

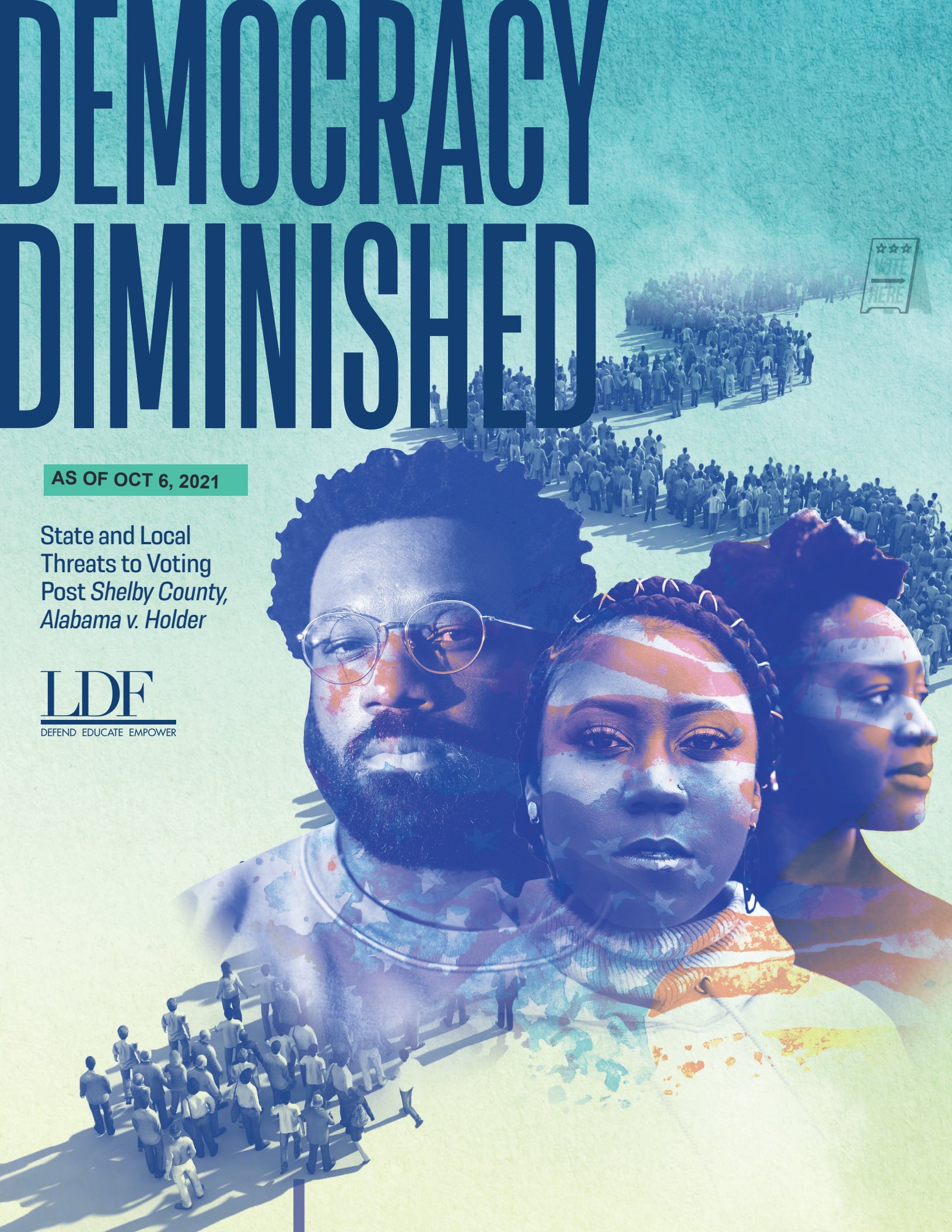
DEMOCRACY DIMINISHED



AS OF OCT 6, 2021

State and Local
Threats to Voting
Post *Shelby County*,
Alabama v. Holder

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**DEMOCRACY DIMINISHED: STATE AND LOCAL THREATS TO VOTING
POST-SHELBY COUNTY, ALABAMA V. HOLDER
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Introduction

For nearly 50 years, Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) required certain jurisdictions (including states, counties, cities, and towns) with a history of chronic racial discrimination in voting to submit all proposed voting changes to the U.S. Department of Justice (U.S. DOJ) or a federal court in Washington, D.C. for pre-approval. This requirement is commonly known as “preclearance.”

Section 5 preclearance served as our democracy’s discrimination checkpoint by halting discriminatory voting changes *before* they were implemented. It protected Black, Latinx, Asian, Native American, and Alaskan Native voters from racial discrimination in voting in the states and localities—mostly in the South—with a history of the most entrenched and adaptive forms of racial discrimination in voting. Section 5 placed the **burden of proof, time, and expense**¹ on the covered state or locality to demonstrate that a proposed voting change was not discriminatory before that change went into effect and could harm vulnerable populations.

Section 4(b) of the VRA, the coverage provision, authorized Congress to determine which jurisdictions should be “covered” and, thus, were required to seek preclearance. Preclearance applied to nine states (Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia) and a number of counties, cities, and towns in six partially covered states (California, Florida, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, and South Dakota).

On June 25, 2013, the Supreme Court of the United States immobilized the preclearance process in [*Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder*](#),² a challenge to the constitutionality of Sections 4(b) and 5 of the VRA. The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) vigorously defended the VRA’s constitutionality in the Supreme Court and in the lower courts. In a devastating blow to the essence of the preclearance process, the Supreme Court ruled that Section 4(b) was unconstitutional, effectively disabling Section 5. The Court held that the Section 4(b) formula for determining which jurisdictions would be covered under Section 5 was out-of-date and unresponsive to current conditions in voting.

Since the *Shelby County* decision, states and local jurisdictions have been free to implement changes in voting without the preclearance process to determine whether those changes are racially discriminatory or harmful to language minorities. Indeed, the *Shelby County* decision left voters of color with *no* advance notice of discriminatory voting changes, despite that thousands of voting changes are considered each year by formerly covered jurisdictions. **According to the U.S. DOJ, it processed 44,790 Section 5 submissions between 2010 and 2013 alone.**³

Another consequence of the devastating *Shelby County* decision is that the number of federal election observers sent by the U.S. DOJ to previously covered jurisdictions for the November 2016 presidential election—the first election in more than 50 years without the VRA fully in operation—was the lowest since Congress passed the VRA in 1965.⁴ Indeed, the U.S. DOJ sent federal election observers to only five states—Alabama, Alaska,



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California, Louisiana, and New York—in November 2016 because the U.S. DOJ interpreted the *Shelby County* decision as having ended the department’s ability to send observers to previously covered jurisdictions based on evidence of possible discrimination. Federal court rulings, however, authorized federal observers to monitor elections in these five states. DOJ’s observer program was similarly limited in 2020.⁵

Historically, federal observers—who are authorized by Section 8 of the VRA to be inside the polling place on Election Day and examine voter registration rolls within them—have collected evidence of unlawful activities around elections and prepared reports that litigants have used in court to challenge those activities. There are scores of examples of federal observers acting to protect voters from racial discrimination at the polls.⁶

LDF and other advocates view this scale-back of the federal election observer program as another impediment to being able to learn of and defend against efforts to intimidate voters or stop them from voting, an issue that remains ongoing in previously covered jurisdictions, as the record below demonstrates.⁷ The potential for voter intimidation and unlawful challenges to voters in the November 2016 election was a particular concern also because of the then Republican presidential candidate’s calls, which had been challenged through litigation by state Democratic parties in some previously covered jurisdictions like Arizona and North Carolina, for supporters to act as layperson observers against non-existent voter fraud⁸ and for law enforcement to be deployed near and within polling places.⁹ The Democratic National Committee claimed that the Republican National Committee had enabled the then Republican presidential candidate to intimidate minority voters in violation of an ongoing consent decree between the two party committees.¹⁰ Similarly, voter intimidation was rampant during the 2020 general election, including caravans in or around polling places with armed people.¹¹

Bogus Claims of Widespread Voter Fraud

Against the backdrop of the *Shelby County* decision dismantling of one of the most successful federal voter protections, the 45th President claimed within the first week of his new administration, without evidence, that approximately three to five million people illegally voted (*i.e.*, committed voter fraud), in the 2016 election, and threatened to use his executive authority to order an investigation into widespread voter fraud.¹² The new President’s threat was resoundingly condemned by representatives from both major political parties, as well as civil rights and pro-democracy organizations, because of the belief that this threat, based on the myth of voter fraud, would form the basis for continued voter suppression efforts, particularly impacting communities of color, such as those documented in this report.¹³

Following through on his threat, the President signed an executive order in May of 2017 establishing the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity. Stacked with advocates for restricting access to the ballot box, the commission purported to “enhance the American people’s confidence in the integrity of the voting processes,” with an emphasis on weeding out “improper” or “fraudulent” registration and voting.¹⁴ Civil rights advocates and others expressed deep skepticism about the need for and purpose of the Commission, particularly as it was led by the Kansas Secretary of State. This individual has been frequently sued by civil rights groups for voting rights violations (*e.g.*, involvement in discriminatory proof-of-citizenship and photo ID



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bills). He was sanctioned in one of those suits for “demonstrat[ing] a pattern” of misleading statements to the court, and has been a strenuous peddler of the voter-fraud myth.¹⁵ The Commission’s other members had similarly exaggerated claims of voter fraud,¹⁶ or had little experience with voting-related administration or voting rights issues.¹⁷ Accordingly, LDF and other advocates filed various [Freedom of Information Act requests](#) related to this Commission.¹⁸ LDF and other advocates also filed lawsuits (e.g., *LDF v. Trump*) alleging that the Commission’s operation and actions violated multiple federal statutes and state laws.¹⁹ Various secretaries of state—of California, Virginia, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Wisconsin, for example—pushed back against the Commission’s efforts in late June 2017 to obtain, among other things, a wide array of voter data, due to concerns about how and for what undisclosed purposes the Commission sought this information, which it may not be legally entitled to have.²⁰ The Commission sent a second request for voter data in August 2017.²¹ Voters responded in certain states by withdrawing their voter registrations²² or suing elected officials to prevent the release of their data.²³ Furthermore, a member of the Commission, Maine’s Secretary of State, obtained a court order requiring the Commission to disclose communications and documents to him after he filed suit, alleging that he was being illegally excluded from the Commission’s decision-making process.²⁴ And in August 2018, after receiving thousands of pages of documents, he issued a statement contending that the Commission lacked any evidence of widespread voter fraud, the Commission’s purported reason for existing, and that the documents illuminated reasons why the Commission sought to keep its inner-workings secret.²⁵ Moreover, the Democratic National Committee formed a Commission on Protecting American Democracy from the Trump Administration, aimed at debunking the myth of widespread voter fraud and highlighting ways to expand access to the ballot box.²⁶ A federal bill called the Anti-Voter Suppression Act was introduced to repeal the President’s Commission and prohibit the use of federal funds for it.²⁷

In January 2018, the President signed an executive order disbanding the Commission, citing the refusal of many states to provide the data the Commission had requested, as well as the expense of defending against the multiple lawsuits filed to challenge the Commission.²⁸ Notwithstanding that victory, voting rights advocates remained concerned about the President’s request that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) review the Commission’s findings and statements by the vice-chairman of the Commission that DHS should continue the Commission’s work. But DHS reportedly has not publicly articulated any plans to do the work of the Commission or look into the issue of voter fraud.²⁹ Moreover, a White House official indicated in a sworn statement filed in court that it will destroy the data collected by the Commission and will not send records to DHS.³⁰

Following the disbandment of the sham Commission, the President continued to repeat baseless claims of voter fraud, reiterating his claim that Californians engaged in voter fraud.³¹ Meanwhile, four individuals, represented by pro-democracy groups, have sued a member of this former sham Commission and an organization to which he belongs because of their accusations that hundreds of Virginians, including the plaintiffs, illegally registered to vote; the suit alleges that these defendants “[l]abel[ed] the individuals named in the reports as non-citizens and therefore felons with reckless disregard for the truth of those accusations,” thus “act[ing] to intimidate and threaten those individuals and to deter them from voting or registering to vote.” Plaintiffs brought claims under the VRA and the Ku Klux Klan Act.³²



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LDF'S RESPONSE TO SHELBY COUNTY

LDF has closely monitored how formerly covered states and localities are responding to the *Shelby County* decision. In addition, LDF attorneys have engaged with communities of color across the nation that have been left vulnerable by the Supreme Court's ruling to urge them to be their community's eyes and ears, and to alert LDF of any [potentially discriminatory voting changes](#).³³ LDF attorneys have collectively traveled hundreds of thousands of miles to over a dozen states, holding community empowerment forums, meeting with community leaders and individuals, distributing literature, investigating complaints, meeting with election officials and elected representatives, and monitoring elections through our annual [Prepared to Vote](#) campaigns.³⁴

In addition, LDF continues to vigorously enforce other provisions of the VRA, such as Section 2, which are even more essential to the protection of our democracy in the absence of Section 5's preclearance process. By contrast, under the former president's administration, beginning in 2017, it had failed to affirmatively bring a single lawsuit to protect minority voting rights under the VRA.³⁵

LDF also is at the forefront of the effort to restore the VRA to its full strength and reactivate the preclearance protections.

Statewide changes like redistricting and photo identification (ID) laws post-*Shelby County* have attracted significant media attention, as well as challenges in court under other provisions of the VRA. Voting changes at the local level, such as moving a polling place or switching from district-based to at-large voting, have garnered less attention, but are no less problematic. **In fact, more than 85% of preclearance work previously done under Section 5 was at the local level.**³⁶ Years after the *Shelby County* decision, we are only beginning to see the impact of local changes, including changes to polling places. For example, a 2018 study found that since 2013, jurisdictions formerly covered by Section 5 closed, on average, almost 20% more polling stations per capita than jurisdictions in the rest of the country, and that within 18 counties in 13 states examined, many of the closed polls were in neighborhoods with large populations of people of color.³⁷ By 2020, a study found that approximately 21,000 polling places nationwide that served voters on Election Day have been eliminated.³⁸

Common changes at the state or local level that are potentially discriminatory include: reducing the number of polling places; changing or eliminating early voting days and/or hours; replacing district-based voting with at-large elections; implementing onerous registration qualifications like proof of citizenship; and removing qualified voters from registration lists. Indeed, minority communities are more likely to live in areas where polling places are difficult to access, leaving minority communities vulnerable to discriminatory changes that depress turnout.³⁹



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THE VOTING RIGHTS AMENDMENT & ADVANCEMENT ACTS

In addition to monitoring post-*Shelby County* voting changes and pursuing litigation with the legal tools that remain available, LDF is urging Congress to aggressively respond to the *Shelby County* decision with new legislation that will protect voters of color from discrimination.

On January 16, 2014, seven months after the *Shelby County* decision, a bipartisan group of Members of Congress introduced the [Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014](#). Congressmen John Lewis (D-GA-5), James Sensenbrenner (R-WI-5), Steve Chabot (R-OH-1), and John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI-13), among others, introduced H.R. 3899 in the House.⁴⁰ Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and other Senators introduced a companion bill, S. 1945, in the Senate on the same day. The Voting Rights Amendment Act represented a threshold but still significant step by Congress toward ensuring that communities of color are protected against voting discrimination.⁴¹ This bill had several important provisions, including: a mechanism to identify places with the worst recent record of voting discrimination and require preclearance for their proposed voting changes; an enhanced ability to obtain preliminary injunctive relief when challenging voting changes likely to be discriminatory; an expansion of the authority of federal courts to order preclearance for jurisdictions that have discriminated against voters of color; and nationwide notification of potential voting changes to increase transparency and accountability and enable communities to challenge potentially discriminatory changes before elections.

The Voting Rights Amendment Act was reintroduced during the 2015-2016 legislative session (H. 885) and had 100 co-sponsors, 15 of whom are Republican.⁴² During the 2015-2016 legislative session, Congressional members also introduced the [Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015](#) (H.R. 2867/S. 1659), which had 45 co-sponsors, including a Republican representative, in another effort to respond to the void created by the *Shelby County* decision.⁴³ This bill had several important provisions, including ones that would have: modernized the preclearance formula to cover states with a pattern of discrimination that puts voters at risk; ensured that last-minute voting changes would not adversely affect voters; protected voters from the types of voting changes most likely to discriminate against people of color and language minorities; enhanced the ability to apply preclearance review when needed; expanded the federal observer program; and improved voting rights protections for Native American and Alaskan Native people.⁴⁴

Four years after the *Shelby County* decision, congressional representatives introduced the [Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2017](#), which, under a new coverage provision, would apply to 13 states—Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Texas, Louisiana, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Arkansas, Arizona, California, New York, and Virginia—and, among other things, require these jurisdictions to preclear their voting changes for 10 years with the opportunity to bail-out of this obligation if they demonstrated the necessary record.⁴⁵ A bipartisan [Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2017](#) also was introduced.⁴⁶ This legislation would make all states and local jurisdictions that had committed five voting violations in the last 15 years eligible for preclearance



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review, require notice of any changes to polling times, dates, locations, and protocols, and ensure that preliminary relief could be obtained more readily.

After the November 2018 elections, House members indicated their plans to introduce legislation to respond to the *Shelby County* decision.⁴⁷ In March 2019, the [Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2019](#) (also known as H.R. 4) was introduced and successfully voted out of the House in December 2019.⁴⁸ This legislation—similar to the above-mentioned 2017 version of this bill—proposes a new coverage framework to determine which states and localities with repeated voting rights violations over the last 25 years would be subject to Section 5’s protections. Under this framework, states with 15 or more voting rights violations in the past 25 years would be required to obtain preclearance on voting changes. Additionally, states with a history of 10 or more voting rights violations, if one of the violations occurs at the state level, and subdivisions with three or more voting rights violations in the past 25 years, would have to pre-clear proposed changes to local election laws. Further, the VRAA’s preclearance requirements would apply nationwide to known potentially discriminatory practices like at-large voting and cuts to multilingual voting materials and polling places. And this bill would provide for increased transparency by requiring reasonable public notice for voting changes and permitting the U.S. Attorney General to authorize the use of federal observers anywhere in the country where serious threats to voter access and fair elections exist. H.R. 4 was revised and reintroduced in August 2021. The legislation was updated to respond to the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee*. H.R. 4 includes the aforementioned provisions and responds to the *Brnovich* decision by rolling back the elevated guidelines enunciated by the Court that set barriers to challenging future discrimination. The bill also instructs courts hearing voting rights cases to consider the impacts of discrimination across impacted jurisdictions, from education and employment to health. House members passed H.R. 4 along strict party lines before taking their August 2021 recess, and the legislation now remains pending before the Senate as the [John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021](#).⁴⁹

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Until the Voting Rights Act is restored to its full strength, we must all play a vigilant role in protecting our democracy from discrimination in voting. Thus, LDF is encouraging individuals, communities of color, and their representatives to:

- notify LDF of any voting changes in their communities by emailing vote@naacpldf.org; and,
- reach out to representatives in the [U.S. House of Representatives](#) and [Senate](#) to urge them to do their job by holding hearings on legislation to respond to the *Shelby County* decision, such as the Voting Rights Advancement Act.⁵⁰

The need for immediate Congressional action is starkly illustrated in the examples of efforts by states and localities to enact measures with potentially devastating consequences on political participation by communities of color.



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What follows is a compendium of state, county, and local level voting changes in the wake of the *Shelby County* decision that threaten minority voting rights. There have been scores of changes following the *Shelby County* decision, as LDF predicted that there would be during our defense of Section 5 in the *Shelby County* case. Each change potentially impacts thousands of voters. For example, four courts have found that Texas's implementation of its photo ID law (*i.e.*, one change) impacts more than 600,000 registered voters and one million eligible voters. A change to the electoral method for local bodies (*i.e.*, one change) when Fayette County, Georgia, attempted to implement at-large voting for a special election for members of its board of commissioners, had the potential to impact more than 100,000 people in that county.

In the absence of legislation that responds to the *Shelby County* decision, this compendium is ever growing. LDF maintains and regularly updates this compendium of voting changes on our website. For the most recent report, please visit www.naacpldf.org.

If you have questions or need further information, please contact LDF Deputy Director of Litigation, Leah Aden, who has authored this compendium since 2013. Leah appreciates the support of Fadilat Olasupo, Nicole de los Santos, Mohammed Amer, Clyde Hollins, Sara Carter, Regina Fairfax, and Maria Smith for their editorial, drafting, and other contributions to this compendium. For questions about the information contained herein or to share information about voting changes in your community, please contact 212.965.2200 or vote@naacpldf.org.

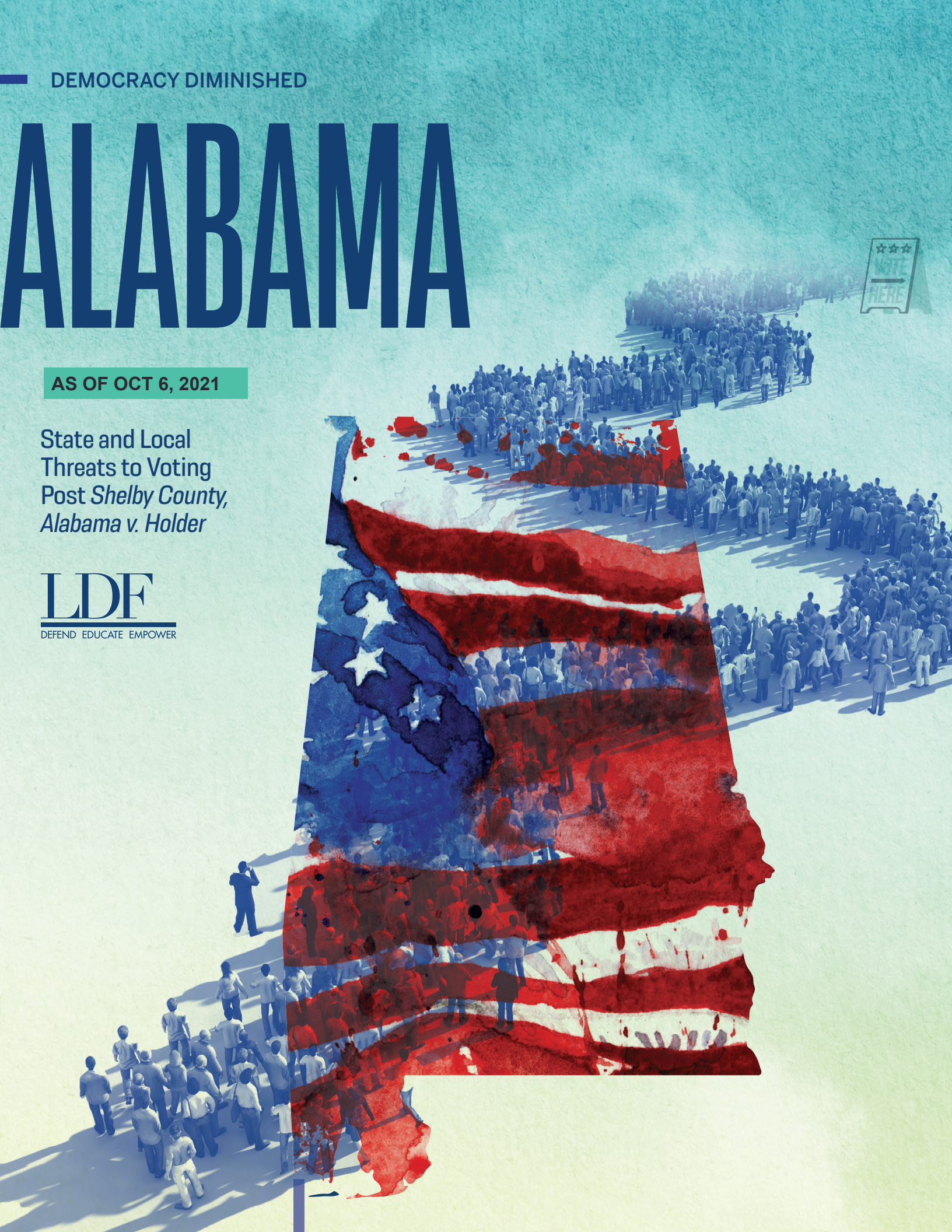
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ALABAMA

State Level:

Photo ID & voucher requirements

In 2011, Alabama passed a law requiring photographic proof of identity to vote either in-person or absentee (“photo ID law”). However, the state did not immediately seek to implement the law, as all voting changes in the state were subject to preclearance under Section 5 at that time. Indeed, Alabama never sought preclearance for its photo ID law. Instead, for two years, the state delayed implementation of the law, awaiting the final resolution in *Shelby County*. The day after the Supreme Court announced the decision, Alabama announced that it would enforce its photo ID law for the 2014 election cycle.

Numerous studies indicate that photo ID laws depress voter turnout in Black and Latino communities.⁵¹ Alabama’s photo ID law restricts in-person and absentee voting to individuals who can produce one of seven required forms of “valid” photo ID. A prospective in-person voter without the required photo ID cannot cast a regular ballot unless two election officials present at the polling place choose to “positively identify” that person.⁵² There are reports of cases in which “elderly people who had been voting for decades could not be vouched for by the new people who had moved to the neighborhood and were working the polls.”⁵³ All other prospective in-person voters, and nearly all other absentee voters without the required photo ID, must cast a provisional ballot that will be counted only if the prospective voter provides a designated election official with the required photo ID within a limited period of time before or after Election Day.

In December 2015, LDF, on behalf of other civil rights and pro-democracy organizations and individual voters, filed a lawsuit, [*Greater Birmingham Ministries et al. v. Alabama et al.*](#), under Section 2 of the VRA and the U.S. Constitution to challenge Alabama’s photo ID law and “positively identify” provision. The lawsuit seeks, among other remedies, that a federal court bail-in Alabama for preclearance review under Section 3(c) of the VRA.⁵⁴ Plaintiffs filed a preliminary injunction in advance of the 2016 elections to stop the enforcement of the “positively identify” requirement, arguing that that provision functions as a prohibited voucher requirement. A federal court denied the request for preliminary injunction with respect to the “positively identify” provision; however, LDF continues to challenge this and the photo ID provision before the federal court as part of the long-term relief that it seeks.⁵⁵

The litigation revealed that the ballots of more than 2,000 otherwise eligible voters have gone uncounted solely due to their failure to provide ID during the 2014 and 2016 elections.⁵⁶ According to the plaintiffs’ experts, 118,000 registered voters in Alabama lack an acceptable ID under the law.



