

The Voting Rights Act of 1965:

How a Landmark Legislative Victory Reformed Voting Practices in the U.S.

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Historical Paper

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When I discovered this year's National History Day theme, I knew that it was perfect for an influential event from the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. I gravitated towards the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) because of its lasting impact on our country, both historically and today. Additionally, the VRA connects well to the National History Day theme of Revolution, Reaction, Reform at various stages in the Act's development and its significance.

For my research, I began with databases to study the topic as a whole and its broader historical context. Using an online library system, I then found reading material on the topic that supplemented my dive into the era's powerful activists. This provided both speeches and other primary sources. Because the topic focuses on legislation, my research led me to documents and government sites that provided excellent, in-depth information. Some of the most personally valuable resources came from my interviews with Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon; Associate Director of the League of Women Voters Minnesota, Heidi Kloempken; and Sequoia Ragland, Policy Advisor to co-chair and founder of the Congressional Voting Rights Caucus Representative Marc Veasey. In preparation for the national contest, I also reached out to several members of Congress and former political leaders, the California Secretary of State, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National League of Women Voters, and the NAACP, but I was unable to acquire a response.

My research offered guidance on historical movements and major events to aid in curating the roadmap of my paper. I decided to zero in on how the country arrived at the VRA and why it has lasting historical reverberations. One method of achieving this was highlighting the Civil Rights Movement leading up to the main event, with a focus on the crucial events that directly played into passing the VRA. This roadmap was later adapted as a major Supreme Court

case ruling was made (*Louisiana vs Callais*) that greatly affected the VRA and how voting rights will continue in the nation.

My historical argument is that the VRA reformed voting practices in our country as the direct result of African American activists' reaction to the discrimination causing them to be widely barred from voting rights through the early 1960s. This revolutionized political rights for minority communities, and especially African Americans, by granting them access to the constitutional right to vote. Subsequently, this enhanced political opportunities nationwide. These protected voting rights are still challenged today, while the fight to advance these protections persists.

The VRA has historical importance by inciting tremendous reform as a legislative victory, but it also undeniably ties into current issues. Today, Supreme Court cases question the constitutionality of the VRA, new legislation furthers interactions with voting rights, and the Act still causes intense reactions within our country. However, it is incredibly important to note that the VRA and its legacy largely continue to protect the enfranchisement of *all* Americans. This makes one thing clear: the Voting Rights Act is continuously significant in history.

“No voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by any State or political subdivision to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.”

- *The Voting Rights Act, 1965*¹

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) was a major achievement in the Civil Rights Movement, as African Americans reacted to unfair voting practices that kept minorities from the poll booths. Having drawn attention to governmental systems in place to disenfranchise African Americans despite constitutionally-given rights established a century prior, civil rights activists achieved victory as the VRA majorly reformed voting systems in the U.S. By largely removing the obstacle of discriminatory voting systems to protect minority groups’ right to vote, the VRA revolutionized American politics—especially for these minorities. These very same rights continue to be fought for today.

A Long Road to Voting

The path to the VRA was long and tumultuous, beginning during a period called “Reconstruction,” where Congress attempted to integrate new ideals of racial equality within the Confederate South.² Included in this societal reshaping were the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, granting citizenship to African Americans and the vote to all male citizens, respectively. This marked a crucial turning point in United States history because, theoretically, all men of color could exercise their right to vote. However, political turmoil and the subsequent oppositional violence to Reconstruction in the South caused major tensions that eventually led to the end of this period in history.

¹ “Voting Rights Act (1965),” National Archives, February 8, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/voting-rights-act>.

² “Research Guides: Reconstruction: A Resource Guide: Introduction,” n.d., <https://guides.loc.gov/reconstruction>.

The post-Reconstruction era in the U.S. placed a stopper in the progression of civil rights, setting the stage for the discriminatory backdrop of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. The end of Reconstruction in 1877 effectively halted the Reconstruction amendments' progress in practice, as the South returned to a state of racial oppression through Black codes and Jim Crow laws.³ More than half a million African American men had exercised their vote in the South, but the end of Reconstruction re-energized white supremacist terrorist groups, like the Ku Klux Klan⁴, to use local government control and violence to blockade poll booths from minorities.⁵ Voter suppression in the form of literacy tests, from which white people were largely exempt due to grandfather clauses based on ancestors' ability to vote before the Fifteenth Amendment, and hefty poll taxes acted as loopholes that racist state governments used to prevent African American voter registration.⁶ (See Appendix A) These conditions persisted throughout the first half of the 20th century and set the stage for the influential Civil Rights Movement.

Voting on Their Minds

The beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-19th century lit the fire that enabled the expansive movement to fight for change in communities across the country, eventually leading to the Voting Rights Act. In response to bus segregation, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was sparked by Rosa Parks and resulted in an anti-discriminatory Supreme Court ruling. This is largely regarded as the match to the civil rights flame.⁷ Later, the newly prominent movement leader Martin Luther King Jr. aided in creating the Southern Christian Leadership

³ *Britannica School*, s.v. "Fourteenth Amendment," accessed March 2, 2026, <https://school-eb-com.content.elibrarymn.org/levels/high/article/Fourteenth-Amendment/474682>.

⁴ *Britannica School*, s.v. "African Americans," accessed March, 3, 2026, <https://school-eb-com.content.elibrarymn.org/levels/high/article/African-Americans/477096#285195.toc>.

⁵ Artika R. Tyner, *Black Voter Suppression: The Fight for the Right to Vote*, 2021.

⁶ Tyner, *Black Voter Suppression: The Fight for the Right to Vote*.

