

# VOTING REFORMS

## HR1/S1 • FOR THE PEOPLE ACT

HR1/S1, the For the People Act of 2021 is a democracy reform bill that was reintroduced in the House of Representatives on January 4, 2021. The bill is designed to improve access to voting for all citizens, decrease the harmful impact of big money in our democracy, and strengthen ethics rules and regulations. This document examines some voting reform aspects of HR1/S1.



## What kinds of voting reforms are included in HR1/S1?

### Voter registration will be modernized in a number of ways:

- **Online voter registration:** Makes it possible to both register and update voter information online in every state ([40 states already have online voter registration](#)).
- **Automatic voter registration:** Eligible unregistered voters who interact with state agencies, such as the DMV, will be automatically registered to vote, unless they decline.
- **Same-day voter registration:** Improves accessibility by allowing voters to register to vote on Election Day ([21 states already have same-day registration](#)).

### Voting by mail will be allowed in every state with the same guidelines:

- Each state will establish an absentee ballot tracking system so voters can verify the status of their mail-in ballot.
- All mail related to voting will include prepayment of postage stamps.
- States must inform voters if a signature discrepancy caused rejection of their absentee ballot and provide an opportunity to resolve the discrepancy.
- HR1/S1 requires the availability of secure drop boxes as another way to return a ballot.
- States cannot add other restrictions on voting by mail, such as limiting access to those with valid excuses or requiring witnesses or notarization.
- It establishes a uniform deadline for acceptance of mail-in ballots (all ballots postmarked on or before Election Day and received in the subsequent 10-day period).

### HR1/S1 increases voting access in other ways:

- Establishes a national standard for early voting (15 days).
- Makes Election Day a federal holiday.
- Standardizes processing of provisional ballots.
- Prohibits discriminatory voter purges and voter caging.

**“Voter caging”** is the process of using returned, non-forwardable mail to remove registered voters from the rolls. It has proved to be an unreliable and discriminatory method.

**Provisional ballots** are used when there are concerns about a voter’s eligibility or if a registered voter shows up at the wrong precinct. The voter can still cast their vote on a provisional ballot. However, before the ballot is counted, the question of their voter eligibility must be resolved.

## What is the purpose of these voting reforms?

As things currently stand, rules regarding voting registration, absentee ballots, and early voting vary significantly state by state. HR1/S1 would provide a national standard for a minimum level of voting accessibility. Voting registration reforms are necessary to provide equal access to the vote in every state. This is especially important considering that states with the most [voter suppression](#) have a long history of [racial discrimination in voting](#). These reforms align closely with MWEG’s Principle of Ethical Government 2(a): “Political structures and electoral systems should be designed to maximize participation of and provide equitable access to all citizens in a society.”

***Why are these voting reforms nonpartisan by nature?*** *Voter registration modernization protects the voting rights of citizens across the political spectrum. Automatic, same-day, and online voter registration already exist in many states with support from Republican and Democratic election officials. Additionally, voting by mail has historically had bipartisan support, and [research shows](#) that expanding vote-by-mail access does not result in any partisan advantage.*

## How will HR1/S1 increase voting access for disenfranchised groups?

HR1/S1 seeks to address the obstacles facing eligible voters in a number of ways. The table below explores how various minority groups have been disenfranchised and what this bill would do to improve voting access.

GROUPS NEEDING IMPROVED VOTING ACCESS	HOW VOTING ACCESS HAS BEEN LIMITED	HOW HR1/S1 IMPROVES VOTING ACCESS
Military & Overseas Voters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many overseas and military voters do not receive their ballots early enough to return them in time to be counted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires states to send absentee ballots to them at least 45 days before an election</li> </ul>
Individuals with Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many individuals with disabilities experience obstacles to voting when reasonable accommodations are not made</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guarantees that individuals with disabilities can use absentee voting procedures</li> <li>Establishes a pilot program to expand voting-from-home options</li> </ul>
Formerly Incarcerated Individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many formerly incarcerated individuals find that once their time is served, they are still disenfranchised</li> <li>Significant racial disparities in felony disenfranchisement are related to systemic racism in the criminal justice system and a history of voter suppression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restores the right to vote in federal elections for formerly incarcerated individuals who have completed their sentence</li> <li>Requires states to inform individuals when their voting rights are restored</li> </ul>
College & University Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of accessible polling places</li> <li>Barriers to voting eligibility for out-of-state students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Considers public universities as “voter registration agencies” to help increase access to voter registration for students</li> </ul>
Native Americans Living on Tribal Lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of a residential address on tribal lands can limit access to voting for many Native Americans</li> <li>Insufficient provision of early voting and Election Day polling places</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides mail-in ballots to voters on tribal lands without requiring a residential address</li> <li>Establishes designated ballot dropoff locations where there is limited access to mail</li> </ul>
Racial Minorities Affected by Voter Suppression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voter suppression laws disproportionately target racial minorities, especially Blacks and Latinos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prohibits voter caging</li> <li>Protects eligible voters from voter purges</li> </ul>

## What are independent redistricting committees, and why are they necessary?

### HR1/S1 requires adoption of independent redistricting committees to prevent partisan gerrymandering.

- As required by the Constitution, congressional redistricting occurs every 10 years following the national census.
- Gerrymandering occurs when district boundaries are drawn to unfairly favor the political party that has power over the redistricting process.
- Gerrymandering harms our democratic institutions and individual voices by allowing elected officials to choose their voters rather than voters choosing their elected officials. It increases polarization and distorts representation so that some votes count more than others.
- The solution is surprisingly straightforward: Have multi-partisan independent redistricting committees draw district maps with ample public feedback.
- 21 states currently have some sort of nonpartisan redistricting, HR1/S1 would empower all states to protect our democratic institutions in the same way.
- Harms Democratic and Republican voters alike. A [2017 poll](#) shows overwhelming bipartisan support for limiting gerrymandering.

*Gerrymandering takes away the power of people to choose their representatives and allows the politicians to choose their electorates. This creates party strangleholds that disenfranchise voters.*

*Gerrymandering silences voters' voices by creating political minorities.*

## How does HR1/S1 protect election integrity and security?

### HR1/S1

- Prohibits the intentional use of misleading election information.
- Strengthens penalties for voter intimidation or deception.
- Requires use of individual, durable, voter-verified paper ballots.
- Establishes quality standards for election infrastructure vendors.
- Improves poll worker recruitment and training.
- Enhances the ability to investigate and prevent cybersecurity election threats.

In light of evidence that there was [foreign interference in the 2016 U.S. election](#), HR1/S1 enhances election security against both foreign and domestic actors. The bill prohibits disinformation campaigns, facilitates communication between federal and state levels regarding election threats, and seeks to improve election cybersecurity. Since paperless voting machines are more vulnerable to election interference, the bill requires the use of durable, voter-verified paper ballots, which are secure and easy to audit if a recount is necessary. It also implements standards for election infrastructure vendors and requires testing of voting systems nine months prior to a general election to ensure compliance with cybersecurity guidelines. In addition, HR1/S1 requires states to have emergency plans in place in the case of natural disasters or public health crises. All of these measures protect the integrity and security of elections so we can have confidence in our democratic processes.

## Additional Resources

- [The Brennan Center: Annotated Guide to the For the People Act of 2021](#)
- [Common Cause: For the People Act](#)
- [Campaign Legal Center: The Bipartisan Origins & Impact of the For the People Act \(HR1/S1\)](#)