# Voting Rights Timeline

## Reconstruction, 1863-1877

### December 4, 1863

President Lincoln presents legislation guaranteeing Black men’s rights after being emancipated by proclamation.

### April 9, 1865

Robert E. Lee surrenders and the Civil War effectively ends.

### December 6, 1865

The 13th Amendment ratified, ending slavery except in prisons.

### December 3, 1867

Andrew Johnson delivers baldly racist remarks before Congress in his annual address. “Negroes have shown less capacity for government than any other race of people. No independent government of any form has ever been successful in their hands. On the contrary, wherever they have been left to their own devices, they have shown a constant tendency to relapse into barbarism.”

### July 9, 1868

The 14th Amendment was ratified, guaranteeing citizenship rights to all people born on U.S. soil and secured all citizens equal protection under law.

### September 28, 1868

Opelousas Massacre begins: Over the course of 2 weeks, 250 people, mostly Black, were killed and white Louisianians rebelled against the recent amendment to the state Constitution guaranteeing black men the right to vote.

### February 3, 1870

The 15th Amendment was ratified, guaranteeing men the right to vote no matter their race, color or previous condition of servitude. However, conditions could be imposed to qualify to vote – and they were.

### April 4, 1873

Colfax Massacre: Between 60 to 150 Black Americans were killed after an 1872 election in Louisiana installed a Republican government to which Democrats (then Dixiecrats) objected and violently took over the courthouse.

### January 29, 1877

Republican President Ulysses S. Grant signs the Electoral Commission Act, establishing a commission to settle the contested 1876 presidential election between Rutherford B. Hayes (Republican, still Lincoln’s party) and Samuel J. Tilden (Democrat, still under the control of Dixiecrats). Democrats agreed to give Hayes the presidency on the understanding that the federal government would remove its troops from the former Confederate states who had been protecting Black Americans rights to a certain extent. This betrayed the trust of Black Americans and abolitionists while empowering the Ku Klux Klan and recent Southern confederate sympathizers.

## Jim Crow, 1877 to 1965

During this time, registration requirements, poll taxes, literacy tests and understanding clauses curtailed the voting rights of all people of color, although they were specifically aimed at disenfranchising Black Americans.

### May 6, 1882

The Chinese Exclusion Act was signed into law that was renewed in 1892 and made permanent in 1902, prohibiting citizenship to Chinese people and severely restricting immigration.

### February 8, 1887

The Dawes Act was signed into law. The federal government broke up reservations and tribal lands into individual or private plots under the Dawes Act signed by Democratic President Grover Cleveland. The goal of the Dawes Act was to Christianize Native Americans or assimilate them into White mainstream society; it had a devastating impact on tribal sovereignty.

### August 12, 1890

Mississippi holds a convention to rewrite the state Constitution to explicitly disenfranchise Black Americans through poll taxes, literacy tests, and grandfather clauses. Other Southern states followed suit. When it was adopted on November 1 of the same year, one of the state constitution’s framers, Democrat James K. Vardaman, who would go on to become governor and a U.S. Senator, once said, “Mississippi’s constitutional convention of 1890 was held for no other purpose than to eliminate the n\*\*\*\*r from politics.”

### June 1, 1896

The Plessy vs. Ferguson decision by the United States Supreme Court upheld racial segregation and established the principal of “separate but equal” which strengthened Jim Crow laws and practices, including terrorizing American citizens and even murdering them in a practice known as “lynching.”

### November 10, 1898

The Wilmington Massacre: In Wilmington, North Carolina, a White mob ejected a legitimately elected biracial government and installed White supremacists, reading from the so-called White Declaration of Independence. 60 or more people were killed.

### 1909

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded.

### June 21, 1915

Guinn vs. U.S., the Supreme Court unanimously found that Oklahoma’s grandfather clause exemption to literacy tests violated the 15th Amendment.

### August 19, 1920

The 19th Amendment was ratified, giving white women the right to vote.

