

# Reason Gone Mad

HUMOR AND COMMENTARY



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### The Race to Restrict Voting

By Bill Shein  
May 12, 2011

The all-out sprint in many states to implement new restrictions on voting has made small-"d" democrats like me wonder if there might, just possibly, be some blatantly partisan game afoot.

**CUT TO:** Bill Shein, adjusting his "I'm The Most Naïve Person in the World!" baseball cap.

Dozens of states – all with legislatures and governors' offices controlled by Republicans – are racing to implement new photo ID requirements for voting. Additionally, many states are further restricting voting by requiring a certified birth certificate to register, curtailing early and absentee voting, and trying to eliminate same-day registration.

As [I wrote in this space in March](#), requiring photo ID is a solution in search of a problem.

The voter-impersonation fraud it allegedly addresses simply doesn't exist. But the new requirements will reduce electoral participation among [the 25 million otherwise-eligible Americans](#) who don't have government-issued photo ID.

Because those without photo ID – young, poor, minority, disabled, and elderly voters – tend to favor Democrats, it's no surprise that

Republicans want changes in place by 2012. Their attempts to piggy-back other restrictions on top of photo ID clearly reveals the game they're playing.

Republican State Sen. Mike Bennett, who helped advance sweeping new voting restrictions in

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Florida, **said last week**, "I wouldn't have any problem making [voting] harder ... this should not be easy." Meanwhile, the GOP sponsors of **new voting restrictions in Maine** admit there's no evidence of voter fraud, but suggest Maine needs a "lean-forward" approach to the "problem."

In Kansas, where Gov. Sam Brownback says **new restrictions on voting are "reasonable,"** it will soon be necessary to produce a certified birth certificate to register, effectively ending voter-registration drives by the League of Women Voters and other groups. In Florida, a new law achieves the same end by adding onerous filing requirements and large fines for minor missteps by third-party groups.

While most states say they will provide "free" photo identification to those who need it, they won't cover the cost of acquiring necessary documents (often from other states), reimburse people for time away from hourly jobs, pay for child care while they wait in line for hours at a government office, and so on.

These efforts to limit voting are being aided by the **American Legislative Exchange Council** (ALEC), a corporate-backed group that produces so-called "model legislation" that – don't be shocked – advances the goals of wealthy corporate interests. ALEC's **"Private Enterprise Board"** is filled with representatives from Exxon-Mobil, Peabody Energy, Kraft Foods, Wal-Mart, Koch Industries, and others who stand to profit handsomely by maintaining the economic status quo.

Why would these corporations support new restrictions on voting? Because the ultimate threat to The New American Plutocracy, where **corporate profits set records** while millions go without jobs, retirement security, health care, or even **enough to eat**, is a reinvigorated American electorate that votes in large numbers – well above the meager 38 percent who participated last November when partisan control of many state legislatures and the U.S House of Representatives changed hands.

Voting is – for now, at least – one way that pesky

human beings can counter **the unlimited spending on elections and lobbying by fictitious corporate "persons."**

Unfortunately, few Americans pay much attention to election law and many think requiring photo ID to vote is no big deal. Some mistakenly believe that everyone already has photo ID because you need one to get on a plane, cash a check, or drive a car.

(FYI: Millions of Americans don't fly or drive, and at least 17 million don't have a checking account, according to **a 2009 study** by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.)

Comment threads on Web sites where elections are discussed (including mine) are filled with dismissive suggestions that if someone "can't be bothered" to "just go and get" a photo ID, even if they have to pay \$30 or more, take time off from work, and pay for child care, they "probably don't know much about the issues" and "probably shouldn't vote anyway."

If we believe our national talking points about democracy and the right to vote, such statements must be vigorously challenged. As must the sweeping new restrictions on voting in Ohio, North Carolina, Florida, Texas, Kansas, South Carolina, and elsewhere.

It's not naïve to believe that the future of our democratic experiment, and the quality of life for millions of Americans, hangs in the balance.

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**Bill Shein's "Democracy Boy" superhero costume is freshly cleaned, pressed, and ready for 2012.**

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These voter ID bills pose a threat to (d)emocracy as great as that presented by the Supreme Court's decision in the Citizens United case. Unfortunately, there has not been as much publicity of the United States Supreme Court decision in 2008 upholding Indiana's statute requiring a picture ID for a voter to cast a vote. See: Crawford v. Marion County Election Board, <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/07-21.ZS.html> After re-approving a prior US Supreme Court decision finding that a poll tax was legally unacceptable, the majority went on to find that Indiana's provision of a "free" state ID, which required that the person present a birth certificate, which the court agreed in many cases had to be procured for a cost, was not tantamount to a poll tax. Be afraid, be very very afraid

May 12, 2011 at 3:20 PM | [PJK](#)

If you don't like the solution, then propose something else to solve the problem. It seems in this day we should be able to come up with some method to identify people, determine they are legally eligible to vote, and that they only vote once, which does not place undue burden. To say that voter fraud is not occurring is ignoring the evidence found almost everytime re-counts are done.

May 14, 2011 at 7:55 AM | [JMK](#)

As noted, requiring photo ID to vote can only prevent voter-impersonation fraud, which essentially doesn't exist.

Recounts don't produce much evidence of individual voter fraud, massive or otherwise. They do sometimes produce evidence of election-administration errors, but mostly they put on display the partisan machinations of partisan election administrators. A much-needed reform in the United States is non-partisan election administration to replace our system which is led, in each state, by a partisan secretary of state. The "fraud" in our system is

systemic, not individual.

Entirely unsubstantiated fear of "widespread fraud" is being used to advance efforts to restrict voting. We have much to improve in our electoral system, and it's good to see there's great interest in doing so. But there is no "problem" of individual voter-impersonation fraud to "solve," so clearly this effort to require a form of identification that at least 11 percent of Americans don't currently have has other goals in mind.

At present, there are significant criminal penalties for voting when not eligible, as well as more than adequate safeguards in place that require voters to confirm their identity and address when registering. That's why a five-year investigation by the Bush Justice Department found only a few dozen cases of individual voter fraud across the country in an eight-year period. It's simply not a problem, but rather, a distraction from what truly needs attention. And, sad to say, one that is almost entirely partisan.

May 16, 2011 at 11:30 AM | [Bill Shein](#)

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