



**National
Urban League**

To Be Equal #15

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Voting in November 2014 Midterm Elections More Important Than Ever

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"The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men because they are different from other men." President Lyndon B. Johnson

Last week in Austin, Texas, three former United States Presidents and President Barack Obama came together to celebrate the 50th anniversary of President Lyndon Johnson's signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed discrimination and segregation based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The Civil Rights Act also offered greater protections for the right to vote, paving the way for the much more comprehensive landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965. Those laws may have been signed in ink, but they were written in the blood of thousands of men and women who put their lives on the line to ensure a better future for America. Every major gain of the past half-century for African Americans and other minorities was made possible by the expansion and guarantee of what President Johnson called "the first right and most vital of all our fights" – the right to vote.

However, unfortunately voter suppression did not suddenly disappear in the 1960s, as evidenced by increased efforts in the past five years by some states to enact new voter ID laws and other restrictive measures. The Supreme Court also joined the fray last year with its disappointing and specious ruling to invalidate Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act. But African Americans responded in 2012 by going to the polls in greater numbers than ever before. As predicted in the National Urban League's 2012 "Hidden Swing Voters" report, African American voters not only tipped the scales in the re-election of President Obama, Black voter turnout surpassed the white vote for the first time in history. This was accomplished despite some of the most obvious and egregious voter suppression efforts in recent history and demonstrates the power of our vote when we exercise it. That is why a new poll released last week is so disturbing.

A survey by pollster Stan Greenberg found that a group called the "Rising American Electorate," comprised of young people, unmarried women and minorities, is significantly less likely to vote than other, less progressive groups in the midterm elections this November. Greenberg's poll shows that only 64 percent of members of the Rising American Electorate say they are "almost certain" to vote in 2014, compared to 79 percent of others. All 435 seats in the House of Representatives and 36 of the 100 seats in the Senate are up for grabs (with 33 Senate elections on the normal six-year cycle and special elections in South Carolina, Oklahoma and Hawaii).

With so much at stake – jobs, health care, education, equal pay, minimum wage and more – a failure to vote could have catastrophic consequences on maintaining and achieving critical policies that seek to bridge the growing divides of unemployment, income, wealth, achievement and social justice in our nation.

Historically, members of the Rising American Electorate are far less likely to vote in midterm elections than they are when the Presidency is on the line. As reported in the New York Times, according to "the Voter Participation Center – a nonpartisan organization dedicated to increasing the share of historically underrepresented voting groups – the drop-off among these groups between 2008 and 2010 was nearly 21 million, going from roughly 61 million to 40 million."

Last week, President Obama said, "The right to vote is threatened today in a way that it has not been since the Voting Rights Act became law nearly five decades ago." While organizations like the National Urban League, National Action Network, NAACP, National Coalition on Black Civic Participation and many others will continue to fight these efforts through the courts and Congress, every individual must also continue to fight by casting a vote. The transparent efforts to suppress votes in the name of unfounded and false claims of voter fraud should be an incentive for every American to go to the polls, not an excuse to stay home. Voting is not, nor should it ever be used as, a partisan issue. It is an essential issue of citizenship and democracy. The change and progress we seek in this country will only be achieved if we go to the polls in the November midterms with the same fervor and numbers that we did in 2012.

Remember, every vote counts. Don't let anyone count you out.

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