

# Voting Rights – List of Laws and Amendments

## Constitutional amendments

Several amendments expanded suffrage to new groups of people and prohibited certain discriminatory practices:

- **14th Amendment (1868):** Defines citizenship, guarantees equal protection under the law, and broadly prohibits states from infringing upon citizens' privileges or immunities. The Supreme Court later affirmed that voting is among the rights of citizenship.
- **15th Amendment (1870):** Prohibits the government from denying a citizen the right to vote based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude".
- **19th Amendment (1920):** Prohibits states and the federal government from denying the right to vote based on sex, effectively granting women's suffrage.
- **24th Amendment (1964):** Prohibits the use of poll taxes in federal elections, which had been used to disenfranchise poor voters and especially African Americans. A 1966 Supreme Court ruling later banned poll taxes for state and local elections.
- **26th Amendment (1971):** Extended voting rights to all citizens 18 years of age and older.

## Federal legislation

Federal laws further define and protect voting rights by providing enforcement mechanisms and prohibiting specific discriminatory practices:

- **Civil Rights Acts (1957, 1960, 1964):** These laws provided some of the earliest federal protections against discrimination in voting.
- **Voting Rights Act of 1965:** Considered a landmark piece of civil rights legislation, this act banned literacy tests and other discriminatory practices used to suppress voter turnout. It gave the federal government the power to oversee elections in jurisdictions with a history of discrimination, though a key provision of this was later weakened by a 2013 Supreme Court decision.
- **National Voter Registration Act (1993):** Also known as the "Motor Voter" Act, this law makes it easier for citizens to register to vote by requiring states to offer

registration opportunities at motor vehicle agencies, public assistance offices, and through mail-in applications.

- **Help America Vote Act (2002):** Passed in response to the 2000 presidential election, this law established minimum standards for election administration across the country and provided funding to help states meet those standards.

### **The role of states**

Though federal law establishes broad protections, states still have significant authority over elections. Each state determines specific regulations, such as voter registration requirements, and some states still differ on voting qualifications for certain groups, like felons.