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Supreme Court Declines To Reinstate North Carolina Voter Restrictions

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A divided U.S. Supreme Court refused Wednesday to reinstate a set of voter restrictions enacted by the Republican-controlled Legislature in the battleground state of North Carolina.

Last month a federal appeals court invalidated the restrictions (<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/07/29/487935700/u-s-appeals-court-strikes-down-north-carolinas-voter-id-law>), declaring that they were deliberately targeted at making it more difficult for African-Americans to vote.

The restrictions were enacted in 2013 shortly after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a key provision (<http://www.npr.org/2013/06/25/195599353/supreme-court-up-to-congress-to-fix-voting-rights-act>) of the Voting Rights Act. That provision, until then, had required areas with a history of discrimination in voting to pre-clear any changes in voting laws with the Justice Department or the federal courts.

Once freed from that obligation, North Carolina, as well as other states, began enacting laws that minorities said were deliberately aimed at making it harder for them to vote. In the Tarheel State the restrictions ranged from strict requirements for photo IDs at the polls to the partial elimination of early voting and elimination of same-day registration.

In July, the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals threw out those restrictions as intentionally discriminatory. The court noted that the GOP-controlled Legislature had drafted the law after receiving data showing that African-Americans would be the most disadvantaged by the new rules.

Republican Gov. Pat McCrory then appealed to the Supreme Court, asking the justices to restore the law for the November election.

Late Wednesday, the Supreme Court refused to do that, with the justices split, for the most part, 4-to-4, and the court's most conservative justices falling one vote shy of the five votes it takes to block a lower court decision.

The court has been operating without a full complement of nine justices since the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in February and the refusal of the Republican-controlled Senate to consider President Obama's nominee, Merrick Garland, to replace him.

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