⁷ *Britannica School*, s.v. "American civil rights movement," accessed March 3, 2026, <https://school-eb-com.content.elibrarymn.org/levels/high/article/American-civil-rights-movement/82763#288198.toc>

Conference, one of many groups that collaborated under the larger civil rights umbrella.⁸ A new era had descended upon the U.S., with a burgeoning movement of civil rights activists leading sit-ins and demonstrations with an established purpose of fighting for equality—including a focus on the right to vote.⁹

Despite impressive civil rights victories in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, such as *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the 1964 Civil Rights Act, there was still a noticeable gap in the nation's equality, as unfair voting restrictions remained prevalent. In his "Our God is Marching On!" speech, Dr. King described this, stating, "The Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave Negroes some...of their rightful dignity, but without the vote it was dignity without strength."¹⁰ In addition to this, southern African American communities pushed hard against ingrained discriminatory voting practices and society as a whole. Fannie Lou Hamer's crucial 1964 Democratic National Convention testimony called attention to violence, aggression, and outright racism surrounding African Americans attempting to register to vote.¹¹ John Lewis, an up-and-coming civil rights leader and chair of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was also struggling for poll booth access.¹² To this effect, he used his March on Washington speech as a major driving factor in pushing to end discriminatory voting practices.¹³ Together, their emphasis on the right to vote allowed the issue to take center stage in the Civil Rights Movement.

⁸ Tyner, *Black Voter Suppression: The Fight for the Right to Vote*.

⁹ "The Atlanta Constitution 1960-03-09: Vol 92 Iss 225 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive," Internet Archive, March 9, 1960, h, such as *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act in 1964, there was still a noticeable gap in the nation's commitment to equality in voting, as unfair voter restrictions remained prevalent https://archive.org/details/per_atlanta-constitution_1960-03-09_92_225/page/n11/mode/2up.

¹⁰ "Our God Is Marching On!," The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, n.d., <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/our-god-marching>.

¹¹ Michael E. Eidenmuller, "American Rhetoric: Fannie Lou Hamer - Testimony Before the Credential Committee," n.d., <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fannielouhamercredentialscommittee.htm>.

¹² Matt Doeden, *John Lewis: Courage in Action* (Lerner Publications TM, 2018).

¹³ Voices of Democracy, "Lewis, 'Speech at the March on Washington,' Speech Text - Voices of Democracy," July 5, 2016, <https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/lewis-speech-at-the-march-on-washington-speech-text/>.

The march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, fueled by the reaction to discriminatory voter restrictions, was a direct lead-up to the VRA. A demonstration focused on defending their right to vote, civil rights activists persevered through police violence on Bloody Sunday and the grueling trek, all to fight for their constitutionally-given right.¹⁴ This highly-publicized protest attracted national support for the movement, even causing President Lyndon Johnson to send the National Guard to protect marchers after the violent event.¹⁵ This support snowballed into the countrywide attention needed to drive protective voting legislation through Congress.¹⁶

Reforming the Vote

The nation had garnered valuable support for the voting rights movement. Now, the difficult work to pass the Voting Rights Act was underway, as there were still those who felt threatened by the premise of federal voter protections. One letter to Congress from George Neu of Virginia compared the Act to authoritarianism in 1930s Germany.¹⁷ This evidence displays how communities, especially in the South, remained impervious to the push for reform happening elsewhere in the country. However, overwhelming support in both houses of Congress overpowered resistance, with a Senate vote of 77-19 in favor.¹⁸ In addition, moving statements of support from President Johnson that posed voter discrimination as denying the American purpose¹⁹ and Representative John Conyers Jr.'s testimony on the urgency to pass the Act further

¹⁴ Mariel Fernandez, "Voting Rights Act of 1965: History and Timeline," Legal Defense Fund, December 2, 2025, <https://www.naacpldf.org/voting-rights-act-history-timeline/>.

¹⁵ Doeden, *John Lewis: Courage in Action*.

¹⁶ Sam R. Garrett, "The Voting Rights Act: Historical Development and Policy Background," *Congress.Gov*, April 25, 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47520>.

¹⁷ "Letter From Mr. George Neu Against Voting Rights, March 26, 1965," National Archives, September 29, 2020, <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/voting-rights-1965/neu.html>.

¹⁸ "Roll Call Vote Tally on S. 1564, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, May 26, 1965," National Archives, July 26, 2019, <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/voting-rights-1965/roll-call.html>.

¹⁹ "President Lyndon Johnson's Speech to Congress on Voting Rights, March 15, 1965," National Archives, September 29, 2020, <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/voting-rights-1965/johnson.html>.

solidified its Congressional success.²⁰ By August, no filibusters nor other opposition were able to stop the inevitable momentum.²¹

The VRA was signed into law by President Johnson, reforming voting practices across the U.S. and protecting minorities from discriminatory government systems. Arguably the nation's biggest victory in civil rights legislation, the VRA was created to prevent state and local governments from using unfair laws against minority citizens. Among these protections were prohibiting literacy tests and mandating the Attorney General to object to the use of poll taxes in elections.²² Another major protection was the preclearance section, which applied to states and political subdivisions that previously used discriminatory voting practices or maintained lower than 50 percent voter turnout by November 1964.²³ Preclearance required these governments to obtain confirmation in federal court that new voting and election laws were racially unbiased.²⁴ For African Americans, these specific provisions reformed ingrained systems designed to deny constitutional rights throughout the nation's history.²⁵ On August 6th, 1965, a bill was not just signed into law: a new day was dawning on the American horizon.

The Revolution: One Person, One Vote

In the aftermath of the Voting Rights Act, new voter protections revolutionized the political landscape for African Americans, especially in the South. For the first time since

²⁰ "Statement of Congressman John Conyers, Jr. On H.R. 6400, April 1, 1965," National Archives, July 26, 2019, <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/voting-rights-1965/conyers.html>.

