

# Voting Rights in the United States

1789

The U.S. Constitution grants states the power to set voting requirements. In most states, only property-owning white men 21 years of age or older were eligible to vote.

Lossing and Barritt. Benjamin Franklin in the National Convention, between 1840 and 1890. Engraving. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Reading Room, Washington, DC



1828

Maryland becomes the last state to remove religious restrictions for voters.

1856

North Carolina is the last state to eliminate property ownership as a requirement to vote, making nearly all white male U.S. citizens 21 years of age or older eligible to vote.

1868

The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution grants full citizenship rights, including voting rights, to all men born or naturalized in the United States. Black voters, however, are systematically turned away from state polling places.

E. W. Kemble. Congress—14th Amendment, Second Section, 1902. Ink and scappling out over graphite underdrawing on paper. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

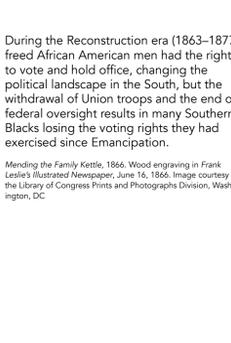


1870

The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, removing some racial barriers to voting. Native Americans, however, are still denied the right to vote.

The Fifteenth Amendment, ca. 1871. Lithograph. Savannah, GA: C. Rogan. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

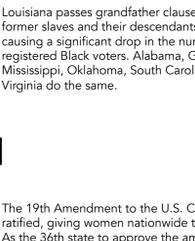
Thomas Nast. "Move on! Has the Native American no rights that the naturalized American is bound to respect?" April 22, 1871. Wood engraving. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC



1877

During the Reconstruction era (1863–1877), freed African American men had the right to vote and hold office, changing the political landscape in the South, but the withdrawal of Union troops and the end of federal oversight results in many Southern Blacks losing the voting rights they had exercised since Emancipation.

Mending the Family Kettle, 1866. Wood engraving in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, June 16, 1866. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC



1887

The Dawes Act grants citizenship to Native Americans who are willing to disassociate themselves from their tribes, making them eligible to vote.

Reservation in Idaho, where Alice Fletcher arrived in 1887 to implement the Dawes Act. The man on one knee is James Stuart, Fletcher's interpreter, ca. 1887. Image courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives, Suitland, MD



1896

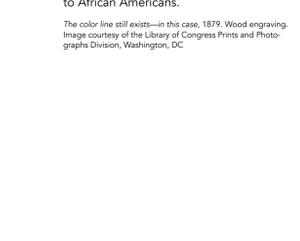
Louisiana passes grandfather clauses to keep former slaves and their descendants from voting, causing a significant drop in the number of registered Black voters. Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Virginia do the same.

1920

The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, giving women nationwide the right to vote. As the 36th state to approve the amendment, Tennessee completes the three-quarters majority needed to make it the law of the land.

Rosa Inin. We Want Our Rights, 1912. Ink, gouache, and opaque white on layered paper-board. Published in Life, February 20, 1913. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

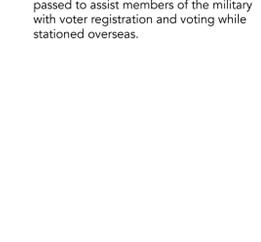
Carl Deeg. Governor Frederick Gardner signs a resolution ratifying an amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting universal franchise to women, 1919. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC



1924

The Snyder Act grants Native Americans born within the territorial limits of the United States full U.S. citizenship and voting rights.

President Calvin Coolidge poses with Native Americans, possibly from the Pitmeau area in the northwestern United States, near the White House South Lawn, February 18, 1925. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC



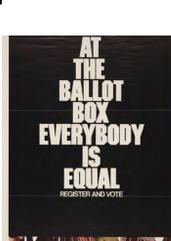
1943

The Magnuson Act gives Chinese immigrants the right to citizenship and the right to vote.

1949

The U.S. Supreme Court holds Alabama's literacy test in violation of the 15th Amendment, as it was designed to deny the vote to African Americans.

The color line still exists—in this case, 1879. Wood engraving. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC



1955

The Federal Voting Assistance Act is passed to assist members of the military with voter registration and voting while stationed overseas.

1961

The 23rd Amendment grants people in the District of Columbia the right to vote in presidential elections.

1964

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is passed, prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations, employment, education, governmental services, and voting.

The 24th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, eliminating poll taxes in federal elections.

