



LET AMERICA VOTE

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# TAKING ON VOTER SUPPRESSION IN 2018

YOUR GUIDE TO STANDING UP  
FOR VOTING RIGHTS

**"We have a voting problem in America. Voting in our country has never been easy, but there's a new challenge: Politicians are trying to stop Americans from voting because of who they are likely to vote for in an election."**

**- Jason Kander, President of Let America Vote**

# Introduction

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LAV believes that every eligible voter has a right to register to vote and participate in our democratic process conveniently. We need to hold politicians that support voter suppression laws accountable for their actions and get them out of their jobs.

The fight for voting rights in America is as old as the nation itself. But, over the past decade, momentum has gone dangerously in the wrong direction –our voting rights are under attack again. In 2013, the Supreme Court of the U.S. gutted a key portion of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that prevented states from passing discriminatory laws. The decision, *Shelby County v. Holder*, paved the way for state legislatures across the country to pass laws aimed at making it harder for people to vote. These extreme voter suppression laws tend to disproportionately impact people based on their race or ethnicity, gender, age, or income. If we don't fight back, more and more Americans will become disenfranchised.

In 2017, state lawmakers across the country introduced at least 99 bills that would make it harder for certain people to vote. These bills include voter identification laws, barriers to voter registration, including proof of citizenship requirements and domicile laws, and cuts to early voting. Additionally, some state election officials are purging registered voters from the rolls and are creating additional barriers to the ballot box.

## **Purpose**

The LAV Voter Guide is a toolkit that individuals across the country can use to break down barriers to the ballot box at the local, state, and federal level. The toolkit provides background on some of the voter suppression policies enacted around the country in recent years. Activists can use the information in the toolkit to respond when a neighborhood polling place is closed, an elderly neighbor is having a hard time voting, or a state elected official introduces a bill creating barriers to voter registration. This guide provides the resources to advocate for changes around voting policy in communities. Whether it is testifying at a local board of elections hearing, requesting a meeting with a county election director, or mobilizing your friends and neighbors to take action with you against vote suppressors, this guide can give you the tools you need to be an effective champion for voting rights.

As President Obama has said, "The most important title is not president or prime minister; the most important title is citizen." So let's get to work and make sure that as citizens we do everything we can to protect our democracy.

# Take Action to Protect Voting Rights

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Take action today to make sure our voting rights are protected. Here's how:

**1. Join our Rapid Response Team** to take action in your community and across the country to protect voting rights: [letamericavote.org/RapidResponse](http://letamericavote.org/RapidResponse)

**2. Join Let America Vote**

– Donate to elect candidates that will fight for voting rights: [letamericavote.org/LetsGo2018](http://letamericavote.org/LetsGo2018)

– Start a local chapter to mobilize your community to get active and hold politicians accountable

**3. Call an elected official** now and tell them to oppose any bills or policies that will make it harder to vote or support any bills or policies that will make our elections more fair and accessible. Remember to:

– Let them know you are a constituent.

– State clearly why you oppose or support the legislation or policy.

– Remind them that you will consider how they vote on the bill when you are making your decision on who to support during the next election.

**Invite 10** of your friends and ask them to get 10 of their friends to make a call too!

**4. Attend and speak at a public hearing** where the bill or policy will be discussed. Be sure to get there early and put in your speaker card. Keep your points short and direct on why you oppose or support the bill.

And remember to invite 10 of your friends and family to attend with you and speak up!

If you can't be there in person, make a call and/or writing a letter stating why you oppose or support the bill/policy.

**5. Write a letter to the editor.** It may seem old-fashioned, but politicians (and their staffs) read the local newspapers every day. Send a letter to the editor urging your local, state, or federal official to take action to support voting rights.

**6. Organize a chapter.** Start a Let America Vote chapter in your community: In 2018, we need you to join our fight by leading action and advocacy efforts at the local level.

