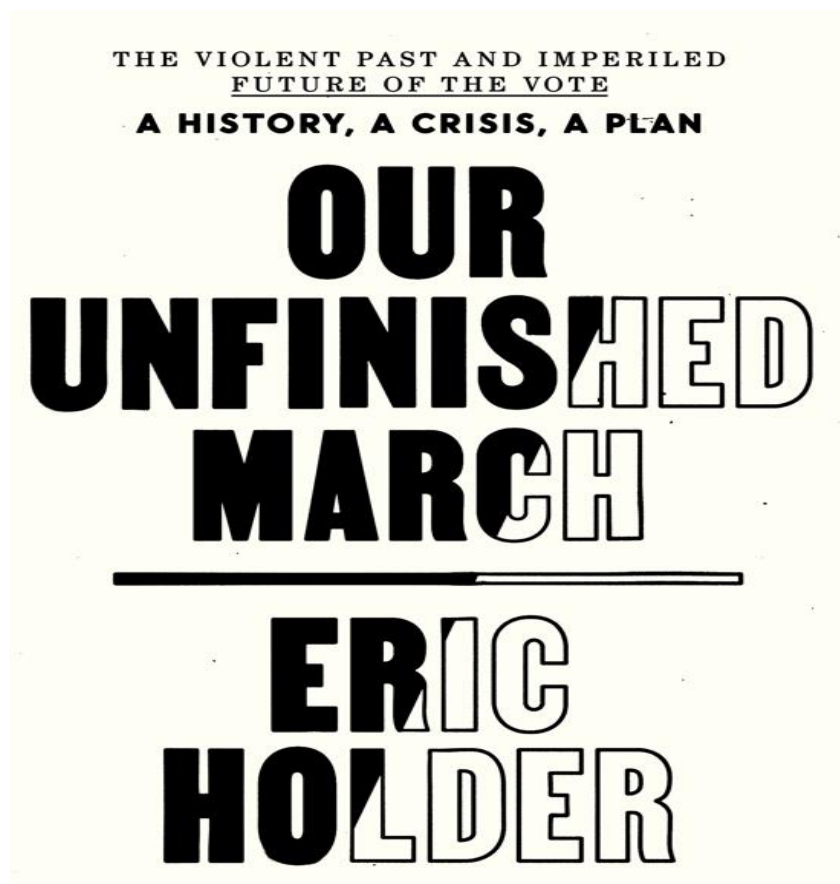


Can Voting Protect Our Democracy?



Supporting Questions

1. How has the right to vote in the United States changed over time?
2. Why do some people think that our democracy is in crisis?
3. What steps can be taken to protect voting rights in this country?

Content of this IDM was developed by the Vermont Agency of Education

Grade level Inquiry

Can Voting Protect Our Democracy?

Standards and Content

College, Career, and Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards:
 D2.Civ.2.9-12. Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans' participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.
 D2.Civ.5.9-12. Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.
 D3.3.9-12. Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims.
 Common Core Anchor Standards in ELA/Literacy:
 Reading 1-10, Writing 1, 2, 7-10

Staging the Compelling Question

Since this IDM spans grades 7-12, staging the inquiry "Can Voting Protect Our Democracy?" will vary considering prior knowledge and learning experiences. It is important in staging the compelling question that students have a clear understanding of democratic ideals and how our form of government differs from other types that exist around the world. Further resources provided on page 5 of this template provide opportunities for students to understand what founding principles comprise a democracy, and help to stage the question.

Supporting Question 1

How has the right to vote in the United States changed over time?

Formative Performance Task

Create an annotated timeline showing how various groups have gained the right to vote (franchise) or lost the right to vote (disenfranchise) in the United States.

Featured Sources

Source A: **Our Unfinished March** (p. 21-106)

Source B: [The U.S. Constitution](#)

Supporting Question 2

Why do some people think our democracy is in crisis?

Formative Performance Task

Complete the graphic organizer identifying policies/actions/events that have challenged our electoral processes and threatened the nation's democratic system.

