

Name _____

Date _____

Voting

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. The word “democracy” comes from Greek and means, roughly, “people power.” In a democracy, the citizens have a voice in how the government is run. Sometimes, this takes the form of direct democracy. That’s when citizens vote on actual decisions. In the US, examples of direct democracy include ballot measures or propositions. For instance, a local election might include a measure that asks citizens if they support the city investing in a new bike path. If the majority of votes support the proposition, it passes. If not, it fails.

More often, elections in the US are examples of representative democracy. That’s when citizens don’t vote on decisions directly but instead choose a candidate they want to make decisions in accordance with their beliefs. Midterm elections are a good example of representative democracy at work. The midterms occur every four years at the midpoint of the president’s term in office and determine who will fill many of the seats in the United States Congress. That’s the branch of government that makes federal laws.

Namita is voting in a state election. She selects the candidate she wants to be state senator, a position that involves drafting and approving changes to state laws. This election is an example of

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| A. a ballot measure. | B. an executive order. |
| C. direct democracy. | D. representative democracy. |

2. In the US, voting is a right. That means a citizen who meets the requirements is allowed to vote by law. Voting is also considered a civic responsibility, or good citizenship. That’s because voting helps democracy function better. To understand why, imagine that 20 students are eligible to vote for class president. 12 prefer Candidate A, and 8 prefer Candidate B. You might expect Candidate A to win with 60% of the vote (12 out of 20). But what happens if six voters who support Candidate A decide *not* to vote? They might think Candidate A will win without them and decide to sit out. Then Candidate B will actually end up winning with 57% (8 out of 14). And what happens if six students who support Candidate B decide not to vote? They might think their votes won’t matter since their candidate is not favored to win. Then Candidate A will end up winning by almost 86% (12 out of 14). It will seem like Candidate A had much more support from her classmates if people choose to be silent.

Which of these best explains why voting is considered a civic responsibility and good citizenship?

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| A. By voting, citizens help make sure decisions will benefit a broader range of Americans. | B. By voting, citizens can be sure that the candidate they support always wins. |
| C. Citizens who are eligible and registered are legally allowed to vote. | D. By not voting, citizens risk losing their voting rights. |

3. In an election, turnout is the percent of people who actually cast a ballot. Compared to other democratic countries, the US as a whole typically has low turnout. Turnout varies across different groups within the US, too. Generation X and younger generations, like Millennials, are the majority of eligible voters in the US. However, in 2014, they cast 21 million fewer votes than older generations did. Typically, new voters (ages 18-21) have the lowest turnout of any age group.

Based on the passage, which of these is true of US voter turnout?

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| A. Younger voters are often underrepresented in federal elections. | B. Turnout of each age group is roughly equal to its share of the population. |
| C. Older generations are usually the most underrepresented in federal elections. | D. Millennials usually have a higher turnout than Generation X in federal elections. |

4. At the founding of the country, only white landowning men were granted suffrage. When Andrew Jackson promoted what was then called “universal suffrage,” it meant voting rights for all white men with no land-ownership requirement. The list below includes major legislation that expanded voting rights in the US and how these changes came about.

- **1869:** The 15th Amendment granted all men the right to vote regardless of race or previous servitude. That meant black men, including former slaves, were allowed to vote for the first time. This first major expansion to voting rights was passed during the Reconstruction Era after the Civil War. However, discriminatory state laws and violence kept many eligible black voters from registering and voting in many southern states for almost another century.
- **1920:** The 19th amendment granted women the right to vote, ending the Women’s Suffrage Movement’s decades-long fight for voting rights.
- **1965:** The Voting Rights Act banned literacy tests and other obstacles that had prevented eligible African Americans from voting. It also required some states to have federal pre-approval before making changes to voting processes. This act was signed after civil rights groups and activists came to Selma, Alabama and organized a series of marches.
- **1971:** The 26th Amendment lowered the minimum voting age from 21 to 18. This was the last major expansion of voting rights. It came after protesters drew attention to the draft for the Vietnam War, which was sending men to war for a country where they were too young to vote.

The rights of the 15th Amendment were expanded and protected by which of these later pieces of legislation?

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| A. the 16th Amendment | B. the 19th Amendment |
| C. the 26th Amendment | D. the Voting Rights Act |

5. Today, Americans are eligible to vote if they are at least 18 years old, US citizens, state residents, and--in 48 states--not currently in prison or on parole for a felony. In 49 states, eligible voters must register to vote. North Dakota is the only state that does not require this. The exact rules for how and when to register vary by state. Some states offer same-day registration, but many have registration deadlines ahead of Election Day. Some states have voter ID laws. These require voters to have official identification to register, receive a ballot or vote. If you're eligible to vote or will be soon, be sure you know how and when to register and what you'll need to vote in your state.

Which of these is governed by federal and not state law?

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| A. registration deadlines | B. voter ID requirements |
| C. minimum voting age | D. the registration process |
6. Civic responsibility includes registering to vote and voting. But just filling out a ballot is not enough; it's important to be an informed voter. In any election, there can be many issues to consider. Being an informed voter starts with knowing which issues you care most about. What do you want your candidate to do about those issues? Being informed involves researching the candidates and finding out what their stances are on those issues. You can learn about their platforms, read articles about them and check out their official websites. There's a lot of information out there! Remember to look out for bias and fact-check your sources. Watching debates allows you to hear directly from candidates as they talk about their ideas and visions. Once you have formed your opinion, make sure you have a plan for Election Day. How and when will you vote? Help others get excited to vote, too!

Which of these best describes an informed voter?

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| A. Javier, who did not realize there was an election today | B. Jordan, who knows what's on the ballot, who he will vote for and why |
| C. Samantha, who knows there's an election but not what's on the ballot | D. Evan, who does a quick internet search about the candidates on his way to vote |