

SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

South Carolina v. Katzenbach

383 U.S. 301 (1966) · No. No. 22, Orig. · Decided May 2, 1966

SUMMARY

The Supreme Court considered South Carolina's challenge to selected provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Court held that the provisions properly before it were appropriate measures under Congress's enforcement authority under the Fifteenth Amendment and were consistent with the Constitution, denying South Carolina's request for an injunction.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the United States
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Chief Justice Warren; Justice Black; Justice Douglas; Justice Clark; Justice Harlan; Justice Brennan; Justice Stewart; Justice White; Justice Fortas
JURISDICTION	Federal
DECIDED	May 2, 1966
DOCKET	No. 22, Orig.
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	South Carolina invoked the Supreme Court's original jurisdiction by filing a bill of complaint seeking a declaration that selected provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were unconstitutional and an injunction against their enforcement.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Court reviewed whether the challenged provisions were an appropriate means of enforcing the Fifteenth Amendment and whether they were consistent with other constitutional provisions.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published binding Supreme Court precedent
PARTIES	South Carolina v. Nicholas deB. Katzenbach, Attorney General

TOPICS

voting rights

election law

constitutional law

federalism

due process

PRACTICE AREAS

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Congress's enforcement provisions under Section 2 of the Fifteenth Amendment were limited to prohibiting discrimination in general terms or could include specific, preventive, and geographically targeted remedies.
2. Whether the Voting Rights Act's Section 4 coverage formula was an appropriate exercise of Congress's Fifteenth Amendment enforcement power.
3. Whether the Act's suspension of literacy tests and similar voting devices was constitutional.
4. Whether Section 5's suspension of new voting rules pending federal review was constitutional and violated Article III by authorizing advisory opinions.
5. Whether the federal-examiner and voter-listing provisions were constitutional, including challenges based on due process, separation of powers, and the absence of judicial review of administrative findings.
6. Whether the Act's limitation of certain litigation to the United States District Court for the District of Columbia violated constitutional principles.
7. Whether South Carolina could invoke the Due Process Clause, Bill of Attainder Clause, and separation-of-powers principles against the Federal Government in its capacity as a State.

HOLDINGS

1. Congress may use any rational means appropriate to effectuate the Fifteenth Amendment's prohibition against racial discrimination in voting, including specific remedies directed at particular jurisdictions.
2. The Section 4(b) coverage formula was a rational and permissible means of identifying jurisdictions subject to the Act's special remedies.
3. The Act's temporary suspension of literacy tests and similar voting devices in covered jurisdictions was a constitutional and appropriate remedy.
4. Section 5's suspension of new voting qualifications, standards, practices, and procedures pending federal review was a constitutional exercise of Congress's Fifteenth Amendment enforcement power and did not authorize advisory opinions.
5. The Act's authorization for federal examiners to register qualified voters in covered political subdivisions, subject to an expedited challenge procedure, was constitutional.
6. South Carolina could not invoke the Due Process Clause, Bill of Attainder Clause, or separation-of-powers principle as protections applicable to a State against the Federal Government in this case; the objections were considered only as aspects of whether Congress acted appropriately under the Fifteenth Amendment.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“As against the reserved powers of the States, Congress may use any rational means to effectuate the constitutional prohibition of racial discrimination in voting.” (383 U.S. at 324)

“We here hold that the portions of the Voting Rights Act properly before us are a valid means for carrying out the commands of the Fifteenth Amendment.” (383 U.S. at 337)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Congress enacted the Voting Rights Act of 1965 after extensive hearings and legislative findings concerning pervasive and persistent racial discrimination in voting. The record described the discriminatory use and administration of literacy tests, understanding tests, property qualifications, good-character requirements, grandfather clauses, voucher requirements, and other devices, particularly in several Southern States. Congress concluded that prior case-by-case litigation had been too slow and ineffective because jurisdictions repeatedly evaded decrees, adopted new discriminatory devices, or closed registration offices. South Carolina was covered by the Act's formula and challenged several operative provisions.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

By leave of the Supreme Court, South Carolina filed an original bill of complaint against the Attorney General. The Court expedited consideration, dispensed with appointment of a special master because the complaint raised no issues of fact, and permitted numerous States to participate as amici curiae. The Court denied the requested injunction and dismissed the bill of complaint.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Georgia v. Pennsylvania R. Co., 324 U.S. 439 (1945)
- McCulloch v. Maryland, 4 Wheat. 316 (1819)
- Ex parte Virginia, 100 U.S. 339 (1880)
- Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States, 379 U.S. 241 (1964)
- Katzenbach v. McClung, 379 U.S. 294 (1964)
- United States v. Darby, 312 U.S. 100 (1941)
- McGowan v. Maryland, 366 U.S. 420 (1961)
- Salsburg v. Maryland, 346 U.S. 545 (1953)
- Coyle v. Smith, 221 U.S. 559 (1911)
- Lassiter v. Northampton County Board of Elections, 360 U.S. 45 (1959)
- Louisiana v. United States, 380 U.S. 145 (1965)
- Alabama v. United States, 371 U.S. 37 (1962)
- United States v. Thomas, 362 U.S. 58 (1960)
- United States v. Raines, 362 U.S. 17 (1960)

- Massachusetts v. Mellon, 262 U.S. 447 (1923)
- Florida v. Mellon, 273 U.S. 12 (1927)
- United States v. Brown, 381 U.S. 437 (1965)
- Ex parte Garland, 4 Wall. 333 (1867)
- Neal v. Delaware, 103 U.S. 370 (1881)
- Guinn v. United States, 238 U.S. 347 (1915)
- Gomillion v. Lightfoot, 364 U.S. 339 (1960)
- Carrington v. Rash, 380 U.S. 89 (1965)
- Public Utilities Commission v. United States, 355 U.S. 534 (1958)
- United States v. California, 332 U.S. 19 (1947)
- Carlson v. Landon, 342 U.S. 524 (1952)
- Mulford v. Smith, 307 U.S. 38 (1939)