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VOTER RESOURCE GUIDE

Civics 101.

We live in a nation where, "We The people" have the power to vote. The concept is similar to the Broadway success Hamilton; power to vote determines many aspects of life because our government is a democratic republic. Meaning "We The People" elect representatives who act as our voice in the government. Those elected officials hold office for terms of varying lengths and are re-elected based on how well they did representing us, their constituents.

The federal government is the overarching structure, or institution, that gets the most attention. They're charged with regulating the whole country at the highest level. That being said, we are a country of unified states, and each of those states has their own government. This system of government is known as federalism, "a system of government in which the same territory is controlled by two levels of government". State governments have a closer impact on our everyday lives, making your local vote even more important than your federal one.

The Federal Government is composed of three branches: Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. Their powers were established through the U.S. Constitution. The executive branch is charged with the enforcement of laws and their execution. The executive branch includes the President, the vice president, and all the cabinet secretaries/political appointees. The legislative branch are the decision makers. They're meant to direct representatives and speak our direct voice. The legislative branch makes the rules, policies, and laws that we follow. They spend taxpayer dollars, can declare war, and have to agree with the individuals the president appoints to help them run the country. The legislative branch is composed of Congress. The 535 members of the two houses (the House and the Senate) that make up Congress, introduce and debate new bills that could potentially become laws. The judicial branch is composed of the judges and the courts system. That would include the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the country, but it is only an appeals court. They decide on the constitutionality of laws and if constitutional rights have been violated. Supreme Court justices are appointed by the president and have a life term. The Founding Fathers (the first freedom fighters) also built in checks and balances to ensure that no branch became too powerful. They greatly feared the rise of a monarch or king.

Oftentimes, our day to day lives are far more impacted by the state and local governments. That's why it's so important that we do our part and cast educated votes in as many elections as possible.

State Governments are modeled after the Federal Government consisting of three branches: Executive, Legislative, and Judicial



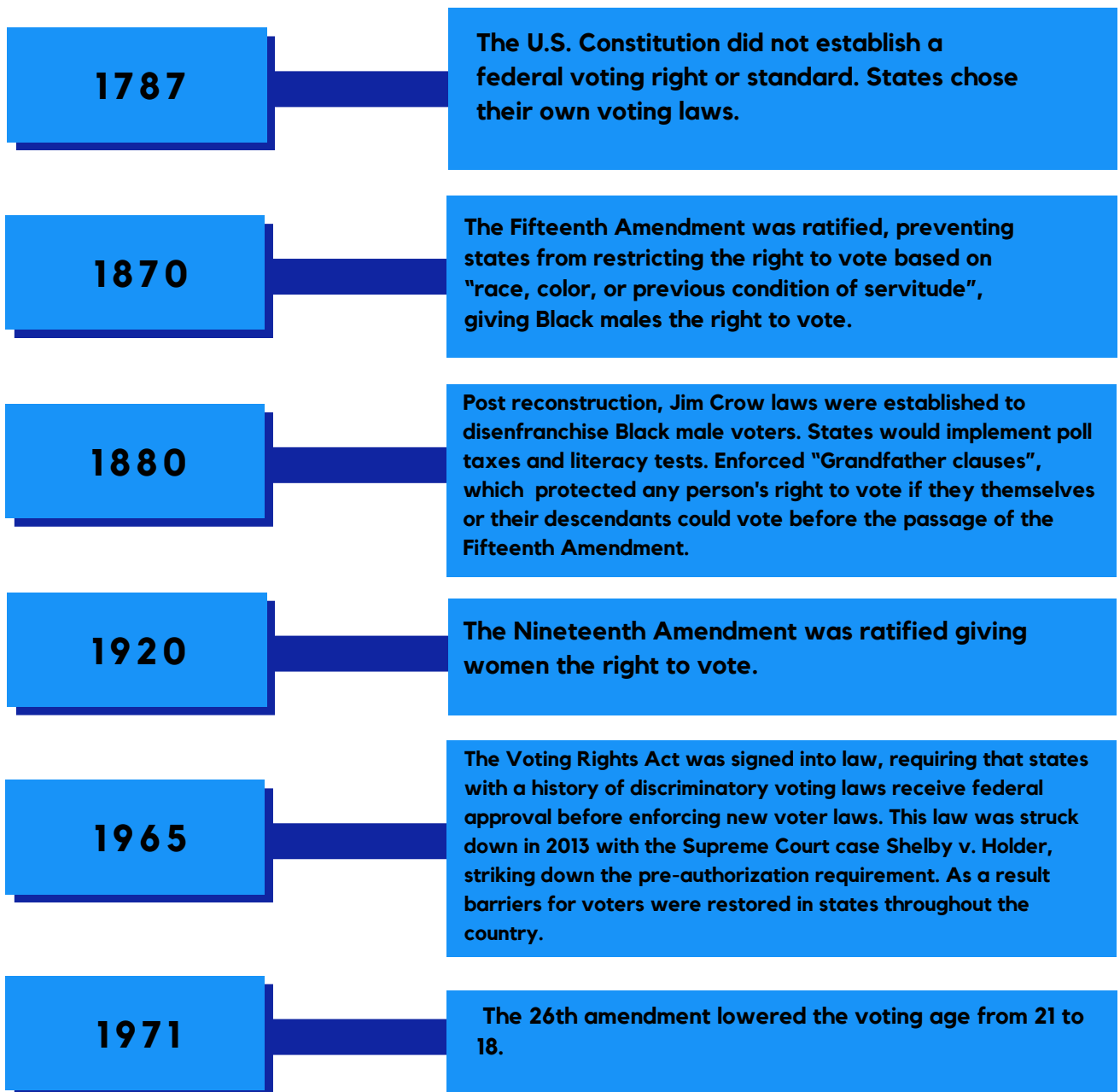
Figure 1: Similarities of structure and powers held at the Federal, State and Local levels

