

Voting Rights

The right to vote is one of the most important tenets of American democracy. Not all citizens had access to the right to vote, and certain groups continue to experience barriers to exercising their right. The effort to expand and ensure voter access for all citizens is not just part of our history; it's part of our present and our future.

Equity Heroes



[More than 1,300 Chicago students](#) worked as election judges on Nov. 8, 2022. These students received four to six hours of training to fulfill this crucial role at more than 600 precincts across the city. In the process, they gained firsthand experience about how democracy works, inspiring many to share that information with family and friends.



[Rep. John Lewis](#) worked at the forefront of the civil rights movement, risking his own safety by participating in nonviolent protests. One was the 1965 march in Selma, Alabama, known as “Bloody Sunday,” during which police used clubs and tear gas to brutally attack peaceful demonstrators. The incident sparked support for the Voting Rights Act, which became law later that year. Lewis was elected to Congress in 1987 and served more than three decades. The [John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021](#) established “new criteria for determining which states and political subdivisions must obtain preclearance before changes to voting practices may take effect” in order to prevent changes that may limit voting access.



[Rep. Stacey Abrams](#) is a voting rights activist who served in the Georgia House of Representatives from 2007-17. She is the founder of Fair Fight Action, an organization that addresses voter suppression. In 2018, she became the first African-American woman nominated by a major party for a governorship. She has authored a dozen books (some fiction, some nonfiction), including the children’s book, *Stacey’s Extraordinary Words*.



[The REV UP Campaign: REV UP](#) is a network of more than 200 organizations that work together to “build the power of the disability vote” by increasing accessibility to voting and helping individuals with disabilities register to vote. The right to vote for disabled Americans is protected by several [federal laws](#) that provide guidelines for ensuring access to ballots and polling places.

DID YOU KNOW?



Turnout for presidential elections for voters of all races ages 18-24 increased more rapidly than any other age group from 2012-20, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).

[Election Day](#) was established as the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November in 1845.

Chicagoan Anthony Beranek patented the first [voting machine](#) for general elections in 1881. Jacob H. Myers patented the first mechanical lever voting machine in 1889 based on Beranek's design.

[Rock the Vote](#) is a "nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to building the political power of young people." Since its founding in 1990, Rock the Vote has helped 14 million people register to vote. It estimates that in 2024, "Millennials and Generation Z" will make up 44% of American voters; highlighting the potentially powerful impact of young voters.

Larger waves of Hispanic, Black, Asian, and other non-white demographics are exercising their right to vote more routinely over the past [two decades](#).

Women have cast almost 10 million more votes than men in [recent elections](#).

RESOURCES

[League of Women Voters: Voting Rights](#)
[U.S. Election Assistance Commission](#)
[Voting Rights Milestones in America: A Timeline](#)
[National Constitution Center Classroom Resources: Voting Rights](#)
[PBS Learning Media: To Vote or Not to Vote](#)

If you have a suggestion for an Equity Hero theme, please email equity@isbe.net.

Photos

Chicago Student: abc7Chicago | Rep. John Lewis: Wikipedia | Rep. Stacey Abrams: Wikipedia | The REV UP Campaign: The REV UP Campaign