



League of Women Voters

Election Improvement Agenda

With Election 2012 in the rear-view mirror and 2014—and 2016—looming soon, the League of Women Voters is pleased to present this comprehensive Election Improvement Agenda. Even as our electorate grows ever more diverse, we have witnessed an undeniable and systematic assault on voters' right to participate, the likes of which we have not seen since the Jim Crow era. At the same time, our nation continues to suffer from an under-resourced, desperately outdated and increasingly complex election system in dire need of modernization.

This report draws upon the insights and localized field reports provided from the front lines by our nearly 800 state and local volunteer activist teams nationwide. It provides an action plan for overcoming the fallout from recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions and sets in motion the League's plans to overcome the unprecedented and well-organized state-level voter suppression crusades taking place nationwide. Finally, it lays out the League's roadmap for taking advantage of practical opportunities to build election systems that meet tomorrow's needs.

This includes continuing to bring in millions of new voters and advocating for solutions that make our elections free, fair and accessible to all. Together, these pose key challenges for future election cycles.

The League's 2011-2012 Impact

- **Voter suppression defeated in 11+ states**
- **100,000+ voters registered online & on the ground**
- **3.5 million voters served online**
- **2 million educational materials printed**
- **600+ candidate debates hosted nationwide**
- **200,000 GOTV contacts made**
- **14,000+ news stories featured the League's work**

About our Data-Gathering

In keeping with the League of Women Voters' 93-year track record of fighting so that all Americans of all backgrounds have an equal say in our democracy, in January 2011 the League made an unprecedented

organization-wide commitment to launch a comprehensive Power the Vote campaign.

Fueled by external support and existing internal resources, the initiative aimed to heighten voter protection and engagement by equipping all 800 volunteer-driven state and local Leagues with guidance, resources, training, national staff support

and a visionary strategy for success. The Power the Vote initiative set the framework for a vast array of coordinated League activities in all 50 states. It also provided a powerful dose of momentum and coordinated goal-setting to help our tens of thousands of volunteers and supporters **ultimately register well over one hundred thousand voters, equip millions with education materials to help them successfully cast a vote and protect the rights of many millions more.**

League leaders drove strategic planning, conducted individual consultations with local volunteer teams, supported planning and execution of community projects, and developed plans and toolkits to help volunteers engage with voters, lawmakers, partners and the media.



At the national level, League staff trained 2,000+ volunteers and leaders through webinars, in-person trainings, and flexible one-on-one support to address last-minute challenges right up until Election Day. Post-election, the national League office conducted its most extensive survey ever of League leaders and activists around the country in order to identify key challenges and present plans for future programs. This publication is possible because of detailed reports provided from hundreds of League leaders nationwide.

For more detail about our 2012 Power the Vote Campaign and outcomes, [please read our whitepaper here.](#)

A Never-Ending Assault on Voters' Rights

In just the past few years, more than 30 states have enacted restrictive voter suppression laws that are a calculated, strategic attempt to silence the voices of those least heard and rarely listened to in this country: the poor, the elderly, racial and ethnic minorities, the young and persons with disabilities.

In 2011-2012, the League's well-organized state campaigns resulted in the defeat of five strict voter photo ID bills (CO, IA, ME, MO and NC); successful court action to block ID laws from implementation in four more states (SC, TX, PA and WI); a successful "People's Veto" in Maine in relation to same-day voter registration; and successful legal fights to reinstate the rights of voter registration organizations in Florida and prevent the illegal purging of voters in Colorado. In Minnesota, the League was instrumental in leading a successful coalition effort to make possible the nation's first-ever voter-led rejection of a proposed constitutional amendment to require photo ID.

Despite these staggering efforts of thousands of League volunteers and their partners, renewed voter suppression efforts began on day one of the 2013 state legislative season. All in all, nearly 7,000 election-related bills were introduced as of

July 2013: Some of these bills were pro-voter reforms while others would make it more difficult for voters to participate in elections.

League volunteers are currently combatting widespread voter suppression attempts in Texas, North Carolina and elsewhere; see below.

