

**TEXT SUMMARY**

States decide voter qualifications. Over time, the qualifications have changed to include many more people.

Today, all States require voters to be citizens and legal residents of the State in which they wish to vote. In most cases, people must have lived in a State for a certain period of time before they may vote there—a practice meant to give people time to get to know the State's issues as well as to prevent outsiders from affecting local elections. Most States also forbid **transients**, or people living in a State for only a short time, from voting there.

There is also an age requirement for voting. In 1971 the 26th Amendment established 18 as the age at which a State may not deny a person the right to vote.

Forty-nine States—all except North Dakota—require voter **registration**,

which is the act of signing up with local election officials. This requirement gives officials lists of registered voters, called **poll books**. State law tells officials to periodically review the poll books and purge them. **Purging** them means removing from them names of those no longer eligible to vote.

Today, no State has a voter requirement of **literacy**—the ability to read or write. Nor does any State require a **poll tax**, a tax paid for voting.

All States deny the right to vote to people in mental institutions or those legally considered mentally incompetent. Most States also deny the right to vote to anyone who has been convicted of a serious crime.

**THE BIG IDEA**

**While all States have requirements for voting, most of those used to disenfranchise certain groups have been eliminated over time.**

**GRAPHIC SUMMARY: How States Decide Who Can Vote**

Voter Qualification	Status
State Citizenship	Required by all States
State Residence	Most States require 10–50 days, with an average of 30 days
Age	All States require a minimum age of 18
Voter Registration	Required by 49 States
Mental Competency	No State allows voting rights to anyone in a mental institution or legally considered mentally incompetent
Criminal Record	Most States deny voting rights to anyone convicted of a serious crime

Every State defines voter qualifications, although not all States require the same ones.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What is voter registration?

2. **Chart Skills** Name two groups of citizens who are denied the right to vote in most States.