

DEMOCRACY 101: UNDERSTANDING VOTER ID LAWS

APRIL 2025



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What is Democracy 101?

With new legislative sessions kicking off in states across the country, MAP's Democracy program is releasing a series of policy briefs focused on educating communities about emerging trends in election and voting-related legislation, including [proof of citizenship requirements](#), [Voting Rights Acts](#), and more.

The policies detailed in this series are among the 50+ laws we track in real time with our Democracy Maps, which can be viewed [here](#).

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Introduction

Voter ID laws have been a central issue in election and voting policy for over two decades and continue to be a focus for policymakers today. These laws require that voters present specific forms of identification when casting their ballot in person. Voter ID requirements differ significantly across states, ranging from strict photo ID mandates to more flexible alternatives which allow voters to prove their identities in a variety of ways and provide fail-safes for those who may not possess the necessary documents.

As debates over voter ID laws continue into the 2025 legislative session, proponents maintain —

without evidence — that these laws are necessary to prevent voter fraud. Opponents, however, contend that such laws create unnecessary and intentional barriers to voting. This brief explores the history and evolution of voter ID laws, the current landscape and legislative proposals, and examines the harms these policies impose, particularly on marginalized communities.

A study found only 31 instances of voter fraud nationwide from 2000 to 2014.

For reference, the total number of ballots cast during that timeframe exceeded 1,000,000,000.