Additionally, as of July 2013, League advocates continue to move forward with critical legal challenges to a restrictive voter photo ID law in Pennsylvania, and separate efforts to halt both discriminatory redistricting maps and restrictive voting laws in North Carolina and Wisconsin.

In addition to the now all-too-common proposed voter photo ID laws, state legislatures in 2013 appear fixated on rolling back common-sense reforms that have been making the process easier for voters for decades. For example, in North Carolina the legislature ended same-day registration, shortened early voting, dispensed with Sunday voting and defunded programs to help pre-register 16 and 17 year olds. The League has brought two legal challenges against the new North Carolina law; see below for more.

Game-Changing Supreme Court Decisions

It had been known for months that two key voting rights decisions before the Supreme Court could well change the landscape for future election cycles. As expected, in the midst of this bruising 2013 legislative season, the Supreme Court weighed in on two key voting laws: the National Voter

Registration Act (NVRA) and the landmark Voting Rights Act (VRA).

Voting advocates celebrated a major win when the Court sided with the League and other plaintiffs in ruling that Arizona is prohibited by the NVRA from applying its documentary proof of citizenship provision to persons who apply to register to vote using the Federal Form. The Secretaries of State in Arizona and Kansas have reacted to this decision by petitioning the federal Election Assistance Commission for permission to add proof-of-citizenship requirements to the federal voter registration form in their respective states. The League and partners are currently weighing legal options to halt these attempts to effectively overturn the Court's decision.

Just a week after the NVRA victory, the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, effectively gutting the federal "preclearance" mechanism that has protected millions by preventing discrimination in voting for more than four decades.

The floodgates are now open for state legislatures to put in place barriers to voting in the jurisdictions with the worst records of discrimination.

Indeed, within just days of the Court's decision, we saw vicious actions taken against voters in several critical states that had previously been subject to VRA preclearance:

- In Texas, the legislature took immediate steps to advance both its photo ID requirement that had been blocked by the US Department of Justice and an

egregious redistricting plan that had been found to be discriminatory.

- In North Carolina, the state immediately took steps to advance a photo ID requirement, reduce early voting and eliminate same-day registration. The League is the named plaintiff in a federal legal challenge to overturn North Carolina's egregious law. In its suit, the League has also asked the Court to bring the state back into preclearance using Section 3 of the VRA, as DOJ has sought to do in Texas.
- Alabama and Mississippi are moving forward with implementing voter photo ID laws.

A Path Forward

The League is immediately taking a multi-pronged approach to combat the effects of the Supreme Court decision, prevent other state-based attempts to restrict the vote, and push for urgently needed reforms to our outdated and unrepresentative election system.

1. Demand Urgent Federal Action

The League believes that now and going forward, Congress must act to restore the effectiveness of the Voting Rights Act. With state officials already capitalizing on the opportunity to disenfranchise voters, time is of the essence. It is up to Congress to act quickly and decisively to close the door to voter discrimination by restoring the effectiveness of the Voting Rights Act.

The League is working with partners and members of Congress and their staffs on a

multi-faceted campaign to repair, renew and restore the VRA in a bipartisan and bicameral fashion. To support this work, the League has successfully leveraged grassroots activists to submit more than 30,000 letters urging Congress to take action. League leaders have also successfully published more than twenty state and local newspaper letters to the editor on the topic.

The League is also actively pursuing avenues for bringing states back into preclearance using Section 3 of the Voting Rights Act in North Carolina and has vocally supported the U.S. Department of Justice's decision to do so in Texas. Use of Section 3 preclearance is one critical step toward undoing the damage done by the Court's decision even as we await full-scale action by Congress.



The League and its legal partners are also working with the Obama Administration to ensure the Affordable Care Act provides voter registration opportunities in full compliance with NVRA requirements for state public assistance agencies; see the “New opportunities for NVRA compliance” section below.

