

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



Chapter 18 Voting and Elections

Lesson 1 Expanding Voting Rights

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Who should have the right to vote in a democracy?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

device a mechanism designed to serve a special purpose or perform a special function

minimum the least number possible

Content Vocabulary

election an orderly process for making group decisions

voting making a choice among alternatives in an election

suffrage the right to vote

disenfranchise to deprive of the right to vote

grandfather clause an exemption in a law for a certain group based on previous conditions

literacy test a test based on a person's ability to read or write

poll tax money paid in order to vote

TAKING NOTES: *Key Ideas and Details*

LISTING Use the graphic organizer to list some of the laws, customs, and procedures by which suffrage was restricted and expanded over the course of American history.

Restricted Suffrage	Expanded Suffrage

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ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Who should have the right to vote in a democracy?

Read each of the examples below and decide whether each person should have the right to vote in our democracy. List your reasons for each decision.

- Sue is 16 and very smart. She has taken a civics class in school and studied issues in the upcoming election.
- Mary is 92 years old. She uses a wheelchair and has trouble reading small print.
- Kavna is 48 years old. She dropped out of school at age 10 and cannot read or write well.
- Jeff has been diagnosed with schizophrenia and is currently living in a mental health hospital.
- Stan was convicted of a felony drug crime. He has served his time and was released from prison one month ago.
- Raul, now 22, was born in South America and moved to the U.S. with his parents when he was young. He is not a U.S. citizen.
- Marty is currently homeless. He has not had a permanent address in the past year and splits his time between shelters and parks in his city.

Voting Limitations in Early America

Guiding Question *Who could and could not vote in early America?*

An **election** is an orderly process for making group decisions. Free and fair elections are the key part of democracy. **Voting** is making a choice among alternatives in an election.

The right to vote is not absolute. It is limited by regulations and restrictions. Law, custom, and even violence have prevented certain groups of people from voting during some periods of American history.

The colonies placed many restrictions on who had the right to vote before the American Revolution. Women and most African Americans were not allowed to vote. White males who did not own property or pay taxes were not allowed to vote. Some colonies only allowed members of the dominant religious group to vote.

These rules meant that only about five or six percent of the adult population was eligible to vote. These restrictions existed because educated white men of the time believed that voting was best left to wealthy, white, property-owning males. They thought those men would make wiser choices. John Jay served on the U.S. Supreme Court as the first chief justice of the United States. He said that the people who own the country should be the people in charge of it.

The Constitution allowed the states to set the time, place, and manner of elections. Each state could have its own rules about who could vote in national elections. However, these rules must not violate the U.S. Constitution. Congress did not make many laws regulating elections until after the Civil War. But it did have the power to do so before then.

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State legislatures gradually abolished property requirements for voting during the first half of the 1800s. They also ended religious restrictions for voting. The country achieved nearly complete white adult male **suffrage** by the mid-1800s. Suffrage is the right to vote. Still, the vast majority of African Americans and all women could not vote.



Reading Progress Check

Describing What restrictions prevented most white males from voting in early America?

African American Suffrage

Guiding Question *How was African American suffrage restricted and extended in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?*

The Constitution went into effect in 1789. Enslaved and free African Americans made up about 20 percent of the U.S. population at that time. Enslaved persons were not permitted to vote anywhere. Free African Americans were allowed to vote in only a few states.

The Fifteenth Amendment

The first effort to extend suffrage to African Americans nationwide came shortly after the Civil War. That first effort was when the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870. This amendment said that no state could take away any citizen's right to vote because of race, color, or because they had once been enslaved. This was the first time that the U.S. Constitution dictated rules to the states about who they must allow to vote.

Grandfather Clause

The Fifteenth Amendment was an important achievement on the road to full suffrage. However, it did not result in complete voting rights for African Americans. Political leaders in Southern states set up a number of barriers to voting. They did this to **disenfranchise** and discourage African American voters from participating in elections. When people are disenfranchised, it means that they are prevented from voting.

One such practice was the **grandfather clause**. It was incorporated in the constitutions of some Southern states. The grandfather clause said that only voters whose grandfathers had voted before 1867 were eligible to vote without paying a tax or passing a **literacy test**. A literacy test measured whether a person was able to read or write. The grandfathers of most African Americans living in the South had been enslaved. They had not been permitted to vote. As a result, the grandfather clause prevented most African American Southerners from voting. In 1915, the Supreme Court declared the grandfather clause unconstitutional (*Guinn v. United States*). Even so, state governments throughout the South developed additional rules that prevented the vast majority of African Americans from voting.

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The Literacy Test and Poll Tax

Until the 1960s, many states required citizens to pass a literacy test to qualify to vote. White voters were usually judged literate if they could write their names. However, African American voters were often required to do much more. For example, they were often asked to explain a complicated part of the state or national constitution.

Another **device** that was designed to discourage African American suffrage was the poll tax. A device is a mechanism that performs a special function. Citizens had to pay a **poll tax** before they could vote in some places. The poll tax was usually only a dollar or two. However, the poll tax had to be paid both for the current year and also for previous unpaid years. It was a financial burden for poor people of all ethnic and racial backgrounds. The tax had to be paid long before Election Day. The poll-tax payer had to present a receipt showing payment before voting. Voters who did not have their receipts were prevented from voting. Thousands of African Americans in the states with poll taxes were unable to vote.

