



Combating Voter Suppression

The Reform Movement's
2020 External Voter
Engagement Toolkit

Religious
Action
Center
of Reform Judaism



Introduction to Voter Suppression and Opportunities for Action Within Our Jewish Community

As Reform Jews, we believe democracy is strongest when everyone participates—and it suffers when citizens are shut out from the democratic process or choose not to engage.

Nonpartisan civic engagement work is one way that we fulfill the sacred mandate of *tikkun olam*, world repair, and ensure that our enduring values are represented in the public square.

To realize our goal of building a more just and compassionate world, we have formed Every Voice, Every Vote: The Reform Movement's 2020 Civic Engagement Campaign.

This campaign will encourage all U.S. citizens to exercise their right to vote and work to break down obstacles that shut some out of the voting booth. Further, it seeks to mobilize the entire Reform Jewish community—be it through a congregation, NFTY region, sisterhood, a camp community, or campus activism. We know our Movement is strongest when we act together.

If you believe that civic engagement is important for the Jewish community, we want you with us.

Use this Combating Voter Suppression toolkit to help your community plan its strategy for meaningful, Jewish, nonpartisan civic engagement in 2020.

A Note about COVID-19 and Its Impact on Civic Engagement Work:

Every Voice, Every Vote: The Reform Movement's 2020 Civic Engagement Campaign has been planned for two years. But over the past few weeks, we've witnessed North America and the world change in ways we never could have expected.

COVID-19 has spread through cities and towns, sown uncertainty and fear within our communities, and forced widespread social distancing. However, our current circumstances also highlight the critical role that elected officials play at every level of government. Their leadership matters more than ever during challenging times such as this one. Elections are the opportunity to select the civic leaders who not only determine the policies that we care about, but also those we turn to in moments of crisis. In light of this, our civic engagement work is more urgent than ever.

This toolkit was built to provide a range of tools for Reform Jewish communities to facilitate civic engagement and bolster voter turnout in all communities. Some of the recommendations in this resource require or suggest in-person communication and contact. **While we hope that this becomes possible between now and November, you should always follow the guidance of public health officials and abide by any "shelter in place" or social distancing guidance.**

Many parts of civic engagement work can easily be done from home, including phone and text banking and relational organizing using the Empower app. The RAC already provides much of its civic engagement training and resources virtually, through webinars and content on our website. We have also made our pledge cards digital this year.

As we move into an unknown future together, we encourage you and members of your community to utilize this resource to the best of your ability, be creative and constructive, adapt its concepts and core goals, and look forward to a world where we can be together in person to support and encourage one another and where exercising the right to vote is an exciting demonstration of agency to secure a better, more just world for everyone.

We're here to help.

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Introduction to Voter Suppression

■ Why combating voter suppression matters

We know that the electorate—the part of the population that votes—is not representative of our country: It is older and whiter than the general population. But politicians in both parties are most responsive to the concerns of those who vote, meaning that the needs of young people and people of color do not carry as much weight. Reform Jewish communities can partner with congregations and organizations dedicated to getting out the vote in underrepresented populations through joint door-to-door canvassing and phone banks. We can strengthen our democracy by engaging voters across the age, racial, and political spectrum, and ensure elected officials truly reflect the will of the people.

Inadequate ballot access due to discriminatory laws and practices have long restricted and prevented citizens from exercising their right to vote. In the early 20th century, this took the form of poll taxes, literacy tests, and voter intimidation. Once the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) was signed into law, these tactics were outlawed and further discriminatory laws were prevented, as the act authorized federal oversight of election and voting laws in states with a history of discrimination.

