

Voter Suppression Film Presentation Proposal

Background

Voter suppression is in the news as the 2020 election nears, but there is nothing new about barriers to the ballot box. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg evoked this country's long history of voter suppression in her 2013 dissent to the gutting of the Voting Rights Act in *Shelby County v. Holder*. In her words,

"Early attempts to cope with this vile infection resembled battling the Hydra. Whenever one form of voting discrimination was identified and prohibited, others sprang up in its place."¹

Ginsburg was referring to Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act that included a provision requiring states and local jurisdictions with a history of suppressing voting rights to submit changes in their election laws to the U.S. Justice Department for preclearance.² In her dissent, Ginsburg warned that striking down Section 5 would result in setbacks to the progress made toward voting equity. She noted that "Throwing out preclearance when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet."³

Ginsburg's prediction that the country would see a resurgence of voter suppression measures appears to have been borne out by the rapid increase in barriers to voting seen since the 2013 Supreme Court decision. These barriers have disproportionately affected people of color, students and the disabled.⁴ In fact, more than half the states in this nation have placed "direct burdens on people's right to vote" with restrictive voter ID policies,⁵ even though over 21 million U.S. citizens don't have a government-issued photo identification.⁶ When restrictive voter ID laws have been met with legal challenges, other restrictions have been imposed. For example, large-scale voter registration drives met with "exact match" laws mandating that voters' names on registration

¹ Supreme Court of the United States, *Shelby Co. v Holder*. Retrieved from

<http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/717250-supreme-courts-voting-rights-act-decision.html>.

² Voting Rights: A Short History. Retrieved from https://www.carnegie.org/topics/topic-articles/voting-rights/voting-rights-timeline/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwvIT5BRCqARIsAAwwD-TzpfVtRr1wGGNfoA4IPa_RJFbajtPEbUo56ULyZT_913F2ZDW154oaAoe0EALw_wcB.

³ Supreme Court of the United States, *Shelby Co. v Holder*. Retrieved from

<http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/717250-supreme-courts-voting-rights-act-decision.html>.

⁴ Block the Vote: Voter Suppression in 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/news/civil-liberties/block-the-vote-voter-suppression-in-2020/>.

⁵ The New Voter Suppression. Retrieved from <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/new-voter-suppression>.

⁶ Block the Vote: Voter Suppression in 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/news/civil-liberties/block-the-vote-voter-suppression-in-2020/>.

records perfectly match the name on their identification approval form.⁷ This law had a disproportionate effect on voters in Georgia, where 80% of those blocked from voting in the 2018 midterm election were people of color.⁸

Myriad barriers to the voting box have been erected, ranging from previously mentioned voter ID laws to late changes in polling locations and hours; reductions in the number or consolidation of polling locations; mass purges to voter rolls; too little funding for elections; and lack of language access or assistance to non-English language speakers in high minority districts.^{9,10} One barrier begins outside of the election cycle, occurring when legislators redraw district lines. Packing and dividing districts – or gerrymandering – can be done with the purpose of providing an advantage to one party over the other. Gerrymandering is named after Elbridge Gerry who in 1812 signed legislation adopting new electoral district boundaries designed to keep his party’s control over state and national offices.¹¹

The increase in burdens placed on voting rights has led to an increase in calls to protect every citizen’s fundamental right to vote. The U.S. League of Women Voters has been among the leading organizations working since its founding to ensure that all eligible voters have the opportunity to vote. The League’s mission—Making Democracy Work®—includes ensuring a free, fair and accessible electoral system for all eligible voters.¹²

“Through our national Public Advocacy for Voter Protection Project (PAVP) and dozens of state-based volunteer activist teams, the League works year-round to combat voter suppression through advocacy, grassroots organizing, legal action and public education.”¹³

Chief among the strategies the League employs is raising public awareness about this issue through a focus on public education. The following proposal was developed based on the LWV-BMC’s continued work in this area.

⁷ What You Need to Know About Georgia’s 53,000 Pending Voters. Retrieved from <https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/what-you-need-know-about-georgia-000-pending-voters/0aulxJglullpKgMmpexBmK/?mode=new>.

⁸ The New Voter Suppression. Retrieved from <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/new-voter-suppression>.

⁹ Block the Vote: Voter Suppression in 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/news/civil-liberties/block-the-vote-voter-suppression-in-2020/>.

¹⁰ 11 Barriers to Voting. Retrieved from <https://www.carnegie.org/topics/topic-articles/voting-rights/11-barriers-voting/>.

¹¹ Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerrymandering>.

¹² Retrieved from <https://www.lwv.org/voting-rights/fighting-voter-suppression>.

¹³ Ibid.

Proposal

The LWV-BMC Voter Suppression Working Group (VSWG) of the Civic Education Committee proposes to partner with the LWV-BMC Voter Service Committee on a project with two goals related to voting and voter suppression.

- To raise public awareness about voter suppression strategies, and
- To provide answers to participants' questions about voting and voting rights specific to our community (Bloomington and Monroe County).

Implementation

We will accomplish our goals by initiating meetings between the two committees and planning for the screening of two documentaries on voter suppression, which will be shown one week apart. Each of the screenings will be followed by a question and answer (Q&A) period comprised of a facilitator and panel of 1-3 guests with expertise on voting topics (e.g., registering to vote, key dates and voting options, information required for voting). The panel of experts will be recruited from the Monroe County Election Board and the LWV-BMC Voter Service Committee.