Featured Sources

Source A: **Our Unfinished March** (p. 107-147)

Source B: [Human Rights Watch](#):

Supporting Question 3

What steps can be taken to protect voting rights in this country?

Formative Performance Task

Write an argumentative essay highlighting the two steps that you feel are most important to protect voting rights in the United States.

Featured Sources

Source A: **Our Unfinished March** (p. 148-222)

Source B: [100% Democracy: The](#)

(Amendments 15, 19, 23, 24, 26)

Source C: [Snyder Act of 1924](#)

Source D: [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#)

Source E: [Shelby v. Holder](#)

[The United States: Events of 2020](#)

Source C: [How Redistricting Became a Technological Arms Race](#)

Source D: [Brennan Center for Justice: Voting Laws Roundup](#)

Source E: [ACLU: Explaining Moore v. Harper, the Supreme Court case that Could Upend Democracy](#)

Source F: [Letter from Coretta Scott King about Jeff Sessions](#)

Source G: [U.S. Constitution, Article II](#)

Source H: [How America Changed During Barack Obama's Presidency](#) and [How America Changed During Donald Trump's Presidency](#)

[Case for Universal Voting \(video/transcript\)](#)

Source C: [Free and Fair Elections](#)

Source D: [Felony Disenfranchisement Laws \(Map\)](#)

Source E: [Laws Permitting Noncitizens to Vote in the United States](#)

Source F: [Right to Vote Website](#)

Source G: [Opinion: Local Officials Must Remain in Control of Elections](#)

Source H: [Defend Our Elections](#)

Source I: [Ten Warning Signs that Democracies are Under Siege](#)

Source J: [Federal Role in U.S. Campaigns and Elections: An Overview](#)

Source K: [Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission](#)

Summative Performance Task	<p>ARGUMENT: Can Voting Protect Our Democracy? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that evaluates the how suffrage upholds democratic ideals by using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views.</p>
	<p>EXTENSION. History stands as a witness to authoritarian regimes spreading propaganda to sway the masses. Currently, authoritarian regimes are similarly using disinformation to distort and manipulate elections.</p> <p>Select a nation, past or present, whose residents have fallen victim to election manipulation; who created the misinformation, why and how was it done, and what was/is the result to the nation and the world?</p> <p>Participate in a Socratic seminar with classmates, which argues your position on the Compelling Question, using newfound knowledge regarding voter manipulation, past and present, around the world.</p>
Taking Informed Action	<p>UNDERSTAND Students will understand the effects of the media on voting behavior.</p> <p>ASSESS Develop a log of key questions for analyzing different media messages for content and bias, recognizing how conflicting documents construct differing messages about the nation/state/locality, and/or political candidates running for office.</p> <p>ACT Develop a guide for voters on how and where to obtain valid and balanced information regarding political candidates and issues pertinent to maintaining a strong democratic system.</p>

**Featured sources are suggested and links are provided. It may be that these links are broken and we apologize in advance for the inconvenience.*

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry is drawn from the book *Our Unfinished March*, written by former Attorney General Eric Holder, and leads students through an investigation of how voting is a means to uphold our democratic system. While voting was the privilege of a few at the time of the nation's founding, it has evolved through struggle to be more representative of this diverse nation. Yet, centuries later, efforts at voter suppression threaten the fabric of our American system. By investigating the compelling question, "Can Voting Protect Our Democracy?", learners will have the opportunity to understand the history of suffrage inequities, delve into current actions intended to suppress the vote, and understand how free and fair elections will uphold the tenets of American democracy.

The formative performance tasks build knowledge and skills through the course of the inquiry and help students to understand how all Americans, regardless of party affiliation, should "be on board with the idea that more voters lead, necessarily, to a healthier democracy, and that a healthier democracy is the bedrock on which the American pursuit of life, liberty, and property rests." (Holder, p. 22) Students will create an evidence-based argument detailing how suffrage upholds democratic ideals by using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views.

