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Elections and Voting

A chastened President Obama, stunned by his repudiation at the polls, talked to the press the day after the 2010 midterm elections. Looming over his shoulder at the press conference was a portrait of Bill Clinton, a man similarly repudiated in his own first midterm election. “It feels bad,” an honest Obama told the assembled media.

In retrospect, Obama’s first wake-up call should have been the January 2010 election of Republican Scott Brown to the U.S. Senate. Brown was elected in a special contest to fill the remainder of deceased Senator Ted Kennedy’s term in traditionally Democratic Massachusetts. Although Brown shunned the label, he owed much of his victory to the support of the conservative tea party movement, which rallied behind his candidacy.

But, Obama appeared to sleep through that alarm, and many others. As 2010 went on, and the elections neared, a slew of polls showed a discontented electorate eager for a change

very different from that which Obama had promised just two years earlier.

One of the reasons Obama and congressional Democrats ignored the warning signs was their focus on policy. President Obama was determined to seal his legacy with the passage of health care reform, even if it cost his party seats in the election. And some Democrats also thought the political landscape would shift dramatically in their favor if they were able to pass any type of health care reform bill. However, when it passed in March 2010, it received virtually no Republican support. The passage of this multi-billion dollar bill, coupled with bailouts of the banking and automobile industries, and high unemployment levels led many voters to believe that Democrats were unconcerned about the economy, and an angry electorate began calling for less government.

The extent of the electorate’s deep dissatisfaction with “big” government was not reserved solely for Democrats, however.



Elections are the festival of the American democracy. They allow citizens to choose their leaders and promote a peaceful transition of power. At left, Representative Vito Marcantonio (R-NY) campaigns for reelection in 1946. At right, Senator Lisa Murkowski (AK), who lost the Republican Party primary, campaigns for Senate as an Independent in 2010; her efforts were successful.

In May 2010, three-term incumbent Senator Robert Bennett of Utah, a Republican, placed third at his own state party convention becoming the first Senate incumbent of the year to lose his party's nomination in a primary. Two more incumbents—Arlen Specter, a recent convert to the Democratic Party, and Lisa Murkowski, a Republican—would follow. This tradition-bucking trend reached its pinnacle when Christine O'Donnell, with the endorsement of Sarah Palin and the tea party movement, upset Mike Castle for the Delaware Republican Senate nomination on September 15th.

On Election Day, many dissatisfied Democrats stayed home, and other voters angered by the state of the economy and the increasing deficits were energized by the tea party movement to come out and vote for Republicans who had raised record amounts of money as a result of liberalized campaign spending and finance laws. Republicans gained over sixty seats in the House, and six

seats in the Senate. In addition, literally hundreds of state legislative seats, not to mention half a dozen governorships went to Republicans. All in all, the Republican Party handed the sleeping Democrats the largest defeat for either party since 1938.

What Should I Know About . . .

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- ★ **13.1** Trace the roots of American elections, and distinguish among the four different types of elections, p. 420.
- ★ **13.2** Outline the electoral procedures for presidential and general elections, p. 423.
- ★ **13.3** Compare and contrast congressional and presidential elections, and explain the incumbency advantage, p. 430.
- ★ **13.4** Identify seven factors that influence voter choice, p. 433.
- ★ **13.5** Identify six factors that affect voter turnout, p. 437.
- ★ **13.6** Explain why voter turnout is low, and evaluate methods for improving voter turnout, p. 440.

Every year, the Tuesday following the first Monday in November, a plurality of voters, simply by casting ballots peacefully across a continent-sized nation, reelects or replaces politicians at all levels of government—from the president of the United States, to members of the U.S. Congress, to state legislators. Americans tend to take this process for granted, but in truth it is a marvel. Many other countries do not enjoy the benefit of competitive elections and the peaceful transition of political power made possible through the electoral process.

Americans hold frequent elections at all levels of government for more offices than any other nation on earth. And, the number of citizens eligible to participate in these elections has grown steadily over time. But, despite increased access to the ballot box, voter participation remains historically low. After all the blood spilled and energy expended to expand voting rights, only about half of eligible voters bother to go to the polls.

This chapter focuses on elections and voting in the United States. We will explore both presidential and congressional contests, and examine the range of factors that affect vote choice and voter turnout.

- First, we will examine *the roots of American elections*, including the purposes and types of elections.
- Second, we will discuss the mechanics of *presidential elections* including primaries, caucuses, and the Electoral College.
- Third, we will explore how *congressional elections* differ from presidential elections, why incumbents have an advantage, and why they may lose.
- Fourth, we will discuss *patterns in vote choice*.
- Fifth, we will look at the range of factors that affect *voter turnout*.
- Finally, we will investigate *problems with voter turnout* and evaluate some suggestions for improving voter turnout rates.



ROOTS OF American Elections

★ 13.1 . . . Trace the roots of American elections, and distinguish among the four different types of elections.

Elections are responsible for most political changes in the United States. Regular free elections guarantee mass political action and enable citizens to influence the actions of their government. Societies that cannot vote their leaders out of office are left with little choice other than to force them out by means of strikes, riots, or coups d'état.

Purposes of Elections

Popular election confers on a government legitimacy that it can achieve no other way. Elections confirm the very concept of popular sovereignty, the idea that legitimate political power is derived from the consent of the governed (see [chapter 1](#)), and they

serve as the bedrock for democratic governance. At fixed intervals, the **electorate**—citizens eligible to vote—is called on to judge those in power. Even though the majority of office holders in the United States win reelection, some office holders inevitably lose power, and all candidates are accountable to the voters. The threat of elections keeps policy makers concerned with public opinion and promotes ethical behavior.

Elections also are the primary means to fill public offices and organize and staff the government. Because candidates advocate certain policies, elections also provide a choice of direction on a wide range of issues, from abortion to civil rights to national defense to the environment. If current office holders are reelected, they may continue their policies with renewed resolve. Should office holders be defeated and their challengers elected, a change in policies will likely result. Either way, the winners will claim a **mandate** (literally, a command) from the people to carry out a party platform or policy agenda.

Types of Elections

The United States is almost unrivaled in the variety and number of elections it holds. Under the Constitution, the states hold much of the administrative power over these elections, even when national office holders are being elected. Thus, as we will see, states have great latitude to set the date and type of elections, determine the eligibility requirements for candidates and voters, and tabulate the results.

There are two stages of the electoral process: primary and general elections. In most jurisdictions, candidates for state and national office must compete in both of these races. Some states (but not the national government) also use the electoral process to make public policy and remove office holders. These processes are known as the initiative, referendum, and recall.

PRIMARY ELECTIONS In **primary elections**, voters decide which of the candidates within a party will represent the party in the general elections. Primary elections come in a number of different forms, depending on who is allowed to participate. **Closed primaries** allow only a party’s registered voters to cast a ballot. In **open primaries**, however, independents and sometimes members of the other party are allowed to participate. Closed primaries are considered healthier for the party system because they prevent members of one party from influencing the primaries of the opposition party. Studies of open primaries indicate that **crossover voting**—participation in the primary of a party with which the voter is not affiliated—occurs frequently.² Nevertheless, the research suggests that these crossover votes are usually individual decisions; there is little evidence of organized attempts by voters of one party to influence the primary results of the other party.³

In ten states, when none of the candidates in the initial primary secures a majority of the votes, there is a **runoff primary**, a contest between the two candidates with the greatest number of votes.⁴ Louisiana has a novel twist on the primary system. There, all candidates for office appear on the ballot on the day of the national general election. If one candidate receives over 50 percent of the vote, the candidate wins and no further action is necessary. If no candidate wins a majority of the vote, the top two candidates, even if they belong to the same party, face each other in a runoff election. Such a system blurs the lines between primary and general elections.

GENERAL ELECTIONS Once the parties have selected their candidates for various offices, each state holds its general election. In the **general election**, voters decide which candidates will actually fill elective public offices. These elections are held at many levels, including municipal, county, state, and national. Whereas primaries are contests between the candidates within each party, general elections are contests between the candidates of opposing parties.

electorate
The citizens eligible to vote.

mandate
A command, indicated by an electorate’s votes, for the elected officials to carry out a party platform or policy agenda.

primary election
Election in which voters decide which of the candidates within a party will represent the party in the general election.

closed primary
A primary election in which only a party’s registered voters are eligible to cast a ballot.

open primary
A primary election in which party members, independents, and sometimes members of the other party are allowed to participate.

crossover voting
Participation in the primary election of a party with which the voter is not affiliated.

runoff primary
A second primary election between the two candidates receiving the greatest number of votes in the first primary.

general election
Election in which voters decide which candidates will actually fill elective public offices.

initiative

An election that allows citizens to propose legislation or state constitutional amendments by submitting them to the electorate for popular vote.

referendum

An election whereby the state legislature submits proposed legislation or state constitutional amendments to the voters for approval.

recall

An election in which voters can remove an incumbent from office prior to the next scheduled election.

INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM Taken together, the initiative and referendum processes are collectively known as ballot measures; both allow voters to enact public policy. They are used by some state and local governments, but not the national government.

An **initiative** is a process that allows *citizens* to propose legislation or state constitutional amendments by submitting them to the electorate for popular vote, provided the initiative supporters receive a certain number of signatures on petitions supporting the placement of the proposal on the ballot. The initiative process is used in twenty-four states and the District of Columbia. A **referendum** is an election whereby the state *legislature* submits proposed legislation or state constitutional amendments to the voters for approval. Legislators often use referenda when they want to spend large sums of money or address policy areas for which they do not want to be held accountable in the next election cycle.

Ballot measures have been the subject of heated debate in the past decades. Critics charge that ballot measures—which were intended to give citizens more direct control over policy making—are now unduly influenced by interest groups and “the initiative industry”—law firms that draft legislation, petition management firms that guarantee ballot access, direct-mail firms, and campaign consultants who specialize in initiative contests.⁵ Critics also question the ability of voters to deal with the numerous complex issues that appear on a ballot. In addition, the wording of a ballot measure can have an enormous impact on the outcome. In some cases, a “yes” vote will bring about a policy change; in other cases, a “no” vote will cause a change.⁶ Moreover, ballot initiatives are not subject to the same campaign contribution limits that limit donations in candidate campaigns. Consequently, a single wealthy individual can bankroll a ballot measure and influence public policy in a manner that is not available to the individual through the normal policy process.

