Chap 6.1: The History of Voting Rights

- The Framers of the Constitution purposely left the power (reserved power) to set suffrage qualifications to each State.

- **Suffrage** means the right to vote. **Franchise** is another term with the same meaning.

- The **electorate** is all of the people entitled to vote in a given election.

- Initially, the right to vote in America was limited to white male property owners.

- Today, the size of the American electorate is greater than 200 million people. Nearly all citizens at least 18 years of age can qualify to vote.
Five Stages of Extending Suffrage

1. Early 1800’s - religious, property, and tax payment qualifications were gradually eliminated.

2. 1870 - 15\textsuperscript{th} Amendment was intended to end race-based voting requirements.

3. 1920 - 19\textsuperscript{th} Amendment prohibited the denial of the right to vote because of sex.

4. The 1960’s:
   - The Voting Rights Act of 1965 guaranteed the right to vote for minorities.
   - 23\textsuperscript{rd} Amendment (1961) granted citizens of the District of Columbia the right to vote for presidential electors.
   - 24\textsuperscript{th} Amendment (1964) eliminated the poll tax.

5. 1971 - 26\textsuperscript{th} Amendment lowered the voting age to 18.
Power to Set Voter Qualifications

The Constitution sets five limits on the power that States have to set voter qualifications:

1. Each State must allow the same voters to vote in all elections within the state.

2. No State can deprive any person the right to vote “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” (Which amendment?)

3. No State can deprive any person the right to vote on account of sex. (Which amendment?)

4. No State can require the payment of any tax as a condition for voting. (Which amendment?)

5. No State can deprive any person who is at least 18 years of age the right to vote. (Which amendment?)
Section 1 Assessment

1. Suffrage in the United States
   (a) has been gradually extended to more and more citizens.
   (b) is granted to property owners only.
   (c) is granted to only women.
   (d) has gradually lessened the number of eligible voters.

2. The minimum voting age in the United States today is
   (a) 21 years of age.
   (b) 25 years of age.
   (c) 18 years of age.
   (d) 16 years of age.
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Chap 6.2 Voter Qualifications

Universal Requirements - There are three factors that States require people to meet to be eligible to vote.

Citizenship
- Most States require United States citizenship in order to vote.

Residence
- One must be a legal resident of a State to vote in elections. Most States require residency for minimum amounts of time in order to vote in the State.

Age
- The 26th Amendment requires that no State set a minimum voting age above 18.
Other Qualifications

- All states except North Dakota require citizens to register to vote. **Registration** is a procedure of voter identification intended to prevent fraudulent voting.

- **Literacy** — a person’s ability to read or write — is no longer required in any State to vote, but had been by several States at times in our nation’s history.

- At one time, **poll taxes**, or a special tax payment required to vote, were used in the South. Poll taxes are now forbidden by the 24th Amendment.

- States also have restrictions on the right to vote on certain members of the population, such as those found to be **mentally incompetent** or people **convicted** of serious crimes.
Political Participation and Awareness in America

Percentage of Americans who...

- Care who won the presidential election
- Watched the campaign on television
- Care who won the congressional election
- Approve of the way Congress has been handling its job
- Think government officials are honest
- Think people have a say in what the government does
- Trust the Federal Government most of the time
- Read magazine articles on the campaign
- Were contacted by either major party
- Gave money to a campaign
- Wore a button or put a sticker on their car in the last election
- Worked for a party or candidate in the last election

Section 2 Assessment

1. The three universal requirements States use for a person to be eligible to vote are
   (a) residence, gender, and income.
   (b) citizenship, property ownership, and gender.
   (c) citizenship, residence, and age.
   (d) income, employment, and age.

