

2015 Will Bring Many Challenges for Voting Rights

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While most of the attention around last year's midterm elections was focused on who would control the US Senate, here at the League of Women Voters' Public Advocacy for Voter Protection project, we

were most interested in the results at the state level and the impact they could have on advancing election-related legislation. While we anticipate continued attacks to voting rights during the 2015 state legislative sessions, as we've seen in the

last few years, there are also opportunities to advance pro-voter reforms to streamline voters' ability to weigh-in on the issues important to them.

Voting rights and access to the ballot box should be a bipartisan effort. Our elect-

ed officials should strive to uphold the Constitution and ensure the government is "of, for and by the people," and this isn't possible when "the people" don't have an opportunity to participate in free, fair and accessible elections.

Taking into consideration the incoming state governments, we analyzed all 50 states on their likelihood to advance either positive or negative election related reforms using the following criteria:

- Voter suppression risks
- Pro-voter reform opportunities
- Likelihood that states will have close elections in 2016, which could influence partisan operatives' plans to try and make the voting process easier or more difficult depending on their desired outcome
- Existing state election laws – i.e., do existing state elections laws assist voters in being able to cast their ballot or are there laws that limit access to the ballot that need to be addressed in the upcoming legislative session, and are there ways the League can assist voters now who need assistance to mitigate the impact of restrictive laws
- Past legislative action that was unsuccessful in either suppressing or expanding the vote
- Compliance with federal election laws

Through this process, the PAVP project identified nearly 20 states that will have a moderate to high chance of passing reforms

ue to keep an eye on all 50 states and respond appropriately when needed. Across the country, we have been successful in protecting voting rights by defeating bad legislation as well as challenging restrictive laws in the court system.

On the flip side, there are 19 states where we remain hopeful that common sense pro-voter election reforms could become law. We will be advocating for bills that:

- Expand early voting options, particularly those that include nights and weekends;
- Implement or expand online voter registration systems, with a particular focus to include individuals without a current driver's license or state ID;
- Improve polling place management, such as ensuring there are adequate voting machines and ballots, well trained poll workers, and fully accessible polling places for voters with disabilities;
- Ensure states offer the opportunity to register to vote at public assistance agencies, as required by the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA); and
- Electronic streamlining, like using electronic poll books which would allow for real-time transmission of information, including voter check-ins and address updates.

There is little doubt that the 2015-2016 state legislative sessions will be an ongoing challenge for vot-

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that will suppress the vote next year. In these states, we anticipate continuing our work against efforts seeking to:

- Implement restrictive voter photo ID and proof-of-citizenship requirements when registering or voting;
- Decrease early voting;
- Eliminate election or same-day registration; and
- Place new restrictions on community-based voter registration drives, like those hosted by Leagues across the country.

These states will be the main focus of our PAVP project this year as we continue our fight against voter suppression by stopping anti-voter legislation and mitigating the impact of anti-voter laws in the states. Of course, we will contin-

ing rights across the country, but once again the League of Women Voters is ready to fight back against voter suppression and to advance pro-voter reforms in the states. It has become crystal clear that the struggle to ensure free, fair and accessible elections will require a long-term movement and we are primed to once again lead the charge to protect and expand voting rights for all eligible voters across the country.

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Thank you, Dr. King.

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