Who Gets to Vote?

Compare how two democracies protect access to elections.

USG.P.2.1 "Demonstrate an understanding of the principles of government, the benefits of democratic systems, and their responsibilities as citizens..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one protection for voting in each country. Circle who runs elections in each country, then number two changes that expanded voting access.

Voting Rights and Government Power

1. In the United States, the Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, barred denying a citizen's vote because of race. Yet states later used literacy tests to block many Black voters. Congress passed the Voting Rights Act in 1965, restricting literacy tests; later amendments banned them nationwide. The Constitution divides power: Congress makes federal laws, while states usually run elections. Federal law can limit state election rules that violate voting protections. Citizens can help protect access by voting and reporting unfair barriers.

2. South Africa's apartheid government denied most Black citizens the vote in national elections. After the country's first national election with universal adult suffrage in 1994, its 1996 Constitution protected that right, along with regular elections and a multiparty system. The constitution established an independent Electoral Commission to manage elections. Parliament chooses the president, unlike the United States, where voters select presidential electors. South Africans can register, vote, and watch whether elections are fair. These safeguards help keep a ruling party from controlling the vote.

3. These histories show that a written promise alone may not remove barriers. In the United States, a constitutional amendment set a principle, but Congress later used federal law to curb discriminatory state practices. In South Africa, a new constitution protected voting rights and assigned election management to an independent body. Each arrangement shapes policy: lawmakers must consider equal access, and election officials must apply rules fairly. Citizens have a responsibility to question barriers, not just cast ballots.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did the United States need a federal voting law after the Fifteenth Amendment?

2. How does responsibility for running elections differ between the two countries?

3. How did South Africa's 1996 Constitution change both voting rights and government structure?

4. What shared principle connects the U.S. voting law and South Africa's election safeguards?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A government proposes closing half its polling places to save money. In four sentences, compare how the U.S. and South African systems could respond, propose a fairer policy, and name one action citizens could take.

ANSWER KEY

Who Gets to Vote?

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one protection for voting in each country. Circle who runs elections in each country, then number two changes that expanded voting access. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did the United States need a federal voting law after the Fifteenth Amendment?	**States still used literacy tests to block many Black voters, so Congress passed a law restricting those tests.**
2	How does responsibility for running elections differ between the two countries?	**U.S. states usually run elections; South Africa's independent Electoral Commission manages them.**
3	How did South Africa's 1996 Constitution change both voting rights and government structure?	**It protected universal adult suffrage and established an independent commission to manage elections.**
4	What shared principle connects the U.S. voting law and South Africa's election safeguards?	**Both aim to protect fair access to voting by limiting barriers or control over elections.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In the United States, states usually run elections, but federal voting protections can limit discriminatory rules. In South Africa, the independent Electoral Commission would manage polling under the constitution's protection of universal adult suffrage. Officials could keep sites open where closing them would make voting difficult. Citizens could report barriers and ask officials to explain their decisions.

Accept other accurate comparisons that distinguish state election administration from South Africa's independent commission. For the open task, the proposed policy and citizen action should address access to voting.