2. The 24th Amendment forbids the use of
   (a) poll taxes.
   (b) alcohol.
   (c) literacy tests as a means of voter qualification.
   (d) the death penalty.
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The Fifteenth Amendment (1870) declares that the right to vote cannot be denied to any citizen of the United States because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.
Early Civil Rights Legislation

Civil Rights Act of 1957
- Created the United States Civil Rights Commission
- Investigated and reported voter discrimination
- Gave the Attorney General the power to require federal courts to issue orders to prevent any interference with a person’s right to vote

Civil Rights Act of 1960
- Created federal voting referees who helped correct conditions to prevent voter discrimination
The Civil Rights Act of 1964

The Law

• More far-reaching than the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 abolished the use of voter registration or a literacy requirement to discriminate against any voter.

• Its enforcement relied on judicial action and the use of injunctions—court orders that either force or restrain specific acts.

The Aftermath

• The violent response of civilians and police and state troopers to a voter registration drive mounted by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma, Alabama showed that the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960 and 1964 were still not enough to ensure voter equality.
# The Voting Rights Act of 1965

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<td>Led to the abolishment of the poll tax</td>
<td>Harper vs. Virginia State Board of Elections, 1966</td>
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<td>Outlawed the use of any kind of literacy test</td>
<td>Oregon vs. Mitchell, 1970</td>
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<td>Mandated preclearance</td>
<td>South Carolina vs. Katzenbach, 1966</td>
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<td>Later amendments added a language-minority provision</td>
<td>Not challenged</td>
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African Americans at the Polls

Southern Black Voters, 1960-1970

Number registered (in millions)

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SOURCE: *Historical Statistics of Black America*
Section 3 Assessment

1. The Fifteenth Amendment
   (a) protects the voting right of adult male citizens of every race.
   (b) gives women the right to vote.
   (c) forbids denying any citizen under the age of 18 the right to vote.
   (d) calls for members of the U.S. Senate to be elected directly by the people.

2. Which piece of Civil Rights legislation was the most effective and influential?
   (a) The Civil Rights Act of 1957
   (b) The Civil Rights Act of 1960
   (c) The Civil Rights Act of 1964
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Nonvoters

• Millions of Americans do not vote when elections are held.
• Only 50.1% of eligible voters voted in the 2000 presidential election.
• Only 46.3% of the electorate voted for the members of House of the Representatives.
• In off-year elections, congressional elections held in years when there is no presidential election; voter turnout decreases significantly.
Why People Do Not Vote

- "Cannot-voters" - people who cannot vote for various reasons, such as
  - physical or mental illness
  - unexpected travel
  - resident alien citizenship status

- Actual nonvoters - do not vote because:
  - voting is in some way inconvenient
  - they believe that their vote will not make a difference
  - they distrust politics and political candidates
Voters and Voting Behavior

Voting is studied more than any other form of political participation in the United States and can also be useful in predicting voting behavior.

Three sources of voter behavior:

- **Results of elections** - information can be determined by studying voting results compared to the population make-up of a particular sector.

- **Field of survey research** - data gathered by polling scientifically determined cross sections of the population, as the Gallup Organization does.

- **Studies of political socialization** - studying the process by which people gain their political attitudes and opinions.
Sociological Factors

Voter preferences can’t be predicted by just one sociological factor.

Voter opinion is a combination of all of these factors and more.

• Income and Occupation
• Education
• Gender and Age
• Religious and Ethnic Background
• Geography
• Family and Other Groups
Psychological Factors

Voters’ perceptions of their party, the candidates, and the issues significantly affects their voting.

Party Identification
The **loyalty** of people to a particular political party is the single most significant and lasting predictor of how a person will vote.

Candidates and Issues
Candidates and issues are two **short-term factors** that can influence even the most loyal Democrat or Republican. People **may vote out of** their chosen party, if they dislike a candidate or the party’s stand on a particular issue.
Demographics
Section 4 Assessment

1. The reason why most nonvoters do not vote is
   (a) they are too ill.
   (b) they believe that their vote will not matter.
   (c) they are not officially United States citizens.
   (d) they are unexpectedly out of town on election day.

2. Voters’ choices are affected by
   (a) their income and occupation.
   (b) their education.
   (c) their religious and ethnic background.
   (d) all of the above.
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