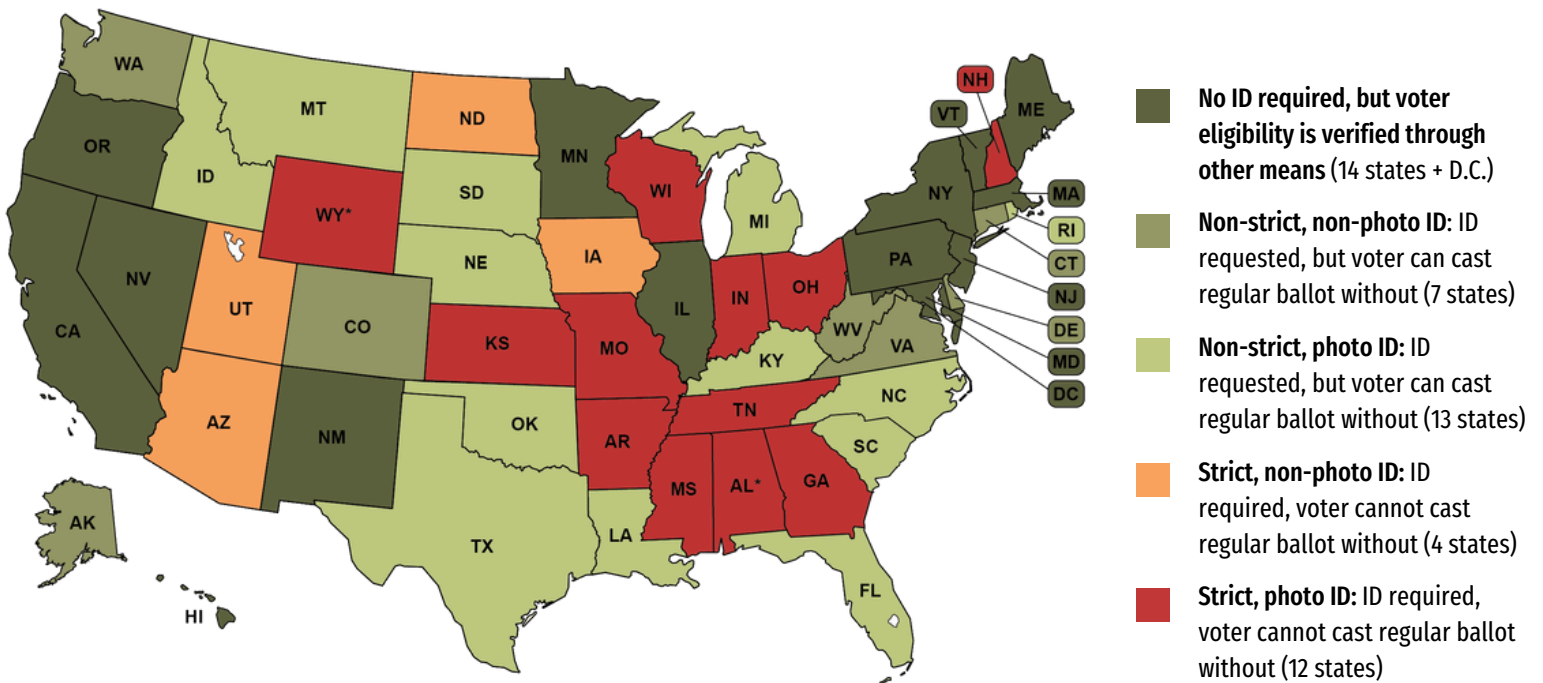
Source: Washington Post

Understanding Voter ID Laws and Their History

In the majority of states, voters show some form of identification when casting their ballot in person. States that do not request or require a form of ID typically ask for the voter's signature or other identifying information to confirm the voter's eligibility. Currently, and as shown in Figure 1, 16 states require some form of identification to vote, with 12 of those states specifically requiring a photo ID. Voter ID laws can be distinguished through four main categories: strict versus non-strict, and photo versus non-photo.

- **Strict vs. Non-strict:** Strict ID requirements usually limit the accepted forms of ID, and most importantly, require voters to undertake burdensome additional steps in order to have their ballot counted if they do not possess the required form of ID. By contrast, in non-strict states, voters who do not have ID can sign an affidavit or other forms of verification and still cast a regular ballot.
- **Photo vs. Non-photo ID:** States with photo ID policies require voters to show identity documents that include a photo, such as a driver's license. In states with non-photo policies, a variety of documents can be used to satisfy requirements, such as a bank statement or utility bill.

FIGURE 1: TWELVE STATES REQUIRE A PHOTO ID TO VOTE IN PERSON



State Voter ID Requirements

Source: MAP, [Democracy Maps](#). Data as of April 2, 2025.

Timeline of Voter ID Laws Since 2000

The history of voter ID laws is relatively recent but the motivation for these policies can be placed in the historical context of voter suppression in America that goes back much further.

