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**title: "Know Your Rights -- Voting"**

**author: Eric M. Fink**

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## **U.S. Constitution**

- 15th Amendment

*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.*

- 19th Amendment

*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 sex.*

- 24th Amendment

*The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.*

- 26th Amendment

*The right of citizens of the United States, who are 18 years of age or older, to vote, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of age.*

## **Voting Rights Act of 1965**

## Introduction

(Source: <https://www.justice.gov/crt/introduction-federal-voting-rights-laws-1>)

*The Voting Rights Act, adopted initially in 1965 and extended in 1970, 1975, and 1982, is generally considered the most successful piece of civil rights legislation ever adopted by the United States Congress. The Act codifies and effectuates the 15th Amendment's permanent guarantee that, throughout the nation, no person shall be denied the right to vote on account of race or color. In addition, the Act contains several special provisions that impose even more stringent requirements in certain jurisdictions throughout the country.*

*Adopted at a time when African Americans were substantially disfranchised in many Southern states, the Act employed measures to restore the right to vote that intruded in matters previously reserved to the individual states. Section 4 ended the use of literacy requirements for voting in six Southern states (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia) and in many counties of North Carolina, where voter registration or turnout in the 1964 presidential election was less than 50 percent of the voting-age population. Under the terms of Section 5 of the Act, no voting changes were legally enforceable in these jurisdictions until approved either by a three-judge court in the District of Columbia or by the Attorney General of the United States. Other sections authorized the Attorney General to appoint federal voting examiners who could be sent into covered jurisdictions to ensure that legally qualified persons were free to register for federal, state, and local elections, or to assign federal observers to oversee the conduct of elections.*

*Congress determined that such a far-reaching statute only in response to compelling evidence of continuing interference with attempts by African American citizens to exercise their right to vote. As the Supreme Court put it in its 1966 decision upholding the constitutionality of the Act:*

*"Congress had found that case-by-case litigation was inadequate to combat wide-spread and persistent discrimination in voting, because of the inordinant amount of time and energy required to overcome the obstructionist tactics invariably encountered in these lawsuits. After enduring nearly a century of systematic resistance to the Fifteenth Amendment, Congress might well decide to shift the advantage of time and inertia from the perpetrators of the evil to its victims."*

*South Carolina v. Katzenbach, 383 U.S. 301, 327-28 (1966).*

*At the time the Act was first adopted, only one-third of all African Americans of voting age were on the registration rolls in the specially covered states, while two-thirds of eligible whites were registered. Now black voter registration rates are approaching parity with that of whites in many areas, and Hispanic voters in jurisdictions added to the list of those specially covered by the Act in 1975 are not far behind. Enforcement of the Act has also increased the opportunity of black and Latino voters to elect representatives of their choice by providing a vehicle for challenging discriminatory election methods such as at-large elections, racially gerrymandered districting plans, or runoff requirements that may dilute minority voting strength. Virtually excluded from all public offices in the South in 1965, black and Hispanic voters are now substantially represented in the state legislatures and local governing bodies throughout the region.*