

The background features a series of overlapping, wavy lines in shades of blue and green, creating a sense of motion and depth. The lines are most prominent on the left side and fade towards the right.

# VOTER SUPPRESSION: THE AGE OF CORONA

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# What is Voter Suppression?

- A *strategy* used to influence the outcome of an election by discouraging or preventing specific groups of people from voting
- Voter suppression can occur in many ways
  - Gerrymandered districts, reducing and restricting time allowed for early and absentee voting, increasing barriers to voter registration, intimidation, and disinformation

# History of Voter Suppression

- Following the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment which granted all men the right to vote regardless of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude” southern democrats began to form methods of voter suppression
- Created the Jim Crow voting laws which lasted from 1870s-1965
  - Pass literacy tests which were manipulated to make sure uneducated slaves wouldn't pass
  - Poll taxes which left poor African-Americans (and some whites) unable or unwilling to pay
  - A period of violence where blacks were physically coerced (threats or beatings) into voting a certain way
  - Purges of names off the official lists of registered voters (more often affected blacks than whites)
  - Former prisoners weren't allowed to vote
    - Blacks often went to prison for minor offenses or trumped-up charges
    - A continued system of legal slavery

# How Voting Suppression Affects People

- In 1900 blacks made up 37.94% of the population in southern states
- Voting rates dropped throughout the south as a result of Jim Crow laws drastically
- Those that weren't registered to vote couldn't sit on a jury or run for public office
- When the majority of African Americans couldn't vote, they also were deprived of their right to have a jury of their peers
- African Americans were often ignored by their representatives when it came to policy that would have benefited them
  - They couldn't vote for a representative that would fight to represent them

# 1965 Voter Rights Act

- The Voter Rights Act was meant to reaffirm the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment and to officially give blacks the right and ability to vote
- Banned the use of literacy tests, provided federal oversight of voter registration, authorized the U.S. attorney general the right to investigate poll taxes in state and local elections which were later banned both federally and in the states by 1966
- It had immediate an impact leading to a quarter of a million new black voters by the end of the year
- By the end of 1966 9 out of 13 southern states had over 50% of African Americans registered to vote
- The Voter Rights Act continued to be strengthened in 1970, 75, and 82

# Voter Suppression: On the Rise?

- In 2008 America elected its first black president
- 2008 saw an almost unprecedented rise in minority voters
  - The gap between white and African-American voters decreased from 6.9% in 2004 to .9% in 2008
  - 15% more African-Americans voted in 2008 than 2004
  - 28% more Hispanics voted in 2008 than 2004
  - 2008 saw record voter turnout throughout the country and 5 million new voters
- 30 states introduced voter suppression legislation in 2011 which 16 passed
  - Maine eliminated Election Day registration
  - Ohio made the end period when people could register and vote the same day
  - Florida and Texas restricted voter registration drives
    - Hispanics and African Americans are about twice as likely to vote through registration drives
  - Florida and Wisconsin made it harder for people who move to stay registered to vote

# Continued Measures Following the 2008 Election

- 10 states introduced bills to reduce early or absentee voting periods
  - They passed in Florida, Georgia, Ohio, Tennessee, and West Virginia
    - African Americans are much more likely to vote early
- 8 states passed voter ID laws in 2011
  - 1 in 10 Americans don't have a government-issued ID
  - 1 in 4 African Americans don't have a government-issued ID
  - In South Carolina (one of the states that passed the voter ID law) minority voters are 20% less likely to have a government issued ID
  - 15% of Americans who earn less than \$35,000 a year don't have a government-issued ID
- Gerrymandering is also a bipartisan strategy intended to minimize the impact a specific group of voters can have on an election
  - <https://www.benjerry.com/whats-new/2017/04/district-or-inkblot-quiz>

\*Statistics used in this and previous slide were based on 2011

# How States are Taking Advantage of the Crisis

- Wisconsin's republican controlled state legislature continued to make the primary an in-person vote despite 7,000 poll workers saying they wouldn't work
- The democrat governor tried to push back the election to allow absentee ballots more time to be received
  - Over 1 million requests for absentee ballots still hadn't been processed
    - 5 to 10 times more than ever before
- On the evening of April 6th (the night before the election) republicans sought to remove a 6-day extension the state would accept ballots
- The Republican supreme court ruled that absentee ballots had to be post-marked by April 7<sup>th</sup> even though thousands of people hadn't received their absentee ballots



# Why Wisconsin Matters

- Although the presidential primary is over a seat on the state supreme court was up for reelection
- Before the election, republicans controlled the court 5-2
- The Republicans hoped that by making it more difficult for people to vote the incumbent would win reelection
  - People were forced to choose between violating the state-wide stay at home order and risking their health and exercising their right to vote
- The democrat ended up beating the republican incumbent making the courts makeup 4-3
  - This court will decide whether or not the state will purge 209,000 voters
  - It will also decide how its congressional map will look like for the next decade
- Citizens are suing the state and calling for a new vote due to disenfranchisement

# More Instances of Voter Suppression

- Georgia Republican state House Speaker opposed sending absentee ballots because it would drive up voter turnout which would be bad for republicans
- North Carolina's state senator opposed modest steps to make mail-in balloting easier because it would make ballot tampering easier
- President Trump is quoted saying that expanding absentee voting nationwide would hurt Republicans "They had levels of voting, that if you ever agreed to it, you'd never have a Republican elected in this country again"