
**TALKING
ABOUT
VOTING
2012**

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The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law is a non-partisan public policy and law institute that focuses on the fundamental issues of democracy and justice. Our work ranges from voting rights to campaign finance reform, from racial justice in criminal law to Constitutional protection in the fight against terrorism. A singular institution — part think tank, part public interest law firm, part advocacy group — the Brennan Center combines scholarship, legislative and legal advocacy, and communications to win meaningful, measurable change in the public sector.

ABOUT ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

Advancement Project is a next generation multi-racial civil rights organization that works “on-the-ground” helping organized communities of color dismantle and reform unjust and inequitable policies that undermine the promise of democracy. Founded by veteran civil rights lawyers, we use law, policy, communications and innovative tools to strengthen social movements and achieve high-impact policy change. Our Voter Protection Project, launched in the days after the 2000 election, has been at the heart of our work eliminating barriers to voting in advance of elections and seizing opportunities to increase civic participation and access to the ballot.

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at New York University School of Law



Over the past two years, state legislatures, filled with politicians trying to manipulate the system for their own benefit, have made it harder for millions of Americans to register and to vote. These restrictive laws impact a broad swath of the population and the hardest hit are older and younger Americans, people with disabilities, people of color, and people who have been affected by the economic downturn.

Advancement Project and the Brennan Center for Justice have partnered to fight against these laws that undermine our democracy. Through extensive research, we have sought to better understand public opinion on issues related to democratic participation, efforts to make voting harder, and fraud.

This document is a result of this research. Our goal is to give you the information you need to answer questions and inform your communities. We hope this guide can serve as a resource for you and your organizations as you continue to talk throughout this election season about voting.

Our nation was founded on the belief that we all are “created equal,” and that principle remains the bedrock of our democracy. Americans believe they have both the responsibility and the duty to make their voices heard on Election Day. That’s why it is so important that our voting system remain free, fair, and accessible to each and every eligible citizen. In order for the integrity of our election system to be maintained, every vote must count.

Now, more than ever, it is important to educate Americans on the importance of their role in our democracy, and to encourage all eligible citizens to register and to vote on Election Day.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Waldman".

Michael Waldman
President
Brennan Center for Justice
at New York University School of Law

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judith A. Browne Dianis".

Judith A. Browne Dianis
Co-Director
Advancement Project

TALKING ABOUT VOTING 2012

GETTING OUR MESSAGE OUT 1

Key Points 1

 When Talking to Potential Voters About Voting 1

 When Talking About Laws and Policies Making it Harder to Vote .. 2

Communication Tips 3

 Talk About Values 3

 Praise the American System 3

 Invoke Civic Creed 3

 Reinforce Responsibility 4

 Note the Importance of Election Integrity 4

 Call Out Politicians 5

 Humanize the Problem 5

 Keep Voters Enthusiastic 6

ENCOURAGING VOTING 7

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS 8

RESOURCES 11

Voter Protection Information 11

Key Dates, Events, and Deadlines 12

GETTING OUR MESSAGE OUT

KEY POINTS

When Talking to Potential Voters About Voting

- Voting brings us together as Americans. By voting, you join your family and friends in helping to strengthen our community.
- Voting is the one time when we are all equal — whether young or old, rich or poor — and the one time when we all have the same say.
- As American citizens, it is our responsibility and civic duty to vote.
- In order to participate in our democracy and have your voices heard, all voters need to understand the rules in their state, register on time, and show up at the correct polling place.
- It's important for us to have a say in what happens in this country. Voting is empowering and provides us all with some control over what happens to us, our families, and our community.
- Your vote makes a difference, and together, Americans' voices count. If you don't vote, you can't complain.
- Voting is our civic duty, and it's something we do to show our country and children that we are proud to be American.