²¹ Garrett, "The Voting Rights Act: Historical Development and Policy Background."

²² *Britannica School*, s.v. "Voting Rights Act," accessed March 3, 2026, <https://school-eb-com.content.elibrarymn.org/levels/high/article/Voting-Rights-Act/399781>.

²³ *Britannica School*, s.v. "voting rights," accessed March 3, 2026, <https://school-eb-com.content.elibrarymn.org/levels/high/article/voting-rights/632952>.

²⁴ *Britannica School*, s.v. "voting rights."

²⁵ Ed Gordon, "The Voting Rights Act, 40 Years Later," *NPR*, August 5, 2005, <https://www.npr.org/2005/08/05/4786618/the-voting-rights-act-40-years-later#:~:text=GORDON:%20Joining%20me%20at%20member,they%20got%2C%20and%20he%20won.>

Reconstruction ended, the poll booths were an assured opportunity, regardless of skin color.²⁶ This access opened the world for the African American community, with the racial voter gap dropping 28 percent.²⁷ Beyond this, African American access to the polls led to federal, state, and local elected officials of color, despite districts' histories of racism.²⁸ (See Appendix B) While the struggle for equality was far from over, the reformed voting systems had revolutionized political opportunity in the African American community and continued to do so over time. Mississippi's 81 counties exemplify this, with African Americans becoming elected officials in 12 counties a mere three years later, and in 52 counties by 1980—numbers that had been zero before the VRA.²⁹ This revolution widened the world for African Americans passionate about sharing their voices through the transformation of public policy and party politics.³⁰ Finally, the ideal of “one person, one vote” had been realized.

The VRA also opened voting opportunities across other minority groups. Just like unfair literacy tests and inherently discriminatory poll taxes negatively impacted the African American community, these measures also prevented many poor women from accessing the ballots.³¹ Other minority groups, including Latino and Asian Americans, were prevented from voting by discriminatory measures that didn't cease until protections provided by the VRA.³² Now, the democratic process was accessible to American citizens regardless of color, economic status, or gender, and the Constitution was being actualized.

²⁶ NAACP, “Voting Rights Act of 1965,” May 9, 2021, <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/legislative-milestones/voting-rights-act-1965>.

²⁷ “The Voting Rights Act, Explained,” Brennan Center for Justice, June 21, 2023, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-rights-act-explained>.

²⁸ “The Voting Rights Act, Explained.”

²⁹ Andrea Bernini et al., “Sixty Years of the Voting Rights Act: Progress and Pitfalls,” *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 40, no. 3 (January 1, 2024): 486–97, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grae026>.

³⁰ “1965: From Women's Suffrage to Women's Liberation | the Long 19th Amendment,” n.d., <https://long19.radcliffe.harvard.edu/teaching/suffrage-syllabus/unit-5/>.

³¹ “1965: From Women's Suffrage to Women's Liberation | the Long 19th Amendment.”

³² “The 19th Amendment, Explained,” Brennan Center for Justice, February 23, 2026, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/19th-amendment-explained>.

The Vote Today

In the years since the Voting Rights Act was signed into law, recognition of its lasting impact endures. Despite original pushback, the Act has continued to gain widespread national support across party lines. This is demonstrated by a successful 2006 bipartisan effort to renew expiring provisions of the VRA that further upheld the legislation.³³ The VRA has also become an integral part of the nation's judicial fabric, aiding in processes designed to keep the doorways to polling booths propped open. This is exemplified in how organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union defend the Act and use the legal opportunities it provides to protect the vote. Additionally, litigation by the organization and judges utilizing the VRA to strike down discriminatory laws expounds this.³⁴ Furthermore, the U.S. feels the strength of the VRA in the influence it has had over time. States like Minnesota have been inspired by the Act to increase statewide voter protections, including expanded accessibility for non-English-language voters.³⁵

But interactions with the VRA have not ceased at the local or state level, as the federal government continuously works with the landmark legislation. Congress, for one, has interacted with the law through policy revisions and proposed advancements. Over the course of several decades post-enactment of the VRA, Congress has amended it several times, including extending the timeline on sections of the law, like sections 4 and 2, and adding further voter protections for language minorities.³⁶ Additionally, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2025, a bill recently introduced to Congress, aimed to revise and support the VRA.³⁷ Backed by

³³ Marcia Johnson, The Voting Rights Act: Then and Now | League of Women Voters, interview by Jayla Smith, *Lwv.org*, August 6, 2025, <https://www.lwv.org/blog/voting-rights-act-then-and-now>.

³⁴ Sophia Lin Lakin, "The Voting Rights Act at 60: A Legacy in Jeopardy, a Democracy at Risk | ACLU," American Civil Liberties Union, August 6, 2025, <https://www.aclu.org/news/voting-rights/the-voting-rights-act-at-60-a-legacy-in-jeopardy-a-democracy-at-risk>.

³⁵ Simon, Steve. 2026. Interview by Tinsae Opheim. Microsoft Teams video interview. April 9, 2026.

³⁶ Garrett, "The Voting Rights Act: Historical Development and Policy Background."

³⁷ Richard J. Durbin, Sponsor, "John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2025," *Congress.Gov*, July 29, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/2523/text>.

nonpartisan organizations like the League of Women Voters, the proposed Act intends to undo previous damage to parts of the original law.³⁸ These moves by Congress to uplift the VRA prove that, in spite of challenges, the VRA both inspired recognition for the importance of voting rights protections and provided the means to do so.

