



VOTING RIGHTS TOOLKIT

for CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

Empowering You to protect our right to vote!

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INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Introductory Letter from the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law President and Executive Director Barbara R. Arnwine, The National Action Network (NAN) founder and President Rev. Al Sharpton, and The National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP) President and CEO Melanie Campbell on the need for this statement and Toolkit

The Lawyers' Committee, the NAN, and the NCBCP are three separate organizations with distinct missions and goals. But we're coming together in one voice to say: We must continue to protect the right to vote in 2014!

Today, across the country, that right is being threatened. Onerous voter identification laws are preventing eligible people from voting. Restrictive early voting deadlines and weekend voting policies are making it difficult for busy citizens to exercise their rights. And in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's deeply disappointing *Shelby* decision, states have an unprecedented ability to change their voting laws and policies without federal oversight.

More than at any time in recent memory, we need grassroots leaders around the country to stand up for the right to vote and help people exercise that right. That means, we need You! The "10 Ways to Protect Voting Rights" and this Toolkit ensure we are all standing together—united and determined!

The Lawyers' Committee, the NAN, and the NCBCP give you the 10 most important things to remember about voting in 2014 and beyond. We've also shared a helpful guide to help you protect voting rights in your community. We encourage civic leaders around the country to print and share the Top 10 list with your organization, and walk through the Toolkit's information in your upcoming meetings and events.

Barbara R. Arnwine, President and Executive Director,
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Rev. Al Sharpton, President and Founder
The National Action Network (NAN)

Melanie Campbell, President and CEO
The National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP)

SECTION ONE

**10 Ways To Protect
Voting Rights**
**by the Lawyers' Committee, the National
Action Network (NAN), and the
National Coalition for Black Civic
Participation (NCBCP)**

10 WAYS TO PROTECT VOTING RIGHTS

by the Lawyers' Committee, the National Action Network (NAN), and the National Coalition for Black Civic Participation (NCBCP)

ONE **Become a Voting V.I.P!** Verify your existing voter registration or register to vote. Find out whether you need Identification to vote or what type of ID you need. And know your Polling location by calling 866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683), visiting www.VOTE411.org, or downloading the Election Protection Smartphone App. Text EPAPP to 90975 to download this app!

TWO **Vote early!** If your state provides early voting, vote before Election Day to avoid Election Day lines. Visit <http://www.canivote.org/> and go to the drop-down menu called, "Make Your Vote Count: Absentee and Early Voting to find early voting deadlines. Or visit your state's Secretary of the State website.

THREE **Traveling on Election Day? Vote absentee!** Request an absentee ballot from your County Board of Election. If you vote by absentee ballot, return the ballot before the deadline.

FOUR **Ask Questions.** If you're unsure about a voting procedure, just ask! Poll workers and Election Protection trained volunteers are here to help **you vote**.

FIVE **Report Any Problems While Voting.** Call 1-866-OUR-VOTE for assistance or to get answers to any voting questions. All questions are important!

SIX **Become a Voting Rights Volunteer!** We need your help as a volunteer voting rights trainer, poll worker, poll monitor or voting changes monitor of state and local voting laws. Become a trained Lawyers' Committee Ambassador for Democracy by emailing toolkit@lawyerscommittee.org. Volunteer as a NCBCP Foot Soldier for Democracy by emailing ncbcp@ncbcp.org. Or join Rev. Al Sharpton and the NAN as a Disciple of Justice Voting Rights Trainer by emailing www.nationalactionnetwork.net/FS20144 or calling 1 877-626-4651.

SEVEN **Be an Online Activist!** Promote voting rights and the upcoming election on Twitter using the hashtags #VotingRights and #ElectionProtection.

EIGHT **Demand State and Federal Election Reform!** Show your support for early voting, same-day registration and online voter registration to your elected representatives. And learn more about the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014 and keep updated on other voting rights bills in Congress.