When Talking About Laws and Policies Making it Harder to Vote

- As the leading democracy of the world, our voting system should be free, fair, and accessible to all eligible Americans.
- Our country was founded on the principle that we all are “created equal.”
 - Living up to this promise — to provide all citizens with the same freedoms and opportunities — means it is wrong to pass laws that block some eligible Americans from voting and deny them the opportunity to participate equally in our democracy.
- Unfair voting laws are being passed by politicians who are trying to manipulate the system for their own benefit — because they don’t like what the voters have to say.
- It’s wrong to pass laws for political gain that take away the right to vote from millions of eligible citizens, including seniors and veterans.

COMMUNICATION TIPS

Talk About Values

Engaging voters at a **values level** (by emphasizing **responsibility, fairness, equality, and freedom**) is the best way to reach them — both in persuading them that restrictive voting laws are wrong and in motivating them to vote.

Communications should build on core American values.

- “The U.S. needs to keep our voting system free, fair, and accessible.”

Praise the American System

Voters believe **America is the leading democracy** of the world.

- “As the world’s leading democracy, we can’t pass laws that block some eligible Americans from voting, or that deny them the opportunity to participate equally in our democracy.”

Invoke Civic Creed

Voters respond very positively to the promise of the Declaration of Independence.

This principle of political and civic equality is critical to oppose efforts that make it harder for some Americans to vote.

- “Our country was founded on the belief that **all men and women are created equal**.”

Reinforce Responsibility

Eligible citizens respond to the belief that voting is their **civic duty and responsibility**.

- “As an American citizen, it is my responsibility to do my civic duty and vote.”

The idea that **voting is empowering** resonates with the public.

- “Voting makes me feel empowered, like I have some control over what happens to my family and my community.”
- “Our democracy grows in strength with every vote. Rather than making it harder to vote, Americans should come together to make sure every eligible citizen can participate.”

Note the Importance of Election Integrity

Voters value the **integrity of U.S. elections**, are **concerned about voter fraud**, and believe **Americans should take responsibility to meet voting requirements**.

Communications must take these values into account by acknowledging the importance of preventing voter fraud.

- “It’s important to protect the integrity of our elections and stop voter fraud. But we should not be making it harder for millions of eligible Americans to participate in our democracy.”
- “It’s important to stop fraud of all kinds. That includes laws that make it harder for millions of eligible Americans to vote.”
- Emphasize the need for flexibility in ID laws, and that “one size doesn’t fit all.”

Call Out Politicians

Americans are angry at politicians. Communications that **name politicians** as people who are **manipulating election laws** for their own political gain are also effective.

People are especially angry when politicians actively target specific blocks of voters — for example, by creating “purge lists”:

- “Florida’s governor recently created a list of tens of thousands of voters to purge from the voter rolls, but almost all of the people turned out to be eligible voters, including some World War II and Vietnam veterans.”

Humanize the Problem

Use personal examples of seniors and veterans who **took civic responsibility and tried to participate in the process** but were then unable to vote (or, at least, risk losing their voting rights) because of restrictive laws.

- For 30 years, **93-year-old Thelma Mitchell cleaned the state Capitol in Nashville, Tennessee**. Her old employee ID, issued by the state, doesn’t satisfy the new state law requiring a photo ID to vote (even though her photo is on it). But she can’t get a valid photo ID because she was delivered by a midwife in Alabama in 1918 and was never issued a birth certificate. As a result, Mitchell — a U.S. citizen — risks losing her right to vote for the first time in decades because she can’t get the photo ID citizens are now required to show in order to vote in Tennessee.

- Bill Internicola is a **91-year-old World War II veteran** who received a letter from the state of Florida asking him to prove his citizenship or be removed from the voting rolls. Just think — if a U.S. veteran can find his name on a list of potentially “ineligible” voters, how many other eligible voters’ names were on that list? And what about the ones who didn’t receive the letter in the mail? They’d arrive at the polls on Election Day only to realize they couldn’t vote — and with no time to try to correct the state’s mistake. That’s nothing more than a political tactic to take away eligible Americans’ rights to vote.
- An **86-year-old Ohio resident** and registered voter, Paul Carroll, was denied the right to vote after Ohio passed a voter ID law. He provided election officials with his Department of Veterans Affairs photo ID card, but was denied the right to vote because his ID did not include his address.