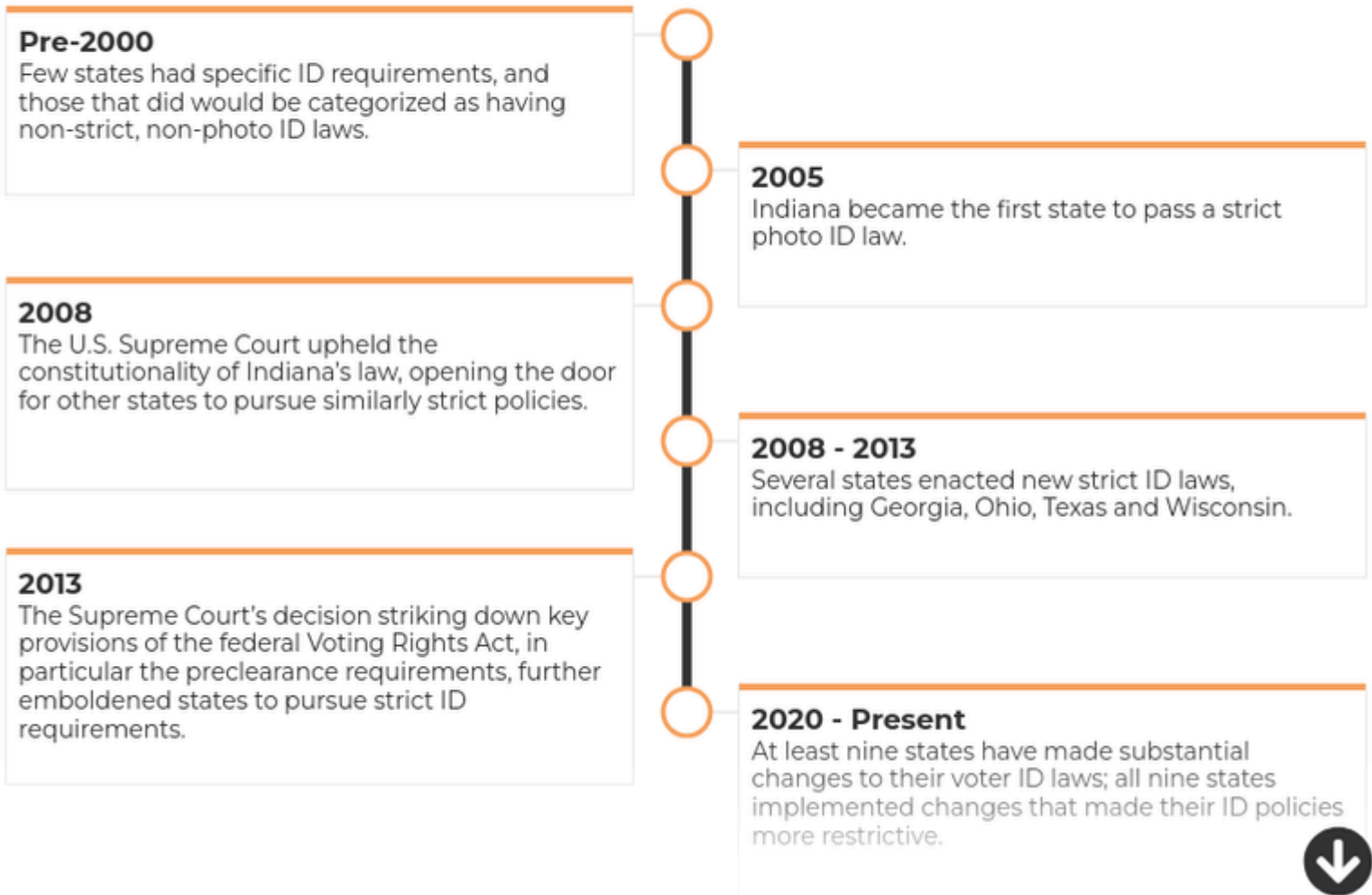
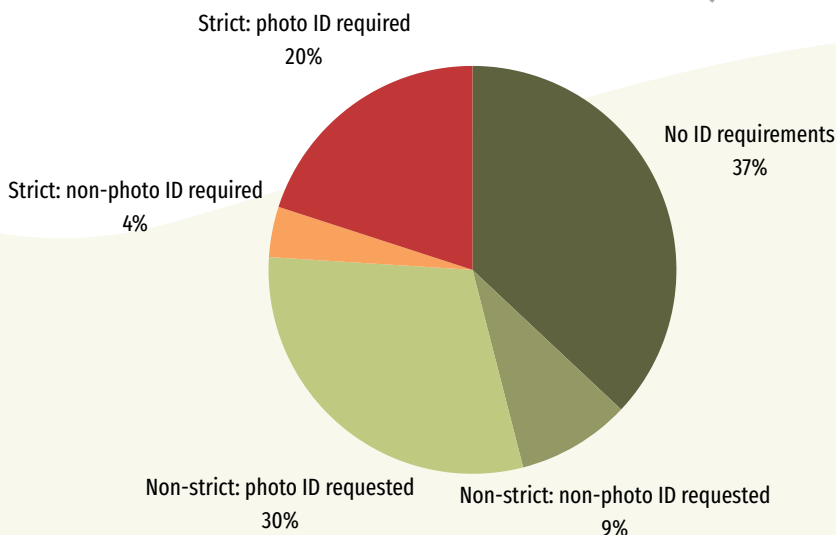


FIGURE 2: NEARLY ONE IN FOUR ELIGIBLE VOTERS LIVE IN STATES WITH STRICT ID REQUIREMENTS



Prior to 2005, no state had enacted a strict photo ID law. Now, nearly 25% of eligible voters live in states with strict photo ID laws.

