

The Constitution Tells the States Who Has the Right to Vote

by Judith Schiffer

The United States is a "Federal Republic." This means that power, like the power to pass laws, is shared between the Federal Government in Washington, D.C., and the governments of each of the 50 states. The Federal Government has certain powers, and the states (and their local governments, like cities and towns) have certain powers. The Constitution of the United States sets out which powers belong to the Federal Government, and which powers belong to the states.

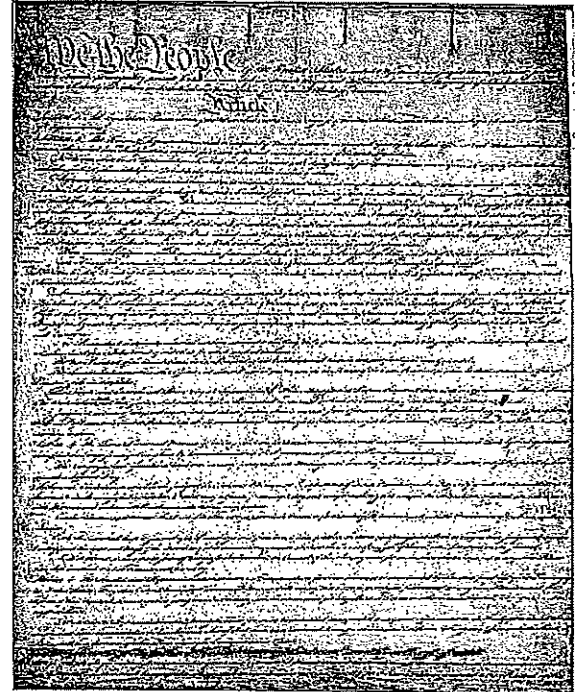
The United States Constitution is the highest law of the land. One of the things it does is to tell the 50 states what they *must do*, and also what they are *not permitted* to do.

The Constitution gives the states the power to conduct elections and to make their own rules about how they do it, and it also tells them what they *are not allowed to do* in conducting elections. For example, states are not allowed to reject people who have the right to vote in an election.

The Constitution says that to be allowed to vote, a person must be a citizen of the United States. You are a U.S. citizen automatically if you are born in the United States. There are also ways to become a U.S. citizen if you were not born there. One of the ways is a process called "naturalization."

Not all citizens are allowed to vote. For example, a ten-year-old may not vote. For much of early U.S. history mostly white men who were at least 21 years old had the right to vote. Other groups, such as women, were not allowed to vote.

Since then, the rules about who has the right to vote for president and other elected officials have changed, with more groups of American citizens being given this right. These changes were the result of additions, or "amendments," to the Constitution. Twenty-seven amendments have been added to the Constitution, and three of them have to do with who has the right to



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vote. These three Amendments prohibit the states from denying the right to vote to some groups of citizens. These three groups are African Americans, women, and people who are 18 to 20 years old. Over time, each of these groups was given the right to vote.

In addition, elected officials in Congress have passed laws so that citizens with voting rights can vote. One law makes it illegal for the states to do anything that prevents or makes it especially difficult for these citizens to vote. But some of the states found ways to prevent some citizens from voting, even though they had the Constitutional right to do so. For example, after former African American slaves were allowed to vote, some states did not want them to vote. So they required voters to be able to read and write. They knew that recently freed slaves were prevented from learning to read and write by their former owners.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. According to the text, what does the federal government of the United States share with the 50 state governments?

- A. power
- B. money
- C. voting rights
- D. companies

2. What does the text list and describe?

- A. powers the president has
- B. what the Constitution say about voting rights
- C. the Bill of Rights of the Constitution
- D. facts about the creation of the Constitution

3. The rights of African American voters have been threatened in the United States. What evidence from the text best supports this statement?

- A. The Constitution says that to be allowed to vote, a person must be a citizen of the United States.
- B. The Constitution gives the states the power to conduct elections and to make their own rules about how they do it.
- C. Some states required voters be able to read and write to prevent former African American slaves from voting.
- D. The voting rights of African Americans have been addressed in the Constitution.

4. Based on the text, to whom did the Constitution give voting rights when it was first written?

- A. white men and women who were at least 21 years old
- B. black men who were at least 21 years old
- C. Native American males who were at least 21 years old
- D. white men who were at least 21 years old

5. What is the main idea of the text?

- A. The federal government of the United States has certain powers, and the 50 states have certain powers.
- B. The United States Constitution includes laws about who can vote but gives states the power to conduct elections.
- C. Some of the 50 states have found ways to prevent some citizens from voting, even though they had the Constitutional right to do so.
- D. Twenty-seven amendments have been added to the Constitution, and three of them have to do with who has the right to vote.

6. Read the following sentences from the text.

"The Constitution gives the states the power to conduct elections and to make their own rules about how they do it, and it also tells them what they *are not allowed to do* in conducting elections. For example, states are not allowed to reject people who have the right to vote in an election."

Based on the text, what does the word "conduct" most nearly mean?

- A. to lead or manage
- B. to carry electricity
- C. to stop or prevent
- D. to make popular

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

The Constitution

The United States Constitution tells the 50 states what they *must do*, and also what they *are not permitted* to do. _____, the Constitution gives the states the power to conduct elections and to make their own rules about how they do it

- A. However
- B. In conclusion
- C. On the other hand
- D. For example