

Voting

By Amanda D. Clark

Definition:

Voting is an act in which a person makes their opinion known on a certain subject. Usually, it is talked about in the context of the process by which a citizen casts a ballot in a democratic election.

Significance to Civic/Political Engagement:

Voting is seen as one of the most fundamental rights of citizens in a democracy. Voting allows people to express their choice for the way in which government should be run. Voting at every level, from small municipal elections to Presidential elections, can influence who is put in office and how policy decisions will be made. In some cases, direct referendums can change policy without going through elected officials.

Although many may feel that one vote cannot change the system, the importance of voting is underscored by how hard people fight for their right to vote or, conversely, how hard they fight to suppress the vote. In the United States, the battle over voting rights has been raging since the beginning of the republic. These battles are complicated by federalism; individual states and counties run elections, while the federal government may pass laws upholding the rights of groups of Americans to vote.

Select Timeline of Voting Rights:

The United States has a long, slow, contentious history of expanding voting rights to all citizens. <https://www.ivotecef.org/timeline>

Key Ideas/Tools:

Examples of processes to increase voter participation:

- Vote by mail (VBM)- Voters may request a ballot be mailed to their residential address, where they can mark and return the ballot to their local election official. Rules on this process vary by state and county. However, this process has been expanding over the last few decades as some states seek to increase voter participation.
- Early voting- This is a distinct period prior to an election where voters can come to a physical location to vote. If available, these time frames vary from state to state.
- Voter Registration Act of 1993- This act, known as “Motor Voter”, required motor vehicle agencies to offer voter registration services.
- Felon voting rights- Voting fights for the incarcerated vary from state to state. There are campaigns across the country to restore these voting rights to the incarcerated or formerly incarcerated.



Examples of processes that hinder voter participation:

- Voter ID requirements- requiring a photo ID or a street address to vote often disenfranchises younger voters, voters of color, and indigenous Americans living on reservations that only have P.O. boxes.
- English only or ableist resources- providing ballots and instructions only in English or not providing ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant options to vote hinders voter participation.
- Voter roll purges- states use voter roll purges to delete registered voters off the list under the pretense that they are making things more efficient (reducing duplicate names, removing deceased voters etc). Voters may or may not be notified of this removal and the need to re-register to vote.
- Budget reductions and poll location closures- states may cut funding to localities for elections or close polling places entirely. Closed polling locations are usually located in communities of color.

Further Scholarly Resources:

Books:

The Fight to Vote, by Michael Waldman. (Simon & Schuster, 2016).

Give Us the Ballot by Ari Berman. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015).

100 Years of the Nineteenth Amendment: An Appraisal of Women's Political Activism by Holly J. McCammon and Lee Ann Banaszak. (Oxford University Press, 2018).

One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression is Destroying Our Democracy, by Carol Anderson. (Bloomsbury, 2018).

Websites:

Elections and Voting in Ohio, <https://www.ohiosos.gov/elections/voters/>

League of Women Voters, <https://www.lwv.org/>

Voting Rights, <https://www.aclu.org/issues/voting-rights>

Voting and Elections, <https://www.usa.gov/voting>

Voting Rights Alliance, <https://www.votingrightsalliance.org/>

Voto Latino, <https://votolatino.org>

Zinn Education Project,

[https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/?cond\[0\]=themes_str:Voting+Rights](https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/?cond[0]=themes_str:Voting+Rights)

Developed in Collaboration with the Growing Democracy Project.

Learn more about the Growing Democracy Project at www.GrowingDemocracyOH.org

