

# When We All Vote, We All Win:

Big and Bold Policies to Create a  
More Vibrant Democracy in America

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# Executive Summary

We believe that democracy in the United States deserves an upgrade. The complex process of registration and casting a ballot in elections needs reform. We believe that by implementing a series of policies aimed at expanding the voting population, the United States will become a more representative democracy that can better serve the needs of all people, not just the wealthy, white and privileged who currently benefit from our system at the expense of the rest of us. We propose a spectrum of reforms, ranging from something as simple as pre-registration for 16 & 17 year-olds to universal voter registration upon the age of 18 and fines or penalties for those who fail to turn out to vote. The complete list of policy suggestions, in order of feasibility, are as follows:

## Phase I

- Improved voter education
- Pre-registration for 16 to 17 year-olds
- Improved transportation on election days
- Improved absentee voting processes & education
- Same-day registration
- Felon re-enfranchisement & prison voting education

## Phase II

- Repeal/Reform voter ID laws
- Challenge & reform electoral college and unfair gerrymandering
- Improved accessibility to polling stations
- Improved voting technology & working on building trust in the voting system

## Phase III

- Making election day a national holiday
- Universal voter registration at age 18
- Potential fines & penalties for those who fail to vote

We believe that if any and all of these policies are implemented over several years, our democracy will become more representative of the people, and the lives of all Americans will improve.

# Introduction

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The United States as we know it is not a true democracy. As much as the American government claims to be “of the people,” there are large swaths of the population that are not able to fully participate in our civic processes. We believe that our system of voting needs an overhaul and propose the gradual introduction of democracy reforms that lead toward national universal voter registration. This will create a democracy that works for all of us.

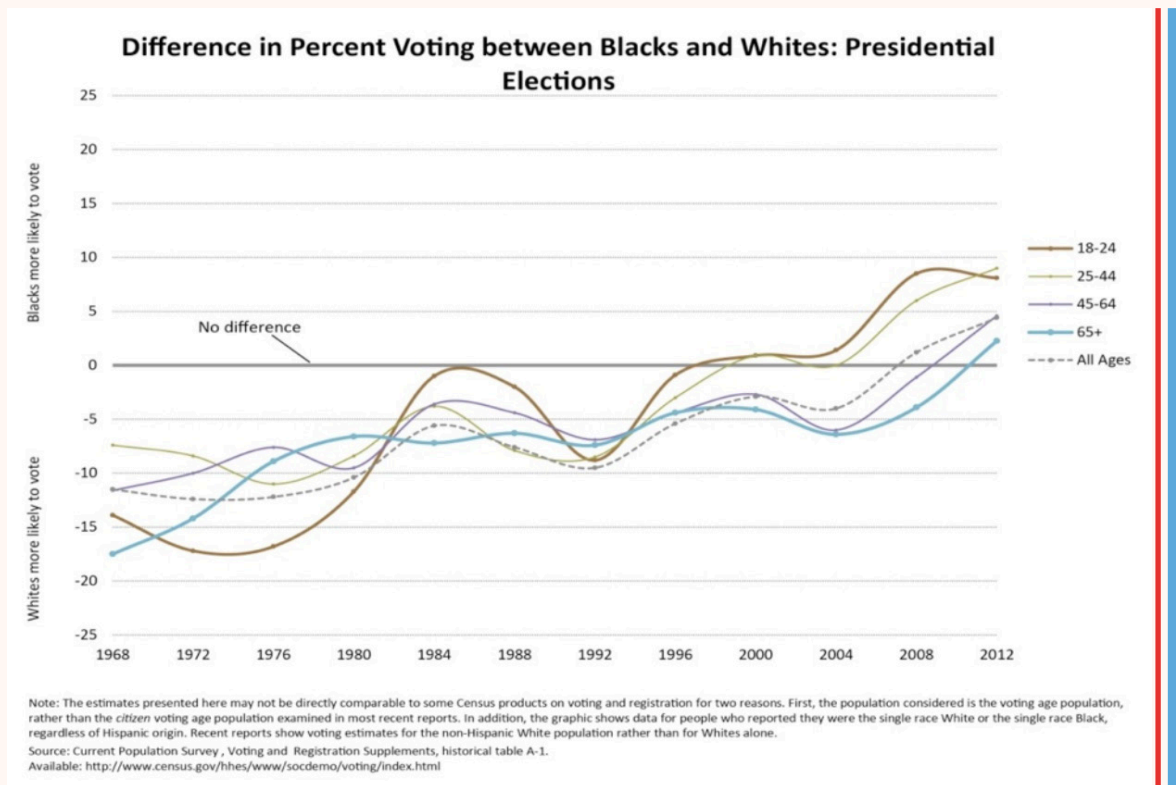
Universal voter registration, referred to in this paper as UVR, is a blanket term for a series of policies that would allow every citizen to automatically be eligible to vote in local and national elections once they reach the age of 18. UVR can also be implemented in such a way that there may be penalties for not voting, which may encourage people to turn out in greater numbers. UVR and similar policies already exist other countries, with the most commonly referenced example being Australia, where voter turnout has remained over 90 percent since the introduction of compulsory voting. Our hope is that with every citizen registered, greater turnout and participation will produce legislative bodies that better represent the interest of the American people and the needs of communities across the country.

## History of Voter Suppression

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In April 1865 President Abraham Lincoln approved Special Field Order No. 15. If enacted properly, this bill— known as “forty acres and a mule”—would have dramatically changed American History. It would have allotted 400,000 acres of property in the South to newly freed slaves. In addition, it would have granted them a mule to farm the land they had been awarded. Shortly after signing Order No.15, Lincoln was assassinated. His successor, President Andrew Johnson, immediately rolled back Order No. 15 and many other policies Lincoln had ratified. Not only was Lincoln’s assassination a national tragedy, it also thwarted the progress of African-Americans.

Known as the Reconstruction Era, the period of time following the Civil War was tumultuous, with many Southerners doing their best to uphold the institution of slavery in everything but name. Though the 15th Amendment was ratified by Congress in 1869, prevailing racism resulted in continued efforts to prevent African-Americans from making their voices heard at the polls.



