Dear Trey:

We have now received three reviews of the manuscript you submitted to APR, titled, “Worth a Thousand Words? An Analysis of Georgia’s Voter Identification Statute,” coauthored with Charles S. Bullock. Thank you for your patience with the APR review process.

As you will see, on balance these reviews are more positive than negative. I am willing to consider a revision of this paper if you would like to resubmit it after digesting the referee reports. We may consider it for publication in APR’s forthcoming special issue on election reform, but we will need to review the revision first, and evaluate the paper alongside related submissions. If you go forward, I will return the next draft to two of these reviewers for a second look.

R1273 is the most enthusiastic of the three reviewers. Read this reviewer’s constructive recommendations very carefully. R1273 asks you to tighten and streamline the argument in some places, and elaborate or expand it in others. This is good advice. You might also add something by way of an appendix about linking the voter file to drivers’ license records.

R1052 is less impressed, and asks for more significant revisions. Not all of this reviewer’s suggestions are viable for this paper, but read through them and make whatever changes you can. The reviewer is trying to be constructive. The reviewer raises some important methodological concerns on the second page of the review, along with some miscellaneous minor points that should be addressed.
R23 weighs in on the positive side. Most of this reviewer’s points go to very practical concerns of clarification and elaboration, and I find myself in full agreement with them. The reviewer is confident that with these revisions, the paper is publishable.

Let me know how you intend to proceed. If you decide to return the manuscript for further consideration, please send me a memo detailing how you have responded to the reviewers’ remarks. Pay particular attention to any areas in which the reviews overlap. You need not make every change the reviewers have suggested, but please explain your decisions in the memo.

If you move forward, I would like to have the revised version of the manuscript returned to us by November 15, 2007, or before.

Thank you for considering APR as an outlet for your work.

Sincerely,

James G. Gimpel
Editor
I am recommending that APR publish your manuscript. I think it is very well done, and quite timely. I can’t remember the last time an academic paper got me to change my mind about a public policy question, but I long suspected that the charge that photo ID requirements would disproportionately suppress turnout in a meaningful way was dubious. This work has convinced me that it’s not.

I do have some general observations and recommendations. I suggest you revise and tighten the opening paragraph or two of your manuscript. I think you’re conflating issues of accuracy (i.e., counting the hanging chads in Florida), and security, which is what the photo ID’s are supposed to ensure; i.e., preventing fraudulently representing oneself as someone else.

Essentially, this research seeks to ask two empirical questions. The major one is whether, holding other factors constant, a person with a valid driver’s license is more likely to vote than a person without one. That is answered in the affirmative, using basic logistic regression and derived predicted probabilities (and I don’t see any reason to use anything else). Further, the paper demonstrates correlations to racial minority status and issues of age and gender which raise questions about equal protection, in some of the same ways as the Bush v. Gore case did, as well as a lot of the case law from the 1960’s onward regarding redistricting, civil rights, and one-man-one-vote requirements. This is actually an avenue which you might pursue to expand the manuscript a bit, although I don’t think it rises to the level where I’d recommend an R&R on that basis.

The second empirical question is whether implementation of the photo ID requirement would have a partisan effect. Here, you also make a case that it would. If you were to expand this discussion, I’d suggest looking at how close an election would have to be for the disparity in turnout to change the election’s outcome. This can be derived mathematically without too much trouble, and would illuminate the scope of the problem.

I think your literature review is quite good, if a little lengthy. I like the discussion of data and methods, mostly; one thing I would have liked you to discuss at further length (perhaps in an appendix) is how you linked the voter file to the driver’s license records. I know from similar work I’ve done that this is not a trivial task, and including that information could be instructional from a methodological perspective, as well as illustrating the amount of effort invested into this project.
Review of "Worth a Thousand Words?: An Analysis of Georgia's Voter Identification Statute"

Ms # 06130

Rev. # 23

June 19, 2007

Virtually any difference will be significant with this number of cases. This point doesn't really affect the interpretations, which sensibly emphasize the magnitude of the differences. Still, this point should be mentioned.

The fact that those without a driver's license vote less often (Fig. 2) doesn't necessarily mean that the lack of a license is why they didn't vote. My strong feeling is that this is to some degree a spurious relationship. The author recognizes this point in the first sentence on p. 21. Perhaps the author should point this out before p. 21.