Our Election Improvement Agenda

- **Federal action to restore the VRA and protect the NVRA**
- **Re-commit our resources to win full-scale statewide campaigns to protect voters' rights (20+ states)**
- **Federal and state legal action to fight back against voter suppression and for state compliance with VRA/NVRA**
- **Register 100,000 voters throughout 2013 - 2014**
- **Educate millions through VOTE411.org and on the ground**
- **Pass pro-voter reforms like early voting, permanent & portable registration, better polling place management, online registration and other electronic streamlining.**

Additionally, League advocates testified at three regional meetings of the Presidential Commission on Elections and in doing so urged the Commission to move forward in support of key reforms that are known to increase turnout and improve voters' experiences, including online voter registration, expanded early voting opportunities, equitable polling place resources, and more. Additionally, the League of Women Voters of the United States is providing written testimony to the Commission as it considers its recommendations.

2. Halt the Impact of Harmful State Legislation

With voters' rights being restricted right now, we simply cannot wait for Congress to act. As a result, the League is redoubling its efforts in the states to fight restrictions like voter photo ID, limits on early voting, efforts

to end same-day voter registration, and unfair redistricting.

With the right combination of determination, reputation, organization and resources, state League advocates have been remarkably successful in advocating against voter suppression and discrimination at the state level, both in areas covered by Section 5 of the VRA and those that are not. Given the uncertain future of Congressional action to fix the VRA, the League believes that continuing to fight the ground game at the state level will be an essential and highly effective approach.

For more than seven years, the national League has equipped and supported key voting advocates in 31 states through our Public Advocacy for Voter Protection Project. Through this national program the League hope to continue providing strategic legislative, legal, field organizing and communications assistance and equip League leaders with the tools they need to combat restrictive voting laws.

As noted above, the League has been instrumental in voting rights successes at the state level in recent years, including:

- The defeat of five strict voter photo ID bills (CO, IA, ME, MO and NC) in 2011-2012;
- Successful court action to block ID laws from 2012 implementation in four more states (SC, TX, PA and WI);
- Success of the “People’s Veto” in ME in relation to same-day voter registration; and,
- A successful “Vote No” campaign to urge Minnesota voters to reject a proposed constitutional amendment that would have required voter photo ID and eliminated Election Day Registration in future elections.

In states where voter photo ID barriers have been implemented, League advocates have worked closely with partners to ensure voters have the information they need to obtain the required identification in time for Election Day. Leagues have printed and distributed education materials detailing new requirements, transported voters to DMV’s, and provided help in obtaining, and in some instances paying for, underlying documentation (e.g.; birth certificates) needed to get a photo ID.

The League is well-positioned to continue its role as a leader of such well-organized voting rights campaigns at the state level. Additional partners and consistent resources are needed so that the voting rights community is able to continue combatting these growing threats.

3. Redouble Efforts to Register and Empower Underrepresented Voters

While legislative solutions are vital to protecting and strengthening the right to vote, we must not wait for our lawmakers to take action. As we proved last year, an effective counter to the attacks on voters is widespread citizen action to register and get out and vote.

Only when our electorate represents the true diversity of our communities will our public policies reflect the needs of all Americans. As post-election Census data shows, major groups within our electorate—including young people and Hispanics— still remain alarmingly on the sidelines of the election process.

With the added negative impact of voter suppression laws designed specifically to keep them home on Election Day, underrepresented communities of voters have never needed the League and its partners—including forward-thinking elections officials—more than right now.

As one of the nation’s leading voter registration organizations, the League successfully registered hundreds of thousands of new voters in 2012. We have unlimited potential to expand our registration efforts in 2013 and 2014.

2013-2014 Voter Registration Campaigns

In all 50 states, the League is conducting campaigns to increase voter registration and turnout with the goal of registering 100,000 new voters throughout 2013 - 2014. We are ramping up focused field registration programs in high-minority high schools, naturalization ceremonies and community colleges and have developed

key grassroots organizing tools to support this effort, including a re-published High School Voter Registration Training Manual entitled, "[Empowering the Voters of Tomorrow](#)."

Encouraged by our successes and preliminary 2012 data from Nonprofit VOTE, NOI and others showing the significant positive impact of independent registration organizations, the League has renewed its commitment to register the hardest-to-reach new voters in 2013 and 2014.

