

# Voter Suppression

## How the Poor, Felons, and Minorities are Disenfranchised in the United States

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“Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.” When listed here in the United Nation’s Declaration of Human Rights, there is little argument for the inhibition of suffrage in our world. Yet time and time again we read or experience some form of limit on the fundamental right to vote that deviates from the “universal and equal suffrage” that Eleanor Roosevelt and the other 18 drafters of the Declaration sponsored.

In 2016, thirty-two states in the United States had a voter-ID law on the books. Some of the strictest require a photo-ID for any individual to vote. In some cases, the federal courts have found these voter-ID laws to have a discriminatory effect on Black and Latinx voters, as seen in Texas and North Carolina. However, any limit on the right to vote may transform into the silencing of an entire group of people; a silence that can grow into an oppression.

Although the days of the appalling treatment of minority voters seem long gone to some, a perpetual awareness of the history of voter suppression is imperative. During the era of Jim Crow, states institutionalized understanding clauses, grandfather clauses, and literacy tests to hinder the participation of black voters. Only through the diligence of the NAACP, SNCC, and other civil rights activists and groups, did states begin to bend to the rules of the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Amendments. The Fifteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution



was ratified in 1870, and granted all men, “regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude” the right to vote. Congress is in charge of enforcing this amendment through proper legislation, yet it took almost a century to see the Voting Rights Act of 1965 rectify literacy tests and other arbitrary limits to suffrage.

For women, the call to arms started well before the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. At the Woman’s Rights Convention in

Seneca Falls, NY in 1848, the suffragette garnered 100 signatures on the Declaration of Sentiments pronouncing “all men and women are created equal.” Under the law, there are still inequalities; but the Nineteenth Amendment guarantees the right to vote regardless of sex, fulfilling a promise that should have been expressed 131 years earlier.

Many of the current limits on suffrage continue to abnegate poor and working class voters, felons, and non-whites; his-

y demonstrates this pattern has never  
re out of favor. In the earliest American  
ctions, property owners were guaran-  
d a right to vote as they had an interest  
who governed and levied property taxes  
d policy. Poor citizens without property  
re considered non-players and were  
nied participation in elections with  
roperty requirements embedded into  
te constitutions. In accordance with the  
nth Amendment to the U.S. Constitu-  
-n, the administration of elections (and  
ting requirements) was left to individual  
ites; this allowance brandished states  
th immense power over who could and  
uld not vote.

Felony convictions also prohibit  
ting rights for those in prison and  
lay the reclamation of rights for those  
ho have served their prison sentences.  
oday, "Florida, Kentucky and Iowa are  
e only states where people convicted of a  
lony permanently lose their voting rights  
ending clemency hearings; an estimated  
7 million Florida residents have been  
ripped of voting rights." Felony convic-  
ons, however, continue to place a burden  
n citizens who have served their sentences  
nd seek to restore their voting rights. The  
Office of Executive Clemency grants the  
eturn of voting rights, but recently Federal  
courts have found the Office's methods to  
e "arbitrary and exceedingly slow."

Finally, movements toward limiting  
oor non-whites were increasingly preva-  
ent. Poll taxes, especially during the Jim  
Crow era and the changing tides of civil  
ights in the mid-Twentieth Century, were  
utilized as just another "facially neutral"  
attempt to prohibit non-whites from the  
allot box. With its ratification in 1964,  
he Twenty-Fourth Amendment to the  
U.S. Constitution banned poll taxes, help-  
ng to further ensure "universal and equal  
suffrage" to all American citizens.

Change requires activism and diligence.  
The right to vote should not be a guaran-  
tee to some, but to all; regardless of age,  
sex, race, color, creed, religion, capacity,  
and/or residency. To protect suffrage  
rights for yourself and others, become

involved in your local and state elections  
along with the national forum. Subscribe  
to the League of Women Voters who offer  
citizens detailed candidate questionnaires  
and state amendment information. In  
Florida, one must register to vote 29 days  
in advance of any election; the registra-  
tion process can be in person, by mail, or  
online. For upcoming primaries, one must  
join their party of choice 29 days prior  
to their party's primary election; party  
changes are made through updates on a  
voter registration form (along with name,  
address, or signature changes). To vote in  
an election, Florida voters can access the  
polls in person, during the available early  
voting period, or through the mail. To  
find out more about elections in Florida  
and pertinent rules and regulations, be  
sure to visit the Florida Division of Elec-  
tions website [[http://dos.myflorida.com/  
elections/](http://dos.myflorida.com/elections/)] and your local county Office of  
Elections website.

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