Despite the continued significance of the VRA, major aspects of the legislation have been contested in Supreme Court cases. The well-known 2013 case *Shelby County vs. Holder* ruled that the preclearance section of the VRA was unconstitutional; Justices stated that preclearance obstructed states' rights to regulate elections.³⁹ Congressman Lewis spoke out about the decision, calling it a "dagger into the heart of the Voting Rights Act of 1965."⁴⁰ Accordingly, governmental organizations like the Congressional Voting Rights Caucus were founded after the Court's decision in an effort to protect and advance the VRA in government,⁴¹ showcasing how the Act remains an integral component of our democracy, despite setbacks. Another 2025 Supreme Court case, *Louisiana vs. Callais*, also argued whether the creation of majority-minority districts to prevent active vote dilution violated the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments.⁴² Recently, the Court made its decision, after months of the country waiting for the fateful ruling. Ultimately, Supreme Court Justices ruled 6-3⁴³ that the creation of majority-minority districts is no longer necessary, as the racial disparities seen at the birth of the VRA are no longer as potent. Many voters across the nation worry that, because of this decision,

³⁸ Kloempken, Heidi. 2026. Interviewed by Tinsae Opheim. Email interview. February 17th, 2026.

³⁹ *Britannica School*, s.v. "voting rights."

⁴⁰ John Lewis, Press Release, "John Lewis and Others React to the Supreme Court's Voting Rights Act Ruling," *The Washington Post*, June 25, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/john-lewis-and-others-react-to-the-supreme-courts-voting-rights-act-ruling/2013/06/25/acb96650-ddda-11e2-b797-cbd4cb13f9c6_story.html.

⁴¹ Ragland, Sequoia. 2026. Interview by Tinsae Opheim. Email interview. April 9, 2026.

⁴² "SUPREME COURT of the UNITED STATES Syllabus." n.d. https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/25pdf/24-109_21o3.pdf.

⁴³ "Louisiana v. Callais (Voting Rights Act) (24-109)." 2026. *Scotusblog.com*. 2026. <https://www.scotusblog.com/cases/louisiana-v-callais-2/>.

preventative measures against voter discrimination in the form of vote dilution will be rolled back, especially as states vie for party control in the upcoming midterm elections.⁴⁴

Alongside these obstacles, the fight to protect voting rights and the legacy of the VRA continues. In coordination with attacks on the VRA, attempts to nullify votes with recounts, gerrymandering, and voter intimidation⁴⁵—along with calling election results “fake” during the 2020 presidential election—are independent threats to voting rights,⁴⁶ that, in turn, threaten the legacy of the VRA. Some of the biggest challenges to the legislation, however, are the obstacles in voter registration. Reverend Jesse Jackson discussed how voter identification requirements to register in Georgia could negatively affect poor and African American people,⁴⁷ and similar photo identification restrictions were hindering minority voter registration in Texas.⁴⁸ It seems that modern-day voter restrictions are ever-present and rampant. This is evident in how states have passed over 100 restrictive laws since 2013, effectively increasing the voter turnout gap between white and African American voters from negative two percent to over eight percent in the 2020 election.⁴⁹ There are even threats in Congress, with the various proposed versions of the SAVE Act seeking a proof-of-citizenship requirement when registering to vote in federal elections.⁵⁰ This would disproportionately affect young voters, voters of color, and women whose married names don’t match birth certificates or passports—groups of citizens the VRA still currently works to protect. Furthermore, the problem the proposals hope to solve is demonstrably

⁴⁴ Sifton, Sam. 2026. “The Voting Rights Act.” The New York Times, May 1, 2026.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/01/briefing/the-voting-rights-act.html>.

⁴⁵ Gordon, “The Voting Rights Act, 40 Years Later.”

⁴⁶ “Joe Biden - Address on Voting Rights at the National Constitution Center (Text-audio-video),” n.d.,
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/joebidenvotingrightsnlconstitutioncenter.htm>.

⁴⁷ Gordon, “The Voting Rights Act, 40 Years Later.”

⁴⁸ Carol Anderson, *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression Is Destroying Our Democracy* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, n.d.).

⁴⁹ National Women’s Law Center, “The Voting Rights Act’s Legacy Is Under Threat - National Women’S Law Center,” August 21, 2025, <https://nwlc.org/resource/the-voting-rights-acts-legacy-is-under-threat/>.

⁵⁰ Chip Roy, Sponsor, “SAVE Act,” Congress.Gov, January 3, 2025,
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/22/text>.

rare, causing citizens nationwide to grow concerned that voting rights are still under threat.⁵¹ As a result of these modern challenges, a national focus on the VRA and voting rights remains,⁵² and importantly, this reveals how the VRA remains historically significant in a time when voting protections are still needed.

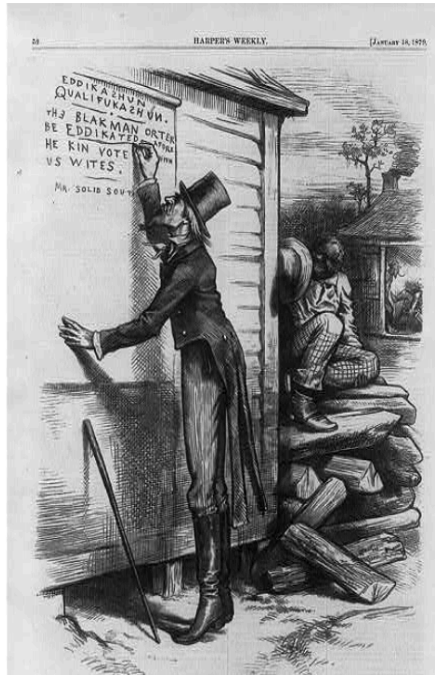
The Then and Now of Voting

Throughout U.S. history, the question of “who gets to vote” has been at the forefront of the country, especially since the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments significantly expanded citizens’ rights. Since then, activists in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement fought to protect those rights. This reaction to discriminatory voter restrictions targeting African American communities and other minorities led to the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965, which reformed voting practices across the country. It effectively enacted several measures to prevent unfair, yet normalized, government systems. In the decades post-VRA, African Americans and other minority groups gained access to rights and opportunities in a revolutionized political landscape newly focused on defending constitutional rights. This renewed enfranchisement has spanned the generations since the legislation was passed. Today, those same rights and the very Act itself are still at the forefront of the nation’s mind. That same question, “who gets to vote?”, is still being asked, just as the fight for the same voting protections continues.

