

Voting Rights: An Asian American Perspective

The Chinese Exclusion Act is the first law passed to keep out a specific ethnic group. Similar laws follow, banning immigration from other Asian countries. Unable to become citizens, people of Asian descent in America have no political voice.

1882

The Voting Rights Act (VRA) is signed into law to prohibit racial discrimination in voting.

1965

The VRA language protections are expanded to cover areas where there are 10,000+ voters with limited English skills.

1992

Asian Americans supporting a Vietnamese candidate are challenged at polls in Alabama. The losing incumbent says of them, **"...if they couldn't speak good English, they possibly weren't American citizens."**

2004

The City of Boston is found guilty of discriminating against Spanish-speaking, Chinese, and Vietnamese voters.

2005

The VRA is renewed for 25 years with strong support from both Republicans and Democrats in Congress.

2006

In the landmark Shelby v. Holder decision, the Supreme Court of the United States rules 5-4 to gut a key part of the VRA while recognizing that voting discrimination "still exists."

2013

A month after the Supreme Court decision, North Carolina passes the most sweeping voter restrictions in the country. Other states follow suit.

2013

Demonstrators rally in Roanoke, Virginia to demand Congress restore the Voting Rights Act.

2015

The Naturalization Act of 1790 limits naturalization to immigrants who are free white persons of good character, thus excluding Asians from citizenship.

1790

Federal policies barring immigrants of Asian descent from naturalizing begin to lift, making them eligible to become citizens. (Most Asians were granted the ability to naturalize by 1952.)

1943

Congress adds protections (Section 203) for voters with limited English skills to the Voting Rights Act.

1975

In Hamtramck City, Michigan, election officials require 40+ Arab Americans to take an oath as a condition to voting.

1999

In Washington State, one citizen challenges the right to vote of 1,500+ people of mainly Asian and Latin descent whose names, he says, "have no basis in the English language."

2005

In Florida, a candidate of South Asian descent is mocked by his opponent:

2005

"I'm not usually prejudiced, but I don't want an Indian in my government."

Redistricting plans in Texas aim to divide our 3rd largest Asian American community and keep minorities from voting as a bloc.

2011

Within hours of the Shelby decision, Texas implements a voter ID law that is later ruled to have been "imposed with an unconstitutional discriminatory purpose" against racial minorities.

2013

83 restrictive voting bills are introduced in 29 states.

2014