

Structural Barriers to Voting among Young Voters: an Intersectional Approach

Authors : Ryo Sato

Abstract : The United States and many other countries witness alarmingly low voting rates among youths, skewing democratic representation. Many scholars and pundits have ascribed to this trend young voters' laziness, indifference, and self-centeredness and placed blame on them. However, a growing body of research is focusing on structural barriers to voting, which are defined as built-in obstacles lying in electoral laws and procedures. Drawing on national survey data from 891 young adults in 2020 and extant literature on structural barriers to voting, the project aims to develop a framework for analyzing systematic obstacles to voting experienced by young people and offer tangible policy recommendations. The preliminary findings presented at this conference include an intersectional analysis of the survey data, focusing on how different social categories — race, gender, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and others — in combination create unique voting experiences and barriers. This project offers a critical framework to combat the individualized understanding of low voting rates among youths and inform pathways to functional democracy.

Keywords : youth voting behavior, structural barriers, intersectionality, democratic participation, S

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