⁵¹ “New SAVE Act Bills Would Still Block Millions of Americans From Voting,” Brennan Center for Justice, February 3, 2026, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/new-save-act-bills-would-still-block-millions-americans-voting>.

⁵² Kloempken, Heidi. 2026. Interviewed by Tinsae Opheim. Email interview. February 17th, 2026.

Appendix A

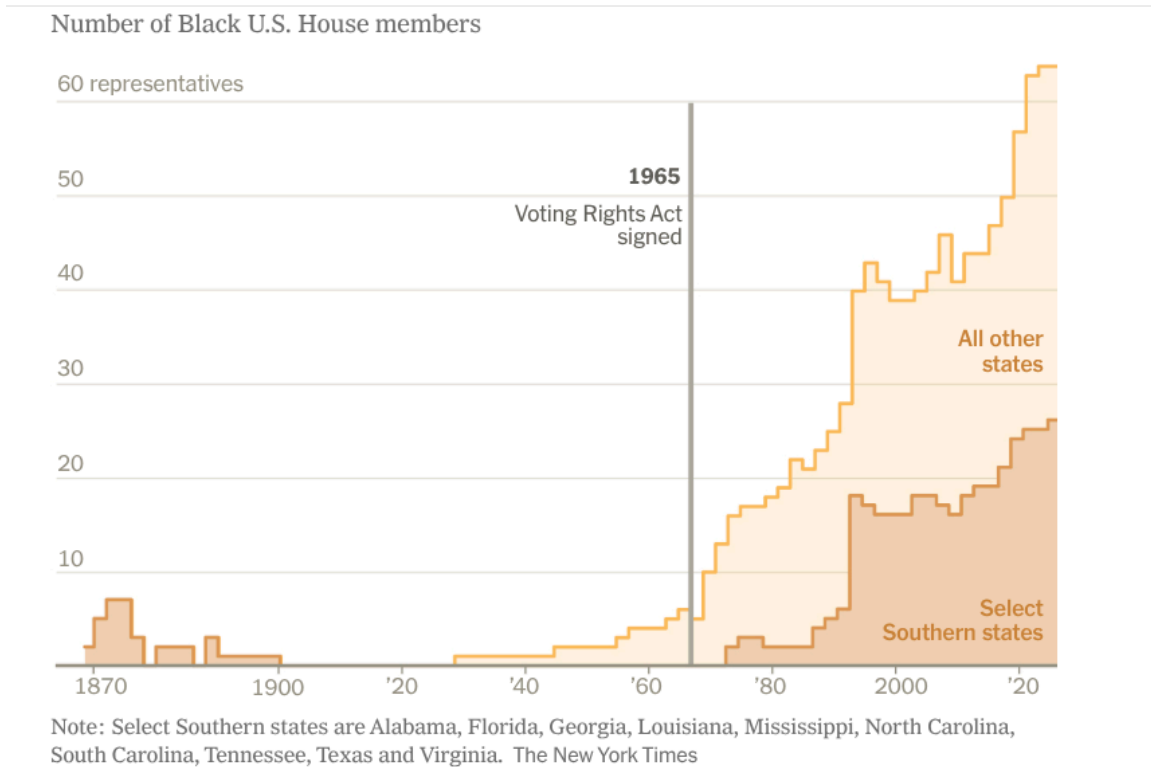


This 1879 political cartoon, published in *Harper's Weekly*, displays unfair voting restrictions against African Americans before the VRA. Uncle Sam writes, "Eddikashun qualifukashun. The Black man orter be eddikated afore he kin vote with US Wites, signed Mr. Solid South."

The Library of Congress. "The Color Line Still Exists - in This Case," n.d.

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3b29638/>.

Appendix B



This graph displays the effects of the VRA on the political landscape for African Americans after the legislation was signed into law. As shown, the number of African American Representatives skyrocketed nationally in connection with voting protections for minority groups.

Chui, Katherine, and Emily Cochrane. 2026. "How the Voting Rights Act Bolstered Black Representation in the House." The New York Times, April 30, 2026.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2026/04/30/us/politics/voting-rights-act-black-population-congress.html?searchResultPosition=7>

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Addresses, Speeches, and Testimonials

Eidenmuller, Michael E. "American Rhetoric: Fannie Lou Hamer - Testimony Before the Credential Committee," n.d.

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fannielouhamercredentialscommittee.htm>.

Hamer's testimony on the situation in the South, especially the violence and discrimination surrounding voter registration, offered insight into the personal experiences of African Americans attempting to vote during the 1960s. This was useful in explaining the great effect of the Voting Rights Act and its importance in my project.

"Joe Biden - Address on Voting Rights at the National Constitution Center (Text-audio-video)," n.d.

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/joebidenvotingrightsentlconstitutioncenter.htm>.

Biden's speech covered modern examples of denying voting rights in reference to recent elections, which provided connections to the historical context of the Voting Rights Act. It was also useful in demonstrating current interactions with voting rights in the modern era, which I discussed in my paper.