The author needs to calculate the number of individuals referred to in the first sentence on p. 21. Perhaps I could do it with the data in the paper, but: a) I shouldn't have to; and b) trying to do so yields some ambiguities in information the author presents. Start by going back to p. 11. The author cites numbers of 305, 074, 106,522, and 198,552 in the top paragraph. In the second paragraph, the author "sent out notices to these individuals." Which individuals? I would guess the 305,074. But then the next paragraph makes no sense. All the 305,074 lacked a license or state ID. But the author then matches these individuals with voter registration data and finds that 5.8% did not possess a license or ID. But it can't be 5.8% of the 305,074—unless the state's data was entirely wrong (in which case this whole enterprise is doomed). Obviously I'm making some mistake here. But the point is that the author ought to clarify what's going on, and should then give me the number that is of real interest (the one referred to on p. 21). The author might well create a table showing the various categories and the number of individuals in each one.

Once the number on the top of p. 21 is determined, the author needs to interpret it. Perhaps 38.5% (general election voters, from Fig. 2) of the 5.8% who did not have ID (from p. 12)—i.e., 2.2% of the population—might be affected. But even this is a high estimate, as some of these may have other forms of ID (p. 20, last para). How many people is this? What does one make of it, if this number have a hard time voting? Is it worth it to keep corruption out of the system? What of those who might vote but didn't?

Overall, I think this paper deserves to be published, but only after some revisions. I think the revisions are straightforward, so I would recommend a revise and resubmit. I might note that I give this recommendation infrequently. But here I think we have a good paper, well done, lacking only a little bit that can be easily rectified. Hence my recommendation.

Minor comments:

p. 1, ln 4: swinging chads? Certainly "hanging" chads, but swinging?
p. 2, para 2, first sentence: the part after the colon is improper (it could not be a stand-alone sentence.

fn 23: obvious typo.
American Politics Research

MS# 06130: “Worth a Thousand Words?: An Analysis of Georgia’s Voter Identification Statute”
Reviewer # 1052

This paper seeks to examine the effect of a voter identification law on turnout, a topic that is timely, important, and likely to be of interest for a number of years to come. It is set in the context of the changes that have taken place since the 2000 election and the literature on election reform, specifically the work on factors that hinder turnout. The authors focus on the recent legislative and judicial issues that arose with Georgia’s voter ID laws and then use data from the GA voter history database, supplemented with contextual data to predict 1) who does not have a driver’s license; 2) who votes, with having a driver’s license as the key independent variable; and 3) which party’s primary do voters choose, with having a driver’s license as the key independent variable.

As the author notes, there are just a few papers on this topic, and to the best of my knowledge none have been published yet, meaning there is a great deal of room open for an important contribution. Unfortunately, I found the paper’s contribution to be limited and question some of the results. As such, I do not recommend the paper be published in APR. I could envision two ways to go with revisions that would make the paper viable for APR: 1) a much shorter and focused paper that concentrates on the question of who does not have ID in GA, here the section on the legal issues in GA could be summarized in a short paragraph, and model 2 dropped, with a case made for why GA is an especially interesting case; or 2) a more extensive analysis of who does not have ID in other states, this would not have to include every state but could pick a set of diverse states, including some that have photo ID laws. There are other possibilities, as I discuss below, but those require even greater changes and would be separate enterprises rather than revisions. The current version, with other revisions, might be better suited for a more specialized journal such as Election Law Journal.

While some might be concerned with any paper that examines a single state at a single point in time, I am not one of those people. So, that the authors focus on Georgia and the elections there in 2004 is not, on its own, problematic for me. If there were something that made Georgia and 2004 particularly interesting or if this context was an especially good one to test some theory I would not worry at all that the paper did not examine other places or times. I found that one part of the paper met this standard while the other did not.

With respect to the analysis of the legislative and judicial history of Georgia’s voter ID law, given GA’s history and the nature of the debate, I think the case of Georgia is interesting on its own, and could see this part of the paper growing into its own paper. That sort of paper might not be a good fit for APR, but there are other journals for which it would be.

