



League of Women Voters of Dane County
Resource Materials for September 22, 2020 Forum
How Can We Ensure a Safe, Fair and Accessible November Election?

Discussion Questions

1. What surprised you about the information presented in the Forum or the Resource Materials?
2. Have you been personally impacted by voting restrictions during your voting career? If so, describe your experience.
3. Why do you think so many people are not concerned about voter restrictions?

Actions You Can Take

1. Make a plan to be sure your vote is counted.
2. Volunteer to work during voter registration or election events. You can get more information from LWVDC [here](#).
3. Forward information on voting from the LWVDC weekly e-news Voter Service Weekly section to your network.
4. Share accurate information with friends and family: www.myvote.wi.gov, In-Person Absentee Voting locations (from each Clerk's office), voting at the polls, and the Dane County Voter ID Coalition Helpline: 608-285-2141 or from [Dane County Clerk Elections](#).
5. Watch and share the Madison City Clerk's office video, [Voting Absentee by Mail](#).

LWVUS Position

“The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed.”

June 2020 LWVUS 54th Biennial National Convention: LWVDC delegate Joan Schwarz wrote in the LWVDC September *Bulletin*, “...members moved and adopted... the Campaign for Making Democracy Work, ensuring a free, fair and accessible electoral system for all eligible voters by focusing on voting rights, improving elections, advocacy for the National Popular Vote Compact, campaign finance/money in politics, and redistricting...”

History of League Voting Rights Actions

Since the League’s inception it has focused on voting rights, and state leagues adopted positions on election laws. While many state Leagues adopted positions on election laws, at the national level, despite a long history of protecting voting rights, during the civil rights struggle of the 1960s the League found itself without authority to take national legislative action on behalf of the *Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA)*. During the 1970s the LWVUS Conventions adopted numerous Bylaw amendments to protect the right to vote of every citizen so that by 1978 the Bylaws reflected that protecting the right to vote was a central part of the League’s purpose.



Photo credit: Unsplash.com

In the 1980s and 1990s, the League worked to break down the barriers to voting, first through reauthorization of the *Voting Rights Act (VRA)* and then through a campaign for passage and implementation of the landmark *National Voter Registration Act (NVRA)*.

When the disputed 2000 elections exposed the many problems facing our election administration system, the League focused attention on bringing coalition allies together, working to ensure that key reforms were part of the congressional debate. In October 2002, the *Help America Vote Act (HAVA)* was signed into law, authorizing funds for each state to improve the operation of elections according to federal requirements.

In 2004, a public awareness campaign, *5 Things You Need to Know on Election Day*, was designed to educate voters about the new requirements and the steps each voter could take to protect access. The highly successful campaign has continued during election seasons with a particular emphasis on providing quality voting information to first-time voters and traditionally under-represented communities.

In 2006, the League launched its highly successful *Public Advocacy for Voter Protection (PAVP)* project to remove or mitigate barriers to voting by underserved populations and to advance the capacity of state Leagues to become even more effective advocates. LWVUS collaborated with state Leagues to enhance public education and advocacy campaigns to fight barriers to voter participation and to ensure election laws and processes are applied in a uniform and non-discriminatory



manner. Five focus areas were identified by the League as essential to protecting the votes of all citizens and improving election administration overall: (1) oppose photo ID and documentary proof-of-citizenship; (2) improve administration of statewide database systems; (3) guard against undue restrictions on voter registration; (4) improve polling place management; and (5) improve poll worker training. By the early 2010s, the PAVP project had expanded to more than 20 states.