Start a Let America Vote Chapter to bring your community together to protect the vote:

[letamericavote.org/startachapter](http://letamericavote.org/startachapter)

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**7. Volunteer during an election.** In order to make sure that our elections are run properly, we need voting rights activists engaged at the local level.

Volunteer to be a precinct captain or poll watcher. If you see something in how the elections are being run that you think will keep people from voting speak up.

**8. Get Informed about what's happening at the local, state, and federal level.**

You can find a helpful map here: [letamericavote.org/states](http://letamericavote.org/states)

To find your local, state, and federal officials go here: [usa.gov/elected-officials](http://usa.gov/elected-officials)

To find your Chief Election Official/Secretary of State go here: [nass.org/membership](http://nass.org/membership)

Elections are administered at the local level (some of these local elections officials are elected and some are appointed - it varies by state). You can find your local official here: [usvotefoundation.org/vote/eoddomestic.htm](http://usvotefoundation.org/vote/eoddomestic.htm)

## Voter Suppression Policies to Look Out For

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Below are examples of voter suppression policies you should look out for at the state and local level and examples of ways you can fight back.

### 1. Barriers to Voter Registration

#### ***Proof of Citizenship Requirements:***

***What are proof of citizenship laws?*** A handful of states, including Kansas and Arizona, require documentary proof of citizenship, which means individuals must provide a passport, birth certificate, or naturalization papers in order to register to vote.

***Why are they problematic?*** These laws are enacted based on the false premise perpetuated by the far-right that there are millions of non-citizens voting in elections. A Brennan Center for Justice study found that improper noncitizen votes accounted for 0.0001 percent of the votes in 2016. Proof of citizenship laws are an onerous solution in search of a problem. These unnecessary laws disenfranchise eligible voters who do not have birth certificates or other required documentation in their possession. These laws also create barriers for organizations who register voters since most people don't walk around with their birth certificate or naturalization papers in their back pocket.

### ***Proof of Domicile Laws:***

***What are proof of domicile laws?*** Some states require voters to provide additional documentation showing their intent to be domiciled in the state where they are registered for the foreseeable future - even though that's not required to vote. New Hampshire recently passed SB 3, requiring voters to fill out a different form and return to the clerk's office within 10 days of registration to provide proof of residence either through a driver's license, utility bill, or residence at a university.

***Why are they problematic?*** By adding new rules and paperwork, domicile laws like SB 3 in New Hampshire aim to discourage college students from voting. Students live where their college is located the majority of the year and should be allowed to vote there if they want. Forcing them to vote where their parents live isn't fair, as they are probably more impacted by the politicians near their school.

***What you can do:*** Keeping voters off the rolls is a key tactic in the voter suppression playbook. If you can't get on the voter rolls in the first place, you can't vote. You may also miss out on receiving important information from your election officials, including sample ballots and poll times and locations. If legislation restricting voter access is introduced in your state legislature, urge your legislator to vote against the bill and notify the Governor about your concerns regarding the legislation.

Also, advocate for reforms that expand voter registration, like those that are mentioned below in the Voting Rights Policies to Advocate For section.

## **2. Voter Identification Laws**

***What are voter ID laws?*** Some states require voters to present a specific photo identification when they vote either in person or via absentee ballot. Depending on the state, permissible IDs can include federal government documents like a US Passport or a state-issued driver's license or non-drivers ID. Some states permit students to use their school identification cards. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, over 34 states have a law requiring voters to show some form of ID to vote.

***Why are they problematic?*** Voter identification laws create a significant barrier to the ballot box for the 21 million Americans that do not have the required ID. States that require largely government-issued photo ID prevent too many from voting and disproportionately affect minority communities, low-income adults, and young people. Thirteen percent of Blacks and 10 percent of Hispanics lack photo ID, compared to 5 percent of Whites.

