

Fifty years after voting act, black churches fight new voting restrictions

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) with added sources in the [September 2, 2015](#) issue

Fifty years after the signing of the Voting Rights Act, many black churches are redoubling efforts to maintain access to the ballot box.

James C. Perkins, president of the historically black Progressive National Baptist Convention, said the denomination is joining other religious and civic groups to challenge restrictions in state voting laws.

The act, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson 50 years ago (August 6), was a crowning achievement of the civil rights movement. But in 2013 the Supreme Court invalidated key provisions, and many states, nearly all of them under Republican control, passed new voting restrictions that critics say target minority voters.

In early August, a federal court ruled that a Texas voter identification law discriminates against minorities. A federal judge was looking into a Justice Department challenge to new voting restrictions in North Carolina.

In some states, Souls to the Polls, which transported churchgoers to voting sites on the Sunday before Election Day, has now been prohibited.

Perkins said that his and other denominations will work to educate pastors about dozens of other laws that are making it more difficult for people to vote.

“We’re trying to call attention to these kinds of laws that have been implemented to show that the Supreme Court was wrong,” Perkins said. “There still is a need to protect our Voting Rights Act.”

His denomination intends to register 200,000 people as part of a larger effort to involve 1 million new people in the voting process in time for the 2016 election.

The PNBC is joining with other black denominations and two organizations co-founded by Martin Luther King Jr.—the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Drum Major Institute—in voter education and registration initiatives.

In June, the PNBC praised the idea of automatic voter registration for 18-year-olds.

“Voting is the most basic right in a democracy,” he said. “And when you work to try to keep people from voting, you’re undermining the very democratic principle that causes the United States to be great.”

[In North Carolina, the Moral Mondays movement began after the legislature passed voting restrictions in 2013. William Barber II, a Disciples of Christ (Christian Church) pastor and head of the North Carolina NAACP, has led protests at the state legislative building. He recently gave his blessing for [groups in Illinois to adopt the Moral Mondays name](#). Groups in Georgia have also joined the movement, the United Methodist News Service reported.

Anthony Everett, pastor of Wesley United Methodist Church in Lexington, Kentucky—which describes itself on its website as “deeply committed to the Christian faith, our Methodist heritage, and our unique African American experience”—is a longtime supporter of voting rights, including restoring rights to felons after their prison sentences are over, [UMNS reported](#).

Everett told UMNS that the civil rights era and the passing of the Voting Rights Act show that churches and clergy have the power to change society. “We’ve got to be advocates,” he said. “We’ve got to stand up so that God is represented.”] —Religion News Service; added sources

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