But in 2013, the Supreme Court struck down parts of the VRA in *Shelby County v. Holder*. In the aftermath of the Court's misguided decision, many states have tested the extent to which they can legally limit citizens' access to the ballot box by introducing – and in many cases passing—restrictive voting laws. Just 24 hours after the release of the *Shelby* decision, Texas announced a plan to implement a strict photo ID requirement for voting.¹ Since then, 21 states have enacted new restrictive voting requirements and 1,688 polling sites have closed across 13 states, disproportionately impacting communities of color.² The advocacy community fought back from the start, and courts have found intentional discrimination in at least 10 voting rights decisions since *Shelby*.³

When it comes to elections and analyzing voter turnout from different communities, voter suppression and strategies for combatting it come in many shapes and sizes. Felon disenfranchisement, purging of voter rolls, strict voter ID laws, polling place closures, and understaffed polling places are just a few ways that laws can suppress votes and hurt communities of color. For example, in 2017, the state of Georgia enacted an “exact match” law requiring the names of voters on their registration records to exactly match the names on their forms of identification. Leading up to the 2018 election, approximately 80 percent of Georgia voters whose registrations were blocked by this law were people of color.⁴ This one example paints a picture of how restrictive voting laws can deeply affect voter turnout and potentially influence elections.

¹ “The Effects of *Shelby County v. Holder*,” Brennan Center for Justice

² “New Voting Restrictions in America,” Brennan Center for Justice

³ “Democracy Diverted: Polling Place Closures and the Right to Vote,” The Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights

⁴ “The New Voter Suppression,” Brennan Center for Justice

The Reform Movement has been historically committed to protecting and elevating the right to vote as the cornerstone of our democracy. By engaging voters in our broader communities and working across lines of difference, we can help ensure that all people have access to the knowledge and tools necessary to vote.

When we think of historic voter suppression, the pernicious tactics leveraged against Black Americans in the South often come to mind. But it is important to recognize that many obstacles stand between myriad vulnerable communities and their right to vote. People with disabilities can face especially inadequate access to physical polling locations. On Election Day in 2016, nearly two-thirds of the 137 million polling places inspected had at least one impediment to voting for people with disabilities.⁵ If your community is interested in combatting voter suppression as it affects people with disabilities, or if you seek resources on supporting turnout for voters with disabilities, [visit Appendix A in this toolkit](#).

■ Types of Voter suppression

While the following list is not exhaustive, it highlights some of the most prevalent voter suppression tactics and those that you have the greatest ability to combat before and during an election.

- **Voter roll purges:** Purging voter registration rolls includes a range of state practices that can rob Americans of the right to vote through overly aggressive attempts to “clean” voting lists and voter roll manipulation designed to influence elections. Between 2014 to 2016, almost 16 million registered voters nationwide were removed from registration rolls—nearly four million more than the period between 2006 and 2008.⁶
- **Strict voter ID laws:** Since the 2013 *Shelby* decision, 15 states have put more restrictive voter ID laws in place. Strict ID requirements have notable racial disparities: research has shown that while 7 percent of all Americans lack a government-issued photo ID, that rate is 13 percent among African Americans, 10 percent among Hispanics and 12 percent for people who earn below the poverty line.⁷ Additionally, many Native American tribal government IDs are not acceptable under the stricter laws.⁸ What is and is not an acceptable form of identification can sometimes seem arbitrary. For example, in Texas, you can vote with a concealed handgun license, but not a student ID.⁹

⁵ “How Voters With Disabilities Are Blocked From the Ballot Box,” Pew Charitable Trusts

⁶ “Almost 16 million voters were removed from the rolls. We should be alarmed.” Washington Post

⁷ “Americans With Photo ID: A Breakdown of Demographic Characteristics,” Project Vote

⁸ “Many Native IDs Won’t Be Accepted At North Dakota Polling Places,” NPR

⁹ “In Texas, You Can Vote With a Concealed Handgun License—but not a Student ID,” The New Republic

