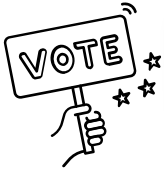




# Voting Rights



## WHAT IS IT?

MARCH 2024

The right to vote is one of the most basic promises of our democracy. In a democratic government, every person is considered equal and is empowered to both participate in their government and speak on the issues that impact their daily lives. Through our votes, we're able to express our values around concerns like health care, climate change, criminal justice, taxes, and so much more.

(Source: League of Women Voters)



## WHY IT MATTERS

The right to vote is a fundamental right and, as the Supreme Court noted more than a century ago, is "preservative of all rights." Historically, the franchise was not open to all citizens in the United States. Only with years of struggle and a demand for inclusivity was the right to vote expanded to include women, African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and young voters. There was a recognition that our country could not legitimately claim to be a representative democracy when it banned huge segments of the population from participating. Without a democracy that affords fair and equal opportunities for participation to everyone, we cannot make meaningful progress on urgent civil and human rights issues like justice reform, immigration, affordable health care, education equity, and economic security. (Source: The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights)



## STATE LEVEL

After record voter turnout in Georgia's 2020 elections, legislators passed S.B. 202, a discriminatory law disproportionately affecting voters of color and voters with disabilities. For example, the voting legislation imposes several conditions on individuals seeking to vote absentee, whether by mail or through drop box submission. These regulations adversely impact and significantly hinder individuals with disabilities who heavily rely on absentee voting methods. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund and civil rights groups filed a federal lawsuit on March 30, 2021, challenging S.B. 202's violation of constitutional and voting rights laws. An amended complaint, filed on May 24, 2021, included disability rights groups and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as plaintiffs. On August 18, 2023, a federal court ruled on emergency motions to lift restrictions imposed by S.B. 202 for the 2024 elections.

The court blocked bans on providing aid to voters waiting more than 150 feet from polling places and requiring birthdates on absentee ballot envelopes, citing violations of the First Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The ruling followed motions filed in May 2023 by voting rights groups to remove barriers disproportionately affecting Black voters, voters of color, and voters with disabilities in Georgia's 2024 elections.

Georgia's 2018 voter purge stands out as one of the most significant disenfranchisement endeavors in U.S. history. In 2019, Georgia sought to purge nearly 330,000 voters, marking the second-largest purge in state history. More recently, in late 2023, Georgia removed almost 190,000 people from its voter rolls (around 2% of voters), and over 82,000 more voters are still in danger of being purged if they don't confirm they still live in the state.

Further, in Georgia, 250,000 individuals with felony convictions are presently unable to vote, with roughly 60% being Black. The state's constitution bars individuals convicted of felonies involving "moral turpitude" from voting. In 2019, the Lt. Governor of Georgia initiated a study committee to conduct a statewide listening tour regarding the issue. The Committee submitted written testimony endorsing the narrowing of the existing law and pledges ongoing support for endeavors aimed at restoring voting rights to returning citizens in Georgia.

It is crucial for the courts to continue to intervene in safeguarding the rights of the hundreds of thousands of marginalized voters and voters with disabilities in Georgia, ensuring their equal participation in the 2024 elections. By putting a stop to the implementation of perplexing and restrictive felony provisions and allowing counties to situate drop boxes outdoors, the court has the power to reinstate the more inclusive voting regulations that existed prior to the enactment of SB 202. Thus, efforts must persist in resisting state actions from unlawfully purging eligible voters from the rolls as well as other measures aiming to disenfranchise Georgians such as advocating for enhancements in Georgia's existing early voting opportunities and safeguards against the closure of polling places.



## FEDERAL LEVEL

In 1965, Congress enacted the **Voting Rights Act** (VRA) to combat racial discrimination in voting, a deeply entrenched issue in U.S. history. Subsequent amendments extended its coverage to include discrimination against other marginalized groups. However, the fundamental right to vote remains endangered, especially due to recent Supreme Court rulings, including a 2013 ruling (Shelby County v. Holder) which eliminated the VRA's requirement that states and localities with a history of discrimination must first obtain federal approval before changing voting rules.

The detrimental court decisions, widening racial turnout disparity, and proliferation of restrictive state voting measures emphasize the pressing necessity for Congress to approve the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 14). This critical legislation, named after the late civil rights champion and Georgia congressman, aims to reinstate the Voting Rights Act to its former potency and incorporate supplementary safeguards required in the present context. (Source: Brennan Center)



# ADVOCACY

Advocating for voting rights in Georgia necessitates concerted efforts and engagement. Here are five impactful ways to support this cause:

1. **Contact Elected Officials:** Reach out to senators, congressional representatives, and local officials through emails, letters, calls, or in-person meetings. Personalize your communication to convey the importance of voting rights and the impact on communities.
2. **Community Outreach and Education:** Organize community events, workshops, and informational sessions to educate people about voting rights, voter registration procedures, and the importance of participating in elections. Empower individuals with knowledge to exercise their voting rights.
3. **Join Advocacy Groups:** Collaborate with advocacy organizations focused on voting rights and electoral reforms. Participate in campaigns, rallies, and initiatives aimed at promoting equitable access to the voting process.
4. **Support Legal Challenges:** Stay informed about legal challenges and lawsuits related to voting rights in Georgia. Support organizations and initiatives that challenge discriminatory voting laws and practices through legal means.
5. **Voter Registration Drives:** Organize voter registration drives in underserved communities, colleges, and minority neighborhoods. Provide resources and assistance to help eligible voters register and navigate the registration process effectively.

By actively engaging in these efforts, individuals can contribute to safeguarding and expanding voting rights for all Georgia citizens, fostering a more inclusive and democratic electoral system.



## RESOURCES

- <https://fairfight.com>
- <https://newgeorgiaproject.org>
- <https://www.acluga.org/en/issues/voter-rights>
- <https://www.naacpldf.org>
- <https://www.georgianaacp.org>
- <https://www.lwv.org/local-leagues/lwv-georgia>
- <https://www.brennancenter.org>

### Contact Information

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