John Lewis, Press Release, “John Lewis and Others React to the Supreme Court’s Voting Rights Act Ruling,” *The Washington Post*, June 25, 2013,
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/john-lewis-and-others-react-to-the-supreme-courts-voting-rights-act-ruling/2013/06/25/acb96650-ddda-11e2-b797-cbd4cb13f9c6_story.html.

This press statement by activist and Congressman Lewis was in response to a Supreme Court decision about the Voting Rights Act and explained the impacts of today’s interactions with the original legislation. This source was helpful in displaying opinions regarding government decisions to further or scale back the Voting Rights Act.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute. “Our God Is Marching On!,” n.d.
<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/our-god-marching>.

Dr. King’s speech contained passionate dialogue about the importance of voting rights within the Civil Rights Movement and why it was necessary to continue fighting for equal access. This source was important as it explained why civil rights activists continued pushing for the VRA leading up to its enactment.

National Archives. “Statement of Congressman John Conyers, Jr. On H.R. 6400, April 1, 1965,” July 26, 2019.
<https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/voting-rights-1965/conyers.html>.

Conyers's advocacy for the Voting Rights Act and support before Congress were useful in demonstrating the urgency behind passing the Voting Rights Act. I used this source to explain the proponents' perspective and need for such an act in my project.

"President Lyndon Johnson's Speech to Congress on Voting Rights, March 15, 1965," National Archives, September 29, 2020,
<https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/voting-rights-1965/johnson.html>.

President Johnson's speech in favor of the Voting Rights Act was insightful as to the reasoning behind proponents of the legislation within the context of the time period. His rhetoric to persuade Congress to pass the Act was useful in discussing its passage in my project.

Voices of Democracy. "Lewis, 'Speech at the March on Washington,' Speech Text - Voices of Democracy," July 5, 2016.
<https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/lewis-speech-at-the-march-on-washington-speech-text/>.

John Lewis's speech also described the necessity of pushing for voting rights, which helped me understand the moving parts of the Civil Rights Movement that aided in pushing the legislation through Congress. I used this source to talk about the direct lead-up to the event of passing the Voting Rights Act.

Government Documents

Durbin, Richard J., Sponsor. "John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2025."

Congress.Gov, July 29, 2025.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/2523/text>.

This document is official legislation for the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act currently in Congress. It has information about the policies the bill seeks to enact, and serves as an example of current interactions the country has with the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

National Archives. "Roll Call Vote Tally on S. 1564, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, May 26, 1965," July 26, 2019.

<https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/voting-rights-1965/roll-call.html>.

This government document depicted the official vote on passing the Voting Rights Act in the Senate. This source displayed the support that was garnered in Congress for the bill and is representative of the government's role in passing the act. I was able to use this information to describe the process and Congressional support behind passing the Act.

National Archives. "Voting Rights Act (1965)," February 8, 2022.

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/voting-rights-act>.

The official transcript and document for the Voting Rights Act were a critical part of my project, giving context and clarification to the exact purpose the legislation served in history. Consequently, this source allowed me to better understand both the act itself and its historical significance. I was also able to use this document for direct quotations within my paper.

Roy, Chip, Sponsor. "SAVE Act." *Congress.Gov*, January 3, 2025.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/22/text>.

This government document details the specifics of the SAVE Act, a controversial bill in Congress. As a resource, it allowed me to discuss the specifics of the bill and what it entails, especially surrounding the context of the Voting Rights Act.

"SUPREME COURT of the UNITED STATES Syllabus." n.d.

https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/25pdf/24-109_21o3.pdf.

The syllabus for the *Louisiana vs. Callais* Supreme Court cases offered great insight into the specifics of the incredibly noteworthy case. Subsequently, I used this source to explain the context of the case, how it relates to the Voting Rights Act, and later to discuss in my paper how the decision affects the VRA and the country as a whole.

Interviews

Gordon, Ed. "The Voting Rights Act, 40 Years Later." *NPR*, August 5, 2005.

<https://www.npr.org/2005/08/05/4786618/the-voting-rights-act-40-years-later#:~:text=G>

ORDON:%20Joining%20me%20at%20member,they%20got%2C%20and%20he%20won

This interview with Reverend Jesse Jackson discussed much of the struggle for voting rights, along with the impact it had within the African American community. His information was helpful to explain not only the significance of the Voting Rights Act, but also the lead-up and long-term outcomes it had on minorities in the U.S.

Johnson, Marcia. 2025. The Voting Rights Act: Then and Now | League of Women Voters

Interview by Jayla Smith. *Lwv.org*.

<https://www.lwv.org/blog/voting-rights-act-then-and-now>.

In this source, Chief of Activation and Justice Marcia Johnson shares her perspective about the importance of the Voting Rights Act and why advocacy today is crucial, especially against forces seeking to weaken the VRA. This source was especially helpful when Johnson went into detail about how previous efforts to reauthorize sections of the Voting Rights Act were bipartisan, as it allowed me to connect the Voting Rights Act to modern-day interactions and impacts.

Kloempken, Heidi. 2026. Interview by Tinsae Opheim. Email interview. February 17, 2026.

This email interview with Associate Director of the League of Women Voters Minnesota Heidi Kloempken covered information regarding modern-day organizations dedicated to voting rights and participation. Her insight on the current impacts of the Voting Rights Act and how voting rights prevail in shaping our society was useful when discussing the long-term impacts of the Act in my paper.

Ragland, Sequoia. 2026. Interview by Tinsae Opheim. Email interview. April 9, 2026.

This interview allowed me to learn more about the ways the Congressional Voting Rights Caucus works to uphold and further the Voting Rights Act. The information Ms. Ragland shared helped me contextualize the challenges to the VRA we see in the modern era, and how the national government still interacts with the legislation frequently.

