

# Need an Uplift? Check Out Airlift

By Frances Moore Lappé

December 2021

If you risk despair about the challenges to our democracy, I get it. We've suffered a near-insurrection, our democracy has seen big setbacks in numerous states. In just the first nine months of 2021, at least 19 states enacted 33 laws making it more difficult to vote, [reports](#) the Brennan Center for Justice, also [warning](#) that "aggressive gerrymandering is distorting the nation's congressional maps."

We should be worried and fighting with all our might to make sure Congress passes the [Freedom to Vote legislation](#) before the holiday recess. But what's not yet in the headlines are all-volunteer, citizen-driven initiatives strengthening our democracy from the ground up.

Recently, I had the pleasure of discovering a great example—[Airlift](#). All volunteer run, Airlift funds local, grassroots organizing groups in battleground states and California battleground counties. Launched in 2017, Airlift is tackling what it calls the largest block of voter age Americans—the non-registered. That's *80 million* of us.

Because it's volunteer run, essentially 100 percent of Airlift funds go to local "Partner Groups" whose focus is registering voters and advocating for the causes their communities champion in big battleground states: Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Florida, Texas, North Carolina, and Arizona.

Airlift documents big impacts—for example, in both Georgia and Michigan.

Between 2018 and the election in 2020, Georgia saw an increase of 600,000 registered voters, and Airlift cites as one key to this progress the galvanizing communities around local issues and dogged door-to-door work of the groups it funds to register new voters. Partner Groups focus especially on engaging young voters, and people of color. Georgia had the highest youth vote in the country, the Black vote was up 20 percent, LatinX vote up 72 percent and Asian-American vote up 91 percent. Some 47,000 people voted for the first time in 2020, and Biden won by only 12,670 votes.

In Texas, a group Airlift funds, MOVE Texas, is led by youth, Claudia Yoli Ferla and Zenen Jaimes Perez. "They reframed the shocking voter suppression in Texas as a reflection of and reaction to the success of MOVE and its allies in getting so many young people out to vote in 2020.

Asked whether young Texans are outraged by the new laws, Claudia told Airlift, "We are young, we are pissed, and we are voting!" Zenen added, "We know that we can get even more creative" going forward. And we bet they can too!"

That spirit is captured a tool they call "Party at the Polls" to encourage newly registered voters actually to cast their ballots. MOVE works in the 12 most populous of Texas's 254 counties, those representing 60 percent of Texas, Zenen told Airlift, "We have developed a proactive, pro-democracy agenda that could be adopted at the local level to push officials to create a culture of civic participation."

Claudia notes, "Texas is changing in ways that even the most crusty and crappy politicians cannot prevent. Our generation is more diverse than ever... we are the most diverse electorate in history, and we are not just the future you all need to invest in, we are the powerful present of organizing."

Registering new, especially young voters, is a powerful strategy for reversing the downward slide of our democracy.

I'm cheering!