



## The Social Policy Journal

ISSN: 1533-2942 (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wzsp20>

# What Social Workers Need to Know About the Right to Vote

Donna Hardina

To cite this article: Donna Hardina (2003) What Social Workers Need to Know About the Right to Vote, *The Social Policy Journal*, 2:4, 53-70, DOI: [10.1300/J185v02n04\\_05](https://doi.org/10.1300/J185v02n04_05)

To link to this article: [https://doi.org/10.1300/J185v02n04\\_05](https://doi.org/10.1300/J185v02n04_05)



Published online: 15 Oct 2008.



Submit your article to this journal 



Article views: 44



View related articles 

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=wzsp20>

# What Social Workers Need to Know About the Right to Vote

Donna Hardina

**ABSTRACT.** Policy advocates and social workers who provide services to low-income and other marginalized populations must be involved in helping members of these groups develop political power. Lobbying for progressive policy reforms is difficult unless members of historically oppressed groups can actually cast votes that will be counted. This paper examines barriers to full participation in the voting process and describes strategies that can be used to link disenfranchised groups to the electoral process. These strategies include involvement in voter registration, voter education, the mobilization of prospective voters, and support for legislation that improves access to the voting booth. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

**KEYWORDS.** Political social work, election reform, voter education, voter registration, political empowerment, voting rights

Involvement in ensuring that all citizens have a right to vote is a critical practice activity, especially for social workers involved in policy advocacy. Voter registration and participation in the electoral process are significantly correlated with the ability of ethnic and other historically marginalized populations to obtain equal access to jobs, education, and

---

Donna Hardina is affiliated with the Department of Social Work Education, 5310 Campus Drive, Fresno, CA 93722 (E-mail: donna\_hardina@csufresno.edu).

The Social Policy Journal, Vol. 2(4) 2003  
<http://www.haworthpress.com/web/SPJ>

© 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.  
Digital Object Identifier: 10.1300/J185v02n04\_05

other public benefits (Jesuit, Nirchi, de Haymes, & Sanchez, 2000; Joyce, 1997). The National Association of Social Worker's Code of Ethics specifically identifies social and political action as activities needed to:

Eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, or mental or physical disability. (Section 6.04 of the NASW Code of Ethics as cited in Reamer, 1998, p. 284)

Involvement in politics is also a critical component of the empowerment model of social work practice. This model focuses on helping individual clients, families, and communities overcome institutional oppression by increasing their personal feelings of self-efficacy, leadership skills, and political participation (Gutierrez, Parsons, & Cox, 1998; Rose, 2001).

Most studies of political participation among social workers focus exclusively on voting or actual involvement in political campaigns: making monetary contributions, volunteering in a campaign, attending candidate forums or running for office (Colby & Buffum, 1999; Ezell, 1991; Hardina, 1995; Mary, 2001; Reeser & Epstein, 1990; Rose, 1999). None of these studies have specifically examined social work participation in voter registration or an individual social worker's responsibility for ensuring that everyone has a right to vote. Awareness of barriers to voting among members of historically oppressed groups should be of critical importance to social workers in their struggle for progressive social policies.

The purpose of this paper is to remedy this gap in the literature. The importance of engagement in voter registration activities is discussed. The impact of low rates of voter registration and turnout is examined. Specific actions that can be taken by policy advocates and social workers to improve registration among historically unrepresented groups are identified. Actions that can be taken to improve access to the polling place for low-income and underrepresented populations are also described.

### **VOTER PARTICIPATION: DOES EVERYONE HAVE A RIGHT TO VOTE?**

Fostering the political participation of historically oppressed groups is not necessarily an easy task. In many states, individuals who are not

members of middle- or upper-income communities face significant barriers to casting ballots in local, state, and national elections. The United States Commission on Civil Rights (2001) identified the following voting problems in Florida during the 2000 Presidential election:

- The failure of the state government and county election offices to process voter registration applications in a timely manner.
- The use of polling places that were inaccessible to persons with disabilities.
- The failure of county election offices and poll workers to provide voting assistance to disabled, elderly, and non-English-speaking voters.
- The distribution of election ballots by county election departments that were hard to read or that contained instructions that confused voters.
- The use of an inaccurate database to purge individuals with past felony convictions from the voter registration list.

In 2001, the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People filed lawsuits in Florida and several other states charging that African American voters were significantly less likely than white voters to have their votes counted during the 2000 Presidential election (ACLU, 2001).

