

Power of Participation: Session III Breaking Through the Barriers

Did You Know?

In 1965 the Voting Rights Act (VRA) was passed. Section V of the VRA outlawed the discriminatory voting practices adopted in many states after the Civil War. It gave the US Justice Department veto power over any new election rule or law passed in parts of the country with a proven history of racial discrimination.



In 1965, people of color made up 12 percent of the United States population.

Today nearly 39% of the US population are people of color.

Since 2010 many states have made it more difficult to vote:¹



25 states have new voter restrictions.

15 states have more restrictive voter ID laws in place.

6 states have strict photo ID requirements.

12 states have laws making it harder for citizens to register (and stay registered).

6 states reduced early voting days and hours.

3 states made it more difficult to restore voting rights for people with previous criminal convictions.

10 states made it more difficult to vote early or absentee (this was the number prior to Covid-19, many states are now reducing absentee ballot restrictions for 2020 elections because of the pandemic).

¹ <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/new-voting-restrictions-america>

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In 2013 the US Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision to strike down Section V of the Voting Rights Act on the grounds that racial discrimination was no longer widespread enough to justify it.

In North Carolina in 2013 the state's Republican-controlled legislature passed a new election law that:

	Imposed strict voter ID requirements.
	Restricted early voting.
	Restricted same-day voter registration.
	Closed 27 polling places.
	Eliminated the popular practice that allowed voting on the Sunday before Election Day.

In Alabama in 2015 state Republicans announced the closures of:

	31 DMV offices across the state.
	The closures were concentrated in the black belt.
	Of the 10 counties with the highest percentage of nonwhite voters, the state closed DMV offices in eight, and left them without offices entirely.

In Kansas:

- The advertisements for their strict voter ID law alone decreased turnout.
- The law's actual effects on ballot accessibility further cratered turnout.

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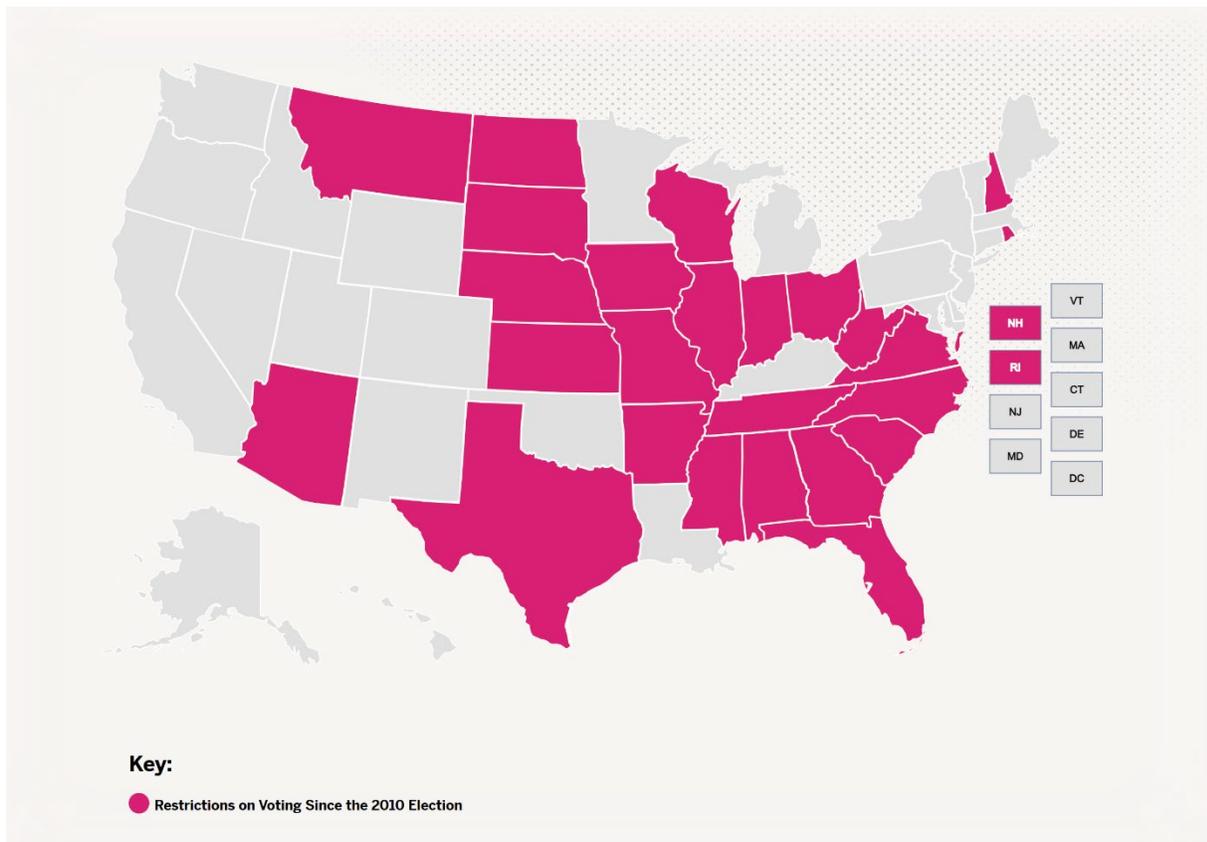
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In the 2016 Election:

- Black turnout dropped for the first time in 20 years.

10% of Americans who are fully eligible to vote don't have the right form of identification to satisfy new voter ID laws

States with Increased Voting Restrictions Since 2010



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Voter Suppression Tactics

"I don't want everybody to vote because our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down."

Paul Weyrich, co-founder of the Heritage Foundation,
a conservative think tank

Some of the Many Ways Voting Is Suppressed

These tactics are particularly designed to reduce voting in people of color communities.

- Voter ID laws—for example requiring voters to have a government-issued ID like a driver's license in order to vote
- Purging voter rolls, often without notifying voters—voters often only find out their name has been purged when they turn out to vote
- Strict voter registration laws requiring registration well in advance of the election—this effectively limits the vote because many people don't think to register until close to an election
- Not restoring voting rights to people with criminal convictions in their past
- Requiring a residential address for voter registration and IDs—this especially affects Native Americans who often only have PO boxes or nontraditional addresses
- Requiring an excuse for absentee voting, and limiting the excuses that are accepted
- Delays in processing requests for absentee ballots
- Requiring that absentee ballots be notarized
- Limiting or eliminating early voting days
- Closing polling locations, which often leads to long lines at the polls that are open
- Changing the polling location—voters often don't realize the location has moved
- Rejecting and/or not counting mail-in ballots
- Requiring 'signature matching'—signatures on a ballot that don't *exactly* match the signature on the voter registration rolls can be rejected
- Intentional voter intimidation and harassment efforts
- Faulty voting machines
- Reducing county budgets for elections
- Racial gerrymandering—drawing district lines to limit the impact of people's votes



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In Their Own Words

 Jon Ossoff

“Voting rights are constitutional rights. I encourage all eligible voters to ensure that they are registered and make their voices heard on June 20th and in all elections, regardless of their party or political persuasion.”

When asked in a debate to name an issue he wouldn't compromise on, Jon Ossoff answered: “voting rights.”



“I am concerned by the apparent inclination of the Justice Department under Attorney General Sessions to back away from strict enforcement of civil rights and voting rights legislation,” he said. **“I will stand up for the right of every Georgian to exercise their right to make their voice heard at the polls.** I will conduct aggressive congressional oversight to ensure that federal agencies are enforcing the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act.”

 Karen Handel

As Georgia's secretary of state from 2007 to 2010 Karen Handel had a long record of making it harder to vote—supporting Georgia's strict voter-ID law, trying to purge thousands of eligible voters from the rolls before the 2008 election, repeatedly challenging the residency of qualified Democratic candidates, and failing to secure the state's electronic voting machines.



