

Sixty Years of the Voting Rights Act

The International Academy of Trial Lawyers Honors Progress;

Advocates for a Future where Every Voice is Heard

August 6, 2025 – On this day in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act. This landmark law made the promises of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments real for African Americans by outlawing racially discriminatory voting practices.

Its impact was immediate:

- In Selma, Alabama, 381 new Black voters registered on August 14, 1965, more than in the previous 65 years combined.
- Nationwide, by December 1965, nearly 250,000 had registered to vote.
- In Mississippi, Black voter registration climbed from 6.7 percent in 1965 to nearly 60 percent by 1967, reshaping civic life across the South.

Progress, however, has never moved in a straight line. Supreme Court decisions such as *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), which struck down the Act's coverage formula, and *Brnovich v. DNC* (2021), which narrowed Section 2 protections, have weakened the statute's original reach. Now, in 2025, new legislative proposals, restrictive voting laws, and ongoing court challenges threaten to further erode its protections. This is a reminder that the fight for equal access to the ballot is far from over. The gains secured in 1965 are not guaranteed, and they require constant vigilance. Even today, Texas is attempting to gerrymander its congressional districts, which will have the effect of diluting voters' rights. These actions are anti-democratic and have the collateral impact of further polarizing the country.

"As lawyers, we know liberty is not self-executing," said Academy President Joe Tucker. "The Constitution gave us ideals, and Amendments have strengthened them, but it is up to judges to apply the law, lawyers to uphold it with courage, and citizens to insist that it work for everyone, so those ideals become a reality."

The Academy celebrates the Voting Rights Act as a milestone in our constitutional journey. We also acknowledge that the road to full freedom, equal rights, and justice can be littered with debris. As 19th-century abolitionist Theodore Parker observed, "I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one ... I am sure it bends towards justice." Protecting the progress of the past six decades, and ensuring that the Rule of Law, equal rights, and equal justice remain realities for all, is central to our mission.

"The Voting Rights Act reminds us that when we stand together for justice, we can transform ideals into reality," added Tucker. "The work is not finished, but our commitment to equality is stronger than ever, and our belief in a future where every American's voice is heard remains unshakable." The Academy understands that we must be part of the struggle if there is to be progress. Our commitment to the Rule of Law demands nothing less.