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In advance of trial, scheduled for February 2018, the district court granted Defendants' request for summary judgment and, in so doing, rejected Plaintiffs' claims under the VRA and U.S. Constitution and dismissed the case.⁵⁷ Plaintiffs appealed that decision,⁵⁸ but in July 2020, a divided three-judge panel of the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals issued a ruling affirming the trial court's decision.⁵⁹

During the 2018-2019 legislative session, Alabama adopted a law that requires photo ID when applying for an absentee ballot, effective as of August 1, 2019.⁶⁰

Closure of driver's license issuing offices

In 2015, after implementing its photo ID law, Alabama also proposed closing 31 driver's license offices located predominately in rural areas of Alabama's Black Belt, even though driver's licenses are one of the few forms of photo ID accepted by election officials in the state. LDF and other advocates voiced opposition to these proposed changes because of their likely impact on Black voters.⁶¹ As a result, rather than permanently close offices, Alabama decided to keep them open one day a month, which still severely restricts access to photo ID for many individuals.⁶²

In addition to LDF's advocacy in response to this reduction in access to driver's license offices, the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) investigated whether Alabama's proposed closure of and reduction of service hours for the state's driver's license offices is discriminatory in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Title VI prohibits entities that receive federal funding for transportation-related projects from instituting policies that discriminate based on race.⁶³ In December 2016, the U.S. DOT and the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA), Alabama's department of motor vehicles, entered an agreement that fully restores the hours of driver's license issuing offices in nine predominately Black counties in the Black Belt.⁶⁴ In addition, for the next two years, the agreement requires ALEA to seek pre-approval from the U.S. DOT before initiating any driver's license office closures or other reductions in service.

Proof of citizenship

Alabama also has sought to require voters to show proof of citizenship.⁶⁵ Specifically, Alabama has requested that the federal Election Administration Commission (EAC) modify the federal voter registration form to require proof of citizenship to vote in state and local elections. Such a requirement potentially sets up a two-tiered/dual system for voting in federal, state, and local elections.⁶⁶ The federal form, which can be used as an alternative to local voter registration forms and already requires individuals to swear, under penalty of perjury, that they are citizens, does not require a birth certificate or other document as proof of citizenship when registering. Civil rights and pro-democracy organizations have sued the EAC to challenge its actions to enable Alabama to attempt to require proof of citizenship and a federal court temporarily blocked the EAC from enforcing the proof of citizenship requirement for the 2016 elections.⁶⁷



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Other states (including Arizona) have attempted to construct a similar two-tiered/dual system, but have been blocked by the courts (see below on Arizona’s efforts to require proof of citizenship). Dual registration systems (*i.e.*, one system for voting in state elections and another for federal elections) have a historical association with racial discrimination, harkening back to the pre-VRA era, when multi-tiered voter rolls were maintained to intentionally prevent Black voters from lawfully registering to vote. Section 5 blocked a similar two-tiered system of voting in Mississippi in the 1990s.⁶⁸

Voter Intimidation

In November 2017, Alabama’s SOS claimed that nearly 700 people may have committed electoral fraud by voting in the state’s Democratic primary elections in May 2017 and then the Republican runoff in September 2017.⁶⁹ Those convicted of violating a new law, banning such cross-over voting, risk a felony conviction punishable by up to five years in prison and a \$15,000 fine. However, the SOS’s figures reportedly were wrong and the result of clerical error, meaning that roughly half—if not more—of those accused of violating the state’s law did not. Advocates criticized the SOS for making his claim before widely publicizing the change in the law and before verifying the numbers that he relied upon to accuse voters of illegally voting, because of the potential of these accusations to chill voter turnout in the December runoff election and the threat of prosecution under Alabama’s new law.⁷⁰

During the December 2017 Senate election, civil rights advocates investigated reports of voter intimidation, including reports that: voters received text messages with false information that their polling site in **Jefferson County** had been changed; there was a hostile precinct chief in the town of Ramer in **Montgomery County**; and police set up near polling locations in that county to check people for outstanding warrants.⁷¹

Voter registration

During the 2017 special election, LDF raised [concerns](#) about poll workers in the state requiring voters to answer immaterial questions on a form, such as the county of their birth, before allowing them to cast a ballot.⁷² This requirement could have run afoul of a provision of the VRA, providing that no election official “may deny the right of any individual to vote in any election because of an error or omission” on a voting record if that error or omission “is not material” in determining whether the individual is qualified to vote.

During the 2018 election, LDF sent a [letter](#) to Alabama’s Secretary of State, urging his office to address reports of confusion at Alabama polling sites over how to process the votes of voters listed as “inactive.” The letter contended that under Alabama law, such voters are entitled to cast a regular ballot as long as they fill out an updated registration form, but many voters were denied those forms and were made to fill out provisional ballots.



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Local Level:

Methods of election, redistricting, & voter purges

In January 2014, following litigation challenging various discriminatory voting practices, a federal district court ordered Section 5 preclearance review of certain voting practices in **Evergreen** in **Conecuh County** as a remedy under Section 3(c), the “bail-in” provision of the VRA.⁷³ Specifically, until December 2020, Evergreen must submit any voting changes related to the method of election for the city council, including any redistricting plan impacting the city council, as well as any change to the standards for determining voter eligibility to participate in Evergreen’s municipal elections, to either the federal court or the U.S. DOJ for Section 5 preclearance review. Since the *Shelby County* decision, Evergreen is the only jurisdiction to have been bailed back into Section 5’s preclearance system through Section 3(c). In addition, the court appointed federal observers to monitor Evergreen’s elections under the VRA.

In 2012, Section 5 blocked Evergreen from continuing to implement an unprecleared discriminatory voter purge based on utility records that omitted eligible voters from a voter registration list, including nearly half of the Conecuh County registered voters who reside in districts heavily populated by Black people.⁷⁴ That same year, Section 5 also blocked an unprecleared municipal redistricting plan that packed Black voters into only two of the five districts when it was possible to establish a third majority-Black voting district, thereby diluting the voting strength of Black voters in Evergreen.

In March 2016, City Council members in **Daphne**, a majority-white city located in **Baldwin County**, passed a mid-cycle redistricting plan, which purportedly did not consider the impact on the Black community.⁷⁵ The racial impact remains unclear because the City’s demographer did not perform a formal analysis on the plan’s effect on the Black electorate, which would have been required under Section 5. Advocates have asked the U.S. DOJ to investigate.

In 2016, the **City of Gardendale** sought to secede from the Jefferson County school system to establish an independent municipal school system. The Gardendale school system (1) would transfer Black persons living in Gardendale from a district-based elections system (the Jefferson County School Board) in which Black voters have an equal opportunity to participate and elect candidates of their choice to a governmental system (the Gardendale school board) that is appointed by the Gardendale city council in which currently Black voters have no comparable opportunity or representation; and (2) would exclude nearby unincorporated Black neighborhoods.⁷⁶ In 1990, the U.S. DOJ blocked a similar attempt by the City of Valley to succeed from the Chambers County school system.⁷⁷ In 2017, in the [*Stout v. Jefferson County School Board*](#) school desegregation litigation, LDF represented Black parents and students who successfully demonstrated that Gardendale’s proposed secession was motivated by a racially discriminatory intent and would have a segregative effect on Black students.⁷⁸ In 2018, the federal Court of Appeals ruled that, because Gardendale’s succession was borne of discriminatory intent, the city could not separate from Jefferson County.⁷⁹



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During the 2017 special election in Alabama, **Mobile County** poll workers reportedly erroneously required voters to present ID with an address that matches state voter registration records, resulting in some voters being unable to do so and having to cast provisional ballots.⁸⁰ LDF raised [concerns](#) about this extralegal address-matching requirement and also whether it may have had a racially disparate impact on Black voters.

Form of government

In **Decatur**, a city in **Morgan** and **Limestone** counties, a federal court in 2014 retained jurisdiction over a legal challenge to Decatur's failure to implement the city manager form of government, which, pursuant to state law, would have reduced the single-member voting districts from five to three, with a fourth district and the mayor elected at-large.⁸¹ As of May 2019, this case remains pending in federal court.⁸² Voters selected this form of government in a 2010 referendum vote, but the City has failed to implement it because the City contends that doing so would violate the VRA by eliminating the only majority-minority district.

Polling place closures & reductions

In November 2016, a civil rights organization released a report that studied polling place closures in Alabama since the *Shelby County* decision and found that "12 counties reduc[ed] 66 polling places."⁸³

Moreover, in March 2016, City Council members in **Daphne**, a majority-white city located in **Baldwin County**, voted to reduce the number of polling places from five to two, forcing residents of one of the only two districts with a sizable Black population to travel more than two and a half miles away from their current polling places, while preserving the polling locations for most of the City's heavily white populated districts.⁸⁴ Advocates have asked the U.S. DOJ to investigate. Members of the City Council have denied that the decision to reduce the number of polling places was done to inconvenience minority voters.⁸⁵

In December 2016, **Elmore County** Commissioners contemplated consolidating a voting precinct, God's Congregation Church, a majority-Black precinct, with the voting precinct at Tallaweka Baptist Church, which is a majority-white precinct, in part due to purportedly low turnout by voters at God's Congregation Church compared to Tallaweka in the 2016 election season, and to save the County money through consolidation.⁸⁶ These precincts are located in Jordanville which is in Tallassee, a city in Elmore County. A former Tallassee city councilmember opposes the closures because of its impact on Black voters.

Changes to Date of Elections for City Elections

In 2021, the Alabama legislature moved the a) date of elections in all but 11 municipalities off the same calendar year as presidential elections, b) candidate qualifying periods from July to June, and c) timeframe for the runoffs from six weeks to four— beginning in August 2025 purportedly to address: volunteer poll



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worker fatigue; equipment shortages; and voter confusion from having to jockey from multiple voting venues within the same calendar year.⁸⁷

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ARIZONA

State Level:

Proof of citizenship

The state of Arizona (along with the state of Kansas) sued the federal Election Assistance Commission (EAC), seeking to require that agency to modify the federal voter registration form to require proof of citizenship to vote in state and local elections, potentially setting up a two-tiered/dual system.⁸⁸ The federal form can be used as an alternative form to local voter registration forms and already requires individuals to swear under penalty of perjury that they are citizens; the federal form does not require a birth certificate or other document as proof to register to vote. Arizona challenged the EAC because of its decision denying the state's request to modify the federal form.⁸⁹ Section 5 blocked a similar two-tiered/dual system of voting in Mississippi in the 1990s. Dual registration systems have a historical association with racial discrimination, hearkening back to the pre-VRA era, when segregated voter rolls were maintained to intentionally prevent Black voters from lawfully casting ballots.

Multiple groups, including communities of color, intervened in the states' lawsuit⁹⁰ and have brought other cases to challenge Arizona's (and Kansas's) proof of citizenship requirement for voter registration laws.⁹¹ On March 19, 2014, a federal court ordered the EAC to modify the state-specific instructions on the federal mail voter registration form to reflect Arizona's (and Kansas's) requirements that voter registrations provide documentary proof of citizenship.⁹² An appeals court reversed that decision and remanded the case to the district court to vacate its order requiring the EAC to modify the federal form to require proof of citizenship; *i.e.*, the state must accept a federal voter registration form *without* additional proof of citizenship, though state voter registration forms can still demand proof of citizenship.⁹³ The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear a case during its 2015-2016 term that could have allowed states to require proof of citizenship for those applying to vote in federal elections, effectively upholding the lower federal court ruling rejecting Arizona (and Kansas's) attempt to require that proof.⁹⁴

Notwithstanding this litigation, in 2016, the Executive Director of the EAC unilaterally acted to change the instructions that accompany the federal voter registration form to respond to Arizona's requests that residents who register to vote using the federal form must show proof of citizenship to vote in state and local elections. In response, civil rights and pro-democracy organizations have sued the EAC, challenging the actions of its Executive Director to enable Arizona to require proof of citizenship; a federal court temporarily blocked the EAC from enforcing the proof of citizenship requirement for 2016 elections.⁹⁵

During the Supreme Court's 2012-2013 term, in *Arizona v. The Inter Tribal Council of Arizona*, the Court found that Proposition 200, Arizona's proof of citizenship law for voter registration, violated the National Voter



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Registration Act (NVRA). In its ongoing pursuit of a proof of citizenship requirement, Arizona contends that the Court’s *Inter Tribal* decision only applies to federal elections.

Voter purges

In 2014, state lawmakers considered reenacting voting provisions—previously blocked by voter referendum—that would allow counties to purge people from the permanent early voter list. Counties use this list to mail ballots prior to every election to individuals, who, after marking their ballot, mail them back or take them to a polling place.⁹⁶

Restrictions on third-party voter registration

Advocates are concerned that H.B. 2023 may disenfranchise many Native American people who live in remote areas of reservations and cannot make it to polling places.⁹⁷ The legislation, enacted in 2016, makes it a felony (punishable by a year in prison and a potential fine of \$150,000) to collect other people’s ballots and bring them to the polls. The Democratic Party and the presidential campaigns of Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, on behalf of the Democratic National Committee, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, the Arizona Democratic Party, and several individuals, sued Arizona for policies like this one that could potentially have a dramatic and disparate impact on minority communities.⁹⁸ Plaintiffs unsuccessfully sought a preliminary injunction to stop the implementation of this law, arguing that collecting ballots has benefited minority voters without secure mailboxes or transportation to the polls.⁹⁹ A divided (2-1) Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the denial of the preliminary injunction, which had enabled the law to remain in effect as the litigation proceeded before the *en banc* Court and then subsequently, temporarily enjoined Arizona from implementing the law; the Supreme Court, thereafter, stayed the appellate court’s decision enjoining the law; therefore, H.B. 2023 was in effect for the November 2016 election.¹⁰⁰ A divided Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ultimately denied Plaintiffs’ claims in a September 2018 ruling.¹⁰¹ However, in January 2020, the full panel of Ninth Circuit Court judges found, after trial, that Arizona’s changes to ballot collection violate the VRA and U.S. Constitution, a decision that was reversed by the Supreme Court in its 2020-2021 term.¹⁰² The Supreme Court’s 6-3 decision in *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* added “guideposts” never before considered in Section 2 cases, including whether a state provides more opportunities to vote now than most states did when Congress last amended Section 2 in 1982.¹⁰³ Justice Elena Kagan criticized the majority opinion for issuing “its own set of rules, limiting Section 2 from multiple directions.”¹⁰⁴ The Court’s narrow reading of Section 2 further weakens the VRA and could make it more difficult to challenge discriminatory voting laws.¹⁰⁵

Restrictions on ballots cast out-of-precinct

In advance of the November 2016 election, a federal court rejected an attempt by the state and national Democratic Party to require counties, under Section 2 of the VRA, to count the provisional ballots of voters, disproportionately people of color, who vote at the wrong polling place, specifically for those seats that the



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person would have been entitled to vote for had he/she been in the correct assigned precinct.¹⁰⁶ The court determined that plaintiffs failed to show that this practice impacts voters of color disproportionately.

Local Level:

Method of election

The **Maricopa County** Community College District Board added two at-large electoral districts to its existing five-member Board, which were elected by districts.¹⁰⁷ The community college district, which is the largest in the country, had enrolled more than 260,000 students in 2013. Reportedly, this change had been on hold, but was implemented for elections in 2014 following the *Shelby County* decision. Section 5 previously blocked similar plans for at-large voting in other jurisdictions because this electoral method diluted the voting strength of communities of color.

Polling place closures & reductions

In November 2016, a civil rights organization released a report that studied polling place closures in Arizona since the *Shelby County* decision and found that “[b]y sheer numbers and scale, Arizona is the leading closer of polling places in the aftermath of *Shelby [County]*,” with “[a]lmost every county in the state reduc[ing] polling places in advance of the 2016 election and almost every county clos[ing] polling places on a massive scale, resulting in 212 fewer polling places.”¹⁰⁸ The study further finds that “**Pima County** has closed more voting locations than any county in [the] study and counties with a demonstrated record of discrimination, like **Cochise County**, have reduced polling places without any oversight.”

Moreover, during the 2016 primary season, voters in **Maricopa County**, the largest county in the state, endured long lines and waits of up to five hours to vote because election officials reduced the number of polling places by 70% (from 200 to 60), so that one polling place served every 21,000 voters in the County, compared with one polling place for every 2,500 voters in the rest of the state.¹⁰⁹ People of color are more than 40% of the County’s population. The reduction was purported to save costs and transform the County to a vote center system wherein, instead of being assigned to a single polling place, voters could vote at any of the 60 centers. Those voting centers were unable to handle the number of voters in the County during the 2016 primary election season, producing long wait times to vote. The state’s House and Elections Committee held a hearing with elected officials to learn about the issues experienced by voters in the County during the 2016 primary election and the reasoning behind the polling place consolidations. This type of assessment of the impact of the reduction in polling places would have taken place *before* the polling place consolidations took effect had Section 5 been operable.¹¹⁰

The U.S. DOJ initiated an investigation into the County’s voting change, seeking specific data that would support the County’s purported rationales for closing the polling places.¹¹¹



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The Democratic Party and the presidential campaigns of Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, on behalf of the Democratic National Committee, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, the Arizona Democratic Party, and several individuals, sued Arizona in federal court, alleging that its inadequate voting centers had a particularly burdensome impact on Black, Hispanic, and Native American communities, which had fewer polling locations than white communities and, in some cases, no places to vote at all. A plaintiff in this lawsuit requested that the court order Maricopa County elections officials to explain its plan to have polling places open for the November 2016 election and to count as valid votes provisional ballots cast out-of-precinct in that election.¹¹² Plaintiffs also requested a preliminary injunction to stop the County from (1) implementing polling place changes that may lead to similar problems experienced in the 2016 primary election and (2) failing to count provisional ballots cast out-of-precinct in jurisdictions that opted to conduct the November 2016 general election under a precinct-based rather than vote center-based model.¹¹³ In September 2016, the parties reached a partial-settlement in this lawsuit, while other claims (e.g., involving a ballot statute that automatically rejects provisional ballots not cast at the correct polling place and a law that makes it a felony to collect ballots for others and bring them to the polls) remain pending.¹¹⁴

A civil rights organization, on behalf of two voters, also filed a lawsuit in state court, challenging the “drastic reduction in the number of polling places” in Maricopa County, that “created unendurable wait times for numerous Arizonans who were forced to leave polling places without casting a ballot.”¹¹⁵ These plaintiffs also requested the court to order production of election administration plans and require judicial approval of those plans in advance of an August 30, 2016 primary election and November 8, 2016 general election.¹¹⁶ In October 2016, plaintiffs reached an agreement with County election officials—in advance of the 2016 general election and for every primary and general election through 2020—that requires officials to develop a comprehensive wait time reduction plan.¹¹⁷ This plan includes a formula for projecting turnout at each polling place; delineates roles and responsibilities for county officials, poll workers, and troubleshooters in reducing wait times; outlines a mechanism to effectively respond to wait times if they exceed 30 minutes; and promotes the use of poll worker and voter hotlines for reports of long lines.

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ARKANSAS*

State Level:

*Arkansas was once a covered jurisdiction under Section 3’s bail-in mechanism due to LDF’s litigation efforts in *Jeffers v. Clinton*.¹¹⁸ Prior to the *Shelby County* decision, Arkansas ceased to be covered; however, LDF continues to work in Arkansas to track racial discrimination in voting.

Photo ID requirement

Arkansas passed a photo ID law in 2013. That same year, the Governor vetoed the law and a bi-cameral majority voted to override the veto.¹¹⁹ The law was scheduled to be implemented on January 1, 2014. However, after voters filed state constitutional challenges to stop the implementation of the photo ID law, one state court ruled that the law was “void and unenforceable.”¹²⁰

Notwithstanding the trial court decision, appellate rulings permitted the photo ID law to be implemented in the May and June 2014 primary elections.¹²¹ Subsequently, and after LDF submitted a [friend of the court brief](#) in support of the challenge, the Arkansas Supreme Court permanently struck down the law, finding that it violated the state constitution by adding a new voter qualification.¹²² However, during the November 2014 elections, the Secretary of State reportedly requested voter ID of certain voters, particularly voters who transferred their registration to a new county. LDF and other civil rights organizations and advocates notified state and county officials of their concerns with the state’s implementation of a photo ID requirement and its impact on Black and other voters. Studies have indicated that photo ID laws depress voter turnout in Black and Latino communities.¹²³

Subsequent to the state court litigation, during the 2017 legislative session, the Arkansas legislature advanced, and the Governor signed into law, H.B. 1047, which, like the legislation previously found unconstitutional, would require voters to produce one of the following forms of photo ID to vote: driver’s licenses, photo ID cards, concealed-handgun carry licenses, passports, employee badges or ID documents, student ID cards issued by accredited Arkansas colleges and universities, U.S. military ID documents, public-assistance ID cards, and “free” voter-verification cards.¹²⁴ Opponents of the bill contend that it violates the Arkansas Constitution and will disproportionately impact minority voters in Arkansas. An amendment to the bill allows voters without an accepted ID to cast a provisional ballot—that should be counted unless there are separate grounds from the voter ID law for not counting the ballots—after attesting that they are who they say they are.¹²⁵ Immediately following the passage of this law, it was challenged in court; however, in May 2018, the state supreme court allowed the law to remain in effect while it hears the state’s full appeal of a lower court injunction blocking its enforcement.¹²⁶ In October 2018, in a 5 to 2 vote, the Arkansas Supreme Court reversed a lower court ruling



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that found the law unconstitutional, which meant that a photo ID requirement was in effect for the November election.¹²⁷

Relatedly, during the 2017 legislative session, a constitutional amendment, SJR 6, also was introduced, which would leave it to the voters to decide whether to require a photo ID to vote in person at the polls (but would not apply to absentee voters), as was another bill, HJR 1016, which would require the General Assembly to decide upon the acceptable IDs for and exceptions to photo IDs for in-person voting.¹²⁸ This proposed amendment was on the ballot for voters' consideration in 2018 as Issue 2; it succeeded, meaning that voter ID will now be enshrined in Arkansas's state constitution.¹²⁹

Voter purges

In 2016, Arkansas's Secretary of State mistakenly flagged about 4,000 registered voters to be purged from voter registration lists based on inaccurate data.¹³⁰ The SOS intended to flag people convicted of a felony and still on parole or probation who are denied the ability to vote under state law. However, some of those that the SOS flagged had not been convicted of a felony and others had been convicted of a felony but had legally regained the right to vote. The SOS reportedly left it to counties to deal with the flawed data, which led to varying responses from counties: some offices have reinstated all canceled voter registrations and thereafter planned to vet them; and other offices have cancelled all registration and planned to reinstate voters on a case-by-case basis after receiving a complaint from a purged voter.

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CALIFORNIA

Local Level:

Voter intimidation

In June 2016, in **Siskiyou County**, an armed Sheriff visited Hmong property owners and allegedly questioned them about their voter registration status and told those owners that they were believed to have registered illegally and could be arrested if they tried to cast a ballot.¹³¹ Because Hmong people live in a rural area of the County, their property is given a parcel number rather than a street address, which was why the voter registrations were allegedly called into question. In California, parcel numbers can be used when registering to vote. Purportedly, while registrations of new Hmong voters were allegedly scrutinized, those of white property owners in the same area who also used parcel numbers were not. Several Hmong residents have filed a federal lawsuit, challenging this voter intimidation.¹³²

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FLORIDA

State Level:

Voter purges

A 2018 report found that since 2016, Florida has purged more than 7 percent of voters.¹³³ The following counties have had the highest rates of purges, eliminating 10 percent of their voters from the rolls: **Hardee, Hendry, Palm Beach, and Okaloosa** counties.

Indeed, in 2014, Florida’s Governor sought to reinstitute a purge of purported non-citizens from the state voter database, as he attempted to do in 2012.¹³⁴ In 2012, because of litigation in *United States v. Florida*, Florida election officials were blocked from using an error-prone list to purge purported non-citizens from the election rolls.¹³⁵ Following *Shelby County*, county election supervisors resisted the Governor’s attempts to purge voters.

In 2016, the Florida Democratic Party and the national Democratic Party filed a federal lawsuit challenging the Secretary of State’s practice of election officials tossing vote-by-mail ballots if the voter’s signature—which plaintiffs contend can change over time—on the ballot envelope does not match the one on file.¹³⁶ Plaintiffs contend that when a person does not sign the envelope, state law gives them the opportunity to submit an affidavit confirming that they are the one who cast the ballot. However, the state does not provide that same opportunity to those whose signature on the envelope does not match the one in the state’s voter file. In that lawsuit, thus far, a federal court has accused the Secretary of State of delaying a hearing on the lawsuit “so that he could use every second available to run out the clock” so there would not be enough time to address problems raised in the lawsuit.¹³⁷ The court also said that the Secretary of State’s actions amounted to an “undeclared war” on the right to vote in Florida, the largest swing state in the 2016 presidential election. In addition, the court temporarily enjoined the state’s matching requirement, noting that “this Court knows disenfranchisement when it sees it and it is obscene.”¹³⁸

Voter registration

In October 2016, the Secretary of State refused to extend the deadline to register to vote for the November 2016 election in the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Matthew and the Governor’s evacuation order in the last five days before the registration deadline.¹³⁹ A substantial number of people typically seek to vote in the final days of voter registration; for example, in 2012, about 50,000 people in Florida registered to vote during the last five days before the deadline. A federal court ordered the state to extend the voter registration deadline, following a lawsuit filed by the state Democratic party brought under the U.S. Constitution and Section 2 of the VRA.¹⁴⁰ As a result of the extension, at least 64,000 names were added to the voter rolls.¹⁴¹



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In July 2018, advocates complained about issues with Florida’s voter registration website, including that it works only intermittently, after organizers tried registering 17 voters in low-income, predominantly black Orlando neighborhoods but could successfully register only two.¹⁴² Advocates were concerned that this was a form of voter suppression in advance of the 2018 elections.

