



PRESENTATION TITLE: Get Out The Vote: Democracy Depends On It!

RUNNING TIME: Approx 35 minutes (3,724 words)

SLIDE 1: “Get Out The Vote: Democracy Depends On It!” Title Slide

Welcome everyone and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I have about a 35 minute presentation for you and then we’ll have time for Q&A afterwards.

SLIDE 2: U.S. Voter Turnout Is Apathetic, Especially In Midterm Elections

If voter turnout is a reflection of the health of a democracy, then America’s democracy is severely anemic, especially in midterm elections. Here we see voter turnout for the 2008 election (shown in yellow bars), 2010 (red bars) and 2012 (green bars). Even for the historic Presidential general elections of 2008 and 2012, only about 60% of total eligible voters actually cast a vote, leaving about 90 million eligible voters sitting on the sidelines. In the 2010 midterms, the total turnout dropped to 41%, meaning the majority of eligible voters — 128 million — stayed home instead of voting. Compare this to 95% turnout in Australia, which has a mandate to vote, and 87% for Denmark. The OECD average for developed countries is a 70% turnout.

When we drill down on the turnout numbers by race, age and job status, we start to see why the system is working from some groups and not so much for others. White voters show up in higher percentages than the overall population, especially in midterms. Black voters also show up big, although they comprise a much smaller percent of eligible voters. Turnout, however, really drops off with Hispanics — the fastest growing demographic. In the 2008 and 2012 Presidential elections, barely 50% of eligible Hispanic voters showed up, dropping to a dismal 30% in the 2010 midterms. And you wonder why we can’t get immigration reform passed: Republicans just don’t feel the heat. Turnout among Asian voters is similar to Hispanics, although they comprise a much smaller percentage of total eligible voters.

When it comes to age groups, seniors 65 and older show up like gangbusters — topping 70% in Presidential elections and even getting to 60% in a midterm. Meanwhile, only 40% of young voters 18 to 24 voted in 2012, which was at least better than the dismal 20% that showed up in the 2010 midterms. This partly explains why politicians — especially on the right — tip-toe around Social Security and Medicare, but won’t lift a finger to help students with college loan debt or a struggling job market: They feel the heat from seniors, but not from younger voters. Likewise, the majority of unemployed voters fail to show up on election day, which explains why Republicans feel totally safe blocking an extension of unemployment benefits for the last nine months. Once again, they just don’t feel the heat.



SLIDE 3: The Higher Your Income The Higher Your Voter Participation

Here we see voter participation by income level during the 2008 Presidential election. Once again, while 60% of eligible voters overall actually voted, only 40% to 50% of eligible voters making below \$30,000 showed up. Meanwhile, over 75% of those making more than \$100,000 cast a vote. This starts to explain why the game is rigged for the rich, and why Republicans are so comfortable denigrating the so-called “47%,” slashing away at food stamps, and refusing the Medicaid expansion, but they won’t dare touch the home mortgage interest deduction. They just don’t feel the heat from the poor, as they do from the rich.

SLIDE 4: Untapped Power Of Hispanic Voters

When you hear political prognosticators say “demographics is destiny” or “Republicans can’t win another national election if they don’t start appealing to Hispanic voters,” these two graphs illustrate what they are talking about. On the left we see that Whites, while still the vast majority of eligible voters, have been steadily losing share — approximately two percentage points, or about 4 million eligible voters, from 2008 to 2012. Meanwhile, the Hispanic eligible voting block has been steadily growing — increasing by about 3.3 million during those four years. But as we saw earlier, Hispanics as a voting block do not show up and exercise their growing untapped power: Half don’t vote in the Presidential elections and two-thirds stay home during midterms. Republicans count on this apathy so they continue to disrespect and disregard Hispanics with impunity.

