

BUILDING JUSTICE PODCAST



Season 2, Episode 26: [The Impact of Voter Suppression Laws in the United States.](#)

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Guests: George Harris, Graduate Student, Political Science

Please note: This transcript may be imperfect. Please contact Professor Victor directly should you have questions.

Music lyrics:

Company under construction, the function, justice for the human family we demand it. Justice, true freedom, equality is a must. Thus, decolonization of the planet. So bust this. People be the power now we're Building Justice. Pulling out divinations, now we're Building Justice. Welcome the planet to the Podcast, "Building Justice," "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Building is to add on, or to do away with.

00:00

Kristina Flores Victor: Hello and welcome to Building Justice. A podcast by Sacramento States' Center on Race, Immigration, and Social Justice, otherwise known as CRISJ. We explore critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world.

I am Professor Kristina Flores Victor, and I am here with George Harris, a Master's student in the Political Science Department here at Sac State and today we will be discussing his project how voter identification laws impact voter, suppression.

First of all, Thank you very much for being here today. George.

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George Harris: Yeah, Thank you for having me.

Kristina Flores Victor: Of course, I would like to start off with asking you a few questions about how you came to be here at Sac State. If you could share a little bit about your background, and how you came to be in graduate school here at Sac State.

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George Harris: Yeah, I guess I could just start overall just the decision to go to graduate school. That was, honestly, it wasn't something. I had always thought of going to graduate school, but I never really saw how I was going to do it. I didn't really see it as an option as I started to move forward with undergrad. But one other thing I should add, I was a student athlete in my undergrad, as well. At UC Santa Barbara. I competed on the men's track and field team where I was, I competed in the shotput and in Hammer events, and so my plan was to full fully use my scholarship and graduate, and 4 years from there, which I eventually did. But when Covid happened in 2020. I was granted another an additional year of athletic eligibility, which helped me go to Sac State on scholarship, and it pay for my tuition for my first year. So that was a really big incentive to can not only continue school, but continue track and field for another year, and do something I really like, which is political science. I've always loved for local science. So doing it more here it's been. It's been really fun for the past 2 years.

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Kristina Flores Victor: Fantastic, being a student athlete and a graduate student is no joke. That's a lot of work.

George Harris: Yeah, it was a really tough balance. But I mean I had a really good support system between all my teachers, as well as all of my coaches. So, everyone was just trying to see me succeed, which made it the transition and all the difficulties a lot easier.

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Kristina Flores Victor: Excellent! So, I am curious about what sparked your interest, you know, around issues of voter, turnout, voter, engagement, voter, suppression. What kind of got you interested in this topic even before you began your thesis project?

George Harris: Yeah. So just I guess well racial disparities have been something that have always. I've always been passionate and just seeing. and I mean the idea it's really a simple thought, you know, ever since I was a kid. It's like, Why can't everyone just get along? You know it's like there's something we all thought at some point in time, and it's like as we grow up all of the subconscious and like just implicit bias throughout society and stereotypes just force you to real to think it's okay that certain groups aren't given the same opportunities and others. And I've never really, even though I grew up in the same societies, and I always I never really understood it. It didn't make much sense to me, and not even just for my minority groups, but also for other minority groups and oppressed people as well. But it really hit me during Covid because that was a really tough time for me going back to sports. That was, I was on pace for a really big year and athletics, and having that you're taking away from me, really made me have to look for it, had to make me think I may have to stop doing track altogether, and really made me look internally, and seeing what I was passionate in, and it was the same time all the protests were going on, and it really made me realize how I can, what I can do to help people

and the my communities, and I really got into voting, voting rights as a as a part of that, because if we, the way I see it is that if we can get more elected officials that look like that actually represent their communities. We could see some type of system and change, and that's kind of how it led me to a voter and a voter to turn out an election law specifically, and how it harms specific populations and prevents them from getting those elected representatives.

