



Scholar Exchange: Voting Rights Amendments Class Outline and Worksheet

OVERVIEW

Part I: A Constitutional Story Walk

Part II: Founding Stories: Who Can Vote?

Part III: Supreme Court and Voting Rights

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What does the Constitution say about voting rights? What's in there, and what isn't? Who can vote in America (and when)?
- Before the Constitution, who could vote, and which level of government controlled the vote? (Federalism)
- How did Reconstruction transform voting rights in America? What were its limits?

PART I: A CONSTITUTIONAL STORY WALK

Structural Constitution

- Article I, [Section 2](#)
- Article I, [Section 3](#)
- Article I, [Section 4](#)
- [Article II, Section 1](#)

Big Takeaway: The Original Constitution left voting issues largely to the states. It's a story of federalism/state power.



Amendments

- [12th Amendment](#): Alters the Electoral College
- [14th Amendment](#): The Supreme Court uses the Equal Protection Clause to protect voting in a series of twentieth-century cases. Section 2 provides a mechanism for penalizing states when they deny African American men over the age of 21 access to the ballot box.
- [15th Amendment](#): Bans racial discrimination in voting.
- [17th Amendment](#): Provides for the popular election of U.S. Senators.
- [19th Amendment](#): Bans gender discrimination in voting.
- [23rd Amendment](#): Grants the District of Columbia three Electors in the Electoral College—giving D.C. a voice in presidential elections.
- [24th Amendment](#): Bans poll taxes in national elections.
- [26th Amendment](#): Protects voting rights for those eighteen and older.

Big Takeaway: Several amendments extend protections to new groups, including protections based on race (Fifteenth Amendment), gender (Nineteenth Amendment), and age (Twenty-Sixth Amendment). While the states still play a central role in elections, various amendments establish an increased role for the national government in some contexts—most notably, through the enforcement clauses of the Fifteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-Fourth, and Twenty-Sixth Amendments. (This is still a federalism story.)



PART II: FOUNDING STORIES: WHO CAN VOTE?**DATE: 1776-1791**

Who gets to vote at this time? Generally, which people at the founding had the right to vote?	White Men White women African American Men
Does the Original Constitution include a right to vote?	
Does the Bill of Rights?	

DATE: 1820s-1850s

How does voting change for women at this time? Do they get the right to vote?	
Do African American men or women have the right to vote at this time?	
Can you name one or two people you learned about who fought for the right to vote?	

DATE: 1860s-1920s

Name the big amendment that added voting rights into the Constitution for African American males.	
Name one person who fought for the right to vote.	
What year did the Indian Citizenship Act begin to give Native American's the right to vote in America?	



PART III: SUPREME COURT AND VOTING RIGHTS

One of the Civil Rights Movement’s landmark achievements was the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (“VRA”). What Amendment did it cite from the Constitution?

Can you name the recent major case that discussed the Voting Rights Act of 1965?

How are these cases still about federalism and the relationship between state and federal power?

Extra Credit, Answer 2 of 3: What does the Original Constitution say about voting rights? How did constitutional amendments transform the Constitution and its relationship to voting? What are the relative roles of the national government and the states in this context?