- **Felon disenfranchisement:** Some states have lifetime voting bans based on criminal records, even after people have served their sentences. Given the increase in mass incarceration, by 2016, more than six million Americans lost their right to vote due to past felony convictions.¹⁰ This is also a racially-tinged policy because while Black Americans compose just 13 percent of the general population, they make up approximately 34 percent of the prison population and are five times more likely to be incarcerated than white Americans.¹¹
- **Polling place closures:** From 2012 to 2018, there were 1,688 polling place closures across 13 states, almost double the total in 2016 when there were 868 polling place closures—all in jurisdictions formerly covered by the VRA before the *Shelby* decision.¹² During the 2018 midterm election in Georgia, there were polling place closures in 10 counties with large black populations.¹³
- **Limitations on early voting and absentee and mail-in ballots:** While all states will mail an absentee ballot to certain voters who request one, one-third require a valid excuse to receive one.¹⁴ All but nine states offer some form of early voting, which vary in length from 4 to 45 days. At least 24 states and the District of Columbia allow some weekend early voting.¹⁵ Since 2011, states have made cuts to their previous early voting rules, which inevitably led to longer lines on election day and fewer voters overall.¹⁶ These changes disproportionately impact Black Americans. For example, in one study, Black American voters in Ohio were twice as likely to vote early than white voters.¹⁷

■ Let the RAC know about your combating voter suppression efforts

We are more powerful when we work together, and with the full force of the Reform Movement behind this Civic Engagement Campaign, our impact grows exponentially. We want to celebrate your community's work and make sure it is counted as part of our movement's overall efforts. Let us know about your voter engagement efforts by [submitting this short form](#).

■ Staying nonpartisan

It is important that as a 501(c)(3) organization, your Reform Jewish community remains nonpartisan while doing combatting voter suppression work. For more information and general guidelines, refer to the RAC's ["The Do's and Don'ts of Civic Engagement Work: Rules for Non-Profits."](#)

¹⁰ "Felony Disenfranchisement Laws (Map)," ACLU

¹¹ "6 Million Lost Voters: State-Level Estimates of Felony Disenfranchisement, 2016" The Sentencing Project

¹² "Democracy Diverted: Polling Place Closures and the Right to Vote," The Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights

¹³ "Polling Places in Black Communities Continue to Close Ahead of November Elections," Governing

¹⁴ "Voting Outside the Polling Place: Absentee, All-Mail and other Voting at Home Options," National Conference of State Legislatures

¹⁵ "State Laws Governing Early Voting," NCSL

¹⁶ "Cutting early voting is voter suppression," ACLU

¹⁷ Ibid.

How can Reform Jewish Communities Combat Voter Suppression?

■ Voter engagement work across lines of difference

To effectively combat voter suppression, Reform Jewish communities must partner with the communities most impacted by restrictive voting laws. Using existing relationships and building new partnerships is essential for this work and is vital to the success of any GOTV campaign. The best partners are those you have an existing relationship with, and this work can be an excellent way to strengthen those connections. If your Reform Jewish community does not have a ready partner, the RAC may be able to help your community partner with people across lines of difference on voter engagement and combatting voter suppression. To explore this option, [sign up to be notified](#) as these opportunities emerge. If you already have partners on the ground, [let us know who they are and what work you're doing](#).

■ National partnership

The Reform Movement is excited to partner with [the Center for Common Ground](#) as part of their 2020 Reclaim Our Vote Campaign to increase voter turnout among people of color. In partnership with CCG, your congregation can educate and support voters through phone and text banks, postcards, and more. [Join the Reclaim Our Voter Campaign](#) today, and when you sign up, please remember to indicate that you heard about the campaign through the Reform Jewish Movement so we can continue supporting your work with resources and training.

■ Action opportunities

Through [the Center for Common Ground's Reclaim Our Vote Campaign](#), Reform Jewish communities and individuals can volunteer to help increase voter turnout in a variety of ways. You can participate in existing phone and/or text banks or host your own, drive voters to polls on Election Day, send postcards to voters prior to the election, and canvass in your community. These different tactics are designed to combat voter suppression, particularly in communities of color. [Join the Reclaim Our Vote Campaign](#) today.