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George Harris: So yeah, that that that's kind of how my whole thought process came to voter identification laws, and I remember my first class with Professor Victor in or my first semester. It was like we had to come up with a topic on the spot, and like that was the first thing I came up with this voter, just voter election vote election law specifically, and how it harms voters and just kind of I kept building it from there, and we'll how to we out today.

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Kristina Flores Victor: Sounds like a lifelong interest right?

George Harris:

Definitely.

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Kristina Flores Victor: Now for someone who maybe doesn't have that kind of lifelong interest or commitment to it. And maybe some of our listeners don't know much about, or don't know the details of voter suppression efforts, or what's going on with voter ID laws what would you say is the most relevant background that our listeners ought to know before we begin to kind of really discuss your particular project on voter, suppression and voter ID laws.

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George Harris: Yeah. So I think the best way to explain it is. I mean, for starters going over voter suppression. It's most recorded, heavily recorded in the South. The Jim Crow Arrow was an era where there was the idea, ideology, is such a separate but equal where you had separate rights to different things, but like it could be access to water or bathrooms where they clearly were not equal under those separate laws and delegations within society, and part of the things that enabled and established that power in Jim Crow was people being restricted to vote. There was laws such as the grandfather clause where you could only vote if your grandfather had voted and if you were. if your grandfather was a slave in in the late 1800s, you slaves, and have the right to vote, so you would never have given been granted that right to vote, and it just became a systemic issue. If you were, if you couldn't read, if you couldn't read or write at legibly you can be given the right to vote, even though today all you need to do is just be able to sign your name.

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George Harris: So there was a lot of different challenges that existed, but in 1,965 the voting rights act of 1,965 was passed, which eliminated a lot of these targeted laws that prevented

people from voting and however, recently in 2013, there was a Supreme Court ruling called Shelby County versus Holder and Shelby County was trying to use some type of restrictive law that was preventing specific population specifically black voters from voting. and the county and the at the Superior Court was, it was deemed, and constitutional what they were doing, and it. This the county ended up suing again, and it went to Supreme Court. and the Supreme Court voted in favor of the county, saying that what their law was doing they should have the State should have jurisdiction over the type of election law. They're occurring which completely overturned the Voting Rights Act, which protected specific populations from a federal perspective. And since that ruling in 2013, a lot of States have much more control over their laws, and have some of these restrictive laws have come back into play, and especially since now it's been since 2013. We have about 6, 7 years of like hard data to look at to see how voter turnout, and how populations have been voting since this overturning, and you can see that once again the same populations have been targeted over time again.

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Kristina Flores Victor: I think that's a great segue to begin talking about your particular project, and you've been working on this mixed methods, Master's thesis. If you could tell the listeners a bit about your project, and it's specifically on how voter identification laws impact voter suppression in the United States.

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George Harris: Yeah. So my research it some mixed methods, meaning it uses a little bit of quantitative and qualitative analysis for it. Starting with the quantitative piece. I used a study created by the National Conference of State legislatures which scaled each of the 50 States photo ID law on a scale of 1 to 5 in the 2020 Presidential election and I modified it a little bit to make it a little more feasible for a data set with only 50 States. So I condensed it into 3 scales and those 3 scales where the having the least, the level one states which were the least strict which do not require photo ID requirements. Then there was a level 2 states that require some variation of photo ID requirements, but voters can vote provisionally without the photo ID and the provisional ballot just means that the ballot will be cap will be counted once the signature, or once their registration is verified at a later day, it's not counted immediately. And then a strict state it requires photo ID. And even if a voter does vote provisionally, they must return to the elections office within 7 days with ID for that bout to be counted. And so I compared each to these 50 States. Turn out, or each of these States photo I do want, and compared it to the average turn to the turnout for each State. And just off that comparison I saw that strict States had a 4% lower turnout than non strict states which were the level one States versus the level 3 States. And then I also used a multivariate regression which had control variables that were a little more pertinent to my research about voter suppression which we each state's black population the number of polling places where people were allowed to vote per 1,000 or 1,000 voters.