Supporters of ballot measures argue that critics have overstated their case, and that the process has historically been used to champion popular issues that were resisted at the state level by entrenched political interests. Initiatives, for example, have been

instrumental in popular progressive causes such as banning child labor, promoting environmental laws, expanding suffrage to women, and passing campaign finance reform. The process has also been used to pass popular conservative proposals such as tax relief and banning gay marriages.⁷ Supporters also point out that ballot measures can heighten public interest in elections and can increase voter participation.

RECALL Recall elections—or delections—allow voters to remove an incumbent from office prior to the next scheduled election. Recall elections are very rare, and sometimes they are thwarted by an official’s resignation or impeachment prior to the vote. The most recent visible recall election occurred in 2003, when Californians recalled Governor Grey Davis (a Democrat) and replaced him with movie star (and Republican) Arnold Schwarzenegger. Immediately following the recall, commentators feared

How do citizens use ballot measures? Ballot measures often address controversial policy issues that legislators would prefer to avoid. Here, citizens rally for and against California’s Proposition 8, which addressed gay marriage rights.



Photo courtesy: AP/Wide World Photos

that voters in California had set a precedent for the people of a state to recall governors whenever things are not going well. This, however, has not been the case.

Presidential Elections

★ 13.2 . . . Outline the electoral procedures for presidential and general elections.

No U.S. election can compare to the presidential contest. This spectacle, held every four years, brings together all the elements of politics and attracts the most ambitious and energetic politicians to the national stage. Voters in a series of state contests that run through the winter and spring of the election year select delegates who will attend each party's national convention. Following the national convention for each party, held in mid- and late summer, there is a final set of fifty separate state elections all held on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November to select the president. This lengthy process exhausts candidates and voters alike, but it allows the diversity of the United States to be displayed in ways a shorter, more homogeneous presidential election process could not. (To learn more about the 2008 presidential election, see **chapter 14**.)

Primaries and Caucuses

The state party organizations use several types of methods to elect national convention delegates and ultimately select the candidates who will run against each other in the general election:

1. *Winner-take-all primary.* Under this system the candidate who wins the most votes in a state secures all of that state's delegates. While Democrats no longer permit its use because it is viewed as less representative than a proportional system, Republicans generally prefer this process as it enables a candidate to amass a majority of delegates quickly and shortens the divisive primary season.
2. *Proportional representation primary.* Under this system, candidates who secure a threshold percentage of votes are awarded delegates in proportion to the number of popular votes won. Democrats now strongly favor this system and use it in many state primaries, where they award delegates to anyone who wins more than 15 percent in any congressional district. Although proportional representation is probably the fairest way of allocating delegates to candidates, its



Plurality Versus Proportional Representation

There are many different ways to organize elections for legislative bodies. The United States uses a plurality system in which the candidate with the most votes wins even if it is not an absolute majority of the votes cast. Great Britain also uses a plurality system. Plurality systems tend to favor large parties over smaller ones. Many other countries, including Germany, France, and Japan, use a proportional representation (PR) system. While there are many different varieties of PR systems, all are based on the idea that the number of seats a party has in the legislature should reflect its vote total. In 2010, Great Britain held an election in which no party won a majority of seats in Parliament. This led to a coalition government, with two parties sharing in leadership. An analysis of the election by the Electoral Reform Society using public opinion poll and other data suggest that while a PR system would not have changed the overall outcome, it would have resulted in a different distribution of seats in Parliament. The results of their analysis appear in the table:

Political Party	Plurality System (Actual Results). ^a	Alternative Vote PR System (Hypothetical Results). ^b	Single Transferable Vote PR System (Hypothetical Results). ^c
Conservative	307 seats	281 seats	246 seats
Labor	258 seats	262 seats	207 seats
Liberal- Democrat	57 seats	79 seats	162 seats
Other	28 seats	28 seats	35 seats

Source: Electoral Reform, *Guardian* (May 10, 2010), www.guardian.co.uk.

- Which of the two proportional representation systems presented in the table provides voters with the most choice?
- Which system is more democratic: a plurality system or a proportional representation system? Why?
- Would a proportional representation system work in the United States? What kind of impact might it have on the Democratic and Republican Parties?

^aThe candidate with the most votes wins, even if there is no majority.

^bVoters rank the candidates. If no candidate gets over 50% of the vote, the bottom candidate is eliminated and his or her votes are redistributed to the voters' second preference. This continues until one candidate gets over 50% of the vote.

^cVoters rank the candidates. Candidates must achieve a quota (certain number) of votes to get elected. If a candidate has more than enough votes, the surplus votes are redistributed to candidates who are listed as the second preference on these ballots. If their new vote totals are greater than the quota number, they too are elected.

Where are party caucuses held? While voters go to polling places located in buildings such as schools and community centers to vote in primary and general elections, caucuses can be held in living rooms, high school gyms, or even in casinos. Here, union members supporting Senator Hillary Clinton rally for their candidate at a casino before caucuses in Nevada.



Photo courtesy: AP/Wide World Photos

downfall is that it renders majorities of delegates more difficult to accumulate and thus can lengthen the presidential nomination contest.

3. **Caucus.** The caucus is the oldest, most party-oriented method of choosing delegates to the national conventions. Traditionally, the caucus was a closed meeting of party activists in each state who selected the party's choice for presidential candidate. Today, caucuses (in Iowa, for example) are more open and attract a wider range of the party's membership. Indeed, new participatory caucuses more closely resemble primary elections than they do the old, exclusive party caucuses.⁸

SELECTING A SYSTEM The mix of pre-convention contests has changed over the years, with the most pronounced trend being the shift from caucuses to primary elections.

Only seventeen states held presidential primaries in 1968; in 2008, forty states chose this method. In recent years, the vast majority of delegates to each party's national convention have been selected through the primary system.

Many people support the increase in the number of primaries because they believe that they are more democratic than caucuses. Primaries are accessible not only to party activists, but also to most of those registered to vote. Related to this idea, advocates argue that presidential primaries are the best means by which to nominate presidential candidates. Although both primaries and caucuses attract the most ideologically extreme voters in each party, primaries nominate more moderate and appealing candidates—those that primary voters believe can win in the general election. Primaries are also more similar to the general election and thus constitute a rigorous test for the candidates, a chance to display under pressure some of the skills needed to be a successful president.

Critics believe that the qualities tested by the primary system are by no means a complete list of those a president needs to be successful. For instance, skill at handling national and local media representatives is by itself no guarantee of an effective presidency. The exhausting primary schedule may be a better test of a candidate's stamina than of his or her brain power. In addition, critics argue that although primaries may attract more participants than caucuses, this quantity does not substitute for the quality of information held by caucus participants. At a caucus, participants spend several hours learning about politics and the party. They listen to speeches by candidates or their representatives and receive advice from party leaders and elected officials, then cast a well-informed vote.

FRONT-LOADING The role of primaries and caucuses in the presidential election has been altered by **front-loading**, the tendency of states to choose an early date on the nomination calendar. Seventy percent of all the delegates to both party conventions are now chosen before the end of February. This trend is hardly surprising, given the added press emphasis on the first contests and the voters' desire to cast their ballots before the competition is decided. (To learn more about front-loading, see Figure 13.1.)

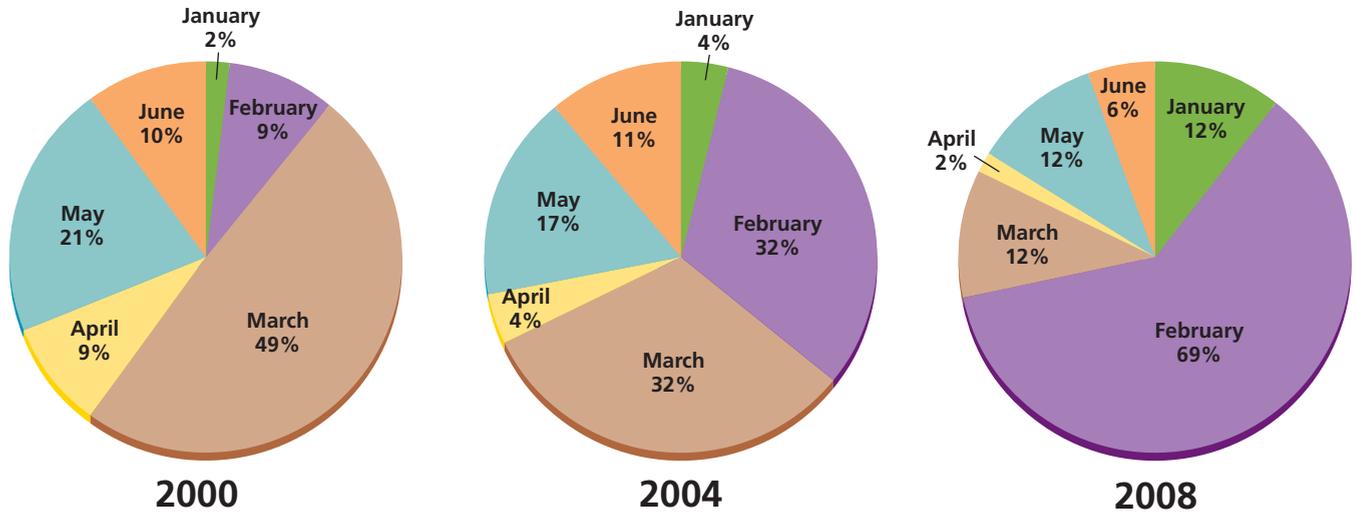
front-loading

The tendency of states to choose an early date on the nomination calendar.

Figure 13.1 *When do states choose their nominee for president?*

These pie graphs show when Democratic Party caucuses and primary elections have been held in the last three election cycles. The trend toward front-loading is evident.

Source: Joshua T. Putnam, “Whodunnit? The Actors Behind the Frontloading of Presidential Primaries and Caucuses, 1976–2008.” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 2010. See also frontloading.blogspot.com



Front-loading has important effects on the nomination process. First, a front-loaded schedule generally benefits the front-runner, since opponents have little time to turn the contest around once they fall behind. Second, front-loading gives an advantage to the candidate who wins the “invisible primary,” that is, the one who can raise the bulk of the money *before* the nomination season begins. Once primaries and caucuses begin, there is less opportunity to raise money to finance campaign efforts simultaneously in many states.

