Thank you to the Charter for Racial Justice Seminar Committee Voting Rights Project, led by Sabrina White, member of the United Methodist Women’s Program Advisory Group (Baltimore Washington Conference) for their vision and commitment to protecting voting rights for all.

We also want to thank Yvette Richards, president of United Methodist Women, who participated as a member of the Project Committee.

Thanks to Susie Johnson and Janis Rosheuvel for developing this project.

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Protecting Voting Rights

What You Need to Know!

Scenes from a rally in front of the Supreme Court where justices were hearing cases on the Voting Rights Act, Washington, DC

—Photo by David Sachs / SEIU
Why a Voting Rights Act?

The 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA) is a cornerstone piece of civil rights legislation meant to end racial discrimination in the voting process.

Signed into law by President Johnson on August 6, 1965.

Meant to enforce the voting rights provisions of the 13th and 14th Amendments, which had only achieved modest implementation until the VRA’s passage.

The murder of voting rights activists across the nation and the unprovoked attack on peaceful marchers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, in March 1965 compelled the VRA’s passage.
Highlights of 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA)

Prohibited the denial or abridgment of the right to vote based on failure of literacy tests on a nationwide basis.

Contained special enforcement provisions targeted at those areas of the country where Congress believed the potential for discrimination to be the greatest.

Between 1965 and 1969, the Supreme Court also issued several key decisions upholding the VRA’s constitutionality.

Current State of Voting Rights

Since 2010, 21 states have passed laws that make it more difficult to vote.

Voter ID restrictions remain at the forefront of the voting wars.
Nearly half of the voting bills introduced so far this session that restrict access are aimed at establishing voter ID requirements or tightening pre-existing ones.

Other restrictions on voter rights are also increasing, such as:
Requiring documentation of citizenship, eliminating same-day registration and increasing the difficulty to stay registered when moving.

2013 Supreme Court Decision on the Voting Rights Act (VRA)
The VRA requires states and localities get clearance before implementing new voting procedures or laws if they have a track record of discriminatory practices.

Supreme Court ruled in Shelby County v. Holder that the formula used to determine which areas need oversight was outdated and unconstitutional.
States With New Voting Restrictions Since the 2010 Election

Brennan Center For Justice
Who’s Most at Risk?

11 percent of eligible voters don’t have a form of photo identification. Barriers to getting an ID affect elderly and low-income groups the most.

7 of the 11 states with highest African-American turnout and 9 of the 12 states with highest Hispanic turnout passed new voting restrictions after 2008.

5.85 percent of Americans aren’t allowed to vote because they have felony convictions.

Laws that block voting rights for people with felony convictions affect about 1 in 13 African-Americans.
States That Expanded Voting Since the 2010 Election

Brennan Center For Justice
Methodist Her-Story and Voting Rights

1958: Women’s Division launches a program designed to cultivate church women as citizens to be more active in local politics with Citizenship Brunches.

1962: Southern Regional Council and the Fellowship of the Concerned (racial justice groups that include Methodist women) get a $325,000 grant for a two year voter registration program.

1963: Women’s Division takes strong stance on voter registration by calling on Christian women to “open doors” to thousands of black citizens who had been deprived of their voting rights.

1965: Women’s Division, along with the Board of Missions, Board of Christian Social Concern and the Methodist Student Movement, join the march for voting rights from Selma to Montgomery.

From the book Fellowship of Love by Alice Knotts
How can United Methodist Women continue to make her-story today for voting rights?
Charter for Racial Justice in an Interdependent Global Community’s Mandates

Because We Believe:
The biblical, moral and Christian foundations of why we must seek a racially just United Methodist Women, church and world.

We Will:
Act as we must if we are going to fully honor our beliefs.
Charter for Racial Justice in an Interdependent Global Community’s Mandates

Because We Believe:
... that our struggle for justice must be based on new attitudes, new understandings and new relationships that must be reflected in the law, policies, structures and practices of both church and state,

We Will:
... work for the development and implementation of national and international policies to protect the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all people, such as through support for the ratification of the United Nations Covenants on Human Rights.
Take Action for Voting Rights TODAY!