Since 2012, the League has served on the national working committee that oversees National Voter Registration Day, a major national initiative that has brought together thousands of partners to register hundreds of thousands of voters each September. In 2016, more than 350 Leagues from 45 states participated and registered more than 19,000 individuals to vote on National Voter Registration Day. And 2018 was the League’s biggest year yet, with Leagues from 40 states hosting over 400 events and registering more than 32,000 individuals to vote—making the League the single largest on-the-ground participant for the seventh year in a row. In all, the League protected over 4.2 million voters through various advocacy, litigation, and education efforts throughout 2018. Summary of [League of Women Voters of the United States, Impact on Issues 2018-2020: A Guide to Public Policy Positions, 2018-2020, \(Pgs 10-18\)](#)

Quotation for the Day

“Who are to be the electors of the federal representatives? Not the rich, more than the poor; not the learned, more than the ignorant; not the haughty heirs of distinguished names, more than the humble sons of obscurity and unpropitious fortune. The electors are to be the great body of the people of the United States,” James Madison, *The Federalist* 57

The Brennan Center Democracy Program: An Election Agenda for Candidates, Activists, and Legislators, Solutions 2018.

Web Resource Materials

[Election Experts Warn of November Disaster](#) - **Excerpt:** “After a presidential primary season plagued by long lines, confusion over mail-in voting and malfunctioning equipment, election experts are increasingly concerned about the resiliency of American democracy in the face of a global pandemic. With just four months until the presidential election, the litany of unresolved issues could block some voters from casting ballots and lead many citizens to distrust the outcome of one of the most pivotal races of their lifetimes. There is widespread concern among voting activists, experts and elections officials that it will take further federal investment in local election systems, massive voter education campaigns and election administrators’ ingenuity to prevent a disaster come November. ‘The coronavirus has really laid bare the cracks in our system,’ said Myrna Pérez, director of the Brennan Center’s Voting Rights and Elections Program.”

[How Voters With Disabilities Are Blocked From the Ballot Box](#) – **Excerpt:** “It can be more difficult to vote when a person has a disability. Many of the 35 million voting-age Americans with disabilities rely on special voting machines equipped with earphones or other modifications. Voters have complained that untrained poll workers have discouraged the use of accessible voting machines, leaving no access for some people with disabilities. According to the Government Accountability Office nearly 2/3 of the 137 polling places inspected on Election Day 2016 had at least one voting impediment to people with disabilities, including an accessible voting machine placed in a corner turned off with a flower wreath hung on it.”

Brennan Center Resources: “If the Covid-19 pandemic continues into November, we will need to change our election practices to make sure voters don’t have to choose between their health and their right to vote. What Wisconsin Has and What’s Needed...There are three key areas where we need to shore up our elections systems for success during a pandemic: registration, mail voting, and in-person voting. You can access the Brennan Center’s election 2020 covid-19 toolkit [here](#).”



Photo credit: Tiffany Tirtipes

In a report quoted by many, the Brennan Center says, “American elections are marred by an infrastructure that is rickety, excludes too many, and is prone to partisan manipulation and

deliberate voter suppression that often targets communities of color and young people.” The Brennan Center works to make voting free, fair, and easy. The Center recommends reforms to modernize American elections, starting with automatic voter registration and measures to ensure election security. You can read more [here](#).

This [short to-do list](#) identifies actions to take for election security by election officials.

Supplementary Resources:

The Union of Concerned Scientists say “...the institutions that we rely on to make social choices about our shared fate are eroding. We can, and must, rehabilitate our democratic institutions if we are going to address these challenges. The solutions are there for us, tested through research in American states and across other democracies. By expanding voter eligibility, providing early and easy access to the ballot, and ensuring an accurate count of votes, we will eventually be able to pass evidence-based, equitable policies to improve the nation’s health.” You can read the white paper [here](#).

[Defending America’s Election Infrastructure](#) - **Excerpt:** “American elections are decentralized, with state and local election officials retaining primary authority for administering them. This means, among other things, that they bear considerable responsibility for defending our infrastructure against concerted attacks from sophisticated nation state actors. Fortunately, election officials take this duty seriously, and the federal government has recently provided some overdue assistance, in the form of minimal funding to improve election security and better coordination with agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security....Much more can be done, however, to strengthen election security and increase public confidence in elections. Here are our top policy recommendations for doing so.”



Photo credit: Cyrus Crossan