

## Voting Rights Act: A Year in Review

Yesterday marked the one year anniversary of the Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, which gutted crucial voter protections. The decision invalidated Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act, a key provision that established preclearance coverage formulas. In 2006, Congress reauthorized the Voting Rights Act on an overwhelmingly bipartisan basis, passing 390-33 in the House, and 98-0 in the Senate. Here's a look at what's happened in the past year since the Supreme Court's decision:

- **June 25, 2013:** The U.S. Supreme Court strikes down, 5-4, the coverage formula of the Voting Rights Act in *Shelby County v. Holder*, effectively gutting VRA's requirements that states with documented histories of voting exclusion and disenfranchisement prove to federal authorities that any proposed voting changes will not negatively affect minority voters before they take effect. [[Supreme Court](#)]
- **June 25, 2013:** In her dissent in *Shelby*, Justice Ginsburg observes: "Throwing out preclearance when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet." [[Supreme Court](#)]
- **June 25, 2013:** The New York Times publishes an editorial, "An Assault on the Voting Rights Act," saying, "The future of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 now lies in the hands of President Obama and Congress. If we had a federal government that was not paralyzed by partisanship, this ruling would serve as an inspiration to take action. Congressional Democrats would quickly prepare a more expansive formula, and the Republicans who voted for the old formula just seven years ago would support the new one." [[New York Times](#)]
- **July 26, 2013:** North Carolina passes a law that mandates strict voter ID, excluding student IDs, public employee IDs, etc., to cast a ballot, "even though 318,000 registered voters lack the narrow forms of acceptable ID according to the state's own numbers and there have been no recorded prosecutions of voter impersonation in the past decade." [[The Nation](#)]
- **September 17, 2013:** Texas voter ID law is challenged on the grounds that it violates the Voting Rights Act and the Constitution by erecting discriminatory barriers to voting. [[Press Release](#)]
- **October 10, 2013:** Arizona and Kansas work to create a two-tiered voting system that bars some residents from casting ballots in all but congressional races unless they prove they are U.S. citizens. [[Bloomberg](#)]
- **November 20, 2013:** The National Commission on Voting Rights holds their first post-*Shelby* hearing in a string of nationwide hearings to collect testimony about voting discrimination and election administration challenges. The Voting Rights Commission held 19 additional hearings between then and April 29, 2014. [[Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law](#)]
- **November 21, 2013:** The League of Women Voters of the United States and their affiliate organizations in Kansas and Arizona join a lawsuit arguing that the new laws requiring proof of citizenship to vote violate federal law. [[Press Release](#)]

- **January 16, 2014:** Members of Congress introduce the Voting Rights Amendment Act, a bipartisan bill to reinstate protections against voter discrimination. [[The Nation](#)]
- **March 19, 2014:** The Department of Justice plans expansion of its voting rights enforcement efforts, including additional monitoring of elections throughout the country. [[USA Today](#)]
- **March 20, 2014:** A Republican co-sponsor of the Voting Rights Amendment Act, Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (Wis.), writes a USA Today Op-Ed, “Protect our right to vote,” saying, “The belief that no voter should be disenfranchised and every legal vote should be tallied is nonpartisan. And now, as we approach this year's elections, we must ensure the proper protections are in place. As elected officials, our legitimacy depends on free and fair elections. Support for voting rights and voter identification are consistent goals. Only in hyper-partisan Washington can we lose sight of this... Proponents face an uphill battle, but the Voting Rights Amendment Act is worth the fight. The right to vote should be unassailable. This is not a partisan principle, but an American one.” [[USA Today](#)]
- **June 17, 2014:** The Brennan Center for Justice releases a report, which examines new laws and restrictive election changes in the wake of *Shelby County v. Holder*. [[Report](#)]
- **June 18, 2014:** Texas Republicans call for the repeal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and announce their support of removing the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. [[MSNBC](#)]
- **June 20, 2014:** The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights releases a new study showing that voter discrimination remains a significant problem by highlighting dozens of instances of voting discrimination since 2000. [[Report](#)]
- **June 22, 2014:** Mississippi conservatives, led by the Senate Conservatives Fund, team up with Freedom Works and the Tea Party Patriots to deploy poll watchers for Senate primary race. [[New York Times](#)]
- **June 22, 2014:** Republican Senator Rand Paul announces plans to introduce a bill that restores voting rights to nonviolent felons in federal elections. [[Politico](#)]
- **June 25, 2014:** Senate Judiciary Committee holds a hearing on the Voting Rights Amendment Act. [[The Hill](#)]
- **June 25, 2014:** Congressional leaders join together at the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights’ Voting Rights Amendment Act Capitol Hill Rally to urge the House to move forward in the legislative process. [[LCCR](#)]

In addition to the one-year anniversary of the Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, another important upcoming anniversary adds to the call to act. Wednesday, July 2, 2014, marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1954, which outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. With this landmark anniversary in mind, it is time for Republicans to work with Democrats to continue to protect equal rights, including those at the ballot box.