

AAUW is committed to open and fair elections that are broadly accessible to all voters, nonpartisan voter education efforts that will promote equitable political participation and representation in appointed and eleT p a i

More than a century ago, the 15th Amendment guaranteed the right of all men to vote regardless of race, color, or previous condition of slavery. Fifty years later in 1920 the 19th Amendment gave some women the right to vote. It wasn't until decades more of racially discriminatory practices like literacy tests, poll taxes, and Jim Crow laws that the right to vote for everyone was written into law with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Despite this landmark legislation, some communities were still unable to equitably access their right to vote. The 1975 amendments to the Voting Rights Act required that all voting materials be made available in multiple languages and ensured the right to vote for Asian Americans. Latinos, and Native Americans.

Broadly speaking, the Voting Rights Act made it illegal for any election law or practice to discriminate against or prevent anyone from voting. Two critical provisions—Sections 4 and 5—gave teeth to the law. Section 4 of the VRA created a "coverage formula" to identify states with a history of unlawful, racially discriminatory election laws and practices that needed more focused remedies. In 1965 states covered under this formula included Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia, along with political subdivisions in four additional states. Other localities were added after the 1970 and 1975 amendments broadened the tests for discrimination.

Section 5 of the VRA required the states that were identified by Section 4 to seek out "preclearance" from the Department of Justice before they could enact any changes

to their election laws. That is, the states had to prove to the Department of Justice that any proposed changes would