Educate/Learn:
See the resources page below to do further reading and research on how to protect voting rights.

Act:
Contact your Congressional Representative (202-224-3121) and urge them to support:

• Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2015 (H.R.2867) restores the VRA.

• Voter Registration Modernization Act in the Senate (S.1088) and the Voter Empowerment Act in the House (H.R.12) aim to make registration easier and more accessible.

• Democracy Restoration Act of 2015 (S.772) in the Senate guarantees former felons the right to vote in any federal election.

More information at www.unitedmethodistwomen.org!
Resources


- www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/racial-justice/timeline (now online!)

- The Brennan Center for Justice
  www.brennancenter.org

- The Sentencing Project
  www.sentencingproject.org/template/index.cfm

- League of Women Voters
  www.lwv.org

- NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund
  www.naacpldf.org

- U.S. Department of Justice History of Federal Voting Rights Laws
  www.justice.gov/crt/history-federal-voting-rights-laws
Get Social

Hashtags to use:
#RestoreTheVRA,
#VRA,
#VotingRights

Accounts to follow:
@VotingMatters,
@VotingRightsNws,
@RockTheVote,
@VotoLatino,
@FairerElections
## A Timeline of Voting Rights in the United States

By Beth Rowen | [infoplease.com](http://infoplease.com)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>Only white male adult property owners have the right to vote.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>Last religious prerequisite for voting is eliminated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Property ownership and tax requirements eliminated by 1850. Almost all adult white males could vote.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Connecticut adopts the nation’s first literacy test for voting. Massachusetts follows suit in 1857. The tests were implemented to discriminate against Irish-Catholic immigrants.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>The 15th Amendment is passed. It gives former slaves the right to vote and protects the voting rights of adult male citizens of any race.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Florida adopts a poll tax. Ten other Southern states will implement poll taxes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Mississippi adopts a literacy test to keep African Americans from voting. Numerous other states—not just in the South—also establish literacy tests. However, the tests also exclude many whites from voting. To get around this, states add grandfather clauses that allow those who could vote before 1870, or their descendants, to vote regardless of literacy or tax qualifications.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>The 17th Amendment calls for members of the U.S. Senate to be elected directly by the people instead of State Legislatures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>Oklahoma was the last state to append a grandfather clause to its literacy requirement (1910). In <a href="https://supremecourt.gov/case.html?caseId=9083">Guinn v. United States</a> the Supreme Court rules that the clause is in conflict with the 15th Amendment, thereby outlawing literacy tests for federal elections.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>The 19th Amendment guarantees women’s suffrage.</td>
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<td>1924</td>
<td>Indian Citizenship Act grants all Native Americans the rights of citizenship, including the right to vote in federal elections.</td>
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<td>1944</td>
<td>The Supreme Court outlaws “white primaries” in <a href="https://supremecourt.gov/case.html?caseId=10806">Smith v. Allwright</a> (Texas). In Texas, and other states, primaries were conducted by private associations, which, by definition, could exclude whomever they chose. The Court declares the nomination process to be a public process bound by the terms of the 15th Amendment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>The first law to implement the 15th Amendment, the Civil Rights Act, is passed. The Act set up the Civil Rights Commission—among its duties is to investigate voter discrimination.</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>In <a href="https://supremecourt.gov/case.html?caseId=11516">Gomillion v. Lightfoot</a> (Alabama) the Court outlaws “gerrymandering.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>The 23rd Amendment allows voters of the District of Columbia to participate in presidential elections.</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>The 24th Amendment bans the poll tax as a requirement for voting in federal elections.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. mounts a voter registration drive in Selma, Alabama, to draw national attention to African-American voting rights.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>The Voting Rights Act protects the rights of minority voters and eliminates voting barriers such as the literacy test. The Act is expanded and renewed in 1970, 1975, and 1982.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>The Supreme Court, in <em>Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections</em>, eliminates the poll tax as a qualification for voting in any election. A poll tax was still in use in Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia.</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>The Court upholds the Voting Rights Act in <em>South Carolina v. Katzenbach</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Literacy requirements are banned for five years by the 1970 renewal of the Voting Rights Act. At the time, 18 states still have a literacy requirement in place. In <em>Oregon v. Mitchell</em>, the Court upholds the ban on literacy tests, which is made permanent in 1975. Judge Hugo Black, writing the court's opinion, cited the “long history of the discriminatory use of literacy tests to disenfranchise voters on account of their race” as the reason for their decision.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>The 26th Amendment sets the minimum voting age at 18.</td>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>In <em>Dunn v. Blumstein</em>, the Supreme Court declares that lengthy residence requirements for voting in state and local elections is unconstitutional and suggests that 30 days is an ample period.</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>The Federal “Motor Voter Law” takes effect, making it easier to register to vote.</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>Federal Voting Standards and Procedures Act requires states to streamline registration, voting, and other election procedures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>In <em>Shelby County v. Holder</em>, the Supreme Court strikes down Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, which established a formula for Congress to use when determining if a state or voting jurisdiction requires prior approval before changing its voting laws. Under Section 5 of the act, nine mostly Southern—states with a history of discrimination must get clearance from Congress before changing voting rules to make sure racial minorities are not negatively affected. While the 5–4 decision did not invalidate Section 5, it made it toothless. Fallout from the ruling was swift, with several states quickly moving to change their voting laws.</td>
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Organization List