However, Internet fund-raising has emerged as a means to soften the advantage of a large campaign fund going into a primary battle, since it allows candidates to raise large sums from many small donors nationwide virtually overnight. In 2008, long-shot Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul raised a record \$6 million in one day, shattering his own record of \$4.2 million in the previous month. All of the major 2008 presidential candidates relied on online donations to finance their campaigns, but the highly compressed schedule still forced even the best-funded candidates to make difficult decisions on how to allocate their financial resources.

Electing a President: The Electoral College

Given the enormous amount of energy, money, and time expended to nominate two major-party presidential contenders, it is difficult to believe that the general election could be more arduous than the nominating contests, but it usually is. The actual general election campaign for the presidency (and other offices) is described in [chapter 14](#), but the object of the exercise is clear: winning a majority of the **Electoral College**. This uniquely American institution consists of representatives of each state who cast the final ballots that actually elect a president. The total number of **electors**—the members of the Electoral College—for each state is equivalent to the number of senators and representatives that state has in the U.S. Congress. The District of Columbia is accorded three electoral votes making 538 the total number of votes cast in the Electoral College. Thus, the magic number for winning the presidency is 270 votes.

Keep in mind that through **reapportionment**, representation in the House of Representatives and consequently in the Electoral College is altered every ten years to

Electoral College

Representatives of each state who cast the final ballots that actually elect a president.

elector

Member of the Electoral College.

reapportionment

The reallocation of the number of seats in the House of Representatives after each decennial census.

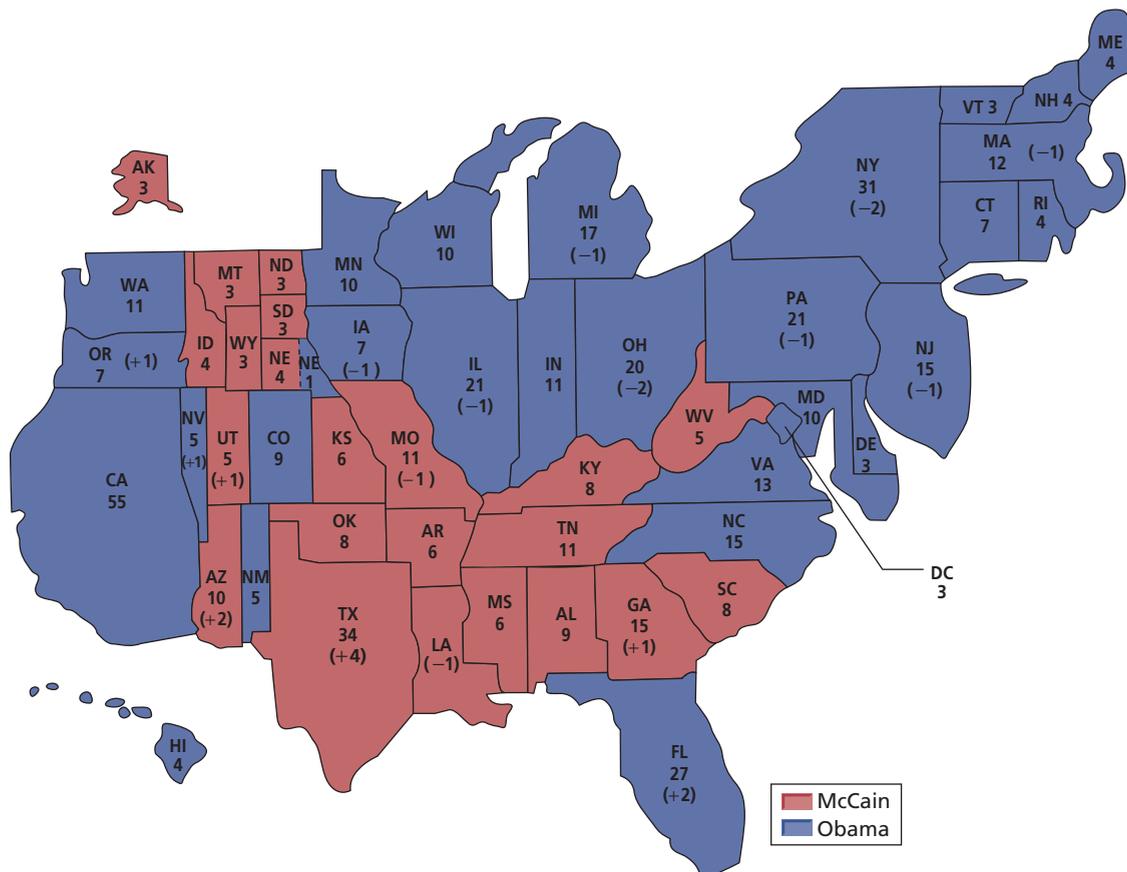
reflect population shifts. Reapportionment is simply the reallocation of the number of seats in the House of Representatives that takes place after each decennial census. Projections for the 2010 Census show a sizeable population shift from the Midwest and the Democratic-dominated Northeast to the South and West, where Republicans are much stronger. If these projections hold, Texas will gain four congressional districts, and therefore four additional seats in the House of Representatives and four additional votes in the Electoral College. Arizona and Florida will gain two seats and two votes, while four other states will gain one. New York and Ohio stand to lose two seats and two votes, while eight states stand to lose a single seat and electoral vote. If Barack Obama runs for reelection and wins the same states in 2012 that he won in 2008, he will win 5 fewer votes. (To learn more about the 2008 Electoral College results, see Figure 13.2.)

HISTORICAL CHALLENGES The Electoral College was the result of a compromise between those Framers who argued for selection of the president by the Congress and those who favored selection by direct popular election. There are three essentials to understanding the Framers’ design of the Electoral College. The system was constructed to: (1) work without political parties; (2) cover both the nominating and electing phases of presidential selection; and, (3) produce a nonpartisan president. Most of the challenges faced by the Electoral College are the result of changes in the

Figure 13.2 *How is voting power apportioned in the Electoral College?*

This map visually represents the respective electoral weights of the fifty states in the 2008 presidential election. For each state, the projected gain or loss of Electoral College votes based on the 2010 Census is indicated in parentheses.

Source: synapse.princeton.edu/~sam/ev_projection_current_map.jpg and www.edssurvey.com/images/File/NR_Appor07wTables.pdf.



The Living Constitution

Each State shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a Number of Electors, equal to the whole Number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress: but no Senator or Representative, or Person holding an Office of Trust or Profit under the United States, shall be appointed an Elector.

—ARTICLE II, SECTION 1, CLAUSE 2

This clause of the Constitution creates what is called the Electoral College, the representative body of citizens formally responsible for choosing the president of the United States. This body was created as a compromise between some Framers who favored allowing citizens to directly choose their president and other Framers who feared that directly electing a president could lead to tyranny. As stipulated in the Constitution, each state has a number of votes in the Electoral College that is equivalent to the number of senators and representatives that state has in the U.S. Congress.

Since the ratification of the Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution in 1824, the Electoral College has remained relatively unchanged, save for the addition of electors as the size of the House of Representatives and Senate grew. However, one major change in the Electoral College occurred when Congress enacted and the states ratified the Twenty-Third Amendment to the Constitution. This amendment gave the District of Columbia, which had evolved from a dismal swampland to a growing metropolitan area, representation in the Electoral College. The amendment set the number of electors representing the District as equal to the number of electors representing the smallest state, regardless of

the District's population. Today, the District has three electors, making it equal with small population states such as Delaware and Wyoming.

This provision could become problematic if the population of the District grows from its present level of 600,000. Then, if the District were to have voting power in the Electoral College equal to its population, it would have at least one additional elector. Republicans in Congress, however, have resisted modifying this provision, as well as giving the District a voting member (or members) of Congress, in part because the District is one of the most heavily Democratic areas of the nation. In 2008, for example, more than 90 percent of the District's residents voted for Barack Obama.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Should the Electoral College continue to play a role in the selection of the president? Why or why not?
2. What reforms could be enacted to make the Electoral College a more democratic institution?
3. Should the District of Columbia have representation in the Electoral College equal to its population? Why or why not?

practice of elections that have occurred over time. (To learn more about the creation of the Electoral College, see *The Living Constitution: Article II, Section 1, Clause 2.*)

For example, because the Framers expected partisanship to have little influence, the Electoral College originally was designed to elect the president and vice president from the same pool of candidates; the one who received the most votes would become president and the runner-up would become vice president. To accommodate this system, each elector was given two votes. Following the development of the first party system, the republic's fourth presidential election soon revealed a flaw in this plan. In 1800, Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr were, respectively, the presidential

How was the 1876 presidential election resolved? This cartoon from the 1876 presidential contest between Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel J. Tilden describes the frustration of many Americans with interpreting the constitutional procedures for resolving Electoral College disputes. An electoral commission formed by Congress to decide the matter awarded all disputed electors to Hayes, giving him the victory even though he had lost the popular vote by a 51-48 percent margin.

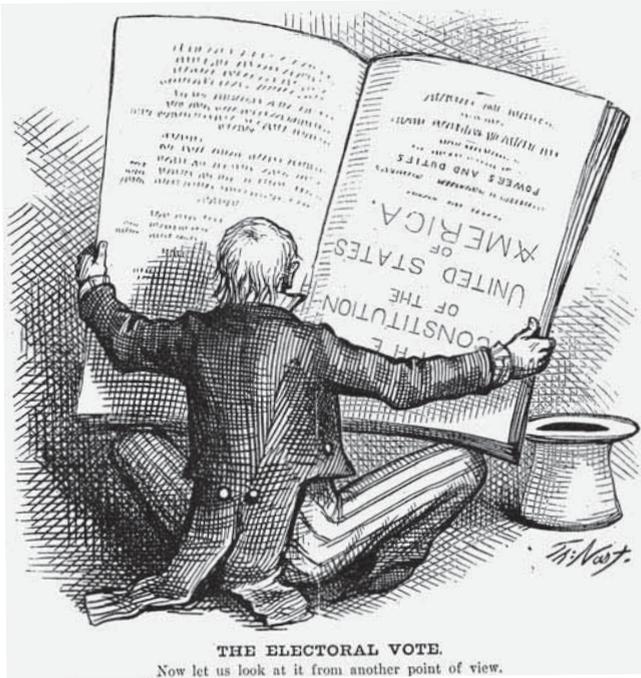


Photo courtesy: The Granger Collection, New York

and vice presidential candidates advanced by the Democratic-Republican Party, whose supporters controlled a majority of the Electoral College. Accordingly, each Democratic-Republican elector cast one of his two votes for Jefferson and the other one for Burr. Since there was no way under the constitutional arrangements for electors to earmark their votes separately for president and vice president, the presidential election resulted in a tie between Jefferson and Burr. Even though most understood Jefferson to be the actual choice for president, the Constitution mandated that a tie be decided by the House of Representatives, which was controlled by the Federalists. The controversy was settled in Jefferson's favor, but only after much energy was expended to persuade Federalists not to give Burr the presidency.