With respect to the analysis of who has a driver’s license, Georgia is not a particularly interesting case, in part because the current law is quite open with respect to the types of ID one can use. Before reading the paper I expected there would be some test of the effect of a voter ID law on turnout, but since the GA law didn’t change, the author cannot provide such a test. So, we can learn about who does and who does not have a driver’s license in GA and assess that against the debate regarding the law. But here, GA is just one of 50 states, we are not provided with any
new theory, and but for the finding for the urban and suburban variables, the conventional wisdom is confirmed (I would have liked to see much more discussion of the urban/suburban findings). Getting voter history data for other places is not particularly cheap or easy to do, but since we would really like to know about who does and does not have a driver’s license in other places, particularly those places, unlike GA, that require photo ID in order to vote, the current paper is limited. As noted above, the model of turnout does not test a change in the law, something that could be done by studying other states. But even in the study of Georgia, the model is problematic. The driver’s license variable is surely picking up other things, likely the attitudinal variables not available to the author (note that on page 20 the author seems to suggest having a license and interest in politics are related). The author is somewhat cautious when interpreting these results but needs to elaborate much more. One way to address this issue would be to take into account the seemingly endogenous situation. In model 1, the author shows that having a driver’s license varies systematically, if the error term from model 1 and the error term from model 2 are correlated, as I suspect they are, the estimates for the driver’s license variable in model 2 will be misleading. Again, I think a test of the change in the law would be a larger contribution, but if the author wishes to pursue model 2, he/she should wrestle with the issue of endogeneity. I like the idea of model 3, but again GA does not seem to be the best place to examine this; I think a place that has party registration would provide deeper insights. I am open to the notion that GA is a good case for these questions, but the author has not made that case; and as I have noted, there would be at least some counterarguments to such claims.

If we were to examine the effect of an ID law on turnout, couldn’t we do this directly? The states seem to allow the use of provisional ballots on election day and then the opportunity to come back and provide the necessary proof. If we examine the number of ballots that get tossed out because no ID was provided, that would give us an upper bound on the effect.

Misc:
- The author needs to tell the reader what to expect much sooner. He/she does this on page 10, but by then the reader is halfway through the paper.
- Jonathan Katz and Delia Bailey also have a paper on voter id that might be useful for the author.
- For the most part, the results section could be shortened to focus on the main independent variable of interest.
- To establish the importance of this work, there should be more discussion of the paper in comparison to Vercelleti and Anderson (2006). I have not read Vercelleti and Anderson (2006) but with the author’s summary I imagine I would find some parts of it problematic. Their finding that non-photo ID requirements were most consistent in depressing turnout is surprising and based on the cross-sectional data source suggests to me that perhaps correlation is being confused with causation.
- I don’t recall being asked for photo ID at Blockbuster (page 6) and my rental card is from the 1980s and a place I have not lived for some time; but next time I will pay more attention to what they ask for.
The author(s) also ought to reconsider their approach to the data analysis. The author(s) find that race, gender, age, etc. are significant predictors of whether a registered voter holds a driver’s license. The author(s) then use the driver’s license variable, along with the significant predictors of that variable, to predict voter turnout. The raises the possibility of high collinearity among the demographic and driver’s license variables in the voter turnout models. An alternative approach would be to use a structural equations model, with the demographic variables having an indirect effect, mediated by the driver’s license variable, and a direct effect on turnout. Given the categorical nature of the endogenous variables, the author(s) would need to estimate the structural equations model with weighted least squares. Also, in modeling the determinants of whether registered voters have a driver’s license, the author(s) need to be mindful of two things. First, the driving population consists of those ages 16 and older, while the voting population consists of those ages 18 and older. The author(s) need to make that distinction when reporting their aggregate percentages of the population that hold licenses and are eligible to vote. Second, after consulting the Federal Highway Administration data on the age distribution of licensed drivers, the author(s) might want to include an age-squared predictor in their driver’s license model to account for the apparent curvilinear relationship between age and holding a driver’s license. Also, in creating the dummy variables for race in each of the analyses, are the Blacks non-Hispanic Blacks? Are the Whites Non-Hispanic Whites? The author(s) need to be clear on that point. Also, what is the source of data on per capita income? In terms of the logistic regressions, the author(s) ought to report a pseudo-R-squared for each model, as well as a measure of model fit, such as percentage of pairs accurately predicted. In reporting differences in predicting probabilities, the author(s) ought to comment on the magnitude of the differences as well. Not only should the results be statistically significant, they ought to be substantively significant as well in order to merit discussion. (These results, if they stand up in properly specified analyses, would have some substantive significance.)

There also is a larger issue for the author(s) to consider. The effects of photo identification requirements pertain not just to who has or does not have a driver’s license. There is also the issue of whether the license is current in terms of mailing address. A license alone does not necessarily guarantee access to the franchise when photo identification is required.

Finally, the author(s) need to do a better job of proof-reading before re-submitting this manuscript for publication in any venue. There are a number of careless mistakes (the title page is dated April 2004; there is a reference on p. 10 to the State Election Board making a request in June 2007; there are words missing at various points in the manuscript). These errors detract from the quality of the manuscript.