Our Unfinished March provides a wealth of resources which would allow the learner to respond to the summative and formative assessments. Additional resources are provided for each formative assessment as this IDM spans multiple grade bands; resources are included for differentiation and acknowledgement of varying skill and knowledge levels. IDMs recognize the expert level of the educator and allow for the inclusion/exclusion of additional resources, as long as the learners are able to respond to the formative assessments and develop an evidence-based summative argument.

Students begin the inquiry with an understanding of the tenets of differing governmental systems; specifically, how democracy is the form of government that is most representative of the will of the people and the role suffrage plays in its' survival. (see *Our Unfinished March* pp. 3-25 and Staging the Inquiry (below)). Students then learn about multiple forms of voter discrimination and suppression during the history of this nation, as well as the length that groups and individuals went to ascertain the right to vote (see *Our Unfinished March* Part I: Lessons from the Past and Formative Assessment 1). Part II: The Crisis of the Present spans the Obama and Trump years, detailing policies, actions and events that have created instances of voter suppression and a subsequent threats to our democracy (Formative Assessment 2). The inquiry ends with students gaining insight into free and fair elections and how we can maintain equity in voting while preserving the sanctity of our three branches of

government (Part III: A More Perfect Union and Formative Assessment 3).

This inquiry highlights the following additional standards:

- Common Core:
English Language Arts Standards » History/Social Studies » Grade 7-8; Grade 9-10; Grade 11-12

Note: This inquiry is expected to take three or four 50-minute class periods as well as additional time allotted for reading *Our Unfinished March*. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (e.g., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, featured sources, writing, Socratic seminars, class discussions). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiry to meet the needs and interests of their students. This inquiry lends itself to differentiation and modeling of historical thinking skills while assisting students in reading the variety of sources.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question, “Can Voting Protect Our Democracy?”, students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources, including the text “*Our Unfinished March*”, in order to construct an argument supported by evidence while acknowledging competing perspectives. Through an examination of differing sources, the first formative assessment task helps students build their knowledge of voter equity/inequity in the United States. The second task provides students with an opportunity to understand that voter suppression is not a concept that lives only in the past. The third task allows students to understand how free and fair elections uphold our system of democracy.

Staging the Compelling Question

As this IDM spans grades 7-12, staging the inquiry will vary considering prior knowledge and learning experiences. It is important in staging the compelling question, “Can Voting Protect Our Democracy?”, that students have a clear understanding of democratic ideals, and how this form of government differs from other types that may exist around the world. The following sources provide opportunities for students to understand what principles comprise a democracy.

- [Defining Democracy](#) A 50-minute lesson from Facing History and Ourselves allowing students to define democracy and consider how it may relate to the community/culture in which they live.
- [Forms of Government](#) Five-minute video addressing the differences between authoritarian forms of government and democracy.
- [What is Democracy](#) Definition of democracy, with links to further understand to principles such as ‘majority rule, minority rights’ and ‘human rights’.

Former Attorney general and author Eric Holder begins *Our Unfinished March* with powerful testimony of his experience on the Edmund Pettus Bridge 50 years after Bloody Sunday. The following 9-minute PBS

video clip provides video and commentary from participants in the march: [Selma Civil Rights March 50th Anniversary](#). After watching the clip, students may respond to the question, “What were lasting impacts of the March on Selma?”

Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question— How has the right to vote in the United States changed over time?- asks the students to build their knowledge of voter equity/inequity in the United States. The formative performance task asks the students to create a suffrage timeline which visually identifies who gained the franchise, and when. The timeline leaves unanswered questions regarding situations that can incur the loss of franchise privileges, as well as a conversation regarding states’ rights and voting.

The following procedures may be considered when implementing this task:

- Review guidelines regarding the creation of timelines, identifying that a specific measurement equates to a specific period of time, and students need to be consistent ;
- Teachers may have the students create the timelines prior to reading Part I, as students may choose to pencil in dates/information as they read;
- Teachers may choose to have annotations included in a separate area;
- At the conclusion of Part I, and timelines are complete, teachers may choose to have a Socratic seminar regarding how much power states should have regarding the vote.

