

## EDITORIAL

## Voting Rights Under Siege

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American laws that strip convicted felons of the right to vote, barring nearly five million from the polls in the last election, are the most punitive and regressive laws of their kind in the democratic world.

Several states have recently softened or eliminated the voting bans, and many others are considering laws that could eventually establish voting as a basic American right that should never be curtailed in a way that bars a whole class of people from the polls.

This attitude is gaining traction even in the Deep South, which pioneered voting bans to disenfranchise black Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But the new trend toward fairness has somehow vaulted over Pennsylvania, where the Republican majority in the State House is pushing to pass one of the most odious felon-voting bans ever seen above the Mason-Dixon line.

Under current Pennsylvania law, people can vote once they leave prison. But a bill pending in the Legislature would disenfranchise those on parole or probation. The bill would go further and bar convicts from voting until the dates when their maximum sentences would expire — even if they had been fully released from the system much earlier.

Pennsylvania, a swing state that will hold some critical elections this fall, is being barraged by legislation, championed by Republican lawmakers, that would raise voting barriers, especially for groups that tend to be Democratic. One measure would institute one of the most restrictive voter-identification laws in the nation, in a state that currently requires only first-time voters to prove their

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identities. Pennsylvanians — who have been at the forefront of fairness in voting rights issues — should not allow partisanship to erase that legacy.

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