

The background of the entire page is a teal-colored United Nations emblem. It features a world map in the center, surrounded by a laurel wreath. The map shows the continents of Asia, Australia, and parts of Africa and Europe.

MUN@UWCSEA XIII

CHAIR REPORT

Forum: US Senate

Issue: Ensuring voter accessibility and
safeguarding the integrity of democratic elections

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Introduction:

The right to vote is one of the most fundamental rights in democracies around the world, especially the United States. Despite this right having long been expanded to all US citizens above the age of 18, it has been often contested, restricted, or undermined due to intentional suppression or systemic barriers to accessibility. With the development of new technology in recent years, the priorities of improving voter access while ensuring election security and fairness have become increasingly difficult to balance—making this topic rise to prominence as a central debate in American politics. On one hand, democracies should guarantee that every eligible citizen can cast their vote safely, freely, and without external influence. However, governments should also seek to prevent election fraud, often turning to increased voter verification as a method to preserve the integrity.

Proponents of expanding voter accessibility (most commonly Democrats) tend to assert that policies such as same-day registration, vote-by-mail, and extended early voting help increase voter turnout and strengthen democratic participation. They highlight that historically marginalised communities still face systemic barriers to voting, necessitating federal oversight to guarantee equal and fair access. Measures like strict voter ID laws and the reduction of polling locations are criticised as modern-day voter suppression tactics that threaten the core principles of free and fair elections.

On the other hand, opponents (most commonly Republicans) often emphasise the importance of stricter voter ID requirements and signature verification to protect against fraud and maintain election integrity. They argue that state-level control over election procedures preserves local autonomy and prevents federal overreach, and warn that excessive accessibility measures may increase the risk of administrative errors or potential manipulation.

This debate continues to be highly contested today: it became particularly polarized after the 2020 presidential election and has continued to be a contentious issue during the election in 2024, making it extremely relevant to address.

Definition of Key Terms:

- 1. Voter Accessibility:** The extent to which eligible citizens can conveniently and effectively register to vote, cast their ballots, and have their votes counted (includes physical accessibility, language accessibility, procedural accessibility).
- 2. Election Integrity:** The degree to which elections are conducted fairly (involves preventing fraud, influence, and tampering).

- 3. Voter Suppression:** Any action or policy that intentionally or unintentionally reduces the ability or likelihood of specific groups of citizens to participate in elections. Historical examples include voter ID laws, literacy tests, and intimidation.
- 4. Absentee (Mail-in) Ballots:** Allows voters to cast ballots by mail rather than in person at polling places. This process increases voter accessibility, but also has been criticized for increased potential for fraud.
- 5. Election Audits:** Post-election reviews that verify the accuracy of vote counting and election procedures. Often use statistical verification to strengthen public confidence in election integrity.
- 6. Voter ID Laws:** Regulations that require individuals to present specific forms of identification before voting. They are generally supported for preventing fraud, but some are concerned that they disproportionately reduce accessibility for minorities and low-income individuals.
- 7. Provisional Ballot:** Used when there are questions about a voter's eligibility or registration status. They are kept separate from regular ballots and are investigated by local election officials after election day. If the voter is verified, the ballot is fully or partially counted. If not, the ballot is declared invalid.
- 8. Early Voting:** A process that allows voters to cast ballots prior to Election Day, either in person or by mail. Generally improves accessibility through preventing congestion at polling stations on election day and providing increased flexibility for differing schedules.
- 9. Automatic Voter Registration:** Eligible citizens who interact with government agencies (e.g. for tasks like license renewal) are registered to vote automatically, unless they actively decline. The voter's information is transmitted to election officials electronically rather than via paper registration forms, and this tends to increase registration rates.

Background Information:

Historical context surrounding this issue mainly involves the expansion of constitutionally enshrined voting rights over time, and instances of manipulating voter accessibility being used as a means of voter suppression of minorities. At the same time, there have been historical instances of increased accessibility causing manipulation of votes and a loss of election integrity, deepening debate.

Historical Foundations of Voting Rights

The struggle for voting rights has characterized much of US history, often reflecting the political and social structures of the time. At its founding, voting was reserved for white male property owners. Rights were then unequivocally expanded

to non property owning white men by 1856. Following the Emancipation Proclamation, the 15th Amendment to the Constitution in 1870 extended suffrage to African American men. Finally, as a result of widespread women's rights protests, the 19th Amendment in 1920 granted women the right to vote. In essence, the debate on voting rights and accessibility has extended across history and even has been enshrined by the constitution. Though these legal changes represented voting rights for all US citizens being explicitly protected by the federal Constitution, in certain states measures continued to be taken to disenfranchise minority voters.