The Twelfth Amendment, ratified in 1804 and still the constitutional foundation for presidential elections today, was an attempt to remedy the confusion between the selection of vice presidents and presidents that beset the election of 1800. The amendment provided for separate elections for each office. In the event of a tie or when no candidate received a majority of the total number of electors, the election still went to the House of Representatives; now, however, each state delegation would have one vote to cast for one of the three candidates who had received the greatest number of electoral votes.

The Electoral College modified by the Twelfth Amendment has fared better than the College as originally designed, but it has not been problem free. On three occasions during the nineteenth century, the electoral process resulted in the selection of a president who received fewer votes than his opponent. In 1824, neither John Quincy Adams nor Andrew Jackson secured a majority of electoral votes, throwing the election into the House. Although Jackson had more electoral and popular votes than Adams, the House selected the latter as president. In the 1876 contest between Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel J. Tilden, no candidate received a majority of electoral votes; the House decided in Hayes's favor even though he had 250,000 fewer popular votes than Tilden. In the election of 1888, President Grover Cleveland secured about 100,000 more popular votes than did Benjamin Harrison, yet Harrison won a majority of the Electoral College vote, and with it the presidency.

No further Electoral College crises have occurred. However, the 2000 presidential election once again brought the Electoral College to the forefront of voters' minds. Throughout the 2000 presidential campaign, many analysts foresaw that the election would likely be the closest since the 1960 race between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon. Few observers realized, however, that the election would be so close that the winner would not be officially declared for more than five weeks after Election Day. And, no one could have predicted that the Electoral College winner, George W. Bush, would lose the popular vote and become president after the Supreme Court's controversial decision in *Bush v. Gore* (2000) stopped a recount of votes cast in Florida. With the margin of the Electoral College results so small (271 for Bush, 267 for Gore), a Gore victory in any number of closely contested states could have given him a majority in the Electoral College.

SHOULD THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE BE REFORMED? Following the 2000 election, many political observers suggested that the system of electing a president was in

need of reform. Two major proposals were put forward and are discussed in this section. To date, however, no changes have been made, and it will likely take another major electoral crisis to reopen the debate.

First, and perhaps most simply, some observers have suggested using the national popular vote to choose the president. While this is the most democratic reform, it is by far the least likely to be enacted, given that the U.S. Constitution would have to be amended to abolish the Electoral College. Even assuming that the House of Representatives could muster the two-thirds majority necessary to pass an amendment, the proposal would almost certainly never pass the Senate. Small states have the same representation in the Senate as populous ones, and the Senate thus serves as a bastion of equal representation for all states, regardless of population—a principle generally reinforced by the existing configuration of the Electoral College, which ensures disproportionate electoral influence for the smallest states.

Another proposed reform is known as the congressional district plan. This plan would retain the Electoral College but give each candidate one electoral vote for each congressional district that he or she wins in a state, and the winner of the overall popular vote in each state would receive two bonus votes (one for each senator) for that state.

The congressional district plan is currently used in two states: Maine and Nebraska. In the 2008 election, Nebraska, which has three representatives and two senators for a total of five electoral votes, split its votes between Senators Barack Obama and John McCain. McCain won a majority of the state's votes and had majorities in two of the congressional districts, so he received four electoral votes. Obama received one electoral vote for his victory in Nebraska's 2nd congressional district, which includes Omaha and the surrounding areas.

One advantage of the congressional district plan is that it can be adopted without constitutional amendment. Any state that wants to split its Electoral College votes need only pass a law to this effect. It may also promote more diffuse political campaigns; instead of campaigning only in states that are “in play” in the Electoral College, candidates might also have to campaign in competitive districts in otherwise safe states.

But, the congressional district plan also has some unintended consequences. First, the winner of the popular vote might still lose the presidency under this plan. Under a congressional district plan, Richard M. Nixon would have won the 1960 election instead of John F. Kennedy. Second, this reform would further politicize the congressional redistricting process. If electoral votes were at stake, parties would seek to maximize the number of safe electoral districts for their presidential nominee while minimizing the number of competitive districts. Finally, although candidates would not ignore entire states, they would quickly learn to focus their campaigning on competitive districts while ignoring secure districts, thereby eliminating some of the democratizing effect of such a change.

How was the 2000 presidential election resolved? Controversy over the counting of votes in Florida during the 2000 presidential election between Al Gore and George W. Bush resulted in a great deal of litigation over how to count disputed ballots. Ultimately, the Supreme Court's decision in *Bush v. Gore* (2000) decided the vote counting issue, and turned the Electoral College outcome in Bush's favor.



Photo courtesy: Tim Boyle/Newsmakers/Getty Images

Congressional Elections

★ 13.3 . . . Compare and contrast congressional and presidential elections and explain the incumbency advantage.

Compared with presidential elections, congressional elections receive scant national attention. Unlike major-party presidential contenders, most candidates for Congress labor in relative obscurity. There are some celebrity nominees for Congress—television stars, sports heroes, and even local TV news anchors. The vast majority of party nominees for Congress, however, are little-known state legislators and local office holders who receive remarkably limited coverage in many states and communities. For them, just establishing name identification in the electorate is the biggest battle.

The Incumbency Advantage

The current system enhances the advantages of **incumbency**, or already holding an office. Those people in office tend to remain in office. In a “bad” year such as the Republican wave of 2010, “only” 87 percent of House incumbents won reelection. Senatorial reelection rates can be much more mercurial. In 2006, only 79 percent of senators seeking reelection were victorious. In 2010, 90 percent of incumbents were reelected. To the political novice, these reelection rates might seem surprising, as public trust in government and satisfaction with Congress has remained remarkably low during the very period that reelection rates have been on the rise. To understand the nature of the incumbency advantage it is necessary to explore its primary causes: staff support, visibility, and the “scare-off” effect.

STAFF SUPPORT Members of the U.S. House of Representatives are permitted to hire eighteen permanent and four nonpermanent aides to work in their Washington and district offices. Senators typically enjoy far larger staffs, with the actual size determined by the number of people in the state they represent. Both House and Senate

members also enjoy the additional benefits provided by the scores of unpaid interns who assist with office duties. Many of the activities of staff members directly or indirectly promote the legislator through constituency services, the wide array of assistance provided by a member of Congress to voters in need. Constituent service may include tracking a lost Social Security check, helping a veteran receive disputed benefits, or finding a summer internship for a college student. Having a responsive constituent service program contributes strongly to incumbency. Research has shown that if a House incumbent’s staff helped to solve a problem for a constituent, that constituent rated the incumbent more favorably than constituents who were not assisted by the incumbent,⁹ therefore providing the incumbent a great advantage over any challenger.

VISIBILITY Most incumbents are highly visible in their districts. They have easy access to local media, cut ribbons galore,

incumbency

Already holding an office.

What are some of the advantages of incumbency? Outspoken Michele Bachmann (R-MN), shown at left, became a media darling during the 2010 election season. She also won strong support from former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, at right, and the tea party movement.



Photo courtesy: AP/Wide World Photos

attend important local funerals, and speak frequently at meetings and community events. Moreover, convenient schedules and generous travel allowances increase the local availability of incumbents. Nearly a fourth of the people in an average congressional district claim to have met their representative, and about half recognize their legislator's name without prompting. This visibility has an electoral payoff, as research shows district attentiveness is at least partly responsible for incumbents' electoral safety.¹⁰

THE “SCARE-OFF” EFFECT Research also identifies an indirect advantage of incumbency: the ability of the office holder to fend off challenges from strong opposition candidates, something scholars refer to as the “scare-off” effect.¹¹ Incumbents have the ability to scare off high-quality challengers because of the institutional advantages of office, such as high name recognition, large war chests, free constituent mailings, staffs attached to legislative offices, and overall experience in running a successful campaign. Potential strong challengers facing this initial uphill battle will often wait until the incumbent retires rather than challenge him or her.¹²

Why Incumbents Lose

While most incumbents win reelection, in every election cycle some members of Congress lose their positions to challengers. There are four major reasons these members lose their reelection bids: redistricting, scandals, presidential coattails, and midterm elections.

REDISTRICTING At least every ten years, state legislators redraw congressional district lines to reflect population shifts, both in the state and in the nation at large. This very political process may be used to secure incumbency advantage by creating “safe” seats for members of the majority party in the state legislature. But, it can also be used to punish incumbents in the out-of-power party. Some incumbents can be put in the same districts as other incumbents, or other representatives' base of political support can be weakened by adding territory favorable to the opposition party. The number of incumbents who actually lose their reelection bids because of redistricting is lessened by the strategic behavior of redistricted members—who often choose to retire rather than wage an expensive reelection battle.¹³ (To learn more about redistricting, see [chapter 7](#).)

SCANDALS Scandals come in many varieties in this age of investigative journalism. The old standby of financial impropriety has been supplemented by other forms of career-ending incidents, such as sexual improprieties. Incumbents implicated in scandals typically do not lose reelections—because they simply choose to retire rather than face defeat.¹⁴ Representative Eric Massa (D–NY), for example, resigned from office in 2010 after accusations of sexual harassment and impropriety with staff members. His seat remained vacant until the November elections, when it was filled by Tom Reed (R–NY).