Despite the 2000 election controversy, there is little evidence that state governments have taken appropriate steps to reform voting procedures. A study by the NAACP (2002) found that only five states responded to public concerns about voter disenfranchisement by passing voting reform legislation. Only 14 state election offices were found to provide any type of standardized training to poll workers and election judges. The quality and content of training courses varied substantially among local election offices. The League of Women Voters also conducted a national survey of local voting procedures in 2001. Typical problems for low-income voters and persons of color included poorly functioning or insufficient voting machines, insufficient numbers of poll workers, and poorly maintained voter registration lists (League of Women Voters, 2002a).

### ***SOCIAL WORKERS AND PRESERVING THE RIGHT TO VOTE***

This analysis gives strong support for increasing the role of social workers in the electoral reform process. Social workers can lobby for

changes in registration laws to increase voter registration among groups historically underrepresented in the voting process. Social workers also can work through community-based organizations to register people to vote. According to Keyssar (2000), this work is critical because:

In socially diverse nations, ethnic, racial, and religious antagonisms often have sparked the impulse to suppress or restrict the rights of minorities. Even individual issues have sometimes loomed so important that factions have sought to deny political voice to their adversaries. (p. 323)

Social workers who are interested in electoral activism should be aware, however, that federal and state governments place some restrictions on political activity. Federal and state government employees are prohibited from engaging in electioneering when on the job by the Hatch Act. This legislation has been interpreted to prohibit such on-the-job activities as wearing campaign buttons, canvassing voters, selling tickets for campaign fundraisers, or running for office. A government employee generally is required to quit or take a leave of absence from his or her job when running for office (Pawlak & Flynn, 1990). No federal, state, or local laws restrict political involvement among social workers if such involvement strictly consists of volunteer work that is not reimbursed by employers.

Federal law also restricts political activities by the nonprofit organizations that employ many social workers. Most nonprofit social service organizations are incorporated under 501(c)(3) of the Federal tax code. Nonprofit organizations have the option of forming separate political action committees that are permitted to solicit funds from donors for distribution to candidates endorsed by members of the PAC. The National Association of Social Workers has its own political action committee, Political Action for Candidate Election (P.A.C.E.). This allows NASW to make political endorsements and "bundle" contributions from PAC donors for distribution to P.A.C.E.-endorsed candidates (NASW, 2000).

While nonprofit organizations can lobby politicians for changes in legislation, the federal government regulates some types of legislative action. Nonprofit organizations may not use a substantial proportion of their annual budgets to lobby government. "Substantial" is defined as 20 percent of the organization's first \$500,000 in expenditures (Hopkins, 1989). However, a number of activities are considered allowable lobbying expenditures by the IRS, including lobbying government employees

for changes in legislation, lobbying by volunteers (if the organization has not spent its own funds to facilitate this), or lobbying to ensure that the organization receives government funds (Arons, 1999). Employee activities related to voter registration and education are also considered allowable expenses. In keeping with these regulations, most states permit community-based organizations to assist in voter registration efforts; county boards of election often provide training to volunteer registrars recruited by nonprofit organizations. Interest groups such as the National Association of Social Workers actively engage in voter registration and "get-out-the-vote" efforts. Interest groups are also permitted to compile candidate "scorecards," ranking incumbents in terms of their past votes on major pieces of legislation that are of interest to the organization and its constituents. However, to be an allowable expense, the organization must not advocate support for specific candidates.

### **VOTER REGISTRATION: LINKING PEOPLE WITH THE ELECTORAL PROCESS**

One of the more critical campaign activities is voter registration. Currently, only two-thirds of all U.S. citizens, 18 and over, are registered to vote (Alliances for Better Campaigns, 1998). With turnout in recent campaigns at about 40 to 50 percent, this means that less than 30 percent of all U.S. adults actually vote. Voters are substantially more likely to be white, age 50 or over, and college graduates than nonvoters. They are also likely, on average, to have higher incomes than people who do not vote (Jackson, Brown, & Wright, 1998; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1997).

One of the reasons for the limited participation of low-income individuals and communities of color is that laws in many states have made voter registration difficult. Potential voters must show I.D. and travel to designated spots to register. The registration period may end 30 days prior to the election. New registrations are needed when the individual changes residence or last name (due to marriage or divorce). Poor people typically have difficulty with registration requirements; they may be transient, changing residence on a regular basis (Piven & Cloward, 1988, 2000). These institutional barriers are in stark contrast to Canada, Australia, and many European countries that send registrars door-to-door or require compulsory voting (Solop & Wonders, 1995).

