



Every Year, Every Vote

**Principles & Policies
to Protect the
Freedom to Vote**

To create a truly strong and vibrant democracy, Americans must not only focus on maximizing voter turnout in election years, but also on making essential investments in a healthy and resilient democracy in the wrongly-labeled “off” years.

For the Fair Elections Center, **there is no such thing as an “off” year.**

We prioritize strategic litigation, policy advocacy, voter education, and civic engagement. We work on strengthening election infrastructure and administration, **all year, every year, so that every vote counts.**

We can build a stronger democracy that works for all Americans.

Principles & Policies to Protect the Freedom to Vote



Our Values

The freedom to vote is the very cornerstone of American democracy. Preserving our democracy means protecting and expanding the right of all eligible Americans, regardless of race, age, income or ability, to participate in our nation's elections without burdensome barriers to voting and registration.

It is critical that we counteract systemic racism, discrimination, and ableism to ensure that our democracy is truly representative, especially in the face of nationwide legislation aiming to further disenfranchise already-marginalized communities.

Our communities and economies are more sustainable, inclusive, and equitable when every citizen has a voice in our government. An inclusive democracy means young people must participate and lead, but systemic barriers and structural problems often prevent young people, and students in particular, from voting. We must meet young

people—and all new voters—where they are in order to help them cast ballots that count.

Our Objectives & Focus Areas

Grounded in our core beliefs about American democracy, Fair Elections Center works to eliminate barriers to voting, particularly for historically underrepresented citizens, and to increase voter participation through litigation, advocacy, and education. We recognize that protecting and expanding voting rights requires a comprehensive, multifaceted approach. To expand registration and voting access, we must build a robust civic infrastructure using **sustained policy changes** that ensure accessibility like:

- Guaranteeing citizens can easily register to vote and stay on the rolls,
- Permitting registration up to and on Election Day, and
- Encouraging robust civic engagement organizing.



For more than 15 years, we have worked year round to identify and remove barriers to voting. With a new wave of attacks on voting in state legislatures across the country, and a debate over federal voting rights legislation that will help determine the future of our democracy, our work to maintain a robust, sustained effort to protect the freedom of all eligible Americans to cast their ballot is more important than ever.”

—Robert M. Brandon, President and CEO

At Fair Elections Center, we fight for robust early voting for all voters (including students), for widespread by-mail voting access and convenience for all voters, as well as for voting sites to be equitably selected, accessible, and fully-staffed with well-trained, tech-savvy poll workers who meet the language needs of the community. Whether at the polls or voting at home, voters of all backgrounds should be equipped with effective language assistance needed to participate equally, regardless of their English proficiency.

We also need to fight back against new and long-standing policies limiting voting rights through aggressive, strategic **litigation**. We initiate lawsuits representing voters who have had their voting rights unjustly restricted, mounting a sustained, year-round effort to use the courts to challenge and strike down legislation that reduces the ability of citizens to participate fully in our democracy.