“This is going to boil your blood,” she wrote in an e-mail to supporters in 2017. “Just hours ago, **the Democrats won their lawsuit to extend voter registration in Georgia before our election.** This lawsuit should be seen for exactly what it is: A partisan attempt to change the rules in the middle of an election for a nakedly partisan outcome.”

To this day, Handel cites the voter-ID law as one of her “most important accomplishments.” She said in a TV ad for the Sixth District race: “As secretary of state, I fought President Obama to implement photo ID and won,” even though Georgia's voter-ID law was passed in 2005 and took effect in 2007, well before President Obama assumed office.

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Quick View: Voting Rights in Alabama (Updated 8/7/2020)

GOOD 	BAD 	HOW IT WORKS
Online voter registration		https://www.alabamainteractive.org/sos/voter_registration/voterRegistrationWelcome.action
	No automatic voter registration	
	Photo ID required to vote	https://www.sos.alabama.gov/alabama-votes/voter/voter-id
	Absentee voting is allowed only under certain conditions	https://www.sos.alabama.gov/alabama-votes/voter/absentee-voting
	No same day voter registration	For any election, the last day to register to vote or update your voter registration is the 15th day prior to the election.
	Restrictions to the restoration of voting rights to some people with prior criminal convictions	In 2017, Alabama HB 282 provided a list of felonies that involve “moral turpitude” that disqualify a person from exercising his or her right to vote. Previously there was no comprehensive, authoritative source for defining a disenfranchising crime in Alabama.

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Quick View: Voting Rights in Nebraska (Updated 8/7/2020)

GOOD 	BAD 	HOW IT WORKS
Online voter registration		https://www.nebraska.gov/apps-sos-voter-registration/
Automatic voter registration		Opt in or out at DMV, also possible to register at Dept. of Health and Human Services or Dept. of Education
No photo ID required to vote in person		https://sos.nebraska.gov/elections/election-day-faq
Vote by mail and absentee voting		https://sos.nebraska.gov/elections/early-voting-0
No excuse early voting		https://sos.nebraska.gov/elections/early-voting-0
	No same day voter registration	https://sos.nebraska.gov/elections/registering-vote
NE restores voting rights for people with prior criminal convictions	Voting rights are not restored until 2 years after incarceration is completed and parole and probation period are completed	Need to submit a new voter registration application to the county election office where you intend to reside. https://sos.nebraska.gov/elections/felon-voting-rights

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Quick View: Voting Rights in South Carolina (Updated 8/7/2020)

GOOD 	BAD 	HOW IT WORKS
Online voter registration	No automatic voter registration	https://info.scvotes.sc.gov/eng/ovr/start.aspx To register online, you MUST have a valid SC driver's license or identification card issued by the S.C. Department of Motor Vehicles
	Photo ID required to vote in person	You will be asked to show one of the following photo IDs to vote: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SC Driver's License • SC DMV ID card • SC Voter Registration Card (<i>with photo</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To obtain an SC Voter Registration card with photo, take proof of residency (current utility bill, bank statement, paycheck or other gov't document) to your county voter registration office to receive a FREE photo voter ID card. Take that ID to vote. • Federal Military ID • US Passport
Absentee voting by mail or in person	Must provide a reason for absentee voting	https://www.scvotes.org/absentee-voting Starting 30 days before an election, voters may vote absentee in person or by mail. There are 16 different reasons to qualify to vote absentee before election day. See website for more details.
	No same day voter registration	In South Carolina, voters must register to vote a full 30 days before an election in order to vote in that election. **In October 2018, a judge ruled to extend the SC voter registration deadline 10 days due to Hurricane Florence flooding, but this was a special exception to the usual rule.
SC law allows formerly incarcerated people to re-register to vote	Voting rights are not automatically restored, must re-register	After finishing a felony sentence, including probation or parole, and payment of any fines or fees, formerly incarcerated individuals can re-register to vote like a new voter. See above for rules on when and how to register to vote.
Can register to vote if 18 by general election		A 17-year old who will be 18 by Election Day (typically in November) can register and vote—even in the primaries (typically in June)!