Beginning in the early 1980s, efforts have been made on a state-by-state basis to reform the voter registration laws. Political scientist Fran-

ces Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, Professor of Social Work at Columbia University, founded the organization behind this effort, Human SERVE. Human SERVE worked to change state laws to permit community groups to register people to vote. In addition, Human SERVE advocated for the National Voter Registration Act, passed by Congress in 1993 (Piven & Cloward, 2000). The NVRA requires that states implement "motor voter" procedures for voter registration. People are encouraged to register when they apply for driver's licenses. This legislation requires that people be allowed to register at public assistance offices, military recruitment offices, and in agencies that serve people with disabilities. People are permitted to update names, addresses, and party affiliation at these sites. The legislation also requires that all states permit "mail-in" voter registration (Human SERVE, 1999).

Human SERVE believed that these changes in registration would increase voter participation among people in poverty. Early assessments of the impact of the motor voter initiative suggest that it has had mixed success. While there was an increase of 11 million registrations in the 1998 Congressional elections, voter turnout (at 49 percent of all registered voters) was significantly lower than previous levels (Alliance for Better Campaigns, 1998). Turnout dropped most dramatically among the young, low-income, and transient voters that "motor voter" was intended to reach (Knack, 1999). However, research conducted by Human SERVE in the mid-1980s also suggests that at least 70 percent of those who registered to vote in public welfare and other social service organizations did indeed actually vote (Piven & Cloward, 2000).

### ***ARE VOTER REGISTRATION ACTIVITIES SUFFICIENT TO INCREASE VOTER TURNOUT?***

One of the problems inherent with advocacy efforts that focus exclusively on voter registration is that some people who do register simply do not vote. While this may be a matter of preference or convenience for some individuals, research on voter participation indicates that there are numerous factors that limit voter participation among people of color, members of low-income groups, the elderly, people with disabilities, and persons with limited English language fluency. These factors include:

- Requirements that some voters provide personal identification in order to vote.

- Limited access to the polling place for persons with disability.
- The availability of ballots in languages other than English.
- State laws that prohibit voting by former felons.
- Voter alienation and disengagement from the political process.

### ***Personal Identification Requirements***

Many states undertake specific actions to ensure that only qualified voters are registered and can vote. One of these requirements involves requiring voters to present identification when registering and when voting. Identification requirements can range from verification of the voter's signature (cross-checking the signature on the registration form with the sign-in sheet on election day), having voters bring their voter registration card to the polling place, and requiring that the voter present an additional form of identification such as a driver's license (Constitution Project, 2002). Twenty-four states use one of these methods. In 11 states, identification is required and in four states identification is optional. Such identification requirements place a severe financial burden on low-income and transient populations (Constitution Project, 2002; League of Women Voters, 2002b). Many low-income, urban residents do not have driver's licenses (Piven & Cloward, 2000). In addition, students who vote in university communities rather than in their place of primary residence can be disenfranchised by identification requirements (League of Women Voters, 2002b).

Often demands by poll workers to examine voter identification papers exceed state requirements or are enforced differently for members of different demographic groups (American Civil Liberties Union, 2001). For example, people of color may be asked to present one or two pieces of identification at the polling place while white voters are not asked for any identification. In some states, selective enforcement is possible because the law allows the polling place supervisor to determine if the identification presented is sufficient (Constitution Project, 2002; *New York Times*, 2001). The League of Women Voters (2002b) argues that signature verification can be used effectively to prevent voter fraud.

### ***Accessibility for People with Disabilities***

The Federal Voter Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act requires that all polling places be physically accessible to people with disabilities and that appropriate accommodations be provided to dis-

abled voters. Election officials must provide alternative voting mechanisms such as curbside voting if the polling place cannot be made accessible (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2001).

Despite these legal provisions, persons with disabilities often have difficulty casting votes due to problems with wheelchair access. In many cases, appropriate assistance is not available for visually-impaired, deaf, or other disabled voters ("In N.J., effort launched," 1999). A study conducted by the U.S. General Accounting Office (1998) found that only 16 percent of the polling places examined were accessible to voters in wheelchairs or for voters who had visual, dexterity or mobility-related disabilities. None of the almost 500 polling places visited by the GAO had special voting equipment for use by visually-impaired voters nor did they provide other types of accommodations such as magnifying glasses or ballots in large print. Most states permit disabled voters (within some restrictions) to bring a friend or relative into the voting booth to provide assistance, but these regulations are complex and vary substantially by state (Electionline.org, 2002). Poll workers often are not aware of these rules or enforce them selectively (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2002).