Percent of eligible voters in states with different voter ID policies. Source: MAP, [Democracy Maps](#). Data as of April 2, 2025.

Impacts and Harms of Voter ID Laws

While proponents continue to argue that voter ID requirements are critical election security measures, these arguments are often based on false narratives of widespread voter fraud. Numerous court cases, investigations and studies, [even by conservative organizations](#), have found that voter impersonation fraud is exceedingly rare. A [comprehensive study](#) published by the Washington Post in 2014 found just 31 credible instances of voter impersonation fraud nationwide from 2000-2014, out of more than 1 billion total ballots cast. As a result, it is fair to say that much like many other restrictive voting policies, voter ID laws are simply a solution in search of a problem.

The evidence is also clear that voter ID laws create intentional barriers to voting, reduce voter turnout, and cause harm particularly to marginalized groups. Studies show that strict voter ID laws [reduce turnout](#) across the general population by as much as three percentage points. While these unnecessary barriers make it harder for everyone to vote, the effects are particularly severe for:

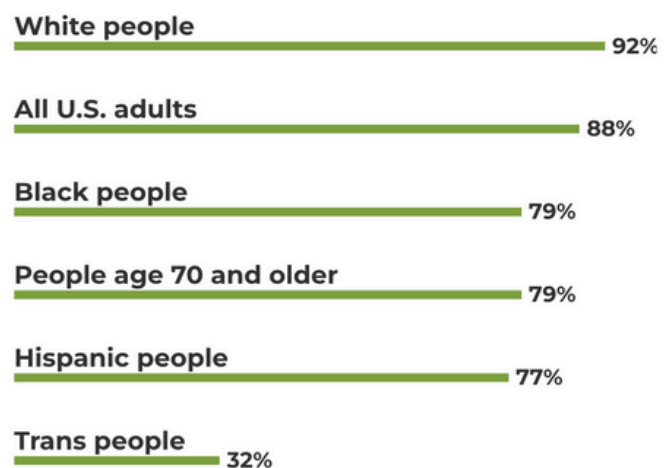
- **Voters of Color:** Black, Hispanic, and Native American voters [are less likely](#) to possess government issued IDs, making it harder for them to vote.
- **Transgender Voters:** [Nearly half](#) of transgender voters in states with voter ID laws lack an ID that accurately reflects their name and/or gender identity.

- **Low-Income Voters:** Due to structural obstacles, [many low-income individuals](#) lack the time, money, or transportation needed to obtain an ID.
- **Elderly & Rural Voters:** Senior citizens and rural residents [may struggle to access](#) offices that issue IDs, which are often located far from their homes.
- **Students & Young Voters:** Young voters are [less likely](#) to possess IDs such as driver's licenses. In addition, a [growing number of states](#) have explicitly banned the use of student IDs to satisfy voter ID requirements.

These deliberately restrictive policies — part of a long history of voter suppression — have both immediate and long-term consequences for voter participation and democracy as a whole.

FIGURE 3. DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES HAVE DIFFERENT ACCESS TO VALID, ACCURATE DRIVER'S LICENSES

Who has a valid, accurate driver's license?



Sources: American National Election Studies 2020, U.S. Transgender Survey 2015, Sivak and Schoettle 2014

Current Legislative Proposals

Despite the clear harms and impacts of these laws, state lawmakers continue to consider ID requirements through the 2025 legislative session.

As of April 2, at least 34 states are considering at least 125 bills related to voter ID laws. Of these proposals, almost 80% would implement more restrictive ID requirements. MAP tracks these laws and their developments in real time on our [Democracy Map](#).

