



“Lift Every Voice: Democracy, Voting Rights, and Electoral Reform”

An action of the 225th General Assembly (2022)



Approved by the 225th General Assembly (2022)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Developed by
The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP)
of the General Assembly Mission Council/Presbyterian Mission Agency
www.pcusa.org/acswp or www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/acswp
See also www.justiceUnbound.org for current discussion



Recommendations

The 225th General Assembly (2022) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approves the following recommendations:

1. Reaffirm “[Lift Every Voice: Democracy, Voting Rights, and Electoral Reform](#),” approved by the 218th General Assembly (2008) and updated by the 222nd General Assembly (2016).
2. Approve the following statement and direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to distribute it electronically to congregations and mid councils of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for study:

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms that exercising the right to vote is the fundamental act of civic engagement that makes all others possible. We state unequivocal opposition to attempts at voter suppression. Further, we renounce the white supremacist and white Christian nationalist ideologies that informed much in those voter suppression efforts as well as the legislation approved or proposed by some state legislatures that will curtail the voting rights and access to the ballot box primarily of BIPOC and those citizens who have the fewest resources in our country; and those laws, proposed or enacted, which would allow a state to subvert legal elections after the fact by manipulating the verification process, disallowing valid ballots or other means.

We recognize the role of gerrymandering as an oppressive and suppressive force in our political life that results in unfair representation in state and national legislatures. In addition, we note the corrupting power of money in electoral and governing processes. We call for wide-ranging election finance reform and for an end to the practice of gerrymandering in favor of more representative voting districts.

We acknowledge that intimidation of election officials and workers is severe and ongoing. The PC(USA) calls on law enforcement agencies to enforce current laws to protect them. And we call on national and state lawmakers to enact laws to increase such protection of election officials and workers.

In light of recent political elections, protest and Supreme Court cases, we call on all Presbyterians and entities of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to resist all efforts to subvert voting rights and promote policies and practices that work toward equitable election processes.

3. Direct the Office of Public Witness, Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations and Office of the Stated Clerk to continue to promote the principles and recommendations in “Lift Every Voice” and in this reaffirmation by the 225th General Assembly in their work regarding our nation’s public life.
4. Direct the Office of Public Witness, Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations and Office of the Stated Clerk to speak on behalf of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in support of proposed laws that respond to the weakening of voting rights.
5. Encourage institutions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), such as seminaries and church-related colleges and universities, to speak on the important issue of voting rights for all people.
6. Direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to produce a video that addresses the concerns and issues of this resolution for use by congregations and mid councils for their use in study or advocacy.



The United States faces many issues that challenge the voting rights on which our republican form of government is founded. “Lift Every Voice” addressed many of those challenges and emphasized with completeness and clarity the close relationship between voter suppression efforts and racism. The document bears revisiting by every member of the PC(USA). Further, events since the 222nd General Assembly (2016) warrant a reaffirmation by this Assembly.

The 2016 presidential election was decided not by the number of votes cast by the people in the nation but by the votes apportioned through the electoral college. “Lift Every Voice” speaks to the ways in which the electoral college can deny a voice to some of the citizens of our nation and the means by which those inequities can be addressed.

More important are the attempts that emerged in 2020 as states struggled to manage elections amid the Covid pandemic. Early voting, successfully established in several states for years, and voting by mail, an expansion of the long-standing practice of absentee voting used in all states, were key means by which states sought to ensure the opportunity to vote for all citizens. Some, including public officials, used those efforts as a pretext for seeking to deny people the franchise. There were municipalities in which polling places were reduced in number, and polling hours reduced; there were places in which officials allowed only one receptacle for early mail-in ballots, where population and size of area warranted more; and some states aggressively purged voter registration rolls. Further, there were those who sought to disallow valid ballots on spurious bases (for example, ballots arriving at the board of elections after Election Day but properly postmarked earlier). Not coincidentally, those efforts affected disproportionately — indeed, intentionally and almost exclusively — citizens who have historically suffered discrimination.

Even bigger threats to people’s voting rights occurred after the election was completed. There were baseless charges of cheating and fraud, culminating in dozens of legal challenges to votes around the country, only two of which were successful. It is distressing that some public and political officials perpetuated the false claims that the election had been stolen by a variety of voting irregularities, illegal actions by states and corruption. Other officials received vicious criticism and high-level political pressure when they properly fulfilled their legal and constitutional duties to certify the election. The challenge to the election was fed by, and subsequently promoted, a variety of conspiracy theories that had no basis in reality — indeed, the proffering of false information was an important element in the effort to overturn the election. These officials and their followers purposely sought to subvert confidence in the nation’s electoral process, on which our system of government and life together are founded.

Further, as of the writing of this resolution, two states (Georgia and Texas) have passed laws to restrict voting rights and voting access, and others have legislation pending. The dangers of voter suppression, identified in “Lift Every Voice” and its 2016 update, have become an increasing reality. (There are also voting implications in legislation that criminalizes behavior such as obtaining an abortion or a transgender person using bathroom facilities not the same as their birth identity. If found guilty of such crimes, voting rights might be rescinded.) We note that some state legislatures are pushing to restrict



voting integrity through legislation that would intervene in elections after the fact, removing the right of verification of elections from the secretary of state, for example. Although events may outstrip the ability of general assemblies to respond, it is imperative that the PC(USA) declare its support for voting rights and access as part of this national debate.

There are central biblical and theological values at stake in the current situation, as “Lift Every Voice” discusses clearly. Here we would note once again God’s sovereignty over all areas of human endeavor, the affirmation of human dignity as children of God, the call to love one another, the emphasis of Jesus on justice and equity for all people, and recognition of sin and the consequent need for accountability in human institutions. On the basis of such foundational elements of our belief, the denomination has long affirmed the importance of people of faith involving themselves in political life (see, for instance, “Reformed Faith and Politics,” approved by the 1983 General Assembly).

We argue, in the light of such biblical and theological affirmations, that two fundamental values of the United States are thrown into question by the actions we have noted here — and, of course, our survey is not exhaustive, but representative. First, our political life together is built on the conviction that each person is important and their vote counts. Indeed, exercising the right to vote is the fundamental and initial act of civic engagement that leads to others, such as communicating with elected officials, protesting, running for office, etc. Nothing should prevent a person’s exercise of the voting franchise. When that is taken away, it thwarts a person’s right to act on their own behalf and to promote the policies and practices they want to see manifested at various levels of government — that is, the right of participation in government. The franchise is a basic and inalienable right; attempts to suppress that right must be rejected.

Second, our founding documents establish the principle that all people are equal and should share the same rights (no matter how poorly we have sometimes lived up to that conviction). The systematic way in which voter suppression targets communities that have experienced discrimination in the nation not only endangers the rights of those people but denies their equality as citizens of the United States and children of God.

In short, “Lift Every Voice” and events since 2016 demonstrate the close relationship of two matters at the core of our national life (the basic right of citizenship and the history of racism) and the intersection of those concerns with basic elements of our Reformed faith. Given that the threats to voting rights and the republican bases of our political life together are even greater today than when it was first approved, we believe it is essential that Presbyterians speak their voice in order that the principles and actions of “Lift Every Voice” will be heard in national discussions of this crucial issue.





PDS #10-2301-22-002
Copyright © 2022
The Office of the General Assembly
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202

*A policy statement is an excerpt from the Minutes of the
General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