Early Voting

In 2018, a federal court ordered that Florida provide early voting sites on several campuses, following a lawsuit brought by pro-democracy groups. However, several counties, including Tallahassee’s **Leon County**, home of Florida State and the third largest historically black university in the nation, Florida A&M University, and **Miami-Dade County**, home to Florida International University, which serves large populations of students of color, and Miami-Dade College, which has more than 160,000 students, decided not to add a campus early voting site in 2018.¹⁴³ Civil rights and pro-democracy groups, including LDF, [urged](#) county officials to provide additional early voting opportunities, including at HBCUs.¹⁴⁴ Data revealed that college students took advantage of early voting opportunities in 2018, and that Florida has a record of attempting to limit students’ access to voting in the state. During the 2019 legislative session, the Florida legislature adopted and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis enacted into law a bill, SB7066, that sought to circumvent the 2018 federal ruling by requiring college campuses to “provide sufficient non-permitted parking to accommodate the anticipated number of voters.”¹⁴⁵

Voter Eligibility

SB7066, which was enacted by the Florida legislature and signed into law by Governor DeSantis during the 2019 legislative session, targets voter eligibility in several key areas. Provisions of this law require some people with felony convictions to pay certain legal financial obligations (LFOs) associated with their sentence—like fines, fees, court costs, and restitution, including when it is converted to a civil lien and cannot be enforced by criminal contempt—*before* they can register to vote and cast their ballot. This law was immediately challenged in federal court by LDF, along with other civil rights and civil liberties groups. Together, these groups represent civil rights organizations, and 10 individual plaintiffs. Other civil rights groups also filed lawsuits, representing additional plaintiffs. All of these cases have been consolidated into a single lawsuit, [Jones, et al. v. DeSantis, et al.](#)¹⁴⁶ While a successful ballot initiative in November 2018, Amendment 4, automatically restored voting rights to over a million disenfranchised Floridians with prior felony convictions, SB7066, effective as of July 1, 2019, creates wealth-based hurdles to voting, was enacted with a racially discriminatory intent, and significantly undermines Floridians’ overwhelming support for Amendment 4. The complaint thus alleges that parts of SB7066 violate several provisions of the U.S. Constitution, including the First, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Twenty-Fourth Amendments.



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During the legislative process, LDF and the Florida NAACP attempted to stop the passage of SB7066 by jointly submitting a number of [letters](#) to the Florida House and Senate urging legislators to oppose said bill and its proposed predecessor bills (HB7089 and SB7086).¹⁴⁷

On August 2, 2019, plaintiffs also filed a motion for [preliminary injunctive relief](#) to try to block portions of SB7066 as early as possible from being implemented, including for the upcoming 2019 elections.¹⁴⁸ That filing includes a preliminary analysis of outstanding LFOs in Florida that shows that in the 48 counties for which data had been analyzed, fewer than one in five—or just 66,108 of 375,256—individuals with a felony conviction other than murder or a felony sexual offense who had been released from county or Florida Department of Corrections supervision are likely to be eligible to register to vote under SB7066. In October 2019, the district court granted the preliminary injunction with respect to the claim that SB7066 constitutes unconstitutional wealth-based discrimination; a three-judge panel of the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the order.¹⁴⁹ Following an eight-day trial on all of plaintiffs’ claims, the district court found that SB7066’s LFO requirements violated the Fourteenth and Twenty-Fourth Amendments, as well as the NVRA. On September 11, 2020, an *en banc* panel of the Eleventh Circuit reversed the trial court’s post-trial ruling.¹⁵⁰

Voter Suppression Omnibus Law

Just months after the 2020 election cycle, Florida enacted a sweeping voter suppression law. Signed by Governor DeSantis on May 6, 2021 during an exclusive early morning broadcast on “Fox & Friends,” where journalists were reportedly locked outside the doors, Senate Bill 90 (“SB 90”), was a direct response to increased Black voter participation in vote-by-mail in the 2020 election.¹⁵¹ SB 90’s multiple provisions dramatically restrict access to voting and disproportionately burden voters of color and voters with disabilities—traits reminiscent of Jim Crow era voting restrictions.¹⁵²

SB 90 establishes new ID requirements for voters requesting vote-by-mail ballots—when nearly 44% of voters, including over 500,000 Black voters, cast mail ballots in Florida during the 2020 general election. The law requires voters to provide sensitive ID information over the phone or in the mail, such as the last four digits of their social security number, to request their vote-by-mail ballot. Moreover, SB 90 makes it a crime for third parties to possess or return more than two completed vote-by-mail ballots for voters who are not family members. Black and Latino voters will bear this burden most, as they are less likely to have access to a vehicle, or be able to secure time off work, as well as voters with disabilities who are more likely to need help returning their vote-by-mail ballots. Moreover, SB 90 requires voters to renew vote-by-mail requests each general election cycle, ending the “standing” applications that were valid for up to two general election cycles. Additionally, while SB 90 allows for the continued use of secure ballot drop boxes, the law: places extreme restrictions on the availability of drop boxes, requires all drop boxes to be monitored by election officials at all times, and limits the use of drop boxes to limited hours and days of early voting. These limitations disproportionately impact Black voters and other historically disenfranchised groups. Finally, SB 90 criminalizes any activity within 150 feet of polling places or drop boxes that may “influence” a voter, a provision that likely makes providing voters information, free water, or snacks a crime.



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Civil rights organizations, including LDF, pro-democracy groups, Florida Democrats, and all 67 members of Florida’s Supervisors of Elections voiced their opposition to the bill, as well as its House counterpart, H.B. 7041.¹⁵³ Following the enactment of the law, the Florida Democratic Party Chair released a statement condemning Governor DeSantis and state Republicans over the “blatant voter suppression” that results from the new law, stating that “[i]t is clear that when given a choice between defending the rights of voters or suppressing voters, the Florida Republicans will disturbingly choose to suppress and sacrifice our rights every single time.”¹⁵⁴

Minutes after the bill was signed on May 6, 2021, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (“LDF”) and other civil rights groups filed a [federal lawsuit](#) against Florida’s SOS challenging SB 90.¹⁵⁵ The lawsuit alleges that the restrictive, voter suppression bill violates Section 2 of the VRA, the First and Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and Title II of the ADA.¹⁵⁶ In addition to LDF’s, other lawsuits challenging SB90 are pending in federal court.

Local Level:

Registration qualifications

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement investigated allegations that an appointed white city clerk in **Sopchoppy**, a city in **Wakulla County**: (1) suppressed Black voters in a June 2013 election by questioning their residencies with no reasonable basis; and (2) failed to remain neutral in her capacity as city clerk by actively campaigning for three white candidates, including in an inter-racial contest.¹⁵⁷ Following the clerk’s efforts to prevent Black voters from casting their ballots, a Black city commissioner lost and the incumbent Black mayor lost by only one vote.

Polling place closures & reductions

In **Jacksonville**, located in **Duval County**, the Board of Elections in 2013 relocated a polling place that served large numbers of Black voters in the City to a less accessible area.¹⁵⁸ In 2012, Black voters constituted more than 90% of those who voted early at the former polling place. According to plaintiffs challenging the closure, the relocated polling place was difficult to reach by public transportation and imposes other burdens on voters.

In 2013, **Hernando County** adopted a plan to close and consolidate voting locations, with a focus on the neighborhoods of the **City of Brooksville**.¹⁵⁹ The plan called for elimination of polling places for the general elections, and consolidation of all Brooksville precincts into one. While the overall African-American citizen voting-age population (CVAP) of the County is approximately 4.5%, the CVAP affected by this change in polling places is nearly 22% African-American. There are no African-American or Latino individuals serving on the County Commission.



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In February 2014, the **Manatee County** Commission approved a proposal submitted by the Supervisor of Elections that reduced almost one-third of polling sites (from 99 to 69) and half of the polling places in a district with a substantial minority population, citing decreased Election Day turnout as more voters switched to in-person early voting and vote-by-mail options.¹⁶⁰ Local civil rights organizations expressed concern that the elimination of these polling places would decrease voter turnout, particularly among the elderly and people without cars, because voters would have to travel further to a polling place and the cuts disproportionately affected minority-heavy precincts. When the Supervisor of Elections served in the Florida Senate in 2011, he supported legislation that reduced the number of early voting days in Florida, which LDF opposed in [*Florida v. United States*](#), and endorsed making it harder to vote, stating: “I wouldn’t have any problem making it harder. I would want them to vote as badly as I want to vote. I want the people of the state of Florida to want to vote as bad as that person in Africa who’s willing to walk 200 miles...This should not be easy.” One study demonstrates that the changes to early voting opportunities between the 2012 and 2014 elections reduced Latino voter turnout by 7% as compared to the turnout for Latino voters whose polling places remained the same.¹⁶¹

Monroe County reportedly has reverted to English-only ballots following the *Shelby County* decision.¹⁶² Indeed, its October 1, 2013, post-*Shelby County* election was conducted without Spanish language ballots or election materials.

In **Pinellas County**, the Supervisor of Elections has refused requests by advocates to provide early voting sites within Black communities in South St. Petersburg and St. Petersburg to provide access to voting for community members without transportation options.¹⁶³

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GEORGIA

AS OF OCT 6, 2021

State and Local
Threats to Voting
Post *Shelby County*,
Alabama v. Holder

LDF
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GEORGIA

State Level:

Early voting

Georgia lawmakers proposed legislation during the 2014 legislative session that would have cut early voting periods to six days (including a Saturday) for small consolidated cities as a purported cost-saving measure.¹⁶⁴ Just four years earlier, Georgia had already reduced early voting in the state from 45 to 21 days.¹⁶⁵ A Georgia legislator suggested that he opposed new Sunday voting hours because Black and other voters of color take advantage of these voting opportunities disproportionately, explaining that he “prefer[s] more educated voters than a greater increase in the number of voters.”¹⁶⁶ Following that legislation’s defeat, and [opposition](#) to the legislation by LDF and other organizations in 2014, in the next 2015 legislative session, Georgia lawmakers proposed an even more restrictive bill that would reduce early voting by seven days across Georgia and would not mandate Sunday voting despite its proven popularity. This legislation, which LDF and other organizations also [opposed](#), was proposed purportedly as a cost-saving measure and to achieve uniformity in early voting across Georgia.¹⁶⁷ In 2016, the state’s early voter turnout broke its 2008 record for early voting in advance of the presidential preference primary, demonstrating the ongoing need for early voting opportunities in Georgia.¹⁶⁸

In 2018, the General Assembly considered S.B. 363, which proposed to shorten voting hours on Election Day in Atlanta, which is majority-Black and the most populous city in Georgia, from 8:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.¹⁶⁹ Members of the General Assembly introduced this proposal on January 29, 2018 and the Senate passed it on February 23, 2018 with all of the Black representatives who voted on the bill opposing it. The House proposed a version of this bill, which passed through favorable out of committee on March 14, 2018, that was amended to also effectively eliminate early voting on the Sunday before Election Day in Georgia. Such Sunday voting is widely-known in Georgia and elsewhere as “Souls to the Polls,” wherein Black voters worship together and then march or share rides to vote, which has resulted in high Black voter turnout. Civil rights and pro-democracy groups, including LDF, [opposed](#) these changes. Fortunately, this bill died in committee during the 2018 legislative session.¹⁷⁰

Voter registration & purges

*A 2018 report found that since 2016, Georgia has purged 10.6 percent of voters.¹⁷¹ Nonwhite voters were slightly overrepresented among those purged when compared to the total population breakdown. Four counties (**Chattahoochee, Liberty, Dade, and Camden**) stood out for purging at least 15 percent of their voters. Another report illuminates that approximately 107,000 people had been purged, triggered by their failure to vote in federal*



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elections, which a 2018 Supreme Court decision arising out of Ohio has permitted to the extent it cannot be shown that such a process disproportionately impacts racial minorities.¹⁷²

For example, in 2014, Georgia's Secretary of State launched an investigation of allegations of voter fraud against the New Georgia Project (NGP) related to its registration of more than 85,000 voters statewide, including many first-time, young voters of color.¹⁷³ NGP coordinated one of Georgia's largest voter registration efforts and views the allegations as an attempt at voter suppression.¹⁷⁴ The investigation followed complaints about NGP's submission of allegedly forged voter registration applications and signatures on releases, as well as applications with purportedly false or inaccurate information.¹⁷⁵ Organizations registering voters are required to deliver all completed voter registration applications to the Secretary of State or the appropriate board of registrars within 10 days after receiving the application or by the close of registration, whichever period is earlier. These organizations are not required to filter or discard applications. Overall, the Secretary of State's investigation diverted resources away from and chilled NGP's voter registration efforts because of registrants' concerns about the impact of the investigation on their applications, among other consequences. After conducting its investigation, the Secretary of State reportedly identified an issue with just 25 of 85,000 voter registration applications.¹⁷⁶

Following this finding, NGP filed a lawsuit against the Secretary of State and several counties in 2014, alleging that more than 40,000 voters (of the more than 85,000 registered), a substantial number of whom are voters of color, were missing from the voter rolls due to the state's alleged failure to process those voter registrations.¹⁷⁷ The Secretary of State denied that the applications had not been processed.¹⁷⁸ A state judge dismissed the lawsuit, citing lack of proof that state and county officials failed to fulfill their duties to process voter registration applications.¹⁷⁹

Subsequently, reports reflected that Georgia continued to purge voters from the rolls, a disproportionately number of whom were voters of color, suspecting these voters of being double voters (*i.e.*, voting in two or more states in the same election).¹⁸⁰ In 2016, civil rights and pro-democracy organizations sued the Secretary of State for these purges under the NVRA and U.S. Constitution.¹⁸¹ According to the lawsuit, as of June 2015, over 800,000 voters in Georgia were in danger of being purged from the voter rolls.¹⁸² A pro-democracy organization also has filed a separate lawsuit under the NVRA against the Secretary of State for his refusal to release public records relating to voter registration applications that his office failed to process so that advocates can understand why voter registration applications were rejected, cancelled, or otherwise kept off of the rolls.¹⁸³ While that litigation is ongoing, a federal court has ordered the SOS to release certain public records under a disclosure provision in the NVRA.¹⁸⁴

In September 2015, a civil rights organization filed a separate lawsuit under the VRA and First and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, seeking to stop the Secretary of State's administrative policy that fails to add to the list of eligible voters persons whose identifying information on their voter registration applications does not match exactly with the Georgia Department of Driver Services or Social Security Administration Records.¹⁸⁵ Those persons, therefore, are denied the right to vote unless they overcome bureaucratic hurdles



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to match those records or fall within a couple of narrow and arbitrary exceptions. According to the complaint, at least 42,500 voter registration applications, a disproportionate number of which have been submitted by Black, Latinx, and Asian American applicants, have been suspended or rejected due to the verification protocol between July 2013 to the present. For example, since July 2013, only 13.6% of the 47.2% of voter registration applications submitted by white applicants have been rejected because of the Secretary of State's policy. By contrast, 63.6% of the 29.4% of voter registration applications submitted by Black applicants have been rejected, and 7.9% of the 3.6% of voter registration applications submitted by Latino applicants have been rejected. In response, the Secretary of State filed a letter with the court, indicating that Georgia would suspend this database matching process and move voters canceled for failing to respond to a "non-match" letter back into "pending voters," impacting voters cancelled since October 2014. Once these voters showed appropriate ID at the polls, they could cast a regular ballot in November 2016 and be moved to "active voter" status.¹⁸⁶ In light of this, though the litigation remained pending, plaintiffs withdrew their motion to stop the Secretary of State from implementing this "no-match" policy for the November 2016 election. Notwithstanding, in October 2016, and in advance of the 2016 general election, advocates contended that Georgia had failed to process approximately 100,000 voter registration applications.¹⁸⁷

Indeed, in February 2017, the parties settled the lawsuit, agreeing to implement reforms, similar to those in place for the November 2016 election, to help ensure that eligible voters will not be denied the right to register and vote because of data entry errors, typos, and other database matching issues.¹⁸⁸

Notwithstanding, during the 2017 legislative session, the Georgia Legislature introduced House Bill 268, which advocates contend is an attempt to implement similar voter registration restrictions that were the subject of the above-mentioned litigation and settlement.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, this bill would require an exact match between the information that an individual provides on his/her voter registration application and the information included in the DMV's databases, which is known to be error-prone and flawed. Where there is not an exact match, applicants would have 26 weeks to correct any information, including by providing ID while voting in person during that timeframe, and could not vote absentee until they correct the discrepancy. Moreover, other provisions of the legislation would: remove Bureau of Indian or tribal treaty ID cards as acceptable proof of citizenship (even though Georgia has long accepted tribal ID for these purposes and the federal government accepts them as valid ID), impacting over 25,000 Native Americans who are currently registered to vote; and limit the ability of nonpartisan groups to help voters and answer questions outside of polling places.

Reports indicate that this exact match requirement continues to threaten the voter registration of Georgians, particularly people of color in 2018. Specifically, in advance of the November 2018 election, Georgia's Secretary of State, who also was running for governor, flagged 53,000 registrations, disproportionately from people of color, due to the state's "exact match" program.¹⁹⁰ Several civil rights and pro-democracy groups have filed lawsuits to challenge this program under the VRA, NVRA, and Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.¹⁹¹ As part of that litigation, plaintiffs received a ruling before the November 2018 election that allowed voters who have their applications held up under this program to vote a regular ballot if they provide proof of citizenship to a county registrar or poll manager and, if they cannot, to vote by provisional ballots and provide the needed



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information to a registrar before the Friday after the election.¹⁹² LDF also [called](#) for Georgia’s SOS to recuse himself from being involved in these voter registration and other decisions while running for governor; individual voters also filed a lawsuit seeking to force the SOS to recuse himself or resign, which he ultimately did after the Tuesday, November 6, 2018 election.¹⁹³

In October 2016, responding to a lawsuit filed by a civil liberties organization, a federal court refused to order Georgia to extend the deadline to register to vote (in Chatham, Bryan, Camden, Glynn, Liberty, and McIntosh counties) for the November 2016 election in the wake of Hurricane Matthew, whose devastation forced evacuations and government closures.¹⁹⁴ A substantial number of people sought to vote in the final days of voter registration, but disruptions caused by the storm made it difficult and, in some cases, impossible, for people to register or conduct voter registration drives, impacting Black and other voters. Other states like Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina, in some instances by court order, extended deadlines in counties impacted by the hurricane.

Civil rights groups also won a preliminary injunction in May 2017, requiring Georgia to extend the voter registration deadline (from March 20 to May 21) for the June 20, 2017 special election for a congressional seat.¹⁹⁵ As a result, more than 5,500 voters, as of May 21st of that year, had registered for the special election.¹⁹⁶ Georgia had cut off registration for the run-off elections two months early, according to advocates. The NVRA prohibits states from cutting off voter registration more than 30 days ahead of an election. Georgia, notwithstanding, unsuccessfully argued that the June 20 runoff was not its own election, but rather was just an extension of the first round of voting, held on April 18. Reportedly, Georgia had 464,000 more registrants in 2017 than during the last non-presidential election year.¹⁹⁷ Certain counties, like Cobb, DeKalb, and Fulton, struggled to publicly notify voters of the extension in voter registration.¹⁹⁸

In November 2018, an organization formed by a 2018 gubernatorial candidate filed a lawsuit on behalf of individual voters and an organization, challenging under the 1st, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, the VRA, and HAVA, various voting “irregularities that disproportionately affected voters of color,” including voter purges, used by the GA SOS and other officials during the 2018 election season.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, the lawsuit alleges that Georgia officials created “an obstacle course for voters” that disproportionately affected counties with large numbers of poor and Black Georgians. These obstacles include: the “exact match” system that places voters in a “pending” status based on minor discrepancies between their registration forms and state records; long lines at polling places due to lack of sufficient voting machines, or because machines malfunctioned; reports of voters being told incorrectly that they were not registered, or that they were registered in other counties; no paper receipts for votes tallied by electronic machines, making it impossible to check the results; the closure or relocation of over 300 polling locations since 2012, often in majority-Black counties; shoddy training by the state for local officials, who gave some voters inaccurate information about whether they could vote; insufficient numbers of provisional ballots, leaving some voters without any recourse; absentee ballots mailed to voters too late for them to use them; and absentee ballots thrown out over minor typographical errors in Gwinnet County, with a population that is 60% minority, more than any other county in the state.



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Proof of citizenship

Georgia, like Arizona and Alabama, has also requested that the federal Election Administration Commission (EAC) change the state-specific instructions that accompany the federal voter registration form to require residents to show proof of citizenship.²⁰⁰ In 2016, civil rights and pro-democracy organizations sued the EAC for its actions enabling Georgia to require proof of citizenship; a federal court temporarily blocked the EAC from enforcing the proof of citizenship requirement for 2016 elections.²⁰¹

In 2018, **Baldwin County** attempted to enforce a photo ID requirement to register to vote, though currently no such requirement is in place.²⁰²

Candidate qualifications

In 2016, Georgia state officials challenged the candidate residency qualifications and eligibility of a Black Democratic candidate, who was competing against a white Republican incumbent candidate who had represented the majority-Black state legislative district for three decades.²⁰³ This district is exceptional because it is the only majority-minority district in Georgia that is represented by a Republican. The Black candidate had lived and voted in the district at issue for approximately 18 years. Yet, in March 2016, the boundary lines of the district changed, edging the Black candidate out of the district in which he sought to run for office after the period for candidate qualification has ended.

Redistricting

During the 2017 legislative session, the Georgia Legislature considered H.B. 515, which would have led to mid-Census redistricting by changing the district boundaries for one Black elected official affiliated with the Democratic party, without any advance notice, according to that official, and eight officials affiliated with the Republican party.²⁰⁴ Civil rights and pro-democracy organizations expressed concern that this proposal was drawn to dilute Black voting strength in certain districts, with race as the predominant motivating factor.²⁰⁵

Relatedly, in April 2017, civil rights organizations filed a lawsuit, claiming, among other allegations, that in violation of the VRA, the Georgia Legislature diluted minority voting strength in two state House districts encompassing Gwinnett and Henry counties—specifically by moving minority voters out of the districts of two vulnerable incumbent lawmakers—during a 2015 mid-Census redistricting.²⁰⁶ Redistricting typically occurs after the decennial Census and not mid-decade. In Gwinnett and Henry counties, between 2000-2014, the number of white voters declined by 3,000 and Black voters increased by 74,000 reportedly. In October 2017, a similar lawsuit was filed, contending that the state legislative redistricting violates Black voting rights.²⁰⁷ The state has defended against these suits by claiming that voters were moved because of party affiliation, which the U.S. Supreme Court has not yet found to be unconstitutional, and that race was not the predominant reason for the changes. While finding “compelling evidence” that the legislature engaged in racial gerrymandering, the court declined to enjoin elections in those districts under the challenged plan while the case is being litigated.²⁰⁸



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Voter suppression omnibus law

Just months after the 2020 election cycle ended, Georgia enacted a sweeping voter suppression law. Passed after a rushed and non-transparent legislative process and signed into law behind closed doors, this 98-page omnibus bill, Senate Bill 202 (“SB 202”), was a direct response to increased Black voter participation in the 2020 general and 2021 runoff elections.²⁰⁹ SB 202’s numerous provisions dramatically curtail access to voting and disproportionately burden voters of color, new citizens and religious communities—traits reminiscent of Jim Crow era voting restrictions.²¹⁰

SB 202 makes it a crime to give or “offer to give” food and water to individuals waiting in line to vote. Black voters will bear this burden most—Black Georgians, on average, wait nearly one hour to vote, compared to white voters who wait only six minutes. Moreover, SB 202 places unnecessary and burdensome restrictions on absentee voting—when nearly 30% of Black voters cast their ballot by mail in the 2020 general election. The law requires absentee voters to provide a photocopy of and mail sensitive ID information to request a ballot. Similar sensitive information, including a voter’s social security number, may be required to return an absentee ballot. The law allows for a “free” state issued ID, but studies show that the actual cost for “free IDs” typically range from \$75 – \$175 after factoring in documentation, travel, and waiting time. This cost may be exacerbated for Black voters, as 21 contiguous and predominantly Black rural counties in Georgia have driver’s license offices that are only open 2 days per week or fewer. Additionally, while SB 202 allows for the use of secure drop boxes, the law: caps the total number of drop boxes; requires them to be located inside of the office of the board of registrars or absentee ballot clerk or inside of an advance voting location (outside of an emergency); limits drop-off hours; limits their use and availability during the early voting period; and imposes new in-person security requirements, which could include law enforcement. These limitations disproportionately impact Black voters and other historically disenfranchised groups. SB 202 also invites unfettered voter intimidation by codifying that Georgia electors can submit unlimited challenges to the right of any voter to remain registered or to cast a vote. The November 2020 election saw mass baseless and untimely voter challenges that resulted in no significant findings. Moreover, SB 202 reduces the voting period for runoffs from three weeks to one week, with no mandatory weekend voting days, including Sunday voting. This provision follows an increase in Black voter turnout in the 2021 runoff election—Black voter turnout was almost 92% of that in the general, a higher percentage than for white voters. Additionally, SB 202 invalidates provisional votes cast in the correct county but the wrong precinct, which, under prior law, would have been counted. This will disproportionately affect voters of color, who have seen an increased number of polling location closures and changes, heightening the need to vote provisionally. Finally, SB 202 unilaterally empowers the State Board of Election to take over the process of disqualifying ballots across the state, removing that power from county boards of election.²¹¹ While these provisions are terrible on their own, the totality of the law—and all the methods by which voters will be suppressed—makes it one of the most restrictive laws in the nation.



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In March 2021, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) and other civil rights groups filed a [federal lawsuit](#) challenging SB 202.²¹² In addition to LDF's lawsuit, to date, at least seven other lawsuits have been filed to challenge SB202.

