

Voting Rights

In April 2016 a controversial opinion column appeared in the New York Times titled [“Should Everyone Vote.”](#) The author, a professor of philosophy, reviewed the reasons why people don’t vote. He went so far as to suggest that people not fully informed should not vote and says voter education is “impractical, time-consuming and expensive.” As controversial as his ideas are, we need to recognize that assumptions about voting rights are being challenged today. The election process itself has become a partisan, political football with charges of voter suppression and fears of hacking and foreign interference in US elections.

The League of Women Voters (LWV) strongly believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed, and we are committed to voter education. In response to the challenges to voting rights, the League, at its 2018 national convention, again made its priority over the next two years *Making Democracy Work* – a program that focuses on protecting citizens’ right to vote and encouraging people to register and vote.

Voter Turnout Rates

Voter turnout in the Cincinnati area is consistent with numbers nationally. There is high turnout for presidential elections every four years, but much lower turnout in other years.

Cincinnati Area Voter Turnout

Percent of registered voters who voted in the election

Counties	2014 midterm	2016 presidential	2017	2018 primary
Hamilton	45%	72%	31%	19%
Butler	37%	71%	25%	15%
Warren	41%	78%	30%	22%
Clermont	39%	74%	26%	18%

Why don’t eligible, registered voters participate in elections? Recent research by the Pew Charitable Foundation gives some idea.

- 39% of those registered said they don’t vote because “I’m not informed enough about the candidates or issues to make a good decision.”
- 37% said “I don’t like any of the candidates on the ballot.”
- 20% said “I dislike politics.”
- 18% said “I’m too busy to vote.”
- 10% said “I’m not interested in what is happening in government.”

For additional information, please see the [full Pew report](#).

Registration and the Ohio Voter Purge Case

In Ohio, voter registration purges can be initiated after voters miss a single federal election.

After skipping one federal election cycle, voters are sent a notice. If they fail to respond and do not vote in the next four years, their names are purged from the rolls.

Ohio's current practice of purging the voter registration lists was upheld by the US Supreme Court in June 2018 in the case *Husted v. A. Phillip Randolph Institute*. The LWV of the United States and the LWV of Ohio [filed a friend of the court brief in the case](#), arguing that the state's purge process violated the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. This Act was established to make it "easier for all Americans to register to vote and to maintain their registration" according to the [Department of Justice](#). However, the Court ruled that because non-voters were dropped only after failing to respond to a mailed notice from election officials, Ohio had not violated the Act. The Court said not voting and not responding to a notice was sufficient evidence that the person had moved. For additional information, please see the linked [New York Times article](#) which describes the arguments and the decision on this case. Further details can be found in the full [Supreme Court](#) opinion.

Other states have similar procedures for keeping their voting rolls up to date, but none moves as quickly as Ohio's to drop registered voters. There is concern that the Supreme Court ruling will encourage other states to follow Ohio and become more aggressive in purging registered voters. Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted said no registrations will be canceled before the November 2018 election. However, a process that flags inactive voters for future removal is resuming. The League and other civic groups are encouraging Ohio voters to verify their registration status. It can be done quickly online with an "Am I registered?" button on the front page of most county Board of Elections websites. It is also possible to register to vote or update your address online through the [Board of Elections](#) website.

Proposed Automatic Voter Registration Act

A proposed federal Automatic Voter Registration Act was introduced in Congress in 2017.

According to the [Senate Bill](#), its purpose is:

(A) to establish that it is the responsibility of government at every level to ensure that all eligible citizens are registered to vote;

(B) to enable the State and Federal governments to register all eligible citizens to vote with accurate, cost-efficient, and up-to-date procedures;

(C) to modernize voter registration and list maintenance procedures with electronic and Internet capabilities; and

(D) to protect and enhance the integrity, accuracy, efficiency, and accessibility of the electoral process for all eligible citizens.

