

BILL SUMMARY: **JOHN LEWIS VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT**

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#RestoretheVRA

Whatever our color, background, or zip code, most of us believe that voters pick our leaders — our leaders do not get to pick their voters. When it comes to our elections, we want a transparent process we can trust, where Americans have equal freedom to vote, whether we live in a small town or big city, the south or the north. It is time to restore and strengthen our freedom to vote by eliminating racial discrimination at the ballot box.

Background

In its 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court eviscerated the process (called “preclearance”) in the Voting Rights Act (VRA) that our nation had long relied on to prevent state and local officials from implementing voting changes that discriminate against voters of color. The Court struck down the criteria for identifying states and localities subject to this process, but left open the option for Congress to create new criteria that addresses the ways that state and local officials are discriminating against voters of color today.

The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act takes up the Court’s challenge. It would restore and strengthen our freedom to vote by making sure that any state or local changes to voting rules are federally reviewed to ensure they are not discriminating against voters based on race or background, so we all have an equal say in our future and our rights are protected. It would reinvigorate and strengthen the Voting Rights Act and prevent new discriminatory voting rules from being adopted in the future.

This is critical. There is a tremendous surge of state legislation restricting access to the franchise. As of May 14, 2021, [state lawmakers have introduced more than 380 bills](#) that create barriers to voters’ freedom to vote in 48 states.



If passed, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act would restore the VRA in the following ways:

Establishing new review and approval criteria for preventing racial discrimination in voting

Based on evidence of voting discrimination, the act would create new criteria for identifying states and political subdivisions required to obtain federal review and approval of voting changes to ensure those changes do not infringe upon people of color's freedom to vote. The Department of Justice would perform an annual nationwide assessment to determine which jurisdictions meet these new criteria.

Mandating greater nationwide transparency of voting law and policy changes

The act would require all states and localities to provide public notice to all voters of certain voting changes.

Requiring federal review of specific voting practices known to be used to discriminate against voters of color.

Every state and locality nationwide that is sufficiently diverse would be required to obtain federal review and approval before enacting specific types of voting changes that are known to be used to silence the growing political power of voters of color.

Expanding the federal observer program

The U.S. Attorney General would have authority to request federal observers anywhere there is a serious threat of racial discrimination in voting.

Pausing discriminatory voting changes during judicial review

The act would provide voters with additional protection by permitting courts to temporarily block certain types of voting changes while the change is under review in court. This is important because once a voter is discriminated in an election, it cannot be undone.