Specifically, the League is continuing to build voter registration programs that effectively reached hundreds of thousands of diverse voters in 2012. These included young voters, especially non-college youth, community college and high school students, as well as new citizens and other underrepresented groups who are often left out of mainstream voter registration efforts.

The League is also proud to once again serve on the national organizing committee for National Voter Registration Day, an unprecedented coordinated effort that successfully engaged thousands of volunteers and organizations to register more than 350,000 voters in 2012. As of July 2013, more than 200 local Leagues have signed up to participate in National Voter Registration Day 2013, representing about half of all local organizations signed up to participate.

Finally, the League is proud to have launched an improved online voter registration program. With dedicated efforts to reach underrepresented voters online in key states in 2012, the League facilitated registration by more than 33,000 Americans through its www.VOTE411.org website. We

are encouraged by recent NOI analysis showing that the League's online registrants turned out to vote at rates slightly higher than the average rate of other groups, and are committed to continuing to improve our online reach.

New Opportunities for NVRA Compliance

In the wake of the positive Supreme Court decision upholding the integrity of the NVRA, League advocates will continue to urge state leaders to fully comply with the federal requirements set forth in this landmark law. This includes: informing public assistance agencies of their Section 7 obligation to provide voter registration opportunities to individuals; guiding agencies and elections officials so that their registration work is as effective as possible; and taking legal action when necessary.

In South Carolina, the League will soon announce its intention to bring a legal challenge in conjunction with the NAACP and Project Vote. The suit will challenge the state's clear and egregious non-compliance with NVRA at social service agencies.

Similarly, in Kansas, League advocates are working with partners to pursue a legal challenge to the broad non-compliance documented there.

Voter Registration and the Affordable Care Act

Among the many important aspects of NVRA compliance, the League is particularly interested in ensuring that state officials uphold their obligations to provide voter registration opportunities to individuals seeking benefits through the federal Affordable Care Act, set for implementation beginning in October 2013. As health care

exchanges will provide assistance to individuals seeking health benefits and insurance, including Medicaid beneficiaries, they must fully comply with Section 7 of the NVRA.

At the federal level, LWVUS is actively working with partners to ensure that the federal ACA application, which will serve as a model for all states, fully complies with the NVRA. [See our recent comments to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.](#)

Second, LWVUS and partners are working throughout the summer of 2013 to inform state officials of their obligations, sending letters and background legal information to chief state elections officials in states with state-run health exchanges, supporting in-state advocates as they provide guidance for proper implementation, and more.

Educating Millions through VOTE411.org

Voters need quality and trusted information about how elections work in their communities, when and where to vote, and who will be on their ballot. This information is especially critical for mobilizing underrepresented groups of voters as well as those most affected by restrictive voting laws in their states.

There is no better national source of election-related information than the League's VOTE411 website, which served over 2.5 million voters in 2012.

VOTE411 is consistently used as a key resource by the 1-866-OUR-VOTE and 1-888-VE-Y-VOTA hotlines, the media, thousands of partner organizations and hundreds of League volunteer teams nationwide. VOTE411 is updated year-

round and contains all the laws, regulations and polling place locations in each state, as well as customized information about thousands of candidates running for office.

Lack of candidate information is a key barrier keeping many underrepresented groups of voters from the polls on Election Day, according to recent research conducted by Lake Research Partners. Candidate information is especially lacking during non-presidential election years, when less-publicized state and local races dominate the ballot.

The League seeks to overcome this barrier by providing an ever-increasing breadth of local candidate information through VOTE411.org.

Americans must turn out and vote in 2014 and beyond in order to weigh in on the great challenges facing our nation. Leagues in nearly 800 communities in every state are steadfast in their commitment to increase turnout so that we have a representative electorate. VOTE411 continues to be a key tool in this work.

A Time for Common-Sense Election Reforms

The time has come for a comprehensive, multi-faceted effort to leverage public enthusiasm and lawmakers' willingness to modernize and streamline our election system. The League has already made headway in key states so far in 2013.

