

Voting Rights and Wrongs: A Timeline

1777–1807: The states of New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New Jersey, **which had previously allowed women to vote, take away those rights.**

1776–1828: Some state constitutions restrict the right to vote to **people with preferred religious beliefs**, primarily Protestant or Christian.

1787: The passage of the U.S. Constitution gives **white male property owners age 21 and over** the right to vote.

1790: Naturalization Act of 1790 restricts citizenship to “**free whites.**” Since white is defined as people of **pure European ancestry**, many men are excluded even if they own property.

1807–1843: Series of acts change voting requirements so that **all white men 21 and older** can vote.

1857: The Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision **declares that blacks, free or slave, have no citizenship rights.** This decision legally defines all black people as “subordinate, inferior beings — whether slave or freedmen.”

1870: The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees the right to vote to **all men 21 or older regardless of race or ethnic background.**

1920: The 19th Amendment gives **women age 21 and older** the right to vote.

1924: American Indians gain the right to vote.

1952: McCarran-Waller Act repeals the racial restrictions of the 1790 Naturalization Act, eliminating race as a barrier to naturalization and citizenship.

1964: The 24th Amendment makes it illegal for states to charge poll tax to voters.

1965: The Voting Rights Act authorizes the federal government to take over registration of voters in areas where state officials had regularly prevented blacks and other minorities from registering to vote or cast their ballots through literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and intimidation tactics. This act enforces provisions previously guaranteed in the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments almost a century earlier.

1971: The 26th Amendment **lowers the voting age across the nation to 18.**

1982: The Voting Rights Act Amendments extends right to vote guarantees given in the 1965 legislation. Further provisions **for Americans with disabilities,**

voters not able to read and write and those not fluent in English are added to ensure their freedoms.

1993: The National Voter Registration Act (Motor Voter) expands the opportunity for convenient voter registration for every person of voting age by increasing the number of active government agencies that register people to vote.

2002: The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) requires voting places to have voting equipment that allows persons with disabilities, including individuals who are blind or have visual disabilities, the same access, privacy and independence as other voters. It also allows individuals whose right to vote is in question the right to cast a ballot, which can be deleted later if eligibility is not proved.

2012: All but 11 states have some kind of voting rights restriction affecting individuals with disabilities. The National Council on Disability 2012 Voter Experience Survey found that people with disabilities continue to experience significant attitudinal, architectural and other physical barriers to their right to vote. (For more information, see [Experience of Voters with Disabilities in the 2012 Election Cycle](#).)

Many states still deny **prisoners and individuals with cognitive or mental health conditions** the right to vote, despite a growing understanding that the inability to make some decisions or carry out certain activities does not necessarily affect someone's ability to make informed choices when voting. Individuals with disabilities are going to court to challenge state laws that deny them the right to vote. (In Vermont, both prisoners and people with disabilities can vote as long as they meet other election requirements.) For more information, see the [Vermont Secretary of State website](#).

Constitutional Amendments Expand Citizenship

The 13th Amendment abolished slavery (1865): "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

The 14th Amendment (1868) provided additional protections: State and federal citizenship for all persons regardless of race both born or naturalized in the United States; no state is allowed to abridge the "privileges and immunities" of citizens; no person can to be deprived of life, liberty, or property without "due process of law;" and no person could be denied "equal protection of the laws."

The 15th Amendment (1870) said that the right to vote can't be denied based on "race, color or previous condition of servitude."

The 19th Amendment (1920) made it illegal to deny or limit any citizen's right to vote in federal or state elections because of their gender. It gave the federal

government the right to enforce this protection. (A few states had already given women the right to vote, but many had not.)