The Ballot Gap

Compare voting barriers and weigh ways to reduce them.

SS24.USG.7c "Analyze historic and current barriers to voting access and voter turnout, and weigh the benefits and consequences of possible solutions."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two historic barriers and circle two present-day barriers. Number the two voting options in the final paragraph, then draw an arrow from each option to a barrier it could reduce.

Who Can Cast a Ballot?

1. In 1960, a Black citizen in parts of the South might face a literacy test graded by a registrar who could pass white applicants and fail Black applicants. Some states also charged poll taxes, making voters pay before casting a ballot. Officials used these rules to exclude Black citizens despite the Fifteenth Amendment's ban on denying voting rights because of race. The Twenty-Fourth Amendment banned poll taxes in federal elections in 1964; a 1966 Supreme Court ruling banned them in state elections. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 and later amendments prohibited literacy tests nationwide, removing a tool of discrimination.

2. Today, a voter may be legally eligible yet still struggle to cast a ballot. A worker whose shift overlaps polling hours may lose wages by leaving work; a voter without a car may face a long trip and a long line. These obstacles can reduce turnout without explicitly banning anyone from voting. Identification rules pose a different debate: supporters say they help confirm voter identity, while critics say obtaining an accepted ID can require time, documents, or travel. Rules differ by state, so the burden is not the same everywhere. People facing several obstacles at once may have the fewest practical choices.

3. Consider two responses. More days of in-person early voting can give shift workers additional chances to vote and may spread crowds across days. Yet extra hours require staff, sites, and funding; a distant site still leaves a transportation barrier. Voting by mail removes the trip and lets voters complete a ballot on their own schedule. However, voters need a reliable way to receive and return ballots, and officials need time to verify them. A policy can improve access for some people while leaving others behind. Weighing a solution means asking whose turnout it might increase and what new costs or obstacles it could create.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did literacy tests restrict voting differently from the work and transportation obstacles described today?

2. How does a poll tax differ from the costs a voter might face when obtaining an accepted ID?

3. Which barrier could more days of early voting reduce, and which barrier might it leave in place? Explain.

4. Why might voting by mail increase turnout for some voters but remain difficult for others?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a county where many eligible voters work weekday shifts and the only polling place is far from several neighborhoods. In five sentences, propose one change not named in the passage, explain how it might affect turnout, identify one cost or risk, and suggest how to limit that cost or risk.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.7c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two historic barriers and circle two present-day barriers. Number the two voting options in the final paragraph, then draw an arrow from each option to a barrier it could reduce. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did literacy tests restrict voting differently from the work and transportation obstacles described today?	**Officials used literacy tests to exclude Black applicants from voting. Work schedules and transportation can prevent eligible people from reaching the polls without explicitly banning them.**
2	How does a poll tax differ from the costs a voter might face when obtaining an accepted ID?	**A poll tax required payment before voting. Obtaining an accepted ID may instead require time, documents, or travel, depending on state rules.**
3	Which barrier could more days of early voting reduce, and which barrier might it leave in place? Explain.	**Additional voting days could help a shift worker find time to vote, but a distant voting site could still be hard to reach.**
4	Why might voting by mail increase turnout for some voters but remain difficult for others?	**Voting by mail removes the trip and allows voters to use their own schedule, but they need a reliable way to receive and return a ballot.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The county could partner with employers to offer two hours of paid voting leave on Election Day. Workers who fear lost wages would have a better chance to vote, which could raise turnout. Employers, especially small businesses, would have to cover the cost of those hours. The county could offer participating small businesses partial reimbursement to limit that cost. Paid leave would not solve long trips for voters without cars.

Accept other passage-supported comparisons and tradeoffs. For the open task, look for a distinct proposal, a plausible effect on turnout, a cost or risk, and a response to that drawback.