In particular, Hispanics need to stop blaming supporters like President Obama and the Democrats for failing to pass immigration reform and start blaming themselves for not punishing Republicans who blocked the Dream Act in 2010 with a filibuster in the Senate and who now refuse to let the Senate immigration bill get to the floor of the House. Every single one of the 54 Senate Democrats voted for the immigration bill last year, joined by a lukewarm 14 out of 46 Senate Republicans. And virtually all 199 Democrats in the House would vote for it if Speaker Boehner (R) would put the bill to a vote — requiring only a meager 18 out of 233 Republican votes to send it to President Obama for signature. So this gridlock is hardly “equal on both sides”: Democrats are the full-throated champions and Republicans the bitter enemies (or at best feet-dragging supporters) of comprehensive immigration reform. And Presidential executive orders, while giving temporary relief, only lull Hispanics into more voter apathy.

SLIDE 5: Democrats Win Big With Minority Voters

When that sleeping giant finally awakens, however, Republicans better watch out. Here we see that Democrats win by a huge margin with minority voters. They win Black voters by about a 90% margin and have been steadily winning Hispanics and Asians by wider and wider margins as ugly Teapublican bigotry and xenophobia take over the Republican party.

SLIDE 6: “If You Can’t Beat ‘em, Cheat ‘em!” (Cartoon)

The Republicans know that even with manipulative, Orwellian framing, they cannot win national elections on the power of their ideas so time to suppress voters on the other side. (*read cartoon*). Ohio State Senator Nina Turner indicts this right-wing strategy thusly: “If you can’t beat ‘em, cheat ‘em.”



SLIDE 7: Map of SHAME: States With New Voting Restrictions Since Nov 2010

Indeed, since the November 2010 midterms when Teapublicans took over many of the state houses and governors' mansions, there have been a rash of voter suppression schemes implemented in at least half the states. These schemes, which are designed to make voting harder for likely lefty voters, include...

- **Require Specific Photo I.D. At Polls:** For example, Texas' new I.D. law permits voters to use concealed-handgun licenses as proof of identity, but not state university I.D.s. Hmmm...
- **Reduce Early Voting Days:** In 2008, more than one-third of voters cast ballots before election day. And Republicans certainly don't want a repeat of the electorate that showed up in 2008 or 2012. The vote suppressors even unabashedly eliminate specific days like the Sunday before election day — when black communities have traditionally conducted their "souls-to-the-polls" after church.
- **Eliminate Same-Day Registration:** Because states with Election-Day registration have 7 to 12% greater turnout than states without. And Democrats benefit from higher turnout.
- **Curb Registration Drives:** Because 12% of minority voters report registering through voter drives, twice the rate of white voters. And we saw how Democrats win minority voters by wide margins. What's more, 80% of the 75 million eligible voters who sat out the 2008 election were not registered to vote. Getting folks over the registration hurdle increases turnout, which is bad for Republicans.
- **Reduce Poll Locations** — especially in certain areas that are heavily minority or student.
- **Obstruct Ex-Cons Regaining Vote:** Because this disproportionately affects the Black vote. 38% of the 4 million Americans who have completed prison sentences but are still disenfranchised are Black.

(Source: "UFO Sightings Are More Common Than Voter Fraud," Mother Jones, July 3, 2012)

Note: Voters in Arizona approved a referendum in 2004 requiring documentary proof of citizenship to register to vote. It is currently held up in the courts.

SLIDE 8: Voter Photo I.D.: A Solution In Search Of A Problem

The Republican vote suppressors hide behind the boogeyman of "rampant voter fraud" to try to justify their crackdown on voting. This is a bunch of B.S. In fact, From 2000 to 2010, there were 649,000,000 votes cast in general elections and only 13 cases of in-person voter impersonation — the only kind of fraud that could possibly be stopped by a photo I.D. That's an infinitesimal 0.000002%. To put it in perspective, during that same time, there were 47,000 UFO sightings and 441 Americans killed by lightning. In short, voter photo I.D. is a solution in search of a problem.

