The Changing Ballot

How voting methods and voting rights evolved

9-12.GOV.49 "Describe the evolution of voting (methods and process) and enfranchisement including key amendments (15th, 19th, 23rd, 24th, 26th) and laws (1965 Voting Rights Act) that have extended the right to vote to previously disenfranchised..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline changes in how people cast ballots, circle each amendment or law that expanded access to voting, and number the circled changes in chronological order.

Who Could Vote, and How?

1 At the founding, states set voting rules. Most barred women and enslaved people, and many required men to own property. Ballots also changed: some voters declared a choice aloud, and political parties later printed ballots that voters brought to the polls. By the late 1800s, states began adopting government-printed secret ballots, which made it harder to pressure a voter at the polls. Today's registered voters may mark a paper ballot or use a voting machine, depending on local rules. A new way to cast a ballot, however, does not necessarily mean that more people are allowed to vote.

2 After the Civil War, the 15th Amendment (1870) prohibited denying a citizen's vote because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Yet discriminatory state rules, threats, and violence kept many Black Americans from voting. The 19th Amendment (1920) prohibited denying the vote because of sex, extending voting rights to women who had been excluded. The 23rd Amendment (1961) gave residents of Washington, D.C., a voice in presidential elections by granting the district electoral votes. It did not give them voting representation in Congress. Each amendment changed who could participate, but legal guarantees did not always end barriers at polling places.

3 The 24th Amendment (1964) banned poll taxes in federal elections, so voters could not be charged to vote for president or members of Congress. In 1965, the Voting Rights Act attacked racial discrimination in voting. It suspended literacy tests in places with records of discrimination and authorized federal oversight of certain election practices. The 26th Amendment (1971) protected the right of citizens age 18 and older to vote, allowing younger adults to participate. Together, these changes show two kinds of progress: expanding who qualifies to vote and removing obstacles that prevent eligible people from exercising that right.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why was the Voting Rights Act needed even after the 15th Amendment?

2. How did the 19th and 26th Amendments extend voting rights to different groups?

3. How did the 23rd and 24th Amendments address different barriers to participation?

4. How was adopting secret ballots a different kind of change from passing the voting amendments?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75 to 100 word label for a museum display titled “Who Gets a Ballot?” Trace at least three dated legal changes from the passage in chronological order, including the Voting Rights Act, and explain how a change in voting method differs from a change in access.

ANSWER KEY

The Changing Ballot

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.GOV.49

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline changes in how people cast ballots, circle each amendment or law that expanded access to voting, and number the circled changes in chronological order. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why was the Voting Rights Act needed even after the 15th Amendment?	**The 15th Amendment barred denial based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude, but discriminatory rules, threats, and violence still kept many Black Americans from voting. The Voting Rights Act targeted discriminatory practices and authorized federal oversight.**
2	How did the 19th and 26th Amendments extend voting rights to different groups?	**The 19th barred denial of the vote because of sex, extending rights to women who had been excluded. The 26th protected voting rights for citizens age 18 and older.**
3	How did the 23rd and 24th Amendments address different barriers to participation?	**The 23rd gave Washington, D.C., residents a voice in presidential elections through electoral votes. The 24th removed poll taxes as a barrier in federal elections.**
4	How was adopting secret ballots a different kind of change from passing the voting amendments?	**Secret ballots changed how people cast votes and helped protect them from pressure. The amendments changed who could vote or removed a barrier to voting.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Early voters sometimes announced their choices aloud, but secret ballots later helped protect privacy at the polls. The 15th Amendment (1870) barred denying a citizen's vote based on race, yet threats and discriminatory rules still blocked many Black voters. The 19th Amendment (1920) barred denial based on sex. The Voting Rights Act (1965) targeted discriminatory practices, including literacy tests in places with records of discrimination. Finally, the 26th Amendment (1971) protected voting for citizens age 18 and older. Secret ballots changed how people voted; these laws changed access to voting.

Accept other accurate sets of at least three dated legal changes in chronological order if they include the Voting Rights Act. The label should distinguish a change in ballot-casting methods from a change in who can vote or what barriers eligible voters face.