



Democracy & Voting Policy Priority Brief

Voter Registration

What is Voter Registration?

When we look to advancing policies related to **voter registration**, we're specifically seeking laws and policies that simplify this process, including measures that allow for online and automatic registration.

Voter Registration Across the U.S. and In The South

The status of voter registration laws in the Southern United States ranges widely from state to state, creating a complicated and complex landscape of regulations and practices about which it is difficult for people to remain informed and updated. Many states also have strict deadlines related to voter registration, some requiring registration as much as 30 days before the date of an election. These deadlines often disenfranchise voters or become eligible or motivated as an election date approaches. It is interesting to note that the majority of the Southern states do offer online voter registration, with only Mississippi, Arkansas, and Texas not having yet implemented this process, limiting access for voters in those states who may have difficulty registering in person due to work schedules, transportation issues, and other barriers. We've also recently seen aggressive voter roll maintenance practices, particularly after the 2020 election and rampant, yet unfounded, allegations of people voting fraudulently or when ineligible. These purges are purported to remove inactive voters but can result in eligible voters being removed from the rolls, often without their knowledge, and disproportionately affects minority and low-income voters.

How Simplifying Voter Registration Can Advance Equity in the South

Simplifying voter registration processes, such as by allowing online and same-day registration, can significantly increase access to the vote for marginalized groups who may face logistical challenges with traditional registration methods. The simplification of this constitutional right can foster greater civic engagement and political participation in underrepresented communities, leading to more equitable representation and policy outcomes that better address the needs of the whole. As mentioned in our other priorities, easing voter ID requirements and

extending registration deadlines are also other ways that can ensure all eligible voters can register to and participate in the vote without undue hardship. Reforming voter roll maintenance practices and preventing massive purges without proper notification ensures the fair and transparent maintenance of these records and can prevent eligible voters from being erroneously purged and being ineligible to vote.

Legislative Efforts Related to Voter Registration

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of legislative measures brought across the states related to voter registration; most of these measures, however, have sought to implement more restrictive measures as opposed to providing simpler processes. For example, Florida increased the maximum fine a voter registration group could receive from \$1,000 to \$50,000, and then raised it again in 2023 to \$250,000. The laws the state passed also limit how and where organizations can return voter registration forms and barred people from working with these groups if they were non-citizens or people with certain felonies.

The following restrictive measures related to voter registration were brought forth by Southern legislatures in the 2024 legislative sessions:

1. **Tennessee:** Senate Bill 2586 imposes a similar fine on voter registration organizations as the one in Florida mentioned above. Among other provisions, this new law limits who can assist others with registering to vote and now establishes a fine of up to \$50,000 for any organization or individual who violates this year, even if done inadvertently or in ignorance of the law.
2. **West Virginia:** Senate Bill 624 requires the cancelation of voter registrations for any voters who get out-of-state driver's licenses.
3. **Georgia:** Senate Bill 189 will now require unhoused people to re-register to vote, no longer allowing them to register at shelters and government offices but instead requiring them to register at the voter registrar's office in the county where they reside. The bill also makes it easier for "voter fraud hunters" to challenge the validity of other voters' registrations.
4. **Louisiana:** Louisiana's Secretary of State presented a comprehensive legislative package intended to "boost [the state's] election integrity policies" and included several measures targeting voter registration and access, including House Bill 506, which will now require that those conducting voter registration drives be registered with the Secretary of State's office.