Keep Voters Enthusiastic

It is critical to **encourage voter participation** when discussing restrictive laws.

- “It’s your civic duty as an American to join your family, friends, and community at the ballot box. Take responsibility and stand up for what you believe in, because your vote matters. Let politicians know that they need to listen to the American people.”
- “It’s every American’s responsibility to participate in our political process and make his or her voice heard. If you disagree with new policies, have your say at the ballot box. If you don’t vote, you can’t complain.”
- “You have the right and duty to participate in our democracy and make your voice heard. Every voter needs to understand the rules in his or her state; to register on time; and to show up at the correct polling place.”

ENCOURAGING VOTING

- **It's your civic duty:** As an American citizen, it is your responsibility to do your civic duty and vote on Election Day.
- **Improve your future:** Voting brings us together as Americans and is something you can do to help strengthen your community. All eligible Americans should cast a ballot on Election Day for their future, their children's futures, and the future of our great nation.
- **Taking control:** Voting is your chance to take control over what happens to your family and your community. Many Americans are struggling these days in the economy — to find jobs, pay their mortgages, and put food on the table — and all Americans deserve a say in how to solve these problems.
- **Stand up:** It's important to stand up for our rights and elect leaders who will lift up our country and our communities. America's future is our future, and we need to vote and make sure the politicians hear our voices and know we count and we matter. We can't complain about the way things are going if we don't take responsibility and stand up for what we believe in.
- **Your voice matters:** Your vote — along with everyone's vote — matters. It lets politicians know that the American people have an opinion, and that they need to listen to what we have to say.
- **Understand the rules:** In order to participate in our democracy and have your voice heard, you need to understand the voting rules in your state, register on time, and show up at the correct polling place.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What are these new laws, and why do you say they're bad for democracy?

A: Over the past two years, politicians in states across the country have passed laws and taken other actions that make it harder for millions of eligible Americans to vote. These actions range from creating last-minute lists of people to remove from the voter rolls to cutting back on early voting hours in targeted places — and, in many cases, to strictly limiting the forms of “valid” documents people must show in order to vote.

These aren't reasonable election regulations. They are efforts by some politicians to manipulate the system for their own advantage. These laws could keep millions of eligible citizens from participating. In a country founded on the principle that we are all “created equal,” it's just wrong to pass laws that keep some eligible Americans from participating equally in the political process.

Q: Aren't these new laws necessary to stop voter fraud?

A: We can all agree that ineligible people shouldn't vote. But we should also agree that politicians shouldn't pass laws that keep eligible people from exercising their rights to vote. These new laws do little to improve the integrity of our elections, but they do exclude eligible voters from participating in our democracy. They fall hardest on the elderly, veterans, and communities of color. Our country's voting system must be free, fair, and accessible.

Q: Aren't there instances of in-person voter impersonation fraud that can only be stopped by photo ID requirements?

A: The real problem with restrictive voter ID laws is that they risk pushing our nation's seniors, veterans, young people, African-Americans, and Latinos out of the voting process. American citizens have the right to vote, and this right shouldn't be denied.

Q: It wasn't hard for me to register to vote. Why is it so hard for others?

A: Whether it's easy or hard, we should make sure every American has the same opportunity to register and vote. Unfortunately, restrictive new laws have cut back on voter registration opportunities, especially for some groups, including seniors, veterans, and folks who have been hardest hit by the economic downturn. As the leading democracy of the world, we should make sure all Americans have the ability to participate in our democracy. Politicians must not be permitted to interfere with the right of eligible voters to vote.

Q: Voting is easy. Why do you claim these new laws make it so hard?

