Reproductive Justice powered by young people in the South, Midwest, and California.

URGE
UNITE FOR REPRODUCTIVE & GENDER EQUITY

Voting Rights & Voter Suppression 101

Our Community, Our Power, Our Voice

Voting is a fundamental right and a strategic tool communities use to build power and protect our futures. But that right is shaped by policy: state lawmakers decide how elections operate and by extension, what barriers voters may face. When lawmakers create obstacles to the ballot, they can limit the power of young people—particularly people of color, queer and trans people, and communities historically pushed out of political systems.

The rules that govern voting:

1. **Registration:** States set the rules for registering, updating voter information, and voter rolls.
2. **Voter ID:** States determine whether voters must show identification and which documents qualify.
3. **Early & Mail Voting:** States determine who can vote before Election Day, who can vote by mail, and the deadlines and requirements for doing so.
4. **Voting in Practice:** State and local rules determine where and when people vote, how ballots are cast and counted, and what assistance and accessibility protections are available.

The growing push to restrict voting:

Numerous states are actively changing the rules that determine how people register and vote. Since 2020, at least 30 states have enacted 123 restrictive voting laws, making it harder for eligible voters to register, remain on the rolls, or cast a ballot.[1] From January 2025 through April 2026, 19 states enacted 44 restrictive laws.[1] Some states have expanded voting access, but restrictive policies are increasingly outpacing those efforts. In 2025, 25 states enacted 30 expansive laws, but restrictive laws outnumbered expansive laws for the first time since 2021.[2]

Know your state! Know your rights!

Every state has different rules; what you need to vote depends on where you live. Check your state or local election office for the voting rules that apply to you, including registration, ID, early voting, mail voting, polling places, and ballots. Visit urge.civicengine.com for more state-specific voting information.[3]

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What does voter suppression look like?

Voter suppression is any attempt to prevent or discourage individuals from registering to vote or casting their ballot. These measures often target specific groups based on race, ethnicity, political affiliation, age, or other aspects of voters' identities.[4] Widely used forms of voter suppression include discriminatory voter ID and proof-of-citizenship restrictions, reduced polling place hours in communities of color, the elimination of early voting opportunities, and illegal purges of voters from the rolls.[4] Some barriers are direct, while others create additional time, cost, or administrative hurdles that make voting harder to access.

Who faces the greatest barriers?

Voting barriers do not fall evenly across communities. Young people can face additional logistical and structural barriers to registering and voting.[5]

- **Young people and students:** 48% of voting-eligible youth who weren't registered said they did not know how to register, ran out of time, missed the deadline, or had trouble with the application process.[5]
- **Voters of color:** Voters in predominantly Black neighborhoods had to wait in line 29% longer than voters in predominantly White neighborhoods nationwide, and they were 74% more likely to have to wait more than 30 minutes to cast their ballot.[6]
- **LGBTQIA+ voters:** Approximately 113,700 voting-eligible transgender people live in states with the strictest voter ID laws (where government-issued photo ID is required to vote and few or no alternatives are available) and do not possess the state required ID to vote.[7]
- **People with disabilities:** Nearly 1 in 6 voters with disabilities reported difficulty voting or accessibility concerns in the 2024 election, twice the rate of voters without disabilities who reported the same concerns.[8]
- **Low-income and working voters:** People earning less than $30,000 a year are 4 times more likely to lack a driver's license or state ID with their current name and/or address than those earning more than $100,000.

Why does URGE care about voting rights?

Reproductive freedom and voting rights are intrinsically linked because the policies that shape our bodies, families, health, and futures are shaped by elected officials. For young people, voting is one way to help shape those decisions and the conditions we live in. When access to the ballot is restricted or voting power is diluted, communities most affected by inequity have less ability to influence the decisions that govern their lives. Voting is one tool we use to protect one another and build power, alongside the daily and year-round work of fighting for reproductive justice.

[1] State Voting Laws Roundup: May 2026. Brennan Center for Justice. Updated August 2026. https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/state-voting-laws-roundup-may-2026

[2] State Voting Laws Roundup: 2025 in Review. Brennan Center for Justice. Updated August 2026. https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/state-voting-laws-roundup-2025-review

[3] VOTE411. League of Women Voters Education Fund. Updated 2026. https://www.vote411.org

[4] Fighting Voter Suppression. League of Women Voters. Updated 2026. https://www.lwv.org/voting-rights/fighting-voter-suppression

[5] New Restrictions on Voter Registration Are Likely to Harm Young Voters. CIRCLE, Tufts University. April 2026. https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/new-restrictions-voter-registration-are-likely-harm-young-voters

[6] Racial Disparities in Voting Wait Times: Evidence from Smartphone Data. National Bureau of Economic Research. Updated November 2020. https://www.nber.org/papers/w26487

[7] The Potential Impact of Voter Identification Laws on Transgender Voters in the 2026 General Election. Williams Institute. Updated September 2026 https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Trans-Voter-ID-Sep-2026.pdf

[8] Practical steps towards full accessibility for voters with disabilities. Center for Civic Design. Updated November 2025. https://civicdesign.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Report-Towards-full-accessibility-for-voters-with-disabilities-11-30-25.pdf

[9] New CDCE Survey Shows Millions Lack ID as Voter ID Laws Spread to More States. Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement, University of Maryland. Updated March 2024. https://cdce.umd.edu/feature/new-cdce-survey-shows-millions-lack-id-voter-id-laws-spread-more-states