Local Level:

Redistricting, voter registration, ballot access, & voter intimidation

In **Fulton County**, Georgia's most populous county, the County Commission considered a redistricting plan in 2013 that would have created a new overwhelmingly white district and reduced the district sizes of majority-Black districts.²¹³ Additionally, in a 2015 litigation settlement, Fulton County admitted to illegally disenfranchising and misleading voters in the 2008 and 2012 elections, constituting more than two dozen violations of state law, including improperly rejecting eligible ballots, sending voters to the wrong precincts, failing to update supplemental voter list, failing to timely process changes of address and other registration documents, failing to provide official voters lists to all precincts, and failing to provide absentee ballots to all voters who requested them.²¹⁴ During the 2016 presidential election, Fulton County was one of three Georgia counties where federal monitors observed elections.²¹⁵

In 2013, **Greene County** implemented a redistricting plan for the five-member County Board of Commissioners. The plan, which a Black member of the Commission denounced, resulted in Black voters making up less than 51% in all five districts under the plan.²¹⁶ Under Section 5 of the VRA, the U.S. DOJ blocked another redistricting plan in Greene County in 2012 and was in the process of reviewing the above-mentioned plan before the *Shelby County* decision.²¹⁷

A redistricting lawsuit against the **City of Decatur** was filed in federal court. At issue is whether a reduction in the number of City Council districts, through implementation of a voter referendum, would dilute Black voting strength in the City.²¹⁸

In **Sumter County**, a plaintiff-voter challenged a redistricting plan in 2014 that would have reduced school board districts from nine to seven, two of which would be at-large, to align with the county commission districts.²¹⁹ The plaintiff alleged that the redistricting plan packed Black voters, who are 54 percent of Sumter's population, into two (of nine) districts in violation of Section 2 of the VRA. In March 2018, a federal district court ruled in favor of plaintiff.²²⁰

In 2014, the **Fayette County** Board of Commissioners and Board of Education attempted to revert to at-large voting to hold a special election for a seat vacated by the first Black County Commissioner, who was elected by a remedial district-based election and died unexpectedly. A federal court ordered the remedial district-based election in 2014, following Section 2 of the VRA litigation brought by LDF in 2011 and settled in 2016 in [Georgia](#)



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[State Conference of the NAACP et al. v. Fayette County Board of Commissioners et al.](#)²²¹ LDF won a preliminary injunction in 2015 that required that the special election be conducted by district-based voting.²²²

In **Emanuel County**, a civil rights organization and two voters filed a lawsuit in 2016 under Section 2 of the VRA, alleging that the redistricting plan for the County school board packs Black voters into one district, when two majority-Black districts are possible, thereby diluting Black voting strength.²²³ Black residents make up one-third of the County's voting-age population, and close to half of the students in Emanuel County are Black, yet there has never been more than one Black member on the school board at one time. Although Black candidates have run in other districts, the only Black candidates who have ever been elected to the school board were elected from the single majority-Black district.

In October 2016, a civil rights organization, on behalf of state-based civil rights and pro-democracy organizations, challenged the refusal of the **Chatham County** Board of Election, which has a sizeable Black population, to extend the voter registration deadline for the November 2016 election in light of the mandatory evacuations caused by Hurricane Matthew; the state refused to extend the registration deadline based on alleged administrative difficulties.²²⁴ Plaintiffs won an order temporarily blocking the County's decision as it prevented potential voters from participating in the November 2016 general election in violation of the U.S. Constitution and the NVRA, which, among other things, requires that states process any voter registration form received or postmarked within 30 days of an election.

In **Jefferson County**, county officials got in the way of dozens of Black senior citizens going to vote in advance of the November elections, prompting LDF to send [letters](#) illuminating how those actions may constitute illegal voter intimidation in violation of federal laws.²²⁵

In **Gwinnett County**, which has an ever-growing population of people of color, officials rejected absentee ballots for signature mismatches (as compared with those on file in the County) without adequate notice and opportunity to correct any errors in advance of the November 2018 election. This was challenged by civil rights organizations and a federal court ruled in plaintiffs' favor, requiring the County to provide absentee voters with notice and the ability to cure any signature discrepancies.²²⁶

Voter purges & intimidation

In **Hancock** and **Sparta counties**, civil rights advocates filed a 2015 lawsuit, challenging the purge of eligible Black voters from the voter rolls because of alleged address changes in violation of the VRA and other laws.²²⁷ For example, plaintiffs allege that the majority-white Hancock County Board of Elections and Registration (BOER) took nearly 17% of all eligible Spartan voters, and at least 53 Spartan voters, nearly all of whom were Black, off of the voter rolls. The purges occurred before the November 15, 2015 Sparta election in which white candidates for mayor and city council were running against African American incumbents. In response to the lawsuit, the BOER has reinstated 17 of the purged voters.²²⁸ These purges followed reports that the BOER had "systematically question[ed] the registrations of more than 180 Black Sparta residents, one fifth of the city's



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registered voters, by dispatching deputies with summonses commanding them to appear in person to prove their residence or lose their voting rights.”²²⁹ In March 2017, the parties settled this lawsuit, ensuring, among other things, that the County will no longer hear third-party challenges to voters’ eligibility and will no longer remove voters based on allegations of a change of address, instead following federal law that requires a waiting period of two federal election cycles before officials may attempt to contact a voter to confirm their address.²³⁰

Early voting

In **Dekalb County**, when an early voting location was opened near a popular mall in 2014, a state senator responded that “this location is dominated by African American shoppers and it is near several large African American mega churches,” and that he would “prefer more educated voters than a greater increase in the number of voters.”²³¹ (See above for more on early voting restrictions in Georgia).

In **Bibb County**, local officials rejected a proposal in 2014 that would have provided for early voting on Sunday, an opportunity for poor and people of color to vote outside of traditional Election Day.²³²

In October 2016, in advance of the general election, some voters in **Gwinnett County**, outside of Atlanta, waited up to three hours to vote.²³³ During the 2016 presidential election, Gwinnett County was one of three Georgia counties where federal monitors observed elections.²³⁴

Polling place closures & reductions & voter intimidation

A 2018 analysis by the Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC) reflects that Georgia has closed 214 polling places across the state since 2012.²³⁵ According to that analysis “[t]hat figure means nearly 8 percent of the state’s polling places, from fire stations to schools, have shut their doors over the past six years.” Other findings from that analysis are that “[o]ne-third of Georgia’s counties — 53 of 159 — have fewer precincts today than they did in 2012” and that “[o]f the counties that have closed voting locations, 39 have poverty rates that are higher than the state average,” and “[t]hirty have significant African-American populations, making up at least 25 percent of residents.”

In 2019, the AJC conducted another analysis of whether precinct closures and the distance voters would thereafter have to travel to access a polling place impacted voting.²³⁶ Specifically, the AJC mapped Georgia’s 7 million registered voters and compared how distance to their local precincts increased or decreased from 2012 to 2018. As the AJC found in 2018, as discussed above, during that six-year period, county election officials closed 8% of Georgia’s polling places and relocated nearly 40% of the state’s precincts.²³⁷ Among the findings from the 2019, analysis, the AJC found that: there was a clear link between turnout and reduced voting access; the farther voters live from their precincts, the less likely they are to cast a ballot; the average Georgia voter’s distance to a polling place more than doubled from 2012 to 2018; precinct closures and longer distances likely prevented an estimated 54,000 to 85,000 voters from casting ballots on Election Day in 2018;



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the impact was greater on Black voters than white voters; Black voters were 20% more likely to miss elections because of long distances; and, without those precinct relocations, overall Election Day turnout in last year's midterm election likely would have been between 1.2% and 1.8% higher.

These findings are consistent with some of the particular changes related to polling sites, detailed below.

Specifically, in 2013, the **City of Athens**, located in **Athens-Clark County**, proposed eliminating nearly half of its 24 polling places and replacing them with only two early voting centers—both of which would be located inside police stations.²³⁸ Community members raised concerns that the location of the new centers would intimidate some voters of color and that the proposed closures would be harmful to voters of color and/or students, many of whom would need to travel three hours by bus just to reach the new polling places.

After initially considering eliminating over half of the County's polling places in **Morgan County**, the County ultimately eliminated more than a third of them in 2013.²³⁹ One city council member expressed his belief that the closures would disfranchise low-income voters and voters of color, many of whom lack cars and would have difficulty reaching the reassigned polling sites.

Election officials in **Baker County**, a majority-Black county with high poverty rates, proposed eliminating four of its five polling places in 2013, requiring some voters to travel upwards of 20 miles to vote.²⁴⁰ As a result of LDF's [advocacy](#), namely an inquiry into whether the purported cost-saving rationale for the change outweighed the potential harm to the minority community, the County decided not to close the four polling places.

In 2015, the Board of Elections in **Macon-Bibb County** proposed reducing the number of polling places from 40 to 26 by closures or consolidations, including closing the Macon Mall as a polling location, even though it is served by public transportation in a County where 20% of residents lack vehicles.²⁴¹ Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the polling places proposed for closure were in majority-Black neighborhoods, the County claimed that the closures were to save the County approximately \$40,000 annually. Other closures were based on rationales such as renovations in certain schools that serve as polling places. The Board formed an advisory panel to consider the closures. Civil rights organizations and pro-democracy groups voiced objections to the closures and consolidations.²⁴² Ultimately, the Board reduced the number of precincts from 40 to 33 (instead of 26), in part by combining two precincts with majority-white voting populations rather than combining precincts with majority-Black precincts.

Moreover, in 2016, the Board of Elections reversed its decision to relocate a polling place to a Bibb County Sheriff's office for the 2016 elections after civil rights and community organizations: voiced concerns that officials had made this decision without considering its impact on voters of color, giving notice to them, or considering reasonable alternatives to this location. Activists subsequently organized a petition, relying upon state law, that gives voters an opportunity to prevent a local board of elections from moving forward with a polling place change if 20% of a precinct's registered voters sign a petition against it.²⁴³ Ultimately, the election officials relocated the polling place at issue to an African American church.



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In 2015, the **Hancock County** Board of Elections and Registration (BOER) proposed to close all of the County's precincts except one precinct located in the downtown area of the **City of Sparta** for purported cost-saving reasons.²⁴⁴ The precincts proposed for closure were between 11 and 17 miles from the downtown Sparta precinct, presenting travel burdens for voters in the majority-Black precincts in the County's mostly poor and rural areas. Civil rights organizations and community members opposed this proposal and, in response to community pressure, in October 2015, the BOER decided to close only one of the 10 precincts instead of consolidating all of the precincts into one. During the 2016 presidential election, Hancock County was one of three Georgia counties where federal monitors observed elections.²⁴⁵

In 2016, the Board of Elections in **Upson County** consolidated election precincts before the state's March 1 primary election.²⁴⁶ One voter reported that poll workers urged people waiting in line to leave and come back later to vote. She stayed and waited an hour and a quarter to vote but estimated that 30 to 40 would-be voters left. Moreover, over the objection of the only Black Board of Elections member, officials in Upson also moved a polling site more than two miles away from a Black neighborhood, Lincoln Park, as part of a plan to cut the number of voting sites in the County from nine to four, purportedly to save \$20,000.²⁴⁷ The Board of Elections ultimately did not adopt a plan which would have closed a polling site in a rural area in Salem that has a large Black population, following residents' complaints about the resulting burden of having to travel an additional 10 miles or more to vote.²⁴⁸

In 2016, **McDuffie County** elected to eliminate three polling places, such that two-thirds of the County's Black voters, and one-third of its white voters, must vote in a single location.²⁴⁹

In 2017, election officials in **Fulton County**, the largest county in Georgia, contemplated closing or moving three polling places located in neighborhoods with significant Black populations a few months before an election.²⁵⁰ Voting rights advocates challenged that proposal, including by filing a lawsuit, because of lack of adequate notice about the changes and the potential impact on Black voters, particularly those who walk or take public transportation to vote.

In August 2018, elections officials in **Randolph County** proposed—but ultimately backed off of—closing seven out of nine (77% percent) of the polling places in this rural county that has a majority-Black population, no public transportation, and high poverty rates.²⁵¹ All nine polls were used in elections earlier in 2018. The proposal was the result of a recommendation by an associate of the Secretary of State, to consolidate polling places in at least 10 other counties, most of which also have substantial Black populations like Randolph: **Macon-Bibb, Muscogee, Lowndes, Telfair, Greene, and Webster** counties.²⁵² The consultant recommended the closures of these voting sites in Randolph because they purportedly are non-compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA); yet the consultant did not recommend that the County make those sites compliant or find alternative ADA-compliant sites. An attorney for the County, in response to a public records' request acknowledged: "[t]here is no document, report or analysis studying the handicap accessibility of polling places in Randolph County and the cost of fixing them within the time frame specified in your open records request.



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The county has no record of such a document in the past year.”²⁵³ In 2012, Randolph County settled a lawsuit brought by the U.S. DOJ to bring the County into compliance with the ADA. Pro-democracy, civil rights, and disability rights groups vehemently opposed this proposal because of its potentially racially discriminatory intent and results and its false use of the ADA to justify the closures.²⁵⁴ LDF also sent [letters](#) to all 254 Georgia counties warning them about polling place changes without an adequate analysis of the impact of those closures on Black and other voters of color.²⁵⁵ Following public outcry, the Secretary of State objected to this proposal in Randolph and the board ultimately and unanimously rejected the proposal.²⁵⁶ Prior to rejecting the proposal, the Board also terminated its contract with the consultant who recommended the closures.²⁵⁷

In 2018, election officials in **Brady County** closed a polling place in the City of Cairo, which suffered devastation following a hurricane, only weeks before the November election; advocates, including LDF, [claimed](#) that officials did so without providing adequate notice to voters about the closure and also where their new precinct was located.²⁵⁸

In 2019, officials in **Jeff Davis County** reopened a polling place in Hazelhurst that was closed in 2017 that advocates contended would disproportionately harm Black voters, including rural and elderly voters.²⁵⁹ This site was reopened after community advocates led a two-year campaign to reopen the site.

Timing of elections

In 2013, election officials in **Augusta-Richmond** reintroduced a plan that would change the date of County elections from their traditional timing in November to over the summer when Black voter turnout is typically lower.²⁶⁰ A lawsuit challenging the change in election date from the November general election to the May 20 primary election was unsuccessful.²⁶¹ Under Section 5, the U.S. DOJ blocked this same attempt to switch the election date from November to a summertime month in 2012.²⁶²

In 2013, officials in **Macon**, a majority-Black city in **Bibb County**, decided to hold a single non-partisan municipal election in July, when Black voter turnout is typically lower. The U.S. DOJ had been scrutinizing this voting change under Section 5 before the *Shelby County* decision. This election schedule was a marked departure from Macon’s traditional schedule of multi-party partisan primary elections in July and a general election in November.²⁶³

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LOUISIANA

Local Level:

Redistricting

In 2010, Section 5 review prevented the Louisiana State Legislature from implementing Act No. 650, which would have reduced the size of the Iberville Parish School Board from 15 members to nine members, eight of which would have been single-member districts and one of which would have been an at-large district.²⁶⁴ However, Section 5 approval by the U.S. DOJ allowed the Parish to bypass state law that mandated that the board be no more than 9 seats. In 2013, prior to the *Shelby County* decision, Section 5 approval also allowed the Iberville Parish School Board to adopt a redistricting plan that reduced the size of the School Board from 15 members to 13 members. However, in 2013, after the *Shelby County* decision and because Section 5 no longer prevented Act No. 650 from going into effect, the Iberville Parish School Board redistricted into 8 single-member districts and one at-large district, even though the School Board acknowledged its preference for the 13-member board to the 9-member board mandated by state law.

In **East Baton Rouge Parish**, a civil rights organization filed a lawsuit in 2014 on behalf of several local residents to challenge the School Board's redistricting which would have reduced the Board's size from 11 single-member districts (six majority-white and five majority-Black) to nine (five majority-white and four majority-Black), contending that the redistricting decision has the effect of diluting minority representation on the School Board.²⁶⁵

Polling place closures

In November 2016, a civil rights organization released a report that studied polling place closures in Louisiana since the *Shelby County* decision and found that "61 percent of Louisiana parishes have closed a total of 103 polling places since 2012," including in **Jefferson** and **Terrebonne** parishes.²⁶⁶ Terrebonne Parish encompasses a state court, whose method of election LDF has challenged in [*Terrebonne Parish Branch NAACP et al. v. Jindal et al.*](#), under Section 2 of the VRA and the U.S. Constitution.²⁶⁷ Moreover, according to a 2018 report, Louisiana consolidated more than 300 precincts between 2016 and 2012, and this reduction "had a racially discriminatory effect, in that as the proportion of African-Americans in a precinct increased, so did their likelihood of being consolidated, thus made larger, and harder for those voters to cast a ballot."²⁶⁸

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MICHIGAN

State Level:

Photo ID & voucher requirements

In 2015, the Michigan Legislature considered, but did not pass, a bill, SB 639, which would have allowed first-time voters to vote by mail only if they presented ID in person at the municipal clerk's office for the municipality of registration.²⁶⁹ According to civil rights and pro-democracy organizations, who opposed this proposal, this requirement is needlessly restrictive since other laws like the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) already have identification requirements for first-time voters.²⁷⁰ College and university students who have not yet become Michigan residents, particularly freshmen studying away from the town of their parents' residence, as well as Michigan voters who travel frequently for work or work non-traditional hours, would have been severely affected by this bill. The bill also proposed prohibiting municipal clerk's offices from staying open beyond regular weekday business hours. This change would have likely suppressed turnout, increased lines at the polls on Election Day in urban areas, and would have had a disparate impact on minority and student voters, according to advocates.

The following year, in 2016, the Michigan Legislature considered, but did not pass, House Bills 6066, 6067, and 6068, which would have eliminated a procedure whereby voters who appear in person to vote without an acceptable form of voter ID can cast a regular ballot if they sign an affidavit attesting to their identity. Instead, these bills would have required most Michigan voters to present limited forms of ID for their votes to count; for those voters without acceptable ID, the bills would have required voters to fill out a provisional ballot that would only be counted if the voter returned to their clerk's office within 10 days to show either a photo ID or present evidence they are either indigent and, therefore, unable to afford an ID or have a religious objection to having their photo taken.²⁷¹ [LDF](#) and other advocates opposed these bills.²⁷²

Straight-party voting

In 2016, a federal court issued four preliminary injunctions against state election officials, stopping them from implementing a new law, P.A. 268. Three Michigan residents and a civil rights organization challenged P.A. 268's ban on straight-party ticket voting, in part because of the law's potential to reduce Black voters' opportunity to participate equally in the political process and place a disproportionate burden on Black voters' right to vote.²⁷³ Straight-party ticket voting, which has been used in Michigan for nearly a century, allows voters to select a slate of candidates affiliated with a particular party rather than to select each individual candidate on a ticket. Black voters tend to vote for candidates affiliated with the Democratic party with a single mark on the ballot. Indeed, opponents advance a correlation between the use of straight-party voting by Black voters: of 15 Michigan cities with a straight-party voting rate of 65% or higher, two were comprised of a majority of



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white residents and five cities with rates greater than 75% were comprised of a majority of Black residents. Opponents of the law contend that its burden is caused in part by or linked to social and historical conditions in Michigan that have produced or are producing discrimination against Black residents in education, employment, and health. The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals declined Michigan's request to overturn the trial court's orders, staying the state's implementation of P.A. 268 while the case is litigated.²⁷⁴ A full *en banc* panel of the Sixth Circuit refused to hear Michigan's request for their review of the trial court's injunction orders.²⁷⁵ Michigan, subsequently, appealed to the Supreme Court seeking emergency relief and the Supreme Court declined Michigan's request.²⁷⁶ In August 2018, a federal court ruled, among other things, that Michigan's officials "intentionally discriminated against African Americans" by trying to eliminate straight-ticket voting in violation of the U.S. Constitution and that the law has a disproportionate impact on Michigan's voters in violation of Section 2 of the VRA.²⁷⁷ In a September 2018 ruling, however, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals (in a 2-1 vote) allowed the state to remove the straight party ticket voting mechanism.²⁷⁸

Vacancies

Following Congressman Conyer's resignation in December 2016, creating a congressional vacancy in the 13th district in Michigan, which is comprised of a majority of Black voters, voters sued to challenge the Governor's decision to hold the election to fill the seat to coincide with the next regularly scheduled elections in November 2017.²⁷⁹ Plaintiffs claimed that the Governor's failure to call an earlier special election violated the constitutional rights of voters in that majority-minority district, including because the Governor had previously set an election for another vacant seat in a majority-white district within two months. A federal judge has dismissed the suit, reasoning that the Governor has a legitimate reason for his decision, which would be saving the taxpayer-funded cost of holding a special election, and the discretion of when to set a special election.

Voter Suppression Bills

In 2021, Michigan's Senate Committee on Elections has considered three anti-voter bills, SB 273, SB 286, and SB 308, that would restrict access to the ballot box and undermine significant progress the state has made to expand voting access. SB 273 and SB 286 would significantly-- and needlessly-- restrict the number of absentee voter ballot drop boxes which would disproportionately impact Black voters and low-income voters. S.B. 308 would require the Michigan Secretary of State to implement a signature-verification process for absent voter ballot applications and envelopes that could not presume voter signatures are valid. Removing this presumption would likely cause absent voter ballots to be wrongfully rejected, increasing the risk of unjustified disenfranchisement for all Michiganders, but especially for elderly voters, voters with disabilities, and voters whose first language is not English. Taken together, the three bills would impose significant barriers to the ballot box and their restrictions would disproportionately impact Black voters and other historically disenfranchised Michiganders.²⁸⁰

On May 5, 2021, LDF submitted [written testimony](#) to the Michigan state Senate Committee on Elections expressing opposition to the above anti-voter bills.²⁸¹



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Subsequently, in July 2017, legislators proposed [39 different bills related to elections](#), including proposals that restrict absentee voting, such as limiting the use of drop boxes to collect absentee ballots and requiring drop boxes to have video surveillance, or prohibiting the SOS from sending unsolicited absentee ballot applications to voters. Legislators considered another pair of bills (S.B. 303 & 304) that would force some voters to show ID *twice* on two separate occasions — once at their polling place and again to a county clerk located at a central government office — or else their ballot will be tossed out. And legislators considered a bill that could prevent the state from certifying elections, including by requiring a supermajority on county election boards to agree to certify election results, and a pair of bills that would give ordinary poll workers an extraordinary amount of power to restrict voting, including by empowering partisan election observers to challenge the eligibility of voters to cast a ballot.²⁸²

In response to these proposals, LDF submitted [written testimony](#), identifying the likely discriminatory impact of certain provisions, namely the aforementioned S.B. 303 and 304, on Black and other voters of color.²⁸³ Specifically, LDF expressed that those two bills would burden all eligible Michiganders’ right to vote by imposing these new hurdles, potentially violating the U.S. Constitution, the Michigan Constitution, and federal law. According to LDF, S.B. 303: makes Michigan’s voter ID law far more restrictive as voters without photo ID would no longer be able to cast a regular ballot by signing an affidavit, and would instead be forced to cast a provisional ballot; subjects in-person voters to a signature-matching process when they sign in to vote—without providing any standards or signature analysis training to ensure that poll workers do not make mistakes; forces voters to vote a provisional ballot when they cannot show ID or when their signatures are rejected; and cause more voters to cast provisional ballots and increase wait times at the polls. LDF also expressed how S.B. 304 interacts with those aforementioned provisions to further restrict access to voting by making it more difficult to have their provisional ballot counted because the bill would require provisional-ballot voters to go to their clerk’s office within six days of the election and present a photo ID to have their ballot counted. This would be extremely difficult or near impossible for voters who were forced to cast a provisional ballot in the first place because they did not possess a photo ID.

Local Level:

Voter intimidation & proof of citizenship

In 2014, advocates for Arab-American voters in **Dearborn Heights** challenged election officials for preventing Arab-American individuals from obtaining absentee ballots, purportedly based on concerns about potential voter fraud and campaign irregularities.²⁸⁴ Advocacy groups monitored polls and provided a hotline for voters to report such issues during a primary election.²⁸⁵ A **Wayne County** judge declined to halt the counting of certain challenged absentee ballots in Dearborn Heights that purportedly were cast fraudulently. The court found that “[t]here [was] absolutely no evidence in this case that there has been one fraudulent ballot submitted by absentee ballot.”²⁸⁶



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Machine malfunctions

Officials acknowledge that 80 voting machines in **Wayne County**, which encompasses Detroit, where 82% of the residents are Black people, were broken on November 8, 2016, denying Black voters the opportunity to participate in the political process.²⁸⁷

Redistricting

A lawsuit claimed that Michigan Republicans intended to give their party a dominant position through gerrymandered maps in 2011 in violation of the constitution.²⁸⁸ Evidence in the case showed that Republicans intended to draw legislative boundaries that would help their party by concentrating “Dem garbage” into four of the five southeast Michigan districts that Democrats now control, and packing Black voters into a metropolitan Detroit House district.