NINE **Learn More!** Download the Civic Engagement Voting Rights Toolkit at www.toolkit.lawyerscommittee.org. Visit the NCBPC at www.ncbcp.org to learn more about protecting your right to vote. And join a NAN voting rights event at www.nationalactionnetwork.net/FS2014.

TEN **Spread the Word! Bring a Friend or 2 with You to Vote!** Print out copies of this Top 10 Voting Rights list and share it in your place of worship bulletin, at your civic organization meetings/events, and with friends and family. And encourage family members, friends and neighbors to vote on Election Day!



SECTION TWO

**Protecting Voting Rights
in the Post-Shelby
Landscape**

Protecting Voting Rights in the Post-Shelby Landscape

Today, one of the most significant challenges to voting rights results from a recent decision by the United States Supreme Court. In the disappointing June 2013 decision, *Shelby* County, Alabama v. Holder, the Supreme Court gutted a key provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA). It ruled that the formula that determined which jurisdictions had to submit their voting changes for federal review was unconstitutional.

What the Supreme Court did in *Shelby*: Simply put, *Shelby* let some states with a history of voting discrimination “off the hook” by allowing them to make potentially discriminatory changes to their voting laws without the federal government’s review.

For many, the Supreme Court’s decision in *Shelby* is viewed as a setback in the fight for voting rights. But we can use the Court’s ruling as an opportunity to modernize and strengthen the VRA, making it more flexible and fully able to meet the challenges of the 21st century. And to do this, we need your help!



SECTION THREE

**Why We Need Your Help
to Protect Voting Rights**

Why We Need Your Help to Protect Voting Rights

ACT!

Let's transform the challenges of *Shelby* into an opportunity! There are two key strategies for protecting voting rights: new legislation and grassroots action.

I. - We need grassroots action. And that means we need You!

The Supreme Court's gutting of the VRA means local civic leaders and grassroots organizers are more vital than ever in taking action to address the **3 Main Problems After Supreme Court's Decision:**

II. - We need new legislation from Congress.

The Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014 (VRAA) (H.R. 3899/S. 1945) has been introduced in Congress. It seeks to update key remedies under the VRA. The bill establishes a new formula for identifying jurisdictions that need "preclearance", increases transparency about voting changes, expands judicial review, allows for faster resolution after discrimination is identified, and gives the federal Department of Justice more monitoring capability. More work needs to be done on the bill, but it's a significant step forward from the current situation in which no states' voting changes are subject to review.

1. Jurisdictions no longer have to notify the federal government when they make changes to the voting process.

Act!: Detect and notify your broader civil rights community of voting changes that affect them.

2. Jurisdictions can now pass new restrictive voting changes.

Act!: Help satisfy new voting requirements, like giving a community member a ride to the DMV to get a new photo ID.

3. Voters are confused about voting changes.

Act!: Educate your communities and motivate them to learn more.

To learn more how you can help, read the Get Involved section in the Background & Resources section of the toolkit.



SECTION FOUR

Background & Resources

LISTENING TO GIANTS: Congressman John Lewis on Why Voting Rights Matter



Q: Congressman Lewis, you have been at the forefront of the fight for voting rights for many years. What milestones in that fight stand out to you the most?

A: The movement had many achievements, but the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 are two of the most significant milestones. Historians have declared these two bills the most influential legislation passed by Congress in the last 50 years. These are achievements that brought an end to legalized segregation and turned the tide against hundreds of years of injustice in this country. And as an outgrowth of that progress other strides were made through the War on Poverty and Great

Society legislation that focused our nation's powerful resources on creating a level playing field for every American citizen. Women, especially, and other minorities benefitted significantly from these changes.

Q: Why do voting rights still matter today?

A: The vote is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have in democratic society to effect change. The vote is precious, almost sacred. It is the cornerstone of every true democracy. It affects the life of every American citizen from the cradle to the grave. The vote is our voice. It gives each person the same opportunity to have a say in the laws and ideas that impact their destiny.

Q: What role can the faith community play in protecting voting rights?