Voter Suppression

Following the ratification of the 15th Amendment, which prohibited states from denying the right to vote on the basis of race, many Southern states implemented discriminatory laws and practices to attempt to suppress African American political participation. Measures such as literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and even violent intimidation managed to disenfranchise such voters for nearly a century following the Amendment. In response to this, the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965, outlawing many discriminatory practices and even requiring certain states to obtain federal clearance before changing voter laws. However, the Supreme Court's 2013 decision in the case *Shelby County v. Holder* overturned the rights of federal clearance, arguing that it was outdated. Several states have gone on to impose stricter voter ID laws following this, reigniting debates over decreased accessibility and modern forms of voter suppression.

Election Manipulation

During the late 1800s, urban political machines such as Tammany Hall in New York, exploited the votes of new immigrants due to weak ballot secrecy, minimal oversight, ballot stuffing, and increased possibilities of coercion as a result of the expanded accessibility. Though newly arrived immigrants were granted the right to participate in elections, this increase in voters significantly weakened oversight rates and lessened the regulations on each individual voter. This allowed political machines to oversee votes themselves, thereby coercing them to vote in their favor and allowing them to maintain control. Though this was partially addressed through the "Australian Ballot" system introduced in the 1890s ensuring ballot secrecy, concerns on increasing accessibility continue to persist.

2020 Presidential Election

The 2020 election marked a crucial development in this issue. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a sharp rise in mail-in voting, which Democrats defended as essential for accessibility, while Republicans claimed it increased opportunities for fraud with the possibility of voting machines being compromised to change/delete votes. After the election, widespread but unfounded claims of election fraud circulated online, leading to legal challenges and recounts in multiple states. One

reason for these claims was that Trump appeared to be leading key vote counts on election night (when he wrongfully claimed victory), but by the following morning, Biden was gaining and pulling ahead in close states. However, this was later disproven with recounts confirming the legitimacy of the results. Since Democrats were more likely to vote with absentee ballots and Republicans often polled in-person, it was shown that the increased tallying time of absentee ballots was the main cause of this discrepancy.

January 6th and Public Confidence

However, the persistent narrative of a “stolen election” eroded public confidence in election integrity, particularly among Republican voters. This mistrust culminated in the January 6th, 2021 storming of the U.S. Capitol, when rioters attempted to disrupt the certification of the Electoral College results. This event exacerbated the polarization of the issue balancing increasing accessibility while promoting democratic integrity in elections, and represented decreasing trust in the voting process among many citizens. Evidently without public confidence, it is possible for secure and accessible elections to also be perceived as fraudulent, highlighting how ensuring public trust is an essential aspect of this debate.

Current Situation:

2024 Presidential Election

The 2024 election reignited many of the tensions from 2020. Disputes arose over ballot counting, mail-in voting reliability, and election security, with reports of ballot drop boxes being tampered with or destroyed. Furthermore, in states such as Washington and Oregon, arson attacks destroyed ballots and highlighted continued distrust in voting institutions (right-wing conspiracy theories that falsely claimed ballot boxes were responsible for voter fraud in 2020). Several bomb threats at polling places across states like Wisconsin, Michigan, Arizona and Georgia caused delays in the vote as security officials cleared the locations, further showing recent difficulties in voting processes. However, this recent election achieved record voter turnouts in many places, showing the impacts of increased accessibility.

Polarization of Election Reform

Current debate surrounding voter accessibility and election integrity is increasingly polarized across party lines. Republicans generally emphasize the causes of preventing voter fraud and maintaining integrity through instituting stricter identification laws, limits on mail-in voting, and more rigorous voter verification processes. Democrats prioritize removing barriers to participation in elections, through automatic voter registration, extended early voting, and larger access to

absentee ballots. Thus, current public discourse on this issue is largely divided across party lines making it more important to reach a consensus.

New State Voting Laws

Following the 2020 election, countless states enacted new voting laws that altered registration requirements, early voting procedures, and mail-in ballot regulations. For example, Georgia's Election Integrity Act of 2021 introduced ID requirements for absentee ballots and limited ballot drop boxes, reigniting existing debates on whether such laws are necessary to safeguard election integrity or if they represent modern attempts at suppression of minority voters. States currently have considerable autonomy over electoral procedures, making this issue highly individual and cause of continued debate.

