



# Mississippi Voting Rights Roundup 2023

The power to vote and elect qualified representatives is a clear and objective path to acquiring freedom. However, that right has long been denied or restricted to far too many people, especially in Mississippi. Mississippi's voting laws are some of the most restrictive in the nation. In fact, data suggests that Mississippi is the second most difficult state to vote in.<sup>1</sup>

Many obstacles lie in the way of electoral freedom in this state, including voter I.D. laws, voter purging, voter suppression, polling place closures and consolidations, gerrymandering, and disenfranchisement, just to name a few.

One Voice's aim is to ensure that all people have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process. The following is an overview of Mississippi's voting rights laws as of July 2023.

Local Black  
Elected Official  
Representation  
in Mississippi

148

COUNTY SUPERVISORS

90

MAYORS

21

SHERRIFS

19

CHANCERY CLERKS

21

CIRCUIT CLERKS

# 2023 Voting Laws

During the 2023 Legislative Session, lawmakers introduced over 120 bills related to voting and elections. Bills introduced to authorize early voting, and allow for online and same-day voter registration, all died early in the legislative session. No suffrage bills to restore the right to vote to people with felony convictions passed this session. And the state failed to reinstate or amend the ballot initiative process. In all, in 2023, Mississippi lawmakers made voting rights in the state even more restrictive. Most notably, restrictive voting laws passed in 2023 include laws that make it easier to purge voters from the rolls and a law passed under the guise of “election integrity” that might deter voting from vulnerable populations.

## House Bill 1310

House Bill 1310 is a voting purge law that authorizes Secretary of State Michael Watson to audit election procedures of the 2023, 2024, 2026, and 2027 general elections in all counties in the state.<sup>2</sup>

Under the bill, voters will be placed on inactive status if they have not voted across two federal elections.<sup>3</sup> After failing to vote during that time period, local election officials are authorized to send the voter a notice by postcard to confirm his or her address.<sup>4</sup> If the voter fails to confirm his or her address four years after receiving the notice or fails to vote, the voter will be purged from the voter rolls.<sup>5</sup> If the voter is purged and placed on inactive status, he or she will be removed from the selection pool for jury duty and must cast an affidavit ballot to vote at their precinct in the election after being purged.<sup>6</sup>

## Senate Bill 2358

Senate Bill 2358 is a law that intends to prohibit ballot harvesting under the guise of “election integrity.”<sup>7</sup> The penalty for violation of this law is imprisonment for up to one year or a fine of up to \$3,000, or both. Family members, household members, caregivers, an election official, or an employee of the United States Postal Service will not be penalized for ballot harvesting under this law, but the law is likely to have no impact on unfounded voter fraud concerns and could deter vulnerable populations like the elderly or people with disabilities from voting who rely on someone else to collect their absentee ballots in order to vote.<sup>8</sup>



**2023**  
**ELECTION DATES**  
\*AT A GLANCE

**One Voice**

JUL 10	Primary Election Voter Registration Deadline
AUG 8	Primary Election Day
AUG 29	Primary Runoff Election Day (If Needed)
OCT 9	General Election Voter Registration Deadline
NOV 7	General Election Day
NOV 28	General Runoff Election Day (If Needed)

# Important Voting Rights Issues in Mississippi

House Bill 1310 and Senate Bill 2358 add to numerous other voting rights concerns in the state, including the following:

## Gerrymandering

Gerrymandering is the result of political leaders' manipulation of electoral boundaries to choose voters of their choice by dividing or arranging geographical boundaries into election districts that provide a way that gives an unfair advantage to a particular political party in elections.<sup>9</sup>The impact of gerrymandering in Mississippi has created disparities in state-level political positions in the state. For instance, although Blacks represent more than a third of the state's population, Black voters are a majority in only one of the state's four U.S. congressional districts.<sup>10</sup>Similarly, only four Black people have been elected to the Mississippi Supreme Court in the last 100 years.<sup>11</sup>And although Mississippi has more Black Mississippians per capita and more Black elected officials than any other state in the nation, the state has not elected a Black candidate to a statewide office in the more than 140 years since Reconstruction.<sup>12</sup>Ensuring that voters elect the person of their choice—instead of politicians choosing their own voters through gerrymandering—requires both federal and state legislation as well as increases civic engagement and voter participation.