PRESIDENTIAL COATTAILS The defeat of a congressional incumbent can also occur as a result of presidential coattails. Successful presidential candidates usually carry into office congressional candidates of the same party in the year of their election. The strength of the coattail effect has, however, declined in modern times, as party identification has weakened and the powers and perks of incumbency have grown. Whereas Harry S Truman's party gained seventy-six House seats and nine additional Senate seats in 1948, Barack Obama's party gained only twenty-one House members and eight senators in 2008. The gains can be minimal even in presidential landslide

What role do scandals play in congressional elections? Many members of Congress who are implicated in scandals, such as former Representative Eric Massa (shown below), choose to resign from their seats rather than lose a contentious reelection bid.



Photo courtesy: AP/Wide World Photos

midterm election

An election that takes place in the middle of a presidential term.

Most apparent is the tendency of voters to punish the president's party much more severely in the sixth year of an eight-year presidency, a phenomenon associated with retrospective voting. After only two years, voters may still be willing to "give the guy a chance," but after six years, voters are often restless for change. In what many saw as a referendum on President George W. Bush's policy in Iraq, for example, the Republican Party lost control of both chambers of Congress in the 2006 election. This midterm election was typical of the sixth-year itch, with voters looking for a change and punishing the incumbent president's party in Congress.

Senate elections are less inclined to follow these off-year patterns than are House elections. The idiosyncratic nature of Senate contests is due to their intermittent

reelection years, such as 1972 (Nixon) and 1984 (Reagan). (To learn more about presidents' electoral influence, see Table 13.1).

MIDTERM ELECTIONS Elections in the middle of presidential terms, called **midterm elections**, present a threat to incumbents of the president's party. Just as the presidential party usually gains seats in presidential election years, it usually loses seats in off years. The problems and tribulations of governing normally cost a president some popularity, alienate key groups, or cause the public to want to send the president a message of one sort or another. An economic downturn or presidential scandal can underscore and expand this circumstance, as the Watergate scandal of 1974 and the recession of 1982 demonstrated.

In 2010, the economy once again led to the defeat of incumbents in a midterm election. Democratic incumbents, in particular, lost in record numbers while most Republicans were re-elected. All in all, Democrats lost more seats than either party has in an election since 1938.

Table 13.1 How does the president affect congressional elections?

President/Year	Gain (+) or Loss (–) for President's Party ^a					
	Presidential Election Years		Year	Midterm Election Years		
	House	Senate		House	Senate	
Truman (D): 1948	+76	+9	1950	–29	–6	
Eisenhower (R): 1952	+24	+2	1954	–18	–1	
Eisenhower (R): 1956	–2	0	1958	–48	–13	
Kennedy (D): 1960	–20	–2	1962	–4	+3	
L. Johnson (D): 1964	+38	+2	1966	–47	.4	
Nixon (R): 1968	+7	+5	1970	–12	+2	
Nixon (R): 1972	+13	–2	Ford (R): 1974	–48	–5	
Carter (D): 1976	+2	0	1978	–15	–3	
Reagan (R): 1980	+33	+12	1982	–26	+1	
Reagan (R): 1984	+15	–2	1986	–5	–8	
Bush (R): 1988	–3	–1	1990	–9	–1	
Clinton (D): 1992	–10	0	1994	–52	–9 ^b	
Clinton (D): 1996	+10	–2	1998	+5	0	
G. W. Bush (R): 2000	–2	–4	2002	+6	+2	
G. W. Bush (R): 2004	+3	+4	2006	–30	–6	
Obama (D): 2008	+21	+8	2010	–60 ^c	–6	

^a Gains and losses are the difference between the number of seats won by the president's party and the number of seats won by that party in the previous election.

^b Includes the switch from Democrat to Republican of Alabama U.S. Senator Richard Shelby one day after the election.

^c As of mid-November 2010, seven House races were still undecided. They are not included in this calculation.

scheduling (only one-third of the seats come up for election every two years) and the existence of well-funded, well-known candidates who can sometimes swim against whatever political tide is rising. In the 2010 midterm elections, Democrats were able to retain control of the Senate despite huge losses in the House. The impact of the tea party movement was far less powerful in statewide elections, and some Senate Democrats in close elections were able to win reelection; among them were Senators Patty Murray (D-WA), and Michael Bennet (D-CO).

Patterns in Vote Choice

★ 13.4 . . . Identify seven factors that influence voter choice.

Citizens who turn out to the polls decide the outcomes of American elections. The act of voting is the most common form of **conventional political participation**, or activism that attempts to influence the political process through commonly accepted forms of persuasion. Other examples of conventional political participation include writing letters and making campaign contributions. Citizens may also engage in **unconventional political participation**, or activism that attempts to influence the political process through unusual or extreme measures. Examples include participating in protests, boycotts, and picketing.

A number of factors affect citizens' choices about which candidate to support. Party affiliation and ideology are at the forefront of these predictors. Other important factors are income and education, race and ethnicity, gender, religion, and political issues. (To learn more about patterns of vote choice, see Figure 13.3.)

conventional political participation

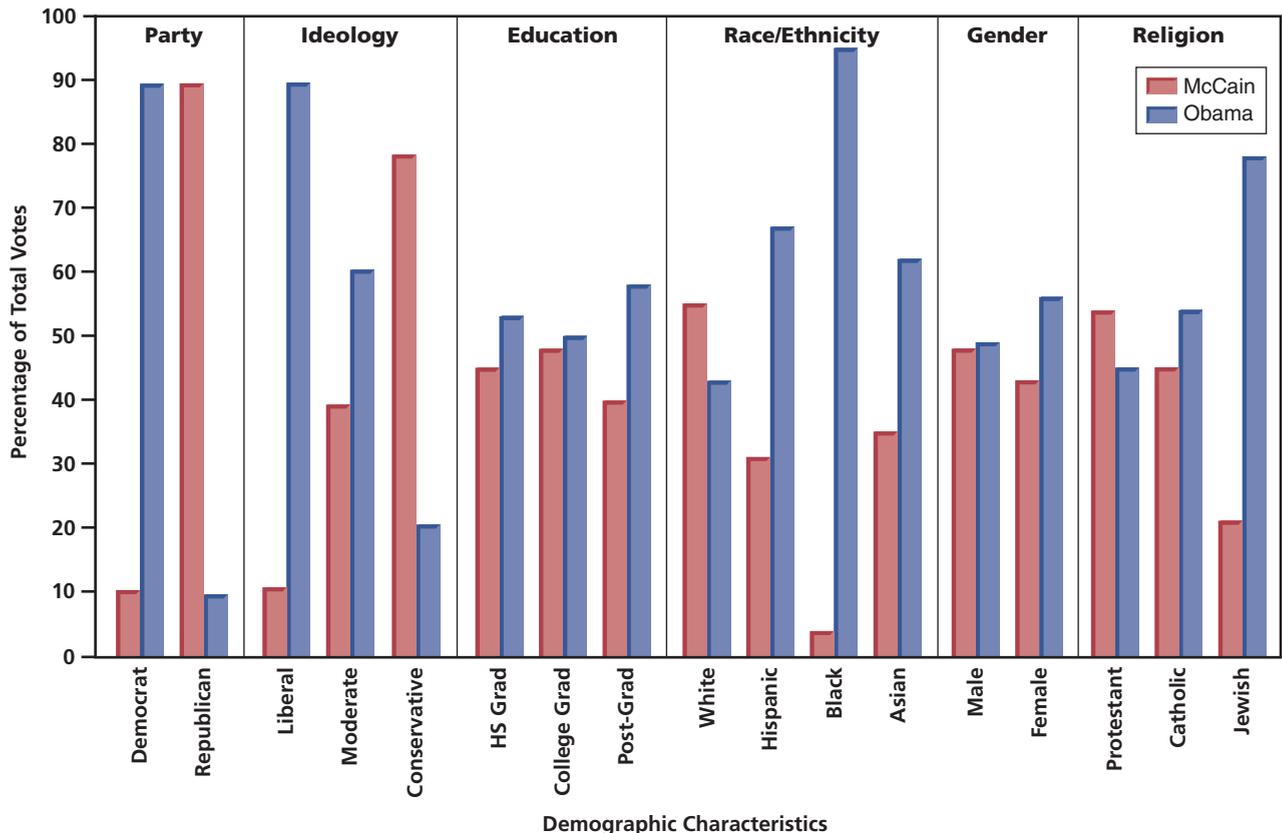
Activism that attempts to influence the political process through commonly accepted forms of persuasion such as voting or letter writing.

unconventional political participation

Activism that attempts to influence the political process through unusual or extreme measures, such as protests, boycotts, and picketing.

Figure 13.3 How do demographic characteristics affect citizens' vote choice?

Source: www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls.main/.



Party Identification

Party identification remains the most powerful predictor of vote choice. Stated simply, self-described Democrats tend to vote for Democratic candidates and self-described Republicans tend to vote for Republican candidates. This trend is particularly obvious in less-visible elections, where voters may not know anything about the candidates and need a cue to help them cast their ballot. However, even in presidential elections, there is a high correlation between vote choice and party affiliation. In 2008, for example, 89 percent of self-identified Democrats voted for Senator Barack Obama, and 90 percent of self-identified Republicans voted for Senator John McCain.

ticket-splitting

Voting for candidates of different parties for various offices in the same election.

In recent years, observers have noted higher levels of **ticket-splitting**, voting for candidates of different parties for various offices in the same election. Scholars have posited several potential explanations for ticket-splitting. One explanation is that voters split their tickets, consciously or not, because they trust neither party to govern. Under this interpretation, ticket-splitters are aware of the differences between the two parties and split their tickets to augment the checks and balances already present in the U.S. Constitution.¹⁵ Alternatively, voters split their tickets possibly because partisanship has become less relevant as a voting cue. A final explanation for this phenomenon is that the growth of issue- and candidate-centered politics has made party less important as a voting cue.¹⁶

Ideology

Ideology represents one of the most significant divisions in contemporary American politics. Liberals, generally speaking, favor government involvement in social programs and are committed to the ideals of tolerance and social justice. Conservatives, on the other hand, are dedicated to the ideals of individualism and market-based competition, and they tend to view government as a necessary evil rather than an agent of social improvement. Moderates lie somewhere between liberals and conservatives on the ideological spectrum; they favor conservative positions on some issues and liberal positions on others.