A more recent comprehensive study by Justin Levitt, a professor at Loyola University Law School, found only 31 credible allegations of voter impersonation out of a total of more than one billion votes cast in general, primary, special and municipal elections from 2000 through 2014. He found more danger of fraud with absentee ballots, which are not affected by current voter I.D. laws.



The infinitesimal rate of voter impersonation is hardly surprising considering that voter fraud is a felony punishable by up to five years in prison, a \$10,000 fine and, if you're an immigrant, deportation. Why would someone risk that for such a miniscule benefit to themselves, especially when they can instead do grassroots activities to get other like-minded individuals registered and out to the polls? More bang and totally legit.

Nor does fear of mythological voter impersonation explain all the other GOP suppression schemes like reducing early voting, poll locations and registration drives. No, it's just a lot of misdirection: To quote Justin Levitt, "I see you have a cold, so I have to amputate your arm." (*interview on Rachel Maddow Show, August 6, 2014*). The real issue all these voter restrictions are designed to address is *not* mythological voter fraud, but rather changing demographics.

SLIDE 9: Greatest (Worst!) Hits From The "I have a scheme" Crowd:

Indeed, a few of the "I have a scheme" crowd have been caught revealing their true motivations. Remember the Pennsylvania House Republican Leader caught on video who said, "Voter I.D. — which is going to allow Governor Romney to win the state of Pennsylvania — Done!" Even worse was the Florida State Senator who actually admitted, "I don't have a problem making (voting) harder. I want people in Florida to want to vote as bad as that person in Africa who walks 200 miles across the desert. This should not be easy." Yowza! He's like the Todd "legitimate rape" Akin of voting rights.

SLIDE 10: 20,000,000+ Voting age U.S. citizens don't have the type of photo I.D. required by recently passed state voter I.D. laws.

That's why they couldn't care less that more than 20 million voting age U.S. citizens don't have the type of photo I.D. required by recently passed state voter I.D. laws and might have trouble getting it. And it's no accident that they are disproportionately minority, young and lower income — you know, likely lefty voters.

SLIDE 11: Cartoon: Free At Last! Supreme Court Guts Voting Rights Act

Even worse, the Teapublican vote suppressors got a huge assist last year when the right-wing majority on the Supreme Court eviscerated Section 5 of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. That provision required certain jurisdictions with a history of discriminating against minority voters to get federal permission before changing voting rules. Chief Justice Roberts voted to gut the Voting Rights Act arguing that "our country has changed," and that Section 5 was no longer needed and unfairly discriminated against certain states. Yeah, that's the discrimination we need to worry about! Justice Ginsburg in her dissent warned that getting rid of Section 5 was like "throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet."

Indeed, since the ruling, GOP lawmakers across the country have been tripping all over themselves to pass new voting restrictions. Some right-wingers actually argued that the fact that we've twice elected the first black President means we no longer need to worry about discrimination of minority voters. Let's be clear: We did not twice elect the first black President. The evolved 66 million of us who showed up and voted for Obama did that. It takes some brass to try to take credit for something you've been obstructing from day one.



SLIDE 12: Most Republicans Used To Support The Voting Rights Act (VRA). Not Anymore!

Of course, there's always a chance that Congress could address the Supreme Court's challenge by updating the formula used to determine which jurisdictions fall under Section 5. An improved Voting Rights Act could emerge covering additional bad actor states like Ohio and Wisconsin. In the past, extensions of the Voting Rights Act have enjoyed huge bipartisan support. As recently as 2006, the Senate voted 98 to 0 and the House 390 to 33 to extend the VRA for 25 years. Of course, the Republican party has been dragged to crazy town since 2006. And now there's no appetite to take up legislation that hinders the GOP's electoral prospects. So don't hold your breath on that one, folks.

SLIDE 13: Fighting Voter Apathy: Procedural Hurdles

In addition to voter suppression efforts, we must also combat rampant voter apathy — a sort of voter self-suppression. As we saw, even in a Presidential election, approximately 90 million eligible voters don't show up. And in midterm elections, more eligible voters sit on the sidelines than cast votes. Reasons for voter apathy fall into three broad categories. First, there are the procedural hurdles:

"I'm too busy."

