

Protecting Student Voting Rights

The often stated claim is that young people don't care about national politics, and are too apathetic to vote. While some teenagers and twenty-somethings fall into to this category, a great many more want to vote, but simply do not register on time or face residual challenges such as targeted intimidation and suppression.

Thus, while get out the vote campaigns such as Rock the Vote, Redeem the Vote, SmackDown Your Vote, and MTV's Choice or Lose campaign are necessary to make voting accessible for all youths we must examine voter registration policies and procedures to ensure that every effort is made to enable all citizens to easily register to vote.

The 26th Amendment guarantees those who are 18 years or older the right to vote and a 1979 U.S. Supreme Court decision ruled that students can vote where they attend school if they establish residency. Despite this, many students still find barriers being raised to deny them their voting rights. During the 2004 election cycle students from all over the country, including the University of New Hampshire, Hamilton College, William and Mary, Texas Prairie View A&M, University of Arizona and University of Michigan, reported voter intimidation, and targeted disenfranchisement.

In the case of Prairie View, the local district attorney publicly stated that if students attempted to register to vote they would be prosecuted for voter fraud. The students were threatened with a 10-year prison sentence and a fine of \$10,000 if they were caught "illegally voting." This at the school where 25 years ago a lawsuit was launched that ended in a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court that students were allowed to vote where they attend school.

At the College of William and Mary, the city council has passed anti-student voting laws, blocked students from becoming residents, restricted students from registering to vote, and thwarted efforts made by students to change the discriminatory policies by running for office.

The Facts:

- In 2004 there was a 9% increase in voting among 18-29 year olds.
- Youth voter share (the percentage of total voters aged 19-29) increased to 18.4% in 2004
- Older age groups continue to register more voters and turn a higher proportion out to vote.
- Despite the increase in voting among younger voters, systematic disenfranchisement of young voters has increased as well.

The Solutions:

- Automatic voter registration in high school and college.
- More states allowing election day voter registration.
- Concentrated efforts to prevent and protect against suppression and intimidation targeted at the youth vote.

What Can You Do?

- Lobby administration to incorporate voter registration into class registration.
- Work with local officials to have voting booths placed on campus.
- Lobby administration to include voter registration and education as part of orientation curriculum.
- Familiarize yourself with state and local voter registration policies to insure that they are not biased against student's voting rights.



The Center for Voting and Democracy

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YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO VOTE

Support H.J. Res. 28, the Right to Vote Amendment
sponsored by Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr.

In November 2004...

- Nearly five million American citizens could not vote because their state has chosen to disfranchise them due to a felony conviction.
- All over the country, most famously in Ohio, voters experienced lines over 4 hours long, and were wrongly turned away by poll workers. Provisional ballot and identification requirements were unknown or ignored.
- Minorities and students were specifically targeted by partisan campaigns designed to disenfranchise them.
- In North Carolina, a voting machine lost 4,500 votes, which should have required a statewide revote, but partisan politics denied citizens the chance to make their voice heard.
- In Washington, the governor's race required three recounts. Legal battles continue over the outcome 4 months later.

A Right to Vote Amendment Would...

- Explicitly guarantee the right to vote to any citizen 18 and over in any state or the District of Columbia
- Empower congress to create national standards for states to follow to protect the individual right to vote.
- Require states to hold the Electoral College accountable to the Presidential popular vote.
- Require election-day registration.
- Provide protection against attempts to deny voters the chance to vote.
- Ensure that every cast vote is correctly counted.
- Protect against voter fraud, so that the deceased are not voting in elections.

What You Can Do

- Contact your congressperson and ask them to support the Amendment.
- Form a student organization in support of the Right to Vote Amendment.
- Download your voting rights kit from www.fairvote.org/righttovote/kit



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