



# Should All Voters be Allowed to Vote?

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Should all voters be allowed to vote?

Ask this question to almost anyone, and the resounding answer will be something like: "Yes! It is the American Way. 'One person, one vote' is the cornerstone of any democracy."

Just how deep this sentiment runs can be seen in the recent protests against policies requiring all voters to first produce a photo ID. The protesters seem to feel that any restriction on the unimpeded access to voting undermines our very democracy.

I support voter ID laws. Without them, a single person could theoretically cast many votes during one Election Day by going to different polling stations; the fraud potential is enormous. If there are people too poor to procure an ID, the small amount of money needed for this purpose should be provided, either by government or private charities.

Though politically incorrect to the extreme, a more fundamental question, I believe, concerns whether all American citizens, even those with proper IDs, should be automatically permitted to vote in major elections, such as for both houses of Congress and the presidency. I raise this issue haltingly, for I recognize the potential for danger whenever government deprives people of their rights. I also feel profound respect and gratitude toward the American practice of all people always being allowed to vote.

Nevertheless, there are valid democratic considerations for why all people should not necessarily be allowed to vote. At the very least, this issue should be publicly aired and debated.

Imagine a team of hospital oncologists agonizing over how to best treat a deadly and never before seen type of cancer. Would they put the matter to a vote of the hospital's secretaries? Of course not! And this is not discriminatory. Clearly, such medical decisions where lives hang in the balance should only be made by those who understand the relevant science and medicine.

When casting a vote in a major election, choices must be made between different positions on life or death matters of national security, for example, whether to bomb Iran, which currently poses a potential nuclear threat. Also at issue are the differing approaches to dealing with the huge and ever-increasing national debt that could destroy the U.S. economy and render its currency worthless. Voters must also respond to the current tendency of government to abuse personal freedoms, as witnessed in the recent IRS scandal.

Yet, many of the Americans casting votes on these weighty matters are appallingly ignorant of the issues they are deciding upon.

An October 2013 Cato Institute article titled Democracy and Political Ignorance reported regarding Obamacare that: “Some 80 percent (of the U.S. public) say they have heard ‘nothing at all’ or ‘only a little’ about the controversial insurance exchanges that are a major part of the law.”

The article also mentioned that:

“Most of the public has very little idea of how federal spending is actually distributed. They greatly underestimate the percentage that goes to entitlement programs such as Medicare and Social Security, and vastly overestimate that spent on foreign aid. Public ignorance is not limited to information about specific policies. It also extends to the basic structure of government and how it operates. A 2006 survey found that only 42 percent can even name the three branches of the federal government: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial.”

A British newspaper’s 2011 article reported that 70 percent of all Americans do not know what the Constitution is and 29 percent cannot name the Vice President.

I therefore say: perhaps the U.S. should require all voters, irrespective of race, education, or income level, to first pass a basic exam on the main issues of the day and the makeup of the U.S. Government.

A sample ballot hangs on the wall during early voting at the Black Hawk County Courthouse on September 27, 2012 in Waterloo, Iowa. Credit: Getty Images

This would not be an exercise in depriving anybody of their right to vote. Rather, it would be a case of making the entirely reasonable demand that voters know the rudiments of what they are voting upon.

Certainly, every effort should be made to educate the uninformed so they can pass a voting competency test. Free courses and materials should be available online, in libraries, and so forth. But until people pass that test, they would be disqualified from voting.

There is a final argument I would like to make on this topic. Many might reject this article’s proposal as being inconsiderate or elitist, for it would deprive many honorable Americans of

their right to vote, at least until they know the issues. (I don't see it that way at all. The intention is to create informed voters, not to stop anyone from voting.)

I feel, however, that U.S. law must also be considerate toward all parties – including those who do understand the issues they are voting on. Returning to the example of Iran, if knowledgeable voters opt for a certain Iran policy, it is because they judge that such will best protect their lives.

It is thus terribly unfair to the responsible voters for such a decision that could endanger their lives to be made in part by people who don't know whether Iran is a city, a country, a continent, or a private warlord. The disregard for the public's safety inherent in accepting such ignorant votes is akin to having the secretaries determining the courses of treatment for a hospital's cancer patients.

At any local Little League game, only an umpire who understands baseball can determine whether a pitch is called a "ball" or a "strike." Shouldn't the same standard of integrity apply as well to the voters who decide on the critical and complex issues that are confronted during every major election?