***After the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which expanded the franchise, the likelihood to vote among black and white voters started to equalize over time.***

The most infamous form of voter suppression that began during Reconstruction was the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan. This group would attack, and in some cases, kill Black citizens who attempted to vote. The group would do the same to White citizens who tried to support the Black vote. This violence spread fear among Southerners who supported the African-American suffrage movement, and their efforts to restrict voting was working. Black voter suppression was also instituted by the government. Many laws were passed that prevented newly freed African-Americans from voting and becoming equal members of their communities. These were known as "Jim Crow Laws." Two that are often mentioned are the literacy tests and the poll tax.

Some States required voters to take a literacy test in order to register to vote. Not only were literacy rates lower in African-American communities, the tests given to African-Americans were significantly more challenging than the tests given to Whites. Equally as deterring, the poll tax constituted a fee that a voter had to pay to be eligible to vote. Due to the higher poverty rates in African-American communities this served as another form of voter suppression. Jump forward almost a hundred years to the 1950s and not much had changed. Jim Crow laws were still in effect across America; though the reach of the organization had

lessened, the KKK still terrorized the black community. After decades of struggles for freedom and the emergence of the broader civil rights movement, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 became law. Change had come. The government had officially decided that voter discrimination was not acceptable in our democracy.

Initially, voter turnout increased in the Black community. In Mississippi, for example, voter turnout rates went from 6 percent in 1964 to 59 percent in 1969. These laws dramatically changed the electorate of the United States.

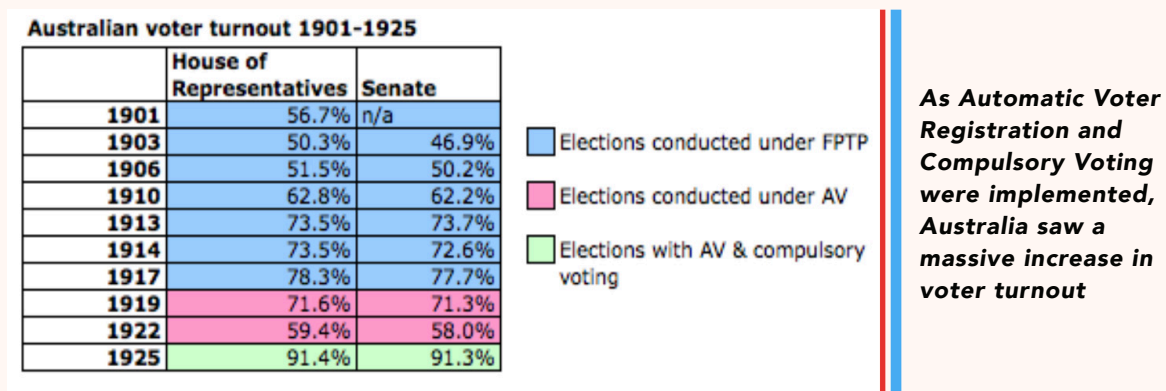
Unfortunately, these laws worked for only so long. With the dramatic increase in the scope of our criminal justice system during the 1970s, specifically in its attack on communities of color, a whole new form of voter suppression arose. 21 states passed laws where felons lost their voting rights while in prison and for a certain amount of time after they served their time. Black people are incarcerated at almost 5 times the rate white people are. With so many Americans behind bars, especially those in lower-income brackets and people of color, the eligible voting population significantly reduced. Other laws and policies that will be discussed throughout the paper show how voter suppression still perverts our democracy today.

Voter suppression has been a component of American democracy since our country's inception. This continuous effort to prevent the rising American electorate from voting has harmed the progress of our country. Today many politicians continue to suppress voters. The policies may be more subtle, but they remain effective. For example, under the guise of protecting against voter fraud, voter ID laws have in effect made it more difficult for low-income Americans, who are more likely to support the Democratic party, to vote. Voter ID laws may not seem as anti-democratic as Jim Crow era policies, but their impact is strikingly similar.

It is vital that American citizens realize that standing up for those who are most vulnerable economically, socially, and politically is essential to our democracy. If we want a democracy that is for all people, we need to take bold action to ensure that all people, regardless of race or income, can participate fully in civic life, and that starts with voting.

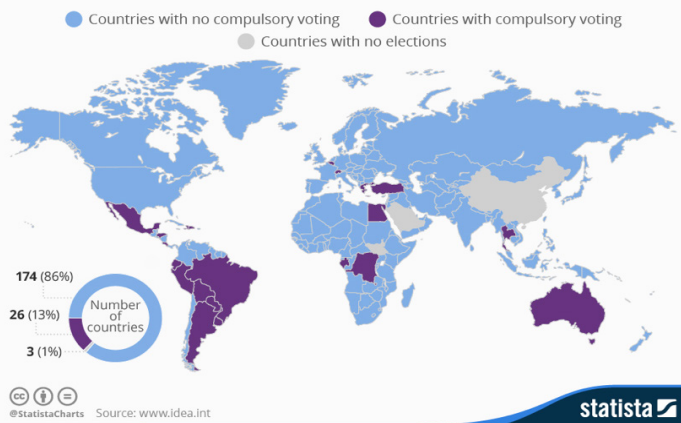
# Voting Systems in Other Countries

The United States is one of the only developed countries that places the full burden of registering to vote on the citizen. There are many systems used by other countries to register voters, but the only nation that has implemented universal voter registration is Australia. In Australia, people can approach the polling station, provide proof of citizenship, sign a waiver saying they haven't voted anywhere else, and vote. A common argument against these types of systems is that it leaves the country vulnerable to voter fraud. This has been a consistent claim under the Trump administration and touted by Republicans as a reason to implement strict voter ID laws. Yet voter fraud is virtually nonexistent in the United States. An independent study cited by the Brennan Center of Justice highlighted that over 14 years, only 31 cases of voter fraud had been identified out of over 1 billion votes cast during that period. In Australia there was an estimated 7,700 cases of voters who cast multiple ballots in 2016. That number, in a country where 14.3 million people voted, only constitutes .005% of the vote.



One reason why there is a high voting rate in Australia is because they impose a \$26.99 Australian dollar fine for citizens who do not vote. The government actively reaches out to its citizens about voting, by using national databases to check registration status, and at many stages of each citizen's life the government makes sure that people are able to participate in their elections.

### The Countries Where Voting Is Compulsory



***There are currently 26 countries with compulsory voting required by law, and 10 that actively enforce it. Those that enforce it include Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Ecuador, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, North Korea, Nauru, Peru, Singapore, Uruguay, and Schaffhausen canton in Switzerland.***

The country with the highest voter turnout rate is Belgium (90.48%), where compulsory voting laws are in effect. If they cannot come up with a valid excuse, citizens who do not show up to vote are fined. These laws are quite effective. In 2010 Chile had a form of compulsory voting. The voter turnout in the 2010 election sat at approximately 87%. After the laws were changed to make voting voluntary the turnout rate dropped to approximately 42%.

