

ARE VOTER ID LAWS NECESSARY?

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Currently, thirty-five states have some kind of voter ID law in place requiring voters to present photo identification when they vote at the polls [1]. Support for voter ID laws stems from the idea that they will ensure the integrity of our election process and promote democracy. However, the laws are not necessary and disproportionately target minority groups, strategically decreasing their participation in elections.

VOTER ID LAWS IN THE US BY STATE

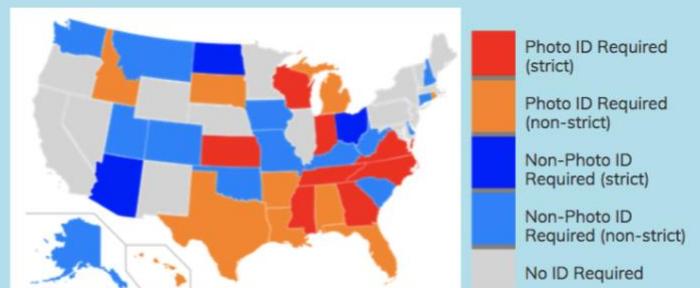


Figure 1 [10]

THE REALITY OF VOTER FRAUD & ITS IMPLICATIONS

(It's not as common as you may think)

31 of the over one billion ballots that have been cast since 2000 have been confirmed as fraud [2].

that accounts for incidence rates of somewhere between

.0003% and .0025% of the ballots cast [3].

A majority of the reports of voter fraud are not due to actual voter impersonation. Instead, they are often a result of unsubstantiated claims by the loser of an election, attempts by a politician to win an election, or an administrative or voter error [4]. So, while there have been a large number of claims of voter fraud, a majority of the are claims are completely false.

Without voter ID laws in place, it is already difficult to commit in-person voter fraud. Lorraine Minnite, a political scientist at Rutgers University and the author of *The Myth of Voter Fraud*, likens committing voter fraud to "pickpocketing a cop". In order to do so, one would have to impersonate a voter well enough to fool election officials and other members of the community, who likely know the person you are impersonating [5]. Altogether, it is a difficult task.

11% of US citizens lack any form of government issued ID [6].



25% of those are African Americans, making it disproportionately harder for them to vote when voter ID laws are in place [6].

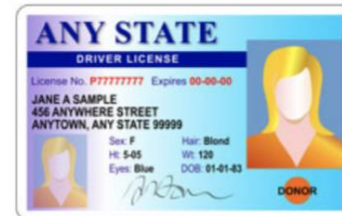
Low income Americans, who are disproportionately people of color, are more than twice as likely to lack the documents, such as a birth certificate or passport, needed to obtain a photo ID [6]. While government issued IDs may be offered free of charge, the document and travel fees needed to get to that point cost on average \$175 and, should there be legal issues, can easily reach \$1,500 [7].

The process is not easy; especially for low income Americans who are more likely to work multiple jobs to provide for their family and not own a car. Often times, they live paycheck to paycheck and are unable to sacrifice their valuable time to get an ID. As a result, strict voter ID laws have been shown to decrease voter turnout by roughly 2 percentage points [8].

Many states with voter ID laws have been ruled by federal courts as discriminatory against minority groups. For example, prior to passing their Voter ID amendment in 2018, North Carolina had their own voter ID law. However, the law was quickly ruled discriminatory by the U.S. Court of Appeals, who said the law's provisions **"target African Americans with almost surgical precision"**. The court pointed out that in making the law, the General Assembly requested data, categorized by race, on the use of a number of voting practices. With this data the General Assembly, which is majority Republican, then restricted voting in five different ways that all disproportionately affected African Americans, who tend to vote for Democrats. [9]

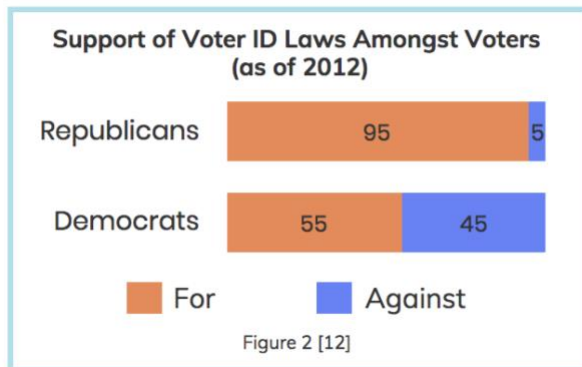
Despite the facts,

The existing framing of the issue has made it difficult to block voter ID laws from getting passed. Despite the low incidence rates of fraud, Republicans are said to have effectively "won the framing war" of the issue and have swayed public opinion towards support of the laws [11]. The widespread support amongst Republicans and Democrats alike can be explained by the Republican Party's successful attempt at convincing their base that voter fraud is a serious problem, and at the same time assuring Democrats that voter ID laws are consistent with their desire for a fair election [11]. Although support for ID laws has started slowly diminishing, this perceived threat prevents any anti voter ID argument from being thoroughly considered.



Some states have offered partial solutions to this dilemma. Tennessee, for example, works to help people acquire photo IDs by offering them free of charge at their Driver Service Centers across the state [1]. However, this only slightly lessens the burden since it does not address the difficulties with getting the necessary documentation and transportation.

Another option is offering the ability to vote through a provisional ballot or signing an affidavit before voting, which is the case in states such as Florida and South Dakota [1]. However, this still limits people's ability to vote in person and many end up not completing their provisional ballots. While these options make it slightly easier for those without an ID to still vote, the best and simplest solution is to not have any photo ID law in place.



Policy Recommendations

As the U.S. Court of Appeals says, voter ID laws are "solutions in search of a problem" [9]. There is no real need for photo ID laws, so the simplest solution is to not have the laws in place. Voter impersonation is rare, and the laws to prevent it systematically disenfranchise and discourage minority groups from voting. The decrease in voter turnout as a result of strict voter ID laws is much more detrimental to our elections than the few votes gained through voter impersonation.

However, if there is such a desire for voter ID laws, then legislators must ensure they will do all they can to help Americans acquire those IDs. Ideally, for both sides, a compromise can be made if a voter ID law can be designed in a way that has no negative effect on voter turnout.

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