"I couldn't get to the polling station."

"Voting is too much of a hassle."

"I don't have the right kind of voter I.D."

Such logistical hurdles are greatly alleviated by grassroots activities to help folks get registered (the biggest hurdle), walk them through a sample mail-in ballot, or remind them of their polling place and times. Help them visualize a plan for voting day. In Arizona with Permanent Early Voting List (PEVL), there really is no excuse for not finding the time to fill in a ballot and drop it in the mail. The real obstacle is probably something else like low information...

SLIDE 14: Fighting Voter Apathy: Low Information

"It doesn't make much difference in my life."

"I'm not interested in politics."

"I can't decide who to vote for — I'm totally confused."

"I don't know enough about politics to participate."

This is the obstacle ConnectTheDotsUSA tackles. I believe the majority of folks who don't vote just feel overwhelmed and ill-equipped and therefore let others make the decision for them. ConnectTheDotsUSA gives them a "way-in" so they can understand what it's all about, separate fact from fiction, and become inoculated from organized money's propaganda (especially all those silly TV ads). For the low-information voter, I suggest starting with one or two issues that could make a big direct impact in your life — like increasing the minimum wage, alleviating student loan debt or getting health coverage. Then find the candidates who support that policy and reject those who don't. Suddenly, the battle lines will become crystal clear, and it will be quite easy to see who is and who's not on your side. This is how I got my start into politics during the healthcare debate of 2009. Then I was motivated to conquer many other issues that I didn't even realize were affecting my life.



SLIDE 15: Fighting Voter Apathy: Cynicism

Finally, we have the “cynicism” hurdle:

“My vote won’t make any difference.”

“Nothing ever gets done anyway: It’s a bunch of empty promises.”

“None of the candidates deserves my vote.”

“Both sides are the same so voting doesn’t matter.”

Wow, if both sides are the same, then I wonder what all the fighting and gridlock are about. This is as naive as saying that all athletes (or doctors, or plumbers or graphic designers) are the same. When you are ill-informed on any subject (like me and football!), it is impossible to see differences — even huge differences. Perhaps politicians fight because they fundamentally disagree about priorities, solutions and sometimes even what the problems are. And maybe folks should spend some time figuring out what policies would actually benefit them and who supports those policies, rather than resorting to silly “I want to have a beer with him” identity politics. Voting should not be a dating game. When people sit out elections because of cynicism, it definitely fulfills someone else’s agenda — namely the 1% who want to write all the rules of society in their favor.

And perhaps progress is painfully slow because the American electorate is just plain uninformed, illogical, ungrateful and downright afraid — constantly taking two steps forward and one step back, or worse, splitting the baby in pursuit of the bipartisan security blanket. In a recent poll, for example, 71% say that Washington gridlock is to blame for our economic problems, but then 43% say they want Republicans to control the U.S. House and Senate for the next two years, and 16% are unsure who they want to control Congress. If folks understood the basic process of how legislation gets passed, they would understand that’s just a recipe for more gridlock! Someone once said that the American people elect Democrats because they want things from government, and they elect Republicans because they don’t want to pay for those very same things (*Paraphrased by Robert George of the New York Post on UP with Steve Kornacki, August 9, 2014*). Well, that explains a lot of the mess!

Finally, beware of politicians that claim to hate government. Would you hire a veterinarian that hates animals? An accountant that hates numbers? When you put people in charge of government who say they want to drown it in a bathtub, don’t be surprised when they wreck it.

SLIDE 16: Every Vote Does Matter: Just Ask Senator Al Franken!

