

VOTER SUPPRESSION 21ST CENTURY STYLE

Thank you for attending today's Voter Registration Drive, sponsored by the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Ministry of Friendship United Methodist Church, and the Southwest Suburban Immigration Project.

The right to vote is one of the pillars of American democracy, but this short report highlights one of today's trends that endangers this right: Voter Suppression—something especially targeting Blacks, other people of color, the poor, and other marginalized groups.

High and Low Points in Voting Rights History

In 1965, in response to the Civil Rights Movement and countless acts of courage on its behalf, Congress passed the historic Voting Rights Act. But what seemed like a guarantee of voting rights *for everyone* in perpetuity was severely weakened in 2013. In that year, a Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County vs. Holder* struck down Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, a section which gave the federal government strict oversight on efforts to suppress voting rights in states, mostly in the South, which had a history racism.

Within 24 hours of that decision Texas, Alabama, and Mississippi instituted voter suppression laws—like laws requiring specific photo ID's—which had been banned by the 1965 Voting Rights Act. As recent events have shown, “a history of racism” applies to virtually every state in the United States, and many other states followed the lead of Texas, Alabama, and Mississippi in instituting suppression policies and taking away voting resources, moves which have overwhelmingly targeted Blacks and other people of color. A 2016 ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth District found that North Carolina's voter ID provisions “target African Americans with almost surgical precision.”

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College students and other young people have also been affected. In Texas, for example, you cannot use your student ID to vote, but you can use your gun permit.

Voter Fraud and Other Myths

Tactics to suppress voting are often presented as “common sense” ways to protect the “integrity of our elections.” We need only these specific voter ID's to protect against voter fraud, for example. But study after study, even by those claiming that “voter fraud is rampant,” have come up empty. Though it does exist, it exists in vanishingly small amounts. One study found 31 cases of fraud in over 1 billion ballots casted. Other reports also confirm that voter fraud is extremely rare: probably no more than 0.0025 percent. Nor

is it true, as some claim, that non-citizens are voting by the millions and tipping the outcomes of elections. A study of the 2016 elections in 42 voting jurisdictions with large non-citizen populations found only 30 incidents of *suspected* non-citizen voting out of 23.5 million votes. Other fake election crises—including voter rolls needing greater purging, and mail-in voting being more susceptible to fraud—have been shown to be very much overblown.

Creating Obstacle Upon Obstacle to Voting

The title of Grace Panetta’s article for *Business Insider* sums it up well: “Black Americans still face obstacles to voting at every step of the process.” This could easily be applied to other marginalized groups. In one Southern state, a government-issued photo ID for public housing was deemed inappropriate for voting, thus disenfranchising tens of thousands of voters. A driver’s license was needed. But DMV’s were then closed, largely in Black districts, forcing people without a car or public transportation to travel 50 miles or more. In a Northern state, one needed a birth certificate to get a driver’s license to vote, but to get a copy of your birth certificate you needed a driver’s license. The Presidential Commission on Election Administration says voting should take no longer than 30 minutes, but in 2018 more than half of Black voters waited an average of 45% more than White voters. In two Western states, 1 out of 5 and 1 out of 10 polling places—mostly in minority districts—were closed, forcing voting wait times to increase to 4, 5, even 6 hours. We have already mentioned an East Coast state whose voting policies targeted “African Americans with almost surgical precision.” It’s a nation-wide problem.

Some Americans face obstacles to voting at every step of the process.

What Can I Do?

Contact people or organizations concerned with voter suppression (like The League of Women Voters, Let America Vote, Spread the Vote, Rock the Vote, or the Brennan Center for Justice...). They’ll suggest ways you can help. Participate in Voter Registration efforts. Support a new Voting Rights Act for the 21st Century. Educate yourself and others about voter suppression in the U.S. A flood of resources exist. The following can get you started.

- ❖ Grace Panetta, “Black Americans still face obstacles to voting at every step of the process” (*Business Insider*)
- ❖ Max Feldman, “Dirty Tricks: 9 Falsehoods That Could Undermine the 2020 Elections” (Brennan Center for Justice)
- ❖ Go to my website (richardrguzman.com) for an introductory video called “Voter Suppression 21st Century Style,” and links to the above and other resources.

—Richard R. Guzman, writing as a member of Friendship United Methodist Church’s Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Ministry