Not surprisingly, ideology is very closely related to vote choice. Liberals tend to vote for Democrats, and conservatives tend to vote for Republicans. In 2008, 89 percent of self-described liberals voted for Barack Obama, whereas only 10 percent voted for John McCain. Conservatives, on the other hand, voted for McCain over Obama at a rate of 79 to 20 percent.¹⁷

Income and Education

Over the years, income has been a remarkably stable correlate of vote choice. The poor vote more Democratic; the well-to-do vote heavily Republican.¹⁸ The 2008 election was, to some extent, consistent with these trends. Sizeable majorities of those making less than \$50,000 annually supported Obama, with 70 percent of those making less than \$15,000 annually leading the way. All other income classes were a virtual toss-up, with Obama and McCain each carrying between 46 and 52 percent of the electorate. It can be said, however, that McCain, as the Republican candidate, performed better with voters in middle-class and high-income brackets than he did with poorer voters.

Since income and education are highly correlated—more educated people tend to make more money—it should be no surprise that education follows a somewhat similar pattern. The most educated and the least educated citizens tend to vote Democratic, and those in the middle—for example, with a bachelor's degree—tend to vote Republican.

Race and Ethnicity

Racial and ethnic groups tend to vote in distinct patterns. While whites have shown an increasing tendency to vote Republican, African American voters remain overwhelmingly Democratic in their voting decisions. Despite the best efforts of the Republican Party to garner African American support, this pattern shows no signs of waning. In 2008, Barack Obama's candidacy accelerated this trend, and 95 percent of African Americans voted for him. John McCain received a mere 4 percent of the African American vote.¹⁹

Hispanics also tend to identify with and vote for Democrats, although not as monolithically as do African Americans. In 2008, for example, Obama received 67 percent of the votes cast by Hispanics; McCain received only 31 percent.

Asian and Pacific Island Americans are more variable in their voting than either the Hispanic or African American communities. It is worth noting the considerable political diversity within this group: Chinese Americans tend to prefer Democratic candidates, but Vietnamese Americans, with strong anti-communist leanings, tend to support Republicans. A typical voting split for the Asian and Pacific Island American community runs about 60 percent Democratic and 40 percent Republican, though it can reach the extreme of a 50–50 split, depending on the election.²⁰ In the 2008 election, 62 percent of Asian American voters supported Obama and 35 percent of Asian American voters supported McCain.

Gender

Since 1980, the gender gap, the difference between the voting choices of men and women, has become a staple of American politics. In general, women are more likely to support Democratic candidates and men are more likely to support Republicans. The size of the gender gap varies considerably from election to election, though normally the gender gap is between 5 and 7 percentage points. That is, women support the average Democrat 5 to 7 percent more than men. In 2008, Barack Obama won 56 percent of the female vote, but only 49 percent of the male vote.²¹

A gender gap in vote choice is not confined only to contests between Democrats and Republicans but is frequently apparent in intra-party contests as well. In the 2008 Democratic primaries and caucuses, Democratic women were more likely than Democratic men to support Senator Hillary Clinton. In the California primary, for example, 59 percent of women and only 45 percent of men voted for Senator Clinton. There was a similar pattern in other competitive states such as Ohio, Texas, and Pennsylvania.²² The strong, consistent support of Democratic women for Senator Clinton, in particular among blue-collar women and women over 50, likely resulted from a long-standing identification with her and her commitment to women's issues. There is no evidence to suggest women and men generally vote for a candidate of their own gender in races that have both women and men running.²³

Religion

Religious groups also have tended to vote in distinct patterns, but some of these traditional differences have declined considerably in recent years. The most cohesive of religious

How does gender influence electoral outcomes? In general, women are more likely to support Democratic candidates. The logo used by Women for Obama, shown below, is just one example of campaigns' efforts to win the support of women voters.



Photo courtesy: The White House

How does religion influence political beliefs? Religious identification is often strongly correlated with vote choice. American Jews, for example, intensely identify with the Democratic Party. Here, President Barack Obama immerses himself in Jewish heritage on a trip to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, Israel.



Photo courtesy: AP/Wide World Photos

groups has been Jewish voters, a majority of whom have voted for every Democratic presidential candidate since the New Deal realignment. In 2008, 78 percent of Jewish voters supported Senator Barack Obama.

In contrast, Protestants are increasingly Republican in their vote choice. This increase in support owes largely to the rise of social conservatives, as well as the Republican emphasis on personal responsibility.²⁴ In 2008, 54 percent of Protestants supported Senator John McCain. Republican support is even stronger among evangelical Protestants. Among those voters who self-identified as “born again,” 74 percent supported McCain.

Catholic voters are a much more divided group. Historically, Catholic voters tended to identify with the Democratic Party and its support of social justice issues and anti-poverty programs. But, since the 1970s and the rise of the abortion issue, Catholic voters have supported Republican candidates in larger numbers. In the last several presidential elections, the

Catholic vote has alternated party support. In 2004, 52 percent of Catholic voters supported Republican President George W. Bush. In 2008, 54 percent of Catholic voters supported Democratic candidate Obama.

Issues

In addition to the underlying influences on vote choice discussed above, individual issues can have important effects in any given election year. One of the most important driving forces is the state of the economy.²⁵ Voters tend to reward the party in government, usually the president’s party, during good economic times and punish the party in government during periods of economic downturn. When this occurs, the electorate is exercising **retrospective judgment**; that is, voters are rendering judgment on the party in power based on past performance on particular issues, in this case the economy. At other times, voters might use **prospective judgment**; that is, they vote based on what a candidate pledges to do about an issue if elected.

The 2008 election provides an example of how both retrospective and prospective judgments helped voters reach their ballot decisions. Following the September collapse of the stock and housing markets, voters were concerned primarily with one issue: the economy. On a consistent basis, Democrat Barack Obama argued that the poor economy resulted from the failed policies of the Republican Bush administration. Many voters offered a negative retrospective judgment on the Republicans’ handling of the economic crisis by voting for Obama; among those who thought their financial situation was worsening, 71 percent voted for Obama.

Other citizens cast ballots for more forward-looking prospective reasons. Among citizens who were very concerned about rising health care costs, a policy area Obama vowed to reform, 66 percent cast ballots for the Democratic candidate.

retrospective judgment

A voter’s evaluation of a candidate based on past performance on a particular issue.

prospective judgment

A voter’s evaluation of a candidate based on what he or she pledges to do about an issue if elected.

Voter Turnout

★ 13.5 . . . Identify six factors that affect voter turnout.

Turnout is the proportion of the voting-age public that casts a ballot. In general, all citizens who are age eighteen or older are eligible to vote. States add a number of different regulations to limit the pool of eligible voters, such as restricting felons' participation and requiring voter identification. (To learn more about the regulations, see *Join the Debate: Should Felons Be Allowed to Vote?* and Table 13.2).

Although about 60 percent of eligible voters turned out in 2008, average voter turnout in the United States is much lower than in other industrialized democracies: about 40 percent. An additional 25 percent are occasional voters, and 35 percent rarely or never vote. Some of the factors known to influence voter turnout include income and education, race and ethnicity, gender, age, civic engagement, and interest in politics.

Who turns out to vote? Demographic factors can predict voter turnout. Here, voters in Fort Lauderdale, Florida stand in a long and winding line to cast a ballot.



Photo courtesy: HANS DERYK/Reuters/Corbis

turnout

The proportion of the voting-age public that casts a ballot.

Income and Education

A considerably higher percentage of citizens with annual incomes over \$65,000 vote than do citizens with incomes under \$35,000. Wealthy citizens are more likely than poor ones to think that the system works for them and that their votes make a difference. People with higher incomes are more likely to recognize their direct financial stake in the decisions of the government, thus spurring them into action.²⁶ In contrast, lower-income citizens often feel alienated from politics, possibly believing that conditions will remain the same no matter who holds office. As a result, these people are less likely to believe that their vote will make a difference and are more reluctant to expend the effort to turnout and vote.

As with vote choice, income and education are highly correlated; a higher income is often the result of greater educational attainment. Thus, all other things being equal, college graduates are much more likely to vote than those with less education, and people with advanced degrees are the most likely to vote. People with more education tend to learn more about politics, are less hindered by registration requirements, and are more self-confident about their ability to affect public life.²⁷

Table 13.2 *How do states regulate voter eligibility?*

- Prohibit all ex-felons from voting (9 states)
- Allow incarcerated felons to vote from prison (2 states)
- Require all voters to show some form of ID to vote (18 states)
- Require or request that all voters show a photo ID to vote (8 states)
- Require no voter registration (1 state)
- Allow Election Day registration (9 states and DC)
- Require voters to register to vote at least 30 days prior to an election (16 states)
- Allow no-excuse absentee balloting (20 states)
- Allow early voting (35 states)

Sources: Pew Center on the States, www.pewcenteronthestates.org, and CIRCLÉ, www.civicyouth.org.



Join the **DEBATE** | Should Felons Be Allowed to Vote?

An estimated 5.3 million citizens could not vote in 2010 because they had been convicted of a felony. States, not the federal government, determine whether or not felons can vote, and there is considerable variation in state laws. Vermont and Maine allow convicted felons—even those in prison or on probation—to vote. Convicted felons in Kentucky and Virginia and nine other states, on the other hand, are barred from voting for life.^a

Proponents of banning felons from voting argue that committing a felony offense demonstrates a basic disregard for the law, and therefore, convicted felons should not be entitled to the basic rights of citizenship. However, others argue that restrictions on felons' ability to vote are a legacy of the racial discrimination prevalent during the Jim Crow era. Restrictions on convicted felons' suffrage also raise important constitutional questions. While the courts have historically ruled that states may pursue whatever policies they like with regard to felons, the Fourteenth Amendment requires that states provide "equal protection of the laws" to all citizens. Should citizens convicted of a felony lose their right to vote forever? Or, after serving their time and rejoining society, should they enjoy all the rights afforded to citizens of the United States, including the right to vote?

To develop an **ARGUMENT FOR** voting rights for convicted felons, think about how:

- **The Constitution affords a number of protections that are not forfeited, even in prison.** If convicted individuals retain constitutional protections such as freedom of speech and prohibitions against cruel and unusual punishment, why should they have to give up the right to vote? Is voting a basic right of citizenship or a reward for good behavior?
- **Limiting the right of felons to vote disproportionately affects minorities and individuals with low levels of income or education.** In what ways does the disenfranchisement of felons subject minorities and members of lower socioeconomic classes to additional disadvantages? How might taking away felons' voting rights work against the objective of promoting the general welfare?
- **Permanently denying a felon the right to vote extends the penalty for committing a crime far beyond the original sentence.** Should someone who has served his or her prescribed sentence permanently lose the right to vote? Is it fair to extend the penalty for committing a crime beyond the sentence imposed by the trial judge and jury?