District Elections and Gerrymandering

In many states, local jurisdictions struggle with limited funding and extremely low voter turnouts for smaller scale elections due to insufficient awareness/willingness to participate in political procedures. This can increase vulnerability to registration errors, unequal counting of votes, and disproportionate representation. Furthermore, legislative districts are drawn by partisan legislatures, leading to gerrymandering, the redrawing of district boundaries to favor one party. This has created significant disparities between the popular vote and the distribution of seats, and even often dilutes minority voting power. Gerrymandering, though legal, has often been seen to reduce democratic integrity of elections and has raised questions about the equal weight of each citizen's vote.

Electoral College

Besides Gerrymandering, the Electoral College continues to be a huge point of contention in the U.S. electoral system, particularly when candidates win the presidency despite losing the national popular vote, as occurred in 2016. The system tends to be more beneficial for Republican candidates, and opposers argue that it dilutes the value of individual votes in heavily populated "safe" states where outcomes are predictable, while voters in swing states carry disproportionate influence. This can decrease voter engagement in "safe" states through individuals believing their vote has little impact, and undermines integrity through potentially electing candidates unrepresentative of popular opinions. Proponents defend the Electoral College as a constitutional safeguard that balances influence among states of varying populations, ensuring smaller states are not overshadowed and also preventing disproportionate sway of sometimes "uneducated" majority opinions.

Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act

The SAVE Act was one of the first bills proposed in the newly Republican congress following Trump's win. It aims to require all voters to show proof of

citizenship when registering to vote in federal elections, aiming to ensure only American citizens vote in American elections (a bipartisan goal). However, some Democrats and voting rights advocates contend that the SAVE Act would make it harder for eligible citizens without easy access to passports or birth certificates to register, disproportionately impacting eligible citizens of color as well as registered Democrats and independents, versus Republicans. This bill is currently stalled in the Senate and highlights the continuing debate surrounding this issue.

Technological Developments

Elections now have increased technological intervention, increasing possible vulnerabilities to fraud. Cyberattacks on election databases or vote counting systems pose a particularly significant risk, causing the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency to work closely alongside states to safeguard digital systems. With technologies for absentee ballots, vote counting, etc. being relatively new, uncertainties on election integrity remain. Increases in voter accessibility often incorporate more technologies, increasing potential uncertainty.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views:

Current parties involved reflect the polarized state of this issue today: Democrats largely prioritise increasing voter accessibility in order to ensure effective representation and inclusion, while Republicans prioritize increased security measures in order to prevent fraud and ensure election integrity. Besides partisan tensions, the federal government also attempts to increase their control over election policy, while state governments enact distinct policies in their own jurisdiction that reflect their party's views.

Democratic Party

Democrats generally advocate for expanding voter accessibility through policies such as automatic voter registration, same-day registration, expanded early voting, and mail-in ballots. They argue that structural barriers disproportionately affect minorities, hindering representation in the electoral process. They also often support federal oversight to ensure that states comply with the suffrage protections enumerated in the constitution and to expand voting accessibility across the nation. However, within the party Moderate Democrats often acknowledge concerns about ballot security and administrative efficiency, advocating for election reforms to balance both priorities. On the other hand, more radical Democrats see increased measures to prevent voter fraud as a modern-day attempt to marginalize minority voters and overrepresent a sub-section of citizens' perspectives, and thus remain opposed to increased election protections of any kind.

Republican Party

Republicans generally prioritize election integrity through measures such as stricter voter ID requirements, signature verification for mail-in ballots, and limits on third-party ballot collection. They argue that these measures are necessary to prevent fraud, and maintain accurate vote counts. They largely support state-level control over elections rather than federal oversight, arguing that states are best positioned to tailor systems to their populations and enforce stringent security measures to maintain integrity. However, within the party traditional conservatives tend to focus on improving overall institutional integrity and the systemic fairness of elections, supporting any reforms that seek to prevent fraud and enhance transparency—even if they also aim to increase accessibility. Recently however, Trump-aligned factions of the party have adopted a more strong stance, questioning the legitimacy of absentee ballots and mail-in voting altogether. These factions seek to reduce existing voting options as well, alleging fraud in recent elections despite integrity being rigorously proven.

State Governments

Republican states such as Georgia, Texas, and Florida have enacted laws emphasizing security and verification, aiming to increase election integrity and aligning with their party's views. While Democratic states like Colorado, Oregon, and Washington have expanded mail-in voting and automatic registration, aligning with their respective party in an attempt to increase accessibility. Essentially, state governments have created distinct local policies aligned with their party's perspectives on this issue, showing how states continue to have considerable autonomy over electoral procedures as opposed to more standardized federal policies.

