



Black women rally against voter ID laws

African-American women, who number about 20 million in the U.S., have long been the largest group of Democratic voters in the country, said David Bositis, senior research associate with the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

Posted: September 21, 2012 - 8:46am

By [SUZANNE GAMBOA](#)

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Deidra Reese isn't waiting for people to come to her to find out whether they are registered to vote.

With iPad in hand, Reese is going to community centers, homes and churches in nine Ohio cities, looking up registrations to make sure voters have proper ID and everything else they need to cast ballots on Election Day.

"We are not going to give back one single inch. We have fought too long and too hard," said Reese, 45, coordinator of the Columbus-based Ohio Unity Coalition, an affiliate of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation.

Reese is part of a cadre of black women engaged in a revived wave of voting rights advocacy four years after the historic election of the nation's first black president. Provoked by voting law changes in various states, they have decided to help voters navigate the system — a fitting role, they say, given that black women had the highest turnout of any group of voters in 2008.

"We've forgotten our mothers went to three jobs, picked us up from school, put the macaroni and cheese on the table, got up and got somebody registered to vote," said actress Sheryl Lee Ralph, one of several women who participated in a strategy session this week during the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's annual legislative conference in the nation's capital. Ralph is married to Pennsylvania state Sen. Vincent Hughes.

The political and financial power of black women is one of the themes of this year's four-day event. It will culminate Saturday with a keynote speech from one of the most visible black women in America, first lady Michelle Obama.

"It's time for us to lead the way because we voted in greater numbers than any other gender and race group last election, and we got to do the same this year," said Elsie Scott, president and CEO of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.

Turnout among women of all races is generally higher than for men. In 2008, about 69 percent of eligible black female voters went to the polls, an increase of 5.1 percentage points over 2004, according to a study of census data on 2008 voters by the Pew Hispanic Center. That compares with 66.1 percent of white women.

African-American women, who number about 20 million in the U.S., have long been the largest group of Democratic voters in the country, said David Bositis, senior research associate with the Joint Center for Political

and Economic Studies.

In a room at the Washington Convention Center on Wednesday, the sense of urgency among the women was palpable. They noted that voter registration deadlines in some states are as early as Oct. 6, the last of them on Oct. 16. Few attendees accepted the argument that the new voting laws were intended to fight fraud, as supporters of those laws maintain.

Judith Browne-Dianis, co-director of The Advancement Project, said black women showed in 2008 they can turn out in record numbers. But in 2010, "we sat home and while we were sitting at home, there were others that were plotting and what they decided to do was to change the rules of the game."

The women invoke the name of abolitionist and women's suffragist Sojourner Truth, and repeat civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer's famous line — "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired" — as a rallying cry. They talk strategy about checking to see who's been purged from voter rolls or locating documents that voters need to get photo identification. All along, they remind voters of the time, before the Voting Rights Act of 1965 became law, when black people were kept from voting.

Barbara Arnwine, executive director of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, said a voter hotline set up by several groups already gets a thousand calls a day. Callers are typically people who don't know if they can vote, whether their felony conviction keeps them from voting or what ID is required in their state, if at all.

Her organization has created a computer app that allows people to verify their registration status, get help registering online, learn about voting requirements in their state, find polling places and receive other assistance.

Online: National Coalition on Black Civic Participation: <http://www.ncbcp.org>

Election Protection: <http://www.866ourvote.org>

TAGS: FILED ONLINE SUZANNE GAMBOA ACTRESS AMERICA ASSOCIATED PRESS COLUMBUS CONTACT DETAILS COORDINATOR DAVID BOSITIS DEIDRA REESE ELECTION FRAUD ELECTIONS ELECTRONIC VOTING ELSIE SCOTT FANNIE LOU HAMER FIRST LADY IPAD LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER LAW MICHELLE OBAMA OHIO OHIO UNITY COALITION PENNSYLVANIA PERSON ATTRIBUTES PERSON CAREER PERSON RELATION POLITICS PRESIDENT PRESIDENT AND CEO QUOTATION RESEARCH ASSOCIATE SHERYL LEE RALPH SOCIAL ISSUES SOCIAL ISSUES UNITED STATES VINCENT HUGHES VOTER ID LAWS VOTER REGISTRATION VOTER SUPPRESSION VOTER TURNOUT WASHINGTON WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

[Back to Top](#)

Lubbock Avalanche-Journal ©2012. All Rights Reserved. [Terms of Service and Privacy Policy](#)



CLOSE X