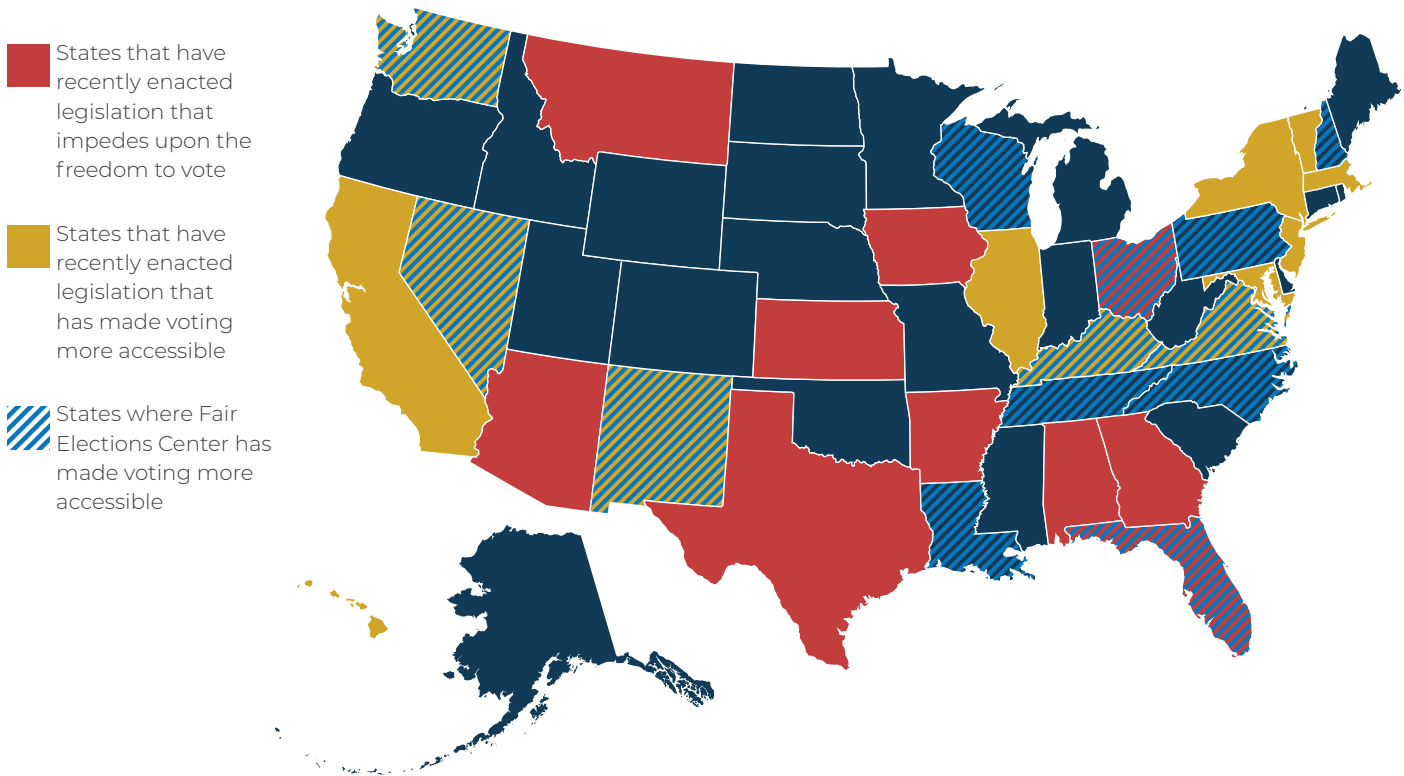
Our nation’s policies must also prioritize **youth civic engagement**. Fair Elections Center’s Campus Vote Project works with higher education institutions to encourage and expand student engagement, focusing on nonpartisan voter

education and policies that expand voting access for students and other young people. Our priorities include: expanding voter pre-registration and the opportunity to register up to and including on Election Day, as well as advocating for clear and equitable voter residency policies, on-campus voting sites, and accessible student ID laws in voter ID states.

Fair Elections Center is also leading the charge in many other efforts to strengthen elections and voting rights. We supply local organizers with **information and technical assistance** to help facilitate their efforts to register diverse communities of voters, including our accurate and digestible 50-state voting guides and voter registration drive guides, as well as **training and recruiting poll workers** nationwide. All of these strategies are essential parts of the year-round effort we need to protect our democracy.

How Is Our Democracy Measuring Up?