A: The Civil Rights Movement demonstrated the power of moral authority to transform a nation. It was a movement led by ministers and people of faith who appealed to a higher law in the struggle for human dignity. It was the rightness of their cause that pricked the conscience of a nation, which had turned a blind eye to decades of injustice. It took courage for the people to speak truth to power, and they gathered their strength, their inspiration and their resolve from their faith.

Q: What was your reaction to the Supreme Court's ruling in Shelby, and why should the decision matter to everyday people?

A: I still believe that the Supreme Court's decision placed a dagger through the heart of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. That injury must be repaired through the legislative action of the Congress. If the decision remains as it stands today, it has the power to turn back the clock, especially combined with other practices like voter ID laws, to make it easier for discriminatory actions to dictate the outcome of local and national elections.

Q: Do you think it's possible to have a new movement for voting rights in this country?

A: Yes, it is possible, and it is likely that we are headed towards another time of great social transformation. Some statistics that quantify today's problems are as bad or worse today than they were in 1964. Hunger, poverty, joblessness, the lack of upward mobility, and inequality in education are all on the rise, and some of these problems verge on 1964 abuses. Throughout history, the people have always taken a stand against injustice. Dr. King would say that the future lies in the hands of the "creatively maladjusted," those who are unwilling to accept abuse, who decide to stand up and speak out. That kind of activism can take shape at any time, whenever people make up their minds to act.

GET INVOLVED: Ways You Can Help

We need your help whether you're an experienced voting rights advocate or a new member of the voting rights movement!

Join one of our **5 teams** critical to needs at the grassroots level:

1. LEAD a team of **voting rights champions**
2. MONITOR local voting changes and INFORM the broader civil rights community
3. HELP voters navigate the voting process
4. EDUCATE your community about their voting rights
5. FIND big and small ways to help voters in your community.

LEAD a Team of Voting Rights Champions

Help recruit a team of volunteers who will protect voting rights in your community by organizing trainings, voter education and GOTV drives, and working with a nationwide network to develop best practices about engaging your community on voting rights.

MONITOR Voting Changes

Track and notify the broader civil rights community of local government voting changes by attending public meetings, reaching out to local newspapers, and sharing notes with voting rights partners about proposed voting changes.

HELP Voters Navigate the Voting Process

Help your community to vote through efforts like voter registration drives, voter education about ID needed to vote, GOTV efforts, and voter assistance.

EDUCATE Your Community about Voting Rights

With all the news and media coverage about voting rights today, many folks are confused. Educate your community through social media – like Facebook and Twitter – to spread the word about voting rights, set up information tables at community events, and chat with friends and family about protecting their vote.

FIND Big and Small Ways to Help Voters

Anything you can do to educate and help those in your community will be a big step toward ensuring that everyone can exercise their right to vote. You can: host a one-time voting rights awareness event; use the 866-OUR-VOTE hotline to report voting problems in your community; encourage youth and young adults to share voting rights information through social media and tabling at local high schools, trade schools, community colleges, and college campuses.

Your role is critical whether you work alone or as part of a team. As the Toolkit organizers, we can and want to help you with any of the roles mentioned above.

FAQs ABOUT VOTING RIGHTS

Voting Rights Yesterday and Today

What is the Voting Rights Act?

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) is a federal law that was passed to ensure all eligible citizens are able to vote without restriction as promised by the 14th, 15th, and 19th Amendments. The VRA ensures that there are no discriminatory restrictions on who can vote and gives the federal government oversight to make sure states abide by this law.

Do We Still Need a Voting Rights Act?

Yes. Today, we still have a long way to go in protecting voting rights for everyone in our country, especially the most vulnerable and targeted—racial and language minorities, voters in rural areas, senior citizens, veterans, and those of lower socio-economic status.

Did the Supreme Court Strike Down the Voting Rights Act?

The Supreme Court did not strike down all of the VRA, just one very important provision. Specifically, in *Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder* (2013), the United States Supreme Court struck down Section 4(b), the coverage formula.

What is the Coverage Formula and What Does the Supreme Court's Ruling in *Shelby* Mean?

