



RESEARCH REPORT | Center for Election Integrity

THE IMPACTS OF PHOTO IDENTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS ON VOTING

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TOPLINE POINTS

- Requiring a photo ID to vote is sometimes mocked and maligned by political elites, but 81% of Americans favor the measure.
- Studies show that photo ID requirements do not negatively affect minority or demographic-specific turnout.
- By establishing photo ID requirements, policymakers can protect legal voters, support election integrity, and increase confidence in election results across the country.

Introduction

“A young man came in to vote and said his name was John Brown. The headmaster, who knew everyone in the area, stood up and came over to the imposter and sniffed his coat. The young man asked him what he was doing and the headmaster said that he smelled very fresh for a man who had been dead for six months” (O’Neill, 2017). In Belfast, Ireland, voter impersonation was a longstanding issue leading up to the 21st century, but in 2002 their Parliament enacted a new law: requiring photo identification (ID) to vote.

No issue in election integrity is more basic than ensuring that people are whom they say they are when casting a vote. Photo ID requirements help accomplish this very objective. Despite widespread use across the globe and more than 80% approval from Americans for this requirement, photo ID

for voters continues to be attacked by progressives.

Though many conservatives praise mandatory photo ID laws, many progressives claim this policy is racist and is a voter suppression tactic. While supporters of photo ID frequently argue that voters proving their identity with a government-issued photo ID before casting a vote is the cornerstone of election integrity, opponents of the policy have relied on faulty analysis or questionable statistics to back up their claims.

This research report analyzes both international and domestic photo ID laws and their impacts on voter turnout, as well as the fallacies in opposition to these laws. Following this analysis, the report offers two specific policy recommendations for how to implement photo ID laws. Policymakers, stakeholders, and the general public can use this comprehensive analysis to make

decisions with the most accurate information in mind. This report's research provides the most accurate evidence that exists to date on the effects of photo ID laws and how they will help protect legal voters and support election integrity in the U.S.

The Importance of Photo ID and Public Support for this Policy

Photo ID requirements permeate all areas of our life. Photo IDs are needed to accomplish many actions, such as buying alcohol or tobacco, opening a bank account, getting married, applying for food stamps, or a myriad of social welfare programs to name a few. Requiring a photo ID to vote considers the fact that voting is a significant action to which each American has individual access *based on their identity as a unique American citizen*. Therefore, each person's identity is crucial to the electoral process and must be verified.

Opponents of photo ID requirements to vote often say that certain demographics, including minorities, the underprivileged, or elderly citizens, are disenfranchised by the law. Opponents also say the costs of obtaining a photo ID are prohibitive (Horwitz, S. 2016).

However, a careful, data-driven investigation is helpful in analyzing these drastically competing claims and providing a clear factual foundation for the development of policy.

As a starting point, the data is clear on where the American people stand. Recent polling shows that 81% of Americans favor photo ID requirements to vote (Rasmussen, 2022). Public opinion on this issue, however, is just one important factor to consider.

Overview and Analysis of International Photo ID Laws

Strong photo ID laws for voting are prevalent internationally. According to a recent report, 33 of the 37 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—an established intergovernmental organization of developed countries whose purpose is to facilitate economic development and world trade—require photo ID (Lott, 2021). Since the report was published, Costa Rica, which also requires a photo ID to vote, became an OECD member country.

The four OECD member countries that did not require a photo ID at the time of the report were the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, and New Zealand. Japan instead uses barcode-verified voter tickets, while New Zealand and Australia do not require any ID. In April 2022, the United Kingdom passed a law for photo ID requirements to be implemented as of May 2023 (Johnston, 2022).

Voter turnout in these OECD member countries with photo ID requirements has not been negatively affected as a result of these policies. On the contrary, their voter turnout numbers are actually quite high.

Excluding countries that actively mandate voter participation, the median voter turnout is 66.2% (International IDEA, n.d.), and the highest turnout is 84.2%. These are strong numbers compared to the U.S. median turnout of 46.6% in the 2022 midterms and 66.6% in the 2020 general election. Though many factors can influence voter turnout, including candidate likeability, proximity to voting centers, and voter age, these percentages demonstrate that pervasive voter suppression via photo ID requirements has not taken place.



OECD's elected leadership does not subscribe to just one political ideology. Many types of ideologies are represented, including conservative, liberal, and nationalist, yet agreement is widespread about the need to require photo ID as a vital measure to conducting a secure election.