To date, notable proposals – those that create significant, restrictive changes to voter ID requirements – include:

Idaho [SB 1049](#), Montana [SB 276](#), and Texas [HB 3367](#)

These bills would repeal current alternatives for voters that cannot present ID at the polls, creating a strict photo ID law.

Indiana [SB 10](#), New Hampshire [SB 223](#), and Oklahoma [HB 1007](#)

These bills would explicitly prohibit the use of student IDs to satisfy voter ID requirements, [harming younger voters' access to the ballot](#).

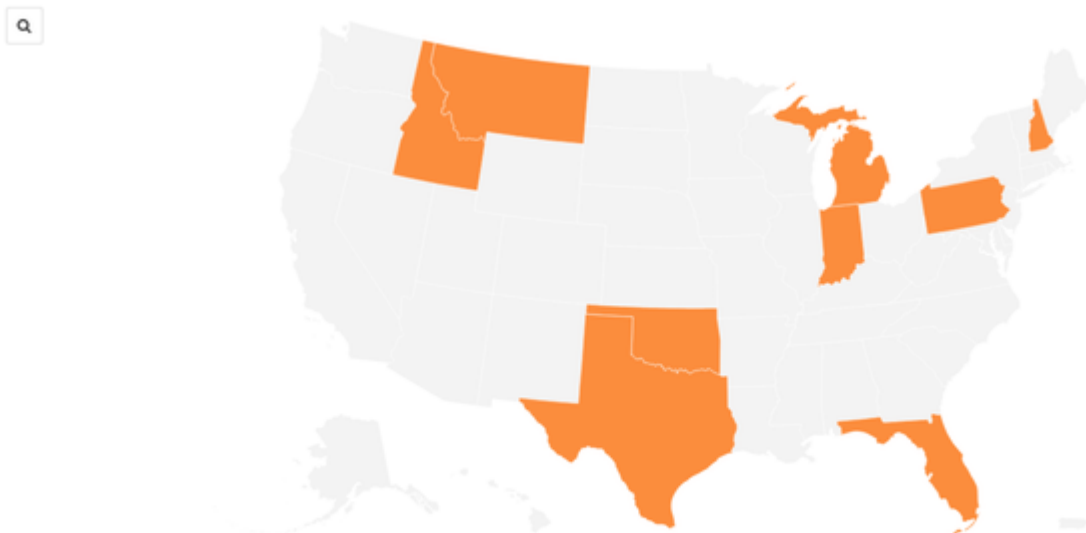
Michigan [HJR 2](#) and Pennsylvania [HB 437](#)

These bills would propose constitutional amendments to impose strict voter ID requirements.

Florida [HB 831](#)

This bill would create strict voter ID requirements, including [proof of citizenship requirements for voting](#).

FIGURE 4: NINE STATES ARE CONSIDERING SIGNIFICANT, RESTRICTIVE VOTER ID BILLS IN 2025



Source: MAP's 2025 bill and legislation tracking. As of April 2, 2025.



Why We Must Pursue Policies that Protect All Voters

As the 2025 legislative session progresses, voter ID laws remain a priority for many legislatures across the country. Despite claims that these policies are intended to protect election integrity, there is no evidence of widespread

voter fraud to justify these restrictions. The real impact of these laws is the creation of unnecessary barriers and the suppression of eligible voters, particularly those from marginalized communities. Policymakers must consider the harmful consequences of voter ID laws, and instead of continuing to pursue these restrictive measures, explore policies that actually improve election security while protecting the rights of all voters.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was authored by:

Movement Advancement Project

MAP's mission is to provide independent and rigorous research, insight, and communications that help speed equality and opportunity for all people. MAP works to ensure that all people have a fair chance to pursue health and happiness, earn a living, take care of the ones they love, be safe in their communities, and participate in civic life.

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