The coverage formula determined which states or jurisdictions would have to submit changes in voting laws, policies and procedures to the Department of Justice for review. It applied mainly to states with a history of voter discrimination.

Does the Removal of the Coverage Formula Mean Voters Don't Have Protections?

No. However, the removal of the coverage formula means that states that were previously required to submit voting changes to the Department of Justice or D.C. District Court before the changes could take effect no longer have to do so. So, those previously covered jurisdictions may take advantage of the fact that they don't have to submit their laws for review by passing laws that might have a discriminatory effect on minority voters.

What's Happening Now to Ensure That Voters Can Vote Free From Discrimination?

In addition to other provisions of the VRA that are still in effect—the National Voter Registration Act and the Help America Vote Act—Congress has introduced new legislation to replace Section 4(b), the section the Supreme Court found unconstitutional. The new legislation is called the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014 (VRAA).

What is the VRAA and What Does It Do?

The VRAA seeks to restore and update the VRA. It replaces Section 4(b)'s coverage formula with a “rolling trigger” that captures recent instances of voting discrimination, increases transparency about voting changes, expands judicial review, gives voters faster resolution when discrimination is identified, and gives the federal Department of Justice more monitoring capability.

Does the VRAA Fix Long Lines at the Poll and Voter ID Restrictions?

No. The VRAA directly responds to the call in the Supreme Court’s *Shelby* ruling for a new formula under Section 4(b) of the VRA. There are additional efforts underway, specifically outlined by the Presidential Commission on Election Administration, to address other voting rights issues related to election administration, like long lines. Additionally, other bills in Congress address broader election administration issues.

ALL HANDS ON DECK

**Come to Our
Fight Party &
Get Prepped to
Protect Your
Vote**

DATE:

TIME:

LOCATION:

QUESTIONS/MORE INFORMATION:

SAMPLE AGENDA for a Voting Rights Awareness Event

Voting Rights Advocacy Meeting

Date: Day, Month, Year

Location/Name of Building:

Room Number:

Time: 00:00 a.m./p.m.

I. Welcome & Introductions

Give each attendee 30 seconds to introduce themselves and share what they hope to learn in your time together.

II. Why Voting Rights Matter

Chat about why voting rights matter by asking participants why voting matters to them, their communities, and to the country.

III. Get involved

Share the different ways to get involved as outlined above in the Toolkit and ask attendees to invite others to get on board.

IV. Stay connected and in the know:

Give your attendees the following information to keep them aware of next steps with your organization, the Lawyers' Committee, NAN, and NCBCP:

- a. Websites
- b. Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or other smartphone apps
- c. Election Protection Hotline:
1-866-OUR VOTE (1-866-687-8683). Explain that anyone can use the hotline, both to report voting changes and to get voting information, including finding their polling place and checking ID requirements.

V. Q & A:

Do your best to answer questions and feel free to direct questions that need additional response to the Lawyers' Committee, NAN, and NCBCP.

VI. Closing:

Close out the meeting with a brief recap, next steps, and announcements/reminders about upcoming deadlines or voting rights events. Thank attendees for coming.

Contact Information:

Details for next event/action item

- a. Personally: Why do voting rights matter to you and your family, ministry, worship center, or civic organization?
- b. Historically and today: Why were and are voting protections needed in the United States, including the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1965?

Current state of play

Inform attendees about the *Shelby v. Holder* decision and its consequences for the VRA:

- a. Discuss changes to Section 4(b) and 5 of the VRA.
- b. Legislative proposal: VRAA, which is designed to strengthen the VRA.
- c. Common and New Voter Restriction Tactics: Highlight some common restriction tactics, both new and old. Emphasize those that have been used or are in place in your state.

VOTING RIGHTS MEETING SIGN UP SHEET

Voting Rights Advocacy Meeting

Date:

Location:

Time:

First Name

Last Name

Home Address

Telephone

Email

SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKIT

Take the Fight on the Road: Social Media, Voting Rights, and You!

Voting restrictions seek to isolate you. At the polls, outside your voter registration headquarters, or even at a local “meet the candidates” debate, those who seek to rob others of their democratic right to vote strike first by separating their targets from larger groups.