The following sources were selected for students to gain an understanding that the words “*all men are created equal*” did not necessarily hold true when considering who should have the right to vote in this country.

Featured Source A: *Our Unfinished March* (pp. 27-106)

Featured Source B: [The U.S. Constitution](#) Specific information pertaining to voting can be found in Amendments 15, 19, 23, 24,26. Students should be able to identify specific groups that gained the right to vote within each amendment, as well as who was not included.

Source C: [Snyder Act of 1924](#) granted Native Americans born in the U.S. to full U.S. citizenship. The Fifteenth Amendment granted all U.S. citizens the right to vote regardless of race, it wasn’t until the Snyder Act that Native Americans could exercise the right to vote.

Source D: [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#) was intended to overcome state and local barriers that were enacted to try to prevent African Americans from voting.

Source E: [Shelby v. Holder](#): This Supreme Court case held that Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act was unconstitutional, outdated, and no longer needed therefore making it easier for state officials to make voting more challenging for ethnic minority voters.

Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question- Why do some people think our democracy is in crisis? - asks students to understand that voter suppression is not a concept that lives only in the past. Students should be able to

identify the cause and effect of actions that influenced events as recently as the last presidential election. The formative task allows students to be agents of their own learning as they create a graphic organizer that identifies policies/actions/events that have challenged our electoral processes and threatened the nation's democratic system.

The following procedures may be considered when implementing this task:

- Refrain from creating a partisan issue; all viewpoints should be accepted, but harken back to Holder's words when he states, "that more voters lead, necessarily, to a healthier democracy, and that a healthier democracy is the bedrock on which the American pursuit of life, liberty, and property rests."

The following sources were selected to provide students with an understanding that while groups and individuals have fought for suffrage rights, there are policies and actions that have tried to undermine the idea of electoral transition, proportional representation through 'one person, one vote', and the foundation of our democratic system.

Source A: *Our Unfinished March* (pp. 107-147)

Source B: [Human Rights Watch: The United States: Events of 2020](#) This report provides overviews of big-picture concerns within the United States during 2020, such as voting rights, women and girl's rights, rights of non-citizens, and freedom of expression and assembly.

Source C: [How Redistricting Became a Technological Arms Race](#) This article from The Atlantic discusses how the influx of money, and inroads in both technology and data mining, have all made the process of gerrymandering easier.

Source D: [Brennan Center for Justice: Voting Laws Roundup](#) This Brennan Center for Justice resource provides expansive information regarding 2022 legislation designed to make the right to vote in the United States more difficult.

Source E [ACLU: Explaining Moore v. Harper, the Supreme Court case that Could Upend Democracy](#) This 2023-24 Supreme Court case deals with the power of a state legislature versus their own state constitution, with repercussions for the nation pending the decision.

Source F: [Letter from Coretta Scott King about Jeff Sessions](#) Coretta Scott King sent this letter in 1986 to the Senate Judiciary Chair regarding Jeff Sessions appointment to a federal position; despite protestations, Sessions eventually became U.S. Attorney General under Donald Trump.

Source G: [U.S. Constitution, Article II](#) The Executive Branch of government outlined by Section and Clause including roles and responsibilities of the President, and the Electoral College.

Source H: [How America Changed During Barack Obama's Presidency](#) and [How America Changed During Donald Trump's Presidency](#) These Pew Research Center articles provide data on 'a different America' during the two presidencies.

Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question- What steps can be taken to protect voting rights in this country?-allows students to understand how free and fair elections play an integral role in maintaining the voice of the people in our system of government. The formative task asks the students to draw on both past and new-found knowledge to craft an argumentative essay highlighting steps that they feel are most important to protect voting rights in the United States and in turn help sustain our democracy.