### May 31, 1921

Greenwood, OK, known as “Black Wall Street,” was burned to the ground by a white mob.

January 1-7, 1923  
Rosewood Massacre: The black town of Rosewood, FL, was destroyed and an unknown number of black people were killed along with 2 white people.

### June 2, 1924

The Indian Citizenship Act was signed into law. However, Native Americans continued to be disenfranchised using the same mechanisms used against Black Americans, including in northern states like Maine, where an official told a native American man trying to vote, “We don’t want you people over here. You have your own elections over on the island, and if you want to vote, go over there.”

### April 3, 1944

Smith vs. Allwright: Concluded that it was in violation of the 14th and 15th Amendments for the Texas Democratic Party, still controlled by Dixiecrats,  to prohibit Black Americans from voting in the Democratic primary.

### July 15, 1948

Harrison vs. Laveen, the Arizona Supreme Court decided “persons of guardianship,” as used in the state constitution, didn’t apply to Native Americans. This did not eliminate poll taxes or literacy tests.

### June 27, 1952

The Immigration and Nationality Act becomes law. Also known as the McCarran-Walter Act, it sought to reform the U.S.’s immigration laws by removing the racial restrictions that previous legislation had placed on citizenship and naturalization but continued to enforce quotas from people considered nonwhite, including Italians, Jews, and people from the Caribbean.

### May 17, 1954

The Brown vs. Board of Education decision ended the “separate but equal” principle in schools.

### July 2, 1964

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is signed into law by Lyndon B. Johnson, a Democrat, prohibiting employment discrimination race, color, religion, sex and national origin and marking the end of Dixiecrat control of the party. It was later expanded to specify sexual orientation and gender identity.

### March 7, 1965

Bloody Sunday: Up to 600 activists set out in Alabama to march from Selma to Montgomery to protest for Black voting rights. But when the marchers reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, they encountered White state troopers, who attacked them with billy clubs and tear gas.

### August 6, 1965

Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. huddled with his friends to watch Johnson pledge to fight for voting rights. Former Rep. Andrew Young said that was the only time he saw King cry.

The VRA also contains provisions relevant to the voting rights of people with disabilities. The VRA requires election officials to allow a voter who is blind or has another disability to receive assistance from a person of the voter’s choice (other than the voter’s employer or its agent ran officer or agent of the voter’s union). The VRA also prohibits its conditioning the right to vote on a citizen being able to read or write, attaining a particular vel of education, or passing an interpretation test.”

### October 3, 1965

The Immigration and Nationality Act is signed into law by President Johnson. Also called the Hart-Celler Act, it got rid of the National Origins Formula, a system based on immigration quotas.

## Post-Jim Crow, 1965 to Present

### April 11, 1968

The Indian Civil Rights Act is signed by President Johnson. “The Act is a highly controversial law because it authorizes federal courts to intervene in intra-tribal disputes, a power they never had before,” Stephen L. Pevar, a senior staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union, writes. “Many Indians bitterly resent this development. Essentially, it does two things: First, it confers certain rights on all persons who are subject to the jurisdiction of a tribal government. Second, it authorizes federal courts to enforce many of these rights.”

### May 31, 1984

The Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984 (VAEHA) requires accessible polling places in federal elections for elderly individuals and people with disabilities. Where no accessible location is available to serve as a polling place, voters must be provided an alternate means of voting on Election Day.

### July 26, 1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law. The ADA’s provisions apply to all aspects of voting, including voter registration, site selection, and the casting of ballots, whether on Election Day or during early voting.

### May 20, 1993

The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA) aims, among other things, to increase the historically low registration rates of persons with disabilities. The NVRA requires all offices that provide public assistance or state-funded programs that primarily serve persons with disabilities to also provide the opportunity to register to vote in federal elections.

### October 29, 2002

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) requires jurisdictions responsible for conducting federal elections to provide at least one accessible voting system for persons with disabilities at each polling place in federal elections. The accessible voting system must provide the same opportunity for access and participation, including privacy and independence, that other voters receive.