According to the [Brennen Center](#), Automatic Voter Registration simplifies the voter registration process, making it more convenient for both voters and government officials, by implementing the following two changes:

1. When eligible citizens interact with government agencies, their voter registration information is automatically added or updated unless they decline, and
2. Agencies then electronically transfer voter registration information to election officials.

The Brennan Center further explains that these simple changes have the potential to boost

registration rates, reduce errors, clean up the rolls, lower costs, and reduce voter fraud.

The LWV supports this legislation.

The League is proud to support legislation that enhances access for eligible voters in our elections and works to modernize our electoral system. This bill will improve the accuracy of voter records, cut down on costs, modernize outdated registration systems while supporting implementation in states across the country.

As of April 18, 2018, 12 states and the District of Columbia have authorized some form of automatic voter registration, according to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#).

An opinion column in the [Cincinnati Enquirer](#) in July 2018 encouraged Ohio to adopt Automated Voter Registration Verification, which would be done through the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV).

Russian interference and hacking election systems

The news has been full of reports this year of Russian interference in US elections and possible hacking of election systems. There is concern that these headlines will further erode voters' confidence in elections, resulting in even more people not voting because of a belief "the system is rigged."

It is important to listen to the reports carefully and not just read the headlines. While hackers "probed" the election systems in several states, they only successfully broke into one state system, in Illinois, and did not alter any data, according to the Department of Homeland Security. This clearly shows a need to be vigilant about the security of our election systems, but nothing found suggests election results do not accurately reflect the votes cast, according to a report by the [National Public Radio](#).

There was also news of a widespread covert Russian disinformation campaign during the 2016 presidential election. The evidence shows that Russian operatives tried to sow polarization and feed a general lack of faith in the democratic process. The success of this campaign raises serious questions about the gullibility of voters and reinforces the need for credible election information. ["Inside a 3-Year Russian Campaign to Influence U.S. Voters"](#). *The New York Times*, February 16, 2018.

Making Democracy Work Campaign

At its 2018 national convention in June, the LWV of the US reaffirmed its program priorities for the next two years, summarized as the Making Democracy Work campaign. The campaign is based on long-standing League positions and includes:

Improving Elections - We work to increase voters' access to the polls, including expanding early voting, automatic and online voter registration. Added as a priority at this year's convention is advocacy for the National Popular Vote Compact, an agreement among states to award all their electoral votes to whichever presidential candidate wins the overall popular vote in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. LWV has had a position supporting popular election of the

president and abolishing the Electoral College since 1970.

Redistricting - Congressional districts and government legislative bodies should be apportioned substantially on population. We oppose partisan and racial gerrymandering that strips rights away from voters. At the LWV convention, the Ohio state League received the national “Strengthening Democracy” award for its successful Fair Districts campaign.

Money in Politics - Elections should be about the voters, not big money interests. It’s time to limit SuperPACs and secret donors to protect representative democracy.

Voter Rights and Fighting Voter Suppression - We challenge all efforts and tactics that limit the ability of voters to exercise their right to vote.

For more detail, please see on [LWV positions](#) on elections and voting rights.

Discussion Questions

1. How will the disappointing Supreme Court decision in the Ohio voter purge case effect elections? What actions can the League of Women Voters take to lessen the impact of the purges?
2. In your experience, why don’t people who are registered vote in most elections? Based on past experience, over 50% of registered voters are expected to skip the coming midterm elections. What can be done to encourage people to vote in November?
3. How do you get information about candidates and issues on the ballot? Will the revelations about Russia planting disinformation make people more cautious in believing what they read on social media sites?
4. The League invests a lot of resources into producing the Voter Guide in print and Vote411 online. Are there additional things we could do to reach more voters with credible election information?

5. What can **you do as a unit** to encourage voter turnout for the November election? Think locally, e.g., voter registration information at a community fair/farmers market; distribute Who & What voter information at a community council meeting; organize an early voting excursion for a church, senior center, housing development; utilize social media to spread the word. Our project will be: