

Voter Suppression vs. Fraud

Lesson Packet #24 from The Change Agent

During the 2020 election, we are hearing a lot about both voter suppression and voter fraud. What are they? How should we evaluate the claims about them? This lesson packet offers some definitions and activities on this topic, and asks students to develop their own questions and then research the answers.



Look at the photo above. What is happening? Say in your own words what the sign means. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Discuss the idea of universal suffrage. It means that all adult citizens should have the right to vote regardless of wealth, income, race, ethnicity, gender, or status.

Do you think we have universal suffrage in the U.S.? Explain. And then turn the page and explore current issues in voting.



Find more teaching resources about Voter Education, Registration, and Action at <https://nelrc.org/stand-up-and-be-counted/>

Voter Suppression vs. Fraud

Learn the Definitions



Study the image. Describe what you see. What are some of the ways voting can be suppressed?

Voter Suppression

Voter suppression is a strategy used to influence the outcome of an election by discouraging or preventing specific groups of people from voting. The tactics of voter suppression range from minor changes to make voting less convenient, to physically intimidating and even physically attacking prospective voters, which is illegal. Voter suppression can be effective if a significant number of voters are intimidated or disenfranchised.

Define voter suppression in your own words:



Study the image. Describe what you see. Is voter fraud different from voter suppression? If so, how?

Voter Fraud

Electoral fraud, sometimes referred to as election fraud, election manipulation or vote rigging, is illegal interference with the process of an election by increasing the vote share of the favored candidate. What exactly constitutes electoral fraud varies from country to country.

Define voter fraud in your own words:

Sources: Definitions from wikipedia.com. Images from the New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/opinion/sunday/voter-suppression-georgia-2018.html> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/19/opinion/north-carolina-election-fraud.html>.

Test Your Understanding

Try this Quiz

Read the following situations. Identify each with an “S” for suppression or “F” for fraud.

1. _____ Polling places in rural areas are shut down so that voters have to travel several hours to be able to vote.
2. _____ A voter votes once at one polling place and then travels to another and votes a second time under a different name.
3. _____ A state law gives formerly incarcerated people the right to vote, but the application to resume voting rights is very complex and time-consuming.
4. _____ A well known and powerful public figure claims the election is rigged, giving people the idea that there is no point in voting.
5. _____ Local government redraws voting districts to favor a particular party (also known as gerrymandering).
6. _____ Someone prints fake ballots (forgeries) and fills them out and mails them in.

Answers: 1. S; 2. F; 3. S; 4. S; 5. S; 6. F.

Take It Further

Develop your own questions about voter suppression and fraud

Work with a partner or in a small group. Develop some questions about what you have been learning so far, and write them here. Share your questions with the whole class. Choose one or two that you would like to learn more about. Conduct research on the questions you choose. Search the internet and/or use the articles from *The Change Agent* listed on p. 5. Take notes about what you learn and keep track of your sources. What sources are trustworthy? How do you know?

Evaluate Claims about Fraud

Real Statements: Are they true?

BEFORE YOU START: Learn the definition of *claim* from the box on the right. Do the activity.

In each Tweet below, the person is making a claim. Read, discuss, and make sure you understand each Tweet. You may have questions about the content of the Tweet. For example, what is the difference between mail-in voting and absentee voting? Is it possible to delay the election? If so, how? What does fraudulent mean?

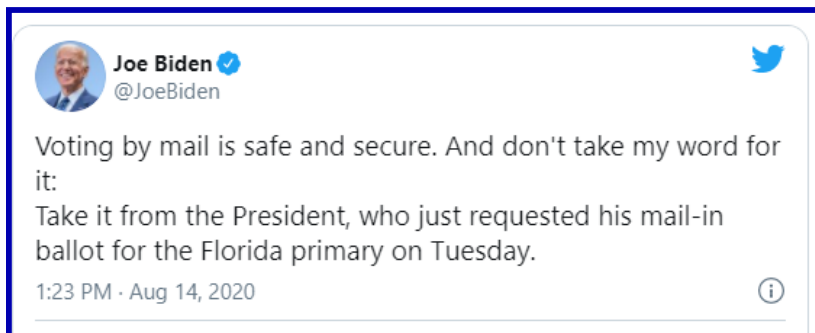
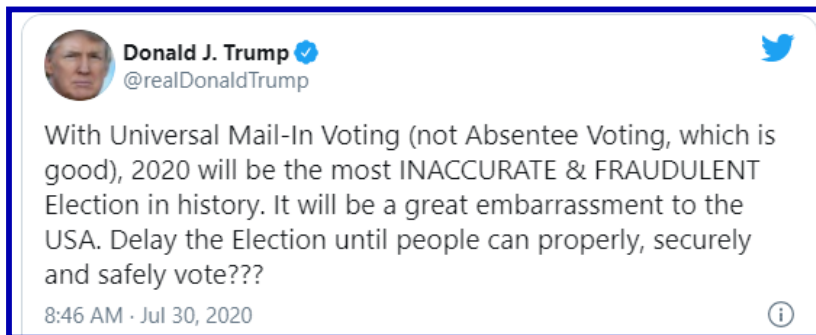
After you feel sure you understand each Tweet, write in your own words what the person is claiming. Then research to find evidence for the claim. Bring your evidence to class and share it with your classmates. (*Hint: before you start your online research, work with others and brainstorm what words to use in your search.*)

Write a paragraph that either backs or disputes the claims made in one of the Tweets.

What Does *Claim* Mean?

DEFINITION: A claim (noun) is an assertion of the truth that may or may not include evidence. For e.g., *It is my claim that the dog ate my homework.* It can also be a verb: *She claimed that the dog ate her homework.*

ACTIVITY: Use claim (the noun and/or verb) in several sentences. Try to draw from current events, especially related to the elections. What claims have you been hearing?



More Readings and Activities

To explore more election-related topics

“Gerrymandering and the Fight for Democracy in 2020,” Annette Bowen, pp. 19-20 of “Stand Up and Be Counted,” Issue #50 of *The Change Agent*, <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/gerrymandering-and-the-fight-for-democracy-in-2020/>.

“Race and Voting Rights in 2016,” Andy Nash, pp. 28-29, “Talking about Race,” Issue 42 of *The Change Agent*, available in text and audio here: <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-42/race-and-voting-rights-in-2016/> (Level 10).

“Race and Voting Rights in 2016: Lesson Ideas.” This packet includes more activities to explore the history of voting rights and voter suppression. It is available in two PDFs here: <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets/#packet11> (one at level 6, and the other at level 10).

“Voting in a Time of Uncertainty,” Maegan Morris, p. 27 of “Pandemic,” Issue #51 of *The Change Agent* (September 2020).

“Stand Up and Be Counted,” Issue #50, March 2020, pp. 19-31, articles about elections, voting, and issues by adult students. <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-50-march-2020-stand-up-and-be-counted/>

“Democracy in Action,” Issue #26, March 2008, articles about elections, voting, and issues by adult students: <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-26/>.

The New England Literacy Resource Center’s “[Stand Up and Be Counted](https://changeagent.nelrc.org/)” webpages on the Census and Voter Education, Registration and Action (VERA).