

Papers, Please: Unfortunately, Trump Isn't Much Ahead of His Time

At a Florida campaign rally on July 31, President Donald Trump informed the crowd, by way of promoting voter ID laws, that “if you go out and you want to buy groceries, you need a picture on a card. You need ID.”

Twitterverse mockery ensued, mostly to the effect that Trump has little experience with the real world in which no, normal people generally do not need photo ID to buy milk, bread, and the latest edition of *The National Enquirer* at one’s local supermarket.

Maybe Trump is out of touch, but many of his hecklers are too. More disturbing than the drive for laws to address the nearly non-existent phenomenon of voter fraud is the degree to which most Americans take current ID requirements — many of which didn’t exist even a couple of decades ago — for granted.

These days, it’s difficult if not impossible to board an airplane (or get an Amtrak train or Greyhound bus ticket) without displaying a government-issued identification card.

Of course, you need a government-issued driver’s license to operate a car. Prefer to walk or ride with a friend? In many states, you’re required to produce ID documents on demand if a police officer claims “reasonable suspicion” that you’ve committed a crime (including “loitering”).

If you’d like to accept a job and an employer would like to hire you, you must present one or more government-issued identification papers for submission to US Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Yes, you’re required to present government identification papers to open a bank account as well.

Over the last few decades, the US has effectively re-created the Soviet Union’s old “internal passport” system. Your rights to move about, to work, to conduct your financial affairs, and in general just to live your life, are subject to the government’s demand that you prove your identity at any time and for any reason.

America survived for exactly a century without any such thing as “photo ID” — the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia required all exhibitors and staff to carry a “photographic ticket” produced by Canadian photographer William Notman.

It wasn’t until well into the 20th century that most Americans started carrying a government driver ID with a photograph on it (you didn’t even need a passport to enter or

leave the US until after World War 2), and not until near the end of that century that ID requirements started spilling into every corner of our lives.

In fact, prior to 9/11, most “conservatives” opposed most national ID schemes on perfectly reasonable privacy grounds. Their increasing embrace of an all-encompassing surveillance state, including everything from imposing “REAL ID” standards on the states to conscripting employers as unpaid immigration police informants, is a sad indicator of how far they’ve strayed from even minimal respect for freedom and privacy.

The scandal isn’t that Trump doesn’t know ID isn’t required to buy groceries. It’s that he, and most politicians of both major parties, think ID should be required for pretty much everything. And that Americans aren’t resisting the idea.