



RESTRICTIVE or DISFRANCHISING VOTER ID REQUIREMENTS

Many state legislatures have passed or are currently considering passing bills that will require all voters to show government issued photo identification before they cast a ballot. Although at first glance requiring identification at the polls may seem harmless, these bills will disenfranchise more eligible Americans than any tactic since the poll tax. For the most part, these proposals are cynical attempts to instill fear in the electorate rationalizing a policy that will have the effect of allowing representatives to pick their voters, instead of allowing eligible Americans to pick their representatives.

What is the anatomy of a typical voter ID bill introduced in the states?

- **Typical bills would require that every voter provide photo identification before casting a vote.** The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002 mandates that states implement new requirements for first time voters registering by mail. According to HAVA, voters who register by mail for the first time must now include a driver's license number, social security number, or state-issued unique identifier at the time of registration. These numbers are then checked against state records to ensure the voters identity. If a voter fails to provide the identifying number or that number does not match state records, then the voter will have to show identification at the polls. Many states have passed or are considering bills that go far beyond HAVA's ID requirement, requiring that all voters present one piece of government approved photo identification at the polls. Some states will allow voters who are unable to produce these items to present multiple items such as bank statements and pieces of official mail. While such a requirement is also unnecessarily burdensome, other states go further, disenfranchising voters who cannot produce a photo ID.

Why are bills requiring voter ID at the polls being introduced in the states?

- **Proponents of ID, often state legislators and election officials, claim they want to prevent voter fraud.** However, their claims that fraud is rampant on Election Day are unjustified and unfounded. Individual voter fraud at the polls is rare. Based on recent studies and investigations completed in several states such as Wisconsin and Ohio, evidence suggests that voter fraud is minimal and unlikely to impact election results. In

addition, voter ID does not prevent more pernicious election fraud such as voter intimidation, voter suppression, misinformation, vote buying and other threats to the integrity of elections.

What's Wrong With a Voter ID Requirement?

- **They have a disproportionate impact on people of color, rural voters, young people, the homeless, low-income people, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, frequent movers, and persons in large households.** A number of studies have documented that certain segments of the population are far less likely to have state-issued identification than others Americans. . Long lines at the polling place and long waiting times, created by the voter ID requirements, will also prevent many working citizens from having the chance to vote.
- **Requiring voter identification is equivalent to a poll tax.** By mandating that voters provide identification, states are in essence mandating that these voters pay for documents to verify their identities. IDs such as drivers' licenses, passports, and birth certificates cost money. The documents required to get those IDs also cost money. Many eligible voters cannot afford the cost of these documents. Also, many Americans can not take time during working hours to obtain the required documentation from often difficult to get to issuing agencies.
- **Voter ID proposals are often hidden in anti-immigrant legislation.** Because their real goal is to impede voting by minorities and low-income citizens, voter ID proposals are commonly imbedded in laws that restrict the rights of undocumented immigrants. In this way, the sponsors of voter ID proposals hope to capitalize on anti-immigrant sentiment and gain support from nativist factions within their state legislatures. While legislation such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Help America Vote Act have sought to make it easier for all citizens to vote, and have resulted in increased voter participation by Latinos and other minorities, voter ID bills are an attempt to restrict minority voting by taking advantage of the current anti-immigrant sentiment across the country.
- **Eligible voters will be turned away.** Restrictive voter ID does much more to inhibit eligible voters' ability to cast a regular ballot than it prevents voter fraud. For example, if a piece of identification does not contain the voter's current address, he or she may be turned away from the polls. Millions of Americans possess drivers' licenses that do not show their current address. If an eligible voter forgets to bring identification, it is unlikely he or she will return to the polls a second time.

What are some of the ineffective arguments for voter ID requirements?

- **Voter Identification is Necessary to Prevent Pervasive Fraud.** Fraud committed by voters is rare in the United States, and fraud in the form of voter impersonation – the only type of fraud that an ID requirement addresses – is miniscule. The number of people disenfranchised by ID requirements far exceeds the number of people who might be deterred from the risky and felonious act of voting in the name of another person.

- **“You have to show an ID to rent a movie, so why not to vote?”** In contrast to this common argument, voting with ID requirements is not as easy as renting a movie. Renting a movie is a luxury, not a right. A large number of people in the United States cannot afford or obtain access to what others consider basic necessities such as running water, electricity, and gas services. How, then, is it acceptable to expect them to pay for an ID to exercise their right to vote? Also, ID requirements are administered in a discriminatory way. Recent experience shows that many minority voters and voters who don’t speak English proficiently are singled out and asked for ID when other voters are not. This even happens where there is no ID requirement. Singling out traditionally marginalized voters is intimidating and disenfranchising.
- **“The voter ID requirement will be fair if states expand their lists of acceptable IDs.”** There are some people in this country who simply do not have identifying documents, such as utility bills, in their own, current names and addresses. No matter how expansive a list of acceptable IDs, this requirement will never allow all eligible voters to cast their votes on Election Day. Inevitably, people will be turned away from the polling place with this requirement in place.