### *Availability of Ballots for the Non-English Fluent*

The Federal Voting Rights Act passed by Congress in 1975 mandates that election ballots, in some situations, be made available in languages other than English. The legislation requires that language-appropriate ballots be made available in local voting jurisdictions in which five percent of all citizens or a minimum of 10,000 are members of language minorities or have limited English proficiency (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2001). The Voting Rights Act also requires that some election personnel be available to provide oral assistance to voters in the appropriate language (U.S. Justice Department, 2002). Language-appropriate voter registration material, polling place notices, ballot pamphlets, and absentee ballots must also be made available. Special assistance is also to be made available in areas in which the level of citizen illiteracy exceeds that of the national illiteracy rate. The U.S. Justice Department uses data collected in the U.S. Census to determine those voter jurisdictions in which the language requirements must be met.

Despite these very detailed Federal regulations, ballots may not always be available for non-English fluent or illiterate voters. Some county election boards fail to comply with these requirements, essentially disenfranchising many new immigrants and elderly voters (U.S.

Commission on Civil Rights, 2001). The U.S. Justice Department is responsible for the enforcement of these regulations. However, the Federal government must often rely on complaints by election observers to activate the investigatory process (U.S. Justice Department, 2002).

### ***Prohibitions on Voting by Former Felons***

Human SERVE reported that there were 70 million adults in 1994 who were not registered to vote. Of the 70 million, they estimated that 16 million could not vote because of felony convictions, residency in mental hospitals, or because they were not citizens (Piven & Cloward, 2000). Thirty-two states prevent individuals from voting while on parole or probation (Fletcher, 1999). Eight states deny the vote to all ex-offenders: Alabama, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Mississippi, Nevada, Virginia, and Wyoming. Five other states prohibit voting by most ex-offenders. However, some of these states permit ex-offenders to petition the governor for restoration of their voting rights (NAACP, 2002).

The Sentencing Project estimates that 3.9 million adults have permanently lost the vote due to these restrictions on voting rights. One direct impact of these laws is that one-third of those who are disenfranchised for past criminal convictions are African American men (Allard & Mauer, 2000). In fact, these laws disenfranchise *13 percent of all adult, African American men* (NAACP, 2002). The disparate impact on the voting rights of African Americans may be due in part to mandatory drug sentencing laws. Often African American men who distribute crack receive harsher sentences than whites who distribute cocaine (Kilty & Joseph, 1999; The Sentencing Project, 1999). Currently, the NAACP and other civil rights organizations have launched state-by-state campaigns to restore voting rights to former felons who have completed their sentences (Fletcher, 1999; NAACP, 2002).

### ***Voter Alienation***

Members of historically disadvantaged groups, people in poverty, African Americans, and Latinos often do not vote because they believe their interests will not be represented ("Can the black vote hold up," 1999). Rates of participation are higher in communities in which citizens perceive themselves to have the ability to influence the political process and believe they can improve their own lives through voting for representatives who will fight for their needs. Walzer (1997) argues that

motor voter legislation was based on some erroneous assumptions about the likely behavior of new registrants:

The truth is that a lot of the Americans who don't vote would support conservatives or right-leaning populists. . . . The problem is that many of the non-voters—perhaps especially the long-term non-voters—are not only disengaged but also unaffiliated and unorganized. They have not been educated by a political party or movement; they have little or no experience of the discipline of collective action. (p. 1)

Organizations such as the NAACP, League of United Latin American Citizens, Rock the Vote, and the Southwest Voter Registration Project conduct outreach and voter mobilization efforts specifically targeting young people and communities of color. Political parties also conduct voter registration and education campaigns among groups of potential new voters. However, much of the funding received by Democratic and Republican parties for voter outreach in low-income and ethnic communities has been obtained through soft money donations (Piven & Cloward, 2000). One of the concerns about the McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 is that it restricts soft money campaign donations and consequently may limit funding for voter outreach and education (see Box 1).