Appendices

■ Appendix A: Resources for Accessible Voting and Supporting Voters With Disabilities

Government resources:

- U.S. Election Assistance Commission: [Resources for Voters with Disabilities](#)
- U.S. Department of Justice Office for Civil Rights: [Solutions for Five Common ADA Access Problems at Polling Places](#)
- U.S. Government Accountability Office: [Observations on Polling Place Accessibility and Related Federal Guidance](#)

Advocacy organization resources:

- Autistic Self Advocacy Network
 - [Your Vote Counts: A Self-Advocate's Guide to Voting in the U.S. and full report](#)
 - [What is the law in my state?](#)
 - [Words to Know](#)
- National Disability Rights Network—[Power at the Polls](#)
- American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) [Resource Center](#)
 - [REV UP: Register, Educate, Vote, Use your Power](#)
 - [National Disability Voter Registration Week—Third week of July](#)
 - [Issues Guide](#)
- Nonprofit Vote—[Voting with a Disability](#) including state-by-state guides

■ Appendix B: Election Day Hotlines

Supporting voters on Election Day means connecting them to resources and information throughout the voting process. Provide voters with your local board of elections phone number in addition to the following national hotlines in case they experience problems on Election Day:

- 866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683) (English)
- 888-VE-Y-VOTA (1-888-839-8682) (Spanish)
- 888-API-VOTE (1-888-274-8683) (Asian multilingual assistance)
- 844-YALLA-US (1-844-925-5287 (Arabic)
- 301-818-VOTE (301-818-8683) (American Sign Language - Video)

■ Appendix C: Tabling in the community

Ensuring people are registered to vote is the first step toward increasing voter turnout in an election. Registering and educating voters beyond your Reform Jewish community is relatively easy for your leaders to organize in partnership with other congregations and organizations and create a major impact. Below are some helpful tips for tabling in your broader community:

- Consider partnering with another local organization or religious community. The best partners are those you know and with whom you have an existing relationship. This work can be an excellent way to strengthen those connections. If your Reform Jewish community does not have a ready partner with whom to register voters, the RAC may be able to help connect you with a local organization across lines of difference. To explore this option, please [fill out this short form](#).
- Find your location. There are a few options to consider when determining where to set up a table to register and educate voters. Do you want to work with a specific group of people, such as high school seniors who've just turned 18, new citizens, communities affected by voter purges, etc.? When making this determination, having a partner is very important.
 - When targeting a specific community, ensure your table is visible and accessible. Whether at a high school or on a college campus, outside a town hall where new citizens are having their naturalization ceremony, or in a community you don't frequent, ensure that you're clearly identifying yourselves as a nonpartisan group of volunteers encouraging voter turnout. Once you determine where you will be tabling, call to get permission and reserve space (there is usually no fee).
 - When doing less targeted tabling in the broader community, set up your table near highly frequented public spaces such as a shopping center, grocery store, farmers' market, football game, community event, or concert. Once you determine where you will be tabling, call to get permission and reserve space (there is usually no fee).
- When promoting your registration event, make sure to target a broad audience by creating flyers and using outlets including social media and local newspapers.
- Make sure your main messages and talking points are tailored to your audience. For example, outside of your Reform Jewish community, it is less appropriate and persuasive to discuss the importance Judaism places on civic engagement as a reason for voter registration. Consider why voting is important to the people you hope to register, and make sure these messages are nonpartisan.

- Stand up and move beyond your table. Volunteers should be proactive and move around the space or event with a clipboard. Engage with people and encourage them to approach your table by presenting a positive and confident attitude.¹⁸
- Keep track of people you register so you can contact them later during your turnout efforts.

For more tools to organize voter registration events, [refer to the RAC's Engaging Reform Jewish Voters Toolkit](#). To partner with an organization or join existing efforts in your area to register underrepresented voting populations, reach out to your local League of Women Voters by [searching the directory on the League of Women Voters website](#). If you do not have a ready partner or a local League with whom to register voters, the RAC may be able to help connect you with a local organization. To explore this option, please [fill out this short form](#).

¹⁸ "Tips for 'Active' Tabling: Voter Engagement in a Lobby or at an Event," Nonprofit VOTE .



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