The 2020 election saw the highest voter turnout in more than 100 years. Millions of voters cast their ballots by mail, an option that was expanded for voter safety as the coronavirus pandemic raged across the country. However, an ugly backlash based on the political outcome and not the election process itself has taken hold of state legislatures across the country. As of September 2021, at least 425 bills have been introduced in 49 states to restrict voting, many of them addressing mail-in voting. At least 14 states have enacted legislation that impedes upon the freedom to vote. Some examples include:



Arizona has restricted which voters will automatically receive mail ballots during each election cycle. Due to their procedure changes, voters on the Active Early Voting List (previously the Permanent Early Voting List), will now be removed if they fail to vote using an early ballot in two consecutive election cycles and fail to respond in time to a government notice that they are at risk of being purged from the list.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed a bill with numerous restrictive provisions. Voters now have to renew their mail voting application every two years and the use of drop-boxes for returning mail ballots is now limited to early voting hours, with a maximum of 12 hours per day. The local supervisor of elections can now be subject to a \$25,000 fine if any drop boxes are accessible outside of this 12-hour window. The law also restricts voter registration drives by requiring organizations to give applicants a misleading warning, gives partisan election observers more access to the ballot-counting process, and criminalizes providing water to voters waiting in long lines in the Florida heat.

Georgia has enacted a broad set of provisions that curb voting rights. A new law prevents the Secretary of State from proactively sending mail ballot applications to all voters, requires voters to submit ID with their mail-in ballot applications for approval, and reduces the window for the application process. The law imposes new restrictions on ballot drop boxes; the number of drop boxes for Georgia's four most populous counties, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett, will drop from 94 in 2020 to 23 in 2022. Another provision makes it a crime to give water to a citizen waiting in line to vote. The legislature also removed the Secretary of State as the chair of the State Election Board and granted the General Assembly the power to install its preferred replacement, while giving the State Election Board authority to replace county election officials.

Iowa shortened voting hours on Election Day and during the early voting period, as well as the application period for mail ballots. Recent legislation bars election officials from proactively sending application forms to voters and has diminished local

officials' discretion in placing drop boxes. If county auditors do not follow certain procedures in purging voter rolls, they could face criminal charges.

Texas lawmakers passed SB 1, a sweeping voting restrictions bill, in a special session after multiple attempts. SB 1 limits local election officials' traditional authority over election administration, adds more barriers to voting for voters with disabilities, and makes it harder for state and local officials to safely conduct elections during public emergencies. Additionally, an anti-student voting bill, SB 1111, passed during the regular session, making it harder for students to remain registered at their home address while attending school in another county or state.

While there is much action needed to combat anti-voter legislation across the country, there are significant opportunities for protecting and expanding voting rights in many states. Some legislatures are making progress:

Last year, **Virginia** made Election Day a state holiday, repealed its voter ID law, and enacted a 45-day window of no-excuse absentee voting, as well as instituting automatic registration for anyone who receives a Virginia driver's license. In early 2021, the Commonwealth passed The Voting Rights Act of Virginia. Based on the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, the law prohibits racial discrimination in voting, establishes a preclearance provision for proposed election administration changes, and empowers the Attorney General to sue in cases of voter suppression.

Kentucky has enacted laws to expand early voting, make mail voting more accessible by expanding drop box locations, and codify procedures that notify and offer voters the opportunity to fix issues with their ballot that would otherwise invalidate their vote.

Vermont and **Nevada** have both passed universal mail-in voting for all registered voters.

New York and **Washington** have enacted legislation that restores voting rights to all persons who are not incarcerated for a felony conviction.

Maryland has passed new laws that expand early voting and broaden mail ballot drop box access.

Every Year, Every Vote

Fair Elections Center's Approach to Building a Resilient Democracy

To help protect the freedom to vote and make our democracy more durable, we are launching our **Every Year, Every Vote** campaign to sustain year-round efforts to broaden civic engagement. The Every Year, Every Vote blueprint is our vision for the legal, policy, administrative, and civic education strategies that policymakers, advocacy organizations, and other key players must continuously pursue to strengthen democracy and meet the urgency and scale of the challenges voters face.

Policy Advocacy

To maximize voter turnout in key election years and in all elections, policymakers and advocacy organizations must maintain consistent efforts to roll back policies that make it harder to vote and advance policies that expand the freedom to vote.

Fair Elections Center works year-round to prevent policy makers from enacting barriers to voting,

especially those that harm already-marginalized communities, including young people, the elderly, people of color, people with felonies, disabled people, or those who fall into some combination of those categories. We work with election officials throughout each year to guide best practices, advocate for adequate election resources, and introduce creative solutions to make voting more accessible.