### ***ENSURING THE RIGHT TO VOTE: THE PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF SOCIAL WORKERS***

There are a number of activities that social workers should undertake to increase voter participation among members of marginalized groups. For example, social workers can monitor state government to make sure motor voter laws are implemented properly. They can lobby state government for Election Day registration or other laws that increase access to the electoral process. Social workers can also develop effective methods getting registered voters to the polls on Election Day. These activities include:

- V. *Volunteer* to register prospective voters, or work as an election judge or poll watcher (League of Women Voters, 2002a). Some national voting rights organizations are promoting the use of a generic voter registration form that can be downloaded from the

## BOX 1

**TECHNIQUES FOR INCREASING VOTER TURNOUT**

- Distributing applications for absentee ballots that can be used by disabled and elderly voters or people who will not be available to vote on Election Day.
- Driving voters to the polls on Election Day.
- Canvassing to find likely voters, then knocking on doors or making phone calls to ensure that people vote on Election Day.
- Using television or radio advertising to motivate unregistered voters.
- Targeting “get out the vote” campaigns to specific ethnic or interest groups.

Internet by prospective voters and volunteer registrars (Federal Elections Commission, 2002).

- O. Conduct *outreach* activities in communities in which residents historically don’t vote (Walzer, 1997). Door-to-door canvassing, phone calls, and direct mail are methods that have been found to be very effective for increasing voter turnout (Gerber & Green, 2000).
- T. Provide *training* to campaign workers, poll watchers, and prospective voters on the Federal Voting Rights Act. County and state efforts for informing voters and election workers of their rights are inconsistent at best, and at worst information is provided that is not congruent with Federal law (American Civil Liberties Union, 2002; NAACP, 2002; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2001). Consequently, supplemental training, provided by independent advocacy groups, is essential for ensuring that every citizen’s vote is counted (LWV, 2002a).
- E. *Educate* the public about barriers that could prevent individuals from casting their votes. For example, citizens should be informed about the importance of making sure that polling places are accessible to disabled and elderly voters. In addition, social workers should inform their clients about state procedures designed to restore voting rights to former felons (Fletcher, 1999).
- R. Conduct *research* to identify structural barriers to voting. Any analysis of voting should also include a demographic analysis of likely voters and identification of communities where participation has been low. One essential skill for social workers interested in increasing access to the polls for marginalized groups is determining what demographic groups are likely to vote and the degree of likely turnout (Crone, 1997; Taylor & Terhanian, 1999). Once

these groups have been identified, specific communities can be targeted for "get out the vote" efforts.

In addition, social workers and other policy advocates should become informed about Federal and state proposals for increasing voter participation and making the voting population more representative of all citizens. Some states have started to allow citizens to vote using the Internet. In March 2000, members of the Arizona Democratic party were given the option of voting online for candidates in the presidential primary. Participants without computers were able to find terminals at predesignated sites or voted using paper ballots (Thomsen, 1999). Voters in Washington state and Iowa have participated in "test" elections to assess the feasibility of online voting. While voting at home using the Internet is more convenient and private than traveling to polling places, poor people and persons of color are less likely to have access to the Internet than traditional white, middle- or upper-income voters (Bolt & Crawford, 2000). Consequently, Internet voting may increase rather than narrow the voting gap.

Other proposals that may have an impact on voter participation include allowing voters to mail in their ballots to the local election board and same-day registration and voting. Oregon has permitted all voters to mail in their ballots since 1998 (LWV, 2002b). Preliminary research indicates that mail-in voting has increased participation substantially. Same-day registration and voting are currently permitted in only six states: Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming (Constitution Project, 2002). This permits individuals to register to vote at their polling place.

Social workers and other policy advocates should also be prepared to monitor enforcement of the Voting Rights Act and other election reform measures. Federal legislation was approved in 2002 that creates national standards for conducting elections. Currently, states are responsible for running elections; many of these responsibilities are then delegated to county election offices, creating substantial variations in standards among localities (Constitution Project, 2002). The Ney-Dodd-Hoyer-McConnell Help America Vote Act of 2002 allocates Federal funds to county governments for voting equipment and to improve the accessibility of polling places for disabled voters. The Act also sets standards for voting equipment and voting practices, requires that states allow voters the opportunity to correct errors on their ballots, and requires that statewide voter lists be computerized (Constitution Project, 2002b). However, this legislation was opposed by many civil rights and

advocacy organizations such as the League of Women Voters and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. Some Latino members of Congress also opposed this legislation, arguing that it will discourage voting by low-income people and individuals with limited English proficiency (Anderson, 2002; LWV, 2002b). Given these troubling provisions, social workers should play a lead role in monitoring the impact of this legislation on voting rights.