Simon, Steve. 2026. Interview by Tinsae Opheim. Microsoft Teams video interview. April 9, 2026.

My interview over Microsoft Teams video with Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon was incredibly insightful regarding the inner workings of government agencies using the Voting Rights Act. Along those lines, this source also helped me learn about the specifics of VRA impacts in Minnesota and other states, which was fantastic information for making long-term connections with the VRA.

Letter

National Archives. "Letter From Mr. George Neu Against Voting Rights, March 26, 1965,"

September 29, 2020.

<https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/voting-rights-1965/neu.html>.

Mr. Neu's letter to Congress was a prime example of oppositional sentiments to the Voting Rights Act. From this source, I learned about the reasoning behind those sentiments and how they played a role in the event. That information allowed me to write about different perspectives on the Voting Rights Act.

Newspaper Advertisement

Internet Archive. "The Atlanta Constitution 1960-03-09: Vol 92 Iss 225 : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive," March 9, 1960.

https://archive.org/details/per_atlanta-constitution_1960-03-09_92_225/page/n11/mode/2up.

This statement, a paid advertisement in the *Atlanta Constitution*, explained the reasoning behind sit-in protests during the Civil Rights Movement, showcasing how important voting rights were to the movement as a whole. This afforded me a greater understanding of the historical significance of voting rights, and therefore the Voting Rights Act, so I used this information to explain the focus on voting rights as a lead-up to the event.

Secondary Sources

Books

Anderson, Carol. *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression Is Destroying Our Democracy*.

Bloomsbury Publishing USA, n.d.

Anderson's book explains how voting identification laws can be another form of unjust voting practices in the modern era. Her examples were useful in describing this current situation in my paper and in displaying how those threats relate to modern-day struggles with the VRA.

Doeden, Matt. *John Lewis: Courage in Action*. Lerner Publications TM, 2018.

Doeden's book covered John Lewis's part of the push for voting rights and civil rights as a whole. This text helped me understand the effort that went into getting the Voting Rights Act passed from the perspective of civil rights activists within the movement. I was able to use this understanding to explain the events that went into the direct lead-up to the main event.

Tyner, Artika R. *Black Voter Suppression: The Fight for the Right to Vote*, 2021.

Black Voter Suppression: The Fight for the Right to Vote was very useful in explaining the background of discriminatory voting practices and the oppression prevalent in the

South. This background is crucial to understanding the Voting Rights Act and why it is historically significant.

Websites

“1965: From Women’s Suffrage to Women’s Liberation | the Long 19th Amendment,” n.d.
<https://long19.radcliffe.harvard.edu/teaching/suffrage-syllabus/unit-5/>.

This source was useful in discussing voter oppression in the U.S. through the early 1960s, with a focus on women, both inside and out of the African American community. I was able to use this information to explain the wider effects of the Voting Rights Act on minorities throughout the country.

Bernini, Andrea, Giovanni Facchini, Marco Tabellini, and Cecilia Testa. “Sixty Years of the Voting Rights Act: Progress and Pitfalls.” *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 40, no. 3 (January 1, 2024): 486–97. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grae026>.

This research was beneficial because of the amount of data and graphs the source included. It allowed me to show statistically how the Voting Rights Act impacted minority communities. Therefore, this source was important because it helped me make connections to the lasting effects of the VRA from a statistical lens.

Brennan Center for Justice. “The 19th Amendment, Explained,” February 23, 2026.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/19th-amendment-explained>.

This source helped explain the methods of voter discrimination against different groups of women across the U.S., and offered insight as to how the Voting Rights Act protected the voting rights of those groups. This was useful in elaborating on the wider effects of the law and how it further shaped voting access among minorities in the U.S. in addition to the African American community.

Brennan Center for Justice. “New SAVE Act Bills Would Still Block Millions of Americans From Voting,” February 3, 2026.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/new-save-act-bills-would-still-block-millions-americans-voting>.

This source further explained the contents of the SAVE bill in Congress and the ramifications it could have on voter turnout. This was a noteworthy example of the continued struggle to protect voting rights, especially for minorities, and helped me share modern instances of voter discrimination through new and proposed voter identification laws.

Brennan Center for Justice. “The Voting Rights Act, Explained,” June 21, 2023.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-rights-act-explained>.

This site went into detail about what the Voting Rights Act meant in practice, specifically in the aftermath of the legislation being passed. I used this source for specific information

and statistics regarding the effects of the Voting Rights Act on minority groups and voter disparities in the U.S.

Britannica School, s.v. "African Americans," accessed March 3, 2026,

<https://school-eb-com.content.elibrarymn.org/levels/high/article/African-Americans/477096#285195.toc>.

This source covers in-depth information about the history of the African American community within the U.S. It offers insights about how the Voting Rights Act affected the community, and the impacts of the legislation on the country and specific minority groups. I utilized this source in several aspects of my project, especially the background and immediate effects of the Voting Rights Act.

Britannica School, s.v. "American civil rights movement," accessed March 3, 2026,

<https://school-eb-com.content.elibrarymn.org/levels/high/article/American-civil-rights-movement/82763#288198.toc>.

This article covers the complex timeline of the Civil Rights Movement throughout the course of the nation's history. As the Voting Rights Act is an important aspect of that history, this source helped me contextualize the event's place within the overall movement and the era itself while writing my paper.

Britannica School, s.v. "Fifteenth Amendment," accessed March 3, 2026,

<https://school-eb-com.content.elibrarymn.org/levels/high/article/Fifteenth-Amendment/474683>.

