

One More Way to Cheat the Ballot Box

Years ago, when my son played soccer in a middle school league, the organization required a birth certificate for registration.

In my wallet is a driver's license with a photo. (I look like a guy in a police lineup.) If I operate my vehicle without it, I am liable to receive a ticket and a fine.

Even though I'm in my late sixties, my grocery store sometimes requires I show my driver's license before purchasing a bottle of wine.

To [buy a firearm](#) in Virginia, I must present a valid photo ID with my name, sex, and date of birth.

If I wish to travel abroad, authorities require me to carry a passport with my picture on it.

If I want to rent a house, get married, apply for a fishing or hunting license, pick up a prescription, or engage in a dozen [other activities](#), I often need a photo ID.

So why is it that when I go to the polling place this fall I no longer need a photo ID to cast my vote?

Governor Ralph Northam and the Virginia legislature recently [eradicated](#) the photo ID from the election process. They argue that this form of identification is racist because a small percentage of people, mostly under the age of 20 and mostly minorities, don't possess a photo ID. The governor and legislature apparently based their decision on data from [Project Vote](#), a study which is five years old and which covers not the state, but the nation.

Yet other legislators argue that removing a photo ID

requirement for the right to vote will lead to widespread fraud and manipulation:

“‘The bill does nothing to prevent fraud, but instead gives someone who casts a fraudulent ballot priority over the actual voter,’ Virginia House Republicans [said](#) in a statement in February, when the bill passed the chamber.

“‘This bill does not outline a clear mechanism to ensure one person, one ballot,’ said Republican Delegate Chris Head, who represents Roanoke. ‘Imagine someone shows up at your voting precinct and signs the affidavit claiming to be you. What happens when you legitimately show up later that day with your photo ID? Under this bill the fraudulent vote would be counted.’”

In a [statement](#) following his signing of the new laws, Northam had this to say, “Voting is a fundamental right, and these new laws strengthen our democracy by making it easier to cast a ballot, not harder. No matter who you are or where you live in Virginia, your voice deserves to be heard. I’m proud to sign these bills into law.”

As so often happens these days, we hear much about rights and little about responsibilities. The governor is correct in saying that voting is a fundamental right, but nowhere does he mention responsibilities, which are connected with any “right.” The Second Amendment, for example, allows us to buy and own firearms, but with that privilege comes responsibility. We have such rights as free assembly, a free press, and the free practice of our religious faith, but those rights again carry the burden of responsibility. Freedom of assembly does not extend to mob violence and burning down Main Street; a free press bears the onus of reporting the truth as well as it can; and religious rights don’t include human sacrifice or fanatical terrorism.

Northam’s statement that “voting is a fundamental right” is

only half the equation. To open our elections to the possibility of fraud, on whatever scale, shows either a lack of wisdom or a ready embrace of fraud and cheating.

For several years, Virginians without a driver's license or learner's permit have been able to obtain a [photo ID](#) from the Department of Motor Vehicles. Those who wished to vote previously bore the responsibility of obtaining this card.

Voting is the highest of civic duties. The people who enter into voting booths and cast their ballots are not only electing officials who will serve them, but are also expressing in a small, but significant way, their own political will. To open that great privilege to the possibility of fraud is not only wrongheaded, but criminal.

We require citizens to provide a photo ID to apply for Medicare benefits or food stamps, or to open a bank account. Shouldn't we require the same form of identification for voters?

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