

Voting Q&A: True or False

Q: It was once very common for citizens in some parts of the United States to have to pay a fee before they could vote.

A: True. The United States once required people that wanted to vote to pay a capital tax, sometimes called a poll tax, before they could vote. In Southern states during the late 1800s and early 1900s prevented many blacks and poor whites from voting. It wasn't until 1964 that the 24th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolished the poll tax as a prerequisite for voting in the federal elections. The U.S. Supreme Court extended the ban on poll taxes to the states, based on the "equal protection" clause of the 14th Amendment.

Q: The federal government sets all rules about voting in the United States.

A: False. The federal government does set some parameters, including the date of the general election, , which were recently strengthened by the Help America Vote Act of 2002. But many decisions and rules about the vote are determined by the states.

Q: Typically, citizens must register to vote one year in advance of an election.

A: False. In most states, a month and a half prior to an election is sufficient. For example, in 2004 one could still vote if he or she registered by October 1 in Mississippi. Some states are more lenient—for example, people living in Vermont had until October 25.

Tuesday, November 2, 2004 is Election Day



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