

THE PERIODIC TABLE OF THE PRESIDENTS™

The Twenty-Fourth Amendment

Introduction:

Voting in the United States has changed over time. In the beginning, the vote was limited to property owners. That requirement was loosened and voting was extended to citizens that could pay a tax, known as a poll tax. By the middle of the 19th century, the vote was extended to nearly all white men with little use of a poll tax. Enfranchisement was again widened with the Fifteenth Amendment, in which African-American men gained the right to vote. It was then that the poll tax had a rebirth, along with other disenfranchising practices. In 1964, the Twenty-Fourth Amendment banned the poll tax in federal elections. The Supreme Court would extend the ban into state and local elections.

The text of this amendment begins, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay poll tax or other tax.”

Questions:

1. What does the Twenty-Fourth Amendment ban?
2. What year was the Twenty-Fourth Amendment ratified?
3. What is a “poll tax”?
4. When the Constitution was first ratified, what members of society had the right to vote?
5. By the mid-1800s, before the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified, which members of society could vote?
6. Why might southern states have reinstated a poll tax after the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment?
7. Why did the Twenty-Fourth Amendment, as written, apply only to federal elections?
8. What was the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections* (1966)?
9. How does an amendment become a part of the Constitution?
10. Why do you think the Founders made it difficult to change the Constitution with an amendment?