## Improving our Democracy

In order to institute automatic voter registration in the U.S., we believe we should implement gradual policy changes that expand voting rights overtime and shift the culture of voting. As we have highlighted, the America we know today is not a true democracy, and the current voluntary voting system does not accurately represent the will of the people. Reforms to our current electoral system will help usher in a new era of democracy in which all citizens can, and will, actively participate. But universal participation will not happen overnight. We need a series of policy changes that will create a true democracy.

Preliminary steps to improve our democracy must include a cultural shift. In order for mandatory voting laws to have any affect, American citizens must feel as though the laws are not infringing on their rights. To achieve this, laws must be framed as allowing an increased ability to exercise one's right to vote, rather than a paternalistic policy narrative that becomes interpreted as limiting individual freedom. Under our current system, many Americans see voting as a chore, and this is primarily due to the inconveniences of registering, educating

oneself on policies and candidates, and actually getting to the polls to cast a vote.

If we want to increase voter turnout, we have to remove some of the barriers to entry that make voting difficult. Lisa Hill, a political scientist at the University of Adelaide, Australia, believes that the Australian system of mandatory voting is the best practice for countries seeking true democracy. When discussing the possibility of instituting a system like this elsewhere, Hill believes that to be successful, “the obligation imposed on the citizen to ‘vote’ must be met by an even stronger commitment by the state to ensure that the performance of the imposed duty is feasible,” for all eligible citizens. If the government wants to increase the number of people voting, their first steps should be to relieve some of the burden citizens face in the process of voting. The easier it is to cast a vote, the more people will turn out.

Some initial reforms to consider may include better transportation to election booths, pre-registration for younger citizens (16 and 17 year olds), same-day voter registration, improved absentee voting methods, and better voter education in primary and secondary schools.

## Better Voter Education

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The educational component to voting is crucial to implement across public schools if we want any of our reforms to increase turnout. Citizens are unlikely to turn out to vote if they don’t have any knowledge on registration, polling locations, or even the positions candidates running for office have. If the United States was truly a democracy, we would be doing everything in our power to get as many people to vote on election day as possible. Without proper voter education and outreach, we are not doing all that we can.

In California, “the state’s chief elections officer announced the new milestone for teenager pre-registration at the same time he unveiled a new state website designed to connect high school students with civic engagement opportunities, including mock elections and student poll worker programs.” Programs aimed at educating high schoolers about the voting process early on will help bolster youth interest in politics and may lead to greater registration numbers and turnout at the polls. Current youth voter education programs are bleak, and many Americans have severely limited knowledge on even the most basic facets of



the United States electoral process. According to a 2009 study by the Atlantic, 89 percent of Americans expressed confidence in their civic knowledge, but after being given a basic test, 83 percent of those tested failed. The only way to have a knowledgeable, passionate voter base is to educate people early on so that they can participate in our democracy and vote for legislation that will benefit them. Improved voter education is a sensible, feasible reform that very few could be against without openly admitting their anti-democratic leanings.

## **Improved Transportation to Election Booths**

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Travel stipends or cohesive, free public transportation, primarily in lower-income areas, could help encourage greater turnout. Alan S. Gerber, a political scientist at Yale University, thinks such a policy could heighten the overall significance of election day. "Making transportation free on election day is a clear statement that society values voting. This message, that voting is important... may be a significant impetus to vote over and above the turnout produced by lowered transportation costs." Policies like this have less to do with the monetary hurdle of voting, and more to do with changing popular culture with respect to voting. The more committed our government is to getting out the vote, the more people will be encouraged to participate. Instead of viewing it as a chore, we have to shift attitudes so voting becomes viewed as a powerful exercise of our rights.

## **Pre-Registration for 16 and 17 Year Olds**

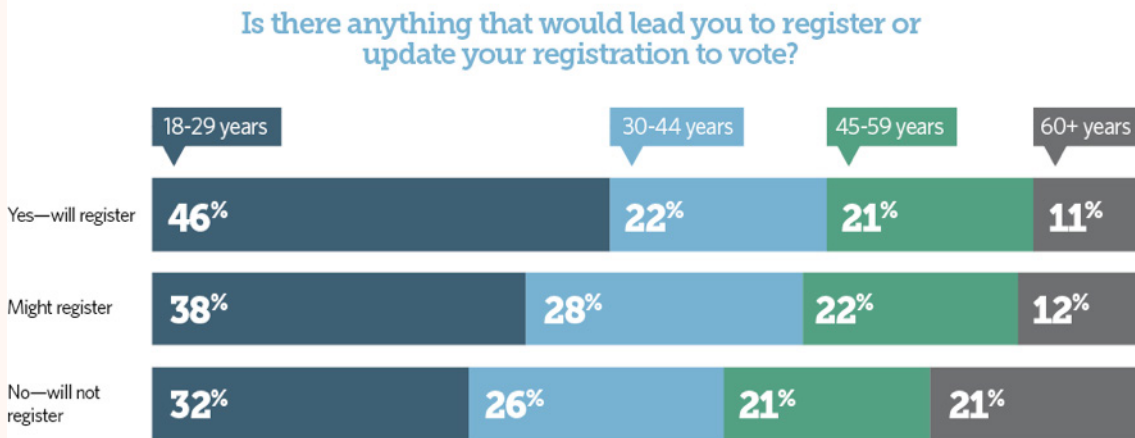
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Preregistration programs have already been implemented in California, and the results are dramatic. 100,000 California teens have pre-registered, meaning that at age 18 they will automatically be able to vote. Among these teens, 43% chose to register as unaffiliated, 38% as Democrats, and about 10% as Republicans. Pre-registration programs are a great introductory law to prepare the country for automatic voter registration, and will encourage higher rates of youth participation and turnout in elections, which is beneficial because the earlier people make voting a habit, the more likely they are to continue participating in our democracy over the course of their life.