Some countries even go further than requiring just *any* form of photo ID. The Czech Republic, for example, requires passports or military IDs, and Colombia and Mexico require biometric IDs to vote. Mexico's biometric identification card, or *Cedula Unica de Identidad Digital*, has the stated purpose of "guarantee[ing] the right to identity" to each Mexican (Mangiaracina, 2020). After the implementation of this system, Mexican voter turnout increased from 47.72% in the 2015 parliamentary elections to 52.66% in the 2021 parliamentary elections (International IDEA, n.d.). As technology progresses, more identification options become available, and some countries have taken advantage of these advances.

Overview and Analysis of Domestic Photo ID Laws

In the U.S., slightly more than half the states require some form of photo ID to vote. State legislatures regularly debate and consider photo ID laws, and in recent years, several states have adopted photo ID, while others have had photo ID pass through the legislature before being vetoed by the governor.

In 2008, the Supreme Court upheld voter ID laws as permissible for states in a 6–3 ruling, following a legal challenge prior to

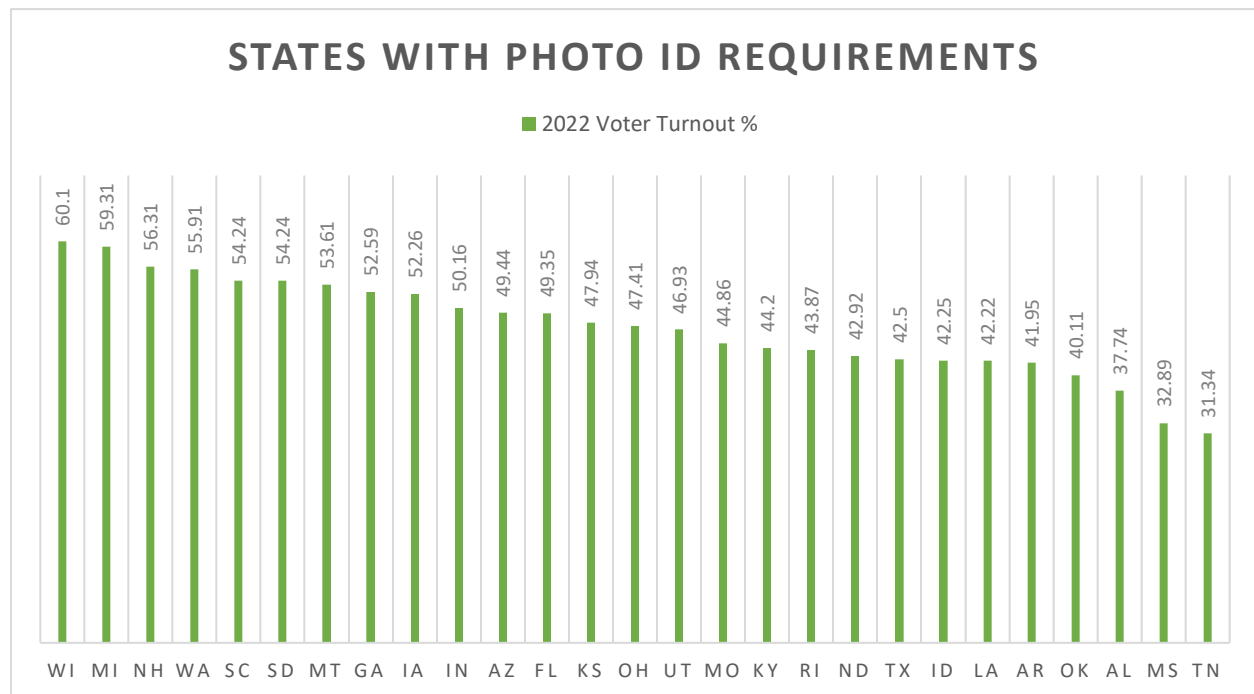
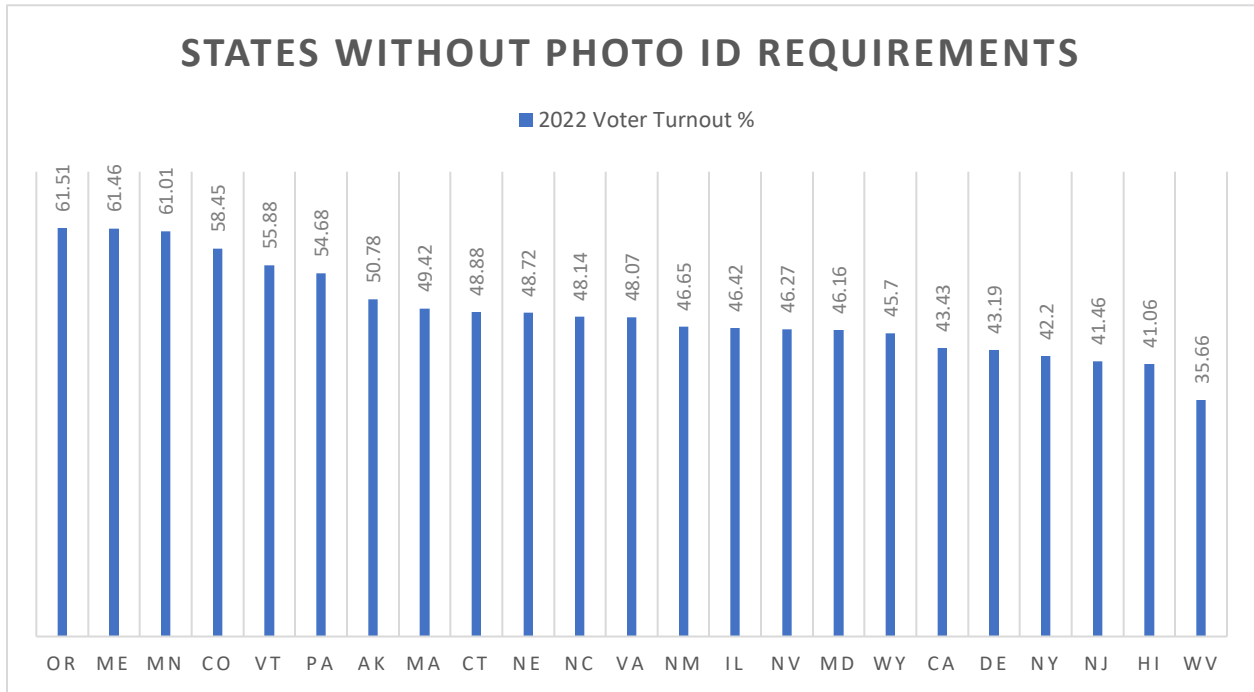
that year's presidential primaries (Vicini, 2008). The Court's majority opinion explained that states had a "valid interest in protecting the integrity and reliability of the electoral process" and cited the possibility of a close election as a reason for states to create reasonable laws intended to curb fraud.