To develop an **ARGUMENT AGAINST** voting rights for convicted felons, think about how:

- **Individuals who commit felony crimes implicitly give up their right to participate in civil society.** If convicted felons do not enjoy the same rights as the rest of us to privacy, employment, and movement, why should the right to vote be afforded unique protection? Should citizens who have disregarded the law be allowed to choose the elected officials who make the laws?
- **Prohibiting felons from voting has nothing to do with race or socioeconomic status.** If all felons are stripped of their voting rights, how can the policy be biased? If certain groups are disproportionately represented among felons, how does that, in itself, justify the expansion of the franchise to convicted criminals?
- **Convicted felons are denied other rights and services.** Is denying the right to vote fundamentally different from denying other rights and services, such as access to student loans or social welfare payments, which are also denied to convicted felons? In what ways does the threat to disenfranchise convicted felons simply represent another deterrent to the commission of serious crimes?

^aProCon.org maintains an excellent, up-to-date listing of state felon voting laws.

Race and Ethnicity

Despite substantial gains in voting rates among minority groups, especially African Americans, race remains an important factor in voter participation. Whites still tend to vote more regularly than do African Americans, Hispanics, and other minority groups. Several factors help to explain these persistent differences. One reason is the relative income and educational levels of the two racial groups. African Americans tend to be poorer and to have less formal education than whites; as mentioned earlier, both of these factors affect voter turnout. Significantly, though, highly educated and wealthier African Americans are more likely to vote than whites of similar background.²⁸ Another explanation focuses on the long-term consequences of the voting barriers that African Americans historically faced in the United States, especially in areas of the Deep South. As discussed in [chapter 6](#), in the wake of Reconstruction, the southern states made it extremely difficult for African Americans to register to vote, and only a small percentage of the eligible African American population was registered throughout the South until the 1960s. The Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 helped to change this situation by targeting states that once used literacy or morality tests or poll taxes to exclude minorities from the polls. The act bans any voting device or procedure that interferes with a minority citizen's right to vote, and it requires approval for any changes in voting qualifications or procedures in certain areas where minority registration is not in proportion to the racial composition of the district. It also authorizes the federal government to monitor all elections in areas where discrimination was found to be practiced or where less than 50 percent of the voting-age public was registered to vote in the 1964 election. As a result of the VRA and other civil rights reforms, turnout among African Americans has increased dramatically. (To learn more about the relationship between race and voter turnout, see [Figure 13.4](#).)

The Hispanic community in the United States is now slightly larger in size than the African American community; thus, Hispanics have the potential to wield enormous political power. In California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New York, five key electoral states, Hispanic voters have emerged as powerful allies for candidates seeking office. Moreover, their increasing presence in Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico—the latter three were key battleground states in the 2008 presidential election—have forced candidates of both parties to place more emphasis on issues that affect Hispanics. However, turnout among Hispanics is much lower than turnout among whites and African Americans. In 2008, Hispanics comprised almost 13 percent of the U.S. population but only 7.4 percent of those who turned out to vote.

Gender

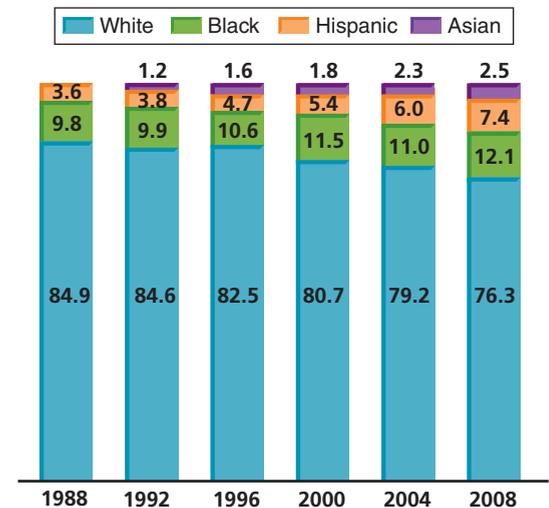
With the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, women gained the right to vote in the United States. While early polling numbers are not reliable enough to shed light on the voting rate among women in the years immediately following their entry into the voting process, it is generally accepted that in the period following ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, women voted at a lower rate than men. Recent polls suggest that today women vote at a slightly higher rate than their male counterparts. Since women comprise slightly more than 50 percent of the U.S. population, they now account for a majority of the American electorate.

Age

A strong correlation exists between age and voter turnout. The Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1971, lowered the voting age to eighteen. While this amendment obviously increased the number of eligible voters, it did so by enfranchising the group

Figure 13.4 *How has the racial and ethnic composition of voters changed?*

Source: Pew Research Center, "Dissecting the 2008 Electorate: Most Diverse in U.S. History," April 30, 2009. www.pewresearch.org.



that is least likely to vote. A much higher percentage of citizens age thirty and older vote than do citizens younger than thirty, although voter turnout decreases over the age of seventy, primarily due to difficulties some older voters have getting to their polling locations. Regrettably, only 70 percent of eligible eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds are even registered to vote.²⁹ The most plausible reason for this is that younger people are more mobile; they have not put down roots in a community. Because voter registration is not automatic, people who relocate have to make an effort to register. As young people marry, have children, and settle down in a community, their likelihood of voting increases.³⁰

Civic Engagement

Individuals who are members of civic organizations, trade and professional organizations, and labor unions are more likely to vote and participate in politics than those who are not members of these or similar types of groups. People who more frequently attend church or other religious services, moreover, also are more likely to vote than people who rarely attend or do not belong to religious institutions.

Many of these organizations emphasize community involvement, which often encourages voting and exposes members to requests from political parties and candidates for support. These groups also encourage participation by providing opportunities for members to develop organizational and communication skills that are relevant for political activity. Union membership is particularly likely to increase voting turnout among people who, on the basis of their education or income, are less likely to vote.³¹

Interest in Politics

People who are highly interested in politics constitute only a small minority of the U.S. population. The most politically active Americans—party and issue-group activists—make up less than 5 percent of the country's more than 300 million people. Those who contribute time or money to a party or a candidate during a campaign make up only about 10 percent of the total adult population. Although these percentages appear low, they translate into millions of Americans who are reliable voters and also contribute more than just votes to the system.

TOWARD REFORM: Problems with Voter Turnout

★ **13.6 . . . Explain why voter turnout is low, and evaluate methods for improving voter turnout.**

Inspiring citizens to turn out to vote is particularly important in the United States because of the winner-take-all electoral system. In theory, in such a system, any one vote could decide the outcome of the election. Although the importance of individual votes has been showcased in close elections such as the 2008 Minnesota race for the U.S. Senate, which was decided by only 312 votes, voter turnout in the United States remains quite low. In midterm elections, only 40 to 45 percent of the eligible electorate turns out to vote; that amount rises to 50 or 60 percent in presidential elections. The following sections discuss the causes of and potential remedies for low voter turnout in the United States.

Why Don't Americans Turn Out?

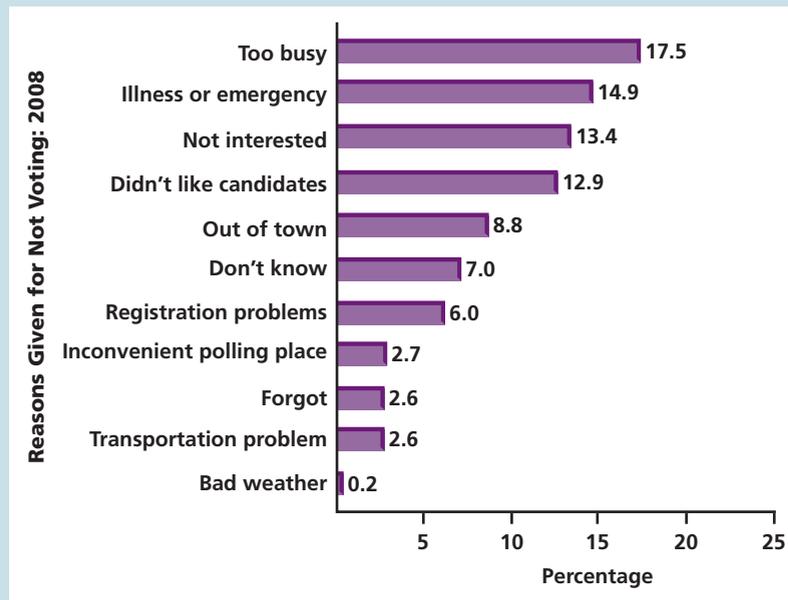
There are many reasons why people may choose not to participate in elections. Non-participation may be rooted in something as complicated as an individual's political philosophy, or something as simple as the weather—voter turnout tends to be lower on rainy Election Days. Here, we discuss some of the most common reasons for non-voting: other commitments, difficulty of registration, difficulty of absentee balloting, the number of elections, voter attitudes, and the weakened influence of political parties. (To learn more about reasons for not voting in the 2008 election, see Analyzing Visuals: Why People Don't Vote.)

OTHER COMMITMENTS According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 17.5 percent of registered nonvoters reported in 2008 that they did not vote because they were too busy or had conflicting work or school schedules. Another 14.9 percent said they did not vote because they were ill, disabled, or had a family emergency. While these reasons account for a large portion of the people surveyed, they also reflect the respondents'

ANALYZING VISUALS

Why People Don't Vote

During November of each federal election year, the U.S. Census Bureau conducts a Current Population Survey that asks a series of voting and registration-related questions. In the November 2008 survey, respondents were asked whether they voted in the 2008 election and, if not, what their reasons were for not voting. Review the bar chart showing the results and then answer the questions.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2008.

- What is the most common reason people gave for not voting in the 2008 election? What about the least common reason?
- How might political parties and candidates use this information to improve voter turnout rates? Are there steps that the government could take to improve turnout rates?
- Why might political parties or interest groups want to suppress voter turnout among certain groups? In what ways could the information provided in this chart assist with voter suppression?

desire not to seem uneducated about the candidates and issues or apathetic about the political process. Although some would-be voters are undoubtedly busy, infirm, or otherwise unable to make it to the polls, it is likely that many of these nonvoters are offering an easy excuse and have another reason for failing to vote.