But you’re an Ambassador for Democracy. You can count on the Lawyers’ Committee, NAN, NCBCP, and our allies to have your back no matter where you are or what situation you’re in!

Join our social media initiatives to make sure you’re never alone and always in the know about your rights at the polls. Tweet us your questions. Post photos and videos of questionable practices on Facebook or other social media websites. Let those who seek to restrict the vote know that you’re watching them. Be our eyes and ears on the ground!

Connect to us via social media when you:

Like and follow our Facebook page at
www.facebook.com/LawyersCommittee
www.facebook.com/nationalactionnetwork
www.facebook.com/pages/The-National-Coalition-on-Black-Civic-Participation/149636419244

Follow us on Twitter at [@LawyersComm](https://twitter.com/@LawyersComm), [@nationalaction](https://twitter.com/@nationalaction), [@NCBCP](https://twitter.com/@NCBCP) and #protectyourvote

Download and share the Election Protection Smartphone app, available in the Google Play and Apple iTunes stores.

Follow us on Instagram at
instagram.com/lawyerscomm
instagram.com/nationalactionnetwork

Connect with us on LinkedIn at
linkedin.com/company/lawyers'-committee-for- civil-rights

LINKS To Voting Rights Reports

National Commission on Voting Rights

The National Commission on Voting Rights (NCVR), organized by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law on behalf of the civil rights community, conducted twenty-five hearings across the country to collect testimony about voting discrimination and election administration challenges and successes. Hundreds of voters, advocates and expert witnesses shared personal experiences and research highlighting both the obstacles to full access to the ballot as well as opportunities for reform. National Commissioners are: Social justice leader, **Dolores Huerta**; Law Professor and Director of the Indian Law Clinic at the Sandra Day O'Connor School of Law, ASU, **Patty Ferguson-Bohnee**, Civil Rights Leader and NAACP Vice Chair, **Leon Russell**, Youth Engagement Leader, **Biko Baker** and Former Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, **John Dunne**. The National Commission issued the report, Protecting Minority Voters: Our Work is not Done, the most comprehensive look at voter discrimination over the last twenty years. The report can be found at www.votingrightstoday.org

The Presidential Commission on Election Administration FACTSHEET

President Obama created the Presidential Commission on Election Administration in 2013. He tasked the Commission with identifying best practices and making recommendations to promote the efficient administration of elections and to improve the experience of voters.

The Lawyers' Committee helped the Commission by submitting to it a 40-page report, including recommendations based on their work, experience, and expertise for improving election administration and the voting process. A sampling of the Lawyers' Committee's recommendations is available at:

Link: www.supportthevoter.gov

Federal Voting Rights Law Fact Sheets

Fact Sheet: Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014 (VRAA)

The VRAA addresses the loss of vital protections against racial voting discrimination that were given under the VRA and declared unconstitutional or nullified by the United States Supreme Court in *Shelby County v. Holder* in 2013. The VRAA will require that jurisdictions with the worst records of recent racial voting discrimination get federal approval before implementing new voting practices and procedures. Under the VRAA, states or political subdivisions will be subject to the Section 5 federal review requirement based primarily upon an annual assessment of their record of current or recent voting discrimination. The VRAA would also provide broad new rules for disclosure of certain voting changes and related information, broaden the Attorney General's ability to assign federal observers, and give federal courts more authority to order federal review of voting changes and suspend voting changes while litigation is pending.

The VRAA legislation is a start in the effort to restore full protections of the VRA. It was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Rep. Sensenbrenner (WI-5), Rep. Conyers (MI-13), Rep. Chabot (OH-1), Rep. Scott (VA-3) and in the U.S. Senate by Senator Leahy (VT), Senator Coons (DE), and Senator Durbin (IL) on January 16, 2014.