## ***CONCLUSIONS***

Effective policy advocacy for social welfare policies that will benefit historically marginalized populations requires that members of these communities be able to vote and have their voices heard. Consequently, social workers and other policy advocates must be prepared to fight for electoral reforms that improve access to the polling place.

There are many opportunities for policy advocates and social workers to participate in voter education and registration. Social workers who engage directly in individual practice with low-income and other marginalized populations have many opportunities to increase voter registration in these communities. Many public and nonprofit organizations assist new applicants with voter registration applications and engage in voter education activities. Currently, Federal Motor Voter requirements remain in place. However, states vary substantially in terms of how rigorously this legislation has been implemented (Piven & Cloward, 1996; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2001). Consequently, social workers employed by state agencies should advocate that their own organizations comply with the Motor Voter law. In addition, social workers that provide services to new immigrants can help people apply for citizenship and subsequently register to vote.

Social workers should also play a role in improving physical access to the polling place for disabled voters and engage in advocacy to restore voting rights to former felons who have repaid their debt to society. Voter education and mobilization activities are also essential. It is imperative that social workers and other policy advocates take a lead role in fighting for legislation that ensures that all citizens can and do vote. The establishment of an electorate that is representative of all citizens, including the poor, is imperative for the promotion of social change because:

The higher the participation of the lower class, the more generous are state welfare policy efforts. . . local leaders tend to be more responsive to the citizenry in communities with high participation rates and . . . community leaders are more likely to concur with the policy priorities of active participants. (Jackson, Brown, & Wright, 1998, p. 2)

Efforts to defend voting rights for all Americans are critically needed. A number of election-related developments in 2002 suggest that the disenfranchisement of Florida voters in the 2000 presidential election was not an isolated incident. The lawsuits filed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Civil Liberties Union against state and local election officials in Florida were settled in the summer of 2002 (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2002). In the settlements, state and county governments agreed to restore voting rights to individuals who were incorrectly identified as felons in 2000, and revise procedures related to voter registration, polling practices, and maintenance of voter lists. The state government also approved additional electoral reform-related legislation. However, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a report in August 2002, that described these reforms as inadequate to ensure voting rights for minority, disabled, and non-English proficient voters. In addition, the state failed to take prompt action to restore voting rights to those individuals incorrectly identified as felons in the 2000 election. According to Palast (2002), the felon "scrub" list for the November 2002 general election included 94,000 names; the private contractor responsible for creating the list confirmed that only 3,000 of the entries included all information (such as social security numbers) that data experts believe are needed to avoid misidentification.

Attacks on the voting rights of communities of color are not limited to Florida. In November 2002, the media reported on efforts that harass American Indian and African American voters in South Dakota, Arkansas, and a number of additional states (Dionne, 2002; Gelder, 2002; Reid, 2002; Tucker, 2002). Given these developments, we must actively work to ensure that all Americans continue to have equal access to the polling place. Failing to act can have dire consequences. A small minority of politicians and voting citizens will be able to implement legislation that is unlikely to benefit, and can actually harm, members of already marginalized groups. In the long run, the loss of voting rights for some will weaken democratic governance and make the policy process substantially less likely to be representative of the needs and policy preferences of all citizens.