The components of this project are provided below in greater detail.

Films Selected for the Project

The voter suppression films selected for this project were screened by members of the previous LWV-BMC Redistricting Committee (now part of the Civics Education Committee). These films were deemed by members to be nonpartisan and appropriate for a general audience. Due to concerns about COVID, screenings will be “virtual”, using the LWV-BMC Zoom account. This will require some members of the VSWG to become familiar with the technical capabilities of this program and will involve “practice sessions” before live screenings. Ann Birch will welcome participants and give a brief introduction at each screening. Each screening and Q&A session will be recorded using the Zoom record feature.

Suppressed: The Fight to Vote. (September 15 at 7:00 pm) A 35-minute documentary that shares stories from voters across the state of Georgia painting an undeniable picture of voter suppression in the 2018 midterm election where Stacey Abrams fought to become the first Black female governor in the U.S. The issues Georgians faced included polling place closures, voter purges, missing absentee ballots, extreme wait times and a host of voter ID issues — all of which disproportionately prevented many students and people of color from casting ballots. The film was created by Brave New Films, a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501[c][3] organization responsible for creating and distributing educational films.

UnCivil War: U.S. Elections Under Siege. (September 22 at 7:00 pm) A 56-minute documentary about voter suppression directed by Richmond, Indiana native Tom Glynn. The film exposes the web of threats facing our elections today. It includes a segment on Indiana's fight for redistricting reform through interviews with co-chairs of the Indiana Coalition for Redistricting Reform, Julia Vaughn (Common Cause Indiana) and Debbie Asberry (LWVIN). The film is funded by the Bertelsmann Foundation, which is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank working to educate and engage audiences on pressing economic, political and social challenges facing the U.S. and Europe.

Panel Members

Nicole Brown, Monroe County Clerk, and Hal Turner, Monroe County Election Board Chair, have agreed to participate on the panel for each of the screenings. Julia Vaughn, Indiana Common Cause Policy Director, will join the panel for the September 22 screening, which incorporates the voter suppression tactic of gerrymandering. Julia is featured in the film and is a highly-regarded expert on gerrymandering in Indiana. She will provide information about what Hoosiers can expect during the redistricting process in 2021. The Q&A facilitator will be Mary Ann Williams, co-chair of LWV-BMC Voter Service Committee.

Cosponsors

Because LWV-BMC has experienced success working with other local organizations, we will further our goal of building community alliances through outreach on this project to the NAACP, UU Racial Justice Task Force, Monroe County Women's Commission and IU's Political and Civic Engagement (PACE) program. All of these groups have expressed interest in this project. If these organizations choose to cosponsor the screenings, their names will be listed on public relations materials.

Public Relations (PR) Materials

Some of the PR information for this project is contained within this proposal (film names, dates, names of panelists and potential cosponsors, etc.). A copy of the PR plan is attached. Specific materials that need to be developed include the following:

- The e-invite and RSVP.
- Directions for new Zoom users with links to the films, in the event participants experience screening/screen quality issues. Other informational links (Voter Service webpage, etc.) will be included, as well. This will be emailed with the Zoom link to all who RSVP.
- A single-page flyer with important details about the project and website to RSVP.

Budget

The Redistricting Committee previously submitted a \$200 grant proposal to the LWVIN for this project. It was approved and since the submission, we have received permission to use and distribute these films at no cost. We may incur about \$65 to increase the cap of our Zoom account if we have more than 100 participants. We also plan to develop flyers for distribution to local coffee shops, food banks and other locations. The estimated costs for the flyers will be \$40-60, depending on the quantity. Posters will cost \$20.00.

Publicity Plan

Source	Contact	Assigned	Notes
Herald Times	Carol Kugler 812-331-4359 ckugler@heraldt.com Letter to the editor LTE Out and About or Neighbor	Vickie/Tomi Jim/Nancy Vickie Nancy	Vickie, contact Carol. Tomi/Jim, write guest column. Nancy write Neighborhood/Out and About/Vickie submit LTE.
IDS	Tristan Jackson Editor-in-chief tripjack@iu.edu Lilly St. Angelo News editor lstangel@iu.edu Annie Aguiar Managing editor aguiara@indiana.edu	Nancy	Vickie to provide details to Nancy who will finalize
Bloom Magazine	Carmen Siering, Exec Editor 812-650-3775 carmen@magbloom.com Article/Interview	Nancy Vickie	Add to their local events page
Facebook, Twitter	Becky Hill	Vickie	Write short Facebook invitation
WFHB	News Department: 812-202-NEWS (812-202-6397). Press release Interviews	Nancy/ Vickie Tomi/Jim	Consider interviews
WFIU/WTIU	https://indianapublicmedia.org/static/add-event.php Noon Edition is 812-855-0811. Webpage is https://indianapublicmedia.org/noonedition/ .	Nancy Tomi/Jim	Nancy will submit online form Contact Bob Zaltsberg
CATS	Yes	Vickie	
Flyer Distribution	Bloomingfoods, coffee shops	VSWG	
Newsletters	League Letter, Time to Choose Coalition newsletter (Aug 15), UU newsletter (Sept 1)	Vickie	
Mailing lists	Distribution lists-RCU Redistricting Network, church list, other nonprofits, legislators, NAACP, UU Racial Justice Task Force, PACE, and Monroe County Women's Commission.	Vickie	