

VOTER TURNOUT IN ELECTIONS

SS.912.CG.2.10 Analyze factors that contribute to voter turnout in local, state and national elections.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Essential Teacher Content Background Information	2
Lesson Summary	5
Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace	7
Government Content Vocabulary	9
Additional Resources, Answer Keys, and Sources	10

2023 BENCHMARK UPDATES

- Updated from SS.912.C.2.16
 - Changed from “Analyze ~~trends~~ in voter turnout.” to “Analyze factors that contribute to voter turnout in local, state and national elections.”
- Depth of Knowledge Changes within Benchmark
 - No Changes
- Addition of Benchmark Clarifications
 - Benchmark clarifications are an addition to the 2023-2024 high school civics and government benchmarks. Benchmark clarifications are listed in the lesson summary below.

Essential Teacher Content Background Information

[Teacher Content Notes Not Appropriate For Student Use]

This section addresses the following topics:

1. Trends in Voter Turnout
2. Attempts to Increase Voter Turnout
3. How Amendments Increased Political Participation
4. Attempts to Suppress Voter Turnout

1. Trends in Voter Turnout

There are many generalizations, or trends, that are observable in the likelihood of someone casting a vote. One trend is that voters are more likely to cast a vote in a presidential election compared to a midterm election. This may be due to voters placing more importance or value in electing a president. Another trend in voter turnout is related to the age of the voter. Older generations tend to be more likely to vote compared to younger generations. This could be due to younger generations believing that they don't have the experience or wisdom to cast a vote. Another trend in voter turnout is that more educated voters are more likely to vote compared to less educated voters. Finally, white voters have historically been more likely to vote compared to minority voters. A notable exception to this phenomenon has been that black voters have recently approached, and in some instances surpassed, the voter turnout rates of white voters.

2. Attempts to Increase Voter Turnout

There have increasingly been efforts to increase voter registration and turnout. These efforts have typically been referred to as "get out the vote campaigns" and usually focus on groups that have low voter turnout. Several organizations have been formed with the purpose of increasing voter turnout. Rock the Vote attempts to increase voter turnout among young Americans. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) attempts to inform citizens in general of their right to vote. The Florida Rights Restoration Coalition attempts to restore the voting rights of citizens who were formerly incarcerated. These organizations, and others like them, attempt to inform citizens on the process of how to register, and encourage voters to go vote on election day.

3. Amendments That Have Affected Voter Participation

Amending the U.S. Constitution has led to a myriad of changes to participation in political processes. Historically, when these amendments were introduced and added to the U.S. Constitution the impact of social and political revelations was unknown. The influence of adding amendments continues to broaden participation in the political process.

Amendment	Impact on Participation in the Political Process
13th Amendment	The 13th and 14th Amendments were important steps towards the ratification of the 15th Amendment, granting the right to vote to African American males. While passage of the 15th Amendment in 1870 initially increased participation in elections and elevated African-American men to political offices, continued limitations were put in place, specifically in the South, that impeded African American men from exercising their new rights. The deterrents achieved their goals of decreasing political
14th Amendment	
15th Amendment	

	participation. They were abolished many years later during the Voting Rights Act of 1965, helping return to the increased ability of African Americans to participate in political processes.
19th Amendment	During the 1800s, women organized, petitioned the government, and protested in attempts to achieve the right to vote. With the passing of the 19th Amendment, it increased the amount of eligible voters during elections. More slowly, women would begin holding elected offices. However, minority women continued to face struggles as voting opportunities were denied.
24th Amendment	The 24th Amendment forbade the use of poll taxes and removed a long time method of suppression to voter participation. It supported an opportunity to increase voter turnout at the federal level. One of the criticisms of the passage of the amendment was that it did not support all voters at the state and local levels.
26th Amendment	The 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to allow young people the opportunity to vote in elections as they were already engaging in other obligations and responsibilities of U.S. citizens. The younger population continues to be an integral demographic in elections and the voting process.

