# Voting Rights Act Timeline

**March 4, 2005**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>What Happened</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>White men with property have the right to vote but Catholics, Jews, Quakers and others are barred from voting.</td>
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<td>1790</td>
<td>The Naturalization Act bars Asian Americans from becoming citizens.</td>
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<td>1792</td>
<td>New Hampshire eliminates property ownership requirements, which gives more white men the opportunity to vote.</td>
<td>New Hampshire becomes the first state to eliminate the rule that only property owners and taxpayers can vote. Following New Hampshire's lead, other states begin to shift away from such restrictions in an effort to open the electorate to more white males.</td>
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<td>1812</td>
<td>Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry redraws voting district lines to favor the Republican-dominated legislature against the Federalist Party.</td>
<td>Today, the term &quot;gerrymander&quot; means the drawing of legislative district lines, usually in a bizarre manner, to give an unfair advantage to one group or political party. Although the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1986 in Davis v. Bandemer that the question of partisan gerrymandering could be settled in a court of law, no court has ever invalidated a redistricting plan on the basis of partisan gerrymandering.</td>
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<td>1848</td>
<td>The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ends the Mexican American War, giving Mexicans in Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas U.S. citizenship.</td>
<td>Mexicans living in Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, and Nevada are guaranteed U.S. citizenship in 1848, but their voting rights are denied when English proficiency is required to vote. Property and literacy requirements are imposed to keep them from voting, along with violence and intimidation.</td>
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<td>1856</td>
<td>Property qualifications for voting are eliminated in certain elections in North Carolina, giving all white men there the opportunity to vote.</td>
<td>North Carolina becomes the last state to eliminate the rule that citizens must own property in order to vote in certain elections, effectively extending the right to vote to all white men within the United States (with the exception of those convicted of certain crimes).</td>
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<td>1866</td>
<td>The Civil Rights Act of 1866 grants citizenship, but not the right to vote, to all native-born Americans.</td>
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<td>1868</td>
<td>The Louisiana Republican Party platform includes a plank embracing equality for African Americans. John W. Menard is elected to Congress from Louisiana but is barred from taking his seat by white members of Congress. Oscar J. Dunn, a former slave, is elected lieutenant governor of Louisiana.</td>
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<td>1869</td>
<td>Congress passes the Fifteenth Amendment giving African American men the equal right to vote.</td>
<td>The Fifteenth Amendment states: &quot;The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. &quot;In addition to the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolishes slavery and the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees equal protection under the law, the Fifteenth Amendment is one of the major tools which enabled African Americans to more fully participate in democracy.</td>
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<td>1870</td>
<td>Hiram Revels is the first African American elected to the U.S. Senate and Joseph Hayne Rainey becomes the first African American member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Jasper J. Wright is elected to the South Carolina Supreme Court.</td>
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<td>1870</td>
<td>The Fifteenth Amendment is ratified by the states, giving freed slaves and other African Americans the equal right to vote.</td>
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<td>1871</td>
<td>The forty-second Congress includes five black members of the U.S. House of Representatives.</td>
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<td>1877</td>
<td>Disputed returns from the November 1876 presidential election, in which Democrat Samuel J. Tilden won the popular vote against Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, but fell one electoral vote short of the 185 needed to win the presidency, provoke a Constitutional crisis. The crisis is resolved when Hayes agrees to recognize Democratic administrations in Florida,</td>
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The U.S. Supreme Court rules in Bhagat Singh Thind that although the Indian Naturalization Act grants citizenship to citizen Indians born within the United States to be "white" under the naturalization law, Thind was approved, but a naturalization examiner appealed the decision. The court rules that Elk is not allowed to vote in Nebraska because his intention to become a citizen requires approval from the United States. The court also states that Elk is not a citizen because he does not "owe allegiance to the United States," and that the Fifteenth Amendment does not apply to him.

In a setback to Native American voting rights, the Supreme Court rules in Opsahl v. Johnson to deny members of the Red Lake Chippewa Tribe the right to vote. The court rules that members of the Red Lake Chippewa Tribe cannot participate in county elections because tribal members have not "yielded obedience and submission to the [Minnesota] laws." The U.S. Supreme Court rules that 273 Indians of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe are eligible to vote under the North Dakota Constitution because they "had adopted and observed the habits and mode of life of civilized people."

The North Dakota Supreme Court rules that 273 Indians of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe are eligible to vote under the North Dakota Constitution because they "had adopted and observed the habits and mode of life of civilized people."

Louisiana and South Carolina - and return federal troops to their barracks - in exchange for Democrats in Congress accepting him as President.

In a setback to Native American voting rights, the Supreme Court rules in Elk v. Wilkins that John Elk, a Native American from Nebraska, cannot vote.