Figure 10

## Young People Are More Likely to Say They Plan to Register to Vote in the Future

Percentage of unregistered respondents, by age

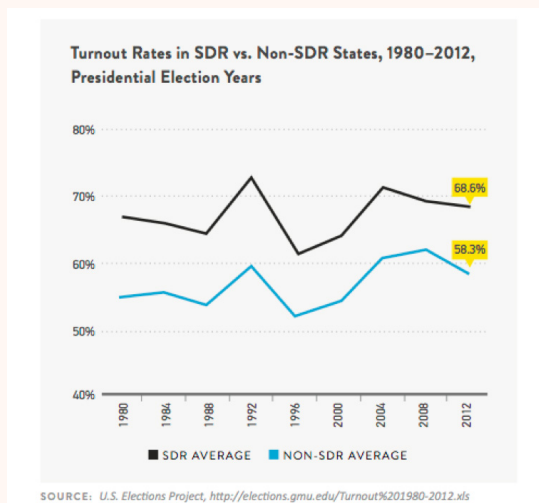


Source: Pew Voting Frequency Survey

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**The younger the person, the more likely they are to consider registering to vote. Unregistered respondents aged 18-29 are more than twice as likely to consider registering than those aged 30-44.**

## Same-Day Voter Registration



**This graph from the U.S. Elections Project shows the difference in voter turnout during election years in states with Same-Day registration and states without. Every year, states with Same-Day registration policies recorded significantly higher turnout**

In a similar vein to pre-registration policies, same day voter registration also provides an opportunity to increase voter turnout, especially in lower-income communities and among youth voters. According to a study on youth turnout and voting methods, "Same Day Registration [SDR] offers those who have recently moved but failed to update registration records another opportunity to register and vote. Research indicates that allowing young people to register to vote on election day could increase youth turnout in presidential elections by as much as 14 percentage points."

STATE	VOTERS USING SDR	SDR USAGE (% OF VOTERS)
Idaho	117,861	17.69%
Iowa	66,289	4.17%
Maine	58,474	8.07%
Minnesota	527,867	17.89%
Montana	8,053	1.64%
New Hampshire	99,299	13.81%
North Carolina	249,922	5.61%
Wisconsin	337,880	10.95%
Wyoming*	28,017	11.18%
Washington, DC	34,646	11.77%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,528,300</b>	<b>10.04%</b>

SOURCE: As reported by state elections officials. Data on file with Dēmos.

\* Preliminary 2012 data; further review pending

***In the 10 states that offered Same-Day voter registration, an average of 10.04% of all votes cast were via citizens who utilized SDR.***

Same day registration would allow new residents or working class citizens to spend less time worrying about how and when they are going to register and allow greater participation in elections for those who were not previously registered to vote.

## Better Absentee Voting

If we want to expand voter turnout in the U.S., an important component is to expand knowledge and ease of absentee voting processes. As of right now, every state has different absentee voting rules as well as regulations on who can participate. Some states even require a valid excuse to vote absentee, and those also vary depending on which part of the country you live in. If we streamline the absentee voting process and create universal rules on how to apply and who is eligible, it will be less daunting to voters and could encourage more people to cast a ballot. Improved absentee voting will also help younger voters, especially college students who want to vote in their home state or studying abroad, participate in our democracy.

# Transforming our Democracy

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These introductory tweaks to our current system would help voters ease into a less complicated voting process, and help expand the vote to communities that have been traditionally disenfranchised by strict registration laws and lack of knowledge about the process in general. But tweaks are not enough. Our democracy demands universal, automatic voter registration on a national level. We see these policy changes existing on a spectrum, from introductory alterations to complete restructuring of the voting system. After implementing policies like preregistration, improved education, and same-day registration, the culture of the country may shift and we can look toward more advanced changes. The next sequence in policy changes should include expanding the types of IDs accepted in states with voter ID laws and working to repeal these racist laws, expanding voting rights and education for felons, improving polling technology to foster more trust in the electoral system, and repealing the plethora of anti-democratic laws that are already in place across America, which includes the electoral college and systems of gerrymandering.

## Felon Re-Enfranchisement & Prison Education

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Another issue that plagues American democracy today is our criminal justice system. Felony convictions in many states result in loss of voting rights, even after someone re-enters civil society. Mass incarceration, which impacts all communities but especially low-income and communities of color, and the subsequent loss of voting rights has dramatic consequences. For example, about 19 percent of the African-American voting-age population in Florida are disenfranchised because of a felony conviction, more than double the overall rate of disenfranchisement in the state.

In some states, the only way to get voting rights restored after a felony conviction is to apply to the state for clemency. Black folks, women, and younger people are significantly underrepresented among clemency applicants in the first place. In Florida, economically disadvantaged citizens are even less likely to receive clemency, because, “anyone who owes outstanding court fees, restitution, or other pecuniary penalties was automatically ineligible for consideration.” Therefore, any attempt to understand the growth of disenfranchisement thus requires examining the rapid growth of criminal punishment. Our justice

system needs a total and complete revolution, a topic for a different paper. However, one of the first ways to mitigate the effects it is having on minority populations is to restore voting rights to felons who have paid their debts and served their time.

It should be noted that voter suppression in the US has received special attention from the international community. A recent United Nations report on extreme poverty and human rights in the U.S. explains how, "in the United States there is overt disenfranchisement of more than 6 million felons and ex-felons, which predominantly affects Black citizens since they are the ones whose conduct is often specifically targeted for criminalization. In addition, nine states condition the restoration of the right to vote after prison on the payment of outstanding fines and fees. A typical outcome of these policies is that a majority of all ex-felons cannot vote.

How can we be a beacon of hope for democracies around the world if we ourselves are not living up to one of our most important values as a country? We need to re-enfranchise voters whose rights have been stripped away, and we also need to provide prison education regarding voting processes and policies. Many incarcerated Americans are victim to an inherently flawed, biased system, and one effective thing they can do to try and change the system is to cast a vote. Taking away their ability to do so is only keeping them trapped in a system they cannot fight against.

