

“Examine the US Constitution as a whole and explain why you think it does or does not fully protect the Right to Vote.”

The Constitution of the United States was conceived with optimistic idealism by men opening a new chapter in the pages of history. After a valiant and patriotic wrestle for the most basic desire of the human soul, the liberty to chart one’s own destiny, our forefathers built a remarkably concise, yet encompassing framework, for a democratic government that guaranteed inalienable rights for citizens. One of these freedoms was the Right to Vote—a unique and progressively modern principle for the new republic, borne of the onerous burdens placed upon subjects with no representation. This right has been shaped and evolved over 200 years of changes in societal norms to more clearly define and expand voting security to the citizenry.

To begin—what is a vote? A vote is having your voice heard. A vote is consideration of each perspective. And a vote is a choice, or say, in your future. The right to vote equalizes the populace, which is why it is such a powerful tool and replete within the Articles and Amendments of the Constitution. Essentially, it’s through voting that issues are moved forward.

Within the first fifty words of the document, the framers established voting rights: “The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen...by the People” (Article I, Section II). White male landowners were the first to receive the Right to Vote. In 1870, following the Civil War, the 15th Amendment was ratified, which forbade denying the right to vote based on “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” This was a notable step forward in equalizing all people, including African Americans and minorities, and ended years of voting rights being unjustly withheld. Society recognized the racial discrimination, and the definition of “the People” began to include all ethnic makeups. The 15th Amendment is an essential pillar in the protection of the Right to Vote.

Fifty years later brought the 19th Amendment, granting women voting privileges and guaranteeing protection against gender-based voting discrimination. This long-needed change to women's suffrage opened the door for females to participate further in the political process. The inclusion of women as voters also displayed the recognition that all adults in the United States were entitled to a say in their representation.

Lastly, the 24th Amendment, adopted in 1964, tied together the progress of the previously mentioned amendments to wholly protect the right to vote. The amendment abolished the poll tax, a fee used by some states to prevent African Americans from voting. Now all economic classes and statuses could participate in electing government officials. Poll taxes, when first introduced, were targeted specifically to oppress Blacks. In addition to persecuting African Americans, this tax disenfranchised many less fortunate White Americans due to their financial situation. The eradication of this practice eliminated a massive stumbling block. The 24th Amendment's protection of economic classes is representative of the Constitution's effort to ensure voting rights are protected and extended to all.

The United States of America is internationally admired as a country that respects natural human rights and the importance of individuality. Much of what makes our country the best in the world is the structure in which a myriad of backgrounds and viewpoints are considered. Unimpeded voting rights were important to the founding fathers and the Constitution has evolved over the years to reflect that sentiment.

As said by Lyndon B. Johnson, "A man without a vote is a man without protection." A society that restricts the choice of leadership diminishes the power of the people and leaves natural rights vulnerable. We progress as a society when we evaluate and change "in order to

form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.

Citations:

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