The court rules that Elk is not allowed to vote in Nebraska because his intention to become a citizen requires approval from the United States. The court also states that Elk is not a citizen because he does not "owe allegiance to the United States," and that the Fifteenth Amendment does not apply to him.

Congress passes the Indian Citizenship Act which grants citizenship only to those Native Americans who give up their tribal affiliations. Adopted as an amendment to the state constitution, Louisiana's grandfather clause prompts a huge decrease in registered African American voters. The provision requires voters to register, at the mean January 1, 1897 and January 1, 1898, and only allows literate property owners to register. Illiterate or non-property owning voters whose fathers or grandfathers could vote in 1867 also are allowed to register. Because nearly all African Americans were slaves two generations earlier, the measure effectively disfranchises all black voters who cannot read or write or who do not own more than $300 in property.

The U.S. Supreme Court rules in Smith v. Allwright that it is unconstitutional for political parties in Texas to discriminate based on race. In Smith v. Allwright, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that excluding African Americans from membership in the Democratic Party and from participating in primary elections is unconstitutional. According to the Court, primary elections are essential parts of the election process and subject to the
1946 Filipinos are granted the right to become U.S. citizens.

1946 (April 1) The federal court rules in King v. Chapman that white primary systems in Georgia are unconstitutional.

1946 (June 10) The U.S. Supreme Court permits unequal voting districts in Colegrove v. Green, thereby unfairly denying citizens equal representation in Congress.

1947 Only 125,000 African Americans in Georgia, or 18.8% of the population, are registered to vote.

1947 South Carolina's effort to save its white primary is invalidated by federal court in Elmore v. Rice.

1952 The McCarran-Walter Act gives first generation Filipinos the right to become U.S. citizens.

1954 (May 17) The U.S. Supreme Court unanimously rules in Brown v. Board of Education that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional.

1954 The Civil Rights Act of 1957 is the first such measure to pass Congress since adoption of the federal civil rights laws of 1875. Among other things, the Act authorizes the U.S. Attorney General to sue to correct discrimination and intimidation of potential voters.

1955 The racial restrictions of the 1790 Naturalization Law are repeated by the McCarran-Walter Act, giving first generation Japanese Americans the right to citizenship.

1957 (August 29) Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1957, giving the U.S. Attorney General the authority to bring lawsuits on behalf of African Americans denied the right to vote.

1959 (June 8) In a major setback to voting rights, the U.S. Supreme Court rules in Lassiter v. Northampton County Board of Elections that literacy tests for voting in North Carolina do not violate the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.


1962 (March 26) In Baker v. Carr, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that courts can direct legislatures to redraw district boundaries to ensure citizens' political rights.

1963 (March 18) In Gray v. Sanders the U.S. Supreme Court finds that Georgia's "county unit" system of voting is unconstitutional and articulates the essential concept of "one person, one vote." The U.S. Supreme Court rules that Georgia's "county unit" voting system violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Under this system, the state gave greater weight to rural votes and smaller urban counties than urban votes and larger rural counties. Because urban districts are much larger, individual voters had less say compared to rural voters over who got nominated in statewide primaries. Writing for the majority, Justice Douglas states: "The conception of political equality from the Declaration of Independence, to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, to the Fifteenth, Seventeenth, and Nineteenth Amendments can mean only one thing - one person, one vote."

1963 The "March on Washington" led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. receives worldwide attention.

1964 (February 4) Poll taxes are outlawed with the adoption of the 24th Amendment.

1964 (June 15) In Reynolds v. Sims, a major voting rights victory, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the one person, one vote rule applies to legislative bodies. Noting that "the right to exercise the franchise in a free and unimpaired manner is preservative of other basic civil and political rights," the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Alabama legislative boundaries that had not been changed since 1900.

1964 (July 2) Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1964, making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, religion, and gender in voting, public places, the workplace and schools.
1975 President Gerald Ford reauthorizes the special provisions of the Voting Rights Act, including new measures to permanently bar literacy tests nationwide and give assistance to language minority voters.

1974 The U.S. Supreme Court rules in Romer v. Ramirez that states may deny convicted felons the right to vote.

1973 Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson becomes the first African American elected mayor of a major Southern city since Reconstruction.

1972 Barbara Jordan of Houston and Andrew Young of Atlanta become the first African Americans elected to Congress from the South since Reconstruction.

1971 Following the election of 12 African Americans to Congress in 1970, Congressman Charles C. Diggs, Jr. of Michigan establishes the Congressional Black Caucus to secure a larger voice for African Americans in public affairs.

1970 Congress renews the temporary provisions of the Voting Rights Act for five years, and they are signed into law by President Richard Nixon.

1969 In Allen v. State Board of Elections, the Supreme Court interprets Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act broadly to require preclearance for a wide range of election practices.

