

Politicians are Beginning to Realize Voter Suppression is a Bad Idea

Posted by Joan Russow

Friday, 11 April 2014 16:13 - Last Updated Sunday, 13 April 2014 21:04

By [Crystal Sheppard](#) April 10, 2014



We are just a couple of months away before the United States is in full swing of midterm election madness. Traditionally lower in voter turnout, the midterms have gained increased significance over the last few election cycles as the stalemate in Washington, D.C. has all but stopped any real forward progress on major issues. While [candidates](#) and political parties prepare their latest slogans, current elected officials have been spending a great deal of time focusing on voter access.

Before the 2012 election, and ultimate re-election of President Obama, numerous (Republican controlled) legislatures ramped up efforts to restrict voter access under the auspices of combating voter fraud. The introduction of voter ID laws, the most popular tactic used, began after the 2000 election of President George W. Bush when Florida passed such a law, having been the center of a contentious election. Since then, almost 1,000 bills have been introduced to make it harder to vote.

The greatest attention was given to those passed prior to the last presidential election. Forty-one states introduced 180 bills focused entirely on restricting voter access. Along with voter ID laws, restrictions on voting times, methods and how polling stations functioned were also introduced. In the end, 19 states passed 27 measures which made it harder to vote. In 2013, after the [Supreme Court](#) gutted the Voter Rights Act of 1965, voter suppression bills surged, leading to some of the most restrictive [voter suppression](#) bills to date.

A new analysis by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law says the [trend may be reversing](#) .

In January, Congress introduced a bill to address the issues of the VRA the Supreme Court deemed unconstitutional. This is just one of the many efforts the Brennan Center says that the focus is now on increasing voter access. While the SCOTUS ruling led to (largely) southern states ramping up their voter suppression efforts in 2013, 46 states had introduced legislation to make voting easier that same year. The momentum continues this year with 190 bills expanding

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voter access introduced in 31 states since the beginning of the year. By comparison, 19 states have introduced 46 voter suppression bills.

While there is often a long path between the introduction of legislation to actual passage, 13 bills making it easier to vote have passed thus far.

The effort to expand access is the result of both sides of the aisle seeing the negative consequences of reducing voter access. Many of the bills introduced were voted down or otherwise blocked via procedural efforts. The Department of Justice has started using other tools at their disposal to prevent the disenfranchisement of voters. The [Voting Rights Act Amendment of 2014](#) introduced by Congress in January has bipartisan support and appears to have a good chance of passage once out of committee. Though voter suppression has been a Republican tactic, even members of that party are seeing the effort as unnecessary and, quite frankly, wrong.

As Wisconsin became the [latest state to restrict voter access](#), state Republican Senator Dale Schultz condemned his party for trying to suppress the vote. "I'm a guy who understands and appreciates what we should be doing in order to make sure every vote counts, every vote is legitimate. But that fact is, it ought to be abundantly clear to everybody in this state that there is no massive voter fraud. The only thing that we do have in this state is we have long lines of people who want to vote. And it seems to me that we should be doing everything we can to make it easier, to help these people get their votes counted."

While efforts may be slowing down, they aren't ending. Several voter suppression bills are still pending, with [nine signed into law](#) thus far.