

## AN OPEN LETTER

To the Hon. Chief Justice and the Associate Justices  
of the United States Supreme Court:

Re: *Shelby County v. Holder*, No. 12-96

America's leadership in voting rights has been a beacon of hope for millions around the world who have made their own sacrifices for freedom and democracy. Advocates for global human rights anxiously await your ruling on efforts to roll back the rights and protections that are enshrined in the United States Constitution and implemented by the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Human rights go beyond the abstract: they are a measure of a nation's spiritual health. At the same time they engender full economic participation and the opportunity for advancement. It is no wonder that voting rights, in particular, often are contested by elites who have much to gain by disenfranchising the most vulnerable segments of our societies.

In 1965, the Voting Rights Act swept aside the discriminatory requirements and practices that for generations thwarted the fundamental right of millions of African American citizens to vote; required Federal pre-approval of certain voting procedures to prevent racist ingenuity from devising new obstacles; and punished those who would deprive citizens of voting rights on the basis of race or color.

We have watched as government officials in many states enacted discriminatory voter identification laws to restrict the availability of polling places and to limit the numbers of citizens able to vote. These actions were rationalized with claims of voter fraud that have been proven non-existent. Many of the specific practices that made the Voting Rights Act necessary, such as poll taxes and literacy tests, are not likely to be exhumed. But the widespread efforts to enact new voting restrictions, with known and intended discriminatory effects, confirms that America still has need of flexible federal power to halt new attempts at disenfranchisement.

Beyond your borders, the global march toward justice will suffer grievous harm should you surrender to those who seek to disenfranchise American citizens. We urge you to heed the United States Congress's judgment that continued federal enforcement of the voting rights guaranty is appropriate and necessary.

*Friends of the Court*

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