

Voter Fraud: Non-Existent Problem or Election-Threatening Epidemic?

5 states aim to end fraud with voter ID laws, but does voter fraud even exist?

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Sept. 12, 2012 -- Reyna Almanza and her son strolled into the Progreso, Texas, school board election in 2009 just like 1,100 of their neighbors, cast their ballots and left. But hours later Almanza took her son back to the polls, where he used his incarcerated brother's name to vote a second time, breaking election laws and landing both mother and son in court.

It is that kind of voter fraud that Texas' voter ID law, which was [struck down](#) in federal court last month, and similar laws passed in eight states over the past two years were written to prevent. But voter impersonation cases like Almanza's, who is serving 5 years of probation for illegal voting, are the exception, not the norm.

Over the past decade Texas has convicted 51 people of voter fraud, according the state's Attorney General Greg Abbott. Only four of those cases were for voter impersonation, the only type of voter fraud that voter ID laws prevent.

Nationwide that rate of voter impersonation is even lower.

Out of the 197 million votes cast for federal candidates between 2002 and 2005, only 40 voters were indicted for voter fraud, according to a [Department of Justice study](#) outlined during a 2006 Congressional hearing. Only 26 of those cases, or about .00000013 percent of the votes cast, resulted in convictions or guilty pleas.

But the push for voter ID laws is not all about preventing fraud, said Pennsylvania state Rep. Daryl Metcalfe, who sponsored his state's voter ID law.

"The driving factor is common sense," Metcalfe told ABC News. "It only makes sense that when you show up to vote, to exercise that very important right and responsibility, that you prove you are who you claim."

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Metcalf said the number of voter fraud cases that are prosecuted are only a sliver of the fraud taking place because there is no system in place to detect fraud. His voter ID law aims to do just that.

But opponents of the law claim that it is trying to solve a nonexistent problem.

"The point here is that people just don't do that," Lorraine Minnite, an associate professor of public policy at Rutgers University-Camden, said of committing voter fraud. "It just doesn't make sense."

Minnite said there is little to no motivation for voters to attempt to impersonate someone else at the polls or for non-citizens to try and cast a ballot, a right reserved only for citizens. The price for that one vote is up to 5 years in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000 for citizens and could mean deportation for immigrants.

That's exactly what happened to Usman Ali, a Pakistani immigrant who had lived in the United States as a permanent resident for 20 years. Ali checked the "yes" box to register to vote while applying for a driver's license in Florida.

Although he never tried to vote, Ali was deported back to Pakistan for allegedly committing voter fraud.

"What are the costs for non-citizens to cast ballots and what are the benefits? It doesn't add up," said Minnite, who testified against Pennsylvania's voter ID law. "The costs are very high and the benefits are practically non-existent."

Tracy Campbell, a history professor at the University of Kentucky who studies voter fraud in past elections, said contemporary voter ID laws are trying to solve a problem that hasn't existed in over a century.

"This would prevent you from going to the polls and claiming that you're Mary Smith so you vote as Mary Smith then you come back later and vote as Mary Joan," Campbell said. "Repeating was a problem a century ago and these laws would have been good for that, but it's a non-event now."

In trying to solve that problem, critics say, the new voter ID laws could disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of voters who cannot obtain the necessary documents. In Pennsylvania, where Metcalfe's voter ID law will be in effect for the November election, at least 90,000 eligible voters did not have an ID that met the law's requirements to vote, according to initial estimates by the Pennsylvania Department of State.

[Read More about getting a voter ID here..](#)


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But Metcalfe said he does not think the voter ID law will prevent people from going to the polls.

"With every right comes a responsibility," the Pennsylvania lawmaker said. "There is a responsibility now in Pennsylvania that goes along with being able to vote and that is when you show up on Election Day to have that photo ID."

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