

A VISION FOR BLACK LIVES: POLICY DEMANDS FOR BLACK POWER, FREEDOM, & JUSTICE

Full Access, Guarantees, and Protections of the Right to Vote For All People Through Universal Voter Registration, Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), Pre-Registration for 16-Year-Olds, Same-Day Voter Registration (SDR), Voting Day Holiday, Online Voter Registration (OVR), Enfranchisement of Formerly and Currently Incarcerated People, Local and State Resident Voting for Undocumented People, and a Ban on Any Disenfranchisement Laws

What is the problem?

- Participating in elections is a public good and fundamental right; a necessary element of what it means to be a free, self-governing people. Yet the U.S. has a voter participation problem. In 2012, 66 million voters chose President Obama, 61 million voted for Governor Romney, and 82 million eligible people did not vote at all.¹ Further, the low overall voting rate is compounded by significant voter turnout gaps among different demographic groups. We see significantly less participation by low-income people, people of color, and young people compared to higher rates of participation by older and more affluent white voters. As a result, demographics of our elected officials are dominantly older, whiter, and wealthier than the actual electorate.
- Because of the demographic gaps in voter participation, our elected officials are dominantly older, whiter and wealthier than the actual electorate they are charged to represent. These officials in turn are far more likely to be more responsive to the policy positions of older, whiter and wealthier voters. At the same time, many states have erected barriers to voting and/or maintain voting rules that discourage turnout and limit registration. These factors have cumulatively led to policy decisions and outcomes that disproportionately (and negatively) affect people of color, poor and working class people, people with disabilities, and the elderly.
- On June 25, 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a key provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and since then Americans have had to contend with over 30 States proposing or implementing voter suppression laws across the US. These unwarranted actions to disenfranchise Black voters and a wide spectrum of other voters of color must be addressed

¹ David Leip. "2012 Presidential General Election Results." US Election Atlas. <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php>; Thom File. "The Diversifying Electorate—Voting Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin in 2012 (and Other Recent Elections)." U.S. Census Bureau. May 2013. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-568.pdf>.

² 50 Years Later, Voting Rights Act Under Unprecedented Assault, by Vishal Agraharkar <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/50-years-later-voting-rights-act-under-unprecedented-assault>, August 2, 2015



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What does this solution do?

- A number of legislative reforms proactively facilitate and protect the right of every person to participate in elections, by expanding and streamlining the processes of voter registration and casting a ballot. These reforms have the ultimate goal of assigning responsibility to government, instead of putting the burden on individuals, to ensure that people can participate in our electoral system. Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) and Same-Day Registration (SDR) are two major structural legislative reforms. Both ease the process of voter participation by reducing the steps required in order to be properly registered to vote, which is significant because properly registered voters are much more likely to cast ballots than non-registered voters. AVR uses voter eligibility information that certain government agencies already collect to add voters to the rolls; SDR creates a process for eligible voters to properly register and then vote, as a single transaction. Additional reforms, such as pre-registration for 16-year-olds, enfranchisement of formerly and currently incarcerated people, local and state resident voting for undocumented people, and a ban on all disenfranchisement laws, expand the range of eligible voters, while reforms such as early voting and voting day holidays expand the times and opportunities that are available to cast a ballot.
- Online voter registration compliments AVR & SDR efforts, and grants greater access for residents who are disabled, elderly, or have other mobility issues.
- We must also work to combat voter suppression in the form of voter ID laws. In most States across the US, college students are largely left out of the voting process where voter ID laws exist, as students are not able use their college IDs to cast ballots. We should work to eliminate voter ID laws that exclude students, immigrants, formerly incarcerated people, and others from the voting process.

Federal and State Action:

- Federal and state governments should introduce and pass legislation to expand the pool of eligible voters (e.g., full enfranchisement for current and formerly incarcerated individuals; pre-registration of 16-year-olds; local and state resident voting for undocumented people).
- Federal and state governments should introduce and pass legislation that streamlines voter registration processes and increases voter registration rates (e.g., AVR, SDR)
- Federal and state governments should introduce and pass legislation that expands the times and opportunities for voters to cast ballots (e.g., early voting; voting day holidays).
- Federal and State governments should introduce legislation to implement Online Voter Registration streamlining mobilization efforts to register voters across the US.

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- Federal and State governments should work to eliminate voter ID laws across the US, clearing the way for college students, elderly, immigrants and formerly incarcerated person to have greater access to the voting process.

How does this solution address the specific needs of some of the most marginalized Black people?

- These reforms cumulatively provide a counterbalance against the current landscape of voter suppression efforts throughout the U.S., efforts which have disproportionately impacted Black people. Increased access to voter registration and voting can change the demographics of our electorate in ways that 1) alter the demographics of our elected officials; and 2) make our elected officials more responsive to the policy preferences of Black folks.

Model Legislation

Current Federal Actions:

- **Automatic Voter Registration:** On July 14, 2016 [Robert A. Brady](#), [D-PA] and [Sen. Patrick J. Leahy](#), [D-VT] both introduced Federal level Automatic Voter Registration bills.

Current State Actions:

- **Automatic Voter Registration:** In 2016 over 23 States across the US proposed AVR bills, yet only three states passed legislation: [West Virginia](#), [Vermont](#), and [Connecticut](#). Illinois' bill was passed by lawmakers, but was recently vetoed by their Governor. California and Oregon passed legislation in 2015 and implementation process began in 2016.
- **Voter ID:** Louisiana [law-makers and advocates](#) worked to pass [HB940](#) to allow college students in Louisiana to utilize their student IDs to cast ballots. The [Governor](#) signed the bill into law during the Spring Legislative session in 2016. [House Bill 836](#) was recently passed in North Carolina to allow voters to cast a ballot after providing their birthdates, the last four digits of their Social Security number, and an affidavit stating that there is a "reasonable impediment" to their ability to present a photo ID.
- **Online Voter Registration:** In [2016](#) over 32 states and the District of Columbia allow individuals to register to vote completely electronically.
- [Democracy Restoration Act](#) (introduced 2015)
- [Same Day Registration](#) (passed in Colorado in 2013)
- [Pre Registration for 16yr olds](#) (passed in Louisiana in 2014)
- [Online Voter Registration](#) (32 States have passed OVR Legislation)



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Resources:

- [By The People](#)
- [Millions to the Polls](#)
- [Automatic Voter Registration: Finding America's Missing Voters](#)
- [What is Same-Day Registration? Where is it Available?](#)
- [Automatic Voter Registration](#), State & Federal Actions on AVR
- [Automatic Voter Registration, Brief](#), Louisiana
- [Online Voter Registration](#)

Organizations Currently Working on Policy:

- Demos
- Center For Popular Democracy
- Open Democracy Project @ Crescent City Media Group

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***Demos contributed to the development of this policy brief, but does not endorse every single policy position taken in this brief*