An intensive study conducted the year after this Supreme Court decision concluded that the implementation of photo ID laws was not a significant cause for decreased turnout. This study noted that "socio-demographic and political motivational factors are far more determinative of voting than the imposition of identification laws" (Mycoff, J. D., Wagner, M. W., & Wilson, D. C., 2009).

An analysis of turnout numbers in the 2022 elections demonstrates that photo ID requirements have not resulted in fewer people going to the polls. In comparing the 2022 election turnout state numbers of total ballots cast as a percentage of eligible voters with whether or not that state has photo ID laws implemented, there was no correlation between low voter turnout and photo ID requirements (Ballotpedia, 2022). Numerous states with photo ID laws were actually found to have a higher turnout than other states without photo ID laws.

The average turnout rate was 48.92% among states without photo ID laws and 47.28% among states with photo ID laws. This difference is merely statistical noise and does not appear to indicate an actual underlying effect of ID requirements, especially in light of the 7.2% standard deviation in turnout rates across all 50 states.





This recent data set is not an outlier. In 2019, the National Bureau of Economic Research released a working paper that

analyzed a decade of data (2008–2018), which found that *“photo laws have no negative effect on registration or turnout,*



overall or for any group defined by race, gender, age, or party Affiliation.”

Additionally, it noted that “in line with the lack of negative effect on the participation of any subgroup of voters, strict ID laws do not affect the relative vote share of Democratic and Republican candidates either.”

Addressing the important question of action and reaction, the paper also explored the concept of counterbalance—*the suggestion that voters, under a perceived threat to their right to vote, increased voter turnout as a backlash against the laws and therefore negated what would have been a decreased voter turnout. The authors indicated that there did not seem to be any clear evidence supporting this claim* (Cantoni, E., & Pons, V., 2021). In fact, a 2021 study that analyzed the effects of advising voters about their state’s implementation of photo ID laws actually decreased perceptions of electoral fraud (Endres, K., & Panagopoulos, C., 2021).

This study agrees with a previous 2014 study that also showed *advising voters on their state’s implementation of photo ID laws and advertising on how a voter could obtain a photo ID resulted in increased turnout* (Citrin, Green, 2014). Collectively, these studies suggest that voters have more trust and are more willing to participate in a system that adheres to measures meant to protect and ensure the voter’s identity.

