

The 2024 Essay Question

On November 5, 2024, United States citizens will vote to elect a president and other leaders of their government, which enacts laws and executes policies on behalf of a population numbering more than [340 million](#) people and makes decisions that impact people not just domestically, but throughout the world.

If you are over the age of 18, you can influence how issues important to you should be resolved in our representative government through voting. Marshall University finds your right to do so crucial; it therefore works hard to establish itself as a [Voter Friendly Campus](#), empowering you to exercise this right.

This year's essay contest asks you to identify an issue important to you that is at stake in this year's election, to research and explain the various positions taken by politicians and others on your issue, and to propose solutions. You must also discuss how our founding documents -- the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution -- relate to your issue. You must thoroughly describe the issue and why it is important, and your essay should reflect research into prior attempts to address the issue as well as possible solutions.

Background

The [U.S. Constitution](#) drafted in the summer of 1787 created a representative democracy, with leaders elected by large numbers of people; checks and balances among three independent branches of government; federalism, which divided powers between state and federal governments; and courts to enforce the rule of law. The Constitution also provides that it can be amended (see U.S. Constitution, Article V), as the Framers anticipated that changes might be necessary to address issues not resolved then or future issues they could not foresee.

The [Declaration of Independence](#), which will celebrate its 250th anniversary in 2026, was a statement in 1776 by those who rebelled against the British government, articulating the values that inspired them and why they found it necessary for what became the United States to separate from British rule. Its proclamation that all people "are created equal" and have the inalienable right to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" has been relied upon by those seeking the expansion of rights for Black people, women, indigenous people, and others, and is reflected in the 13th, 14th, 15th, 19th, 24th and 26th Amendments to the Constitution.

The expanded recognition of citizenship, human rights, and equal protection of the law throughout our history has not been straightforward or easy; it has involved great

sacrifice, suffering, bloodshed, and a Civil War. But the country has endured, grown, and changed when the ideas for its betterment have been pursued by its citizens. To continue peaceful progress, even in the face of the polarization of our electorate, we must identify and discuss issues important to us and how they can be resolved.

Regarding the upcoming election, both major political parties have identified various priorities in their party platforms. The [Republican Party adopted its platform](#) at its convention in July. Also in July, the [Democratic Party released its proposed platform](#), which will likely be adopted at its convention in August.

You, of course, may identify an issue not in the platforms of the major parties and/or advocate a resolution to an issue that they do not address. It should, however, be a known issue that can be addressed by governmental action. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Constitutional amendments to change the undemocratic aspects of the existing Constitution, such as the electoral college or U.S. Senate
- campaign finance reform
- changes to the U.S. Supreme Court
- climate change
- income inequality
- immigration
- reproductive rights
- the First Amendment's protection of freedom of speech, press, religion, and your right to petition the government
- the Second Amendment
- protecting equal rights
- protecting voting rights
- changes to the criminal justice system
- whether there should be a right to education

In summary, your essay must thoroughly describe the issue you selected and explain why it is critical. You should articulate how it relates to the ideas in the Declaration of Independence and how the U.S. Constitution, as it now exists, permits government to address the issue. If it does not, you must argue whether and how the Constitution should be reformed to allow it to be addressed. Your essay must explain the history of attempts to address your issue, your suggested resolution, how to effectuate it through legal means, and how voting behaviors could impact your desired resolution. Note that you can agree with a position already existing or suggest something you think would be better.