

# DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

## PART ONE

# WHO CAN VOTE?



## WHAT TODAY'S YOUTH SAY:

**There is still a low turnout rate among young adults in this country. What will it take to bring our nation's youth to the polls?**



**EMILY SEDDON:**  
Montpelier

Have the candidates come to schools and have open conversations with students. It makes it more personal and more real. A lot of the problem is that we feel removed from democracy. Voter registration days at schools are an easy way to encourage voter registration.



**RYAN KERR:**  
Brattleboro

Young people are talking and they do know what's going on. You'd think that would make them want to vote, but for some reason it's like work to register. We can run mock elections and try to get them to see that their vote does matter.



**AARON VOLDMAN:**  
S. Burlington

We have to stand up and encourage politicians to start communicating with us. If there is a stronger sense of connection, voter turnout will rise. It's our job to push as it's their job to produce.



**SHIRA STERNBERG:**  
Bennington

There should be programs set up where teachers register students when they turn 18. The majority of students are willing to register. It's that you have to help them or they'll have no idea how to do it. It's not because they don't care.

## WHO CAN VOTE?

The ability to vote and to have a say in how our country is run is one of our most precious and valuable rights. But not everyone in this country has that right. Some people are denied the right to vote because they do not meet the eligibility requirements set by their state law.

### WHO CAN VOTE IN VERMONT?

Any 18 year old United States citizen living in Vermont who has taken the voter's oath may register to vote in Vermont.

### WHO CAN'T VOTE?

Since the 1920s, non-citizens have been denied the right to vote, even if they lived in the United States most of their life. Some states (but not Vermont) allow non-citizens to vote in local elections such as for city council.

Many states have laws that prohibit convicted felons from voting. In Vermont convicted felons can vote -- even while they are in jail! Many of the 48 states that prohibit felons from voting prevent felons from ever voting again. Others prohibit voting only while the person is in jail.

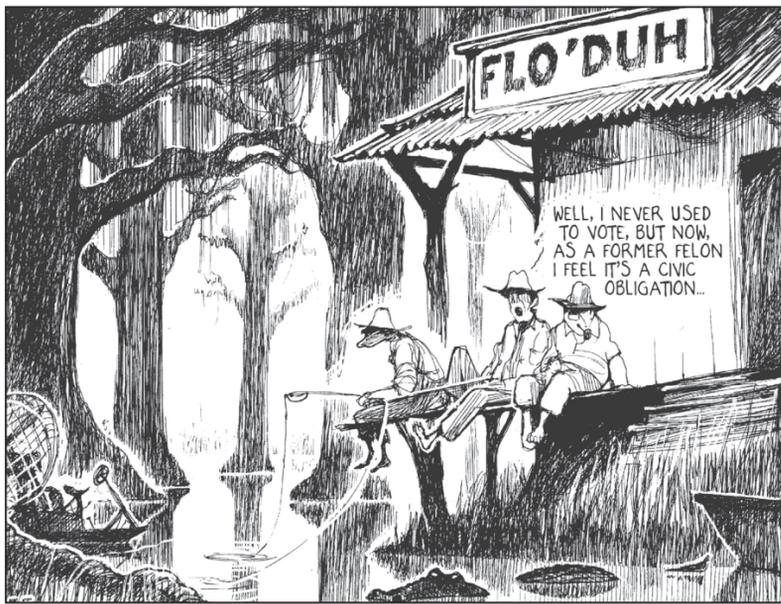
Some people argue that the ban on felons voting should be changed because it disproportionately affects people of color. Although more white people are arrested for committing crimes than people of other races (6,324,000 white arrests to 2,745,000 arrests of other races in the year 2000) it is seven times more likely for an African American to be convicted of a felony. Today, 13% of all African American men have lost the right to vote because of a felony conviction. Those who support the ban say that those

who break the law should not have a say in determining what the laws should be.

44 States have laws that could be used to keep people with certain mental illnesses from voting. Vermont's constitution prohibits those "not of a quiet and peaceable behavior" from voting. Although this language has been used to permit the town constable to remove unruly citizens from town meeting or the polling place, it has never been used to bar individuals who are mentally ill from voting. Did you know that 2.7% of all Vermonters have been diagnosed with some kind of mental illness?

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

**Should non-citizens be allowed to vote? Visit [VermontVotesforKids.com/vtvotes/dia.shtml](http://VermontVotesforKids.com/vtvotes/dia.shtml) to answer.**



## ARE YOU SMART ENOUGH TO VOTE?

Literacy tests were one of many tools used to prevent certain people from exercising their right to vote. A test similar to this was administered to African Americans before they could vote. Take the test to see how you would have fared.

1. Which of the following is a right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights?  
- Public education  
- Employment  
- Voting  
- Trial by Jury

2. If a person is indicted for a crime, name two rights that he or she has.

3. A U.S. senator elected at the general election in November takes office the following year on what date?

4. A person opposed to swearing in the oath may instead say:  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. To serve as a president of the United States a person must have been born in the U.S. and be how old?  
- 25 years  
- 35 years  
- 40 years  
- 45 years

6. If a law passed by a state is contrary to provisions of the U.S. Constitution, which law prevails?

7. If a vacancy occurs in the U.S. Senate, the state must hold an election, but meanwhile the place may be filled by a temporary appointment made by \_\_\_\_\_.

8. The Constitution protects an individual against punishments that are:

9. Name two things that the states are forbidden to do by the U.S. Constitution.

10. Upon the impeachment of the chief justice of the Supreme Court of the U.S., who tries the case?

### VOTER IQ ANSWERS

1. Trial by jury only
2. Immediate presentation of charges; lawyers; speedy trial; trial by jury
3. January 3
4. Affirm
5. 35
6. U.S. Constitution
7. The governor
8. Cruel and unusual
9. Coin money; make treaties
10. The Senate

## SUFFRAGE TIMELINE

### Suffrage - n. right of voting in political election

**1776** - At the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the right to vote is based on property ownership and is reserved primarily for white, male Protestants over the age of 21.

**1777** - Vermont moves the country with a pioneering spirit as the state declares all adult, white males, irrespective of property ownership or religious preference, can vote.

**1789** - George Washington is elected president by the Electoral College. Only 6 percent of the entire population is involved in the election.

**1868** - After the Civil War lawmakers enact the 14th Amendment to the Constitution granting citizenship to African Americans and permitting them to vote.

**1876** - Poll taxes, grandfather clauses and literacy tests are introduced in many

southern states to restrict the ability of African Americans to register and vote.

**1890** - Wyoming is the first state to provide suffrage for women in its Constitution.

**1920** - The 19th Amendment to the Constitution guarantees suffrage for women.

**1943** - Georgia lowers its voting age from 21 to 18 in state and local elections.

**1964** - The 24th Amendment to the Constitution guarantees that no person can be denied the right to vote due to an inability to pay a tax prior to voting. The "poll tax" is now considered unconstitutional.

**1965** - The Voting Rights Act is amended to ban the use of literacy tests, poll taxes and other barriers to voting.

**1971** - The 26th Amendment to the Constitution lowers the voting age to 18.

*"Nobody will ever deprive the American people of the right to vote except the American people themselves -- and the only way they can do this is by not voting."*

- F.D.R.

