

VOTING RIGHTS: A FEMINIST ISSUE

Following the 2013 ruling in *Shelby v. Holder*, which ruthlessly gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965, there has been an increase in voting legislation that intentionally suppresses access to the ballot for millions of citizens. Voting is fundamental to our democracy; close to a century after women won the right to vote and 50 years after the Voting Rights Act outlawed race-based voter suppression, voting rights remain a grave feminist issue. New voter suppression tactics disproportionately affect women, especially women of color, low-income women, and immigrant women. We must examine voter suppression tactics through a feminist lens in order to address the myriad of ways that women are disadvantaged and disenfranchised by these new laws.

WOMEN & VOTER ID LAWS

90% of women change their legal name upon marriage or divorce, leaving only 48% of women with a birth certificate that accurately reflects their current name. This makes them especially vulnerable to voter ID laws. **Only 66% of voting age women have access to proof of citizenship with their current name.** The other 34% of women are required to present both a birth certificate and proof of marriage, divorce, or name change in order to vote. These bureaucratic hurdles exclude legitimate voters who do not have documented proof of citizenship, such as seniors, students living away from home, married women, and immigrants. Trans and gender nonconforming individuals are also disproportionately affected by voter ID laws as their ID and birth certificate often do not match. An estimated 34,000 trans voters were disenfranchised in 2016.

According to a study done by the National Women's Law Center, more than one in eight women (17 million) live at or below the poverty line in the U.S., with women being 35% more likely to live in poverty than men. This number is exacerbated by racial inequality. African American and Latinx women make up the majority of minimum wage and lower-income workers, making it especially difficult for them to adhere to voting rules that require any added expense. Since 2013, 17 states have passed voter identification laws that require photo ID, and 20 million voting-age citizens do not have the type of photo ID required by these laws. According to *The Washington Post*, these restrictions most heavily disenfranchise young voters, people of color, the elderly, low-income voters, immigrants, and those with disabilities.

WOMEN & EARLY VOTING

Cuts to the time allotted for early voting drastically affect access to the ballot for women. In 2011 alone, 10 states introduced bills that would reduce early or absentee voting periods, 3 states passed laws slashing early voting by 50%, and 16 states introduced bills to end voter registration drives. This is alarming when one considers that, in the past three elections, there has been an increase in early voting, particularly among African Americans and women. In fact, according to a recent study on the 2016 election, more than 87,000 women cast their vote early in North Carolina and women of color accounted for 36.34% of early voters in the state.

The use of early voting is likely a result of women having primary care or custody of their children, which complicates getting to a polling station, especially when you consider that Election Day is not a holiday. This, in turn, means women need to take time off work to vote, which is more difficult for those in hourly or low-wage earning jobs. Combine all of this with the fact that on average African Americans and Latinos--in lower income communities--wait 20 minutes more than White voters in long lines to cast their vote on Election Day, and it becomes clear why so many women depend on early voting.

WOMEN & RACIAL GERRYMANDERING

Since the early 1960s, state legislatures have systematically redrawn county district lines across the country to maintain a supermajority in a number of states. African American and Latino voters historically--and currently--vote overwhelmingly Democrat. This likelihood increases when we look at African American and Latinx women. Women of color are an extremely active and powerful voting bloc, giving conservative lawmakers more incentive to suppress their power. On average, African American women vote at the highest rate--more so than any other demographic (74% in the 2012 election). Redistricting is an institutional example of discriminatory practices that further disenfranchise marginalized individuals--namely women of color--and keep conservative politicians in government.

WOMEN & ELECTION DAY RESOURCES

Polling places that predominantly represent women of color are routinely limited. Women of color and immigrant women are often in districts that receive fewer machines, fewer poll workers, fewer publicly accessible polling sites, and less funding. Broken, old, and ineffective machines go to the communities of color. On average, **African Americans waited twice as long to vote in the 2012 election as white voters.** Combine this with other voting hurdles across states, including: Wisconsin's one DMV office for every 689 square miles; Texas's 127 counties lacking ID-issuing facilities; Alabama's removal of driver's license examiners in 31 offices around the state; South Carolina's 432 voters per machine; and Florida's Miami-Dade county prohibiting voters from using the restrooms in six-hour long lines, and it is clear how resource allocation on Election Day is an effective measure towards ongoing voter suppression.