

Herman Fredrick, a resident of Norristown, Pennsylvania, had to show photo identification to vote in a primary election in April 2012. Pennsylvania was among a number of states that had controversial voter ID requirements in place for that year's presidential election.



no awareness “of in-person voter fraud in Pennsylvania and do not have direct personal knowledge of in-person voter fraud elsewhere.” They were even more embarrassed when Mike Turzai, the Pennsylvania House Republican leader, seemed to verify critics’ complaints that the state had passed the law for partisan purposes, saying at a June 2012 rally, “Voter ID . . . is going to allow Governor [Mitt] Romney to win the state of Pennsylvania.”

But defenders of the law say that Democrats and civil rights groups are too quick to dismiss evidence of voter fraud—and all too eager to try to turn accusations of “voter suppression” into a rallying cry to gin up support from the Democratic Party base. These laws have been in place in some states for multiple elections now, with no evidence as yet that they have reduced turnout.

Much of the debate ultimately swirled around competing visions of election regulation—whether the goal should be to ensure that access to the ballot is strictly enforced to protect against abuse, or whether chances for fraud are too slim to justify denying eligible voters their right to vote simply because they lack certain forms of documentation. Both political debate and court cases turned not only on voter ID requirements but also on efforts to purge voter rolls and limit the numbers of hours polling places would be open.

Most people—and certainly most Republican lawmakers—seemed to feel that protecting the ballot box and insisting that citizens make the extra effort to obtain proper identification was the way to go. During debate over Florida’s voter ID law in 2011, Republican senator Mike Bennett said, “I don’t have a problem making [voting] harder. I want



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people in Florida to want to vote as bad as that person in Africa who walks 200 miles across the desert. This should be something you do with a passion.”

Still, plenty of people believed this view of the matter was too harsh, that too many Americans had to endure long lines on election day or, worse, were at risk of being unfairly turned away for lack of knowledge about the new laws and difficulty in acquiring the right kinds of ID. President Obama has repeatedly said that people waiting in long lines to vote is not acceptable in the world’s oldest democracy.

Voter ID laws don’t even help prevent the most common types of fraud, such as ex-felons voting when they shouldn’t or people voting in multiple states, argues political scientist Jonathan Bernstein. “There is a natural trade-off between voting participation and policing fraud,” he wrote in 2014. “Build higher walls against fraud, and some innocent voters will be denied access; make full participation the priority, and some crooks are going to find ways to take advantage. What’s unusual about asking people to show a photo ID at the polling place is that polling-place voter impersonation doesn’t seem to exist, and certainly not without the active collusion of election officials.”^c

^a Katasha Khan and Corbin Carson, “Election Day Impersonation, an Impetus for Voter ID Laws, a Rarity, Data Show,” *Washington Post*, August 11, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/election-day-impersonation-an-impetus-for-voter-id-laws-a-rarity-data-show/2012/08/11/7002911e-df20-11e1-a19c-fcfa365396c8_story.html.

^b Angela Couloumbis, “Numbers Behind Pa. Voter-ID Law Debated in Court,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 27, 2012, http://articles.philly.com/2012-07-27/news/32870331_1_voter-law-form-of-photo-identification-thousands-of-inactive-voters.

^c Jonathan Bernstein, “Voter ID Still Means Voter Suppression,” *Bloomberg View*, May 14, 2014, www.bloombergview.com/articles/2014-05-14/voter-id-still-means-voter-suppression.