FEDERAL VOTING RIGHTS LAWS

Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA)

The VRA was enacted to protect the voting rights of African Americans in the southern states with a long history of disfranchisement. Later, through subsequent reauthorizations, it addressed discrimination against other racial and ethnic groups, particularly Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. And finally, to combat efforts to dilute voting rights and deny the right to vote. The VRA is composed of permanent and temporary provisions. The temporary provisions were reauthorized in 1970, 1975, 1982 and 2006. One of the most important temporary provisions, Section 5, was deactivated by the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2013 when it determined that the formula that determined which jurisdictions were subject to Section 4 was unconstitutional. As a result, an important protection of the VRA is no longer available until Congress acts to restore the VRA's full protections.

National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA)

The NVRA was enacted to make voter registration more accessible to eligible voters in federal elections and to standardize the process of removing voters from the registration list. States that didn't have voter registration or had Election Day registration as of January 1, 1994, are exempt from the NVRA. These states include Idaho, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The NVRA is largely known for its requirement that states allow individuals to register to vote or update their voter registration status at the same time that they conduct business at motor vehicle departments, public assistance agencies, or agencies serving persons with disabilities.

Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA)

The HAVA was the Congressional response to the controversy surrounding the 2000 election. It creates several new requirements for federal elections that include requiring states to maintain a statewide voter registration database; allowing voters whose eligibility is in question to cast a provisional ballot; providing funding to replace old voting equipment; requiring accommodations for people with disabilities that include privacy and independence; requiring voter identification for first-time voters who register by mail; and the creation of the United States Election Assistance Commission.

Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986 (UOCAVA)

The UOCAVA helps service members, their families, and other U.S. citizens living outside the U.S., register and vote absentee in federal elections. Among other provisions, the law allows service members and overseas citizens to use a Federal Post Card Application to simultaneously register to vote and request an absentee ballot. The law also allows for use of a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB), an alternative ballot for overseas and service member voters who applied for a ballot, but didn't receive one. The FWAB is a blank ballot that allows an overseas or service member voter to write in their choices.

Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act of 2009 (MOVE Act)

The MOVE Act significantly expanded provisions of the UOCAVA. With some exceptions, the MOVE Act generally requires states to send absentee ballots to military and other overseas voters no later than 45 days before a federal election. The request for an absentee ballot must have been validly requested and received by the state in a timely manner. States can apply for a waiver if they are unable to comply with the law.



SECTION FIVE

**Get Involved:
Contact Information**

GET INVOLVED: Contact Information

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

1401 New York Avenue, NW

Suite 400

Washington, D.C. 20005

[GET DIRECTIONS](#)

202-662-8600

888-299-5227

(Toll Free) 202-783-0857

Election Protection Resources

1-866-OUR-VOTE

<http://www.866ourvote.org>

Website: www.lawyerscommittee.org

Instagram: [instagram.com/lawyerscomm](https://www.instagram.com/lawyerscomm)

Twitter: [@LawyersComm](https://twitter.com/@LawyersComm) #protectyourvote

Facebook: [facebook.com/lawyerscommittee](https://www.facebook.com/lawyerscommittee)

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/company/lawyers-committee-for-civil-rights](https://www.linkedin.com/company/lawyers-committee-for-civil-rights)

http://www.lawyerscommittee.org/projects/voting_rights

National Action Network

106 W. 145th Street

Harlem, New York 10039

Phone: (212) 690-3070

NAN Hotline: 877-626-4651/ (877) NAN-HOJ1

Website: www.nationalactionnetwork.net
www.nationalactionnetwork.net/FS20144

Instagram: [instagram.com/nationalactionnetwork](https://www.instagram.com/nationalactionnetwork)

Twitter: [@nationalaction](https://twitter.com/nationalaction)

National Coalition for Black Civic Participation

1050 Connecticut Avenue, NW,
10th Floor -Suite #1000
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 659-50259
Fax: (202) 659-5025

Website: www.ncbcp.org

Flickr: flickr.com/photos/ncbcp

Twitter: [@NCBCP](https://twitter.com/NCBCP) #protectyourvote

Facebook: facebook.com/pages/The-National-Coalition-on-Black-Civic-Participation/149636419244



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