While most voters across the country endured relatively short wait times and uneventful voting experiences in 2012, the media coverage was nevertheless full of images showing unbearably long lines in key states like Florida and Virginia, last-minute challenges associated with Hurricane Sandy's devastating impact along the heavily populated East Coast, and many more seemingly preventable problems at the polls.

Most often affected were voters living in underrepresented communities. For example, post-election data released by MIT showed that black voters, on average, waited nearly twice as long as white voters to vote. Hispanic voters also waited significantly longer than whites.

When President Obama gave his acceptance speech on election night, he pointed to some of the challenges that voters faced when casting their ballot earlier that day, saying "we have to fix that."

In the days following the election, the League released this multi-pronged platform for proactive election reform beginning in 2013. The plan includes the following specific election administration reform priorities at the state level:

Secure Online Voter Registration

As more and more Americans use the Internet for daily tasks like paying bills and banking, states must develop online voter registration programs to modernize registration and make it more efficient.

Online registration can reduce costs for already strapped state and local budgets and can reduce the errors that come when officials have to re-enter information from

handwritten forms. We're encouraged that, as of July 2013, at least 17 states have begun to upgrade their voter registration systems to meet the needs of our modern mobile society, with several additional states consider passing it in the coming months. But we also want to ensure that these programs are designed to be available to all eligible citizens.

Unfortunately, many states currently restrict online voter registration to those who already have a driver's license, which means that millions of eligible voters cannot register or update their registrations online. Not only does this limitation substantially reduce the effectiveness of online registration, it also raises concerns about the discriminatory effect. State Leagues are working now with state officials to develop secure online voter registration that best serves all eligible voters.

Permanent and Portable Statewide Voter Registration

Another way to streamline the voter registration process and reduce problems at the polls is to make an individual's registration permanent and portable within a state because nearly 50 percent of Americans will move within five years. This means that once a voter has taken the responsibility to properly register to vote, the registration stays active whenever they move within that state. Voters would still be able to update their addresses before Election Day, but with portable registration, they will also be able to update their addresses when they go to vote. This would help reduce confusion at polling places.

Many voters do not realize they need to update their voter registration when they

move. They show up and wait in line at their new polling place, but then have to be directed to another location or given a provisional ballot. Allowing address updates at the polling place reduces voter confusion while saving the time and costs associated with provisional ballots. What's more, it ensures that those who have a high propensity to move, including renters, young people and lower-income voters, aren't kept from voting.

Citizens who have already followed the rules and taken the initiative to register to vote should be able to easily update their addresses and vote and not be penalized for moving.

Expanded Early Voting

Early voting rules vary widely from state to state, with some offering no early voting options at all. Early voting is important not only because it gives all voters an additional opportunity to fit the important act of voting into busy schedules -- it also reduces the crush of voters on Election Day and makes the whole process more efficient.

The League believes that no voter should have to wait more than one hour to vote (not the three and four hours many voters faced in 2012), and we support early voting because it helps reduce the long lines at the polls. Every state should have in-person early voting, and it should be available at multiple convenient locations outside of traditional business hours, not only in the evening but also on Saturday and Sunday.

Improved Polling Place Management

Our hard-working elections officials and volunteers aren't getting the resources they

need to make all elections run smoothly. Sometimes the resources that are available -- voting machines, ballots, voter registration lists, polling places and poll workers -- are not allocated properly and fairly. This can result in poorly staffed and equipped polling places and unexpectedly long lines at particular precincts, often those that historically have had lower voter turnout.

When there is a particularly exciting election, high new voter registration rates, or population shifts, problems develop. We need to increase the total resources that go toward making our election system work, but we also need to ensure that those resources are distributed fairly and equitably. States need standards that aren't just based on the old patterns but take into account all eligible voters. This would improve the experience for both voters and Election Day workers, as well as help to reduce long lines and increase the efficient use of the resources we do have.

Electronic Streamlining

Using electronic systems instead of paper ones can streamline the elections process and make it more accurate, less costly and more accessible. One key step is for agencies that collect voter registration information, including motor vehicle and social service offices, to electronically transfer voter registration data to elections officials instead of sending completed paper voter registration forms.

