

## **Voter Suppression: The Dark Cloud Hovering over our Elections**

**September 19, 2017**

September 26 is National Voter Registration Day. The strength of American democracy depends on the ability of citizens to exercise their fundamental right to vote. Instead of pursuing the myth of voter fraud and encouraging tougher restrictions on voting, the Trump administration should be intervening to stop voter suppression. And we should all be actively registering new voters in our districts to expand the electorate.

In the wake of the Charlottesville White Supremacist March and the ensuing melee, it is hard to deny that an ill wind is assuming hurricane proportions as it blows in prejudice and discrimination leading to disenfranchisement of the most vulnerable. The specter of voter fraud was often invoked in the segregation era as an excuse to crack down on the rights of blacks and other minorities, and so it is being widely invoked today.

In the 2008 election, racially coded appeals, including insinuations that Obama was not a natural-born citizen, and that infiltrators had stolen in over the Mexican border to ensure his victory at the ballot box, threatened the legitimacy of the electoral process. This rhetoric has again taken hold in the public's imagination, nowhere more evident than in the 2016 election and the demonstrably false statements of the current president.

Over decades, states across the country have passed laws and instituted other procedures to make it harder for African Americans, Hispanic Americans, other minorities, the elderly, students, the poor, and people with disabilities to vote. These measures include restrictive photo ID laws, purging of voter rolls, limitations on early voting, felon disenfranchisement, disinformation about voting procedures (robocalls giving false information), inequality in Election Day resources, closure of DMV offices, voter caging, gerrymandering, Jim Crow laws, and long wait-times at polling stations.

Twenty states have passed new restrictive voting laws since 2010, and 14 states had such laws come into effect for the first time in 2016. On average, African American voters are required to wait in line for twice as long as white voters; Hispanic voters spend one and a half times as long. A Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies report estimated that "long lines deterred at least 730,000 Americans from voting in November 2012."

The 2016 election was the first presidential election since the *Shelby County v Holder* decision in 2013, in which the U.S. Supreme Court effectively gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Although the results of that decision on the 2016 election are still being debated, studies have consistently shown that strict voter ID laws alone can reduce voter turnout enough to effect a close election, particularly with newly registered voters, young voters, and voters of color.

We have to consistently debunk the Trump Administration's baseless claims of voter fraud. The President's so-called "Commission on Election Integrity" should be called out for what it is: a waste of time and taxpayer dollars. There is no evidence that voter fraud occurs on any appreciable scale. This commission is a futile attempt to justify the President's groundless claims that millions of people voted illegally. And it paves the way for future, even more widespread, voter suppression.

While voter registration is not a solution per se to the problems of widespread voter suppression, it is an essential part of our democratic process. To learn how to participate in National Voter Registration Day, go to <https://nationalvoterregistrationday.org>.

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