

Political Reforms - Progressive Era

Giving Power to the People

- Progressive politicians were elected at the local and state levels.
- Much of the work done at these levels was very important and gave American citizens more of a say in their government. (Making it more of a “direct” form of a representative democracy.)

1. Citizens Gained the Power to Create Laws:

➤ Initiative:

A bill originated by the people rather than lawmakers. With an initiative, a group of voters create a petition and have citizens sign it. Once the required amount of signatures is reached, the initiative will be placed on a ballot for citizens to vote.

➤ Referendum:

A vote on an initiative –the voters are able to accept or reject the initiative. This gave voters the ability to part of the law making process.

2. Ability to Remove Public Officials:

➤ Recall:

Voters can remove politicians from elected positions by forcing them to face another election before the end of the term if enough voters ask for it. A petition must be created and signed by citizens.

3. Citizen Involvement in Choosing Candidates for Office:

➤ Primary System:

Prior to this reform, party bosses and/or state legislators choose who will become a candidate for an elected position. With a primary system candidates from one party must be voted on in a state wide special primary election. In this election, just that party’s members would vote for one person to represent the party as a candidate.

Now, voters, not party bosses, choose candidates. The first mandatory statewide primary was held in Minnesota in 1899 and by 1915, about 2/3rds of the states had a form of direct primary.

4. Direct Election of Senators:

➤ 17th Amendment:

Each state has 2 Senators in Congress and population determines the number of Representatives from each state. Prior to this reform, citizens only were allowed to vote on members of the House of Representatives and the state’s legislature chose the U.S. Senators. The 17th Amendment gave more power to the citizens of each state. A direct election forces Senators to become more responsive to the people.