A: The reality is that many voters who live in very rural or in dense urban areas are less likely than you and me to have either driver's licenses or the sort of similar IDs that are mandated by restrictive new voting laws. In fact, more than 21 million Americans don't have the specific form of ID required by their states to vote. Moreover, many hardworking Americans, who have traditionally relied on extended early voting, will have a hard time making it to their polling places with the new cutbacks in hours. Voters should take responsibility for understanding the rules for participating in the political process — but politicians shouldn't be making it harder. Our country's voting system should be free, fair, and accessible for all.

Q: Don't most Americans have the identification required by the new laws that some states are putting in place to vote?

A: Yes, the vast majority of Americans do. But over 21 million Americans don't — and that is where the problem lies. Americans in danger of losing their right to vote include seniors, veterans, and young people who do not drive, as well as those who rely on public transportation.

Q: But people don't just need IDs to drive. You also need ID to fly, cash a check, or buy beer. Doesn't everyone who needs an ID already have one?

A: Not being able to do those things doesn't undermine our democracy, but eligible voters being denied their fundamental rights does. Our country's voting system must be free, fair, and accessible.

Q: Is any type of voter ID law acceptable?

A: In these tough times, we should be flexible and provide a variety of ways for eligible citizens to prove their identity — not pass restrictive laws requiring documentation that more than 21 million eligible American voters don't have.

Q: How is removing ineligible voters from the list a bad thing?

A: We can all agree that removing ineligible voters from the rolls is critical to protecting the integrity of our election system — but purging thousands of eligible voters from the voter lists is plainly wrong. When politicians make lists of voters to purge, these lists are typically full of mistakes. Lots of longtime voters get unfairly caught up in the process and risk losing their rights. Voting should be free, fair, and accessible.

RESOURCES

VOTER PROTECTION INFORMATION

Voters who experience or witness any problems or have any questions should call **1-866-OUR-VOTE**, a non-partisan voter protection hotline; trained volunteers will be able to provide assistance and take steps to ensure that you are able to exercise your right to vote.

For more information on your voting rights, visit **www.866ourvote.org**.

Voters who experience or witness any discriminatory, intimidating, or deceptive conduct should immediately report the problem to election authorities and, when appropriate, to law enforcement authorities.

For more information on how voting laws will affect the 2012 election, and for personal stories of impacted voters, please visit:

- **www.brennancenter.org/election2012**
- **advancementproject.org/campaigns/protect-your-vote**

KEY DATES, EVENTS, AND DEADLINES

Throughout the election cycle, there will be various opportunities to motivate eligible Americans to vote on Election Day. Below is a timeline of key dates that will be important for all partners to engage around.

AUGUST

Aug 27–30 Republican Convention (Tampa, FL)

SEPTEMBER

Voter registration deadlines occur in early October in most states. To ensure that you meet the deadlines, focus your communications in September around voter registration and ensuring that all eligible Americans can register.

Sept 3 Labor Day

Sept 4–6 Democratic Convention (Charlotte, NC)

Sept 25 National Voter Registration Day

OCTOBER

Throughout October, voters will begin voting early or by absentee ballot. Please promote these opportunities for voters to participate in our political process.

Oct 2 Ohio Early Voting Begins (Early Vote continues through Nov 2)

Oct 3 Presidential Debate (Denver, CO)

Oct 9 Texas, Ohio and Florida Voter Registration Deadline

Oct 11 Vice Presidential Debate (Danville, KY)

Oct 16 Presidential Debate (Hempstead, NY)

Oct 22 Presidential Debate (Boca Raton, FL)

Oct 22 Texas Early Voting Begins (Early Vote continues through Nov 2)

Oct 27 Florida Early Voting Begins (Early Vote continues through Nov 3)

NOVEMBER

As Election Day nears, talk about getting out the vote (GOTV) and make sure voters understand their rights, what they need to bring to the polls, and where to vote.

Nov 6 Election Day

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