

# Nine Ways the U.S. Voting System Is Rigged But Not Against Donald Trump

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## **DONALD TRUMP IS right — the U.S. voting system is totally rigged!**

*It's not rigged against him, though. It's rigged against people without much money, and people who are members of any number of minority groups.*

*Some of the rigging is by design, and dates all the way back to the Founding Fathers. Some of it is simply a byproduct of an economic system where the top 0.1 percent have almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent. Some falls somewhere in between.*

Add it all up, and it constitutes a gigantic obstacle to regular people using their purported power to run our purported democracy.

Here are some of the ways in which the voting system is rigged, few of which are ever discussed in American elections — which some might say constitutes its own kind of rigging.

### 1. You have to register to vote.

Between one-quarter and one-third of American adults, up to 50 million people, are eligible to vote but aren't registered to vote.

That's ridiculous. Why do American adults have to take a special, extra step to govern themselves?

Many other countries, including France, Italy, Chile, Israel, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, all register everyone to vote automatically. Not coincidentally, they have much higher voter turnout than we do.

The unregistered are younger, poorer and less white than registered voters. They're also [more likely](#) to support progressive political policies, such as a higher minimum wage and a financial transactions tax.

The good news is that five states — Oregon, California, West Virginia, Vermont and Connecticut — now have [near-automatic voter registration](#), and many other states are considering it. Hillary Clinton [has called](#) for the federal government to push all states to make it happen.

### 2. Election Day is a work day

The less money and power you have, the harder it is to take time off from work to vote.

Many states now have [early voting](#), but some do not. Even if you can vote early, the rules are different everywhere and often change. We should expand and standardize early voting but also, as Sen. Bernie Sanders [has proposed](#), make election day a national holiday.

### 3. Gerrymandering and geography

In 2012, a slight majority of Americans [voted for a Democrat](#) for their congressional representative. Nevertheless, 54 percent of the elected representatives were Republicans.

This was thanks to both [gerrymandering](#) and the [tendency](#) of Democratic voters to live in dense cities. Currently Republican state legislatures use computer software to pack Democratic voters into as few districts as possible, creating the [characteristically bizarre gerrymandered shape](#). But computers can also be used to create districts that look “fair” — i.e., compact and contiguous — and these would *still* put Democrats at a disadvantage because Democrats have by choice packed themselves into a few small places.

This is a problem that may not have an easy answer. Gerrymandering is to some degree in the eye of the beholder. Cities are probably going to remain highly Democratic. [Some people](#) believe it would be best to turn states into “multimember districts,” so that if the state sends seven representatives to the House, everyone in the state would get seven votes and would choose their top seven candidates.

### 4. Many felons can't vote.

[6.1 million Americans](#) can't vote this year because they've been convicted of a felony. 2.2 million of them are African American; in Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia more than 1 in 5 black adults can't vote.

[No other country](#) works like this. The solution here is simple: As in France, Germany, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Peru, Poland and Romania, everyone should be eligible to vote, including those convicted of felonies and even those currently in prison.

### 5. Voter suppression.

Paul Weyrich, one of the founders of today's conservative movement, cheerfully [explained in 1980](#) that “I don't want everybody to vote. ... Our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down.”

Republicans have taken this perspective to heart for decades, and are [doing their best again](#) in 2016 to reduce the number of people voting. Popular methods include [purging voter rolls of eligible voters](#), [reducing polling times and places](#), [requiring photo ID to vote](#) and [voter intimidation](#).

### 6. No Instant Runoff

Instant runoff voting, which was recently used in the [London mayoral election](#), lets third-party supporters vote for their first choice without fear they'll act as spoilers and help elect their least favorite candidate.

Here's how it works: Voters rank as many candidates as they like in the order of their preference, from first to last. If a candidate gets a majority of first choice ballots, he or she

wins. If not, the last place candidate is eliminated – and his or her votes are distributed to the candidates who were the *second* choice of the eliminated candidate’s supporters. And so on. (If this sounds confusing, a Minnesota Public Radio video explains it in a clever way [using post-its](#).)

In terms of this election, a Jill Stein voter who loathes Trump and lives in a swing state can’t vote for Stein without helping Trump. With instant runoff voting, such a Stein supporter could rank Stein as his or her first choice, Clinton as his or her second, and Trump last or not at all.

There is a built-in bipartisan consensus against any such move, however, since it would weaken the two-party duopoly that runs U.S. politics.

## 7. The Senate

The Senate hugely magnifies the power of small states. Deep red Wyoming, population 582,000, has two senators. So does deep blue California, with a population of 38.8 million, 66 times greater than Wyoming’s.

That is so rigged!

The Senate’s ability to slow or stop change is why it was created in the first place. As James Madison, the main author of the Constitution, [put it](#) in 1787: “Our government ought to secure the permanent interests of the country against innovation” and “protect the minority of the opulent against the majority.” The Senate, Madison said, should be the part of the government designed to do this.

## 8. You can’t vote for the Federal Reserve

The U.S. economy is like a car with two gas pedals and two brakes. Congress controls one of each, but the Federal Reserve controls the others.

Its seven governors are appointed by presidents to 14-year terms. Even worse, the Federal Open Market Committee, which controls interest rates, is made up of the seven governors plus five members who are presidents of the regional Federal Reserve Banks. The regional presidents are chosen in a process that’s [largely controlled by banks](#).

## 9. Corporate America is more powerful than politicians



As John Dewey, one of America's most important pro-democracy philosophers, [wrote in 1931](#), "politics is the shadow cast on society by big business."

This could be seen most clearly in the 2008 Wall Street bailout. Not only did the biggest banks have the power to destroy the U.S. economy in a way no politicians ever could, they easily forced the entire political system to stop everything and give them what turned out to be trillions of dollars.

On a smaller scale, both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump hope to slash the tax rate on multinational corporations even though I'm guessing this is not one of your top priorities. Whew, that's a long and depressing list. But don't give up: That list used to be much, much longer, yet regular people have been successfully fighting to shrink it for 240 years. There's no reason to believe we can't make it shorter still or eventually eliminate it altogether.

So [go vote](#)! There's a reason this list exists, which is that democracy is powerful and dangerous and lots of people want to limit it. Don't let them.

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