1968 Nine African Americans are elected to Congress, the largest number since 1875.

1967 African American voter registration jumps from 6.7% in Mississippi before passage of the Voting Rights Act, to 59.8% in 1967.

1965 Congress extends the preclearance rules, which apply to some southern states, for seven years, and extends them to ethnic groups covered by the language assistance provisions. Congress also requires language assistance to be made available when a single language minority group composes more than 5% of the voting age population, or at least 10,000 voters.

1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act into law, permanently barring direct barriers to political participation by racial and ethnic minorities, prohibiting any election practice that denies the right to vote on account of race, and requiring jurisdictions with a history of discrimination in voting to get federal approval of changes in their election laws before they can take effect.

1965 By the end of 1965, 250,000 new black voters are registered, one-third of them by Federal examiners.

1965 Black voter registration dramatically impacts politics in localities throughout the South. For example, in Dallas County, Alabama, where civil rights marchers were brutally attacked in Selma, the number of registered African American voters increased from 383 before the passage of the Voting Rights Act, to approximately 8,000 - which was slightly more than half the black voting age population in the county - by November 1965.

1964 The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the enforcement clause of the Fifteenth Amendment gives Congress "full remedial powers" to prevent racial discrimination in voting, and holds that the Voting Rights Act is a "legitimate response" to the "insidious and pervasive evil" which has denied blacks the right to vote since adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870. The Court further finds that Section 5 of the Act, which requires state and local officials in targeted jurisdictions to obtain federal preclearance before implementing changes in voting, was designed "to shift the advantage of time and inertia from the perpetrators of the evil to its victims."

1963 The Voting Rights Act is enacted as a permanent federal statute that allows for direct action to ensure the protection of minority voting rights. The Act forbids literacy tests and other barriers to registration that have restricted minority access to voting. The Act also empowers the Department of Justice and the courts to monitor problem jurisdictions and ensures that private citizens can seek redress through the courts to remedy violations of minority voting rights.

1962 The 26th Amendment gives 18-year-olds the right to vote.

1961 Tennessee's "Duration Residency" Rule is unconstitutional, giving more people the opportunity to vote.

1960 The U.S. Supreme Court rules in Dunn v. Blumstein, the Supreme Court determines what they are voting on, but the Court disagrees.

1959 In Allen v. State Board of Elections, the Supreme Court upholds the constitutionality of the Voting Rights Act.

1958 The 26th Amendment gives 18-year-olds the right to vote.

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1954 The U.S. Supreme Court rules in Brown v. Board of Education that the "separate but equal" doctrine is unconstitutional, giving more people the opportunity to vote.

1953 The U.S. Supreme Court rules in McGowan v. Maryland that states may deny convicted felons the right to vote.

1952 Kansas law mandates that the "instruction of Negroes" be given by a "qualified instructor of Negroes" who may have no other qualifications.

1951 In a case that would come to be known as "1009," the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the Voting Rights Act violates the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

1950 The U.S. Supreme Court rules in Terry v. Board of Education that the states must provide more than minimal education to African American students.

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**1975 (June 30)**

Minority voting rights are strengthened in White v. Regester, when the U.S. Supreme Court rules that Texas redistricting is unconstitutional because it dilutes minority voting strength in Bexar County.

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**1976 (March 30)**

In a setback to voting rights, the U.S. Supreme Court rules in Beer v. United States that Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act allows preclearance of election changes that are unfair to the minority community as long as the changes are not "retrogressive" (i.e. do not make things worse).

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**1980 (April 22)**

In a major setback to voting rights, the U.S. Supreme Court rules in City of Mobile v. Bolden that voters must prove racially discriminatory intent to successfully prevail in Section 2 litigation. Prior to City of Mobile v. Bolden, it was sufficient to prove a discriminatory result. The "intent-only" standard presents a major obstacle to minority voters who seek to end practices that produce discriminatory results where it is not possible to prove discriminatory intent.

**1982 (June 29)**

Congress reauthorizes the special provisions of the Voting Rights Act for 25 years and legislatively overturns the City of Mobile v. Bolden decision thereby re-establishing that proving a discriminatory result is sufficient to prevail in Section 2 litigation. The bill is signed into law by President Ronald Reagan. In addition to renewing Section 5 and the language minority protections of the Voting Rights Act, the 1982 extension adds protections for blind, disabled, and illiterate voter. President Ronald Reagan declares that the right to vote is a "crown jewel" of American liberties.