In 1964, the Twenty-fourth Amendment outlawed the poll tax in national elections. The use of the poll tax in state elections continued until a 1966 Supreme Court decision (*Harper v. Virginia Board of Election*).

The Voting Rights Acts

There were some improvements. However, many discriminatory practices still prevented African Americans from voting into the mid-twentieth century, especially in the South. One key goal of the civil rights movement of the 1960s was the fight for voting laws that would prohibit this discrimination. When Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the federal government took new steps to regulate state-controlled election procedures. The Voting Rights Act allowed the federal government to register voters. It also allowed the government to send poll watchers on Election Day to states and localities that discriminated against African American voters.

Voting rights laws of 1970, 1975, and 1982 also broadened the federal role in elections. Literacy tests were abolished. The laws also required that ballots be printed in Spanish for Spanish-speaking communities or in other minority languages where appropriate. The Voting Rights Acts resulted in a large increase in African American voter registration. In 1960 only 29 percent of all African Americans in the South were registered to vote. This figure increased to more than 65 percent by the year 2000.

More than 1,000 African Americans were elected to political office within a few years after the 1965 Voting Rights Act passed. Ten years after the law was passed, about 200 African American mayors served in cities of all sizes.

In 2006 Congress reauthorized the Voting Rights Act for another 25 years. Nearly everyone from both major political parties voted in favor of the law. Lawmakers reviewed thousands of pages of evidence. This led them to decide that racial discrimination in voting still happened in many parts of the country. Obvious forms of discrimination such as literacy tests had disappeared. However, more subtle forms of discrimination were still happening. For example, some states changed their district boundaries in order to spread minority voters out so they did not form a majority in any district. Other district boundaries were changed to put all the minority voters into one district. Both of these strategies were a form of gerrymandering. Voters in those districts had a small amount of political power compared to voters in other districts.

Until 2013, the Voting Rights Acts still placed special regulations on states with a history of voter discrimination. Those states had to ask for permission from the federal government before changing

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any of their voting laws. However, this changed after a 2013 case called *Shelby Co. v. Holder*. The Supreme Court ruled that the formula Congress used to decide which states had to follow these special regulations was unconstitutional because the formula was based on discrimination in place over 40 years ago. The Court said that Congress needed to develop a new way to decide which state and local governments would have all changes to their voting laws reviewed by the federal government. This decision ended the special federal review of certain states' voting laws. However, states and districts can still be sued for laws and actions that discriminate against minority voters on a case-by-case basis.

Supporters of the Supreme Court's decision believe it is good that local and state governments have more control over their own election and voting procedures. Critics of the decision are concerned that it damages the protections provided by the Voting Rights Act. Critics think the change makes it easier for state and local governments to enact laws that discriminate against some voters.

Other recent efforts at voting reform include the Help America Vote Act of 2002. This act says that states must meet federal requirements to reform the voting process. States must make the voting process as consistent and inclusive as possible.



Reading Progress Check

Comparing and Contrasting How were the literacy test, poll tax, and grandfather clause similar? How were they different?

Suffrage for Women and Youth

Guiding Question *How was suffrage extended to women and 18- to 21-year-olds?*

It was not until the twentieth century that both universal adult woman suffrage and 18- to 21-year-old suffrage were achieved.

Woman Suffrage

Women organized to fight for their right to vote beginning in the mid-1800s. Groups of women suffragists held meetings, gave speeches, wrote articles and pamphlets, and marched. Groups of women also lobbied for a constitutional amendment giving them the right to vote. Women held vigils and hunger strikes. Women practiced civil disobedience by unlawfully registering and voting. By 1914, women had won the right to vote in 11 states. All of these states were west of the Mississippi.

Women suffragists continued the fight for the right to vote during World War I. In 1917 the National Women's Party began picketing outside the White House and giving out leaflets. Alice Paul was the founder and leader of The National Women's Party. She wrote some of the leaflets, including one that said America was not a democracy because 20 million women were denied the right to vote. The leaflet asked readers to tell the government that women should be allowed to vote.

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The issue of woman suffrage gained momentum during the war. In 1918 President Woodrow Wilson reversed his position and announced his support for a woman suffrage amendment to the Constitution.

The Nineteenth Amendment was ratified after World War I. It put woman suffrage into effect nationwide. The struggle to get the vote was significant, but it ended once the Nineteenth Amendment passed. Women did not face the cultural or legal barriers to voting that many African Americans were forced to deal with far into the mid-twentieth century.

Exploring The Essential Question

Making Connections Why do you think that, once they could vote, women did not experience the same voter suppression laws and tactics as African Americans?

Suffrage for 18- to 21-Year-olds

The **minimum**, or the lowest possible, voting age in most states was 21 for many years. In the 1960s, many young Americans were fighting in Vietnam and many others became involved in protests and politics. They also started a movement to lower the voting age to 18. Individuals were considered old enough to be drafted and had to fight for their country at age 18. They argued that this meant individuals were also old enough to vote at age 18. The Twenty-sixth Amendment was ratified in 1971. It ended this debate by lowering the voting age to 18 in every state. More than 10 million citizens between the ages of 18 and 21 gained the right to vote. In 1972 a large number of young people exercised their right to vote for the first time.

Reading Progress Check

Summarizing What were some of the arguments for allowing women to vote and lowering the voting age to 18?