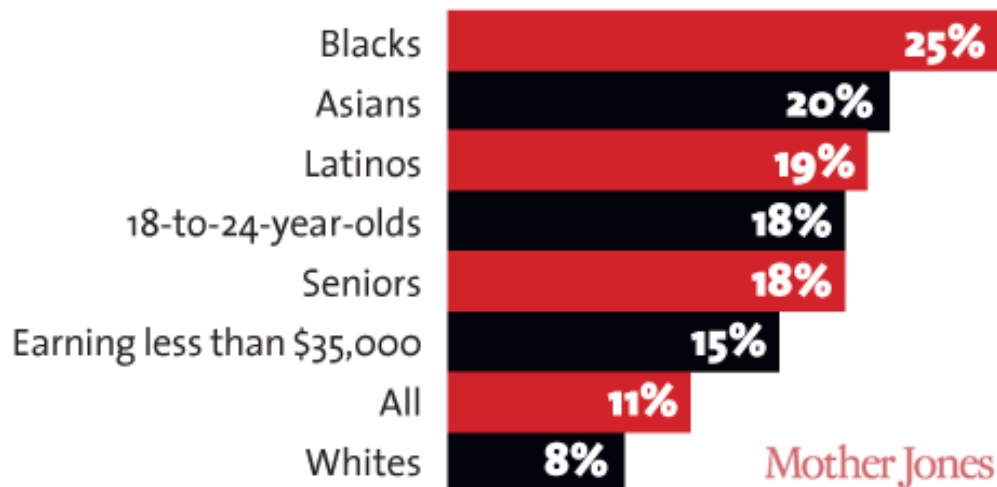
## Voter ID Laws

One of the biggest policies poisoning our democracy are voter ID laws. 11 states during the 2016 elections had this requirement. Many of these states, for example Wisconsin, were swing states that helped push the presidential election to Donald J. Trump. Obtaining a form of photo identification can be a bureaucratic nightmare. Oftentimes people do not care enough about voting to go through this process.

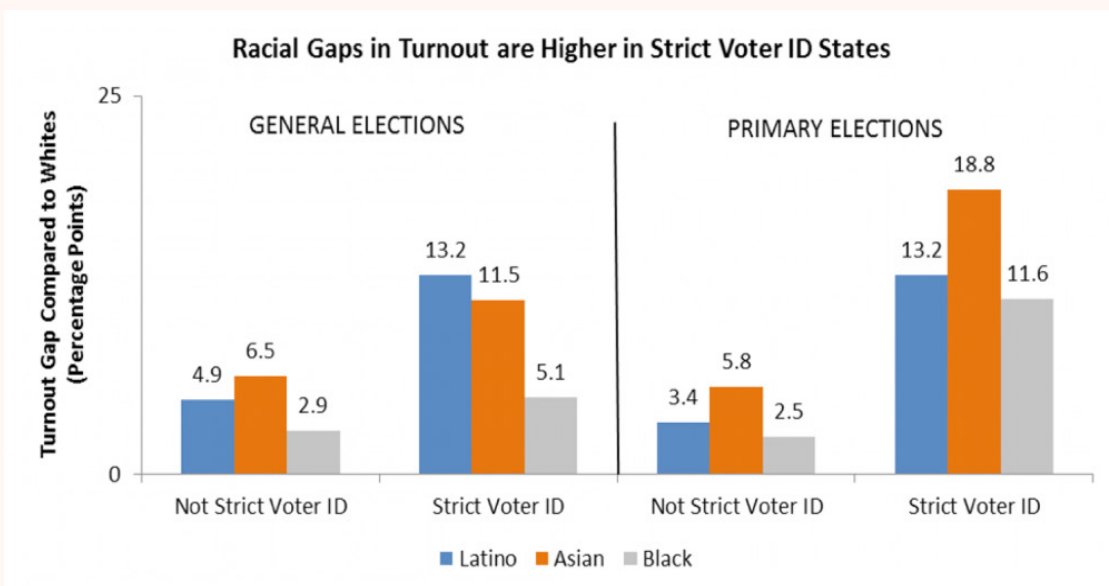
It is more difficult for minority voters to obtain the forms of identification needed to vote, therefore restricting their access to the polls, in the same way literacy tests and poll taxes did. A 2011 study by the Brennan Center for Law and Justice found that 21 million American adult citizens (11 percent) do not possess a government-issued ID, and therefore cannot participate fully in our democracy. That is wrong, and we must demand better. Voter ID Laws must be repealed for the survival of democracy in the United States. At the very least, we must expand the list of acceptable IDs such as student IDs and Medicaid/Medicare cards, while continuing our efforts to repeal these laws.

Voter ID laws have popped up in states across the country under the guise of limiting voter fraud. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, voter fraud only occurs in .0003 to .0025 percent of votes. Voter fraud should not be justified as a rationale for restricting access to the polls. One should be able to go to the polls, give one's name and social security number, and vote. In many states, due to the fear of voter fraud, this is not feasible. What is feasible is loosening voter ID laws. Less strict laws means more citizens voting. Increased turnout means a better representation of our Country. Ultimately, Voter ID laws should be repealed across the country.

## Adults Without Valid Photo ID



**White Americans are three times more likely to own a valid photo ID than minorities.**

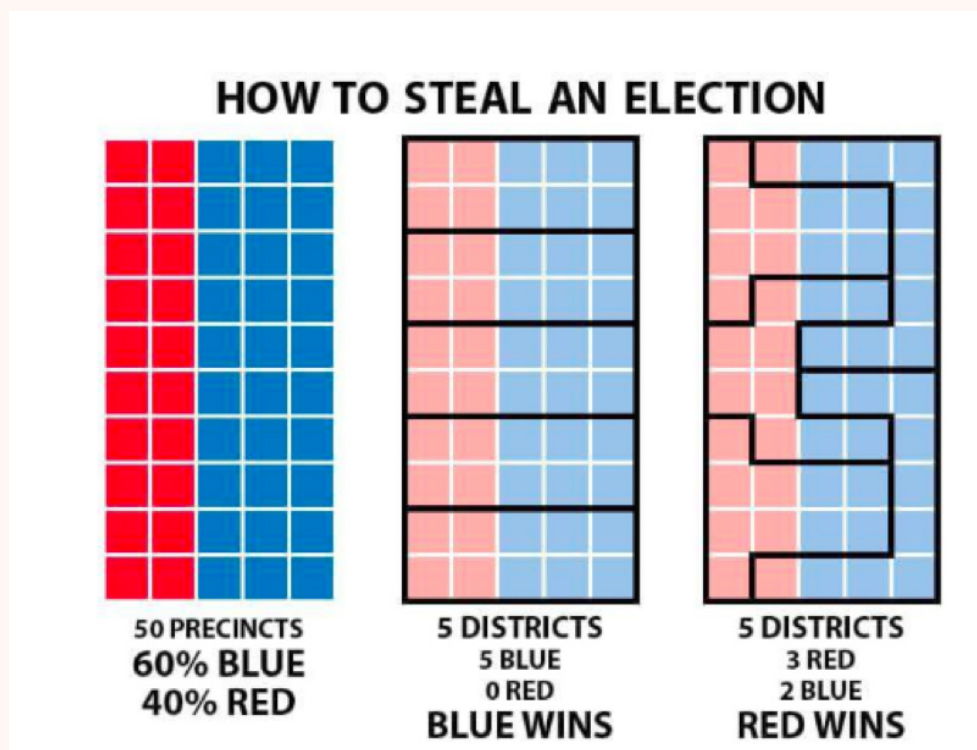


**The stricter the voter ID laws, the larger the gap in racial voter turnout.**

# Electoral College and Gerrymandering

Another poison to our democracy is the way congressional districts are drawn. On John Oliver's Last Week Tonight, he hosted a skit in a New York City art gallery that displayed artwork with the outline of congressional districts across the country. The attending art critics were not aware that the artwork represented the districts. The sketch showed the critics admiring the pieces and discussing how original the art was.