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**1986 (June 30)**

In Thornburg v. Gingles, the U.S. Supreme Court strengthens minority voting rights by invalidating multi-member state legislative districts in North Carolina. While invalidating multi-member legislative districts in a redistricting plan adopted by North Carolina after the 1980 census, the U.S. Supreme Court identified three factors of primary importance to determine a violation of Section 2. Known as the "Gingles Factors," they are: 1. Whether "the minority group...is sufficiently large and geographically compact to constitute a majority in a single-member district;" 2. Whether "the minority group...is politically cohesive," i.e., tends to vote as a bloc; and 3. Whether "the majority votes sufficiently as a bloc to enable it - in the absence of special circumstances...usually to defeat the minority's preferred candidate."

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**1990 (July 26)**

Congress passes the Americans with Disabilities Act which, among other things, requires that election workers and polling sites provide a range of services to ensure that people with disabilities can vote.

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**1990 (July 30)**

As a result of the Voting Rights Act, the number of black elected officials in Georgia grows to 495 in 1990, from just three prior to the VRA.

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**1992 (January 27)**

The U.S. Supreme Court rules in Presley v. Etowah County Commission that the preclearance provisions of Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act do not cover legislative changes to the authority of elected officials.

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**1992 (November)**

Out of 38 African Americans elected to the US House of Representatives who will serve in the 103rd Congress, only three are elected from majority-white districts.

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**1993 (May 20)**

The National Voter Registration Act, also known as the "Motor Voter" Bill, makes registration more uniform and accessible, especially for minority and low income voters. The NVRA requires states to allow voter registration by mail, to allow voters to register when they apply for a driver's license and to allow voters to register at other state agencies such as welfare and unemployment offices.

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**1993 (June 28)**

The U.S. Supreme Court rules in Shaw v. Reno that a cause of action can be brought by white residents of majority black districts who contend that in drawing district lines the state subordinated traditional redistricting principles to race. Shaw v. Reno questions legislative redistricting plans that create districts likely to elect a member of a minority group. The U.S. Supreme Court rules that legislative districts drawn to comply with Sections 2 or 5 of the Voting Rights Act cannot consider race any more than is necessary, and must not be "bizarrely shaped."

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**1994 (June 29)**

Membership of the Congressional Black Caucus reaches 40, including Carol Moseley-Braun of Illinois, the first black woman elected to the U.S. Senate.

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**1995 (June 29)**

The U.S. Supreme Court rules in Miller v. Johnson that race cannot be the "predominant factor" when drawing district lines. Following the trajectory laid out in Shaw v. Reno, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that Georgia's majority black 11th Congressional District is unconstitutional because race was the "predominant" factor in drawing district lines and that the state "subordinated" its traditional redistricting principle to race without a compelling reason.

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**1997 (May 12)**

The U.S. Supreme Court rules in Reno v. Bossier Parish School Board that the federal government can preclear redistricting plans created with a discriminatory purpose, as long as the purpose is not to make things worse (retrogress).

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**2002 (October 29)**

Help America Vote Act. Congress provided funds to states to improve election administration and replace
outdated voting systems. HAVA also creates minimum standards for states to follow in areas of election administration and provides for voting by provisional ballots.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year (Event Date)</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003 (June 26)</td>
<td>In Georgia v. Ashcroft, the U.S. Supreme Court interprets Section 5 to allow preclearance of redistricting plans even if the plans diminish the minority communities' ability to elect, as long as the community is given &quot;influence.&quot;</td>
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<td>2004 (April 28)</td>
<td>Vieth v. Jubelirer. A fractured Supreme Court held that claims of partisan gerrymandering were nonjusticiable.</td>
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<td>2006 (July 27)</td>
<td>Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act. Congress extended Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act for an additional 25 years. It also remedied the decision in Reno v. Bossier Parish School Board by providing that the term &quot;purpose&quot; as used in Section 5 &quot;shall include any discriminatory purpose.&quot; It also remedied Georgia v. Ashcroft by providing that Section 5 protects the ability of minorities &quot;to elect their preferred candidates of choice.&quot;</td>
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<td>2008 (April 28)</td>
<td>Crawford v. Marion County. The Supreme Court rejected a facial challenge to the constitutionality of Indiana law requiring those voting in-person to present a government issued photo ID.</td>
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<td>2009 (March 22)</td>
<td>Bartlett v. Strickland. The Supreme Court held that the ability to create a majority-minority district was a prerequisite for a vote dilution claim under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.</td>
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<td>2009 (June 22)</td>
<td>Northwest Austin Municipal Utility District No. One v. Holder. The Supreme Court held that any jurisdiction covered by Section 5 was entitled to bail out. The Court further found it unnecessary to decide the plaintiff's claim that Section 5 as extended in 2006 was now unconstitutional.</td>
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<td>2009 (October 28)</td>
<td>Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act. Congress established procedures for absent uniformed services voters and overseas voters to request and states to send voter registration applications and absentee ballot applications by mail and electronically.</td>
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