Twelve percent of adults living in a household with annual income less than \$25,000 lack photo ID, compared to just 2 percent for adults in households with annual income over \$150,000. Fifteen percent of 17-20 year-olds lack photo ID and 11 percent of 21-24 year-olds lack photo ID.

**What can you do:** Activists should monitor the 18 states that do not currently require voter ID, and fight back if legislators introduce restrictive voter ID legislation in their state. Activists should monitor states that currently have voter ID laws for legislation that is introduced with the purpose of further restricting voting rights.

### 3. Polling Place Closures and Consolidations

**What are polling place closures and consolidations?** There are many methods of voting. Some voters choose to vote early either in-person or via absentee ballot and some voters prefer to vote on Election Day at their designated polling place. Since the Shelby decision in 2013, we have seen local election officials close or consolidate polling places around the country.

**Why are they problematic?** Fewer polling places often results in longer distances for voters to travel, longer lines, and voter confusion - all of which means fewer people vote. When these closures occur in jurisdictions with a history of voting discrimination, people of color can be disproportionately impacted. What makes poll closures especially malicious is that there is no recourse to get your vote back. Poll closures often occur quietly and at the last minute. Even when the closures are clearly discriminatory, there are no do-overs to account for the ballots that weren't cast because of poll closures.

**What you can do:** Monitor your local newspapers to see if election officials are closing or consolidating polling places in your area. If they are, and voters will be negatively impacted because of the closure or consolidation, testify at your local board of elections meeting, or meet with your county election director and express your concerns. Local coalitions of concerned citizens and advocacy groups have had success by working with local election officials, and have stopped polling place closures in Georgia and other states.

### 4. Purges

**What are purges?** One way to make it harder for people to vote is to remove them from the voter rolls altogether—and this happens much more often than you might think. These so-called “purges” of the voter rolls are often done in the name of “keeping them up to date,” but can, in fact, be ordered by elected officials to kick certain voters off the rolls.

**Why are they problematic?** Georgia and Ohio have recently removed thousands of voters from the rolls for simply not voting. Some jurisdictions have removed voters from the rolls using inaccurate measures and databases. In one egregious example, Thunderbolt County in Georgia tried to remove voters from the rolls if their name did not appear on the city's water bills.

**What you can do:** Voter purges can happen at both the state and local level. Monitor for purges happening in your state or county. Voters may receive a notice in the mail, which is one indication that a purge is happening. Monitor local newspapers for news about a voter purge and contact Let America Vote for assistance.

## 5. Limits on Early Voting

**What is early voting?** Early voting has many forms including in-person early voting and absentee voting. According to a recent study by the United States Election Assistance Commission, the “total number of voters who voted early, absentee or by mail more than doubled from 24.9 million in 2004 to 57.2 million in 2016.” Additionally, a study by the Brennan Center finds that other benefits of early voting include (1) reduced stress on the voting system; (2) shorter lines on Election Day; (3) improved poll worker performance; (4) early identification and correction of registration errors and voting system glitches; and (5) greater access to voting and increased voter satisfaction.

**Why is limiting early voting problematic?** Ohio adopted a measure – known as Golden Week – allowing in-person early voting in the 35 days before Election Day. As registration in the state closes 30 days before Election Day, Golden Week provided a brief period where voters could register and vote at the same time. The state eliminated Golden Week and reduced the early voting period to 29 days arguing that the change will help combat voter fraud and save money - but instead it just stopped eligible voters from voting.

## 6. Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity AKA “Sham Voting Commission”

**What is the Sham Voting Commission?** President Donald Trump is perpetuating the myth of voter fraud by alleging that 3-5 million people voted illegally during the 2016 Presidential Election. To make matters worse, he established the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity made up of some of the biggest vote suppressors in the country to perpetuate the voter fraud myth and make it harder for Americans to vote.

