

# Why Do We Vote on a Tuesday in November?

By Evan Andrews

*This article is provided courtesy of History.com.*

Ever wonder why elections are held on Tuesdays? The answer lies with America's 19th-century farmers. Americans first began the custom of weekday voting in 1845, when Congress passed a federal law designating the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November as Election Day. Before then, states were allowed to hold elections any time they pleased within a 34-day period before the first Wednesday in December, but this system had a few crucial flaws. Knowing the early voting results could affect turnout and sway opinion in states that held late elections, and those same last-minute voters could potentially decide the outcome of the entire election. Faced with these issues, Congress created the current Election Day in the hope of streamlining the voting process.

But why a Tuesday in November? The answer stems from the agrarian makeup of 19th-century America. In the 1800s, most citizens worked as farmers and lived far from their polling place. Since people often traveled at least a day to vote, lawmakers needed to allow a two-day window for Election Day. Weekends were impractical, since most people spent Sundays in church, and Wednesday was market day for farmers. With this in mind, Tuesday was selected as the first and most convenient day of the week to hold elections. Farm culture also explains why Election Day always falls in November. Spring and early summer elections were thought to interfere with the planting season, and late summer and early fall elections overlapped with the harvest. That left the late fall month of November—after the harvest was complete, but before the arrival of harsh winter weather—as the best choice.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1.** When is Election Day?

- A) the first Wednesday in November
- B) the first Wednesday in December
- C) the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November
- D) the first Monday following the first Tuesday in November

**2.** Before 1845, “states were allowed to hold elections any time they pleased within a 34-day period before the first Wednesday in December.” What was one effect of this election system?

- A) Voters in states with late elections knew the results of early elections.
- B) Farmers were often unable to get to their polling place in time to vote.
- C) The people who voted first could decide the outcome of most elections.
- D) People spent less time in church because they would often travel to vote on Sundays.

**3.** Read these sentences from the text.

“Before then [1845], states were allowed to hold elections any time they pleased within a 34-day period before the first Wednesday in December, but this system had a few crucial flaws. Knowing the early voting results could affect turnout and sway opinion in states that held late elections, and those same last-minute voters could potentially decide the outcome of the entire election.”

Based on this evidence, what was probably one of the “crucial flaws” in the voting system before 1845?

- A) Voters had trouble keeping track of when elections were scheduled in their state.
- B) People who voted early often changed their mind and tried to vote again in another state.
- C) Voters in states with late elections had more power over the outcome of elections than voters in states with earlier elections.
- D) Voters in states with late elections had less power over the outcome of elections than voters in states with earlier elections.

**4.** Read these sentences from the text.

“In the 1800s, most citizens worked as farmers and lived far from their polling place. Since people often traveled at least a day to vote, lawmakers needed to allow a two-day window for Election Day. Weekends were impractical, since most people spent Sundays in church, and Wednesday was market day for farmers. With this in mind, Tuesday was selected as the first and most convenient day of the week to hold elections.”

Based on this evidence, what can you infer about the location of polling places?

- A) Polling places were probably near the markets to which farmers traveled.
  - B) Polling places were probably far from the markets to which farmers traveled.
  - C) Polling places were probably near the churches that most people attended.
  - D) Polling places were probably far from the churches that most people attended.
- 5.** What is the main idea of this text?
- A) In the 1800s, most citizens of the United States worked as farmers and lived far from their polling place.
  - B) Election Day is on a Tuesday in November because of the day’s convenience for farmers in 19th-century America.
  - C) Before 1845, states were allowed to hold elections any time they pleased within a 34-day period before the first Wednesday in December.
  - D) Before 1845, early voting results could affect turnout and sway opinion in states that held late elections.

**6.** The title of this text is "Why Do We Vote on a Tuesday in November?" Why might the author have written the title as a question?

- A) to encourage readers to answer the question on their own before reading the article
- B) to prepare readers for a discussion of the answer to this question in the article
- C) to express confusion over a tradition for which there seems to be no explanation
- D) to challenge a practice that has lost much of its value over time

7. Read these sentences from the text.

“In the 1800s, most citizens worked as farmers and lived far from their polling place. Since people often traveled at least a day to vote, lawmakers needed to allow a two-day window for Election Day. Weekends were impractical, since most people spent Sundays in church, and Wednesday was market day for farmers. With this in mind, Tuesday was selected as the first and most convenient day of the week to hold elections.”

Which word would best replace “With this in mind” in the last sentence?

- A) Previously
- B) Primarily
- C) Otherwise
- D) Consequently

8. What did Congress create Election Day “in the hope of”?

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9. Explain why Election Day always falls in November. Support your answer with evidence from the text.

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10. Explain whether the creation of Election Day improved the election process for Americans.

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