



PROOF OF CITIZENSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Several states are currently considering legislation that would require all voters to present proof of their citizenship at the time they register to vote. If passed, such legislation would create a new barrier to voting, potentially disenfranchising millions of eligible Americans. Arizona, which recently implemented proof of citizenship requirements after the passage of Proposition 200, is a case in point. In the first six months of 2005, more than 5,000 Arizona citizens had their voter registrations rejected for failing to provide adequate proof of citizenship.¹ In Pima County, home to Tucson, AZ, sixty percent of new registrants – all eligible voters—were initially rejected. As other states implement similar laws, the potential for disenfranchisement increases exponentially. Democratic elections should be open to all eligible voters. Restrictive proof of citizenship requirements should have no place in a democracy.

Why are proof of citizenship requirements being proposed in several states?

- **Proponents of proof of citizenship requirements say they will lessen instances of voter fraud.** Yet evidence suggests that voting by non-citizens in federal elections is extremely rare. When non-citizens do vote in federal elections, it is almost never an intentional act of fraud, but rather it reflects misinformation or a lack of awareness about their ineligibility to vote.
- **Anti-immigrant legislation is often a way to disguise voter ID proposals that will disenfranchise citizens of color and low-income Americans.** Legislation such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Help America Vote Act have made it easier for all citizens to vote, and have resulted in increased voter participation by Latinos and other minorities. Proof of citizenship measures take advantage of current anti-immigrant sentiment across the country to pass restrictive ID measures that will make it harder for U.S. citizens to vote.

What would a proof of citizenship bill require?

- **Many proof of citizenship bills require that all people registering to vote present documents to prove their citizenship.** Acceptable proof might include passports, US

¹ Elvia Díaz and Robbie Sherwood, Prop. 200.s Effect Minimal, ARIZONA REPUBLIC, Jun. 5, 2005.

birth certificates, or naturalization papers. These documents would be attached to the voter registration form and would be necessary to complete the registration process.

How would proof of citizenship requirements negatively affect voters?

- **Proof of citizenship requirements are equivalent to a poll tax.** Because these requirements place the burden of providing specific documents on the voters themselves, people must obtain passports, US birth certificates, and naturalization documents by paying for them with their own money. These documents are expensive. A US passport costs \$85. A birth certificate usually costs \$10 to \$15. Naturalization documents cost \$210 to replace if they have been lost or damaged in some way. As a result, those who are unable to pay to prove their citizenship are denied their right to vote on Election Day.
- **Proof of citizenship requirements may be impossible for members of some communities to acquire and very hard for others.** For instance, in certain parts of the country, elderly African Americans and many Native Americans were born at home, under the care of midwives, and do not possess birth certificates. People of color, people with disabilities, the elderly, young, and low-income citizens are among the demographic groups least likely to have documents to prove citizenship in their possession.
- **Proof of citizenship requirements might directly counteract national voting rights laws.** Laws such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 were enacted to make voting easier and create a more inclusive democracy. Contrary to the spirit of these federal laws, proof of citizenship requirements make both registration and voting more difficult for eligible voters. These requirements actually turn back the clock on voting rights.
- **Those registering to vote are already required to take an oath of citizenship.** The extra requirement for providing documents is therefore unnecessary and only creates an additional hurdle for voters.
- **Voter registration will decrease.** Because of the added requirement of providing documents as part of the registration process, those who are unable to do so because of time or monetary reasons will be deterred from registering. These requirements would also have a negative effect on the number of people who register at driver's license offices and other alternate registration locations because they will most likely not carry such documentation with them.