



DEBATES OVER DIVERSITY

Contemporary Challenge to Voting Rights

Today we take for granted that all citizens may effectively exercise the right to vote. Unfortunately, some political actors continue to place obstacles in the way of voters, and their efforts could well influence elections in some cases. The recent controversy over strict voter identification laws exemplifies this problem. As of 2018, a total of 34 states had already passed laws requiring voters to show some form of identification at the polls. This included strict photo ID requirements instituted by Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin.¹⁷ Supporters of such voter restrictions argue that they are necessary to curb voter fraud. However, the laws' opponents argue that they place undue discriminatory restrictions on an individual's ability to vote, especially among certain groups (including racial/ethnic minorities, women, low-income persons, seniors, and college-age citizens). These groups are disproportionately less likely to own the required government-issued photo identification, and they normally have fewer opportunities to obtain the needed documents. So far, this battle remains unsettled, as civil rights groups continue to challenge many of the stricter state voter ID laws in the courts, enjoying only mixed success to date.



Driver's License / Alamy Stock Photo

Voter ID laws in Texas and elsewhere that require driver's licenses (or similar forms of validation) to vote have been challenged in court by civil rights groups.

For Critical Thinking and Discussion

1. Do you think photo identification should be required to vote? If so, why? Should it be more difficult to vote than it is to purchase gas for one's car?
2. What are the ramifications of government efforts to place obstacles in the way of greater voter turnout? Do you think strict voter ID restrictions significantly influence voter turnout in elections?