Note: Additional information pertaining to the extension of civil rights and voting rights through the U.S. Constitution and federal law may be found in the Essential Teacher Background Information of SS.912.CG.2.6

4. Attempts to Suppress Voter Turnout

All of the former confederate states worked in some way to suppress or eliminate voter registration and participation among African-Americans. The attempts to segregate and disenfranchise the black population through laws came to be known as Jim Crow laws. Poll taxes, literacy tests, and acts of violence were commonly used as a way to discourage voter participation.

In Alabama, voter registration took place at the courthouse, where the registrar's office was usually open two or three days each month for about two hours. It was typical for Sheriff's deputies to spend time at the courthouse on these registration days to discourage "undesirables" from trying to register. Those who did get the chance to register faced further barriers, such as with the voucher system. Alabama also required that applicants pass a literacy test which consisted of three parts. The first part was an oral exam that asked applicants to interpret sections of the Constitution, while the second part required that applicants write answers to questions about information examined in the first part. Finally, applicants had to pass a written text that consisted of 68 questions. The 68 question exam was considered passed when all answers were answered correctly within the eight minute time limit. A three-member Board of Registrars would decide whether an applicant passed, no matter how that applicant performed on the three part examination. By contrast, it was typical for the Board of Registrars to "qualify" white voters even if their examination responses were incorrect.

Similarly, in Mississippi, black applicants were asked various questions, such as "How many bubbles are in a bar of soap?" or "How many seeds are in a watermelon?" as part of the voter application process. It was not uncommon for blacks to be asked to translate and interpret obscure Latin phrases, while whites who were asked to interpret the phrase "There shall be no imprisonment for debt" were allowed to register if they answered with "I thank that a Neorger should have 2 years in collage before voting because he don't under stand" (spelling and punctuation in the original).

The results of these efforts showed in voter registration and turnout rates for African-Americans in Mississippi in 1964. In the south, black voter registration was about one-third, while in Mississippi it was 5.2%. In Holmes County, all but .2% (one fifth of one percent) of blacks were disqualified from voting, while more than 100% of whites were registered in that same county. In three Mississippi counties, not a single African-American voted.

The experiences in these two Deep South states show the extent to which former confederate states went in order to avoid implementing the letter and the spirit of the 15th Amendment.

Lesson Summary

BENCHMARK		
SS.912.CG.2.10 Analyze factors that contribute to voter turnout in local, state and national elections.		
BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will explain trends in voter turnout. Students will discuss attempts to increase voter turnout (e.g., get out the vote campaigns, social movements). Students will explain how governmental action has affected voter participation (e.g., 15th, 19th and 26th Amendments; Jim Crow laws; poll tax; efforts to suppress voters). 		
FLORIDA CIVIC LITERACY EXAM COMPETENCY CONNECTION		
<p>Competency 1: Understanding of the basic principles and practices of American democracy and how they are applied in our republican form of government</p> <p>Competency 2: Understanding of the United States Constitution and its application</p> <p>Competency 4: Understanding of landmark Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation, and landmark executive actions and their impact on law and society</p>		
OVERVIEW		
In this lesson, students will analyze trends in voter turnout, and explore factors that affect voter turnout.		
ESSENTIAL QUESTION		
What factors contribute to voter turnout in elections?		
GOVERNMENT CONTENT VOCABULARY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15th Amendment, 19th Amendment, 24th Amendment, 26th Amendment, constitutional republic, election, Jim Crow laws, literacy tests, obligation, poll tax, suppression, vote, voter drives, voter turnout, white primary 		
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES		
Class discussions	Note taking	Learning centers
MATERIALS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 Corners Game Signs 4 Corners Game Statements 5 document folders numbered 1-5 Voter Turnout Trends slides Voter Turnout Trends Graphic Organizer 2016 Election Graph Analysis Sample Literacy Test Voter Turnout Note-Taking Organizer 		

- Voter Suppression, Expansion, and Turnout slides

B.E.S.T. STANDARDS

The grade in which this lesson is taught will determine the specific B.E.S.T. standards correlation.