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George Harris: The next variable use was competitiveness of the election and this was measured by looking at the vote spread between the 2, the top 2 presidential candidates, which

were Biden and Trump in each State and then I also use the per our variable proportion proportional representation of black elected officials and this was measured by looking at the proportional representation of Black, of Black people in a State. and then comparing that to the number of elected of black elected officials and the State and Federal legislature in that specific State. And when I did that, I found that the for strict States. The turnout decreases even further down to 5%, which looking at some of these strict states looking at Georgia specifically, it was that would have represented over 125,000 voters in the 2020 election specifically So we're looking at everything. All considered photo ID law does impact turn out. And when you look at the multi-variate regression which includes black populations, specifically it decreases, turn out even more, which does create.

You know, it does ask the question is photo? ID law meant to protect voters, or is it meant to harm specific populations? And I would say it's the second. And in terms of my qualitative piece. It was looking at Georgia specifically as a case study looking at election laws that have been passed or rejected over time within the State and you can see that over time more election laws have been constantly trying to be passed, or have passed that harm voters.

The grandfather clause, for example, was the law that existed in Georgia. And then there was laws after the Voting Rights Act had passed that were rejected by the Supreme Court, and again and after 2013, those same laws that were rejected under the Voting Rights Act we're granted during after Shelby versus Holder, which does suggest that once again, these states I've always been trying to hurt these populations.

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Kristina Flores Victor: That's fascinating. I really like hearing about the additional kind of variables in the study right? And then, when controlling for those that the impact is actually worse, right in states that have these. So why did you decide to do this kind of, I know that a mixed method approach can sometimes be more time consuming right to kind of have to do the deep dive into the case, study, and to also kind of like, find all the data and do all that work. Why take a mixed method approach to this particular question. Why was it important to you?

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George Harris: I think it's just partly my personal passion, and I really wanted to showcase the importance and how prevalent and real this issue is. and second, I thought the mixed method would be the most valuable approach, because I'm not the first person to say that voter suppression exists in the United States. I don't think I'll be the last. But even if I'm not the first to last, I'm going, there's gonna be scrutiny, saying that it doesn't exist. And if you only use qualitative which a lot of arguments in modern research that have been created, just use qualitative research because they don't have the data to support it, it gets rejected. And if you just have the data without historical analysis and context, then you can't release, then the argument is all this hasn't been this isn't. This is just a coincidence, or it was only in that specific election. So, when you combine the 2 pieces, you can really create a true, not even create a

narrative. You can just tell what's been happening and saying that this is what's happened over time, and this is what's happening today, and that oh, this is not new. This is going to continue to persist unless we try to create some new changes and solutions, because what we've currently been doing has not been working to help voters.

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Kristina Flores Victor: I want to ask you this: Follow up on Georgia as your case city. You kind of mentioned a little bit about why, selecting Georgia as the case study. But after your selection of Georgia as a case study, did you find that you just still found interesting things. Things you didn't know before, like even uncovered new and interesting tidbits of like voter, history, and voter suppression history in Georgia.

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George Harris: So I get there's a couple of reasons why I picked Georgia first in 2020. It actually for one of the first, I don't know exactly how long, but it was for the first time in a long time that it had voted Democratic in a Presidential election which was huge to me, and when they show the voter breakdown of how the State was blue. You'd think that they would vote Democratic every time because of the population in Atlanta that voted Democratic is so much larger than the rest of the State, and it's like it really made me think like this, even though the Voting Rights Act passed, so almost 60 years ago like that, there is still been targeted suppression there and then. The second reason why I picked Georgia specifically, is my sister. She is a PhD student at Georgia Tech. And we talk all the time, and I remember talking about our voting experiences, and how I just had to wait in line for a little bit at my polling place at Santa Barbara. But for her it was a whole different experience. Just even the process of registering to vote like I think I might have registered. I think I ended up registering same day because I registered in San Diego, which is my hometown. But then I had to re-register in Santa Barbara to vote there, but she would never have been able to do that and have her ballot counted because you have to register days in advance. They don't have. They don't have same day registration on top of that you have to wait long lines the absentee ballot which is a vote by mail ballot in Georgia. You have to request that months in advance of the election. It's much more difficult to vote, and I really just wanted to see how different are voting. Why, our voting experiences were so different. Because it's so easy for me here versus how much difficulty she had to go through there.

