

Review of: "Contentious Biometric Voters Registration and Democratic Politics under COVID-19: The Myth of 'Social Distance' in an African State?"

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The paper proposes an intuitive thesis: that in-person voting registration led to increases in COVID-19 cases due to a reduction in preventative actions during the registration process (e.g., loss of social distancing). Such arguments were made around many forms of group activities during the COVID-10 crisis, whether it be voting, protests, or attendance at group events such as sports games or religious ceremonies. As such, I find the primary argument of the paper compelling.

I think the paper could focus more on describing cross-sectional differences (across different regions or districts within a region) in how much health protocols were violated during the registration process, as well as the cross-sectional variation in level of COVID-19 cases before, during and after the registration process. On the other hand, I think the paper spends too much time describing the events leading up to the fact that in-person registration was mandated (e.g., the court case). While interesting, the background seems more extensive than necessary for individuals to understand what the policy was, and what the impacts could have been.

What would strengthen the argument (in my eyes) would be a more granular analysis of the sort that economists call difference-in-difference. What would be nice to show is that districts that experienced relatively more crowding during the registration process experienced relatively larger gains in COVID-19 cases when we compare the time just prior to registration to the weeks after registration. This would help convince me that growth in COVID-19 cases was really caused by the registration process as opposed to some other thing that just happened to happen around the same time (e.g., a new, more virulent variety of COVID-19). Of course doing this requires more granular data. But I think it would help bolster the arguments being made here.