

The Political System

Section 3



MAIN IDEA

Americans can participate in government by voting and speaking out on the issues that matter to them.

Key Terms

volunteers individuals who work without pay to help others

political action committees groups that collect voluntary contributions from members and use this money to fund favored candidates

Section Summary

FOUR WAYS CITIZENS CAN PARTICIPATE IN GOVERNMENT

A democratic government is based on the participation of its citizens. There are four ways that citizens can participate in government: speaking on public issues, participating in community action groups, voting, and working on political campaigns. To make sure that your voice becomes part of the public opinion on a particular issue, you may “speak” to your congressional representatives and to senators. You can write letters, make telephone calls, and send e-mails or faxes. In addition, you can join community action groups. Such groups often are focused on local issues such as neighborhood improvement, library resources, or park facilities.

Underline the four ways citizens can participate in government.

Circle four ways that citizens may “speak” to Congress.

VOTING IS IMPORTANT

The act of voting allows citizens to participate in government by choosing the officials who will represent the interests of the citizens. In a democracy, voting is a right of citizenship, but it is also an important responsibility. If voter participation is low, then the elected officials represent only a small percentage of the population.

In America, citizens who are 18 years of age may register to vote. However, statistics show that many people do not register to vote. Also, of those who do

Explain how voting is both a right and a responsibility.

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register to vote, many do not cast votes during elections. Citizens have many reasons for not voting: lack of interest, unpopular candidates, illness, travel, and changes of address. One popular reason that people do not participate in the voting process is the belief that their vote does not affect the outcome of an election. However, this is not the case. Each vote works with other votes to reveal who the majority of voters want to lead.

Draw a box around six reasons why people do not participate in the voting process.

TAKING PART IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

If there is a candidate who represents your interests well, you can choose to **volunteer**—at any age—to work on his or her campaign. In addition, interest groups may send volunteers to work on or donate money to campaigns. The law prevents an interest group from donating money directly to a campaign. However, supporters may donate money to **political action committees (PACS)** that may fund candidates. There are more PACs today than there have been in the past. This increase shows the importance of PACs in the political process.

List three causes or organizations that you might support through volunteerism.

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**Critical Thinking: Identifying Cause and Effect**

Make a chart showing the causes and effects of low voting rates in an election. First, list the reasons that people fail to register to vote. Then, list the effects low voting rates could have on a democracy.

Finally, write a paragraph in which you suggest ways to motivate people to vote.

Section 3, *continued*

DIRECTIONS Use the space below to create an advertisement for volunteers for a specific organization or cause. Include drawings, charts, or other visual elements as well as text. Include the terms **volunteers** and **political action committees** in the text of the advertisement.