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Kristina Flores Victor: It sounds like research runs in your family is what you're telling me to. So something you mentioned right here, I think, leads into our next question is, you know we're talking about you mentioned. Some of this happens consistently in the South, and your case study of Georgia. So you know, as Californians who do have a lot of these same day registration vote by mail, you know. Why should Californians? Or if we're going to be really specific. You know, Sac State students who have a lot of like opportunity to vote on campus and have a lot of maybe things that are not available in Georgia. Why should people in California or sex 8 students care about this issue of voter, suppression, or voter ID laws?

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George Harris: Well, you know, I think the first thing to consider is that one of the things that I found in my research is that since 2,020 more States have slowly gone down the path of becoming more strict, or even going down to that most strict state. 2 more states 2 more states specifically, have become more strict. So I think that's one thing to consider that people are starting to consider photo. ID law, no matter where you are in the country. So I think we shouldn't take what we have here for granted, and that we should continue to advocate for our rights, so that way they not only are maintained, but also can be uplifted for other States. We can be a state that works to make other states better. We don't have to just be the model that everyone tries to follow, as we should use our position of power and progressiveness to influence the States around us, rather than just being proud of who we are. That's I mean, that's nice to be like happy to be comfort. I love to be Californian, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to make everywhere like California as well.

George Harris: So it's very important to take advantage of every opportunity you have, because not everyone around the country has the same opportunities.

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Kristina Flores Victor: Yeah. And I kind of want to ask you because I feel like knowing your work. There's a piece of this in here that we haven't talked about yet, You know people in Georgia like you mentioned. Maybe your sister, are also not happy with the laws, and they're doing things to resist, or to counter or to change what's happening in Georgia. So did any of your research in your project, your thesis project touch on this kind of resistance or this counter movement that's happening even in like a very restrictive place like Georgia.

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George Harris: Yeah. And so I mean, it is true that there are not. There are nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, and really just community organizers that just work together to increase turnout and try to get people that are being targeted to turn out to vote as much as that's happening. The problem is that those organizations can only do so much, and when suppressive laws are continually be continuously being passed that target. These groups, looking at Georgia again, another law that passed into after the 2020 election, made it illegal to hand out snacks or water and pulling lines on pulling places. So, if you're a community organization that gets people to vote and tries to bring them snacks and incentivize them to stay in polling places which tend to be when there's a larger Black, Black and minority populations have longer lines to vote when you're waiting for more time to vote, and you can't have a snack or have anything while you're waiting for the up over. In, in some cases upwards of two hours, an hour and a half.

It makes it even harder for those to be organizations to get people to the polls in the first place. So it, it really is a battle between them. And right now the community organizations are losing a little bit on that end. They're not getting as many people as they could be voting because of the policies that have been enacted. And that's why Federal protection was so necessary under the

Voting Rights Act. That's why you saw there was such a transformation under that bill that has slowly gone away because it's no return. Parts of it have been overturned.

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Kristina Flores Victor: I know that even here in California, and it's like state When the lines at the polls are really long, they have groups that bring pizza out right to encourage students to stay in line, even though the polls are closed, you know. Hold your place in line, so I can imagine that if the lines are long here for voting on campus, right in places that have fewer polling places and more difficulty that the lines are extremely long.

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George Harris: Exactly. Yeah, that that is one thing is that in my research. I did look at the average polling place in each of the 3 ranks, and it's severely lower. In the strict states it's on average, 7, 7 less polling places for 1,000 voters in comparison to rank one, which is a very large number.

Kristina Flores Victor: Yeah, I can't even imagine what the lines must be like, you know, after work, when people get in line, or you know people try and vote before work. So there's even times in the day. Probably that it's that it's even worse.