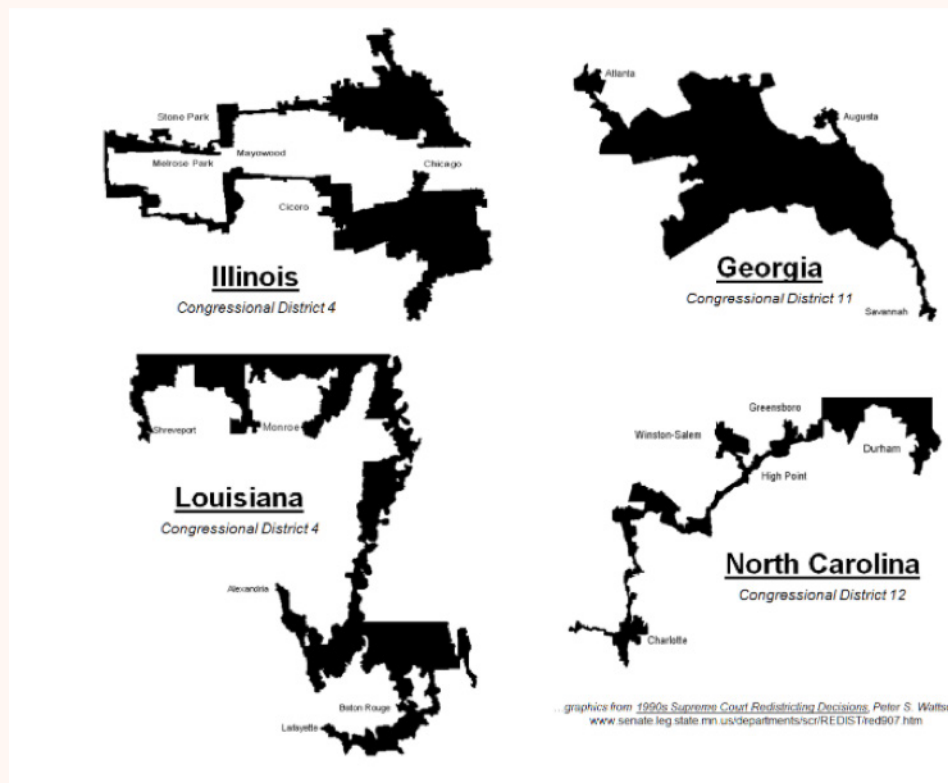
These districts are drawn in such an abstract way by state legislatures in order to allow their parties to obtain the most congressional seats possible. As shown in the graphic below, it doesn't matter what the majority stands for if the districts are drawn to favor the minority. When districts are drawn this way the fair and equal representation of many citizens is lost. Not surprisingly, the majority of people who get harmed by these gerrymandered districts are minorities, and likely Democratic voters.



***With gerrymandering, state legislatures can create electoral maps that favor one party or the other, regardless of the majority.***



Most state legislatures are controlled by Republicans who try to oppress these voters. Though some districts were created to give certain minority groups the majority so that they could have representatives who fight for their community, other districts have far fewer minority voters, even though many more live in the surrounding areas of the district. They are intentionally clustered into a different district where the power of their vote will be limited. In this way minority groups, and in effect Democratic leaning voters, have fewer representatives than they deserve.



***Gerrymandered districts, like those pictured above, are used to give specific parties an advantage based on voter location. Districts can be created in all kinds of shapes to help out party needs.***



# Polling Stations

In Cochise County, Arizona, a voting district on the border of Mexico, 30% of the population is Latino. In 2006, the county was sued by the US Justice Department for violating the Voting Rights Act. The county was not providing its citizens with voting materials in Spanish. After the *Shelby County V. Holder* Supreme Court decision in 2013 that significantly reduced the reach of the Voting Rights Act, the 2006 suit had no merit. The Shelby case removed federal oversight of states voter laws, allowing them to re-implement discriminatory laws that existed prior to the passage of the Act. After the case, Cochise County decided to reduce the number of polling stations by 63%, the most dramatic cut in the country, though many counties were not far behind. This reduction led to the county going from 49 polling places in the 2012 elections to 18 in 2016. These polling stations now serve 130,000 residents. The lines for the 2016 election were estimated to have a wait time of up to five hours. Due to many of the Cochise residents not being able to take that much time off of work this reduction in stations by Republican legislatures significantly affected the Democratic voter turnout.

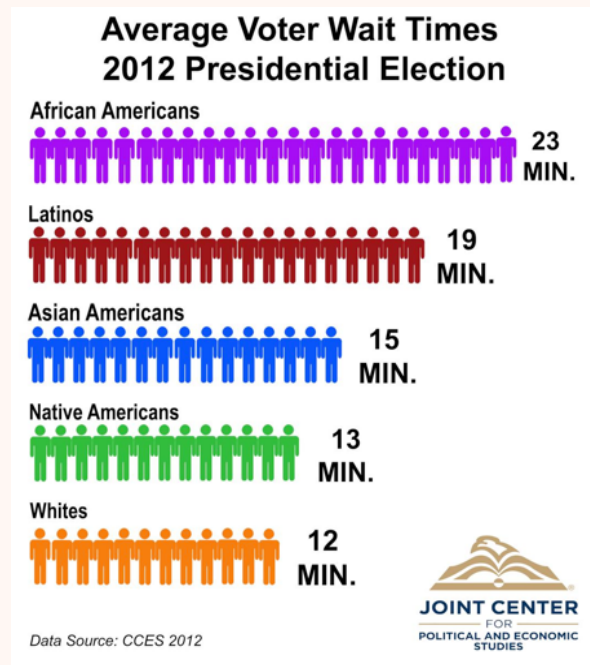
## COCHISE COUNTY

Cochise County reduced the number of polling stations by **63%**, the most dramatic cut in the country. This reduced polling places from 49 to 18.



