



## On the Fence

### Voter fraud used as excuse for voter suppression | ID laws do not prevent voter fraud

Voter suppression is a strategy to influence the outcome of an election by discouraging or preventing specific groups of people from voting. Voter suppression attempts to reduce the number of eligible voters who might vote against a candidate or proposition.

The United States Constitution did not originally define who was eligible to vote, allowing each state to determine who was eligible.

Our history includes many struggles to expand the right to vote from early days in which most states allowed only white male adult property owners to vote until today when constitutional amendments guarantee equal voting rights regardless of gender or race.

United States history also reflects systematic, on-going attempts to limit the access of targeted groups to the ballot box. Following the Reconstruction Era until the culmination of the Civil Rights Movement, Jim Crow laws such as literacy tests, poll taxes, grandfather clauses and religious tests were some of the state and local laws used to deny immigrants (including legal and newly naturalized citizens), poor people, non-white citizens, Native Americans and any other locally "undesirable" groups from exercising voting rights guaranteed under the constitution.

Most of these voter suppression tactics were made illegal after the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, since 2013, when the Supreme Court struck down Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, Republicans have renewed their systematic efforts to suppress the votes of citizens most likely to vote for Democrats.

In North Carolina, for example, Republican lawmakers requested data on various voting practices, broken down by race. They then passed laws that restricted voting and registration in five different ways, all of which disproportionately affected African Americans. Among other things, they cut back on early voting. Later, the North Carolina GOP sent out a press release celebrating the decline in early voting by African Americans.

Federal judges have overturned Republican-backed voting restrictions in several states on the grounds that they were intentionally discriminatory. In Texas, a voter ID law requiring a driver's license, passport, military identification or gun permit was repeatedly found to



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be intentionally discriminatory. A similar ID law in North Dakota, which would have disenfranchised large numbers of Native Americans, was also overturned.

In Wisconsin, a federal judge found that the state's restrictive voter ID law led to "real incidents of disenfranchisement, which undermine rather than enhance confidence in elections, particularly in minority communities."

In addition to imposing strict voter ID requirements, the law cut back on early voting, required people to live in a ward for at least 28 days before voting and prohibited emailing absentee ballots to voters.

Other voter suppression measures include shutting down Department of Motor Vehicles offices in minority neighborhoods, making it more difficult for residents to obtain voter IDs; shutting down polling places in minority neighborhoods; systematically depriving precincts in minority neighborhoods of the resources they need to operate efficiently, such as poll workers and voting machines; limiting early voting; purging voters from the rolls shortly before an election (in 2008 more than 98,000 Georgia voters were purged by "computer mismatch"); and spreading disinformation about voting procedures.

Often, voter fraud is cited as a justification for voter suppression laws. In Iowa, lawmakers passed a strict voter ID law with the potential to disenfranchise 260,000 voters. Out of 1.6 million votes cast in Iowa in 2016, there were only 10 allegations of voter fraud; none were cases of impersonation that a voter ID law could have prevented. Only one person, a Republican voter, was convicted.

In May 2017, Donald Trump established the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity, purportedly for the purpose of preventing voter fraud, claiming falsely that millions of illegal immigrants had voted in the 2016 United States presidential election, costing him the popular vote.

After failing to find evidence of voter fraud or improper registration, the commission was disbanded in January. Democrats believe the commission was established to promote voter suppression.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Today a man owns a jackass worth 50 dollars and he is entitled to vote; but before the next election the jackass dies. The man in the mean time has become more experienced, his knowledge of the principles of government, and his acquaintance with mankind, are more extensive, and he is therefore better qualified to make a proper selection of rulers—but the jackass is dead and the man cannot vote. Now gentlemen, pray inform me, in whom is the right of suffrage? In the man or in the jackass?" Franklin's remarks on barriers to suffrage remain prescient today even though the requirement to own property to vote was abolished in 1856.

For Texas resident Anthony Settles, the "jackass" that prevented him from voting in the 2016 election was the lack of a current photo ID.

Such a document is difficult to procure for Settles, whose name does not match his birth certificate as a result of his mother's re-marriage when he was a minor, according to a Washington Post article written by Sari Horowitz.

His name-change certificate was lost by his family and authorities in Washington, D.C.'s where he was raised, and the cost of securing a replacement are prohibitive. As a result, in 2016 Settles was one of 25 percent of voting-age African Americans unable to cast a ballot.

Securing the ballot box is a massive undertaking, requiring constant vigilance by 50 state and 3,000 county elections officials.

Thanks to these passionate public servants, only 31 cases of voter fraud were confirmed among the 1 billion ballots cast



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in the U.S. between 2000-2014. Despite the impressive success rate in securing American elections, voter ID laws have added additional responsibilities to the voting process have served only to disenfranchise voters. Thirty-one out of 1 billion cases are no reason to disenfranchise 1 percent of any group of Americans, let alone 25 percent of a historically marginalized population.

These statistics should spur us to action. When we become fearful for our democracy, we should try to participate in the process, and there are several ways this can be done locally.

The Union County Clerk's office utilizes volunteers to monitor ballot drop boxes on election night before collection by deputies, and some functions are filled by a ballot-opening board. The ballot tallying process is also open to be viewed by the public. It is only your participation in the democratic process, not repressive voter ID laws, that can keep the American experiment on the right path.

*Alex is the former chair of the Eastern Oregon University College Republicans. A graduate of EOU and College of the Canyons in Valencia, California, he is a veteran of multiple local, state, and national campaigns, including Bud Pierce for Oregon Governor, and Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio for President.*

## Your reactions to On the Fence

### Dill: Health care position unfounded

To the Editor:

In Mr. Burton's "On the Fence" column of July 13, 2018, he touts private insurance as a cure for our health care crisis; however, this position is unfounded.

There are no instances, either in the U.S. or abroad, of unregulated private insurance providing better care for less money to its population than universal health care programs have demonstrated.

The financial performance of individual American insurance companies looks positive because they carefully select their patient risk pools. This includes employed individuals who, on average, have much better health than the unemployed/uninsured populous. Health insurance companies have also denied coverage for pre-existing conditions. These factors minimize risks to insurance

companies' bottom lines while doing nothing to insure a healthier U.S. population.

Most every nation, including the U.S., finds a way to provide health care to the healthy and wealthy. The U.S. is the only first world country that fails to provide care to its sick, poor and uninsured, including many who may be fortunate enough to be employed but still lack employer-provided health insurance. There is little reason to believe that allowing insurance companies to sell across state lines or capping medical malpractice claims (less than 1 percent of our health care spending) will pull us out of the basement.

The U.S. should model its health care reform on systems that already work. Universal health care programs succeed everywhere they are implemented. The time to implement universal health care is now.

*Dwight Dill  
La Grande*

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