Well, I do want to talk to you a little bit about where you plan to go. You know, from here, with your research in the future with your career in the future. But before we get to that question, I wanted to congratulate you, on your first place for your presentation at the campus-wide student Research and Creative Activity, Spring Symposium. and being selected to present your research at the CSU Wide 37th Annual CSU student research competition at the end of April. So, congratulations on that! And I heard, too, that you're a finalist in this Year's Sac State Grand slam. Correct? Okay, so why is it important, do you think for you to be disseminating your research, and maybe even not just disseminating your research? But in venues like this, where students are presenting research.

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George Harris: You know, I think any place that can. I can present my research because I think it's important, and I think that especially when you have research, that student that you have a lot of professional young professionals lot of different researchers that are gonna want to be encouraged to listen to what I have to say and just it's just a really good opportunity for to present my research and just spread the word and spread awareness because a lot of these young people, I mean, even at the Research Symposium on campus. People wanted to talk to me about my research because they were interested in it, and it was just a really good opportunity to spread awareness of these issues, and that evening that these issues could still eventually trickle to California, and that nowhere in the country is safe from voter suppression, unfortunately. And that's why we have to stay diligent and what, and be willing to challenge any type of repression that occurs, and if I can continue to spread that message throughout, now, I have the opportunity to do that at a statewide conference which is really awesome to say and kind of it's still a little surreal to say out loud, and I think about it, but it's, a really I'm

just. It's a really good opportunity to present really important research to a lot of different people. So I'm really excited for it.

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Kristina Flores Victor: Well, we're excited for you. If you could kind of maybe talk about one lesson. You think you've learned from the research process that maybe you hope to apply to your future career, or even some of your future plans after you graduate with your graduate degree in May.

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George Harris: I think that what I've learned really is that for almost any topic that you are passionate about, you can find a way to turn it into research and find a way to measure it and see how really just see if, whatever your thoughts are true, I mean, I didn't think I was gonna ever create a quantitative piece collecting data from all 50 States. So that photo ID law. I just wanted to see how voter suppression exists today, and I didn't really have a direction from there. The first project I had turned in that had this idea listed like 10 different ways. Voter suppression impacts this our society, and which half of them I really didn't know how to measure. I mean even photo. I knew it existed, and I know it was an issue, but I didn't know that this was something that could actually be measured. But it was through a lot of different research. How I came across the NCSL website. And then, just for all the different measures I have variables I had a lot of. It was just things I came up with, and just so spent hours that I don't know if you want to talk about finding different data points. But some of it was already pre-created, and that is one of the amazing things about social sciences is that a lot of the data is just out there. It's just our job as scientists and researchers to find the data and use it for new purposes, and expand upon what's already been done. And I think these types of skills, I mean mainly the idea of looking at what's already out there and applying it in new directions is critical thinking that you can use for any job. I think that part of the data process is important as to build a career.

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George Harris: The path of researching research can be directed in any way. And same with critical writing that you'd have to have for a thesis. So I think that well, this has been a really great passion project. And hopefully I can expand this research more, and excited, to have it, probably to get it finished and publish in the library and presenting it. But it. even if it doesn't, which I and I'm not sure if I want to go down a path of being a researcher, I haven't thought about it. I haven't thought about it, and solidified it yet. But whether I go down the path of research or not, these skills that I learned will definitely help me in the future, no matter what

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Kristina Flores Victor: you have 2 researchers in the family. Right? You can never have too many.

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George Harris: Yeah, that is true.

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Kristina Flores Victor: So what are you hoping to do with your Master's degree once you graduate in May.

