



PHOTO BY ERIC GUO/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, a civil rights leader and former presidential candidate, is an ardent advocate of voter-rights protections.

# Renewed crusade for voter justice

*Jesse Jackson fought for the Voting Rights Act. Now, he's fighting to repair it.*

**BY ADAM SENNOTT**  
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In March 1965, 24-year-old Jesse Jackson joined the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and hundreds of others as they marched on Selma, Ala., in protest of the state's racist voting laws.

Many, including a future congressman, John Lewis of Georgia, were beaten by police during the 18-day protest, but their actions led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. While their victory was historic, Jackson now says they had no idea how fragile it was.

"We didn't understand the chains of voter suppression," Jackson said in a telephone interview with Street Roots' sister street paper in Chicago, StreetWise.

More than five decades after securing the right to vote, Jackson and other civil rights leaders are fighting to defend it. In the 2013, *Shelby v. Holder* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that key provisions of the landmark law requiring federal oversight of voting practices in states and municipalities with histories of discrimination in voting were unconstitutional because these provisions did not reflect the less restricted landscape since the Voting Rights Act was enacted.

Jackson said the decision allowed Republicans to manipulate the electoral map via gerrymandering. Since then, many

**"We put more integrity on a basketball game than we do on voting. There should be integrity on both."**

JESSE JACKSON

states have also enacted voter ID laws and closed hundreds of voting precincts. In the 2016 election, there were 868 fewer precincts across the U.S., according to the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.

"They fought to remove the protections for 40 years," Jackson said. "The *Shelby* decision undercut the *Selma* decision. They removed the protections, and gerrymandering started all over again."

Despite President Trump's claims that millions voted illegally, costing him the popular vote, in-person voter fraud "very rarely happens," according to a report from the Brennan Center for Justice.

"Voter fraud is a fraud," Jackson said. "Voter suppression is real."

Since the Supreme Court's decision, 33 states have passed laws requiring some form of identification to vote. November marked the first election in 50 years without the full protections of the Voting Rights Act.

Jackson said that voter suppression in several states, though not all with voter ID laws, was responsible for Trump's defeat of Hillary Clinton.

"Hillary lost not by the Russian hack but because of voter suppression in North Carolina and Philadelphia and Detroit and Milwaukee," Jackson said. "They suppress the black vote and elevate the white vote."

In Detroit, there were 75,000 ballots that "didn't have the top of the ticket marked," Jackson said — blank presidential votes. Voting precincts were also closed in North Carolina.

On May 11, Trump signed an executive order creating a commission on voter fraud and suppression.

"The Commission on Election Integrity will study vulnerabilities in voting systems used for federal elections that could lead to improper voter registrations, improper voting, fraudulent voter registrations, and fraudulent voting," the White House said in a statement. "The Commission will also study concerns about voter suppression, as well as other voting irregularities. The Commission will utilize all available data, including state and federal databases."

Shortly after the commission was announced, Jackson released a statement giving Trump credit for getting it at least half right by considering voter suppression,

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