

Issue Overview: Voting rights

By Bloomberg, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.05.16

Word Count **628**

Level **770L**



TOP: Voters head to the polls in Alabama's Republican Primary. Photo by Win McNamee. BOTTOM: Graphic by U.S. Department of Justice.

DEFINITIONS

election laws

Laws set by the government that say who can vote, how they can vote, and how elections will be run

voter fraud

When a person or group tries to change the result of an election by cheating at voting; voting more than once is one example

Voting Rights Act

This act, signed into law in 1965, banned practices that tried to stop African-Americans from voting in elections

Courts usually end legal

fights. Other times, the fighting gets worse. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the country. Sometimes the Supreme Court decides that a national law must be changed. In 1965, national lawmakers passed the Voting Rights Act. Before then, most Southern states made it hard or impossible for black people to vote. The Voting Rights Act aimed to change that.

The Act said that some states had to check with the national government before passing new voting laws. The government would not allow the laws if they were unfair. In 2013, the Supreme Court ended an important part of the Voting Rights Act. States no longer need permission from the national government to make new voting laws. The Court said that the law did its job. Black people can vote in all 50 states.

The Situation

Courts and lawmakers are struggling with the Supreme Court decision. Many states have tried to pass new voting laws. Some laws force people to prove they are citizens before they can vote. People must sign up to vote before Election Day. Other laws say voters have to show identification to prove who they are. The states with new laws all have Republican governors.

Republicans and Democrats are the two main political groups in the United States. Lawmakers in the two groups often do not get along. They argue about which ideas should be turned into laws. The Republicans said the new voting laws will end voter fraud. Voter fraud is cheating, like trying to vote more than once. Democrats said these laws make it harder for blacks and Hispanics to vote.

The Background

Judges stopped new voting laws in six states in 2016. The states were Texas, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Kansas, North Dakota and Ohio. A judge said that the North Carolina laws were aimed at black voters. Fifteen states will have new voting laws this year. The laws were passed by states led by Republicans.

Some of the laws limit voting before Election Day. Other new laws say people must prove who they are in order to vote. These laws are hard for people who do not have a driver license. This can affect older people who do not drive anymore.

Hillary Clinton is the Democratic candidate for president. She wants all citizens to be registered to vote. Clinton also wants to allow everyone to vote early. Donald Trump is the Republican candidate. He has said that voting laws must be strict, or people will "vote 10 times."

The 1965 Voting Rights Act made it easier for millions of black people in the South to vote. States used different ways to keep black people from voting. One way was charging poll taxes. People had to pay to register to vote. Sometimes people had to take reading tests.

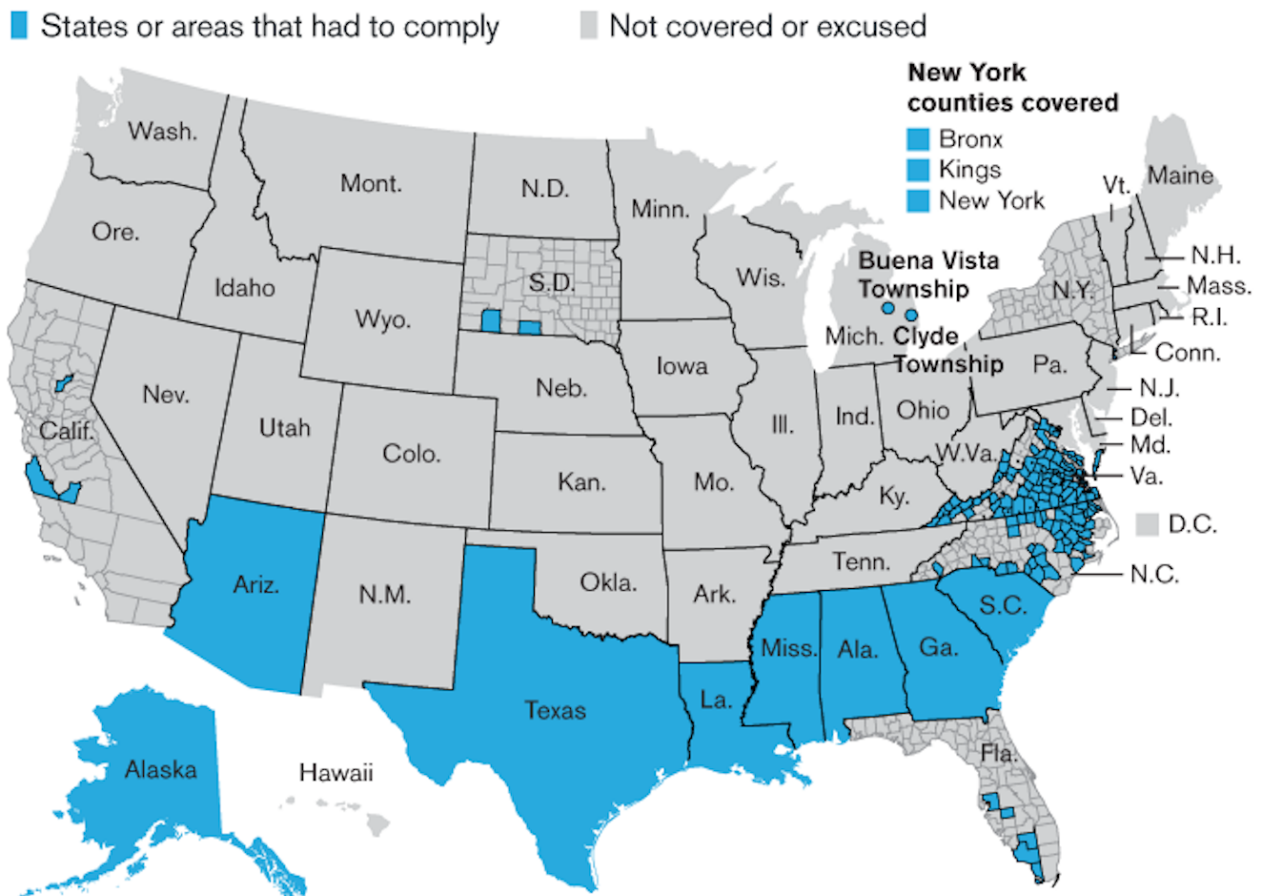
The Argument

The Voting Rights Act forced some states to get permission from the government before passing new voting laws. States that made it hard for black people to vote needed permission. Most Southern states were included, along with Alaska and Arizona. Parts of California,

Michigan and New York were also on the list. In 2013, the Supreme Court voted 5-4 to change part of the Voting Rights Act. The Court said that voting has become more fair. The states no longer need permission to make new laws.

Now They Don't Have to Ask

States and counties that were required to seek federal permission for election law changes before the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated part of the Voting Rights Act



Republicans say the new laws will fight voter fraud. Democrats say voter fraud almost never happens. The Texas court case included information about voter fraud. It showed that fraud had happened just twice on Election Day in the last 14 years.

Republicans and Democrats agree on one thing. Voter fraud happens more during early voting by mail than on Election Day. None of the new laws solve that problem.