This made the lines for the 2016 election have up to a **five hour** wait time.

Cochise was not the only county to roll back their number of polling stations. In Texas over 400 polling stations were closed, the most of any state. In Medina County, Texas, one of the most Republican counties in the state, the county closed the polling station in the only majority-Democrat town in the area, Natalia, whose population was 75 percent Latino. Though the polling station was reopened after activists protested for days to get it back, this closure shows a pattern seen across the nation. Minority voters are targeted by Republican policies, and closing polling stations is a major way the Republican party disenfranchises those voters. As seen in the graphic, wait times for minority groups are significantly higher than for white people due to the lack of polling stations in communities of color. Without the ability to be able to physically cast a ballot, all other reform for disenfranchised voters is for nothing. Closing polling stations in areas primarily populated by these groups prevents them from having their voices heard. We can fix this problem with more polling stations in minority communities.



***Black voters waited almost double the amount of time as White Voters during the 2012 Presidential elections.***

## Trusting the Vote and Better Voting Technology

The technology that counts the votes in American elections is controlled by just a few companies. These companies control the physical booths, as well as the software used to process the information. The industry is sorely out of date.

There are a couple of reasons why this hurts the vote. First, with no individual software system used by all voting companies, an attack on one does not mean the others become immune from an attack of the same nature. Secondly, the companies lock voting precincts into long-term, expensive, contracts, incentivizing the districts to close polling stations to save some expense.

For these companies that have formed an oligopoly on our voting system to be removed from power, one uniform software must be used by all districts across the nation. Though the fear of one singular attack compromising the entire system may be real, if the software is built properly each attack should be contained within a small area. The benefit of having one software across the country is that once the system is attacked it will be able to prevent an attack of the same nature. When there are multiple forms of software across the nation, those attacks can be used multiple times against multiple systems. This creates far more damage. The OSET Institute, an election software organization, is working on creating such software. This will create openness, transparency, and legitimacy for the vote. If this software is used, the hardware can be built by companies such as HP, Intel, or Microsoft, all of which already know how to build safe and secure technology.

It is commonly accepted that Russian hackers meddled in the 2016 presidential election. The election validity was compromised, and the legitimacy of the results has been called into question. There is little doubt the Russians plan on attacking the 2018 midterm elections in the same fashion. It is more vital than ever that we fortify our election security. If people believe their votes are safe they begin to trust the system as a whole, and will participate more regularly.

Trusting the vote is vital. Many people, especially young people and people of color do not believe the system can improve their lives. If people believe the vote is not compromised, whether it is the assurance that their vote wasn't lost or that extra votes were not added by cyber attackers, they are more likely to go to the polling stations. If a person who is already unlikely to vote believes that their vote may not matter, it removes all incentive to cast a ballot. If trust in the election is increased, voter turnout increases, and our democracy better represents our people.

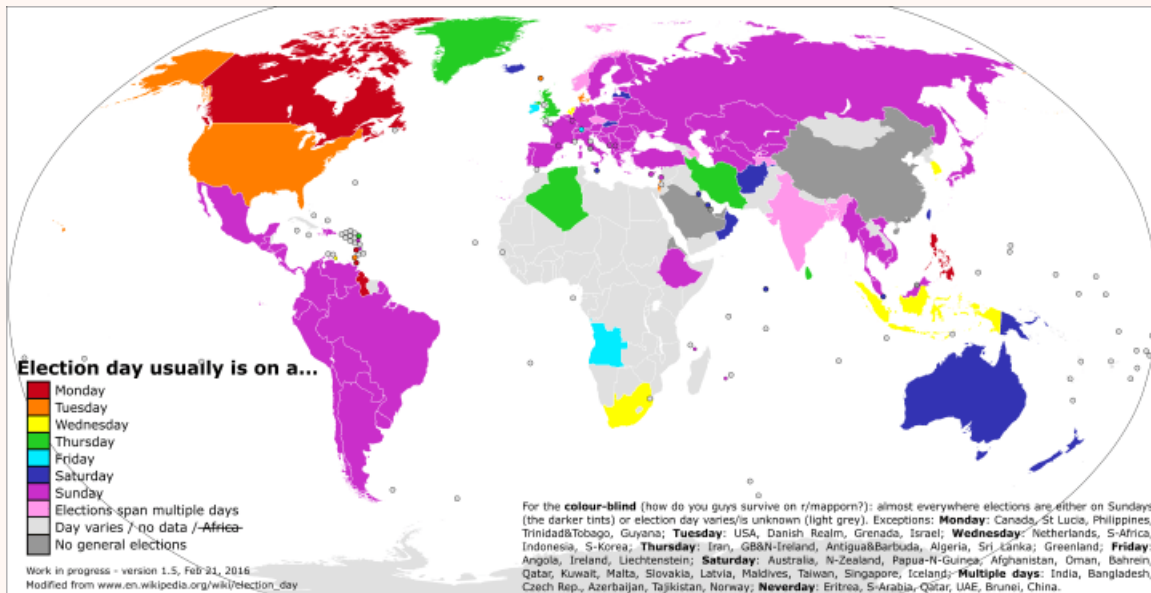
## National Holiday

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In the 2016 presidential elections polling stations opened at different times across each state. The earliest opening time was 6 A.M. while the latest closing time was 8 P.M. The majority of states had a 7am to 7pm polling time. Though this may seem like a long period of time, for many Americans on a regular weekday there is no time to wait on a polling line. The majority of Americans work some form of a 9 to 5. Some work even longer hours. Many parents must also take care of their children. This means getting them to school in the morning, and often picking them up from after-school activities after work. Unless they bring their children to the polling station in the few hours after work they do not have a chance to vote. All of these other priorities decrease the likelihood that they make it to the polls. In addition, many Americans work in the retail industry, where shifts can last the entire time the polling stations are open.

If election day was a national holiday, as it is in South Korea, voter turnout may dramatically increase. In South Korea the voter turnout rate is almost 79 percent, far higher than our 55 percent in presidential years, and 40 percent for midterm elections. With a national holiday people would have time to get to the polls and democracy in this country would be strengthened. What's more, community celebrations could be held and lay the groundwork for a cultural shift that fully values voter participation.