## REFERENCES

- Allard, P., & Mauer, M. (1998). *Regaining the vote: An assessment of activity relating to felon disenfranchisement laws*. Retrieved on August 6, 2002, from <<http://www.hrw.org/reports98/vote/usvote98.htm>>.
- Alliances for Better Campaigns (1998). *Voter turnout*. Retrieved on August 1, 2002, from <<http://www.bettercampaigns.org/documents/turnout.htm>>.
- American Civil Liberties Union (2001). "The system must be fixed": *Election day mess triggers voting rights lawsuits around the country*. Retrieved July 10, 2002, from <<http://www.aclu.org>>.
- Anderson, N. (2002, October 17). Senate passes bill to overhaul voting. *San Francisco Chronicle*. Retrieved on November 6, 2002, from <<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2002/10/17/MN215107.DTL>>.
- Arons, D. (1999). *Teaching nonprofit advocacy: A resource guide*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector.
- Bolt, D., & Crawford, R. (2000). *Digital divide: Computers and our children's future*. New York: TV Books.
- Can the black vote hold up? (1999). *The Economist*, 351(i8113), 23.
- Colby, I., & Buffum, W. E. (1998). Social workers and PACs: An examination of National Association of Social Workers P.A.C.E. Committees. *Journal of Community Practice*, 5(4), 87-93.
- Constitution Project (2002a). *Election reform briefing: Voter identification*. Retrieved on August 9, 2002, from <<http://www.electionline.org>>.
- Constitution Project (2002b). *H.R. 3295 summary, Ney-Dodd-Hoyer-McConnell Help America Vote Act of 2002*. Retrieved on November 7, 2002, from <<http://www.electionline.org>>.
- Crone, B. (1997). Finding priority voters with database overlays. *Campaigns & Elections*, 18 (10), 49-52.
- Dionne, E. J. (2002, November 2002). An election day nightmare. *Washington Post*, p. A25.
- Electiononline.org (2002). *Polling place accessibility and voter assistance*. Retrieved on August 9, 2002 from <[http://www.electionline.org/site/docs/html/polling\\_place\\_accessibility\\_and\\_voter\\_assistance.htm](http://www.electionline.org/site/docs/html/polling_place_accessibility_and_voter_assistance.htm)>.
- Ezell, M. (1991). Administrators as advocates. *Administration in Social Work*, 15 (3), 1-18.
- Federal Elections Commission (2002). *National mail voter registration form*. Retrieved on July 20, 2002, from <<http://www.fec.gov/voteregis/vr.htm>>.
- Fletcher, M. (1999). Voting rights for felons win support. *Washington Post*. Retrieved on July 10, 2002, from <<http://members.aol.com/digasa/stats30.htm>>.
- Gans, C. (2002, November 8). *Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, Post-Election News Release*. Retrieved on November 29, 2002, from <<http://www.fairvote.org/turnout/csaef2002.htm>>.
- Gelder, A. (2002). County ask justices to rule on late ballots. *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. Retrieved on November 11, 2002, from <[http://www.nwanew.com/adg/story\\_national.php?storyid=11308](http://www.nwanew.com/adg/story_national.php?storyid=11308)>.
- Gerber, A., & Green, D. (2000). The effects of canvassing, telephone calls, and direct mail on voter turnout: A field experiment. *American Political Science Review*, 94 (3), 653. Retrieved on January 8, 2002, from the Academic Index.

- Gutierrez, L., Parsons, R., & Cox, E. (1998). *Empowerment in social work practice: A source book*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Hardina, D. (1995). Do Canadian social workers practice advocacy. *Journal of Community Practice*, 2 (3), 97-121.
- Hopkins, B. (1989). *Starting and managing a nonprofit organization*. New York: Wiley.
- Human SERVE (1999). *Summary of the national voter registration act of 1993*. Retrieved on July 15, 1999, from <<http://www.igc.org/humanserve/home.html>>.
- In N.J., effort launched to register disabled voters. (1999). *National Journal*. Retrieved on August 15, 1999, from <[http://Web5searchbank.com/itwsession/151/506/3789847w3/12/xru\\_5\\_0A55194849](http://Web5searchbank.com/itwsession/151/506/3789847w3/12/xru_5_0A55194849)>.
- Jackson, R., Brown, R., & Wright, G. (1998). Registration, turnout, and the electoral representativeness of U.S. state electorates. *American Politics Quarterly*, 26 (3), 259-272.
- Jesuit, D., Nirchi, A., de Haymes, M., & Sanchez, P. (2000). The 1996 Chicago Latino registered voter political survey. Political participation and public policy positions. *Journal of Poverty*, 4 (1/2), 151-65.
- Joyce, P. (1997). A reversal of fortunes: Black empowerment, political machines, and city jobs in New York City and Chicago. *Urban Affairs Review*, 32 (3), 29-57.
- Keyssar, A. (2000). *The right to vote*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kilty, K., & Joseph, A. (1999). Institutional racism and sentencing disparities for cocaine possession. *Journal of Poverty*, 3 (4), 1-17.
- Knack, S. (1999). Drivers wanted: Motor voter and the election of 1996. *Political Science and Politics*, 32 (2), 237-244.
- League of Women Voters (2002a). *Election reform survey*. Retrieved on July 7, 2002, from <<http://www.lwv.org>>.
- League of Women Voters (2002b). *Mail registration-identification and first time in-person voting requirements*. Retrieved on July 7, 2002, from <[http://www.lwv.org/elibrary/pub/ear\\_photoid.html](http://www.lwv.org/elibrary/pub/ear_photoid.html)>.
- Mary, N. (2001). Political activism of social work educators. *Journal of Community Practice*, 9 (4), 1-20.
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (2002). *Defending the vote: Holding officials accountable—NAACP 2001 election report*. Retrieved on July 30, 2002, from <<http://www.naacp.org/news/releases/ElectionReformJuly02.pdf>>.
- National Association of Social Workers (2002, July 2). *Political action for candidate election*. Retrieved on July 20, 2002, from <<http://www.naswdc.org/pace>>.
- New York Times (2001). *36 days: The complete chronicle of the 2000 presidential election crisis*. New York: Times Books.
- Palast, G. (2002b, November 1). Jeb Bush's secret weapon. *Salon.com*. Retrieved on November 27, 2002, from <<http://www.salon.com/politics/feature/2002/11/01/lists/print.html>>.
- Pawlak, E., & Flynn, J. (1990). Executive director's political activities. *Social Work*, 35, 307-12.
- Pierre, R. (2001, May 31). Botched name purge denied some the right to vote. *Washington Post*, A10.
- Piven, F., & Cloward, R. (2000). *Why Americans still don't vote*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Piven, F., & Cloward, R. (1996). Northern Bourbons: A preliminary report on the National Voter Registration Act. *Political Science & Politics*, 29 (1), 39-42.

