

“Voting is the most precious right of every citizen, and we have a moral obligation to ensure the integrity of our voting process.” - Hillary Clinton

Even as the dust has yet to settle from a federal court decision in 2016, the Voter ID law is back on the table in North Carolina. The law was originally struck down due to the “almost surgical precision” with which it targeted minority voters. While this is a common claim of many critics of the Voter ID Law, and possibly has been true in some cases, an analysis of the topic helps to show that the concept of a Voter ID Law is actually practical and favorable.

The law requires voters to present a form of identification that displays 1. a photo of the voter 2. the voter’s full legal name 3. an expiration date and 4. evidence the ID was issued by the state or federal government. Defended and adopted, the proper use of this law has the ability to protect the value of each persons’ vote and reduce the amount of illegal voting that may occur. It is in the citizens, the states, and the nation’s best interest to protect our democracy, and a close assessment of the context and trade-offs presented by this law will show the beneficial nature of requiring a Voter ID.

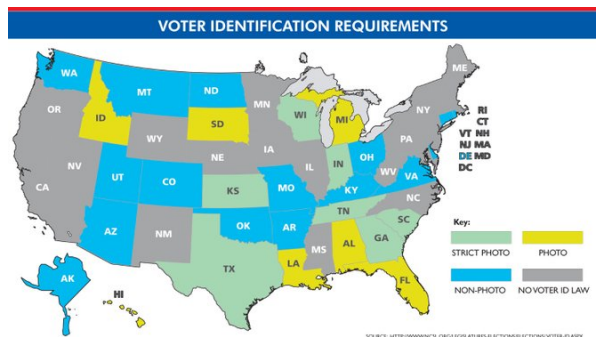
Context and scope:

Throughout the late 20th century, the US was on a trend of lessening the burden to vote, passing acts and amendments to counter historical barriers such as the poll tax, grandfather clause, and literacy tests. However, the “Voter ID Law” has allegedly halted the progress of increased voter turnout¹ and began a retroactive campaign of making voting more difficult². This is one of the main criticisms, as skeptics of the Voter ID Law are classifying this indirect action as a barrier to voting, claiming that it targets racial minorities³. Despite these accusations, **34 STATES** have already made the correct move by

putting some form of a Voter ID Law in place, starting with Indiana in 2006⁴. Additionally, research suggests that, the “racial aspect” is incorrect and that peoples’ voting behavior is actually more **RELATED TO THEIR ECONOMIC STATUS**⁵.

Increased partisanship has turned this rational law into a contentious national debate tainted by half-truths. However, many states have already decided to take the step in defending our democratic process (having passed or voting on the law), as more are hoped to join.

“[Supreme] Court found that...protecting the integrity and reliability of the election process to instill voter confidence was a relevant and legitimate state interest”
-Matt Barreto, et al



What’s at stake?

Granted, the rates of fraud in recent elections have been low, possibly due to the difficulty in measuring fraud, it remains a genuine concern. In a recent Texas election, 13 votes were found to be fraudulent, in addition to 86 filed convictions throughout the US over a five-year period⁶. Although this may seem small, **ANY**

¹ Marjorie Hershey (2009), “What We Know about Voter-ID Laws, Registration, and Turnout”, URL www.jstor.org/stable/20452378

² Rocha and Matsubayashi (2014), “The Politics of Race and Voter ID Laws in the States: The Return of Jim Crow?”, URL www.jstor.org/stable/24371900

³ Rocha and Matsubayashib; Marjorie Hershey

⁴ Matt Barreto, et al. (2009), “The Disproportionate Impact of Voter-ID Requirements on the Electorate: New Evidence from Indiana”, URL www.jstor.org/stable/20452383; Michael Gilbert (2015), “THE PROBLEM OF VOTER FRAUD”, URL www.jstor.org/stable/43267878

⁵ Marjorie Hershey

⁶ Chandler Davidson (2009), “The Historical Context of Voter Photo-ID Laws”, URL www.jstor.org/stable/20452379; Suevon Lee (2012), “Everything You’ve Ever Wanted to Know About

PERCIEVED DEGREE OF FRAUD REDUCES THE VALUE OF AN ACTUAL VOTE, and can cause people to question the integrity of an election⁷, as we often heard in 2016. A Voter ID Law would not make these numbers drop to zero⁸, but it would establish a safe guard that makes voter fraud far more difficult.

If the potential for legislation to protect our democracy exists, shouldn't we act upon it? In a democracy where "every vote matters," wouldn't it make sense to ensure that every vote has the legitimacy and value it should? Despite this, some may claim that a Voter ID Law creates a burden that prevents people from voting; however, in the Indiana Voter ID case the Supreme Court stated that requiring a voter ID was not a compelling undue burden to an individual nor the Constitution⁹. With this in mind, what's at stake is not the **ABILITY** to vote, it's the **VALUE** of a vote – which needs to be guarded similarly to the amendments that protect the right to vote.

Support:

The Brennan Center has compiled a list of



possible alternatives to the Voter ID Law. However, the alternatives they present, such as the verification of a unique identifying number or signature comparisons, are insufficient. Simply put, the alternatives would be easy to avoid. Furthermore, they fail to convince me of their value because things such as:

- getting a marriage license
- using public accommodations
- purchasing firearms
- receiving welfare benefits

"You can't cash a check [or] board a plane... without ID. Why should voting be different? ... public confidence in the integrity of elections is at an all-time low."
-Kris Kobach

all require a valid photo ID in most states¹⁰. If these actions require an ID, then it is rational to believe that voting, one of the quintessential aspects of our democracy, should also require the person to present identification (i.e. driver's license, passport, military ID, etc.)¹¹. Not to mention, the restaurant you may go to get dinner at after voting will probably ask to see your ID if you order a drink.

Americans' Support for Election Law Policies

Requiring all voters to provide photo identification at their voting place in order to vote

Favor: 80%

Oppose: 19%

GALLUP, AUG. 15-16, 2016

Recommendation:

Given the literature and debates surrounding this issue, I would recommend the implementation of a Voter ID Law. It is a controversial policy due to some abuses of the law; thus, its drafting and details need to be consistent with those of states that have successfully passed and defended the law, such as Indiana. A subsidy or removal of the fees to get the documents to attain a valid ID would be helpful and could help to curb criticisms of the law, as this alternative is being practiced in some states¹².

To pass it for the sake of partisanship would be a severe mistake and betrayal of our democratic system; it must be ratified for the sake of protecting our democracy and **ENSURING THE LEGITIMACY AND VALUE OF EVERY VOTE**. We have the power to defend an action that makes our country unique. If we were to abandon that ability for the avoidable, disproven criticisms of this law, we would be doing ourselves and our democracy a grave disservice. That being said, special attention must be paid to other areas where voter fraud is high, such as absentee and mail-in votes. However, the policy for these would require a different avenue of research as the Voter ID Law in focus currently only affects in-person voting.

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⁸ Michael Gilberts

⁹ Matt Barreto, et al.

¹⁰ Fred Lucas (2016), "Amid Voter ID Battles...", URL <https://www.dailysignal.com/2016/08/26/amid-voter-id-battles-here-are-7-things-the-government-requires-ids-for/>

¹¹ Suevon Lee

¹² Suevon Lee

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