### July 27, 2006

The last extension of the Voting Rights Act was signed by George W. Bush. Republican presidents had previously approved VRA extensions with bipartisan support across several administrations in 1970, 1975, and 1982.

### January 1, 2009

The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) updated the definitions of what is meant by disability to cover more people with disabilities.

### June 25, 2013

Shelby County vs. Holder: The Supreme Court finds Section 4 of the Civil Rights Act is Unconstitutional, gutting voting rights and paving the way for massive efforts to suppress voting using tactics like requiring certain ID’s, limiting polling places and hours to vote, ending or limiting absentee or mail-in ballots and curbside voting, surgically removing people from voting rolls, and allowing intimidation of voters and election workers in places where there are higher minority populations, including college students and suburban women. Political gerrymandering, which also seems to fall along racial lines, is now permissible and prevalent. The Court stated the election of our first Black president meant Section 4 was no longer needed.

### December 6, 2019

HR 4, the Voting Rights Advancement Act, passes the House of Representatives controlled by Democrats to restore Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act but is not taken up in the Republican controlled Senate.

### January 6, 2021

Thousands of Trump voters riot and violently storm the U.S. Capitol because they wish to reverse the election of Joe Biden as President over Donald Trump, who has been proven to have lost this election in over 60 court cases.

### January 7, 2021

Georgia’s Republican House Speaker David Ralston announces a “Voter Integrity Committee” to look into voter fraud the Republican Secretary of State, Brad Raffensperger, confirmed did not happen.

### March 3, 2021

Democratic controlled House of Representatives passes HR 1, the “For The People Act” expanding voting rights but is blocked by a 50-50 Senate with 2 Democrats voting against it. (Joe Manchin, WV, and Kyrsten Sinema, AZ)

### March 17, 2021

In his maiden floor speech, Senator Rafael Warnock gives a rousing speech in favor of restoring Voting Rights universally.

### March 25, 2021

In front of a picture of a slave plantation, Georgia Republican Gov. Brian Kemp signs an anti-voting rights bill into law. SB 202 imposes new voter identification requirements for absentee ballots, allows state officials to take over local election boards, curbs the use of ballot drop boxes and makes it a crime for people who aren’t poll workers to approach voters in line to give them food and water.

### May 6, 2021

Florida Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis signs a restrictive voting bill into law. SB 90 imposes stricter voter identification requirements for voting by mail, limits who can pick up and return a voter’s ballot and prohibits private funding for elections, among other restrictive provisions.

### July 1, 2021

Brnovich vs. Democratic Party, the case centered on two Arizona policies: One discards out-of-precinct ballots, and the other largely prohibits third-party groups from returning early ballots for another person. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals struck down these policies, arguing that they’re racially discriminatory under the Voting Rights Act. The Supreme Court reversed this decision.

### September 7, 2021

Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott signed SB 1 into law. The sweeping SB 1 was designed to restrict not only how people vote but also when. “It specifically targets voting initiatives used by diverse, Democratic Harris County, the state’s most populous, by banning overnight early voting hours and drive-thru voting, both of which proved popular among voters of color last year,” The Texas Tribune reported at the time.

### December 6, 2021

The DOJ sues Texas over GOP-approved redistricting maps.

### January 19, 2022

Mansion and Sinema block voting rights again in the Senate, reminding us of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when he said, “The Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens’ Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the White moderate who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice.”

### February 7, 2022

The U.S. Supreme Court restores GOP-drawn Alabama congressional map the lower court ruled weakens Black voters’ electoral power and thus probably violates the already gutted Voting Rights Act.

### June 2022

U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman struck down parts of a Texas law that forbid certain assistance for voters with disabilities and voters with limited English proficiency.

### August 2022

Chief U.S. District Judge James Peterson ruled the Wisconsin state Supreme Court decision violated the rights of people with disabilities guaranteed under federal law, thereby allowing them to use assistance if they determine they need it when filling out and returning their ballots.