Executive Branch	Legislative Branch	Judicial Branch
<p>President (Federal) = Governor (State)</p> <p>Vice President (Federal) = Lt. Governor (State)</p> <p>While the positions of the state governments mirror the federal. How the executive branch is Structured in DE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor - Carney • Lt. Governor - Hall-Long • Governor's Cabinet 	<p>All 50 states have legislatures with elected officials that consider matters brought by the Governor and craft their own laws. Every state with the exception of Nebraska has a bicameral legislature</p> <p>Federal Government: Congress, Bicameral (House of Representatives and Senate) = Delaware Legislative Branch: General Assembly, Bicameral (House of Representatives and Senate)</p>	<p>Supreme Court = State Supreme Court</p> <p>"State judicial branches are usually led by the State supreme court, which hears appeals from lower-level State courts. Court structures and judicial appointments/elections are determined either by legislation or the State constitution. The supreme court focuses on correcting errors made in lower courts and therefore holds no trials.</p>

Source: The United States Government. (2022, July 12). State and Local Government. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/our-government/state-local-government/>

The right to vote has always been available — if you were a wealthy white man. The rest of the United States has had to advocate, fight, march, and organize for that right. The community leaders that fought for civil rights and equal rights wanted to ensure that every American was afforded the right to vote. All of that is to say, if you choose not to vote, you're giving up some of the power that had to be fought for — power to make positive change in your town, community, state, and country.

Figure 2: Timeline: Brief History of Voting Rights in the United States



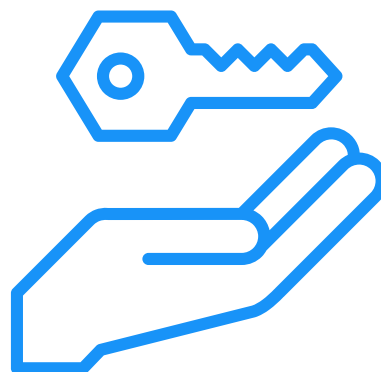
Source: Timeline: Voting rights. Timeline: Voting Rights | Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. (n.d.). https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/online-exhibitions/timeline-voting-rights?gclid=CjwKCAiAq4KuBhA6EiwArMAwIEhCYHvcgcQBWvFpXAXTP7A-TLPzghF0kySO6nCAO-rRj_QKgPkzWBoCP88QAvD_BwE

The two popular party system (currently: Democrat and Republican) flourishes when it allows for a variety of perspectives to be present amongst the different levels of government. It also plays a significant role in the electoral college. The electoral college is a complicated, yet important voting process that is utilized for the presidential election. "The Founding Fathers established the Electoral College in the Constitution, in part, as a compromise between the election of the President by a vote in Congress and election of the President by a popular vote of qualified citizens." What that means is that your vote is counted as a popular vote. In-keeping with the representative philosophy for governing these 50 united states, representatives of each state, called electors, cast ballots to actually elect the president and vice president of the United States. Fun fact: the number of electors for the electoral college votes that your state receives is equivalent to the number of congresspeople that you have. So in Delaware, for example, we have one member of congress and two senators, giving the First State three total electoral votes. This is why you should want to spread the good word about voting. The more popular votes that are cast for a specific candidate, the more difficult it is for an elector to cast a differing electoral vote.

We hope that this foundational knowledge helps to give you a better understanding of how the systems in place came to be.

How Voting Works

You're 18! It's lit. Balloons and bottles, my guy. Happily glo day. A full 365 for you man. Happy born to you. Happy Anni Shawty. We're gonna take a second in the African American Vernacular (AAV): Happy Birthday to you, Happy birthday to you, Happy Birrrtthhhdaayy. HAAAPPPPPYYYYY BIRRTTHHHHDAAAY. - Stevie Wonder. There's a special gift for you... AND YOU CAN VOTE, if you're a citizen and a resident!



Voting Rights

"Voting is the language of American democracy." Having the right to vote means having the ability to influence how the United States Government should function at the federal, state, and local levels. But not everyone who lives in the United States has the right to vote.

Who can vote in the United States:

- U.S. Citizens.
- Those who meet their State's residency requirements.
- Those who are 18 years old on or before the election day.
- Those registered to vote by the voter registration deadline.

Who can't vote in the United States:

- Non-citizens, including permanent legal residents who cannot vote in federal, state, and most local elections.
- Some people cannot vote after being convicted of a felony. The enforcement varies by state. But you can run for president!
- U.S. Citizens living in U.S. territories cannot vote in the general election.

This simple list of who can and cannot vote does not fully capture the complexity of voting rights in this country. Voting leads to representation, which leads to giving power to those who make important decisions that impact our day to day lives. The history of voting in this country is full of highs and lows and a lot has been done to expand voting rights and also suppress it.

Source: Who Can and Cannot Vote. The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. (2024, August 8). <https://civilrights.org/value/voting-rights/>

Conclusion.

We know this may feel overwhelming, and honestly at times it can be. We understand if you feel frustrated with the world of politics, and hold the belief that nothing will truly make a difference. Feeling this way is valid. But the reality is, nothing will really change if we all decide to not be civically engaged. Civil rights have never been won by giving up. As we talked about in earlier sections, so much effort has been deployed to disenfranchise the people's vote. This shows that voting has power. Not only does your vote have power, but the power of your voice is amplified when you stay informed, show up, and connect with your elected officials. Delaware is a small state which at times can lead to some sticky personal situations, ifykyk, lol. It also means there are boundless opportunities to make a meaningful difference in your community.

Remember, the only one who can take away all your power is you!