Policy Highlights

In **Louisiana**, legislators adopted many of our policy recommendations to improve bills related to voter list maintenance, which made it less likely (as compared with the original bill versions) that eligible voters would be purged from voter lists (2021).

In **Florida**, our testimony and analytical support provided state coalition partners with guidance against the anti-voter provisions in SB 90, restricting vote-by-mail, among other key voting rights priorities (2021).

In **New Hampshire**, we submitted testimony against five anti-student bills: HB 362, which would prohibit registrants from listing a college campus address as their residence for voter registration, and HB 429, which would have barred the use of a college student ID as voter ID. The remaining bills tried to remove the option of signing an affidavit to register and vote and change the definition of domicile in ways that would confuse eligible voters about their eligibility. HB 429 was not advanced; consideration of the others was postponed (2021).

In **Pennsylvania**, we worked with voting rights coalition partners to pass no-excuse vote-by-mail bills Act 77 (2019) and Act 12 (2020), which were ultimately critical for voter safety and turnout for the 2020 election during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In **Tennessee**, we led a coalition opposing laws that restricted voter registration drives. We



Right now, anti-democratic forces across our nation are expending massive time, energy, and political might to keep certain groups of people from voting—sabotaging the very foundation of our democracy. We are firmly committed to uplifting policy that makes elections fair and safe for all, particularly for historically disenfranchised communities, because our democracy only works when it works for all of us.”

—Michelle Kanter Cohen,
Policy Director and Senior Counsel

submitted testimony to the legislature, sent a letter encouraging a veto to the governor, and then challenged the law in Court. After a court-ordered injunction, the law was repealed in 2020 (2019).

In **Virginia**, we secured a veto on discriminatory legislation that would have disenfranchised voters just because their registration information didn't exactly match flawed government databases (2019).

Litigation

The need for litigation in the fight for voting rights is as critical as ever. As bills attacking the freedom to vote continue advancing across our nation, litigation enables protectors of our democracy to fight the unjust policies we see today. But litigation cannot wait for presidential election years. The long-lead timeline of litigation challenges requires strategic work all year, every year, in order to protect citizens' right to vote. And many voters go to the polls every year to choose local representatives, school board members, and other critical community leaders. That's why we work consistently to break down voting barriers, whether newly enacted or entrenched, with strategic litigation.



One of the most beautiful aspects of our government is that, not only can we vote to change who holds power, but voters working with organizations like ours can also defend their own right to cast a ballot by invoking the powers of the U.S. Constitution, federal law, and even state constitutions. In this era, litigation is as much about defense as it is about offense. We must press the courts to enforce their own longstanding red lines, lest we lose these bedrock principles of self-government forever.”

—Jon Sherman,
Litigation Director and Senior Counsel

Litigation Highlights

In **North Carolina**, we secured a preliminary injunction ordering a cure procedure for minor defects in absentee ballot certificate envelopes and permission for a client and nursing home resident to vote with assistance from staff. The case is pending (2020).

In **Kentucky**, we filed a constitutional challenge to the state’s failure to expand no-excuse absentee voting, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which compelled the Governor and Secretary of State to issue emergency voter access rules for the November general election (2020).

In **Louisiana**, we filed a case challenging a voter registration law that discriminated against naturalized citizens, which was quickly repealed following our lawsuit (2016).

In **Florida**, we secured the only U.S. District Court ruling in decades to deem a felony

disenfranchisement system unconstitutional. This helped Florida voters pass a state constitutional amendment in 2018 which restored voting rights to people with felony convictions who have completed “all terms of sentence” (2017). A similar challenge we initiated in Kentucky is pending in federal court. (2021)

In **Wisconsin**, we are challenging a state law provision that places added requirements to using student IDs that do not apply to any other forms of voting ID. The case is pending (2019).