The following sources were selected to aid students in understanding through visuals, data, primary sources, editorials, and written research that a well-functioning government relies in part on how well people participate in governing society, and how equitable those opportunities are.

Source A: [Our Unfinished March](#) (p. 148-222)

Source B: [100% Democracy: The Case for Universal Voting](#) (video/transcript) In this Brennan Center for Justice video, “Brookings Senior Fellow EJ Dionne, Jr. and former Connecticut Secretary of the State Miles Rapoport argue that requiring everyone to participate in our elections should be a cornerstone of our democratic system. It would be the surest way to protect against voter suppression and the active disenfranchisement of a large share of our citizens. It would also create a system true to the aspirations written in the Declaration of Independence, by calling for a government based on the consent of *all* the governed”.

Source C: [Free and Fair Elections](#) From Facing History and Ourselves, “this Explainer describes the standards that governments need to meet before, during, and after an election to ensure that the election is “free and fair”.”

Source D: [Felony Disenfranchisement Laws \(Map\)](#) This interactive map, developed by the ACLU, shows the patchwork of inequity in regard to state felony disenfranchisement laws.

Source E: [Laws Permitting Noncitizens to Vote in the United States](#) Extensive data compiled by Ballotpedia, including maps and charts, identifying state, local, and federal laws pertaining to citizen and non-citizen voting; includes references to Montpelier and Winooski.

Source F: [Right to Vote Website](#) The Fair Vote site provides information regarding the efforts to create a Right to Vote Amendment through House Joint Resolution 74.

Source G: NY Times [Opinion: Local Officials Must Remain in Control of Elections](#) This editorial highlights why state and local control of elections serve to protect election integrity.

Source H: [Defend Our Elections](#) This Brennan Center for Justice election landing page directs the reader to topics regarding election security, election integrity, and the ‘Independent State Legislature Theory’.

Source I: [Ten Warning Signs that Democracies are Under Siege](#) The Aspen Institute weighs in on reasons why democracies are failing- including decreased voter participation and the influence of money in politics.

Source J: [Federal Role in U.S. Campaigns and Elections: An Overview](#) The Congressional Research Service created this document outlining “six broad categories of law through which Congress has assigned various agencies roles in regulating or supporting campaigns, elections, or both. These are campaign finance; election administration; election security; redistricting; qualifications and contested elections; and voting rights”.

Source K: [Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission](#) This 2009 Supreme Court decision laid the foundation for corporations and outside groups to spend money in elections that had previously been

forbidden.

Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined the history of suffrage, challenges to the election process, and how the tenets of free and fair elections uphold democracy.

Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students will construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that evaluates the how suffrage upholds democratic ideals by using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views.

Students' arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- Free and fair elections are vital to the quality of a nation's system of government;
- Free and fair elections serve as a check on government and should improve both transparency and the flow of information;
- Free and fair elections support the desires of the founding fathers in regard to equity and freedom of expression;
- Voting is a responsibility, not a right enumerated in the Constitution;
- Our democracy has sustained itself without universal voting nor laws to require voting.

To extend their arguments, students can delve into how propaganda has been used to influence political elections. Students can look to past uses of propaganda or select from current regimes that are using disinformation to distort and manipulate elections. Students are asked to select a nation, past or present, whose residents have fallen victim to election manipulation; who created the misinformation, why and how was it done, and what was/is the result to the nation and the world? Students will use their research to participate in a Socratic seminar with classmates, to argue their position on the Compelling Question, using newfound knowledge regarding voter manipulation, past and present, around the world.

Students have the opportunity to Take Informed Action by understanding the effects of the media on voting behavior. Students will develop a log of key questions for analyzing different media messages for content and bias, recognizing how conflicting documents construct differing messages about the nation/state/locality, and/or political candidates running for office. Students will use the log of questions, and other pertinent information regarding elections, to develop a guide for voters on how and where to obtain valid and balanced information regarding political candidates and issues pertinent to maintaining a strong democratic system.