



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Voting Rights ELCAvotes: Restoring Rights Act

Voting Rights History

The right to vote is rooted in American democracy. However, throughout its history, the U.S. has struggled with voter suppression. The passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act (VRA) was a landmark accomplishment in civil rights, protecting the rights of minority voters and offering fair opportunities for electoral participation. Many pastors, religious leaders and lay Lutherans were involved in the struggle for civil rights and fought for the liberties that further the common good.

In 2013, however, the Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* overturned a key provision of the VRA, which provided the Department of Justice oversight to identify jurisdictions, counties and states that need additional clearance due to past discrimination before implementing voting changes. Subsequently, without oversight, new voting barriers for people of color, the elderly, students, the disabled and low-income workers are now reemerging in many parts of the nation.

"This church will support legislation, ordinances, and resolutions that guarantee to all persons equally: civil rights, including full protection of the law and redress under the law of discriminatory practices; and to all citizens, the right to vote." (ELCA 1993 social statement, "Race, Ethnicity, and Culture").

Who are disenfranchised voters?

The disenfranchisement of voters has been a consistent theme in U.S. history for people of color, those living with disabilities, low-income communities and LGBTQ+ people. Voter suppression in the past has been done through direct tactics, such as public policy (Jim Crow laws), and through informal means, such as violence and intimidation. Today, voter suppression is done through eliminated same-day voter registration, restrictive voting hours and heavy-handed ID laws. Other state-level policies, such as felony disenfranchisement, also impact millions of the otherwise eligible electorate. Injustices of the past cannot be forgotten or erased, but through policy we can work toward guaranteeing that all Americans have the right to vote.

Modern Disenfranchisement Includes:

- » I.D. restrictions
- » Polling place closures
- » Purging voter rolls
- » Cuts to early voting periods
- » Felon disenfranchisement
- » Limitation of information on voting procedures

VOTING RIGHTS: HISTORY & RENEWAL

Call to action on restoring the voting rights act.

What is in the Voting Rights Advancement Act?

After several years of inactivity, U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Ala., has re-introduced the Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would reinstate guidelines that ensure protection through oversight and combat voter suppression. The legislation would improve voting conditions by:

- » Providing voting polls on reservations for American Indians and Alaskan Natives;
- » Ensuring that voting policy changes cannot be made within 180 days of an election;
- » Allowing the attorney general to send federal observers to any location that may pose a substantial risk of discrimination; and
- » Correcting the clearance formula to cover states that have discriminated in the past.

The Lutheran voice and voting

As Lutherans, our theological tradition teaches us that we are called to be good stewards in public life by serving as faithful and active citizens. The 1993 ELCA Churchwide Assembly reaffirmed its commitment to civic inclusion, stating, "This church will support legislation, ordinances, and resolutions that guarantee to all persons equally: civil rights, including full protection of the law and redress under the law of discriminatory practices; and to all citizens, the right to vote" (ELCA 1993 social statement, "Race, Ethnicity, and Culture").

Through civic engagement, we use our voices to defend what we believe is righteous and strive for a more just world where all are fed. As Christians, we understand that if anyone's voice is not heard, we fall short of God's vision for the world. That is why it is imperative for Lutherans to support legislation that ensures that everyone – regardless of race, class, sex, gender, etc. – has the right to vote.

Moral convictions guide us more than partisan politics as followers of Christ. Let us work to bring justice to our communities and to further enrich the vibrant participation of our collective public life, reminded that "when justice is done it is a joy to the righteous" (Proverbs 21:15).

ACTION YOU CAN TAKE

- » Call your legislators: Use the Capitol switchboard number, 202-224-3121, to urge your senators and representative to support the Voting Rights Advancement Act.
- » "God's work. Our hands. Sunday": Add advocacy letter writing to your "God's work. Our hands." Sunday! Your congregation can write letters to senators and representatives letting them know how important it is for our country to pass the Voting Rights Advancement Act.
- » Get educated: Learn about the history of voter rights in your state and the ways you and your congregation can help ensure that all citizens have the right to vote. Find out more about voter participation at [ELCA.org/votes](https://www.elca.org/votes).