

Should proof of identity be required when voting?

The NSW State election is coming up, and while many of us are deciding who to vote for, we may not have considered whether or not to bring our identification along. Interestingly, while we may be asked for ID to purchase alcohol, enter a bar or board a flight, it is not required to vote on NSW election day.

You will, however, be asked:

- Your full name
- Your address; and
- Whether or not you have already voted in the present election

When you consider how many Australians are sceptical of politicians, as well as the stakes involved, it may seem strange that our voting system relies on trust when taking votes.

Is election fraud a significant problem?

[Nearly 2,000 Australians actually admitted voting more than once in last year's Federal election](#), and the Australian Electoral Commission investigated 19,000 instances of multiple voting. Several thousand of these turned out to be clerical errors, but a proportion was also found to be double-voting. This can be a problem, as just a few hundred votes could potentially change the outcome of a vote, especially in close seats.

Section 112 of the [Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Act](#) of 1912 makes election fraud a criminal offence that could expose you to a maximum penalty of three years imprisonment and / or an \$11,000 fine.

Five types of multiple voting have been identified in the current electoral system:

- Enrolling to vote using false names and identification;
- Enrolling to vote using the real names of other eligible voters who haven't enrolled themselves;
- People who vote using their own identity, but at multiple polling booths;
- People who vote using the identity of other eligible voters that have agreed to that course of action; and
- People using the identity of other eligible voters without their knowledge

Proof of Identity or Trust?

Requiring proof of identity has been suggested as a solution to the problem of election fraud.

Queensland introduced such a requirement last year, and it is the only Australian state or territory to have done so. In January 2015, the first Queensland state election was held since the change in law.

Proof of identity in Queensland includes any of the following:

- Current drivers licence;
- Current Australian passport;
- Voter information letter;
- Proof of age card;
- Medicare card or other identification card issued by the Commonwealth or state that evidences a person's entitlement to a financial benefit;
- Recent account or notice issued by a local government or a public utility provider;
- Recent account statement, current account card or credit card issued by a bank;
- Recent document evidencing electoral enrolment;
- Recent notice of assessment issued under the Income Tax Act; or

- Recent phone or bank account statement

There are also special provisions for people without identification, who are still allowed to vote but must complete a declaration.

Is it unfair to require identification?

Some have claimed that requiring identification is both unfair and [politically motivated](#), as socially disadvantaged groups are less likely to possess valid ID, including the young, the homeless and indigenous people.

It has been suggested that requiring voters to bring proof of identity is a way for certain groups to be excluded, especially those that traditionally vote for Labor. In addition, elderly and immobile people who forget their ID or are unaware of the requirement may have difficulties retrieving it.

A spokesperson for the Queensland Electoral Commission said that no one was turned away from the state election. As already mentioned, those without proof of identity were still allowed to vote, but had to fill in a declaration form instead. But some suggest that the availability of declarations undermines the whole idea behind requiring identification, and that the trust system works just as well.