



**National  
Urban League**

**To Be Equal #38  
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Occupy the Vote – No Bullies at the Polls**

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*“Eligible Americans have a civic duty to vote, and government at the federal, state, and local level has a responsibility to protect voters from illegal interference and intimidation.”* Bullies at the Ballot Box report

Last week, a new report by Common Cause and Demos, entitled “Bullies at the Ballot Box,” took direct aim at Jim Crow-like tactics designed to challenge and intimidate voters at the polls. The report especially notes the campaign of intimidation that is currently being waged by a Tea Party affiliated group called True the Vote which has set a goal of training and deploying as many as one million poll watchers “to challenge and confront other Americans as they go to the polls in November.”

True the Vote has said they want to make the experience of voting “like driving and seeing the police following you.” Earlier this year, we saw what happened when an overzealous citizen decided to follow and confront a teenager with a hoodie whose only “crime” was walking while black. As the new report states, “There is a real danger that voters will face overzealous volunteers who take the law into their own hands to target voters they deem suspect.” These mostly conservative groups claim their purpose is to protect against voter fraud – a solution in search of a problem, since the incidence of voter fraud in America is miniscule. The only fraud is their real intent, which is to gain political advantage for their preferred candidate by disenfranchising, suppressing or bullying progressive voters who tend to be people of color, the elderly, students and people with disabilities.

The Bullies at the Ballot Box report raises awareness about this threat and outlines what is legal and permissible when it comes to challenging a voter's eligibility both before and on election day. It also assesses the ability of ten key swing states to protect the rights of voters who may face this type of poll-stalking intimidation. According to the report, “In examining the ten states' laws governing challenges to voters' right to vote before Election Day, including the use of voter lists created through caging or other unreliable practices, we find Colorado,

Nevada, and Ohio are satisfactory, North Carolina and Texas are mixed, and Florida, Missouri, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Virginia - five out of the ten states - unsatisfactory."

The intimidation tactics by True the Vote and others, along with new voter ID laws in at least 30 states, and the elimination of early and weekend voting in several others, could seriously impact the outcome of the November election. Stephen Spaulding of Common Cause, a co-author of the report put it this way: "We're concerned about this well-organized, well-funded effort to suppress the vote by challenging voters in the run-up to the elections and on Elections Day, and fostering a climate of intimidation. We're concerned that these techniques are being targeted at voters of color, students and the poor specifically, for partisan reasons. No one wants voter fraud. The issue is their techniques are just throwing up barriers to eligible Americans, who just want to cast their ballot."

We agree. That's why the National Urban League has devoted this year to removing those barriers through our "Occupy the Vote" campaign. To read the full Bullies at the Ballot Box Report visit: <http://www.demos.org/publication/bullies-ballot-box-protecting-freedom-vote-against-wrongful-challenges-and-intimidation>

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