

Voting in the United States

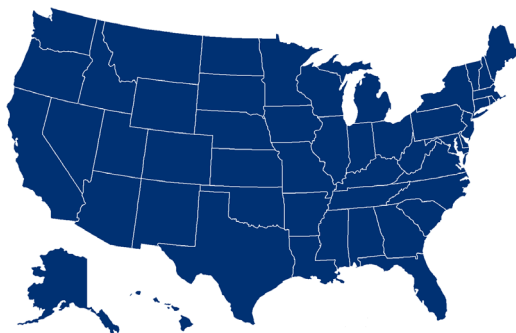
In some countries like Belgium, those who are eligible to vote must vote. If someone doesn't vote, that person could lose his or her job. So, almost everyone votes.

But, in the United States, there is no requirement to vote. The percentage of people eligible to vote who do vote is much lower than it is in Belgium, sometimes as low as 30 percent for a midterm election.

Some people argue that voting is a privilege and only those really interested and qualified should vote.

Others argue that voting is an important right and society should help people know their rights as well as help them be registered to vote.

Every adult citizen should be able to register to vote and should be voting. It took many years and many people worked very hard to ensure people of every race, religion, sex, and income level, have the opportunity to vote.



What Does It Mean to Vote?



A voter is someone who votes.



A voter expresses a personal opinion or preference by voting.



To vote is to help choose who will make decisions in government and what policies the government will adopt.



In a representative democracy, voting is the method by which the electorate appoints its representatives in its government and decides whether certain issues pass, or become part of a state constitution or whether certain taxes increase.

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This program is made possible in part by Ohio Humanities, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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*Creating a better government through
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The Vote



Voting and the Constitution

Who is Elected?

Who Should Vote?

Voting and the Constitution

1868

Fourteenth Amendment - guaranteed citizenship to anyone born in the US or naturalized.

1870

Fifteenth Amendment - guaranteed nonwhite men and freed slaves the right to vote. Unfortunately, in about 1877, Southern States started passing “Jim Crow” laws to disfranchise Blacks.

1913

Seventeenth Amendment - allowed voters to directly choose their State’s two senators by popular vote. Previously, Senators were elected by the legislatures of their States.

1920

Nineteenth Amendment - gave women in the United States the right to vote.

1924

Snyder Act - made Native Americans US Citizens with voting rights. But, some states had put into place poll tax or literacy requirements designed to prevent certain groups from voting.

1951

Twenty-Second Amendment - said no person shall be elected President more than twice.

1964

Twenty-Fourth Amendment - made it unconstitutional for either Congress or the States to charge a poll tax for voting.

1971

Twenty-Sixth Amendment - lowered the voting age to eighteen. The idea was that if you could be drafted at age eighteen (18) to go to war and possibly be killed, you should be able to vote for the elected officials who might send you to war or keep you from war.

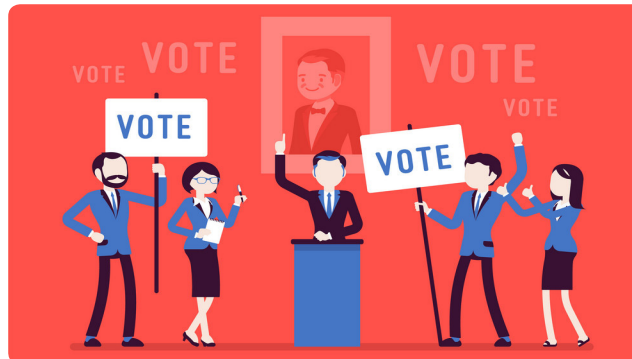
Who is elected?

After winning the American Revolution, the new country tried one type of government, the Articles of Confederation. But, that didn’t work. So, the Founding Fathers wrote the US Constitution and created a new type of government. It had three branches, Legislature, Executive and Judicial, so that control of the government and its policies would never be in the hands of one person. It had separate, independent states as well as the federal government so that neither the states nor the federal government could control everything.

The Founding Fathers decided the President should be elected by electors and each state should have a specific number of electors. The Constitution allowed each state to decide how to pick its electors. By the mid 1830’s, almost all states allowed citizens to vote in a specific district in order to choose electors who would then choose the President.

When the Constitution was written, the people could only vote for members of the House of Representatives. Each State’s legislator chose the two people who would be US Senators.

When the Constitution was written, Article I, Section 1, Clause 3 of the Constitution said that the person who won the most electoral votes became President, and the first runner up became Vice President. It turned out that didn’t work. The Twelfth Amendment, adopted in 1804, changed this, forcing people to decide who would be President separately from who would be Vice President.



We didn’t always have the right to vote.
Divine Right of Kings

In some European countries before the United States existed, people believed that the Creator had given their king his sacred authority. The king was perfect and could do no wrong. Like God, the king gave laws to His people. A king never dies, but is replaced by another king. For that reason, everyone had to obey the king. But, the king did not have to obey the laws.

In contrast, those fighting the American Revolution argued that the only people who could govern them were people who had been personally chosen by the colonists themselves. They argued that a representative of Americans should be not only chosen by the people, but should be one of the people.



It wasn’t so easy to get the right to vote.
Use it, don’t lose it.

There have been some very close elections, where a few votes would have made the difference as to who held office. In 2000, the winning presidential candidate had less than 600 votes more than the loser in a key state. A popular Cincinnati City Council woman lost a race in the late 1980s by just under 80 votes. There are other very close elections where just a few votes would have changed the outcome of the election.

Remember, if you are qualified to vote, you should register to vote and you should vote. Your vote matters. Keep your registration current so you can vote and help elect our local, state and federal governments as well as voice your opinion on those issues that go before voters. Then express your opinion by voting.