Objectives

1. Summarize the history of voting rights in the United States.
2. Identify and explain constitutional restrictions on the States’ power to set voting qualifications.
• **suffrage:** the right to vote
• **franchise:** a synonym for the right to vote
• **electorate:** the potential voting population
• **disenfranchised:** denied the right to vote
• **poll tax:** a fee charged before allowing someone to vote
• How have voting rights changed over the course of American history?

  – Over time, voting rights have been extended to more Americans.

  – Voting qualifications based on property ownership, religion, race, and sex have all been eliminated through federal laws and constitutional amendments.

  – The age requirement for voting has been reduced.
The Electorate

• The Constitution originally gave the power to decide voter qualifications to the States.
  – At first most States allowed only white male property owners to vote.

• Since 1789, many restrictions on voting rights have been eliminated.

• At the same time, the power to decide who has the right to vote has been shifting from the States to the federal government.
Checkpoint Answer: The first voting qualification to disappear was religion.
• After the Civil War, the 15th Amendment made it illegal to deny any citizen the right to vote based on their race or color.
  – In theory, this amendment gave African Americans the right to vote.
  – However, the spirit of this law was violated for nearly 100 years as African Americans were denied the vote in many places.
• In 1920, the ratification of the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote.

  – By 1920, more than half the States had already followed the example set by Wyoming in 1869 and given women the vote.
During the 1960s, the civil rights movement led to new protections for African American voting rights.

- The Voting Rights Act of 1965 defended racial equality in voting.
- The 24th Amendment eliminated the poll tax in federal elections.

In 1971 the 26th Amendment gave those 18 and older the right to vote.
- The Constitution sets five restrictions on the ability of the States to set voter qualifications.

- Anyone allowed to vote for members of their State legislature must be allowed to vote for members of Congress.

- The 15th Amendment bans the States from depriving any person of the right to vote on account of their race, color, or having once been enslaved.
- Under the 19th Amendment, no State can deprive any person of the right to vote based on their sex.

- No State can levy a tax on the right to vote for President, Vice President, or members of Congress.
• Under the 26th Amendment, no State can deprive any person who is at least 18 years of age of the right to vote because of their age.
In addition, no State can violate any other provision in the Constitution when setting its voting qualifications.

– For example, a State cannot set suffrage qualifications that violate the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.
• Now that you have learned about how voting rights have changed over the course of American history, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
  – Why do voters act as they do?