Many on the Left point to studies that show photo ID requirements depress turnout (Kuk, Hajnal & Lajevardi, 2022), (Darrah-Okike, J., Rita, N., & Logan, J. R., 2021). However, when considering studies that claim a direct negative effect of the requirement of photo ID to vote on voter turnout, there may be “methodological

challenges to estimating the true causal effects of strict voter identification law, including deficiencies in data quality and sensitivity of results to choices made in statistical estimation” (MIT Election Lab, 2021). The flaws in these studies greatly weaken the strength of their claims.

Overwhelming Public Support for Photo ID

The majority of Americans view photo ID requirement laws positively. As previously cited, polling by Scott Rasmussen shows an 81% approval rating for photo ID laws, which includes approval of 82% among white Americans, 74% among black Americans, and 80% among Hispanic Americans, which undermines the narrative that minorities disapprove of photo ID voting laws. Popularity remains above 70% (and in many cases 80%) across all levels of education, income levels, and marital statuses.

Example: Georgia’s Elections

In 2021, the state of Georgia enacted photo ID requirements, which makes the state an excellent case study. There were no major shifts in the demographic, population, or political makeup of the state that year (USA Facts, 2022). Because these factors are held reasonably constant, the relationship between photo ID requirements and voter turnout is more straightforward to evaluate.

According to the Georgia Secretary of State’s website, in 2018, prior to photo ID being enacted, voter turnout as measured by voters who cast ballots compared to active voters in the state was 55.9% in the midterm election. In 2022, after photo ID requirements were enacted, voter turnout in the midterm elections was 56.9%. Following



the 2022 election cycle, Georgia's Secretary of State published a summary of some of the milestones achieved, which included:

- All-time turnout records for a midterm election, with more votes cast than any other midterm
- Record-breaking midterm Early Voting turnout
- Record-breaking absentee mail-in votes cast in a midterm
- More Election Day votes cast in the 2022 runoff than on Election Day in the 2022 General Election, than on Election Day in the January 2021 runoff, or on the General Election Day in 2020
- Three days of single-day all-time voting records during Early Voting.

This straightforward comparison clearly supports the claim that photo ID requirements do not have a negative impact on voter turnout.

Policy Recommendations

Overwhelming evidence supports the claim that requiring photo ID does not result in citizen disenfranchisement and is a reasonable, beneficial measure that protects and ensures voter identities during an election. Additionally, many states offer free photo IDs to voters, specifically and exclusively for voting. Research shows that this measure of providing free IDs for voting is seen very positively by Americans (Kane, J. V., & Wilson, D. C., 2021). Considering this evidence and these existing practices, policymakers should consider the following two measures at the state level.

First, require a valid government-issued photo ID to vote. All registered voters casting a ballot should provide a form of

personal photo ID, which includes all of the following: an expiration date that has not passed, a photograph of the voter, the voter's name (which must substantially conform to the voter's name as it appears in the Poll List or Poll Book), and the voter's current address (which also must substantially conform to that listed in the Poll List or Poll Book). Additional acceptable forms of ID should include military IDs and voter photo ID cards. If the voter provides a form of non-photo IDs such as a bank statement, utility bill, paycheck, or other government document, the voter's ballot should be placed in a provisional pile, and the voter is allowed three days to return with a photo ID.

Second, issue free voter photo ID cards.

The appropriate entity within the state should issue free voter photo ID cards to registered voters. These cards should only be utilized for the purposes of verifying identity to vote. The availability of these cards should also be publicly advertised on the website of the issuing entity.

These two measures will protect and ensure the identity of the voter while removing possible barriers to access to identification.

Conclusion

Photo ID remains a politicized topic, but research data shows that polarization is not warranted and is without merit. Instead, photo ID requirements are a commonsense security measure for Americans of all political parties, demographics, and backgrounds. Policymakers must reject political rhetoric and instead adhere to the proven facts of the matter. Photo ID requirements protect and ensure the identity of the voter and do not reduce voter turnout or disenfranchise citizens. Utilizing a photo



ID is already a major part of American life as it is required for many commonplace activities. Developed countries across the world require photo ID to vote, as do many states in America. Requiring photo ID is supported by 81% of the American people

and boosts faith, trust, and confidence in election results. Implementing photo ID requirements is shown to be a fundamental pillar of election integrity and a vital measure in the fight to make it easy to vote and hard to cheat.

BIOGRAPHIES

Anna Pingel is the Policy Analyst for the Center for Election Integrity at the America First Policy Institute.



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