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State Level:

Photo ID requirement

Following the *Shelby County* decision, Mississippi's Lieutenant Governor said that preclearance "unfairly applied to certain states [and] should be eliminated in recognition of the progress Mississippi has made over the past 48 years."²⁸⁹ Mississippi's Secretary of State said he would move forward immediately to implement Mississippi's voter ID law, which was passed in 2012, but not implemented pre-*Shelby*, for primaries in June 2014, and a law that, even as recently as 2017, the SOS contended is a model photo ID law.²⁹⁰ The implementation of Mississippi's photo ID law already impacted Mississippi elections; the outcome of a tied (177-177) local special election depended upon a lone voter returning within five business days with a valid photo ID, after voting provisionally by affidavit ballot, because the voter initially appeared to vote without an acceptable photo ID.²⁹¹ Reportedly, hundreds of voters could not vote in the 2014 mid-term election because of the photo ID law.²⁹² Studies have indicated that photo ID laws depress voter turnout in Black and Latino communities.²⁹³

Local Level:

Polling place closures

***In November 2016, a civil rights organization released a report that studied polling place closures in Mississippi since the Shelby County decision and found that "[a]bout 34 percent of the 59 Mississippi counties surveyed have closed polling places since Shelby, resulting in at least 44 fewer polling places for the 2016 election."²⁹⁴*

***Another report, released in 2018, documents that five percent (or roughly 100) of Mississippi's polling places have closed and/or relocated since the 2013 Shelby County decision.²⁹⁵ Specific instances of those changes are detailed below.*

Just prior to the *Shelby County* June 25, 2013 decision, in **Lauderdale County**, on June 5, 2013, the majority-Black city of Meridian elected its first Black mayor even after a noose was hung outside of the candidate's campaign office.²⁹⁶ Following *Shelby*, the majority-white County Board of Elections eliminated seven polling places – from 49 to 42 – since the 2012 election. Two years later, in 2015, the County BOE proposed a plan to move several of Meridian's municipal election polling places out of Black churches, over the objection of minority community members.²⁹⁷



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In 2020, it was reported that **Madison County** reassigned 2,500 Black and other voters of color to a smaller precinct in a community comprised predominately of white people without notice and purportedly to suppress the participation of the minority community ahead of the 2020 general election.²⁹⁸

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NEW YORK

State Level:

Vacancies

In 2014, a group of leading local and national voting rights advocates, including LDF, [pressed](#) the Governor to hold special elections to fill 12 legislative vacancies in the New York State Senate and Assembly, which would otherwise represent approximately 1.8 million voters across New York, more than 800,000 of whom are people of color.²⁹⁹ In maintaining these vacancies, advocates have claimed that the Governor has departed from precedent in refusing to call elections. As of 2017, vacancies remained an issue.³⁰⁰

Voter Registration

In early March 2017, voting rights advocates sent a pre-litigation notice to the New York State Board of Elections alleging that New York is failing to meet its obligations under the NVRA and VRA by not ensuring that a driver's license or identification card application, renewal, or change of address transaction serves as a voter registration application or change of address, and not providing voting materials and assistance in certain languages, impacting communities of color.³⁰¹

Local Level:

In the borough of **Brooklyn**, which is in **Kings County**, entire apartment buildings and blocks were de-registered from voting in a purge of 126,000 voters, disproportionately Hispanic and Asian voters, from the rolls in advance of the April 2016 primaries, which remains under investigation by multiple entities.³⁰² Civil rights advocates contend that the Board of Elections failed to first designate voters as “inactive” before sending out a second notice that they would be purged from the rolls. Local and national voting rights advocates and a New York representative also asked the U.S. DOJ to monitor and oversee 2016 elections, including those occurring in Kings County.³⁰³ The Board of Elections reportedly restored these voters to the voting rolls in advance of a June 28 primary election.³⁰⁴ Notwithstanding, following the June 28th congressional primary election, reports indicated that voters in New York encountered other obstacles, including illegal requests for identification, unexpected poll closures, and wrongful denials of affidavit ballots.³⁰⁵

In November 2016, civil rights organizations filed a lawsuit against the Board of Elections, contending that the improper purge of registered voters, making them ineligible to participate in the November 2016 election, violates the NVRA.³⁰⁶ Shortly thereafter, the parties settled the lawsuit, which included a provision for voters, who believed they had registered, but were no longer on the rolls, to vote by affidavit ballot, and to notify poll workers and voters of this provision.



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A separate lawsuit also was filed in federal court by civil rights and pro-democracy organizations, challenging the purge of more than 200,000 voters, including 117,000 registered voters in Brooklyn who were purged before the April 2016 primary election; the U.S. DOJ and New York Attorney General moved to intervene in this lawsuit.³⁰⁷ Among other relief, the NY AG's office requested that the court order the Board of Elections to perform an audit of every voter who was sent a cancellation notice based on their failure to vote or an alleged change of address since January 1, 2014, and the reinstatement of anyone the board removed in violation of state and federal law. In addition, the NY AG's office sought to have the court order the removal of New York City's current head of Voter Registration. As of late October 2017, the Board of Elections had tentatively agreed to terms of a consent decree that would require it to restore voters to the rolls that were illegally purged and establish a comprehensive plan to prevent future illegal voter purges.³⁰⁸

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NORTH CAROLINA

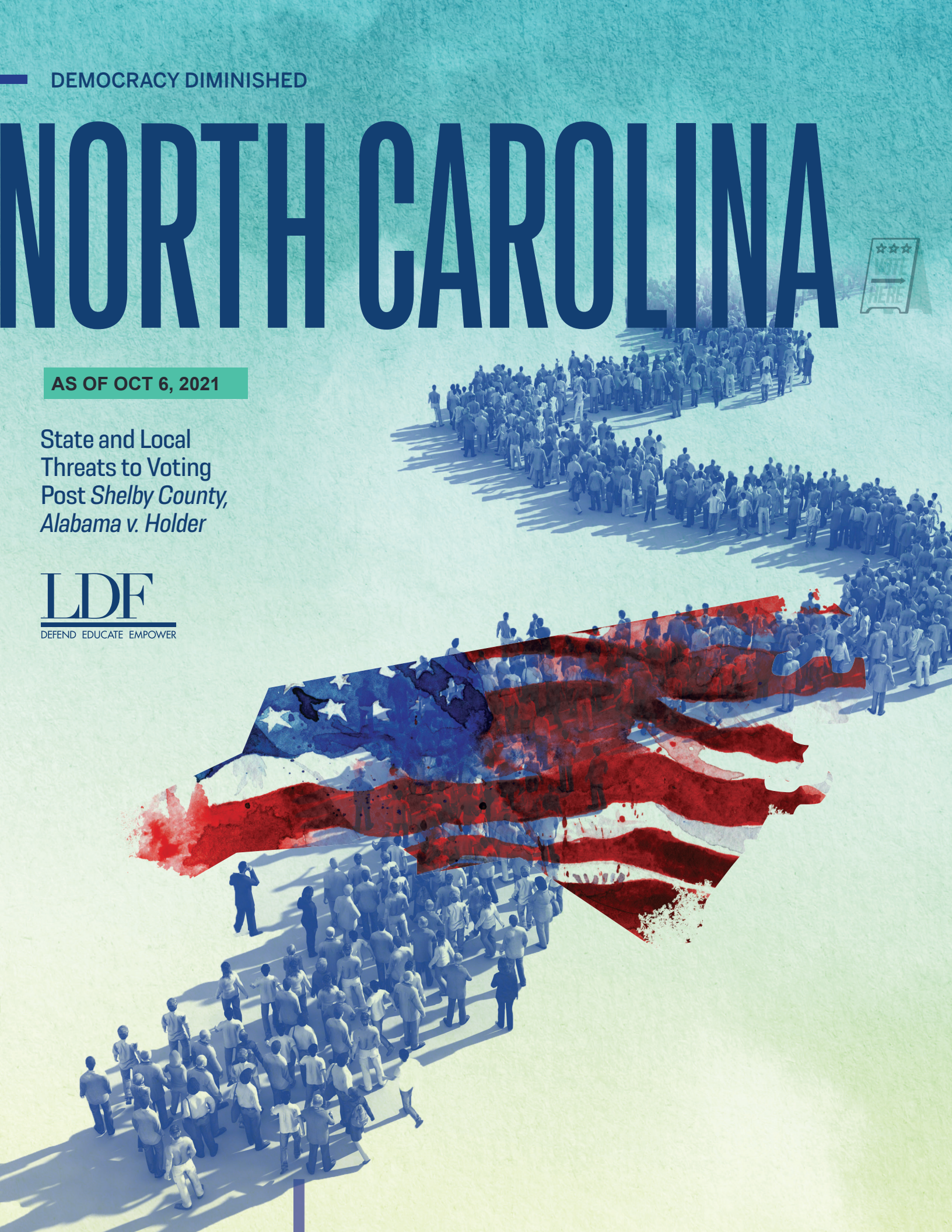


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NORTH CAROLINA

State Level:

Omnibus anti-voter bill (photo ID, early voting, same-day registration, out-of-precinct voting, pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds, etc.)

Immediately following the *Shelby County* decision, the lead sponsor of the state’s voter ID law said that he would move ahead with the measure because of the ruling.³⁰⁹ A North Carolina State Senator also said that he would move quickly to pass a voter ID law because it would purportedly bolster the integrity of the balloting process. Other state legislators in North Carolina began engineering an end to the state’s early voting, Sunday voting, and same-day registration provisions.³¹⁰ North Carolina’s Attorney General said that “[t]he North Carolina General Assembly is now considering legislation that among other changes would limit early voting and require voter I.D.”³¹¹

Within two months of the *Shelby County* decision, North Carolina’s Governor signed an omnibus anti-voter bill, H.B. 589 – dubbed the “monster law” – which includes numerous provisions designed to make it harder for voters to access the polls including: a strict photo ID requirement; elimination of same-day voter registration; cutting the early voting period by seven days (from 17 to 10 days); and throwing out provisional ballots cast at the wrong polling station.³¹²

Early voting, same-day registration, out of precinct voting, & pre-registration for 16- & 17-year olds

A federal judge declined to preliminarily enjoin certain (non-photo ID) provisions of H.B. 589. That ruling was successfully appealed³¹³ to the federal Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, which ordered North Carolina to reinstate same-day registration opportunities and to count out-of-precinct ballots. The U.S. Supreme Court subsequently stayed that ruling for the 2014 elections, but not others. In June 2016, the Fourth Circuit continued its order staying the rollback of same-day registration opportunities and to count out-of-precinct ballots, as the case was heard on appeal (see more below).³¹⁴

A three-week federal trial was held in July 2015 related to the non-photo ID aspects of the omnibus voter law.³¹⁵

The ballots of anywhere from 454 to 1,390 North Carolina voters who are disproportionately people of color went uncounted in the 2014 primary election because of North Carolina’s elimination of same-day registration and prohibition on counting a provisional ballot cast in the wrong precinct.³¹⁶ These and other acts of discrimination in recent elections have been documented.³¹⁷ One estimate suggests that turnout was reduced by at least 30,000 voters in the 2014 election because of barriers to the ballot.³¹⁸ In 2008 and 2012, more than 250,000 voters in North Carolina relied on same-day registration to cast their ballots. In 2012, 41% of the



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voters who relied upon same-day voter registration were Black.³¹⁹ Reportedly, Black voters have cast out-of-precinct ballots at twice the rate of white voters.³²⁰ In 2012, 70% of Black voters used early voting.³²¹

During the 2018 legislative session, the state made changes to early voting opportunities that may impact voters of color and others in the state. Specifically, S.B. 325 would eliminate one of three Saturdays from the early voting period, which is popular among all voters and used disproportionately by Black voters; the bill also would make changes to early voting sites in the state and require the county boards of elections to annually report on their voter registration list maintenance efforts and the State Board of Elections to submit those reports to a legislative committee.³²² In June 2018, the Governor vetoed S.B. 325, commenting that “[p]revious attempts like this by the legislature to discriminate and manipulate the voting process have been struck down by the courts. True democracy should make it easier for people to vote, not harder.”³²³

Photo ID requirement

Plaintiffs unsuccessfully moved the federal court for a preliminary injunction to halt implementation of the photo ID aspect of the omnibus law, which the state began implementing in 2016.³²⁴

A federal trial on the photo ID requirement of the omnibus law took place in January 2016.³²⁵

Prior to trial, the North Carolina legislature made changes to the photo ID law.³²⁶ The new legislation purported to: allow voters with an expired driver’s license or state-issued ID card (no more than four years expired) to vote; require election officials to help voters use mail-in ballots, which do not require photo ID, during the early voting period; and allow voters who do not have a photo ID to provide their voter registration card or provide their birthdates, last four digits of their social security number, and an affidavit attesting to a “reasonable impediment” (e.g., work schedule, lack of transportation, disability or illness, lost or stolen photo ID, lack of birth certificate or other underlying document necessary to obtain a photo ID) to obtaining one of the required photo IDs. Student ID cards, even when government-issued, were not an accepted form of ID.

Reports indicated that many voters lacked awareness about or are confused by the “reasonable impediment” provision of the photo ID law.³²⁷ During the March 2016 primary—the first election in North Carolina to require voters to show a photo ID under the new law and “reasonable impediment” exception—reportedly 26% of people who relied on the “reasonable impediment” provision were Black voters, who only account for 22% of North Carolina’s population.³²⁸ Also, during the March 2016 primary, poll monitors reported that: even when “reasonable impediment” declarations were submitted, it varied county to county whether they were accepted and that at least four different versions of the affidavit forms for identifying “reasonable impediments” were being used.³²⁹

As of the March 2016 primary, approximately 318,000 registered North Carolina voters, disproportionately Black and Latino voters, lacked a driver’s license or state ID card.³³⁰ Voters also reported having difficulties and burdensome costs associated with obtaining the “free” photo IDs.³³¹ Numerous voters also recounted



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various difficulties casting ballots in light of all of the changes to election laws in the state, including the photo ID requirement and the lack of notification of last-minute polling place location changes during the 2016 primary season.³³² More than 40,000 people across North Carolina voted by provisional early ballots; nearly 3,000 voted provisionally because of voter ID issues during the 2016 primary season.³³³ Other voters reported difficulties beyond satisfying a photo ID requirement, such as having to pass a spelling test to vote, encountering voter intimidation, and enduring long lines at the polls.³³⁴ During the 2012 primary, 23,000 provisional ballots were cast.

As noted with respect to other stringent photo ID laws, numerous studies have indicated that photo ID laws depress voter turnout in Black, Latino, and other communities of color.³³⁵

Following the 2015 and 2016 trials on the omnibus voter suppression bill, a federal district court upheld the various provisions of the law, including the photo ID requirement, elimination of same-day registration, out-of-precinct voting, pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds, and reductions to early voting.³³⁶ The court reasoned that: (1) the state had asserted legitimate interests for those provisions, none of which had been proven unconstitutional by plaintiffs; (2) the robust turnout in 2014 proved that the law did not suppress the votes of people of color in the state; (3) while Black residents of the state continue to endure socioeconomic disparities that can be linked to state discrimination and make it more difficult for them to participate in the political process, plaintiffs failed to show that such disparities will materially affect their ability to participate in the political process; and (4) there is “little official discrimination to consider” today.

Plaintiffs appealed to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, which heard the case on an expedited basis with oral argument on June 21, 2016.³³⁷ On July 29, 2016, the Fourth Circuit reversed the trial court’s ruling that had upheld North Carolina’s voting restrictions, finding that the state Legislature adopted its omnibus law with discriminatory intent and the purpose to impose barriers to block Black voters from voting. The appellate court said: “[a]lthough the new provisions target African Americans with almost surgical precision, they constitute inapt remedies for the problems assertedly justifying them and, in fact, impose cures for problems that did not exist.”³³⁸ The court noted that the Legislature “requested data on the use, by race, of a number of voting practices,” and then, data in hand, “enacted legislation that restricted voting and registration in five different ways, all of which disproportionately affected African Americans.” The court could not “ignore the record evidence that, because of race, the legislature enacted one of the largest restrictions of the franchise in modern North Carolina history.” With respect to the “reasonable impediment” provision of the photo ID aspects of the omnibus law, the appellate court stated: “[n]othing in this record shows that the reasonable impediment exception ensures that the photo ID law no longer imposes any lingering burden on African American voters.”

Ultimately, this appellate ruling: prohibits North Carolina from requiring photo ID for in-person elections; restores a week of early voting and pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds; ensures that same-day registration and out-of-precinct voting will remain in effect; and ordered that ballots of people who had mistakenly voted at the wrong polling stations be deemed valid. The court declined to bail North Carolina back into Section 5’s protections under Section 3(c) of the VRA.



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Following its decision, the Fourth Circuit denied the state-defendants' request for a stay of the decision, pending an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.³³⁹ In denying the stay, the Fourth Circuit wrote: “[v]oters disenfranchised by a law enacted with discriminatory intent suffer irreparable harm far greater than any potential harm to the State.” Seventeen days after the Fourth Circuit’s decision, North Carolina then appealed it to the U.S. Supreme Court, requesting that that court allow provisions of its omnibus law to remain in effect (e.g., the voter ID provision) that were used in the 2016 primary election season to not disrupt the election; opponents of the law contended that election officials had sufficient time before November to implement an election that complied with the Fourth Circuit’s decision and that once an electoral law, such as North Carolina’s omnibus measure, has been found to be racially discriminatory and enjoined, operation of the law must be suspended.³⁴⁰ In late August 2016, the Supreme Court denied North Carolina’s request to stay the Fourth Circuit decision; thus, North Carolina’s intentionally discriminatory voting laws were not put into effect for the November election.³⁴¹ In late December 2016, North Carolina filed papers requesting that the U.S. Supreme Court review the Fourth Circuit decision.³⁴² In the interim, following a change in administration after the November 2016 election and in an effort to end the state’s defense of the monster law, the Governor and Attorney General discharged the private attorneys who had been representing the state, as well as moved to dismiss the certiorari petition.³⁴³ Notwithstanding, the former Governor hired private attorneys to continue to press the litigation and the Legislature and members of the Legislature sought to intervene in the case in support of the monster law.³⁴⁴ On May 15, 2017, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to take the case on appeal, with Chief Justice Robert writing a separate statement and invoking the Court’s “frequent admonition that ‘[t]he denial of a writ of certiorari imports no expression of opinion upon the merits of the case.’”³⁴⁵ Accordingly, the denial leaves in place the Fourth Circuit decision enjoining North Carolina’s omnibus law.

Ultimately, reports found that voter impersonation fraud was not rampant during the 2016 elections and that North Carolina’s photo ID provision would have prevented just one fraudulent vote in the November 2016 election, had it been in effect.³⁴⁶

As of 2016, it was reported that North Carolina spent at least \$5 million taxpayers’ dollars defending the above-mentioned election law changes that are part of its omnibus measure; this figure does not include the amount that advocates expended challenging the omnibus bill.³⁴⁷

A state court challenge to the photo ID requirement in the 2013 bill also was filed. The state court, however, stayed the case in light of the above-mentioned federal proceedings that have blocked North Carolina’s enforcement of its photo ID requirement for in-person voting.³⁴⁸ According to reports, plaintiffs intended to support their state law challenge with evidence that the ballots of 1,400 eligible voters were thrown out because of the photo ID law in the 2016 primary election.³⁴⁹



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Despite the above-mentioned federal appellate court decision striking down a photo ID requirement for in person voting in North Carolina, in 2017, the state legislature considered a bill that would add a photo ID requirement to the state constitution and would go into effect if approved by voters.³⁵⁰

Similarly, in 2018, the state legislature also proposed a constitutional amendment that adds a photo ID requirement to vote in person subject to voter approval in the November 2018 election.³⁵¹ The legislature did so despite the above-mentioned federal court ruling, affirmed by an appellate court, finding that North Carolina's 2013 attempt to impose a strict photo ID law was intentionally racially discriminatory. With voters passing the amendment in the November 2018 election, the legislature had the authority to determine the details of the ID legislation, adopting photo ID legislation, S.824, over the governor's veto in December 2018.³⁵² Prior to this referendum vote, legislators tried to strip a bipartisan panel of its power to write captions for those constitutional amendments that appeared on the ballot,³⁵³ which was the subject of lawsuits.³⁵⁴ As soon as the law was implemented over veto, in December 2018, advocates challenged this new photo ID law in federal and state courts, alleging various claims including that the law is intentionally discriminatory and has a discriminatory result on Black North Carolinians.³⁵⁵ In a state court proceeding, the court found that the legislature lacked the authority to put a constitutional amendment related to an ID law on the ballot, particularly because this legislature was enacted under a racially discriminatory redistricting plan.³⁵⁶ While that decision was stayed pending appeal, the Governor signed into law a bill that would delay implementation of the ID law—should it survive legal challenges—until 2020.³⁵⁷ In 2019, after a three-judge panel of state court judges issued a decision that permitted the photo ID law to go into effect for the 2020 elections,³⁵⁸ in 2020, another decision from a three-judge state court reversed that ruling and found the law illegal, a decision which defendants attempted to appeal.³⁵⁹ The case went to trial in April 2021, and in September 2021, a three-judge panel of the state Superior Court effectively struck down the ID law.³⁶⁰ The 2-1 decision cites “persuasive evidence” that a Republican-dominated legislature had rushed the bill to passage at least in part to depress Black voter turnout.³⁶¹ The law remains unenforceable under this ruling, which the legislature will likely appeal.³⁶²

Moreover, in December 2019, a federal court issued a preliminary injunction that temporarily prevented the photo ID law from operating until the federal lawsuit was resolved, ruling that the ID law has discriminatory results and carries over the “taint” of racial discrimination from the 2013 version of the ID law.³⁶³ Defendants appealed that preliminary ruling to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals; oral arguments were held in September 2020. In December 2020, a three-judge panel reversed the district court's ruling, allowing the voter ID law to move forward.³⁶⁴ Plaintiffs appealed to seek *en banc* review from the Fourth Circuit, but the Fourth Circuit declined to review the panel's decision.

Straight-party voting

Advocates expressed concern that North Carolina's elimination of straight-party ticket voting, which voters in counties with large Black populations used in the 2010 and 2012 elections, would impact the 2016 election, given the competitive nature of the various races on the ballot and, thus, voters' need for more time to cast their



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ballots, causing long lines and potentially preventing eligible voters from voting or fully completing their ballots.³⁶⁵ One study reports that 2.5 million voters used straight-ticket voting in 2012.³⁶⁶ At the start of early voting for the 2016 general election, voters in localities across North Carolina—in Charlotte, Raleigh, Fayetteville, and Winston-Salem—experienced long lines and waiting times to vote.³⁶⁷

Appointments

In 2016, Republican State legislators were reported to have considered holding a special session to add two additional Justices on the state Supreme Court following the November election, which would have changed the composition of the existing seven-member court to include four Democrats.³⁶⁸ The need for an additional judgeship is predicated on case load criteria.

Moreover, during a special legislative session in December 2016, the Republican-controlled Legislature acted to place limits on the incoming Democratic-affiliated Governor’s power to make political appointments by (1) stripping future governors of their power to appoint a majority to the State Board of Elections and Ethics Commission (through expanding the number of board members from five to eight, with the eight members to be evenly divided between the two major parties), which a panel of state court judges temporarily blocked; the board plays a critical role in determining where, when, and how North Carolina votes and who has control over investigating ethics complaints against lawmakers and campaigns; and (2) changing the state court system so that it is more difficult for the losers of some superior court cases to appeal directly to the Democratic-controlled Supreme Court.³⁶⁹

Another proposed piece of legislation introduced during the 2016 legislative session would strip the incoming governor of his ability to appoint members to the boards of state universities and reduce the number of state employees that the governor can appoint from 1,500 to 425, as well as make the governor’s cabinet appointees subject to approval by the State Senate. Civil rights and other advocates have decried this power grab because of the impact that these changes—hastily made following the November election—would have on minority voters in North Carolina.

In 2017, North Carolina became the first state in nearly a century to adopt partisan court elections; and the legislature also reduced the size of the state Court of Appeals, which deprives the Democratic-affiliated Governor of the ability to name the replacements of two retiring Republicans.³⁷⁰

In 2018, the legislature considered a proposal to amend the state constitution to give two legislative positions (the House Speaker and Senate Leaders)—rather than the governor, who currently is a Democrat—the authority to appoint an eight member state board of elections; currently, the board is composed of nine members, including four affiliated with each of the two major political parties.³⁷¹ As above, the legislature has been attempting to gain control over the elections board and ethics commission since voters elected the governor in 2016.



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The 2018 legislature also proposed legislation that, rather than have the governor replace vacant judicial seats, would provide an open nomination process, with a nonpartisan commission approving or disapproving of the nominees based on their purported merit.³⁷² The Legislature would then send two of these nominees to the governor to choose from.

There is ongoing litigation in North Carolina's state courts over these changes.³⁷³ Related to this litigation, a state official has raised the possibility of impeaching state Supreme Court justices if they rule against legislative leaders in some of the above-mentioned suits over amendments to the state constitution.³⁷⁴

Voter registration

Following the November 2016 election, the campaign of the incumbent Governor lodged complaints of voter fraud against approximately a dozen get-out-the-vote groups in North Carolina that had focused on outreach among African-American voters.³⁷⁵

Redistricting

In October 2017, the North Carolina legislature passed a judicial redistricting bill that advocates contend could reduce the number of Black judges and other judges of color in North Carolina's judicial system.³⁷⁶

Similarly, during the 2018 legislative session, the legislature considered statewide judicial redistricting legislation, S.B. 757 and H.B. 1037, that advocates also contend would harm minority voters in the state.³⁷⁷ In that same legislative session, legislators considered H.B. 717, which proposed to redraw judicial and prosecutorial districts for electing judges and district attorneys in North Carolina and adding judicial and prosecutorial seats across the state.³⁷⁸ In June 2018, the Governor vetoed H.B. 717, commenting that "[l]egislative attempts to rig the courts by reducing the people's vote hurts justice. Piecemeal attempts to target judges create unnecessary confusion and show contempt for North Carolina's judiciary."³⁷⁹

Absentee Voter Fraud

Surrounding the 2018 electoral season, the North Carolina State Board of Elections and other officials are investigating allegations that a Republican campaign worker targeted Black voters in **Bladen County** by acting to illegally collect their absentee ballots; as a result, the state declined to immediately certify the election results for a congressional race.³⁸⁰ State records reflect that an unusually high numbers of mail-in ballots were requested in Bladen — and an unusually high numbers of those requested ballots were never returned. A disproportionate number of unreturned ballots had been sent to voters of color, who tend to vote Democratic. Indeed, nearly 55% of ballots mailed to Native American voters and 36% mailed to Black voters were not returned, while the non-return rate among white voters in the district was 18%.



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Voter Purges

A 2018 report found that between September of 2016 and May of 2018, North Carolina purged 11.7 percent of its voter rolls.³⁸¹ In 90 out of 100 counties, voters of color were over-represented among the purged group.

Local Level:

A 2015 analysis reflects that the widespread movement of polling places throughout North Carolina, as reported below, has kept tens of thousands of voters, disproportionately voters of color, from the polls.³⁸² According to the analysis, state officials moved almost one-third of the state's early voting polling sites in 2014, which will increase the distance that Black voters would have to travel to vote early, while leaving white voters largely unaffected.