Moving election day may be an easier solution than making it a national holiday. Hosting election day on the weekend would allow those who work during the week to vote more easily. In the vast majority of developed nations election day is held on the weekend.



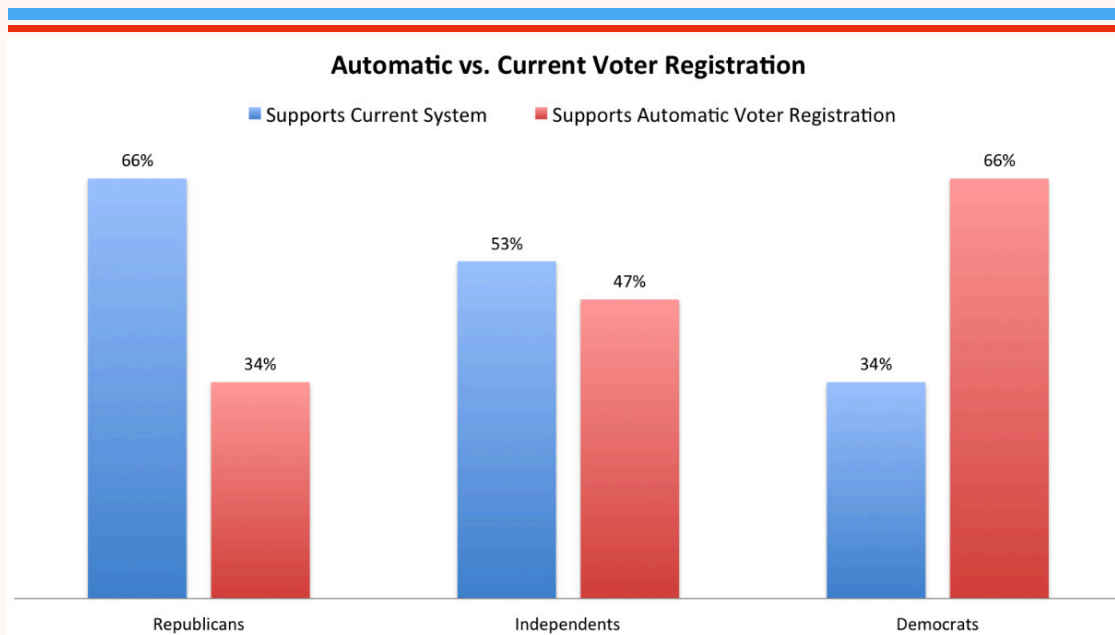
**Most countries host election day on either Saturday or Sunday.**

Election day was originally placed on a Tuesday in the 19th century. Congress did not want to interfere with the Sabbath, and quite often took voters a day to travel to their polling station on horseback. Election day being held on a Tuesday in the U.S. is due to an incredibly antiquated practice and has no place in current society.

## Universal Voter Registration

As stated previously in this paper, restrictive voter registration laws are one of the main ways legislatures have disenfranchised potential voters. Whether it's forcing them to have specific forms of ID to be able to register, or removing their names from a registration list for a plethora of reasons, politicians, mostly of the Republican party, are adamant about finding ways to disenfranchise voters.

The most effective way to solve this problem is by having all citizens automatically registered to vote when they turn 18. This process would make the whole system far simpler and would prevent the restriction of specific groups of voters. This process would mean that every citizen of legal voting age would not have to go through the tedious process of registering to vote. Instead, they would be automatically put into the system. When arriving at a polling station they would have to prove their identity with a certain form of identification, like their social security number or by verifying their address. Then, they would be allowed to vote. Their names would be crossed off of the list of eligible voters who have not cast a ballot in the current election, so that they would not be able to re-vote at a different polling station.



***Support of Automatic Voter Registration is heavily favored among Democrats and heavily opposed by Republicans.***

In the same way that once you turn 21 you can buy alcohol, we are advocating voter registration be just as simple. The process is easy, and would dramatically increase voter turnout.<sup>44</sup> In Oregon, automatic voter registration was implemented for the 2016 federal elections. Not only did voter turnout increase, but the diversity of the electorate dramatically increased. This is because the process of registering takes time, which many families, particularly from marginalized communities, do not have. If all they have to do is show up to the polling station on election day, they can make that happen. We have the power to do this, and because we have the power to demand this bold shift to expand our democracy, we must.



# How to Implement UVR

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To institute universal voter registration in the United States, there may need to be an appropriate penalty for failure to vote. If we are considering a fine for non-voters, it would have to be a small one that is not heavily enforced. We may consider sending letters that require an explanation as to why citizen did not vote, which would make it more of an inconvenience not to vote rather than being punished. According to political scientist Lisa Hill, for fines to be feasible, they cannot be serious. She believes that, "it is best if failure to vote does not attract serious legal consequences in the manner of systems like Greece or Cyprus where abstention can result in a term of imprisonment or the withholding of passports [71]...[which] could bring the institution of compulsion into disrepute and prevent it from becoming accepted as a cultural norm." To prevent Americans from feeling as though their rights are being infringed upon, we could provide an option on ballots that is blank for a write-in vote, or provide a "none of the above" option, also known as abstaining. Laws governing voting could also be framed in a way so that only attendance, or checking in, at the polling place are mandatory rather than casting a ballot.

# Conclusion

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For many Americans voting is not part of their life. Though it is their right to be part of the electorate, they are unable to vote for a plethora of reasons. Whether it is their access to polling stations, their inability to vote due to their ex-felon status, or any of the other reasons outlined in this paper, they cannot cast a ballot. For some, their votes barely count for anything because of partisan gerrymandering. This violates the basic ideas and values of our founding fathers, who proclaimed that all men, and people, are created equal. This does not mean selective equal treatment. It means equal treatment and opportunity in all walks of life, especially in participating in our democracy.

In recent years politicians have passed laws at the local, state, and federal levels restricting the voting ability of many citizens. These must be repealed. They harm the very essence of what makes our country strong. Without free and fair elections every piece of legislation passed is shrouded in questions of legitimacy. This has to end.

Correcting the rules of the game for the American electorate will have major repercussions in terms of how the country is run. If all citizens are allowed to vote, as should be the case, governmental leadership that more appropriately represents the American people would take control and start working to improve our communities and society. So it should be.



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