When I hear folks say “My vote won’t make any difference,” I think about the increasing number of squeaker elections we’ve had. Who can forget the 2000 presidential election when Bush supposedly beat Gore by 537 votes out of nearly 6 million cast in Florida before the righties on the Supreme Court stepped in and stopped the vote counting? Without a Bush/Cheney administration, we would have avoided a war in Iraq and perhaps a lot of other calamities. Elections have real-world consequences. In 2008, Al Franken won the Minnesota Senate race by just 312 votes out of a total of nearly 3 million votes cast. That’s a win by 0.01%! Remember, the election of Senator Al Franken gave Democrats the 60th vote needed to break a Republican filibuster and pass the Affordable Care Act. If you are now able to get health insurance (or more affordable insurance) because of the ACA, those 312 votes in the Minnesota Senate race made a huge difference in *your* life. Elections have consequences, and every vote does matter.



SLIDE 17: Leaving The Politics Of Shame

But it's not enough just to vote — you have to vote *smart*. Sadly, many vote against their own interests. Some out of a sense of shame that has been drilled into them by the American “bootstraps” myth. A recent essay entitled “I Was Poor, But a GOP Die-Hard: How I Finally Left the Politics of Shame,” captures this tendency. The author writes, “Sadly, it took me years — decades — to see the illogic of supporting people who disdain me... I have a close friend on permanent disability. He votes reliably for the most extreme conservative in every election... the person most likely to slash the program he depends on daily for his own survival. It's like clinging to the end of a thin rope and voting for the rope-cutting razor party... (Poor people) should wise up and vote themselves a break. Rich people vote their self-interest in every single election. Why don't poor people?”

And then, paradoxically, some struggling Americans vote against their self interest because they think that someday they too will be rich and will not want to pay higher taxes — like the infamous Joe the Plumber, just one clogged toilet away from untold millions. To quote John Steinbeck, “...the (American) poor see themselves not as an exploited proletariat but as temporarily embarrassed millionaires.” Or as comedian John Oliver jokes, “Even though we know the odds are stacked against us, we all think we're going to win the lottery (and) it's never too early to start protecting your imaginary wealth.” Folks, voting *smart* means voting your *situation*, not your *aspiration*.

SLIDE 18: VOTE = HEAT

We must remind apathetic voters that democracy is not a spectator sport: You can't win the game if you don't play, or if you sit out every other election. And remember it's a marathon, not a sprint, so pace yourself and don't get discouraged at inevitable setbacks. The first step in flexing your citizen muscles is showing up. Seniors, for example, consistently show up so the austerity crowd tiptoes around cuts to Social Security and Medicare for current beneficiaries. When Hispanics, college students and low-wage workers start showing up *consistently* and *massively* at the polls to vote out politicians who block immigration reform, student debt relief, and a minimum wage increase, then we'll start to pass policies that reflect those priorities. As progressive champion Rep. Keith Ellison explains “Sometimes politicians don't see the light until they feel the heat.” Politicians — especially on the right — simply don't feel the heat from Hispanics, college students and low-wage workers. They know from history that voter turnout is anemic in these groups, especially in midterms. Let's prove them wrong: Turn up the heat by voting *smart* in *every* election. Make that small commitment today to yourself, your family and your country.



SLIDE 19: If The 99% Vote, The 1% Won't Matter.

To conclude, we must not let the cynics, the plutocrats, the obstructionists and the bigots keep people from voting. The fact that some would fight so hard to block the vote might, ironically, make people value their vote even more. Hey, it must be important if somebody is trying to take it away from you.

Remember, political power is a numbers game. For the 1%, who are few in number, it's the number of zeros they write on all those checks for campaign contributions, lobbying and buying lots and lots of deceptive television ads to swindle the uninformed masses. For the rest of us, it's the number of like-minded folks we can get to the polls and the streets. As the saying goes, "If you're not at the table, you're on the menu." The 99% have increasingly been on the menu for the last three decades. When We The People realize our power and start voting *smart* in *every* election, the plutocrats will finally lose their stranglehold on our democracy. To quote BoldProgressives, "If the 99% vote, the 1% won't matter."

Thank you, everyone.

SLIDE 20: ConnectTheDotsUSA Logo