Similarly, in 2016, another analysis asserts that 17 of North Carolina's 78 counties made changes to early voting opportunities that had negative impacts on voters, namely voters of color, and 24 counties made voting more difficult for the working poor, who are disproportionately Black.³⁸³

Moreover, in August 2016, the chair of the North Carolina GOP emailed Republican county election board members, who approve election schedules in each county, and other party members, requesting that they "make party line changes to early voting," by reducing early voting hours, not offering Sunday voting (which African American communities commonly use and refer to as "souls to the polls," where church members vote together following Sunday worship services), and not putting polling sites on college campuses.³⁸⁴ This request follows a federal court ruling, discussed above, that necessitates that counties develop new early voting schedules. While the court ruling requires North Carolina's 100 counties to offer 17 days of early voting, it does not prohibit election officials from providing fewer hours and early voting sites than in the last presidential election.³⁸⁵ As a result, boards across 23 North Carolina counties, some discussed in detail below, acted to reduce the number of early voting hours and sites available to voters across the state.³⁸⁶ Nine counties also acted to drop Sunday voting. For those counties in which boards of elections disagreed about early voting plans, the State Board of Election set those plans, and, in some cases, restored Sunday early voting hours and, in other cases, approved restrictions on early voting opportunities.³⁸⁷ Litigation was filed by the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton, on behalf of voters in federal court, that unsuccessfully sought an order requiring the state Board of Elections to modify early voting plans in Mecklenburg, Guilford, Forsyth, Nash, and New Hanover counties to comply with the July 2016 Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals decision (discussed below).³⁸⁸

Ultimately, during the 2016 general election, 17 North Carolina counties provided fewer total early voting hours than in 2012, and three counties that offered early voting on a Sunday in 2012 no longer offered that option.³⁸⁹ Though the state offered more early voting hours overall than voters had in 2012, many counties offered no evening hours, making access difficult for people who work one or more jobs.



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Potentially as a result of these changes to polling sites and early voting opportunities, as well as the elimination of straight-ticket voting (*see above*), voters in localities across North Carolina—including in Charlotte, Raleigh, Fayetteville, and Winston-Salem—experienced long lines and waiting times to vote at the start of early voting for the 2016 general election.³⁹⁰

Moreover, in November 2016, a civil rights organization released a report that studied polling place closures in North Carolina “even after significant opposition from minority communities and advocates,” including in **Pasquotank** and **Cleveland** counties.”³⁹¹

Another report indicated that because of fewer early voting places, Black voter turnout decreased by 16% during the first week of early voting.³⁹² Republican officials also boasted that due to cutbacks to early voting hours, Black voter turnout reduced by 8.5% below 2012 turnout, while turnout for white voters increased by 22.5%.³⁹³

And, in 2018, another analysis revealed that North Carolina’s 2018 midterm election had nearly 20 percent fewer early voting locations than there were in 2014; this is particularly true in rural counties in the state.³⁹⁴

The changes that follow reflect the particular limitations on polling sites and early voting opportunities across North Carolina’s cities and counties.

Polling place closures & reductions, voter intimidation, & early voting restrictions

In 2013, in **Watauga County**, the Board of Elections voted to eliminate an early voting site and election-day polling precinct on the Appalachian State University (ASU) campus.³⁹⁵ A North Carolina trial court found that the State Board of Elections, having ratified the Watauga Board’s decision, intended to discriminate against students;³⁹⁶ an appellate court subsequently dissolved its stay of that decision.³⁹⁷ The County also proposed combining three precincts into one to serve 9,300 voters, making it the third-largest voting precinct in the state. That one precinct site had 35 parking spaces and was located a mile away from the University, along a campus road with no sidewalks.³⁹⁸ In 2016, the County also refused to approve a voting site on ASU’s campus and instead had only one early voting site for the County, in a “tiny office on the first floor of the County Courthouse.”³⁹⁹

In **Forsyth County**, the Board of Elections considered, but tabled, two proposals in 2013 that would have (1) placed security officers at the County’s one-stop early voting site, and (2) collected information from individuals or organizations returning voter registration forms.⁴⁰⁰ The board chairman also proposed closing an early voting site at Winston-Salem State University, a historically Black institution.⁴⁰¹ Reportedly, polling locations in Winston-Salem have slowly been reduced from 15 in 2014 to 12 in 2015, like in other parts of the state, erecting barriers in terms of transportation and other impediments to accessing existing polling places.⁴⁰² In 2016, the Forsyth County Board of Elections, which is majority-Republican, approved a plan to move early voting polling sites in two of Winston-Salem’s prominent minority neighborhoods.⁴⁰³ The State Board of



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Elections reviewed this plan, as well as another submitted by the County board's lone democratic member, to ensure the African-American and Hispanic populations have access to early voting sites. At the start of early voting for the 2016 general election, voters in Winston-Salem experienced long lines and waiting times to vote.⁴⁰⁴

Litigation was filed by the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton, on behalf of voters in federal court, seeking an order requiring the State Board of Elections to modify early voting plans in Forsyth to comply with the July 2016 Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals decision (discussed above).⁴⁰⁵ Plaintiffs contended that the cuts to early voting on Sundays discriminated against Black voters who vote after Sunday service worship, (also known as "souls to the polls") and urged the County to open an early voting site on the Winston-Salem State University campus. A federal appeals court refused an emergency motion, seeking to reverse a trial court's denial of plaintiffs' request.⁴⁰⁶

In 2014, officials in **Shelby**, located in **Cleveland County**, considered consolidating five voting precincts, which serve a substantial number of Black voters, into two precincts purportedly to save \$10,000 per election.⁴⁰⁷

In 2014, **Rockingham County** relocated five polling places from schools to other locations as a purported safety measure, which has impacted Black and other voters.⁴⁰⁸

In August 2016, a member of the **Wake County** Board of Elections attempted and failed to eliminate early voting on Sundays and the opening of an early voting site at N.C. State University.⁴⁰⁹ This member had been appointed to the Board following a federal court decision, discussed below, that the County Commission and School Board's redistricting plans violated the U.S. Constitution and had to be remedied. This attempt comes as a leader of a conservative think tank in North Carolina reportedly encouraged counties to cut early voting sites and reduce hours, even while adding seven additional days of early voting, as required by the federal court litigation discussed above, which blocked the State's efforts to shorten early voting opportunities by one week.⁴¹⁰ Reductions in the number of early voting sites are often proposed in the name of cost-saving measures and often without any analysis or studies of the cost-savings. At the start of early voting for the 2016 general election, voters in Wake experienced long lines and waiting times to vote.⁴¹¹

Also in August 2016, the **Guilford County** Board of Elections threatened to reduce the number of early voting sites from 22 to 12, including closing two sites at two Greensboro universities, one of which (North Carolina A&T) being a historically Black educational institution.⁴¹² Following opposition from activists and concerned citizens, the Board voted unanimously to create 25 early voting sites, maintain Saturday and Sunday voting days, and keep the two university early voting sites open. Still, litigation was filed by the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton, on behalf of voters in federal court, seeking an order requiring the State Board of Elections to modify early voting plans in Guilford County to comply with the July 2016 Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals decision (discussed above), specifically by providing more early voting sites that will be open during the week and at least as many early voting polling sites that were available to voters in 2012, including those locations that Black voters have used heavily.⁴¹³ A 2016 analysis asserts that Guilford's changes to early voting



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opportunities—including its decision to have only one early voting site open during the first week of early voting—are among the most troubling of those made by North Carolina’s counties that have had negative impacts on voters of color.⁴¹⁴ At the start of early voting in October 2016, turnout in the County was down by 85%.⁴¹⁵ Moreover, in 2018, officials voted to provide two fewer early voting (nine rather than eleven) sites in Guilford; students at North Carolina AT&T complained about the lack of early voting on their campus.⁴¹⁶

In August 2016, in **Mecklenburg County**, North Carolina’s largest county, the Board of Elections voted to cut early voting hours by 238, compared to the number of hours offered during the 2012 election, as well as to cut the number of early voting sites.⁴¹⁷ This decision came one day after the chair of the North Carolina GOP, emailed Republican county election board members, requesting that they “make party line changes to early voting,” including by reducing early voting hours. The State Board of Elections reviewed this decision and, according to civil rights advocates, failed to restore early voting hours and sites to account for the expected high turnout in this County. Litigation was filed by the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton, on behalf of voters in federal court, seeking an order requiring the State Board of Elections to modify early voting plans in Mecklenburg to comply with the July 2016 Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals decision (discussed above), specifically by providing longer hours on the last day of early voting.⁴¹⁸ Recently, a federal appeals court refused an emergency motion, seeking to reverse a trial court’s denial of plaintiffs’ request.⁴¹⁹ Ultimately, during the 2016 general election, this County offered 12 fewer voting locations for the first day of early voting than in 2012, despite a federal court recognizing that in recent years, “African Americans disproportionately used the first seven days” of early voting.⁴²⁰ A 2016 analysis asserts that Mecklenburg’s changes to early voting opportunities are among the most troubling of those made by North Carolina’s counties that have had negative impacts on voters of color.⁴²¹ At the start of early voting for the 2016 general election, voters in Charlotte experienced long lines and waiting times (*i.e.*, more than three hours) to vote.⁴²²

In August 2016, members of **Lenoir County**’s Board of Elections proposed to reduce, by about a quarter, the number of early voting hours available for the November 2016 election, and to provide only one early voting site, open only during weekday business hours and on the Saturday morning before the election, in the County seat, despite that the County spans 403 square miles.⁴²³ One in four voters in Lenoir are Black. Elections officials claimed that the reductions to these voting opportunities would allow officials to “monitor voter fraud more effectively,” even though impersonation voter fraud is virtually nonexistent. This decision follows an email from the chair of the North Carolina GOP that he sent to Republican county election board members, requesting that they “make party line changes to early voting,” including by reducing early voting hours.

In August 2016, in **Cumberland County**, the Board of Elections eliminated a Sunday early voting day from a 10-day early voting plan that they had adopted. Sunday voting has been used frequently by Black voters in North Carolina and is commonly referred to as “souls to the polls.”⁴²⁴ Following this decision, the State Board of Elections restored Sunday voting hours. At the start of early voting for the 2016 general election, voters in Fayetteville experienced long lines and waiting times to vote.⁴²⁵



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In October 2016, litigation was filed by the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton, on behalf of voters in federal court, seeking an order requiring the State Board of Elections to modify early voting plans in **New Hanover County** to comply with the July 2016 Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals decision (discussed above), specifically by providing Sunday voting opportunities, which Black voters use to vote after Sunday service worship (also known as “souls to the polls”).⁴²⁶ A 2016 analysis asserts that Mecklenburg’s changes to early voting opportunities are among the most troubling of those made by North Carolina’s counties that have had negative impacts on voters of color.⁴²⁷

In October 2016, litigation was filed by the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton, on behalf of voters in federal court, seeking an order requiring the State Board of Elections to modify early voting plans in **Nash County**, specifically to comply with the July 2016 Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals decision (discussed above).⁴²⁸ According to plaintiffs, under the challenged plan, Rocky Mount residents are forced to travel too far to rural sites to vote during the first week of early voting and no voting sites are opened in the more heavily populated town. A federal appeals court refused an emergency motion, seeking to reverse a trial court’s denial of plaintiffs’ request.⁴²⁹

In 2016, an analysis asserted that **Columbus County** made changes to early voting opportunities that had negative impacts on voters, namely voters of colors, by specifically decreasing the total number of early voting days and number of early voting sites.⁴³⁰

A 2016 analysis asserts that **Buncombe County’s** changes to early voting opportunities, particularly by cutting the early voting hours at voting sites, are among the most troubling of those made by North Carolina’s counties that have had negative impacts on voters of color.⁴³¹

Opposition from a civil rights leader, as well as a 2016 analysis asserts that **Craven County’s** changes to early voting opportunities—including its decision to have only one early voting site open during the first week of early voting—are among the most troubling of those made by North Carolina’s counties that have had negative impacts on voters of color.⁴³² At the start of early voting in October 2016, only 59% of ballots had been cast in that County as compared to 2012, wait times to vote were longer than two hours, and voters reportedly endured other difficulties, including health complications, attempting to vote.⁴³³

Voter qualifications

In 2013, the **Pasquotank County** Board of Elections initially blocked a senior at Elizabeth City State University, a historically Black university, from running for the city council based on a determination that his on-campus address did not establish local residency. The State Board of Elections subsequently reversed this move. Reportedly, a Pasquotank county leader expressed his intention to continue to challenge the voter registrations of more students at historically Black colleges and universities.⁴³⁴



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At an August 2016 public meeting, the appointed chair of the **Henderson County** Board of Elections explored the possibility of requesting that the sheriff deputize armed civilians to patrol the polls in November 2016 in the name of purported safety measures.⁴³⁵ The Board also circulated a flyer designed to help poll workers spot potential terrorists, which included the following descriptions of actions to be aware of: “[p]erson out of place in environment”; “[f]ixed stare”; and “[p]erson whose appearance or manner makes you feel uneasy.”

Methods of election

In 2013, county commissioners in **Benson**, located in **Johnston County**, considered lifting limits on at-large voting. Benson has three commission seats elected by district voting, and three commission seats elected by at-large voting. As a result of earlier Section 2 of the VRA litigation, residents can only vote for one at-large seat every three years.⁴³⁶

Redistricting

In 2015, the **Wake County** Board of Commissioners redistricted in a manner that favored suburban and rural areas of the County to the detriment of the urban core, and packed Black voters into one district; though under the benchmark plan, the County elected two Black members to the Commission.⁴³⁷ Civil rights advocates have challenged that redistricting plan in court. Likewise, advocates have brought a legal challenge to redistricting plans for the Wake County Board of Education that contain unequal populations of urban areas of the County (which contain larger Democratic and minority communities) to the benefit of suburban areas of the County (which contain larger Republican and white communities).⁴³⁸ The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, reversing the lower court decision, found that both plans violate the “one person, one vote” principle under federal and state law.⁴³⁹ A federal court ordered that the County use interim remedial maps for the November 2016 elections involving these local bodies.⁴⁴⁰

In 2015, a redistricting plan for the City Council in **Greensboro**, located in **Guilford County**, received criticism for its potential impact of packing Black voters into two districts when the benchmark plan would elect four Black members to the City Council.⁴⁴¹ Aspects of Greensboro’s voting changes were preliminarily enjoined by a federal court.⁴⁴² After trial in February 2017, the court ruled in favor of the minority plaintiffs.⁴⁴³

Voter purges

In advance of the start of early voting in October 2016, a 100-year-old Black woman voter, who had lived in Belhaven all her life, as well as other registered voters, were at risk of being purged by **Beaufort County’s** Board of Elections after their voter registration statuses were challenged based on lists compiled by Republican officials.⁴⁴⁴ The elderly woman has consistently cast a ballot in elections for the past 24 years, including in the 2016 primary season. These lists have led to the challenges of the registration statuses of disproportionately Black and registered Democrats. A civil rights organization filed a lawsuit under the NVRA to prevent these purges and the U.S. DOJ filed a statement of interest in the case, contending that counties cannot legally remove



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voters “using only mail returned as undeliverable and without following specific required procedures” nor can they carry out “systematic removals within 90 days of a Federal election.”⁴⁴⁵ During a hearing, a federal judge referred to North Carolina’s purge process as “insane” and something “put together in 1901.”

In 2016, hundreds of registered voters in **Moore County** were purged by the Board of Elections after their voter registration statuses were challenged based on lists compiled by Republican officials.⁴⁴⁶ These lists have led to the challenges of the registration statuses of disproportionately Black and registered Democrats in other parts of North Carolina. A civil rights organization filed a lawsuit under the NVRA to prevent these purges and the Department of Justice filed a statement of interest in the case, contending that counties cannot legally remove voters “using only mail returned as undeliverable and without following specific required procedures” nor can they carry out “systematic removals within 90 days of a Federal election.”⁴⁴⁷ During a hearing, a federal judge referred to North Carolina’s purge process as “insane” and something “put together in 1901.”

As of October 2016 in **Cumberland County**, thousands of registered voters were purged by the Board of Elections, within 90 days of the November 2016 election, after their voter registration statuses were challenged.⁴⁴⁸ A civil rights organization filed a lawsuit under the NVRA to prevent these purges and the U.S. DOJ filed a statement of interest in the case, contending that counties cannot legally remove voters “using only mail returned as undeliverable and without following specific required procedures” nor can they carry out “systematic removals within 90 days of a Federal election.”⁴⁴⁹ During a hearing, a federal judge referred to North Carolina’s purge process as “insane” and something “put together in 1901.”

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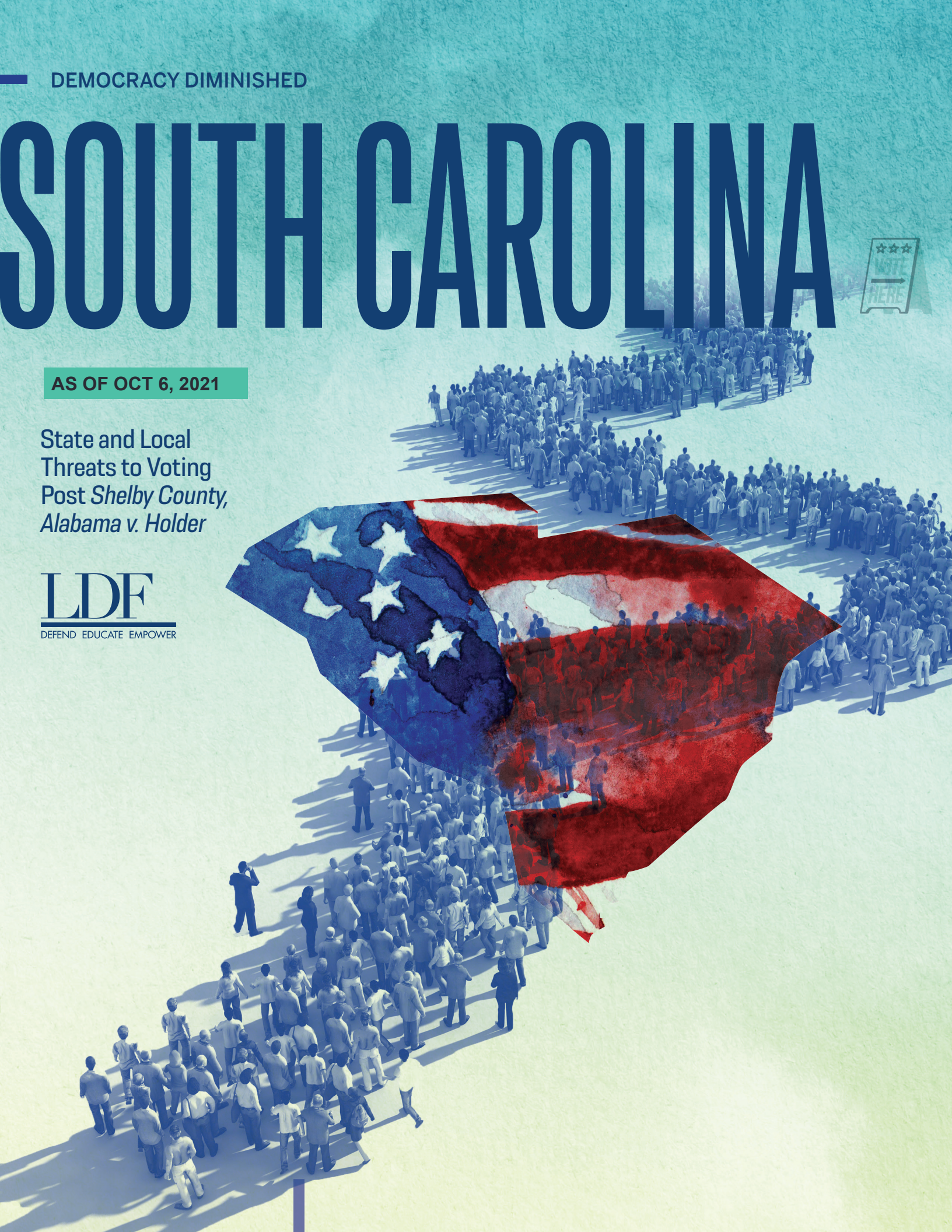
SOUTH CAROLINA



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SOUTH CAROLINA

State Level:

Photo ID requirement

Following the *Shelby County* decision, South Carolina’s Attorney General stated: “[t]his is a victory for all voters, as all states can now act equally, without some having to ask for permission or being required to jump through the extraordinary hoops demanded by federal bureaucracy.”⁴⁵⁰ Moreover, a spokesperson for South Carolina’s Attorney General stated that the assurance that South Carolina gave to a federal court in 2012 about its interpretation of the reasonable impediment exception to the requirement that voters present one of five accepted photo IDs “still applies.”⁴⁵¹ Indeed, as a result of a 2012 trial concerning South Carolina’s photo ID law in [South Carolina v. United States](#), which LDF, along with other organizations and the U.S. DOJ litigated, the state adopted a reasonable impediment exception that recognizes the many reasons why a qualified South Carolina voter may not have an acceptable photo ID and provides a process for how such voters still can vote in-person.⁴⁵²

Notwithstanding the implementation of South Carolina’s photo ID law, along with that of its reasonable impediment exception in 2013, a 2014 study illuminated the burdens that South Carolinians face obtaining complaint-ID in the state.⁴⁵³ Moreover, the state estimates that, as of 2016, approximately 178,000 South Carolinians, disproportionately people of color, lack an acceptable photo ID under the law. Indeed, in 2016, confusion over the reasonable impediment provision of that law persisted three years after its implementation, and South Carolina’s failure to collect data about its administration of the law and analyze that data made it difficult to assess the law’s impact on minority voters in particular.⁴⁵⁴ Still, there is at least some indication that the law disproportionately impacts Black South Carolinians. Specifically, an analysis of the impact of the law in the 2016 election season found that “African-American voters made up 27.6 percent of registered S.C. voters in 2016, but 38.5 percent of the voters impacted by the ID requirement were African-American,” and that “[t]hirty-five percent of voters citing an impediment to getting an ID were black, and 42 percent of the voters who forgot their ID were black.”⁴⁵⁵ Furthermore, even with a photo ID, at least one eligible voter was told that he was “dead” when presenting himself at the polls with a valid photo ID.⁴⁵⁶ During the 2018 election, reports illustrated that the state continued to have problems implementing the photo ID law, including providing information about the reasonable impediment process.⁴⁵⁷

During the 2016 legislative session, the South Carolina Legislature proposed a bill, H.3167, that would allow voters to use concealed weapons permits for photo ID. These permits are disproportionately possessed by white South Carolinian residents, as compared to Black residents. A proposed, but tabled, amendment to the bill would have added all state employee IDs and student IDs issued by one of South Carolina’s colleges or universities to the list of potential acceptable IDs under the law.⁴⁵⁸



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2021 voter suppression bills

Absentee voting. During the 2021 legislative session, the South Carolina Senate introduced S. 236, which would impose new barriers on absentee voters by: first, barring anyone except for immediate family members from returning completed absentee ballots on behalf of another voter; and second, explicitly banning the use of absentee ballot drop boxes.⁴⁵⁹ In the same legislative session, the South Carolina House introduced H. 4150, which would ban counties from offering voters the option to return their absentee ballots to drop boxes and impose extreme and potentially discriminatory reductions to absentee ballot eligibility—notably, raising the age of absentee ballot eligibility from 65 to 75 and abolishing numerous categories of absentee-voting eligibility, including for those who are on vacation, experiencing a death in the family, or attending to a sick or physically disabled person.⁴⁶⁰

Early voting. H. 4150 would implement an early voting framework that would likely result in racial disparities, including with respect to (1) the quantity and placement of early voting locations, (2) the days on which early voting would be available, and (3) the hours in which early voting locations would be open. H. 4150 would force larger counties—home to significant communities of color—to accommodate a greater number of registered voters in each of their early voting locations and would force voters in such locations to drive longer distances to access early voting sites. The bill would also mandate early voting during weekdays as well as the final Saturday before the election but would *not* permit any voting on Sunday, thereby proscribing the “Souls to the Polls” movement. Moreover, H. 4150 would mandate that all early voting occur between 8:30 A.M. and 5:00 P.M., prohibiting any early morning or evening voting.

Polling place consolidation and closure. As well as imposing barriers on absentee voting, S. 236 would lead to the consolidation and closure of polling places in municipal elections. Under current South Carolina law, any precinct with 500 or more registered voters must have its own polling place for municipal elections and is not permitted to “pool” with other precincts in a single polling place. S. 236 would increase that threshold by a factor of six, so that only precincts with 3,000 or more registered voters would be required to have their own polling place in municipal elections. S. 236 would also double the maximum size of pooled precincts from 1,500 registered voters to 3,000 registered voters. Moreover, S. 236 would amend current law to allow polling places that serve pooled precincts to be situated five miles away from the nearest part of any pooled precinct, rather than three miles.

Local Level:

Non-partisan elections

In 2014, the City Council in **Greenville** proposed moving from partisan to non-partisan elections, drawing criticism from the Council’s two minority representatives and others who contend that doing so would dilute the voting strength of the City’s two majority-minority districts.⁴⁶¹ Unlike other South Carolina cities, such as



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Columbia or Charleston, which have non-partisan elections and where the Black populations have remained steady, Greenville’s Black population has declined. Critics of non-partisan elections in Greenville have argued that removing party affiliation from elections will make it harder for Black representatives to get elected. According to some studies, non-partisan elections do not foster greater voter turnout; rather, party affiliation on ballots encourages increased voter participation.

Student voter eligibility

In 2016, the Board of Voter Registration and Elections in **Greenville County** required students, seeking to register to vote and who live on college campuses, to complete a questionnaire with answers that establish their residence in Greenville to the Board’s satisfaction and return the form within 10 days to register to vote or else their application will be rejected.⁴⁶² The questionnaire asks students to detail where their parents live (regardless of whether the student claims that as their legal residence), where their vehicle is registered, whether they work in Greenville County, whether they have other ties to the community, if they have ever registered to vote anywhere else, where their spouse lives (if married), where they have checking or savings accounts, where they pay taxes, whether they split living between Greenville and another location, and what residence they list on official documents. The Director of Elections claims that the additional questions are required, specifically in Greenville, by a 1973 federal district court decision that bars the Board from allowing college students who list their address as a college campus from registering to vote in the County. Other counties do not employ the questionnaire for any resident seeking to register to vote. A civil rights organization, on behalf of three college students, filed a lawsuit in state court seeking to temporarily enjoin the Board’s use of the questionnaire for the November 2016 elections, and, thereafter, block them from implementing the challenged policies that treat students seeking to register to vote unlike any other voters in the state. The policy had the potential to impact 7,000 students in Greenville. In October 2016, a federal court granted the temporary injunction, blocking the Board from implementing the questionnaire.⁴⁶³

Redistricting

In 2017, the South Carolina legislature overrode the Governor’s veto of legislation that added two at-large members to the then seven-member district-based elected **Sumter School District Board of Trustees (School Board)**. Under the legislation, these two at-large board seats were appointed in 2017 and the two appointees stood for election as incumbents in 2018; following redistricting after the 2020 decennial Census, those two seats were converted to two single-member districts. South Carolina’s Governor vetoed this legislation because it “deprives the Sumter County electorate of its opportunity to duly elect representatives to fill these seats and gives undue influence on state representatives.” At the time this legislation was passed, LDF launched a [review of](#) whether this redistricting legislation denies or diminishes voters’, particularly Black voters’, equal opportunity to elect their preferred candidates to the School Board in violation of federal law.⁴⁶⁴ We also expressed concern that this [redistricting](#) ensured the necessary votes to close rural schools in Sumter serving predominately Black students. Indeed, under the seven single-member system for the School Board, a majority



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of members rejected a proposal to close schools in April 2017; however, the addition of these two seats in July 2017 provided the necessary votes to close these schools in April 2018.