Increasing Voter Turnout for Students & Young People

Youth voter turnout nearly doubled in the 2018 midterms compared to 2014, and this trend continued in 2020. The National Student Voting Rate was 66 percent in 2020, up remarkably from 52 percent in 2016. Despite these improving trends, large numbers of youth and student voters are still not engaged in elections and are still voting at proportionally lower rates than older age groups.

In 2020, Fair Election Center’s Campus Vote Project (CVP) worked in partnership with 280 colleges and universities that enrolled 3.4 million students, contributing to the stronger youth turnout. We averaged more than 20 campus partnerships in each of our staffed state programs in Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin and had partner schools in 41 states and D.C.

Most traditional voter registration and GOTV programs ramp up every other year for elections, forcing them to rebuild connections during each push and rely solely on student leaders. For nearly 10 years, CVP has used a unique model for helping increase student turnout by working year-round with campus administrators and faculty to institutionalize a culture of democratic engagement.

Our team works with university and community college administrators, faculty, students, and election officials throughout every academic year to reduce barriers to student voting. Our strategy emphasizes long-term cultural change, anchored in the academic mission of the institution, and leveraging its resources to provide growing civic engagement. In addition to our direct campus partnerships, CVP promotes best practices for voter registration and student voter education, provides voter information to hundreds of institutions via webinars, student voter guides, presentations, and provides training for stakeholder audiences.

In 2022, we expect to partner with more than 300 schools. Our work includes efforts like these from 2020:

- A digital ad campaign targeting young voters with information on registration and voting by directing them to our state student guides, state-specific vote by mail guides, and other voting information, gaining over 31.6 million impressions and 147,000 click-throughs to get to essential voter information.
- Student voter engagement summits with more than 1,000 attendees from more than 216 campuses and other organizations in our nine key states, bringing together students, faculty, and administrators statewide to share, brainstorm, strategize, and problem-solve ways to integrate civic engagement into the academic mission of their campuses.
- CVP's signature initiative, the Voter Friendly Campus, (run with NASPA, the country's largest student affairs professional association). The initiative supports our campuses throughout the year to develop and execute action plans for student voter registration, education, turnout, and voting rights advocacy. A record 235 institutions were designated Voter Friendly Campuses for their 2020 efforts and are,



Young people and students are the newest members of our democracy, and we should be designing policies and processes that meet them where they are, to welcome them into our system of self-government. With each successive generation being more diverse than the last, protecting the voting rights of young people is also a racial justice issue. Ensuring these diverse voices are included in our political and electoral processes is essential for a sustained and healthy democracy.”

—Mike Burns,
Campus Vote Project National Director

therefore, poised to continue comprehensive student engagement efforts in 2021 and 2022.

- Training and supervising our 343 student Democracy Fellows who helped implement written election mobilization plans throughout 33,020 hours of student voter engagement efforts in 2020.
- Our 112 Work Elections Fellows working solely to recruit young people to fill the urgent gaps of poll workers during the pandemic and our 43 Runoff Democracy Fellows contacting over 246,451 Georgia voters during the GA Senate Runoffs.
- Supporting Black student voter turnout through our HBCU Legacy Initiative, informing and shaping additional voter support programs on campuses with large communities of students of color.

We look forward to continuing this momentum all year, every year with continued efforts to expand youth civic engagement. In 2021, a non-federal-election year, we'll have at least 200 Democracy Fellows across our campus partners (as many as we supported during the 2018 midterms).



Campus Vote Project's work is both changing the voting landscape and creating opportunities for students on our campus. Its Democracy Fellowship program has given me the tools necessary to become a successful student leader on my campus. The program has afforded me the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in planning, outreach, and teamwork building. I've learned how to organize, and how to advocate for voting rights on my campus. I will be able to take the skills that I learn every day as a Democracy Fellow and apply them in my future career."

—Jenna Greene, Senior, Texas Lutheran University

State-specific Resources & Technical Assistance

Equipping organizations and local and state-level advocates with appropriate capacity is not an overnight undertaking. To ensure that citizens can register and vote when it counts, we need to ensure the resources that make this happen are in place long before elections occur.

