



Chapter 2: Are All Votes Equal?

While voting is viewed as a necessary right in a democracy, voter suppression continues to be an obstacle to civic engagement in the United States. Learn about different forms of voter suppression and voting methodologies by state and discuss ways to question the effectiveness of our electoral system.

Conversation Questions

1. Why does the general election occur in November, on a weekday?
2. What aspects of the antiquated voting system are still relevant in the modern era?
3. How does voter suppression operate nationally? Within Illinois?
4. What can we do to reduce barriers and ensure people can vote?

Key Definitions (adapted from Merriam-Webster)

- *Voter suppression* – tactics by local or state legislatures to prevent voting; includes reducing the number of polling places, voter ID laws, purging voter rolls, voter registration restrictions, lack of early voting options
- *Gerrymandering* - the practice of dividing or arranging a territorial unit into election districts in a way that gives one political party an unfair advantage in elections; form of voter suppression
- *Electoral College* - the process the United States uses to elect the president and vice president; the number of electors a state receives is equal to that state's number of U.S. senators and representatives; 270 votes are needed to win
- *Swing state* - a U.S. state in which Republican and Democratic candidates have similar levels of support and which is considered to play a key role in the outcome of presidential elections





Read

“How the electoral college gerrymanders the presidential vote” by Christopher Ingraham for *The Washington Post*

<https://wapo.st/2ZY49KN>

Kevin Hayes Wilson's mapping experiment outlined in this article demonstrates the extent to which the principle of “one person, one vote” doesn't really apply to electoral politics.

“In 2013 the supreme court gutted voting rights - how has it changed the US?” by Sam Levine and Ankita Rao for *The Guardian*

<https://bit.ly/3jpEPW8>

The 2013 *Shelby County v Holder* Supreme Court decision removed a key clause from the 1965 Voting Rights Act that protected Black, Latinx, and other marginalized communities from voter disenfranchisement. Now, the impact of this decision is inflating due to COVID-19.

“Voter Suppression Is Still One of the Greatest Obstacles to a More Just America” by Rev. Jesse L. Jackson and David Daley for *Time*

<https://bit.ly/2ZNS4lt>

Authors Jackson and Daley suggest a citizen movement, much like we are seeing with recent protests during the pandemic, is needed to protect voting rights and, as a result, our democracy.

Watch

“Answering the Call: The American Struggle for the Right to Vote” by Brian Jenkins on Kanopy

<https://skokieliibrary.kanopy.com/video/answering-call>

The bloody attacks of protestors in Selma in 1965 led to the historic protection of all U.S. citizens' right to vote. The film explores a cherished family story of Selma and the current state of voter suppression in the United States.





“Rigged: The Voter Suppression Playbook” from the American Issues Initiative

<https://www.riggedthefilm.com/>

Historic and current practices of voter suppression are examined in this film narrated by esteemed actor Jeffrey Wright.

Listen

“Dozens of Baby Bush v Gores” episode from Amicus with Dahlia Lithwick for Slate

<https://bit.ly/3bKFuhl>

This episode projects the new fronts of voting rights battles, examining how changes in the U.S. Postal Service may affect voter turnout and counting in the November general election.

“The Gerrymandering Project” by FiveThirtyEight for ABC News

<https://53eig.ht/32y9FoX>

A six-part podcast series from 2018. The hosts travel the country to understand the effects of gerrymandering and what is being done to try to reform the process.

“What Voter Suppression Looks Like” episode of NPR’s program *On Point*

<https://bit.ly/2FyuHve>

Guests Alexa Ura, Sam Levine, and Francesca Erwin discuss voting rights with On Point news analyst Jack Beatty.