Dedicated to ensuring the right to vote for all Americans, these organizations are a resource for you to get involved and learn more about the movement to restore the Voting Rights Act Amendment (VRA).

• Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
  This organization wants “to build an America that’s as good as its ideals.” One of those ideals is voting rights for every American, and it runs its VRA for Today project to build bipartisan support for the VRA in Congress. Read their reports on voting discrimination and violations. www.vrafortoday.org

• American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
  A public interest law firm, the ACLU works to protect individuals’ constitutional rights and liberties. Its resources include state-by-state breakdowns of individuals’ voting rights, as well as more information on the VRA itself. www.aclu.org/issues/voting-rights

• Demos
  Demos is a public policy organization with multiple publications concerning voter registration, including reports on whether states are complying with the National Voter Registration Act. www.demos.org/issue/voting-rights-voter-registration

• Brennan Center for Justice
  The Brennan Center for Justice is a nonpartisan law and policy institute at the New York University School of Law. It has a Voting Laws Roundup that details voting restrictions and enhancements being made across the United States. www.brennancenter.org/analysis/voting-laws-roundup-2015

• National Action Network (NAN)
  Founded by the Reverend Al Sharpton, NAN is a civil rights organization that has many initiatives, including voter protection and engagement. www.nationalactionnetwork.net/

• Democracy Initiative
  This organization is a coalition that seeks to restore the principle of political equality by reducing corporate money’s role in politics and preventing voter suppression. Check out its report on election reforms and on groups with low voter turnout. www.democracyforus.org/

• NAACP National Voter Fund (NVF)
  NVF’s mission is to increase voter turnout in African-American communities, as well as educate voters about candidates’ positions on civil rights. It also conducts voter registration and civic participation campaigns. www.naacpnvf.net/index.php

• Fair Elections Legal Network (FELN)
  FELN is a nonpartisan voting rights and legal support organization that works to remove barriers to voting, with a focus on students and minority groups. It produces fact sheets and reports, conducts training and seminars, and provides testimony to legislatures. www.fairelectionsnetwork.com/
2016 Election Year

ELECTING THE CANDIDATES WHO REFLECT MY VALUES
What issues matter where you live? Pose a question to the election candidates that reflects what matters to you and your state.

Your state: __________________________

Your question: _______________________________________________________________

Questions will be posted on the web by state. Members will be able to click on a map to discover the issues that matter most to other United Methodist Women in their state. These questions can be used with questions noted in the United Methodist Women’s Election Guide, to develop a local Candidate Forum on issues of national and statewide importance.