Power at the Polls

How Progressive Era reforms changed political power

SS24.US1.20b "Describe the political reforms passed during the Progressive Era."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the name of each political reform, then circle words that show what voters gained because of it. Use your marks to compare the reforms.

Who Gets a Say?

1 At the start of the twentieth century, a party boss could help choose candidates before most voters had a say. Progressives wanted citizens to have more control over government. States adopted the direct primary, an election in which party voters, rather than party leaders alone, chose their party's candidates. At the national level, the Seventeenth Amendment, ratified in 1913, required voters to elect U.S. senators directly. Previously, state legislatures selected senators, a process critics believed could invite backroom deals. Both reforms changed who made important choices, but a primary selects a candidate, while a general election chooses an officeholder.

2 What if lawmakers refused to consider a popular proposal? In some states, progressives won the initiative, which lets voters propose a state law, usually by gathering enough signatures to place it on the ballot. A referendum puts a proposed law before voters for approval or rejection. Depending on state rules, it may come from lawmakers or from citizens challenging an existing law. The recall gave voters a way to vote on removing certain elected officials before their terms ended. These measures did not work identically in every state, but each shifted some political power from officials to voters.

3 Voting access also changed, though not for everyone equally. After decades of organizing by suffragists, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920. It prohibited denying the right to vote on account of sex, greatly expanding women's political power. Yet barriers such as poll taxes and literacy tests continued to keep many Black Americans from voting, especially in the South. Taken together, Progressive Era reforms changed candidate selection, lawmaking, and participation in elections. They did not end corruption or guarantee equal access to the ballot. Reformers had opened new routes for public influence, but who could use those routes still mattered.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the direct primary and the Seventeenth Amendment change two different choices voters could make?

2. How did the initiative and the referendum give voters different roles in making laws?

3. How could a recall address an elected official's misconduct in a way a referendum could not directly address it?

4. How did the Nineteenth Amendment expand political participation, and what limits remained?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

In a fictional state, lawmakers refuse to consider a ban on gifts from donors, and the governor has accepted such gifts but still has years in office. In 3 to 5 sentences, recommend two reforms from the passage, choose which to pursue first, and explain one limit of relying on voter power.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.20b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the name of each political reform, then circle words that show what voters gained because of it. Use your marks to compare the reforms. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the direct primary and the Seventeenth Amendment change two different choices voters could make?	**The direct primary let party voters choose their party's candidates. The Seventeenth Amendment let voters elect U.S. senators instead of having state legislatures select them.**
2	How did the initiative and the referendum give voters different roles in making laws?	**The initiative let voters propose a state law for the ballot. A referendum let voters approve or reject a proposed law.**
3	How could a recall address an elected official's misconduct in a way a referendum could not directly address it?	**A recall could let voters remove the official before the term ended. A referendum concerns a law, not an official's removal.**
4	How did the Nineteenth Amendment expand political participation, and what limits remained?	**It prohibited denying the vote on account of sex. Poll taxes and literacy tests still kept many Black Americans from voting, especially in the South.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would first seek an initiative so residents could put a ban on gifts from donors on the ballot when lawmakers refuse to act. I would also seek a recall rule so voters could remove the governor before the term ends. The initiative comes first because a law could set rules for many officials, not just the governor. Neither reform guarantees fair government if barriers keep some residents from voting.

Accept descriptions that accurately distinguish choosing candidates, electing senators, proposing or voting on laws, removing officials, and expanding voting rights. For Part 3, accept either reform as the first priority if the student explains the choice and identifies a relevant limit.