United States Federal Government

The U.S. Congress and the Department of Justice (DOJ) often work to enforce the establishment of the voting rights Amendments and fund/protect election infrastructure. The Federal Election Commission (FEC) is an agency that oversees campaign finance, while the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) provides guidance and technical support to states. Thus though election administration is largely decentralized, giving state governments more power over procedures, the federal government still attempts to assert control over election procedures. Largely, Democrats believe that the federal government involvement is necessary to ensure accessibility, while Republicans assert that more state control is needed to ensure integrity.

Relevant Congressional Bills:

In an attempt to address the issue of ensuring voter accessibility and safeguarding the integrity of democratic elections several debates have occurred in congress following the introduction of these bills. Though not all have been passed, these bills highlight the existing perspectives in the congress regarding the issue, as well as ongoing efforts to balance these two competing priorities across party lines.

Bill Details:

- **S.3748 - Accessible Voting Act of 2024:** expands voting accessibility for individuals with disabilities and older individuals.
- **H.R.11 - Freedom to Vote Act:** Expands voter registration and voting access while setting districting guidelines, and establishes Election Day as a federal holiday. Declares that US citizens who are convicted criminals have the right to vote unless they are serving their sentence at the time of election, and that any attempt to hinder, interfere with, or prevent another person from registering to vote or helping someone register to vote is illegal, increasing accessibility.
- **H.R.160 - Restoring Faith in Elections Act:** establishes certain standards for voting, including voting by mail, in federal elections (mail-in ballots to be received by the time the polls close on election day, and no individual can possess the mail-in ballot of another person). It also establishes certain requirements for voter registration and maintenance of official lists of eligible voters.
- **H.R.3257 - Election Integrity Act of 2023:** establishes strict regulations on types of electronic voting systems that can be used in federal elections
- **H.R.1295 - Early Voting Act:** expands early in-person voting to a period of at least 15 days
- **H.R.8825 - Right to Vote Act:** prohibits federal, state, and local governments from substantially impairing the ability of any U.S. citizen of legal voting age to vote in federal elections

Possible Solutions:

To address this issue, these are some possible solutions aligned with each party that could be a starting point for discussion in committee:

Democratic Party

- **Establish Federal Standards for Voting Accessibility:** It could be possible to implement minimum national standards for voter registration, early voting, and absentee ballots, ensuring a baseline level of increased accessibility.
- **Reinstate the Voting Rights Act:** Reinstating the federal clearance provisions that were overturned by *Shelby County v. Holder* to ensure that

changes in state voting laws are reviewed by the federal government for potential discrimination.

- **Democratic Integrity Reform:** Review districting apportionments and require states to adopt the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (binding interstate compact agreeing to award their electoral votes to the national popular vote winner, regardless of their state's individual outcome).

Republican Party

- **Strengthen Voter Identification Systems:** Implement standardized national guidelines for voter identification to prevent voter fraud and maintain election integrity.
- **Mandate Post-Election Audits:** Require all states to conduct audits after federal elections to verify the accuracy of vote counts (e.g. through comparing paper to electronic ballots for accuracy, etc.).
- **State-Controlled Election Oversight:** Limit/abolish current federal level voting policies in order to ensure rigorous state-level controls over election administration and ballot counts.

Bipartisan

- **Bipartisan Election Oversight Committees:** Possible institution of joint bipartisan committees at the state and federal levels to oversee election integrity, in an attempt to reduce polarization and misinformation.
- **Misinformation Mitigation Campaigns:** Implement bipartisan educational initiatives to ensure citizens have an accurate understanding of the election process, counter misinformation regarding election integrity, and restore public confidence in democratic institutions.

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Useful Links (in addition to those in Works Cited):

- Source to read about all relevant congressional bills (type in key words like "voting", "voter accessibility", "election integrity", "elections", etc.):
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- Opinion Essay (to increase voter accessibility):
<https://theconversation.com/making-it-easier-to-vote-does-not-threaten-election-integrity-157007>
- Opinions on New SAVE Act (current policy for election integrity):
 - <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/13/nx-s1-5254181/election-integrity-policy-save-act-cleta-mitchell>
 - <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-save-act-an-attempt-to-restrict-voting-rights/>

- Explanation of Election Integrity:
<https://online.hilbert.edu/blog/electoral-integrity/>
- Short Videos on Tackling the Balance Between Access and Election Integrity:
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDwxhSUEj_I
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mTKeolfxFo>
- Opinion on the Issues with the Electoral College:
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- Background on the 2020 Election:
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