**Why is the Sham Voting Commission Problematic?** The Sham Voting Commission's main purpose is to undermine confidence in American elections and to prove that there is voter fraud, when in fact it is exceedingly rare. A paper by three scholars at Dartmouth College reviewed allegations of voter fraud in the 2016 Presidential Election and concluded that

there was no "evidence that there was a widespread, anti-Trump fraud effort that relied on either" noncitizen voting or impersonation fraud on behalf of deceased persons.

**What you can do:** Sign up for LAV's rapid response team to get updates on the activities of the Sham Voting Commission: [www.letamericavote.org/RapidResponse](http://www.letamericavote.org/RapidResponse)

## Voting Rights Policies to Fight For

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*Many states have adopted reforms to expand access to the ballot box and make it easier for people to vote. Here are some examples of reforms that are proven to benefit voters and make election administration more efficient.*

### 1. Automatic Voter Registration

**What is Automatic Voter Registration?** Automatic voter registration (AVR) makes two changes to voter registration. First, eligible citizens who interact with government agencies (e.g. getting a driver's license) will automatically be registered to vote (some states allow voters to opt out or opt in). Second, government agencies will transfer the voter registration information to election officials.

**What are the benefits of Automatic Voter Registration?** This convenient and cost-effective process increases registration rates, cleans up the voter rolls, and reduces the risk of voter fraud. Ten states and the District of Columbia have already approved the new reform and 32 states have introduced legislation to implement or expand AVR. AVR removes barriers to registration, and also updates the voter registration rolls and may lead to higher voter turnout.

### 2. Online Voter Registration

**What is Online Voter Registration?** Online voter registration (OVR) follows the same process as and acts as a supplement to the traditional paper-based process. In addition to giving new voters another way to register, states like Arizona have experienced cost savings in processing registrations.

**What are the benefits of Online Voter Registration?** Individuals who register online are able to update their address or party affiliation in an efficient way, and OVR can lead to cleaner voter rolls. When pushing for online voter registration, it is important to advocate to include individuals who do not have a driver's license or a non-drivers identification to be able to use the online voter registration system.

### 3. Same Day Voter Registration

**What is Same Day Voter Registration?** Same day voter registration (SDR) allows any qualified resident of the state to register and cast a ballot on the same day. Fifteen states and the District of Columbia currently offer same day voter registration.

**What are the benefits of Same Day Voter Registration?** Data also shows that same day voter registration states tend to outperform other states in terms of turnout percentages. The states with the highest voter turnout in 2016 had same day voter registration.

### 4. In-Person Early Voting

**What is In-Person Early Voting?** 37 states and the District of Columbia allow any qualified voter to cast a ballot in-person during a predetermined period prior to Election Day.

**What are the Benefits of In-Person Early Voting?** Benefits include (1) increased turnout; (2) reduced stress on the voting system; (3) shorter lines on Election Day; (4) improved poll worker performance; (5) early identification and correction of registration errors and voting system glitches; and (6) greater access to voting and increased voter satisfaction.

**What you can do:** Activists should monitor potential legislation – or a lack thereof – surrounding these policies and urge their Governor as well as members of the state legislature to support reforms that make it easier for people to vote. Draft op-eds in your local paper to discuss the benefits of such policies.

## Local Election Official Jurisdiction

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Your local election officials may include a County Clerk, County Auditor, Board of Elections, Supervisor of Elections, and/or a County Election Director. These roles can be elected or appointed, depending on where you live. You should check out the laws in your state to learn more about your local officials.

Typically, county election officials have power over the following things: Local administration of elections, recruiting and training poll workers, voter education, allocating funding at the county level, list maintenance, determining polling place locations, purchasing voting equipment, and processing and disseminating voter registration forms.

Local election officials might not have as many formal hearings, but may have citizen advisory councils or other ways that you can engage with them. Because of the smaller size of their jurisdiction, they may be more accessible to the public. Reach out to them early and often and let them know you are concerned about efforts to keep people from voting. It is important that they know that there are active citizens who will hold them accountable to running fair and accessible elections.

