

# Voter ID laws to keep millions from voting in November elections

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30 September 2014

With only five weeks until the November congressional elections, millions of registered voters in the US lack state-issued photo ID cards and will be turned away from the polls if they attempt to vote, according to estimates from state agencies.

The *Washington Post* reported last week the number of voters disenfranchised in this manner includes around 200,000 in Virginia, 300,000 in Wisconsin, nearly 800,000 in Texas, and 500,000 in Pennsylvania. These four states alone account for 1.7 million voters denied the right to vote. The US Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit upheld Wisconsin's voter ID law earlier this month, making it effective for the upcoming November elections.

There are 30 more states with voter ID laws in effect, at least nine of them requiring specific forms of photo identification which many voters lack, particularly the poor and unemployed. Those states include Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

A voter ID law in Arkansas goes to the state Supreme Court on October 2, just weeks before the November elections. New Hampshire's requirement takes effect in 2015, while North Carolina will ask voters for photo IDs this year but not require it as a condition of voting until 2016.

Anyone attempting to vote without such an ID will be given a provisional ballot that is set aside and, in most cases, discarded unless the voter returns with the necessary ID within a definite time frame (usually three to six days).

Voter ID laws are part of a broader attack on voting rights, mainly imposed by Republican-controlled state governments seeking to reduce the turnout of likely Democratic Party voters. Frequently paired with voter ID laws are measures limiting early voting and absentee

balloting, which likewise serve to disenfranchise youth, the poor, the elderly, and minority voters.

Virginia's voter ID law went into effect recently, and the upcoming elections are the first occasion when it will be enforced. The law requires that voters present a photo ID issued by a state or federal government entity, or an employee photo ID card, or a photo ID card issued by a school in Virginia. It is one of the strictest such laws in the country.

While driver's licenses are the most common form of identification in Virginia, state records say that 457,931 voters in Virginia have none. Those without proper ID cards may cast provisional ballots, but they must present or apply for a proper ID card within just days of the election or the ballots will not be counted. Many low-income voters lack the means to pay for documentation required to obtain these ID cards, or to make repeated and expensive trips to state offices.

In Texas, the US Department of Justice is trying to prevent a photo ID law from being enforced during the November elections. The specific terms of the state's voter ID law—concealed weapons permits can be used as proper ID while other photo ID cards, such as student IDs issued by universities, cannot—underscores the partisan intent behind these laws. The Republican Party calculates that gun permit holders are more likely to vote Republican than college students.

Texas enacted these voting restrictions in the wake of the US Supreme Court's decision in June 2014, in *Shelby County v. Holder*, striking down the preclearance provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. These provisions required states with a history of discrimination against minorities (mostly the former Jim Crow states in the South) to get federal Justice Department approval to changes in voting regulations before they can take effect.

Southern state governments, nearly all under Republican control, took the Supreme Court decision as a green light to ratchet up their efforts at voter suppression.

The claims that laws requiring photo IDs are needed to prevent fraud do not bear serious examination. In-person voting by a non-voter is the least likely means of stealing elections, since it is cumbersome, inefficient and, based on the record, virtually nonexistent. Documented cases of actual voter fraud per state typically number in single digits, even going back several decades.

There are far more dangerous forms of fraud, involving stuffing ballot boxes or manipulating the software that tabulates the votes, but neither big business party wants these investigated, since they would call into question the legitimacy of the entire electoral process.

The impact of disenfranchising millions of voters in the November midterm elections, in terms of the outcome of the relative handful of closely contested races, is difficult to predict. The corporate-controlled media would undoubtedly interpret any congressional gains by the Republican Party as a “mandate” for moving official politics even further to the right.

An even greater obstacle to voting, for tens of millions of poor and working-class voters, is the lack of any real alternative when they actually do go to the polls. The two-party system is a political monopoly of the financial aristocracy, which controls both parties, alternating them in power as suits its purposes, secure in the knowledge that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans will ever threaten the power and wealth of the corporate elite.

Just as the multimillionaires regard the two parties as interchangeable instruments of their class rule, working people overwhelmingly regard the two parties as interchangeable enemies hostile to their interests. Public opinion polls show massive majorities of the population opposed to both parties and desirous of an alternative, even though there is widespread uncertainty and confusion about what that alternative should be.



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