



Dismantling Racial Discrimination Fact Sheet: **RACISM AND VOTING RIGHTS**

Racism and voting rights in the U.S. have been deeply intertwined throughout American history, with systematic efforts to disenfranchise racial minorities, particularly Black Americans, continuing to shape electoral access today.

Historical Foundation

The most explicit connection began after the Civil War. While the 15th Amendment (1870) prohibited denying voting rights based on race, Southern states quickly implemented legal workarounds designed to circumvent federal protections. Poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and “White primaries” were crafted to appear race-neutral while effectively barring Black participation. These measures were often accompanied by violent intimidation through groups like the Ku Klux Klan.

The Civil Rights Era Response

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 represented the most significant federal intervention, requiring federal oversight of election changes in jurisdictions with histories of discrimination. This law dismantled many overt barriers and led to dramatic increases in minority voter registration and participation, particularly in the South.

Contemporary Manifestations

Modern voting rights debates often center on policies that critics argue have disparate racial impacts, even when not explicitly race-based. These include voter ID requirements, polling place closures, voter roll purges, and restrictions on early voting or mail-in ballots. Research shows these measures often disproportionately affect communities of color, who may have less access to required documentation, transportation, or flexible work schedules.



Ongoing Legal and Political Battles

The 2013 Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* struck down key provisions of the Voting Rights Act, removing federal preclearance requirements for many jurisdictions. This has led to renewed state-level voting law changes that civil rights advocates argue recreate barriers to minority participation, while supporters contend changes are necessary for election security and integrity.

The intersection remains contentious, with ongoing litigation and legislative battles over redistricting, voter access, and election administration reflecting deeper disagreements about how historical discrimination continues to shape contemporary voting experiences.

Learn more [here](http://www.osfphila.org/justice-and-peace/racism/).