

BRIEF HISTORY ON THE VOTERS RIGHTS ACT

The struggle for equal voting rights dates to the earliest days of history. Now we are beginning to see new obstacles to voting. Certain groups have long tried to keep the vote out of the hands of the less powerful. In the late 1700's only a narrow subset of society -white male landowners, were granted the right to vote. As voting barriers began to be "kicked" down, many southern states produced new ones to keep certain people from voting.

During the early part of the 19th century, state legislatures begin to limit the property requirement for voting. Later, during the Reconstruction Period following the Civil War, Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which ensured that people could not be denied the right to vote because of their race. The amendment was ratified by the states in 1870. However, in the decades that followed, many states, particularly in the South, used a range of barriers, such as poll taxes and literacy tests, to deliberately reduce voting among African American men.

Early in the 20th century, women still were only able to vote in a handful of states. After decades of organizing and activism, women nationwide won the right to vote with the ratification of the 19th amendment to the US Constitution in 1920.

The struggle for equal voting rights came to a head in the 1960s as many states, particularly in the South, dug in on policies-such as literacy tests, poll taxes, English-language requirements, and more- aimed at suppressing the vote among people of color, immigrants, and low-income populations.

1965 a March from Selma, Alabama to the state capital of Montgomery spotlighted the issue of Black voting rights. The first march was brutally attacked by the police and others on a day that became known as "Bloody Sunday."

Thousands finally made the journey, arriving in Montgomery on March 24 and drew nationwide attention to the issue.

Poll taxes forced people to pay money to vote. It was a prerequisite for voter registration in many states. The taxes were expressly designed to keep African Americans and low-income white. People from voting. The twenty-fourth Amendment was approved by Congress in 1962 and ratified by the states two years later. In 1966 the Supreme Court ruled that poll taxes are unconstitutional in any US election.

Congress passed The Voting Rights Act of 1965 Passed by Congress took major steps to curtail voter suppression. The voting age was reduced from 21 to 18 and other voting protection was put into place for language minorities and people with disabilities.

In 2013 The Supreme Court strikes a blow to the Voting Rights Act in its ruling on *Shelby County v. Holder*, paving the way for states and areas with a history of voter suppression to enact restrictive voter identification laws. Twenty-three states jumped on the bandwagon and created new obstacles to voting in the decade leading up to 2018 elections, according to nonpartisan coalition Election Protection.

These activities have a demonstrable and disproportionate effect on populations that are already underrepresented at the polls. Adding to the problems, government at all levels has failed to make

BRIEF HISTORY ON THE VOTERS RIGHTS ACT

the necessary investments in elections (from technology to poll-worker training) to ensure the integrity and efficiency of the system.

“Carnegie Corporation of New York “

November 18, 2019

Information shared by Cherry H. Brown, Chair of MCDP