That's why we provide research and technical assistance to state-based advocates and organizers for mobilization groups representing Black, Latinx, AAPI, and Indigenous peoples for their civic engagement work. We equip these groups with accurate and digestible 50-state voting guides and community voter registration drive guides that help them help others register and cast their ballot.

Recruiting Poll Workers: WorkElections & Power the Polls

Many local election officials struggle to recruit the hundreds of thousands of poll workers needed

nationwide on Election Day. Often, election officials lack the attainable, centralized information networks needed to adequately staff their sites. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the problem in 2020, but our visionary investment in creating a new avenue for poll worker recruitment paid off. Four years earlier, we designed WorkElections.com as a prototype to facilitate poll worker recruitment, aggregating information about poll working in one easily-accessible place for the first time. In 2018, we expanded WorkElections as a pilot to cover nine states and worked to recruit businesses, social service agencies like the YMCA, and language minority organizations to expand its use. In 2019 and early 2020, we populated information from all 50 states. When the pandemic hit, we ramped up the effort, partnering with Civic Alliance, Comedy Central, MTV, Pizza to the Polls, and We Can Vote to form Power the Polls, a massive effort to recruit a new generation of poll workers. The project's website is powered by data from WorkElections and uses our application program interface (API). In July, we provided our information to the Election Assistance Commission to help them launch National Poll Worker Recruitment Day and in September, we joined forces with Facebook, which directed many of its users nationwide to apply as poll workers via WorkElections.com. On September 12, the day Facebook launched its poll worker recruitment effort, the website saw more than a quarter-million users.

From June 1 to November 3, more than one million people visited WorkElections.com. In that same period, the website's "Apply Now" buttons were used over 190,000 times. WorkElections student fellows directly recruited more than 11,000 prospective young poll workers to sign up, as well as hundreds more through county websites and other means.

The original goal for Power the Polls was to have 250,000 signups by the end of October. By the end

of October, Power the Polls had recorded more than **710,000 sign-ups** of people who wanted to be poll workers.

This new generation of poll workers, who are more tech savvy, and many of whom are bi-lingual, can help ensure that new technologies don't undermine the peoples' ability to cast a ballot and that language-minority communities receive the assistance they need. Poll workers are essential to our democracy. Their recruitment needs to happen in every jurisdiction, every year.

Other Support for Administering Fair, Accessible, & Accurate Elections

The need to support and strengthen our elections never stops, nor do our efforts in this endeavour. We advocate for additional resources for federal and local election officials that help voters in their jurisdictions cast their vote. This includes support for technology-based modernization like electronic poll books and online voter registration, which makes access to the ballot more accessible for millions of Americans. We also assist election officials in administering safe and fair elections. For example, early in 2020 while the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting primary elections, we compiled policy proposals of best practices for safeguarding voter registration, mail voting, and in-person voting for the fall elections in our report "Registering and Voting in the Era of COVID-19."

Conclusion

The story of voting rights in the United States is one of continued progress, frequently interrupted by backlash and efforts to suppress the votes of different groups, most notably people of color, women, and young voters. Truly advancing and protecting voting rights isn't accomplished by a single piece of legislation; these victories are the product of sustained, diligent effort by voting rights lawyers and advocates, policy makers, government officials, and more, over generations and at all levels of society and government. By continuing this struggle and working every day to protect the freedom of all Americans to cast a ballot, we are pushing back on those trying to manipulate the process and roll back voting rights in our own time, make real progress on expanding voting rights for those whose voices are marginalized and excluded, and move closer to a democracy that guarantees the rights and freedoms of all Americans.

At Fair Elections Center, we recommit to fighting every year, to protect every vote.

Through essential investments in our civic infrastructure over the long haul, we are building a stronger, more resilient democracy in which all have the freedom to vote. ✓

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FairElectionsCenter.org



CampusVoteProject.org



WorkElections.com