Thematically, this lesson aligns to:

- ELA.R.3.2 Paraphrase and Summarize
- ELA.V.1.1 Academic Vocabulary

Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace

DAY	ACTIVITY SEQUENCE
DAY 1	<p>Planning Note: Prior to the lesson, post the “4 Corners Game Signs” that say: ‘Strongly Agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Strongly Disagree’ in each corner of your room or other appropriate spaced out location.</p> <p>Planning Note: Prior to teaching this lesson, you will need to print and copy the “Voter Turnout Trends” slides. Each chart/graph is considered a separate document. This lesson calls for five groups that will take turns with each document and then pass to the next group. You will need five numbered document folders (#1-5) with multiple copies of the document in them.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin class by having students stand up. 2. Explain that you are going to begin today’s lesson with a game of 4 Corners. 3. Present students with one statement at a time from the “4 Corners Game Statements”. 4. Have students respond to the statement by moving and standing under the sign that represents their opinion. 5. After they choose their corner for each statement, give students 1 minute to discuss within their groups why they chose that place to stand. 6. Ask for students to share with the whole class why they chose the corner they did. Take a few responses, from a variety of corners, for each statement. 7. Have students return to their seats. 8. Explain to students that the statements in the 4 Corners Game all are conversations that are had around the topics of elections and voting. While voting is a crucial component to the survival of our constitutional republic, it is also only an obligation of citizenship and not a requirement. 9. Ask students to brainstorm with a shoulder partner some of the factors that may increase or decrease voter turnout in elections, recording thoughts in their notebooks or on loose leaf paper. 10. Have students share responses through a whole-class discussion. 11. Lead students to the understanding that voter turnout is impacted by many various influences, including but not limited to: whether it is a presidential election year, what major events are going on at home and abroad, the popularity of the candidates overall, if one candidate is historic (i.e. first female), lines at polling places, weather, etc. 12. Explain to students that today, they will be analyzing charts and graphs that contain voter turnout data and attempting to explain some of the trends they see. 13. Split students into 5 groups by numbering them off or any other method appropriate to your classroom management style, and have students assemble in their groups (all #1s together and so forth). 14. Pass out a “Voter Turnout Trends Graphic Organizer” to each student. 15. Pass out numbered folders to each numbered group; folder #1 (containing copies of document 1) to group 1 and so forth. (See planning note above) 16. Provide time for each group to examine their first document. After careful analysis, they should work together to fill in the corresponding row in their graphic organizer. <p>Teacher Note: It is recommended you set a timer for each document rotation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. As students analyze the documents with their group, circulate the class to monitor for engagement and understanding, stopping to help guide groups in filling out their organizers as appropriate.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Monitor the time, giving the class a 2-minute warning as their time with this document nears its end so that students can finish writing responses. 19. When the time you have set has elapsed, have students return documents to their folder, and then have one student from each group deliver their folder to the next group in sequence i.e. folder 1 goes to group 2 and so forth, with folder 5 now rotating to group 1. 20. Repeat steps 16 - 19 with this next document/folder. 21. When each group has made it through all 5 documents, lead a whole class discussion regarding the trends they saw and the possible factors that contributed to those trends. Teacher Note: Use the answer key provided to help guide discussion. 22. Last, provide every group a copy of the “2016 Election Graph Analysis”. 23. Have students work in their groups to analyze the final document and answer the questions at the bottom of the graph. 24. Review responses as a whole class. 25. Before class ends, have students return one final time to a “4 Corners Game Sign” using the statement: Voter turnout will increase/be high in the 2024 presidential election.
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DAY 2	<p>Planning Note: Some of the content of today’s lesson in regards to the expansion of voting rights through government action overlaps with SS.912.CG.2.6.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin class by passing out a copy of the “Sample Literacy Test” to each student. Teacher Note: Since the actual literacy tests were intended to disenfranchise voters by making the tests nearly impossible to pass, you should do something similar. You can give students a very short amount of time to complete the test and/or require 100% of the answers to be correct. But don’t let students know just yet why you have placed these restrictions on the test. 2. Have the students complete the test. Circulate the room to check for student engagement. However, to contribute to authenticity, do not help the students with any of the questions. 3. When enough time has elapsed, stop all students. Teacher Note: Use your discretion on whether you want students to grade their own responses or have students swap papers. It will be quicker if you have students grade their own or if they swap with a classmate. It is not recommended that you collect the tests and grade them yourself, as this will disrupt the flow of the lesson. 4. Verbally go through each of the answers and explain the flaws in the test. 5. Have students place their percentage at the top of the page, then inform them that you’ll come back to whether or not they passed later in the lesson. 6. Pass out a copy of the “Voter Turnout Note-Taking Organizer” to each student. 7. Project the “Voter Suppression, Expansion, and Turnout” slides. 8. Engage students in an interactive lecture that walks them through the components of the benchmark using slides 1-16. 9. As you work through each of the slides, students should be recording notes on their organizer in the appropriate sections, working to summarize points and not copy verbatim from the slides. 10. In addition to pausing to clarify questions they may have, you are going to pause on slides 2, 7, 12, and 15 to engage students in class discussions. Slide 12 will have you return to the sample literacy test from the beginning of the lesson.
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Government Content Vocabulary

