Paths to Participation

How Oklahoma voters can shape public decisions

OKH.C.5.5 "Examine how the Oklahoma State Constitution includes several provisions to promote democratic participation by citizens, such as the direct primary, initiative petition..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each way citizens can influence a public decision, and circle a rule or step needed to use that way. Your marks will help you compare what each process allows voters to do.

More Than One Way to Vote

1. Imagine an election with two stages: choosing candidates, then choosing officeholders. The Oklahoma Constitution directs lawmakers to provide a system of direct primary elections. In a primary, eligible voters choose a party's nominee for an office. That nominee can then appear on the general election ballot. Voters have a say before the final contest, not just on Election Day. The constitution protects voting rights, while state election laws set procedures for registration and voting. An eligible resident must register by the state's deadline to vote in a state election. These rules shape who can participate, not which candidate wins.

2. Citizens can also bring policy questions to a statewide vote. Through an initiative petition, supporters gather the required signatures to propose a new state law or constitutional amendment for voters to consider. For example, residents might propose a law about protecting hiking trails. A referendum works in the other direction: citizens can petition to put an eligible law already passed by the state legislature before voters for approval or rejection. Both routes require a petition process before a statewide vote. The key difference is what starts the process: a proposed change from citizens or a law lawmakers have already passed.

3. Not every form of participation operates statewide. Oklahoma's Constitution allows municipalities to provide for recall in their local charters. Where a charter permits it, residents can use the required process to call an election on whether a local official should remain in office. That does not create a general power to recall state officials. These routes give citizens different kinds of influence: selecting nominees, proposing policy, reviewing a law, or deciding whether certain local officials should stay. To cast a ballot in a state election, a voter must meet eligibility rules and register on time under state law.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does a direct primary give voters influence at a different stage than the general election?

2. Residents want to propose a new state law. Why would they use an initiative petition rather than a referendum?

3. Why could a voter in one Oklahoma city have a recall option that a voter in another city does not?

4. What must an eligible resident do before voting in a state election, and how is that different from signing a petition?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

An eligible state law reduces funding for public libraries. Write four sentences explaining how citizens could respond with a referendum, how an initiative would pursue a different change, why recalling a state legislator is not the same option, and one step a voter must take before voting.

ANSWER KEY

Paths to Participation

HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.5.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each way citizens can influence a public decision, and circle a rule or step needed to use that way. Your marks will help you compare what each process allows voters to do. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does a direct primary give voters influence at a different stage than the general election?	**In a direct primary, voters choose a party's nominee before the general election, when voters choose an officeholder.**
2	Residents want to propose a new state law. Why would they use an initiative petition rather than a referendum?	**An initiative petition can put a proposed new law before voters. A referendum puts an eligible law already passed by the legislature before voters.**
3	Why could a voter in one Oklahoma city have a recall option that a voter in another city does not?	**Recall is available only where a municipality's charter permits it and its required process is followed.**
4	What must an eligible resident do before voting in a state election, and how is that different from signing a petition?	**The resident must register by the state's deadline to vote. Signing a petition is a step toward placing a question on the ballot, not casting a vote on it.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Citizens could gather the required signatures for a referendum petition so voters can approve or reject the library funding law. With an initiative petition, they could instead propose a new state law that increases library funding. Recall is not a general way to remove a state legislator, since the recall option described here applies to officials in municipalities whose charters permit it. An eligible voter must register by the state's deadline before voting in the state election.

Accept answers that distinguish a proposed law from review of a law already passed. For the final task, the proposed initiative need not address library funding, but it must propose a new state law.