



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on July 11, 2012

## Eric Holder Likens Texas Voter ID Law to “Poll Tax”

Railing against Texas’ contentious new voter ID law, Attorney General Eric Holder likened Gov. Rick Perry’s effort to curb voter fraud to a “poll tax” — a post-slavery effort to prevent blacks from voting. Speaking at the annual NAACP conference in Houston on Tuesday, Holder [charged](#) that many voters would be forced to travel “great distances” to obtain a government-issued photo ID and that many minority voters would “struggle” to pay for the required paperwork. “We call these poll taxes,” the Attorney General contended.



The so-called poll taxes Holder cited were prescribed in Southern states following slavery and were sometimes used to prevent blacks and other minorities from voting. However, the [24th Amendment](#) ratified in 1964 terminated the tax in federal elections, and the Supreme Court two years later abolished the tax in all elections.

Arguing that voter ID laws discriminate against minorities, Holder branded Texas the “center of our national debate” on voting rights, while pledging that the Department of Justice (DOJ) would “aggressively” battle to defend those rights. “We will not allow political pretext to disenfranchise American citizens of their most precious rights,” he professed.

“The arc of American history has always moved toward expanding the electorate. It is what made this nation exceptional,” Holder added. “We will simply not allow this era to be the beginning of the reversal of that historic progress. I will not allow that to happen.”

In March, the Justice Department blocked the Texas law, which requires photo identification at the polls, claiming it breached the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Holder’s remarks arrive as DOJ attempts to counter the law are in full force, with a ruling expected sometime next month. “I don’t know what will happen as this case moves forward,” he asserted. “But I can assure you that the Justice Department’s efforts to uphold and enforce voting rights will remain aggressive.”

After the DOJ blocked the law, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott sued in federal court, contending that the Supreme Court has approved the constitutionality of voter ID laws in other states, and that the agency is corrupting the Voting Rights Act to impede on states’ rights.

“This is a case about Texas’ proposed implementation of one of the most popular voting reforms of the last 20 years, a common-sense requirement that when you show up to polls to vote, you prove you are who you say you are with a photo ID,” Texas attorney Adam Mortara [said](#) Monday on the courthouse floor.



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The *Wall Street Journal* [suggests](#) that the administration's attempt to block voter ID laws in Texas is largely an election ploy for President Obama and congressional Democrats running in the November elections:

The nation's first black Attorney General knows exactly what he is doing by citing the fee that some Southern states used after Reconstruction to disenfranchise blacks. Poll taxes were made illegal by the 24th Amendment in 1964. Yet faced with the prospect of a close re-election battle, and fading support from independents, Team Obama is trying to rekindle its 2008 coalition by using the race card to drive up black voter turnout. Texas and Florida, both with GOP Governors, are the election-year foil.

"Mr. Holder knows his charge is buncombe," the *Journal* continues, as the Texas law provides voters with several photo ID options. As for the Attorney General's embellished "poll tax" assertion, the law states that the Texas Department of Public Safety will provide a free Election Identification Card if requested.

Prefacing Holder's speech, NAACP President Ben Jealous blasted voter ID laws, also comparing them to the great civil rights struggles of the 1960s. "We must overwhelm the rising tide of voting suppression with the high tide of registration and mobilization and motivation and protection," Mr. Jealous [charged](#). "Simply put, the NAACP will never stand by as any state tries to encode discrimination into law."

Ironically, the NAACP convention Jealous and Holder were speaking at had its own stipulations, including a requirement for all members of the press to provide (yes, that's right) a government-issued photo ID. "All media must present government-issued photo I.D. (such as a driver's license) as well as valid media credentials," the press release [stated](#).

In another interesting aside, those planning to visit Holder's office in Washington, D.C. ought to bring a photo ID, as the DOJ has two armed guards positioned outside its headquarters to [check government-issued photo IDs](#) of anyone wanting to enter the building.

Photo: Attorney General Eric Holder at the NAACP annual convention, July 10, 2012, in Houston, where Holder said he opposes a new photo ID requirement in Texas elections because it would be harmful to minority voters.: AP Images



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