## Felony Disenfranchisement/Suffrage Restoration

Mississippi is one of twelve states in which individuals may be disenfranchised, or restricted, from voting permanently after a felony conviction. Currently, the state permanently restricts voting after completion of a sentence from those convicted of the following twenty-three offenses: voter fraud, armed robbery, arson, bigamy, bribery, carjacking, embezzlement, extortion, felony bad check, felony shoplifting, forgery, larceny, murder, obtaining money or goods under false pretense, perjury, rape, receiving stolen goods, robbery, statutory rape, theft, timber larceny and unlawful taking of a vehicle.<sup>13</sup>

Mississippi ranks highest in the nation in the percentage of disenfranchised individuals with felony convictions as of 2020.<sup>14</sup> Nearly eleven percent of the state's voting-age population is disenfranchised.<sup>15</sup> And nearly sixteen percent— twice the national average for African Americans—of the state's black voting age population are disenfranchised.<sup>16</sup> Persons seeking to regain the right to vote can attempt to do so in three different ways: they can apply for a pardon from the Governor; they can apply for an Executive Order Restoring Civil Rights from the Governor; or they can seek to have the Mississippi State Legislature pass a Bill of Suffrage on their behalf, which must pass with a two-thirds majority.<sup>17</sup> As it stands, pardons from the Governor can be rare to receive. Also, the state's suffrage procedure is ambiguous and subjective and is an ineffective method for actually restoring voting rights to those disenfranchised. One Voice continues to advocate for voting rights restoration and a clearer, more effective suffrage process through policy advocacy and community engagement and awareness.

## Voter Registration

Mississippi's voting laws are some of the most restrictive in the nation.<sup>18</sup> For instance, Mississippi is one of only three states to permanently restrict people convicted of certain felonies from voting.<sup>19</sup> Mississippi also requires a photo ID to cast a ballot in person at the polls or by absentee ballot in the circuit or municipal clerk's office, does not provide no-excuse absentee voting, does not allow early voting, and does not allow mail-in voting, with the exception of a few categories of absentee voting.<sup>20</sup>

To ensure the expansion of voter rights and access, protect election integrity through voter registration and machinery, and secure the restoration of voting rights for disenfranchised individuals, state lawmakers should consider the following:

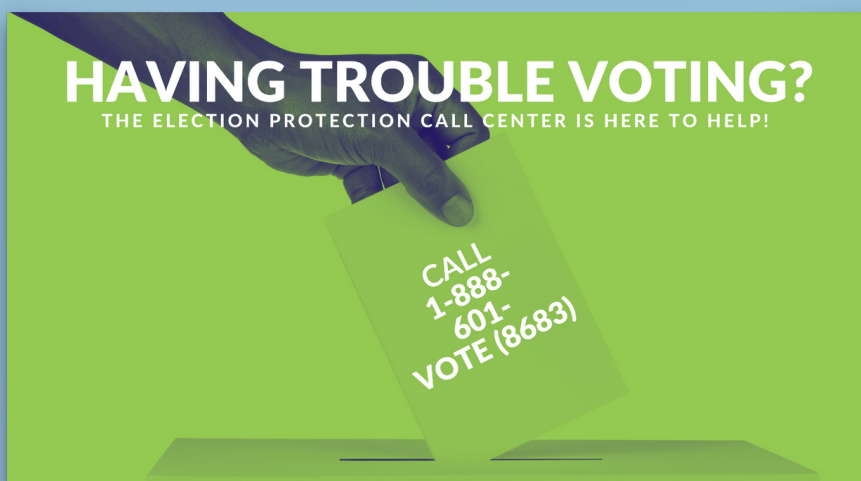
- Eliminate voter purging policies
- Prohibit strict voter ID laws
- Reform voter registration procedures to allow for automatic, online, and same-day voter registration, as well as extended voting hours
- Address language barriers to voting
- Allow for no-excuse early voting and mail-in voting
- Extended polling hours and locations

## The Ballot Initiative Process

Mississippi's initiative law was a process by which voters could place constitutional amendments directly on the ballot when the Legislature refused to act on issues important to them.<sup>21</sup> In 2021, the Mississippi Supreme Court struck down an initiative legalizing medical marijuana and ruled that the process for gathering signatures for an initiative to be placed on a ballot was unconstitutional.<sup>22</sup>

The ruling made Mississippi the only state in recent history to overturn its initiative process.<sup>23</sup> And because the Legislature did not restore or reform the initiative process during the 2023 Legislative Session, the state government is now even less accountable to the people. Restoring the state's initiative process will require that state lawmakers reduce complexities with the process, such as requirements that make it extremely difficult to gather the required number of signatures to place an initiative on the ballot and ensure that the will of Mississippians becomes law.

**One Voice will continue to work to secure voting rights for all residents, prevent voter intimidation and suppression, elevate underserved voices, and seek opportunities to widen political participation. In all, our interests lie in restoration, advocacy, redistricting, and the mobilization of voters.**





ONE VILLAGE  
ONE VISION  
ONE VOICE

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