Cecil Stoughton, White House Press Office. President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the 1964 Civil Rights Act as Martin Luther King Jr. and others look on, July 2, 1964.

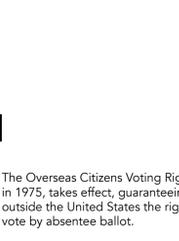
Thomas J. O'Halloran. Three African American women at a polling place, one looking at a book of registered voters on November 5, 1957, in New York City or Newark, New Jersey. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC



1965

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is signed into law, prohibiting any racially discriminatory act that prevents Americans from voting. After its passage, the number of African Americans registered to vote increases rapidly and exponentially.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People poster, created between 1970 and 1980. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC



1966

The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the use of a poll tax violates the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. As a result, poll taxes cannot be used in state or federal elections.

1971

The 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution lowers the voting age to 18.

Joint Resolution proposing the 26th amendment to the Constitution of the United States, extending the right to vote to citizens eighteen years of age or older. Passed by Congress March 23, 1971, and ratified July 1, 1971. Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC



1974

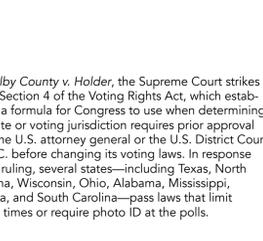
The U.S. Supreme Court rules that denying convicted felons the right to vote does not violate the equal protection clause of the Constitution. Today, most states have differing policies on felon voting rights. In Tennessee, people convicted of felonies forfeit their eligibility to vote. Depending on the crime and when it was committed, these individuals may be able to have their rights restored.

1975

The federal Voting Rights Act is renewed, permanently banning literacy tests nationwide. A section is added, requiring translated voting materials in areas with large numbers of citizens with limited English proficiency.

1976

The Overseas Citizens Voting Rights Act, introduced in 1975, takes effect, guaranteeing all citizens living outside the United States the right to register and vote by absentee ballot.

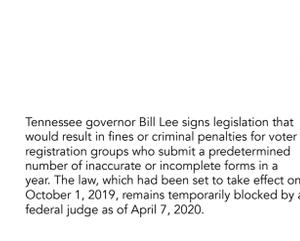


1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act expands the responsibilities of state and local election officials to ensure that all disabled Americans are able to register and vote.

President George H. W. Bush signs the Americans with Disabilities Act on the White House South Lawn on July 26, 1990. Left to right: Evan Kemp, Rev. Harold Wilke, President Bush, Sandra Parnino, Justin Dart Jr. Image courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Washington, DC

R. Michael Jenkins. Jesse Jackson shaking hands with disability advocate Justin Dart Jr., who is in a wheelchair, during a hearing of the House Committee on Education and Labor on a bill that became the Americans with Disabilities Act, July 17, 1989. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC



1993

The National Voter Registration Act, also known as the Motor Voter Act, is enacted, allowing American citizens to register to vote when they are issued a driver's license.

President Bill Clinton signing the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (Motor Voter Act), as Vice President Albert Gore and notable members of Congress look on, 1993. Official White House photograph. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Reading Room, Washington, DC



2000

A federal court decides that Puerto Ricans living in Puerto Rico, though U.S. citizens, cannot vote in the U.S. president. Residents of U.S. territories cannot vote in presidential elections and do not have voting representation in the U.S. Congress.

2013

In *Shelby County v. Holder*, the Supreme Court strikes down Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, which established a formula for Congress to use when determining if a state or voting jurisdiction requires prior approval from the U.S. attorney general or the U.S. District Court for D.C. before changing its voting laws. In response to the ruling, several states—including Texas, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Ohio, Alabama, Mississippi, Virginia, and South Carolina—pass laws that limit voting times or require photo ID at the polls.

2014

Tennessee makes a 2011 law requiring a photo ID to vote more restrictive by defining IDs as only those issued by the state or federal government.

2019

Tennessee governor Bill Lee signs legislation that would result in fines or criminal penalties for voter registration groups who submit a predetermined number of inaccurate or incomplete forms in a year. The law, which had been set to take effect on October 1, 2019, remains temporarily blocked by a federal judge as of April 7, 2020.



Bart Everson. The Green Party of New Orleans sponsored a voter registration drive at the 10th annual hike of the Lafitte Greenway. Hank's Lynne Serge working the table at Second Line Brewing, March 5, 2016. © Bart Everson / CC-BY-2.0

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