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George Harris: I don't really have too much of a direct plan. There's a there's a lot of different avenues that I want to go down. I currently work at the Secretary of State's office where I work as a policy analyst, looking at all types of different policy that work on promoting it accessible election law. This is something I'm really passionate and looking at election law specifically. But I don't necessarily want to limit myself to just working at the Secretary of State. I want to try to see if there's any different avenues possible that can help me promote different laws, Not necessarily the election law, but just promoting accessibility and inclusiveness, and all different aspects of policy. Or I could just as easily see myself going down the path of a researcher and continuing to find different things within our system that can be researched and looked at and find ways to improve them from a research perspective or from a policy perspective. I yeah, there's a lot of lot of different directions. I can go that way.

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Kristina Flores Victor: yeah, definitely. And one last question here, what would you recommend, you had talked a little bit about this in your previous answer. Kind of starting to demystify kind of the research project process for our students here. But what would you recommend for future undergrads or graduate students who are just beginning a program who want to pursue research as students here at Sac State?

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George Harris: The main thing I would tell you is that if you're gonna do pursue the path of research you shouldn't, try to do it just because of the idea of research, and how it's the clout associated and prestige associated with having your own research because it's not a lot. It's not fun like it's a lot of hard work. It takes a lot of hours the amount of days I spent just collecting one portion of one of my variables in the library, for I would spend days upon end just looking for the most of my new details to finish my data set, I-you, really have to love what you're doing, because you really need the passion, because that's not only gonna make you want to keep doing all these extra steps and want to create the best product possible. But it's also gonna really make sure that you're hitting all your deadlines.

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George Harris: And really you're gonna try to create the best possible outcome. I mean I. My passion in this topic is what it enabled me to create all the different variables I came up with, and even have a mixed method approach. That was one of the suggestions I had, because I wanted to make my research stronger. So I think passion is it? It is the most pivotal thing. You have to do something that you love, and that's going to make you not only want to make it the

best version possible, but also it's gonna help you think of all the different ways that you can make it happen. So that's what I would recommend for sure.

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Kristina Flores Victor: I want to thank George Harris for being taking the time to talk with us today. And, George, we kind of want to end with just what you might give to our audience is a call to action, because here at CRISJ, and at the Building Justice Podcast part of what we're trying to do here is strengthen, ties the community, and encourage people to participate and be more involved in civic engagement. So what would you say to the audience, You know, Given everything you've learned through your project through your research, what's one thing, perhaps, that our audience members could be doing to help with this situation.

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George Harris: Well, I think one of, although my topic is about voter suppression, I think the primary reason why it's so important is because it's it. prevent specific populations from voting. So I think. Conversely, looking at the other aspect of this, it's. How do I get these populations to vote, and even in places that voter suppression does not persist in. You do see these hard to reach populations, these minority populations that still do not vote at the same variances of non-minority groups, even in progressive states like California.

So I think we all should try to actively, even if we don't live in a state where voter suppression is occurring, we should still try to promote getting all the people in our communities to vote people that you know, even in your own families, that that Don't vote people in your communities that don't vote. You should really try to swing the importance of this, and how you're our values. While you may not vote, they might not vote because your values may not be represented, and they're not being represented because the people that you would be voting for the people that get voted in don't care about the values that you care about. You have to make sure that your elected officials actually represent who you are as a person, and that only can happen if people of minority populations vote because the minorities never vote. You never get a minority elected official. So you it, it's pivotal, no matter where you are to push voting rights and ensure that all populations are participating, because that's the greatest way that we'll see change whether you're in a progressive state or a suppressive state.

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Kristina Flores Victor: Thank you for ending us with that call to action, and thank you for taking the time to talk to us about your research and kind of its application for us in California, too.

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George Harris: Of course, it was great talking with you.

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Kristina Flores Victor: I want to thank everyone for listening, and we hope that our ongoing conversations, spark understandings, empathy, and motivation, to join the struggle for a better future for all you just listen to the Building Justice Podcast. The information contained in this

podcast represents the views and opinions of the hosts and guests, and does not necessarily represent the views or opinions of Sacramento State, or CRISJ.

Outro Music Lyrics

No more penalties and no more wars. Based on the actions. Now, time for "Building Justice,"
"Building Justice." Time for building justice, justice.