Word/Term	Definition
15th Amendment	an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that makes it illegal for the national or state governments to deny someone the right to vote based on their race
19th Amendment	an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that gave women the right to vote
24th Amendment	an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that made poll taxes illegal as a requirement for voting
26th Amendment	an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that lowered the minimum voting age to 18
constitutional republic	a form of government in which there is democratic voting, but governmental power is limited by the existence of a constitution that protects citizens' rights
election	an organized choice by vote to select a person for a political office or other position
Jim Crow laws	laws used throughout the South during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to enforce racial segregation and discrimination
literacy tests	a written test used to decide whether or not someone was eligible to register to vote; typically used in the south (which was dominated by the Democratic Party) to disenfranchise black voters and poor white voters, who tended to vote for the Republican Party
obligation	a requirement or duty, something a person or government has to do
poll tax	a fee someone has to pay in order to vote; typically used in the south (which was dominated by the Democratic Party) to disenfranchise black voters and poor white voters, who tended to vote for the Republican Party
suppression	any measure used to reduce the likelihood of voting among a targeted group
vote	to elect or decide
voter drives	an organized attempt to encourage more individuals to vote
voter turnout	the proportion of eligible voters who actually cast a vote
white primary	a method of disenfranchising black voters; prevented black voters from participating in the Democratic primary elections throughout the southern states in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; winning the Democratic primary in the South often meant winning the general election

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Florida Department of Education: Florida Civic Literacy Exam Homepage](#)

Florida Department of Education's Civic Literacy Reading List

- Speech to Congress on Voting Rights (1965) by Lyndon Johnson

ANSWER KEYS

Sample Answers: Voter Turnout Trends Graphic Organizer

Sample Answers: 2016 Election Graph Analysis

Sample Answers: Sample Literacy Test

SOURCES

Pew Research Center:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2014/07/24/voter-turnout-always-drops-off-for-midterm-elections-but-why/>

U.S. Elections Project: <https://www.electproject.org/election-data/voter-turnout-demographics>

Who Votes for Mayor?: <http://whovotesformayor.org/compare>

U.S. Census Bureau:

<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/2022-voting-registration.html#:~:text=Turnout%20was%20higher%20among%20the,41.4%25%20turnout%20of%20naturalized%20citizens.>

Ferris State University (Jim Crow Museum):

https://jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu/pdfs-docs/origins/al_literacy.pdf

University of Central Florida: <https://www.ucf.edu/pegasus/the-truth-laid-bare/>

Moore Cultural Complex: <https://www.harryharrietteemoore.org/the-moores>

Images and other visuals in slides are sourced within the presentation