## State Level Jurisdiction

### *Secretary of State/Chief Election Official*

The Secretary of State/Chief Election Official controls the voter registration system in the state and can issue directives to county election officials.

### *State Legislators*

Legislative calendars vary by state. Find out when the legislative session in your state begins and ends here: [www.letamericavote.org/LegislativeSession](http://www.letamericavote.org/LegislativeSession)

Remember that bills go through many steps before becoming a law (<https://vimeo.com/24334724>) so you will have many opportunities to help pass or defeat a bill. You will want to make your activist plan based on your state's calendar. An example of an activist timeline is below. Be sure to make changes as necessary to accommodate your state's legislative timeline.

– **Today:** Start a Let America Vote Chapter

– **One to two months before the session begins:** Information gathering - find out if your legislator or any legislators in the state have moved voter suppression bills in the past, as they may be likely to do it again. Start to get organized. Read the news and blogs that cover your state's political issues to monitor any voting rights bills that legislators might move.

– **Committee hearings:** Most bills have to pass through a committee before they will be voted on by the full legislature. The committee hearing is your best opportunity to defeat, pass, or amend bills.

Organize your chapter or join with another organization to get active when the committee is hearing and voting on the bill. Then take these actions to stop voter suppression bills or support bills that make voting more accessible:

- Make calls to legislators and committee of jurisdiction staff.
- Write a letter in support of or opposition to the bill.
- Attend a hearing and speak or testify.
- Organize and mobilize others to make calls, attend hearings, and write letters
- Organize a press conference or other event to draw attention to the issue

If a bill passes out of committee, it will move to a full vote of the legislature.

- **Floor Votes** on the bill by the full legislature

– Reach out to organizations that have contacts with other legislators to make sure that there is an action plan with those legislators to support or oppose the bill. Most bills need a simple majority to pass, but some may need a higher vote threshold - especially if the bill is amending the state constitution or there is an impact on the budget. These types of bills will be harder to pass. Identify which legislators are the most friendly to your cause and those that are not. Identify legislators that might be persuadable.

You will need to have enough friendly and persuadable votes defeat or pass the bill:

- Make calls to legislators and committee of jurisdiction staff
- Write a letter in support of or opposition to the bill
- Attend a hearing and speak and or testify
- Organize and mobilize others to make calls, attend hearings, and write letters
- Organize a press conference or other event to draw attention to the issue
- Repeat your activism above! If the bill passed through committee and through a floor vote, the process starts again in the other chamber of your legislature.
- Celebrate your success when the bill is defeated or passed!

# Federal Level Jurisdiction

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The federal government does not have as much direct oversight of elections, as states hold much of the power to organize and regulate elections. In the past, Congress has passed laws to ensure that voting is open and accessible to people no matter their economic status, race, ethnicity, gender, and language ability. Federal legislation has also attempted to create as uniform as possible a system for voter registration and helped localities access machines to run elections. With the 2013 Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* one of the federal protections around voting rights was eliminated, giving rise to state restrictive voting efforts.

That is why our efforts to protect voting rights are focused most directly at the state and local levels.

Our democracy is under attack. The Trump Administration is attempting to undermine how the public perceives voting and the security of our voting systems as a way to pass more restrictive voting laws at the national level.

After baselessly claiming that American elections are “rigged,” President Trump established the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity - the Sham Voting Commission. He chose committee members who are some of the biggest vote suppressors in the country to perpetuate the voter fraud myth and make it harder for Americans to vote. The Sham Voting Commission’s main purpose is to undermine confidence in American elections and to assert that rampant voter fraud exists when, in fact, it is exceedingly rare.

Our national advocacy and activism efforts will focus on pushing back against the Sham Voting Commission and its efforts to undermine our democracy.

## Conclusion

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Thank you for working with us to protect our democracy. For more information and to sign up for updates please go to [letamericavote.org](http://letamericavote.org).