Moving from paper to electronic voter registration forms reduces transcription errors and increases government efficiency by reducing duplicative data entry. In addition, jurisdictions that electronically

transmit voter information are less likely to have voter registration forms fall through the cracks, which means fewer provisional ballots and less of a post-election administrative burden on elections officials and voters alike.

Another critical component of electronic streamlining is the creation of online voter registration portals. Providing easy and accessible methods for voters to review and update their registration information is critical to keeping current and accurate voter registration lists. It is also a cost-effective tool for managing voter registration systems. Online portals eliminate the need for voters to print and mail-in new voter registration forms in order to update their records or to register to vote for the first time.

Electronic streamlining also includes equipping poll workers with electronic poll books so that they have access to the statewide voter registration database, which every state is now required to have. Electronic poll books enable the transmittal of real-time information, such as address updates and voter check-ins, to safeguard against possible multiple voting. Real-time information also enables voters who have moved homes to show up at the correct polling place, update their registration information and vote by a regular, rather than a provisional, ballot. It also enables poll workers to easily redirect voters who appear to be at the wrong polling place. Electronic poll books also shorten waiting times and lines on Election Day by enabling all poll workers to process voters and eliminating the need for poll workers to search through pages of paper-based lists to locate a voter's name.

By adopting these electronic practices, government agencies can eliminate costly and time consuming steps in election administration, reduce errors and increase the ease and convenience of the elections process for both their workers and for voters.



Early Signs of Success

The League and other advocates are working right now in Ohio, Michigan, Oregon, Colorado and elsewhere to encourage state legislatures to enact these common-sense reforms.

In Florida, the League and its partners capitalized on the public's post-election furor in order to successfully ensure passage of comprehensive election reform.

Following the recognition of the failure in election administration after Election 2012, the Florida League played a key role, first calling for a bipartisan Election Reform Task Force and then reaching out to Supervisors of Elections across Florida and the Brennan Center for Justice to compile a list of essential recommendations for improvements. The League shared these recommendations with lawmakers and media statewide and launched an aggressive letter-writing campaign to encourage voter engagement in the issue.

As a result, the Florida legislature passed comprehensive election reform in the spring of 2013, restoring early voting days, allowing voters to make an address change at the polls, and shortening legislative amendment length on the ballot.

As one Florida League leader wrote following the passage of this legislation,

“Our voices as citizens can and do make a difference... It's simple: elected officials must know we are paying attention and we will not be silenced, especially when our most essential right to vote is threatened.”



Conclusion

The lessons from 2012 are clear. American voters are under constant attack, with federal and state-level suppression attempts arising weekly. At the same time, our elections systems are staggering under the weight of outdated and inefficient practices.

Time and time again, volunteer League activists have proven essential to overcoming these challenges and forging a path forward.

Continued investment is critical to equipping the League and other advocates to fight back against the effects of coordinated voter suppression, provide registration for new voters and improve the election experience for as many voters as possible.

In 2013-2014 the League will:

- Work at all levels to protect voters, including pursuing a fully restored VRA at the federal level and successful advocacy and legal action to counter attacks on voter registration,

voter roll purges, voter photo ID requirements, and a rollback of positive reforms at the state level;

- Play offense and seek passage of these state-level reforms:
 - Secure Online Voter Registration;
 - Permanent and Portable Statewide Voter Registration;
 - Expanded Early Voting;
 - Improved Polling Place Management; and
 - Electronic Streamlining.
- Launch voter registration programs to effectively reach 100,000 diverse voters throughout 2013 – 2014 with a focus on young voters, especially non-college youth and high schools students, as well as new citizens and other underrepresented groups;
- Update and upgrade VOTE411.org to provide millions of voters with the information they need;
- Expand our on-the-ground voter mobilization programs, with a particular emphasis on targeting the voters least likely to have the information they need before Election Day; and,
- Work with partners and funders to develop integrated, focused initiatives to effectively engage the millions of voters we reach.



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A fixture in the civic engagement community for 93 years, the League of Women Voters encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. With more than 800 state and local affiliates serving millions of voters nationwide, the League of Women Voters is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement.

Join us in Making Democracy Work!™

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