- Piven, F., & Cloward, R. (1988). *Why Americans don't vote*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Reamer, F. (1998). *Ethical standards in social work*. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers.
- Reeser, L. C., & Epstein, I. (1990). *Professionalization and activism in social work*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Reid, T. R. (2002, November 8). New Indian voters turned race in S.D. *Washington Post*, p. A10.
- Rose, S. (1999). Social workers as municipal legislators: Potholes, garbage and social activism. *Journal of Community Practice*, 6 (4), 1-15.
- Rose, S. (2001). Reflections on empowerment-based practice. *Social Work*, 45 (5), 403-420.
- Solop, F., & Wonders, N. (1995). The politics of inclusion: Private voting rights under the Clinton administration. *Social Justice*, 22 (2), 67-86.
- Thomsen, D. (1999, December 5). Click and choose: Arizona Democrats plan online voting for their presidential primary in March. *Fresno Bee*, p. A8.
- Tucker, D. (2002, November 11). State, ACLU settle suit over Indian voting rights. *Argus Leader*. Retrieved on November 11, 2002, from <<http://www.argusleader.com/new/Fridayarticle2.shtml>>.
- U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2001). *Status report on probe of election practices in Florida during the 2000 Presidential campaign*. Retrieved on July 30, 2001, from <<http://www.usccr.gov/Vote2000/flstrpt.htm>>.
- U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2002). *Voting rights in Florida, 2002: Briefing summary*. Retrieved on November 29, 2002, from <<http://www.usccr.gov/pub/vote2000/sum0802.htm>>.
- U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Voting Section (July 26, 2002). *Minority language citizens: Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act*. Retrieved on August 19, 2002, from <[http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/sec\\_203/fedreg\\_203\\_brochure.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/sec_203/fedreg_203_brochure.htm)>.
- U.S. General Accounting Office (1998). *Voters with disabilities: Access to polling places and alternative voting methods*. Retrieved from <<http://www.gao.new.items/do2107.pdf>>.
- Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1997, May/June). The big tilt: Participatory inequality in America. *The American Prospect*, 32, 74-80.
- Walzer, M. (1997). The disenfranchised. *The New Republic*, 216 (1-2), 23.

**WEB RESOURCES ON VOTER REGISTRATION***Voter Registration*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Center for Voting and Democracy          | <a href="http://www.fairvote.org/">http://www.fairvote.org/</a>   |
| Federal Elections Commission             | <a href="http://www.fec.gov/">http://www.fec.gov/</a>   |
| League of Women Voters                   | <a href="http://www.lwv.org/">http://www.lwv.org/</a>   |
| League of United Latin American Citizens | <a href="http://www.lulac.org/Issues/Voter.html">http://www.lulac.org/Issues/Voter.html</a>   |
| National Association of Social Workers   | <a href="http://www.naswdc.org">http://www.naswdc.org</a>   |
| Project Vote                             | <a href="http://www.projectvote.org">http://www.projectvote.org</a>   |
| Rock the Vote                            | <a href="http://www.rockthevote.org">http://www.rockthevote.org</a>   |
| Southwest Voter Registration Project     | <a href="http://www.buscapique.com/latinusa/buscafile/sud/svrep.htm">http://www.buscapique.com/latinusa/buscafile/sud/svrep.htm</a> |