2021 voter suppression bill (restriction on absentee voting)

During the 2021 legislative session, members considered various measures, including one that would require mail-in absentee ballots to be received by mail or handed in by 5 p.m. on the date of the election to count as compared to current law, which provides a three-day grace period for envelopes postmarked by the primary or general election date.⁴⁶⁵ More than 11,600 ballots received during the first three days after the 2020 Election Day were lawfully counted, according to State Board of Elections data. Results still won't get finalized by county and state officials until later in the month of each election.

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TEXAS

State Level:

Photo ID requirement

Within two hours of the *Shelby County* decision, Texas’s Attorney General announced that the state’s photo ID law, previously rejected by a federal court as the most discriminatory measure of its kind in the country, would “immediately” go into effect. Texas’s Secretary of State also immediately announced that the state’s voter photo ID law would go into effect.⁴⁶⁶

On June 26, 2013, the Texas Department of Public Safety began to offer election identification certificates (“EICs”), one of the forms of acceptable photo IDs under the law, to Texas voters lacking other forms of acceptable photo ID. As of March 2016, Texas had only issued 653 EICs.⁴⁶⁷ Even though the EIC is technically “free,” applying for one can require several costly underlying documents like a birth certificate.⁴⁶⁸ Moreover, as a federal court found in 2012, some citizens must drive up to 250 miles to the nearest Department of Public Safety just to apply for an EIC.⁴⁶⁹ These costs to obtain a photo ID in Texas disproportionately harm minority voters. A survey of 46 counties reflected that “many election administrators had little to no familiarity with the [EIC] ID, and some expressed surprise that anyone would inquire about it.”⁴⁷⁰

Civil rights groups, including LDF, the U.S. DOJ, and other advocates challenged Texas’s implemented photo ID law, SB 14, in federal court in [Veasey v. Perry](#), under Section 2 of the VRA and various provisions of the U.S. Constitution.⁴⁷¹ In 2014, a federal court struck down Texas’s implementation of its photo ID law, holding that “SB 14 creates an unconstitutional burden on the right to vote, has an impermissible discriminatory effect against Hispanics and African-Americans [*i.e.*, they comprise a disproportionate share of the more than 600,000 registered voters and one million eligible voters who lack the required photo ID], and was imposed with an unconstitutional discriminatory purpose,” and that it “constitutes an unconstitutional poll tax.”⁴⁷² That ruling was stayed while Texas appealed the merits of the decision.⁴⁷³ Moreover, the Supreme Court, over a dissent by Justice Ginsburg, joined by Justices Sotomayor and Kagan, permitted the law to remain in effect for the November 2014 elections, and it remained in effect for the March 2016 primary season, reportedly impacting participation.⁴⁷⁴

During the early voting period in advance of the November 2014 elections, reports revealed that Texans were prevented from casting ballots because of the state’s discriminatory photo ID law.⁴⁷⁵ Turnout during the 2014 mid-term elections was reportedly lower than during the 2010 mid-term elections.⁴⁷⁶ Certain provisional ballots cast by voters lacking photo IDs also were not counted following those mid-term elections because voters failed to “cure” the ballots by presenting the required ID within six days of the election.⁴⁷⁷ **Travis County**, which covers UT-Austin and the surrounding student residential areas, had the highest number of



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uncured ballots, reflecting that many out-of-state students were impacted by the law since student IDs are no longer an acceptable form of photo ID. In the County, 217 provisional ballots were cast because voters did not have the required ID with them when voting, and only 6% of those ballots were “cured” within six days of the election.⁴⁷⁸ In the 23rd Congressional District, which runs along the majority of Texas’s border with Mexico, one study found that 13% of registered voters with the required ID stayed home during the 2014 midterm elections because they thought that they lacked proper photo ID under SB 14, illustrating inadequate public education about the law.⁴⁷⁹ Additionally, nearly 6% of registered voters in that congressional district state that their principal reason for not voting was because they did not possess one of the limited forms of required photo ID.⁴⁸⁰

During the 2016 primary election season, numerous voters were disenfranchised because of a lack of an acceptable photo ID.⁴⁸¹ Studies have shown that photo ID laws can depress voter turnout in Black and Latino communities.⁴⁸²

Following an appeal of the trial court decision that struck down SB 14, a three-judge panel in the Fifth Circuit ruled in 2015 that Texas’s strict voter ID measure violated Section 2 of the VRA for having a discriminatory effect on Black and Hispanic voters in Texas. The court also determined that SB 14 places an unconstitutional burden on the right to vote. However, the appellate court found that SB 14 did not constitute an unconstitutional poll tax, while remanding the case to the federal trial court to determine whether there is a discriminatory purpose behind the law and an appropriate remedy for the Section 2 effects and burden on the right to vote violations.⁴⁸³ In light of that decision, civil rights groups, on behalf of Plaintiffs, asked the Fifth Circuit to remand the case to the trial court to work on the remedy to provide interim relief from the discriminatory effect of the law in time for the November 2015 election and elections thereafter, which could have required Texas to include voter registration certificates as one of the acceptable forms of photo ID under the law. That request was considered by the full Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, which granted Texas’s motion to hear the case *en banc*. Texas, thereafter, continued to contend that the photo ID law does not violate the VRA, in spite of numerous federal court decisions that have determined otherwise, and sought to be allowed to continue to enforce its photo ID law through the 2016 election season.⁴⁸⁴ The *en banc* panel of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals heard Texas’s appeal on May 24, 2016.⁴⁸⁵

Following the Fifth Circuit’s refusal to grant that interim relief, civil rights advocates requested that the U.S. Supreme Court provide relief in advance of the 2016 presidential election.⁴⁸⁶ On April 29, 2016, the U.S. Supreme Court issued an order indicating that it would be willing to consider issuing interim relief in advance of the 2016 presidential election, if the Fifth Circuit failed to rule by July 20, 2016.⁴⁸⁷

The *en banc* appellate court issued its decision on July 20, 2016, holding that Texas’s photo ID law has a discriminatory effect, as more than 600,000 registered Texan voters and 1 million eligible Texas voters, disproportionately Black and Latino, lack an acceptable photo ID under the law, in violation of Section 2.⁴⁸⁸ The Fifth Circuit ordered the federal trial court to order an interim remedy in advance of the 2016 election.⁴⁸⁹ The *en banc* court ordered the trial court to consider, on remand from the appellate court, what, if any,



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discriminatory purpose motivated Texas to pass SB 14, and, upon a finding of discriminatory purpose, whether Texas should be bailed back into Section 5's preclearance process. The Fifth Circuit noted that despite Texas's interest in ensuring electoral integrity, there were "only two convictions for in-person voter impersonation fraud out of 20 million votes cast in the decade preceding Texas' adoption of the legislation in 2011."

Following the Fifth Circuit decision, the federal trial court began issuing interim remedial orders, providing for the ability of voters without an SB 14 photo ID to cast a regular ballot in the November 2016 election.⁴⁹⁰ Indeed, any voter who did not possess an SB 14 photo ID could sign a declaration affirming their identity, state their difficulty or "reasonable impediment" to obtaining an acceptable photo ID, and show an alternative form of identification—including a voter registration certificate, certified birth certificate, driver's or non-driver's license or personal ID card from any state (regardless of expiration date), utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or any other government document that displays the voter's name and an address—and vote a regular ballot. Voters who possessed one of the acceptable SB 14 photo IDs still had to show them to cast a ballot. In the lead up to the November election, civil rights organizations and the U.S. DOJ successfully challenged Texas's implementation of the interim remedy, including the inclusion of misleading information in the materials that it will use to train election officials and educate the public about the interim remedy.⁴⁹¹

A September 22, 2016 court order required Texas to conform its training and educational materials to its August 10, 2016 remedial order and to share certain materials with plaintiffs for review before their implementation. Certain plaintiffs also unsuccessfully challenged statements by the Attorney General and the chief election officer for Harris County, threatening to potentially prosecute voters who avail themselves of the Court's interim remedy.⁴⁹²

Advocates also expressed concern that, as of the end of August 2016, only 20% of Texas's 254 counties provided "minimally adequate information" about the interim remedial election requirements.⁴⁹³

A poll by the University of Houston found, as of October 2016, that despite the state's public education about the ID law changes, half of the 1,000 respondents remained uncertain about the ID requirements.⁴⁹⁴ Other reports indicated that there was widespread confusion about the interim remedial process (*i.e.*, the use of the affidavit to vote a regular ballot if voters did not possess and could not reasonably obtain an acceptable ID) during the 2016 elections, as well as referrals of affidavits by voters without acceptable ID for potential prosecution.⁴⁹⁵ Two additional studies, released in 2016, found that while voters who cast ballots in Texas in November 2016 rarely lacked a photo ID, those who did were disproportionately people of color.⁴⁹⁶ With respect to the reasons for not possessing a required ID, a study revealed that almost 30 percent of voters indicated that their IDs had been lost or stolen, about 11.5 percent cited work obligations, and another 4 percent said family obligations prevented them from getting one. Nearly 36 percent of individuals without IDs checked the "other" box, many of whom indicated they had moved so their current address did not match what was listed on their IDs. Notably, Texas's law does not require addresses to match between the IDs and poll books. Of those who selected the "other" option, 1.4 percent—82 people—cited cost as the reason they did not



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have the appropriate ID. Moreover, one of those studies found that Black and Latino voters in Texas were about 54 and 14 percent respectively more likely to vote without an ID than non-Hispanic, white voters. Other findings include that: most Texans who voted without an ID actually possessed the correct identification — they just did not have it with them on Election Day, as well as that voters without an ID in 2016 were 14 percentage points less likely to vote in Texas two years earlier than individuals who voted with an ID in 2016.

As early voting began on October 24, 2016, voters complained about the posting of outdated signage and guidance from poll workers that failed to inform them about alternatives to voting with a photo ID for those who qualify in non-compliance with the federal court’s interim remedial orders.⁴⁹⁷ These complaints arose across various Texas counties, including Bell, Bexar, Dallas, Denton, Dewitt, El Paso, Harris, Hays, McLennan, Rio Grande Valley, Travis, and Waller. Civil rights groups won an order against Bexar County, halting its illegal enforcement of SB 14 by posting inaccurate signs and information about the ID process on its website and on its hotline.⁴⁹⁸ Similar complaints regarding outdated signage and guidance from poll workers about the ID requirements were also reported on Election Day.⁴⁹⁹

The federal trial court set a briefing schedule and oral argument date on the issue of whether Texas intended to discriminate against minority voters in enacting SB 14.⁵⁰⁰ The January 24, 2017 oral argument date was rescheduled to February 28, 2017, after the U.S. DOJ sought a continuance on January 20, 2017, the presidential inauguration day, to “brief the new leadership of the Department on this case and the issues to be addressed at that hearing before making any representations to the Court.”⁵⁰¹ Ultimately, a day before the February 28 hearing, the U.S. DOJ moved to dismiss its claim that SB 14 was enacted with discriminatory intent, a claim that that agency had been making since 2013 when it filed its lawsuit against Texas; U.S. DOJ remains a party to the case on the claim already decided by the trial court and affirmed by the appellate court—that SB 14 has a discriminatory effect on Black and Latino Texans.⁵⁰² The U.S. DOJ cited the introduction of a new bill in the Texas legislature, SB 5 (discussed below) that they believed showed that Texas was taking effective and satisfactory steps to remedy the situation. The court held the hearing on intent on February 28, 2017.⁵⁰³

In the interim, on September 23, 2016, Texas petitioned to the U.S. Supreme Court, seeking its review of the *en banc* Fifth Circuit decision, and indicated that it may craft another photo ID law in the 2017 legislative session.⁵⁰⁴ This request did not impact the November 2016 election. On January 23, 2017, the Supreme Court declined to hear the case, with Justice Roberts writing that: “[a]lthough there is no barrier to our review, the discriminatory purpose claim is in an interlocutory posture, having been remanded for further consideration. As for the Section 2 claim, the District Court has yet to enter a final remedial order. Petitioners may raise either or both issues again after entry of final judgment. The issues will be better suited for certiorari review at that time.”⁵⁰⁵

On April 10, 2017, the trial court issued a decision finding (again) that Texas enacted SB 14 with a discriminatory purpose.⁵⁰⁶ The court ordered the parties to notify the court by June 10, 2017 about what, if any, remedial proceedings should occur considering the court’s finding that SB 14 has discriminatory results and a discriminatory purpose.



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During the 2017 legislative session, the Texas legislature passed, and the Governor signed into law, a new photo ID law, SB 5, which contains some provisions that are similar to those in place for the 2016 election because of the interim remedial order discussed above.⁵⁰⁷ However, this law also includes a state criminal penalty of up to two years for those who intentionally misuse the affidavit process that is part of the interim remedy, and failed to expand the list of acceptable photo IDs to include those issued by federal and state government agencies, U.S. military veterans' benefits cards, Native American tribal IDs, and college student IDs—the types of IDs more likely to be possessed by Black, Latino, and other Texans. For this and other reasons, lawyers challenging SB 14 argue that SB 5 keeps the former's basic discriminatory architecture and is old poison in a new bottle.⁵⁰⁸ The U.S. DOJ, which had challenged SB 14 for being intentionally discriminatory for approximately six years until 2017, joined Texas in contending that SB 5 cures SB 14's discriminatory purpose and results.⁵⁰⁹ Prior to passing, SB 5 had languished in the House after passing in the senate on the eve of the end of the regular legislative session. But Texas's Governor issued an emergency declaration to push the legislation onto the House's calendar. At the same time, the senate version of this bill was amended to H.B. 2691, which otherwise related to the appointment of election judges for countywide polling places and voter fraud at nursing homes, to ensure consideration of the photo ID law during the 2017 regular legislative session.

Also in June 2017, Texas considered, then immediately reversed, its decision to reduce operating hours at 11 of the state's busiest and largest driver's license-issuing offices, following pushback from legislators and others.⁵¹⁰ The reversal was against the backdrop of the state's continued defense of its discriminatory photo ID law, discussed above, which requires driver's licenses, among other select documents, to vote in-person. Alabama, as discussed above, also attempted to reduce the operating hours of ID-issuing offices before reversing course, though about a year later, after a Department of Transportation investigation and a lawsuit challenged those changes.

In August 2017, the federal district court *permanently enjoined* SB 14 of 2011 and SB 5 of 2017 as a remedy to its finding that SB 14 was enacted with a discriminatory purpose.⁵¹¹ This decision returned the voter identification requirements to those in place prior to implementation of SB 14 in 2013 and the interim remedy in 2016. The court determined that SB 5, passed six years after SB 14, did not eliminate root and branch the purposeful discrimination finding regarding SB 14, writing: "SB 5 perpetuates the selection of types of ID most likely to be possessed by Anglo voters and, disproportionately, not possessed by Hispanics and African-Americans." Moreover, "S.B. 5's methodology remains discriminatory because it imposes burdens disproportionately on blacks and Latinos." Indeed, the court stated: "[a]long with continued provisions that contribute to the discriminatory effects of the photo ID law, SB 5 on its face embodies some of the indicia of discriminatory purpose—particularly with respect to the enhancement of the threat of prosecution for perjury regarding a crime unrelated to the stated purpose of preventing in-person voter impersonation fraud." The court ordered the parties to brief it by August 31, 2017 on whether an evidentiary hearing is requested for the court's consideration of bail-in of Texas for all or some of its future voting changes under Section 3(c) of the VRA.⁵¹² Within two days of the decision, Texas made a request to the district court to stay *proceedings* in that



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court, as well as to the Fifth Circuit, to stay the district court's *decision*, pending appellate review; the Department of Justice did not oppose Texas's requests.⁵¹³ A three-judge court, by a vote of 2-1, agreed to stay the district court proceedings and decision enjoining SB 14 and SB 5 pending appellate review by a three-judge court.⁵¹⁴ Private Plaintiffs (civil rights organizations) petitioned for an *en banc* panel of the Fifth Circuit to hear the case on the merits and to rehear the three-judge court's decision to stay the district court's injunctive orders and proceedings.⁵¹⁵ Aligned with defendants on appeal, the U.S. DOJ also opposed Private Plaintiffs' request to be heard by the *en banc* panel.⁵¹⁶ The Fifth Circuit denied the petition; thus, the appeal proceeded before a three-judge court with oral arguments held on December 5, 2017.⁵¹⁷ Moreover, in December 2017, Private Plaintiffs moved the Fifth Circuit to lift the stay of the district court's decision enjoining SB 14 and SB 5 and that request remained pending in 2018.⁵¹⁸ On April 27, 2018, a divided three-judge court of the Fifth Circuit reversed the trial court's injunction against SB 5, finding it to be a sufficient remedy, and denied Private Plaintiffs' request to bail-in Texas under Section 3(c) of the VRA; that decision mooted Private Plaintiffs' motion to lift the stay of the district court's injunctions against SB 14 and SB 5.⁵¹⁹ None of the parties subsequently appealed any decisions.

Under S.B. 5, a 97-year-old former official who reportedly lacked required ID could not vote in a 2019 local election in San Antonio in Bexar County.⁵²⁰

As of June 2016, Texas has spent more than \$3.5 million defending its photo ID law since 2011, emblematic of the [time and expense of litigating Section 2 cases](#).⁵²¹ Reportedly, the U.S. DOJ has dedicated at least one million dollars to challenging SB 14.⁵²² These figures do not include the time and money expended by the law's opponents, civil rights, and pro-democracy organizations.

A separate state court challenge brought by a Texas judge, formerly a member of the Republican Party but now the only Democrat elected in a statewide office in Texas, alleged that Texas's photo ID law is an unconstitutional obstacle to a legal activity (*i.e.*, voting). After the case was heard by Texas's Fifth Court of Appeals in May 2016,⁵²³ the plaintiff abruptly dismissed it.⁵²⁴ The challenge was based on a provision of the Texas Constitution that provides: "[i]n all elections by the people, the vote shall be by ballot, and the Legislature shall provide for the numbering of tickets and make such other regulations as may be necessary *to detect and punish fraud* and preserve the purity of the ballot box; and the Legislature shall provide by law for the registration of all voters" (emphasis added). Considering that provision, the plaintiff alleged that Texas's photo ID law does not prevent fraud, but rather presumes that someone is guilty of fraud before they vote, serving as a prior restraint on the constitutional right to vote.

With DPS as an ID-issuing agency in Texas, in August 2018, the state considered closing 87 DPS offices as part of a purported effort to "close inefficient driver license offices" and maximize resources across the state.⁵²⁵ An array of critics opposed this proposal because of its impact on Texans, particularly those in rural areas who would have to drive farther (sometimes 20-50 additional miles) to access a DPS office; in some cases, the DPS office that would close would be the only one in a Texas county (there are 254 total counties). LDF and another civil rights organization also had serious [concerns](#) about the proposal because the closures would impact the



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ability of voters of colors and other Texans to access the IDs needed to vote under the state’s requirement, and to register to vote and update their voter registration at these offices. The state would save reportedly \$760,000 with these closures. It proposed sending mobile units to those counties that would lack a DPS office. This proposal would have had to be passed by the Texas Legislature; however, at the end of August 2018, a commission unanimously voted against further proposing these closures for the legislature to consider.⁵²⁶

Straight-party voting

In 2017, the Texas legislature considered—and passed—a ban on straight-ticket voting in all elections, to go into effect in 2020, raising concerns of such a law’s impact on Black and Latino voters’ opportunity to participate equally in the political process and the potential to place a disproportionate burden on Black and Latino voters right to vote.⁵²⁷ Straight party ticket-voting allows voters to select a slate of candidates affiliated with a particular party with the push of one button rather than to select each individual candidate on a ticket. More than 60% of Texas voters have used this practice. Black and Latino voters generally tend to vote for candidates affiliated with the Democratic party with a single mark on the ballot. One study of straight-ticket voting in Texas found that the two parties’ share of the straight-ticket vote was almost equal during the fall 2016 elections. But given Texas’s changing demographics, the study also found that the Republican share appears to be decreasing while the Democratic share appears to be increasing. And there was some evidence that straight-ticket voting is increasingly popular with Hispanic voters. Another [study](#) of Texas’s two largest counties, Harris and Dallas, found that precincts or House districts with higher minority populations had higher rates of straight-ticket voting. Opponents of the law contend that its burden—in terms of the increased time that it takes to vote were straight-ticket voting banned—is exacerbated in part by or linked to social and historical conditions in Texas that have produced or are producing discrimination against Black and Latino residents in education, employment, and health.

Relatedly, in 2020, a lawsuit was filed to challenge Texas’s elimination of straight-ticket voting, arguing that voters will be forced to take longer to cast their ballots, and minority voters who live in the more densely populated areas of the state will be disparately affected.⁵²⁸

Moreover, in 2021, the Republican-led Texas legislature introduced a bill (“SB 7”) that would eliminate straight-ticket voting once and for all by setting out that “voting system ballots may not be arranged in a manner that allows a political party’s candidates to be selected in one motion or gesture.”⁵²⁹ SB 7 includes a number of provisions that curtail access to vote, including eliminating voting mega centers, rolling back early voting hours and days, prohibiting election officials from distributing early voting applications, and restricting curbside voting. Moreover, SB 7 empowers partisan poll watchers by allowing them to roam freely near polling sites, check ballots, film voters, and surveil voters, enabling dangerous voter intimidation. This bill places disproportionate burdens and barriers on Black and Latinx Texas voters, as well as students, those living in rural communities and individuals with disabilities.⁵³⁰ Furthermore, SB 7’s language surrounding “purity of the ballot box” underscores its likely racially discriminatory purpose.⁵³¹



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On March 22, 2021, LDF submitted [written testimony](#) to the Texas Senate State Affairs Committee in opposition of SB 7. Despite this and other opposition from civil rights organizations and pro-democracy groups, the Texas House passed a pared down version of SB 7 in May 2021, maintaining many of the core voter restrictions and poll watcher protection provisions (see above) included in the original Senate version.⁵³² The bill is currently under review by a conference committee where final revisions and restrictions will be decided behind closed doors.⁵³³

Proof of Citizenship

In 2017, the Texas Legislature considered HB 3474, which would have required voters to show proof of citizenship to vote in Texas state elections; this bill was criticized by voting rights advocates for its potential impact on elderly, rural voters, among others.⁵³⁴

Relatedly, in January 2019, Texas's Secretary of State issued an advisory to all 254 counties in the state, urging them to review an error-ridden list of 98,000 supposed "non-citizens" on their voter registration rolls and potentially purge those individuals and investigate them for voter fraud.⁵³⁵ Recent reports about investigations and prosecutions of voter fraud in Texas confirm what is true nationally – it is not rampant.⁵³⁶ Civil rights organizations and others rebuked this action as (a) unnecessarily sowing confusion among election officials and voters about the accuracy of voter registration, as well as stoking fear among voters that they will be purged and/or falsely prosecuted for "non-citizen" registration and voting, and (b) potentially discriminatory under the VRA, NVRA, and other laws by resulting in thousands of eligible Texans being kicked off the voter registration rolls.⁵³⁷ These groups urged the SOS to rescind the advisory, and county officials to investigate this list and the bases for removing anyone from it before sending out notices to individuals to confirm their citizenship status; they also reminded county officials of their independent obligations to not arbitrarily and discriminatorily purge voters in violation of state and federal laws. In the days after state officials released and promoted this advisory, county officials began identifying problems and mistakes in the data provided by the SOS used to identify purported "non-citizens," including that the list had duplicate names, as well as identified thousands of people who are naturalized as citizens and are therefore eligible to register to vote and cast a ballot.⁵³⁸ At least three lawsuits were filed in response to this advisory, claiming that it is a violation of the VRA and is unconstitutional.⁵³⁹ As a result of the lawsuits, several counties—**Galveston, Caldwell, Blanco, Fayette, Washington, Hansford, Harrison, and Smith** counties—voluntarily agreed to stop any efforts to review the citizenship status of voters identified on the SOS's list and conduct any related purges during the pendency of the lawsuits.⁵⁴⁰ However, in April 2019, reports illuminated that election officials in Galveston, despite being sued in the above-mentioned lawsuits, had referred purported "non-citizen" people to the local district attorney's office to be investigated for voter fraud.⁵⁴¹ Moreover, a federal court: temporarily blocked Texas officials from purging voters identified in the SOS's list; instructed the SOS to affirmatively advise and direct local voting officials at the county level not to send notice of examination letters nor remove voters from registration lists without prior approval of the court; and directed certain counties not to remove any person from their current voter registration list until authorized by the court.⁵⁴² Texas was compelled to restore the



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voter registrations of voters caught up in this debacle as well.⁵⁴³ By April 2019, Texas had tentatively settled aspects of the claims against it, including by scrapping the error-prone list that it was relying on and providing advocates access to any new plan Texas proposes to confirm the eligibility of voters.⁵⁴⁴ Indeed, in late April, Texas settled the federal lawsuits against it by agreeing to rescind the advisory that questioned the citizenship of almost 100,000 registered voters, and agreeing to a new list maintenance process for determining eligibility to vote that does not burden voters.⁵⁴⁵ Reports indicate, however, that Texas has not abandoned all criminal investigations initiated based on the flawed list.⁵⁴⁶

2019 Omnibus Voter Suppression Bill

During the 2019 legislative session, Texas lawmakers considered an omnibus voter suppression bill, Senate Bill (“SB 9”), that considered more than two dozen election-law changes.⁵⁴⁷ This bill proposed to increase the potential criminal penalties for voting-related offenses, while at the same time lowering the standard for proving such offenses by eliminating the requirement of intent; as a result, people who made innocent mistakes while registering to vote or while casting a ballot, with no intent to violate the law or otherwise deceive—or even people who would have voted because they believed, inaccurately, but in good faith, that they are eligible to do so—could have been prosecuted for felonies, fined at substantial rates, and imprisoned for lengthy periods. SB 9 also would have amended the law regarding criminal investigations by granting immunity from prosecution, in most circumstances, to anyone employed by a law enforcement agency who commits an election-related offense while conducting an investigation. Additionally, SB 9 would have established a new criminal offense, potentially resulting in up to 180 days in jail and a \$2,000 fine for “imped[ing] a walkway, sidewalk, parking lot or roadway within 100 feet of a polling place in a manner that hinders a person from entering the polling place.” This provision’s dangerously—and likely impermissibly—vague wording could have called for arbitrary and discriminatory prosecution, particularly against election protection volunteers who assist voters and distribute nonpartisan voting guides outside polling precincts. Further, SB 9 would have imposed new and unnecessary burdens on voters with disabilities and others who need assistance to exercise their fundamental right to vote, as those seeking to offer assistance would have had to fill out forms including their name, address, and relationship to the voter(s). The same would have been true for voters with disabilities who wish to vote by mail-in ballot. SB 9 would also have imposed new burdens and paperwork on people who wished to assist voters who need help reading or marking their ballots. Moreover, SB 9 would have granted Texas’s SOS and its Attorney General with broad authority to access and distribute personal and confidential voter information. For example, SB 9 would have permitted the SOS to disclose voters’ social security numbers and birthdates to other states and jurisdictions, and would have provided the Attorney General with access to the computerized voter registration list that contains the name and registration information of every registered voter in Texas. This expansive access to and discretion over sensitive information would have been particularly concerning given the recent misuse of voter data and unlawful attempts to purge voters by both Texas’ SOS and AG, discussed above. And a provision of the bill would have required counties with countywide polling places to locate their voting centers based on the percentage of registered voters, despite the challenges to voter registration that often confront people of color. Sponsors of the bill contended that SB9 would enhance election integrity in Texas, a similar purported justification for Texas’s photo ID law. After overwhelming opposition



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from national and Texas-based organizations and judges from Texas's five largest counties, which included public testimony from hundreds of individuals and organizational representatives and petitions with thousands of signatures, SB9 failed during the legislative process.⁵⁴⁸

Redistricting

In July 2019, a three-judge federal court rejected a remedial request by minority plaintiffs to bail Texas back into Section 5's preclearance obligation using Section 3(c) of the VRA.⁵⁴⁹ This remedial request followed a seven-year fight to block congressional and state legislative maps that diluted Black and Latinx voting power. Following a 2012 challenge to those maps under Section 5 of the VRA, a three-judge panel ordered Texas to use interim remedial maps for upcoming 2012 presidential elections to fix the most egregiously discriminatory aspects of those legislative maps. Since those interim maps still carried over the taint of discrimination and were not final remedies, the federal court ordered the state to redraw them. Instead, Texas lawmakers adopted the interim maps during a legislative session, which minority plaintiffs subsequently challenged in federal court under Section 2 of the VRA and the U.S. Constitution. In 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court largely upheld the legislatively-adopted maps, affirming just one finding that an aspect of a plan constituted a racial gerrymander designed to harm Latinx voters.