The Fifteenth Amendment, as explained in-depth in this source, was another important aspect in the history of the Voting Rights Act. This source not only helped me understand the details of the amendment, but also aided in my explanation of the complex issue surrounding minority voter rights in the history of the U.S.

Britannica School, s.v. "Fourteenth Amendment," accessed March 2, 2026,

<https://school-eb-com.content.elibrarymn.org/levels/high/article/Fourteenth-Amendment/474682>.

The Fourteenth Amendment is a crucial piece of the background to the Voting Rights Act, and this article helped me better grasp the context for exactly what the amendment did. This source also covered how those effects changed as the time period went on, all of which was critical in discussing the Reconstruction background to the VRA.

Britannica School, s.v. "voting rights," accessed March 3, 2026,

<https://school-eb-com.content.elibrarymn.org/levels/high/article/voting-rights/632952>.

This article helped shape my understanding of voting rights as a whole, which allowed me to better contextualize the significance of the Voting Rights Act both historically and

today. This is a consistent aspect throughout the paper, as the focus on voting rights is necessary for the event itself, its background, and its effects.

Britannica School, s.v. "Voting Rights Act," accessed March 3, 2026,

<https://school-eb-com.content.elibrarymn.org/levels/high/article/Voting-Rights-Act/39978>

1.

This source zoomed in on the Voting Rights Act itself. It helped me better understand important parts of the Act and their practical meanings, and allowed me to describe this in-depth in my project. Moreover, this source talked about modern-day legal challenges the Act faces, which was another crucial part of my paper.

Fernandez, Mariel. "Voting Rights Act of 1965: History and Timeline." Legal Defense Fund, December 2, 2025. <https://www.naacpldf.org/voting-rights-act-history-timeline/>.

This timeline on voting rights in the U.S. granted me information on Bloody Sunday, a major lead-up event to the Voting Rights Act, and the passage of the Act itself. This allowed me to share key information about the forces behind the Act, why they were important, and the event of enacting the VRA.

Garrett, Sam R. "The Voting Rights Act: Historical Development and Policy Background."

Congress.Gov, April 25, 2023. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47520>.

This source was a deep dive into the different ways the U.S. government has amended or expanded the Voting Rights Act in the decades since it was signed into law. This was really useful for demonstrating the continued interactions the country has with the Voting Rights Act, the impacts it has on our governmental policy, and how the legislation has been connected to different groups as protections for voting rights expanded.

Lakin, Sophia Lin. "The Voting Rights Act at 60: A Legacy in Jeopardy, a Democracy at Risk | ACLU." American Civil Liberties Union, August 6, 2025.
<https://www.aclu.org/news/voting-rights/the-voting-rights-act-at-60-a-legacy-in-jeopardy-a-democracy-at-risk>.

The American Civil Liberties Union was a valuable source because this article detailed the current ways the organization uses the Voting Rights Act. When discussing how the VRA continues to protect voting rights today, this provided solid evidence for my claims.

"Louisiana v. Callais (Voting Rights Act) (24-109)." 2026. Scotusblog.com. 2026.
<https://www.scotusblog.com/cases/louisiana-v-callais-2/>.

This website contains a great number of details about the *Louisiana vs. Callais* court case, which I specifically used to list the court's tally on the ruling. This was important in demonstrating the layout of opinions within the Supreme Court as I discussed the recent ruling.

NAACP. “Voting Rights Act of 1965,” May 9, 2021.

<https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/legislative-milestones/voting-rights-act-1965>.

The NAACP, a long-standing civil rights organization, shares information about the specific effects and significance the Voting Rights Act has had on the African American community. This helped me share those effects and a lot of the “why” behind the fight to protect voting rights.

National Women’s Law Center. “The Voting Rights Act’s Legacy Is Under Threat - National Women's Law Center,” August 21, 2025.

<https://nwlc.org/resource/the-voting-rights-acts-legacy-is-under-threat/>.

This source covered the modern-day limits and potential ways people or governments are working to push back against the Voting Rights Act, and the detrimental effects this could have. It also allowed me to explain the significance of the fight for the VRA by connecting it to a continued struggle today. This source also contained impactful statistical information about new methods of voter discrimination, which I used as evidence and for elaboration on the topic in my paper.

“Research Guides: Reconstruction: A Resource Guide: Introduction,” n.d.

<https://guides.loc.gov/reconstruction>.

This source goes into detail about the Reconstruction era in the United States and what that looked like for the African American community in the South. This source aided my deeper understanding of the specifics of Reconstruction as it pertains to the history of voting rights and as a backdrop for the lead-up to the VRA.

Sifton, Sam. 2026. "The Voting Rights Act." *The New York Times*, May 1, 2026.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/01/briefing/the-voting-rights-act.html>.

This article discusses the ramifications of the recent *Louisiana vs. Callais* Supreme Court ruling. It was a useful source as I sought information about the potential effects of the Supreme Court ruling, the country's opinion on the case, and what it means for the Voting Rights Act and its legacy as a whole.

Appendix Graphics

Appendix A

The Library of Congress. "The Color Line Still Exists - in This Case," n.d.
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3b29638/>.

This site in the Library of Congress provided an image from a historical publication. This image was of a political cartoon created to criticize racial voter discrimination in the South, and is a significant visual representation of the historical situation during that time period.

Appendix B

Chui, Katherine, and Emily Cochrane. 2026. “How the Voting Rights Act Bolstered Black Representation in the House.” *The New York Times*, April 30, 2026. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2026/04/30/us/politics/voting-rights-act-black-population-congress.html?searchResultPosition=7>.

Chui’s article dives into the impacts of the Voting Rights Act and how it revolutionized the political world for African Americans. This graph of African American elected U.S. Representatives after the legislation was signed into law offers an important visual for how significant the VRA is towards equality in representation.