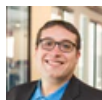


Smashing a System that Suppresses Votes



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We believe that voting is America's first freedom—when more people participate, our democracy is stronger, and election outcomes are better. Yet one of the things creating anger, mistrust, and polarization is an electoral system that is preventing or dissuading people from voting. Some barriers are intentional—active attempts to suppress votes—which is unconscionable and un-American. But too little attention is paid to mechanisms that, while perhaps not ill-intended, have created a system of structural voter suppression.

This is the opposite of what we should seek in a free democracy. Government should approach voters like an usher, not a bouncer. But to change course, we must enact an aggressive set of reforms that will empower the many rather than the few.

The agenda we lay out below does not address money in politics—another major problem that requires urgent attention (see our work on that issue and some proposed solutions [here](#) and [here](#)). Campaign finance reform is necessary but not sufficient to truly make our election system representative. In addition to combatting the influence of

money in politics, here are 8 other vital steps we believe our country must take—and soon—to fix the system.

Bust Open the Polls

1. Kill the caucus & closed primary

In eleven states, both parties have closed primaries; in four others, one party keeps its primary closed. These deny the right to vote to millions of Independents. Caucuses are, in some respects, even worse. They have substantially lower turnout than primaries and cater only to those who are willing and able to spend hours participating in a very public process. The results are often anti-democratic. In 2016, Washington Democrats held a binding caucus, as well as a beauty contest primary. Just 230,000 people voted in the caucus, while 800,000 voted in the primary. The candidate who won the caucus with 73% of the vote would go on to lose the primary by four points. That candidate nevertheless was awarded most of the state's delegates.

2. End hide & seek elections

There is an election nearly every week in this country, and those countless election days decrease turnout and ensure only the most diligent voters participate. Some small elections have turnouts of under 10%; presidential turnout is usually five times higher. Consolidating our elections would help increase participation and reduce the time commitment required to vote.

3. Upend the voter registration system

The responsibility for ensuring every citizen has the ability—not just the nominal right—to vote should be on the government, not individual voters. That means citizens should not have to apply to vote—the government should register eligible voters automatically. Over the last 3 years, 13 states have enacted automatic voter registration systems in which they add a known eligible citizen to the voter registration rolls when they have an interaction with the state. Oregon recently added 225,000 new registrants by this

method, and nearly 100,000 new voters participated in the 2016 elections in that state.

4. Let voters choose how and when they vote

There is no magic to voting on Tuesday. In the 21st century, everyone should be able to vote when it is convenient, without the burden of missing work, school, or family responsibilities. Yet more than 34 million Americans live in states with no early voting, and another 46 million live in states with only excuse-required absentee voting. We should expand the options by mailing ballots to every eligible voter, expanding early voting centers, and allowing people to vote at any polling place in their county.

Restore the Right to Choose

5. Slay the gerrymander

Our current system allows politicians to pick their voters; it's supposed to be the other way around. When politicians draw their own district maps, their focus is either to benefit their party or protect incumbents. We must allow citizens who aren't employed in the political process to draw maps that are intended to represent the public, not the people whose names are on the ballot. States that have implemented such a process have seen an increase in competitive elections and a delegation that matches the overall makeup of the state.

6. Enshrine majority rule

In most contests, whoever gets the most votes wins, regardless of whether they get a *majority* of votes. Implementing ranked choice voting would empower voters by giving them a real choice. They rank candidates in order of their preference, which would require candidates to earn the vote of more than 50% of the people he or she represents.

Give All Americans Their Rights

7. Restore the first freedom to free people

In many states, millions of people who were formerly incarcerated are denied the right to vote even after they have paid their debt to society. We must restore the voting rights of these returning citizens.

8. End geographical blackouts

Millions of Americans are denied voting rights at the federal level because they live in the District of Columbia or the five permanently inhabited territories. We must work to create a process of self-determination to allow these jurisdictions to choose if they would like to take the steps necessary to gain voting representation.

Conclusion

These reforms are designed to get at two core notions: first, voters should have an easier time getting a ballot into their hands, and our system should encourage participation.

Second, voters should be able to cast a vote that is meaningful and ensures that their community has a truly representative voice. By enacting such an agenda, we can ensure that voters are empowered to make real choices and can feel more confident that they are in control of their democracy.

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