2021 voter suppression bills (early voting, mega centers/drive thrus, voter intimidation/poll watching)

During the 2021 legislative session, the Texas legislature considered S.B. 7 and H.B. 6, which would operate to discourage and frustrate in person voting throughout Texas.⁵⁵⁰ S.B. 7 would drastically limit early voting hours by: (1) changing the current minimum of 12 required early voting hours per polling place into the new *absolute maximum*, thereby ending the discretion many urban counties, with higher Black and Latino populations, used to expand early voting; and (2) prohibiting those 12 hours of early voting from occurring at a time other than between 7:00 AM and 7:00 PM, which ensures counties do not provide voters with sufficient opportunities to vote after work. Moreover, S.B. 7 would limit the ability of low-income voters to obtain an early voting application by severely restricting the distribution of early voting ballot applications. Additionally, S.B. 7 takes aim at the voting mega centers that many large jurisdictions in Texas used in recent election cycles—and which Black and Latino voters disproportionately used in 2020. The bill would eliminate the possibility of such mega centers by requiring that “[e]ach countywide polling place in a county must have approximately the same number of voting machines as each other countywide polling place in the county.” S.B. 7 would further eliminate drive thru voting by barring voting from taking place “in a tent or other temporary movable structure or a parking garage, parking lot, or similar facility designed primarily for motor vehicles.” S.B. 7 attempts to eliminate straight-ticket voting (see “straight-party voting” section). Finally, S.B. 7 would give political operatives the ability, if not the right, to engage in voter intimidation, by deputizing and empowering poll watchers to roam freely and record voters in polling locations. Specifically, S.B. 7 discards Texas’ previous restrictions on watchers recording voters in polling locations, thereby providing opportunities for watchers to target and harass voters using their images from the polling locations. Relatedly, the other bill that the legislature considered—H.B. 6—would potentially empower poll watchers to engage in voter intimidation by



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establishing that watchers can never be removed from or asked to leave a polling location, including by an election judge, unless the watcher engages in conduct constituting election fraud. H.B. 6’s repeated appeals to notions of the “purity of the ballot box” underscore its likely racially discriminatory purpose. On the eve of the end of the legislative session, the final version of [SB7](#) took from both bills (SB7 and HB6) to propose cutting back early voting hours, banning drive-thru voting, placing restrictions on voting-by-mail including by making it a state jail felony for local officials to proactively send mail-in ballot applications to voters who did not request them, and enhancing access for partisan poll watchers, such as entitling them to be “near enough to see and hear” the election activity as compared to currently only being able to sit or stand “conveniently near” election workers, and allowing them “free movement” within a polling place, except for being present at a voting station when a voter is filling out a ballot. The final version of SB7 also included various additional rule changes that were not part of each chamber’s previous debate on the bill, including adding new ID requirements for mail-in ballots such as that voters must provide their driver’s license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number, if they have one, to request a ballot, and to include that information on the return envelopes containing their ballots for their votes to be counted. Moreover, the bill proposed to set a higher standard for qualifying for an absentee ballot by requiring a voter to be certain they will “not be capable” of voting in person based on their condition and set four specific categories a voter would have to choose from to qualify based on a disability — illness, injury, medical confinement ordered by a medical professional and mental or physical disability. Notwithstanding, on the last day of the legislative session, Democratic legislators walked out of the session, depriving the body of the quorum needed to vote on SB7.⁵⁵¹

Additionally, during a special legislative session beginning in July 2021, the Texas legislature considered yet once again many of the above-mentioned provisions, including bills that would: ban 24-hour voting and drive-through voting; prohibit election officials from proactively sending out absentee ballot applications to voters who have not requested them; add new voter ID requirements for voting by mail; limit third-party ballot collection; increase the criminal penalties for election workers who run afoul of regulations; limit what assistance can be provided to voters; and greatly expand the authority and autonomy of partisan poll watchers.⁵⁵² In response, members of Texas’s caucus of Democrats left the state for 38-days, during which they deprived the legislature of the ability to move forward with the bills. The Texas Attorney General threatened to arrest these legislative members upon their return to the state. Upon certain members of the caucus’ return to Texas, providing for a quorum, the legislature moved forward again with consideration of certain of the above-mentioned provisions, ultimately passing a 50-page version of SB1.⁵⁵³ This law would” limit early voting and the distribution of mail-in ballot applications, including by imposing new ID requirements; eliminate drive-thru voting centers and mail-in ballot drop-boxes; and impose new criminal penalties on individuals who assist voters, and on election officials who take action to protect voters from interference and intimidation by poll watchers. Multiple lawsuits have been filed to challenge SB1, including by [LDF](#).⁵⁵⁴



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Local Level:

Redistricting & voter qualifications

In 2013, the **City of Pasadena**, located in **Harris County**, changed the structure of the district council by eliminating two seats elected from districts that were predominantly comprised of Hispanic voters, and replacing those seats with two at-large seats elected from districts comprised of a majority of white voters.⁵⁵⁵ Voters approved this change. Pasadena's 152,000 residents include a large and burgeoning (63%) Latino population.⁵⁵⁶ Historically, jurisdictions have used at-large voting to dilute the voting strength of communities of color. A civil rights organization on behalf of five Latino voters filed a lawsuit in 2014, challenging this redistricting under the VRA and U.S. Constitution.⁵⁵⁷ An August 2016 decision by the federal court rejected Pasadena's attempt to dismiss the lawsuit, paving the way for the parties to proceed to a trial, which took place in November 2016.⁵⁵⁸ Following trial, in January 2017, the federal district court determined that Pasadena violated the VRA by redistricting in 2013 to dilute Latino voting strength, as well as the U.S. Constitution, writing that: "In short, Pasadena's elections are racially polarized. The City's 2013 racially polarized vote in favor of the 6-2 redistricting map and plan and the Council's 2014 vote to approve the change were narrowly decided. The effect was to dilute Latino voting strength. That effect was foreseeable and foreseen."⁵⁵⁹ As remedies, the federal court required Pasadena to use the plan with eight single-member districts for 2017 elections and, until 2023, to submit any election-related changes to the U.S. DOJ for Section 5 preclearance. The U.S. DOJ sent monitors to observe Pasadena elections in May 2017.⁵⁶⁰

Following the remedial proceedings, Pasadena appealed the trial court's decision to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals on the narrow issue of what voting method should be in place for the 2017 elections since qualifying for certain elections was imminent (*i.e.*, the remedial eight single-member redistricting plan ordered by the trial court and preferred by minority plaintiffs, or an alternative plan that, according to Pasadena, would cause less disruption). Following oral argument, the appellate court agreed with the trial court that 2017 elections must be conducted under the remedial district voting plan; the City declined to appeal that appellate ruling.⁵⁶¹ Notwithstanding, Pasadena is appealing the district court's finding of intentional discrimination which was the predicate for the court's order that Pasadena seek preapproval of its voting changes until 2023. In October 2017, Pasadena settled the challenge, leaving in place the district court's injunction requiring Pasadena to use its 8-0 redistricting plan for the remainder of the decade, as well as the district court's bail-in order placing Pasadena under section 5 preclearance until June 30, 2023.⁵⁶² In 2013 in **Galveston County**, officials cut the number of constables and justices of the peace districts in half from eight to four — a change that was previously rejected under Section 5.⁵⁶³ The benchmark redistricting plan had been put in place by earlier litigation to remedy discrimination and provide electoral opportunity for voters of color. The effect of the reduced number of officials will be to eliminate virtually all Black- and Latino-held positions on both boards. This redistricting comes in the midst of Black and Latino population gains in Galveston between 2000 and 2010.



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In 2015, **Galveston's City Council** proposed to change the city charter from a 6-1 electoral system to a 4-2-1 electoral system, drawing criticism that such a proposal is another attempt to diminish the voting strength of the minority community in Galveston.⁵⁶⁴ Section 5 previously blocked Galveston's attempts in 2011 and 1992 to change its method of electing City Council members from six single-member to four single-member and two at-large districts.⁵⁶⁵

In **Beaumont**, located in **Jefferson County**, a group of white legislators has acted to eliminate the four-person Black majority school board.⁵⁶⁶ Prior to the *Shelby County* decision, Section 5 blocked a plan that would have changed the method of election from seven single-member districts to five single-member districts and two at-large. This change would have likely reduced the number of Black representatives on the school board. Having failed in that regard, the group then stated that Black board members' districts were not up for re-election in that year, but nonetheless allowed white candidates to submit qualifying papers for elections for those same seats. Having been told that their seats were not up for re-election, the Black incumbents did not submit similar papers. A state court determined that the elections could go on, despite a controversial and convoluted series of events, including that Black candidates were deemed to have not filed qualifying papers for elections that they were led to believe were not taking place. Without Section 5 in place, a state court allowed Beaumont to implement the redistricting plan, changing the election method of certain seats on the board, while denying the challenges to the three Black board members' candidacies.

Polling Place Changes & Early Voting

In November 2016, a civil rights organization released a report that studied polling place closures in Texas since the *Shelby County* decision and found that “[a]lmost half of all Texas counties in [the] sample closed polling places since *Shelby*, resulting in 403 fewer voting locations for the 2016 election than in past years,” including **Fisher, Medina, Aransas, Coke, Irion, Caldwell, Nueces, and Galveston** counties, which have records of discrimination.⁵⁶⁷ The preclearance process in place prior to the *Shelby County* decision would have scrutinized the reasons for these closures, as well as whether voters were provided with adequate places to vote and notice.

Moreover, in 2016, civil rights and pro-democracy organizations in **Waller County** successfully urged a County judge, the Elections Administrator, and the County Commission, to protect early voting locations in a majority-minority precinct in the **City of Prairie View**, reminding those elected officials that closing early voting locations potentially violates the VRA.⁵⁶⁸ The County Commission had voted to reduce (from eight to two) the number of early voting locations in advance of the March 2016 primary. In response to this advocacy, election officials voted to increase the early voting locations in the City of Prairie View, including one within walking distance of Prairie View A&M University (PVAMU), a historically Black university.

Notwithstanding, prior to the November 2018 election, LDF, on behalf of five individual voters, [sued Waller County](#) officials for failing to provide Black PVAMU students with the same or similar early voting opportunities, including at the on-campus early voting site that was hard-won (see above), as those provided to white and non-student voters in other areas of the County.⁵⁶⁹ For example, the County failed to provide Black



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voters in the City of Prairie View or Black students at PVAMU with any early voting during the first of two weeks of early voting in the County and only provided five days of voting during the second week of early voting; other areas in the County had 11 days of early voting over the two week period. This suit alleged violations of the VRA, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Twenty-Six Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Waller County has a long history of discriminating against PVAMU students. Leading into the 2020 election season, Waller County officials, once again, decided to not allow early voting on-campus at PVAMU following new statewide legislation, H.B. 1888, that is subject to a separate lawsuit because of its impact on young voters.⁵⁷⁰

During the 2020 primary elections, Black people and other people of color were disproportionately affected by unacceptably long lines and wait-times, inadequately located and under-staffed and underequipped polling locations, and insufficient communication and transparency with voters, among other impediments or outright barriers, in **Harris County**, including at Texas State University, and other counties that disproportionately serve voters of color—including young voters.⁵⁷¹

Third-party voter registration & intimidation

In November 2016, a Hispanic organization filed a civil rights complaint with the U.S. DOJ, challenging the state’s investigation of voter registration and assistance activities in Hispanic neighborhoods in **Tarrant County** for allegedly being fraudulent, which had been intimidating and concerning for impacted elderly voters.⁵⁷² The investigation was spurred by purportedly improper get-out-the-vote efforts, which include helping elderly Hispanic voters with their mail-in ballots.

A voting rights advocacy group also complained to the U.S. DOJ about an email sent by the local Republican Party in **Tarrant County**, calling for “poll watchers” for “Democrat-controlled polling locations” to “make sure OUR VOTER ID LAW IS FOLLOWED.”⁵⁷³ According to the complainants, the overwhelming majority of “Democrat-controlled polling locations” in Tarrant County are comprised of a majority of minority eligible voters. As discussed above, a federal court has ordered Texas to remediate its ID law because of its discriminatory impact and that same court will reconsider whether it was enacted with a discriminatory purpose.

At the start of early voting for the 2016 general election, voters in **Bexar County** reported that a white man made repeated derogatory remarks against Latino people and others.⁵⁷⁴

In advance of the November 2018 elections, a Republican poll official in Waco in **McLennan County** reportedly refused to assist voters with machine issues when they were voting for Beto O’Rourke, a Democratic candidate for state senator. This reportedly occurred in a polling precinct that serves a significant number of Black registered voters. LDF [urged](#) officials to replace this poll worker with someone who would be willing to assist all voters regardless of their party affiliation.⁵⁷⁵



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Voter Purges

In August 2018, **Harris County** mistakenly placed more than 1,700 voters on its suspension list in response to a local Republican official’s challenge of nearly 4,000 voter registrations.⁵⁷⁶ Other individuals challenged by this official identified facilities associated with homeless people and those struggling with substance addictions and mental health issues, as well as students forms.⁵⁷⁷ The suspensions came to light after the county’s registrar’s office mailed letters to the voters whose registrations were challenged, asking them to confirm their addresses. Reportedly, Texas counties are required to give voters 30 days to respond to those requests before placing them on a suspension list, but the registrar’s office took that action prematurely in some cases. The registrar blamed the mistake on a software glitch and, after discovering the error after three or four days, reportedly fixed the 1,735 suspended registrations. The challenger is a founder of an organization that is widely considered to engage in voter suppression tactics by pushing the myth of voter fraud to justify strict photo ID requirements and voter purges; indeed, in October alone, this organization identified areas of Texas with significant minority populations as “hot spots” for purported “election integrity” issues and where “volunteers” should be on guard.⁵⁷⁸ With respect to the voter eligibility challenges, LDF and other civil rights and pro-democracy organizations sent a [letter](#) to the Texas SOS, requesting that he provide notice to county registrars and other officials throughout the state outlining and explaining the procedures for challenging a person’s eligibility to vote⁵⁷⁹

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VIRGINIA



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State and Local
Threats to Voting
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LDF
DEFEND EDUCATE EMPOWER





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VIRGINIA

State Level:

Photo ID requirement

Following the *Shelby County* decision, a spokesman for Virginia’s Governor said: “[w]e will be working with the Attorney General’s Office to determine what, if any, impact the decision will have on the implementation of this [photo ID] legislation in July of 2014.”⁵⁸⁰ The State’s Senate Majority Leader explained that voters worried about discriminatory voting measures can still bring a lawsuit, noting that: “[v]oter discrimination has no place in the Commonwealth and will not be tolerated by members of the Senate of Virginia. As every Virginia voter who believes a voting law or redistricting line to be discriminatory retains the ability to bring a court challenge, protections against voter discrimination remain intact despite the Supreme Court’s decision on the Voting Rights Act.”⁵⁸¹

Since the *Shelby County* decision, Virginia has implemented its new photo ID law beginning in June 2014.⁵⁸² As of October 2014, about 197,000 registered voters in Virginia did not have a driver’s license, an acceptable photo ID under the state’s new law.⁵⁸³ As of summer 2015, Virginia had issued only 4,400 “free” photo ID cards.⁵⁸⁴ Numerous studies have shown that photo ID laws depress voter turnout in Black and Latino communities.⁵⁸⁵ At least one study has attempted to examine the impact of the photo ID law in Virginia.⁵⁸⁶

In 2014, the State elections board considered, but ultimately modified, a policy that would have allowed voters to present expired (regardless of how long), but otherwise valid forms of photo ID at the polls; the adopted “compromise” policy allows voters to use an acceptable photo ID that has been expired no more than 12 months before Election Day.⁵⁸⁷

During the 2015 legislative session, state lawmakers passed a bill (under the guise of preventing purported non-documented voter fraud) that would require voters to submit a copy of their photo ID when they apply by mail to vote by absentee ballot.⁵⁸⁸ Under existing law, only people who apply for absentee ballots in person are required to present photo ID.

In June 2015, in *Lee v. Virginia Board of Elections*, individual voters and the Democratic Party challenged the photo ID law and other elections-related practices, including a state requirement that restores voting rights to nonviolent individuals with felony convictions only on an individual basis. The lawsuit alleges violations of Section 2 of the VRA, as well as the First, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Twenty-Sixth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.⁵⁸⁹ While continuing to challenge the photo ID requirement, the parties reached a settlement with respect to waiting times for voters to cast ballots and how the state Board of Elections and Department of Elections will handle machine breakdowns.⁵⁹⁰ The photo ID trial was held in late February 2016 and, while a



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decision in that case was pending, the photo ID law was in effect for the state's March 2016 presidential primaries.⁵⁹¹

Also, in March 2016, Virginia's Governor signed an executive order restoring voting rights to more than 200,000 citizens with past felony criminal convictions who have completed their sentences and any supervised probation or parole; at least 11,000 formerly incarcerated people had registered to vote in the state, as of early July 2016, following the Governor's executive order.⁵⁹² Republican representatives and Virginia voters filed lawsuits, challenging the Governor's authority to sign that order providing voting rights restoration for this broad class of individuals rather than having done so on an individualized basis.⁵⁹³ The Virginia Supreme Court, which held a special session in July 2016 to address this challenge in advance of the November 2016 elections, by a 4-3 vote, struck down the Governor's order as unconstitutional, holding that the Governor exceeded his authority by unilaterally rewriting and suspending Virginia's policy of lifetime disfranchisement for people with felony convictions.⁵⁹⁴ In response, the Governor promised to restore on an individual-by-individual basis the voting rights of the more than 200,000 people with felony convictions; as of May 2017, he had restored voting rights to 156,000 individuals with felony convictions.⁵⁹⁵

In late May 2016, a federal court upheld Virginia's photo ID law, following the February trial on the law. The court wrote: "[w]hile the merits of this voter identification law . . . can be reasonably debated, it remains true that Virginia has created a scheme of laws to accommodate all people in their right to vote."⁵⁹⁶ While plaintiffs appealed this ruling to the federal Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit on an expedited basis, which held a hearing on the appeal in September 2016,⁵⁹⁷ the appellate court affirmed the trial court's decision.⁵⁹⁸ Virginia has spent at least \$600,000, defending its photo ID law.⁵⁹⁹

During the 2017 legislative session, a subcommittee blocked HB 1904, which would have eliminated Virginia's requirement that registered voters produce one of the accepted photo IDs to vote in person, as well as amendments that would have permitted voters to use out-of-state university student IDs or photo IDs from state-run nursing homes.⁶⁰⁰

Notably, in 2021, Republican officials considered permitting voters to participate in their primary process, even if they left blank parts of the application process for delegates, including a requirement for a state-issued voter ID and a signature.⁶⁰¹

Proof of Citizenship

A state lawmaker has proposed legislation, HB 1598, that would require documentary proof of citizenship to vote in state and local elections, in the face of opposition by civil rights and pro-democracy organizations.⁶⁰² Specifically, the proposal would require registrants to provide a birth certificate, passport, naturalization document, or other record accepted under federal law, beginning January 1, 2018, to vote in state and local elections. Such a requirement potentially sets up a two-tiered/dual system for voting for federal and state/local elections. The federal form, which can be used as an alternative to local voter registration forms and already



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requires individuals to swear, under penalty of perjury, that they are citizens, does not require a birth certificate or other document as proof of citizenship when registering.

Restrictions on voter registration

After the *Shelby County* decision, Virginia reportedly placed restrictions on community-driven voting initiatives, including prohibiting pre-populated registration forms, and shortening the deadline for returning voter registration forms to the Virginia Elections Commission.⁶⁰³ The legislature attempted these restrictions again during the 2017 legislative session, over opposition from civil rights and pro-democracy organizations.⁶⁰⁴ Given the reliance by Latino and Black communities on such community-based voter registration drives, these restrictions have the potential to harm those communities.⁶⁰⁵

In October 2016, responding to a lawsuit filed by a civil rights organization, a federal court ordered the State to extend the voter registration deadline for the November 2016 election after heavy demand prevented some eligible voters from registering online.⁶⁰⁶ Nearly 28,000 people registered to vote because of the extension.⁶⁰⁷

During the 2017 legislative session, Virginia lawmakers considered a bill, SB 1581, over opposition from pro-democracy organizations, that would reject any new voter registration application if the name, social security number, and date of birth do not match information on file with the Social Security Administration or other database approved by the State Board of Elections, and would subject existing voters' registrations to the same scheme.⁶⁰⁸ Opponents raised concerns about this legislation given the probability of data entry errors, typographical errors, and other issues that are no fault of the applicant and have nothing to do with their eligibility to vote. The Governor ultimately vetoed this bill.



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ABOUT THE NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF or NAACP Legal Defense Fund) is the country's first and foremost civil rights law organization. Founded in 1940, LDF has an unparalleled record of expert legal advocacy in state and federal courts and its legal victories serve as the foundation for the civil rights that all Americans enjoy today.

LDF has worked for over 75 years to ensure the full, proper, and continued enforcement of both the United States Constitution and the federal statutes guaranteeing full political participation, including the Voting Rights Act. To that end, LDF has been involved in nearly all of the precedent-setting cases regarding minority political representation and voting rights before federal and state courts. See, e.g., Shelby Cty., Ala. v. Holder, 133 S. Ct. 2612 (2013); Nw. Austin Mun. Util. Dist. No. One v. Holder, 557 U.S. 193 (2009); League of United Latin Am. Citizens (LULAC) v. Perry, 548 U.S. 399 (2006); Georgia v. Ashcroft, 539 U.S. 461 (2003); Easley v. Cromartie, 532 U.S. 234 (2001); Bush v. Vera, 517 U.S. 952 (1996); Shaw v. Hunt, 517 U.S. 899 (1996); United States v. Hays, 515 U.S. 737 (1995); Chisom v. Roemer, 501 U.S. 380 (1991); Thornburg v. Gingles, 478 U.S. 30 (1986); Beer v. United States, 425 U.S. 130 (1976); White v. Regester, 422 U.S. 935 (1975) (per curiam); Gomillion v. Lightfoot, 364 U.S. 339 (1960); Terry v. Adams, 345 U.S. 461 (1953); Smith v. Allwright, 321 U.S. 649 (1944).

LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957— although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.

If you have questions or need further information, please contact LDF Deputy Director of Litigation, Leah Aden, who has authored this compendium since 2013. Leah appreciates the support that the following individuals have provided to the development of this information over eight years: Fadilat Olasupo, Nicole de los Santos, Mohammed Amer, Clyde Hollins, Sara Carter, Regina Fairfax, and Maria Smith for their editorial, drafting, and other contributions to this compendium. For questions about the information contained herein or to share information about voting changes in your community, please contact 212.965.2200 or vote@naacpldf.org.

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