

The Voting Rights Act

Renew and Restore the Law that Protects Our Right to Vote

Millions of Americans rely on the protections of the Voting Rights Act (VRA). The Voting Rights Act has been widely regarded as one of the most effective and important civil rights laws. Several provisions of the Voting Rights Act are permanent and provide voters with important protections from discrimination. **However, three vital sections of the Voting Rights Act are temporary and will expire in 2007 unless Congress renews them.**

These three sections:

- Require certain states and counties to get federal approval before changing their election laws and procedures. (Section 5).
- Guarantee that citizens who need language assistance are not denied access to voting (Sections 203 and 4(f)4).
- Give the U.S. Attorney General the power to send federal examiners and observers to monitor elections (Sections 6 to 9).

If Congress fails to renew these protections, it will jeopardize the ability of millions of Americans to exercise their right to vote and elect candidates of their choice. Action is needed now so that we don't turn back the clock on 40 years of progress!

Forty Years of Progress

The Voting Rights Act outlawed racial discrimination in voting, ending practices like poll taxes and literacy tests. **The Act also opened the doors of elected office to historically underrepresented communities.** For example, in 1964, there were approximately 300 African American elected officials in office nationwide; today more than 9,100 African Americans serve in elected office. The number of Asian Americans in elected office nationwide has nearly tripled since the implementation of Section 203. The Act also opened the political process for many of the more than 6,000 Latino public officials in elected or appointed office nationwide.

Preventing Discrimination Against Voters

The Voting Rights Act requires state and local governments with a history of discrimination against voters to obtain approval from the Department of Justice before they change election practices or procedures. This has helped to detect and prevent the implementation of many harmful changes in voting laws, and has undoubtedly deterred legislators and local officials from considering some discriminatory changes. The Act also allows the Department of Justice to send federal observers and examiners to observe polling place and vote counting activities, to deter and document discriminatory conduct. **These provisions protect voters by focusing on places where voting discrimination has been and continues to be a significant problem.**



Ensuring That All Voters Have a Voice

Many English-speaking voters struggle with complicated election materials. This struggle is even greater for Native American, Asian American, and Latino citizens who need language assistance. The Voting Rights Act preserves the right of these citizens to cast informed ballots. **If Congress fails to renew the temporary sections of the Act, voters who are not fluent in English will be at risk of being excluded from the voting process.**

Learn More and Get Involved

Our country has come a long way since 1965, but the struggle for equality is not over. Even today, there are many examples of local officials trying to deny minority voters access to the ballot. The Voting Rights Act must be renewed and restored to protect minority voting rights and prevent a return to past discrimination. **To learn more about the Voting Rights Act, download tools that you can use to educate others about the importance of renewing and restoring the Act, and find or plan events in your area, visit www.RenewtheVRA.org.**