DIFFICULTY OF REGISTRATION A major reason for lack of participation in the United States remains the relatively low percentage of the adult population that is registered to vote. Requiring citizens to take the initiative to register to vote is an American invention; nearly every other democratic country places the burden of registration on the government rather than on the individual. Thus, the cost (in terms of time and effort) of registering to vote is higher in the United States than it is in other industrialized democracies.

The National Voter Registration Act of 1993, commonly known as the Motor Voter Act, was a significant national attempt to ease the bureaucratic hurdles associated with registering to vote. The law requires states to provide the opportunity to register through driver's license agencies, public assistance agencies, and the mail. Researchers estimate that this law has increased voter registration by 5 to 9 percent, and some scholars hypothesize that the law is at least partially responsible for the increases in voter participation experienced in recent elections.

DIFFICULTY OF ABSENTEE VOTING Stringent absentee ballot laws are another factor affecting voter turnout in the United States. Many states, for instance, require citizens to apply in person for absentee ballots, a burdensome requirement given that a person's inability to be present in his or her home state is often the reason for absentee balloting in the first place. Recent literature in political science links liberalized absentee voting rules and higher turnout. One study concluded that generous absentee voting guidelines reduced the "costs of voting" and increased turnout when the parties mobilized their followers to take advantage of such absentee voting rules.³²

NUMBER OF ELECTIONS Another explanation for low voter turnout in the United States is the sheer number and frequency of elections. According to a study by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the United States typically holds twice as many national elections as other Western democracies, a consequence of the relatively short two-year term of office for members of the House of Representatives.³³ American federalism, with its separate elections at the local, state, and national levels, and its use of primary elections for the selection of candidates, also contributes to the number of elections in which Americans are called on to participate. With so many elections, even the most active political participants may skip part of the electoral process from time to time.

What does an absentee ballot look like? This absentee ballot from the state of Virginia was used during the 2008 presidential election.



Photo courtesy: Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

VOTER ATTITUDES Voter attitudes also affect the low rates of voter turnout observed in the United States. Some voters are alienated, and others are just plain apathetic, possibly because of a lack of pressing issues in a particular year, satisfaction with the status quo, or uncompetitive elections. Furthermore, many citizens may be turned off by the quality of campaigns in a time when petty issues and personal mudslinging are more prevalent

than ever. In 2008, 13.4 percent of registered non-voters reported that they were not interested in the election. Another 12.9 percent said they did not like the issues or candidates.

WEAKENED INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES Political parties today are not as effective as they once were in mobilizing voters, ensuring that they are registered, and getting them to the polls. As we discussed in **chapter 12**, the parties once were grassroots organizations that forged strong party-group links with their supporters. Today, candidate- and issue-centered campaigns and the growth of expansive party bureaucracies have resulted in somewhat more distant parties with which fewer people identify very strongly. While efforts have been made in recent elections to bolster the influence of parties, in particular through sophisticated get-out-the-vote efforts, the parties' modern grassroots activities still pale in comparison to their earlier efforts.

Ways to Improve Voter Turnout

Reformers have proposed many ideas to increase voter turnout in the United States. Always on the list is raising the political awareness of young citizens, a reform that inevitably must involve our nation's schools. The rise in formal education levels among Americans has had a significant effect on voter turnout.³⁴ No less important, and perhaps simpler to achieve, are institutional reforms such as making Election Day a holiday, easing constraints on voter registration, allowing mail and online voting, modernizing the ballot, and strengthening political parties.

MAKE ELECTION DAY A HOLIDAY Since elections traditionally are held on Tuesdays, the busy workday is an obstacle for many would-be voters. Some reformers have, therefore, proposed that Election Day should be a national holiday. This strategy might backfire, however, if people used the day off to extend vacations or long weekends. The tradition of Tuesday elections, however, should reduce this risk.

ENABLE EARLY VOTING In an attempt to make voting more convenient for citizens who may have other commitments on Election Day, thirty-four states (largely in the West, Midwest, and South) currently allow voters to engage in a practice known as early voting. Early voting allows citizens to cast their ballot up to a month before the election—the time frame varies by state—either by mail or at a designated polling location. Many citizens have found early voting to be a preferable way to cast their ballot; during the 2008 election, 50 percent of eligible voters took advantage of early voting in some jurisdictions.

Critics of early voting, however, charge that the method decreases the importance of the campaign. They also fear that voters who cast early ballots may later come to regret their choices. It is possible, for example, that a voter could change his or her mind after hearing new information about candidates just prior to Election Day, or that a voter could cast a ballot for a candidate who subsequently withdraws from the race.



Voter Turnout

Giving citizens the right to vote is only the first step to having a functioning democracy. Citizens must also exercise that right. In some countries voting is mandatory. In Australia, for example, citizens are required to vote, and the rules are strictly enforced. Voting is also compulsory in Greece, although there are virtually no penalties for not voting. The table presents statistics on voter turnout in selected politically stable democracies (where voting is not compulsory) in their most recent parliamentary or congressional elections.

Country	Year	Voter Turnout (%)
Denmark	2007	86.59
France	2007	60.44
Japan	2005	67.46
United Kingdom	2010	65.10
United States	2010	42.00

Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, www.idea.int/vt/introduction.cfm.

- What might explain Denmark's high voter turnout rate?
- Why do you think voter turnout is so much higher in other countries when compared with the United States?
- Should the United States make voting compulsory? What else could the United States do to improve voter turnout rates?

TIMELINE: Recent Developments in Voting

1988 Early Voting—Texas is the first state to enact legislation allowing citizens to vote several weeks before Election Day.

1995 Vote By Mail—Oregon becomes the first state to hold an election entirely by mail.

2000 Presidential Election Controversy—Difficulty counting and certifying votes in Florida draws attention to the need for improvements in voting technology.

1993 Motor Voter—The law is intended to facilitate easier voter registration; it requires citizens to be able to register in all public buildings.



PERMIT MAIL AND ONLINE VOTING Reformers have also proposed several voting methods citizens could do from their own homes. For example, Oregon, Washington, and some California counties vote almost entirely by mail-in ballots. These systems have been credited with increasing voter turnout rates in those states. But, voting by mail has its downside. There are concerns about decreased ballot security and increased potential for fraud with mail-in elections. Another problem with such an approach is that it may delay election results as the Board of Elections waits to receive all ballots.

Internet voting may be a more instantaneous way to tally votes. Some states, including Arizona and Michigan, have already experimented with using this method to cast ballots in primary elections. In addition, military members and their families from thirty-three states used Internet voting to cast absentee ballots in the 2010 elections.³⁵ However, Internet voting booths have been slow to catch on with the general public because many voters are suspicious of the security of this method and worry about online hackers and an inability to prevent voter fraud. Other observers fear that an all-online system could unintentionally disenfranchise poor voters, who may be less likely to have access to an Internet connection.

MAKE REGISTRATION EASIER Registration laws vary by state, but in most states, people must register prior to Election Day. In the nine states that permit Election Day registration, however, turnout has averaged about 11 percentage points higher in recent elections than in other states, supporting the long-held claim by reformers that voter turnout could be increased if registering to vote were made simpler for citizens.³⁶ Better yet, all U.S. citizens could be registered automatically at the age of eighteen. Critics, however, argue that such automatic registration could breed even greater voter apathy and complacency. (To learn more about one state's efforts to make voter registration easier, see Politics Now: Registered to Vote? There's an App for That.)

MODERNIZE THE BALLOT Following the 2000 election, when the outcome of the presidential election in Florida, and by extension the nation, hinged on "hanging

2002 Help America Vote Act—Federal government enacts legislation designed to help states modernize voting equipment.

2008 Record Turnout—Voter turnout in the 2008 presidential election reaches its highest level in more than 40 years.



2006 Electronic Voting—The use of electronic voting machines reaches an all-time high; nearly 40 percent of Americans cast ballots using this technology.

2010 Internet Voting—Military members and their families living abroad are permitted to use the Internet to cast ballots in the midterm elections.

chads”—punch-card ballots that had not been fully separated—legislators and other observers called for reforms to modernize the ballot. The federal government even enacted the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to aid states in upgrading voting equipment. Reformers hoped that these changes would make the process of voting easier, more approachable, and more reliable.

States and localities have made significant changes in the types of ballots they use as a result of the HAVA. More traditional voting methods such as paper and punch-card ballots (similar to the ballots used in Major League Baseball All-Star balloting) are used in less than 10 percent of jurisdictions today. Most voters use optical-scan sheets (similar to the Scantrons or “bubble sheets” used in many college classes) or electronic voting machines. The latter of these methods was initially thought to be the wave of the future in voting technology. Between 2000 and 2006, use of electronic voting machines nearly tripled. However, concerns about voter fraud and issues with voting machines in the 2006 and 2008 elections led some states to revert to other methods of voting. In 2008, 32.6 percent of voters used electronic voting machines, down from almost 40 percent in 2006.³⁷ (To learn more about the use of electronic voting machines, see Figure 13.5).

Supporters of electronic voting believe that emphasis must be placed on training poll workers, administrators, and voters on how to effectively use the new equipment. Critics believe that the lack of a paper trail leaves electronic machines vulnerable to fraud and worry that the machines could crash during an election. Still other critics cite the expense of the machines. All, however, agree that updating election equipment and ensuring fair elections across the country should be a legislative priority. As Charles M. Vest, the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, noted, “A nation that can send a man to the moon, that can put a reliable ATM machine on every corner, has no excuse not to deploy a reliable, affordable, easy-to-use voting system.”³⁸

STRENGTHEN PARTIES Reformers have long argued that strengthening the political parties would increase voter turnout, because parties have historically been the

Registered to Vote? There's an App for That

By Gerard Matthews

April 12, 2010
Arkansas Times
www.arktimes.com

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Do you think making voter information more accessible will cause registration or turnout to increase? Explain your answer?
2. What privacy concerns may be associated with having voter information accessible via smartphones and other technology?
3. What other ways might states make information of this kind more available to citizens?

Secretary of State Charlie Daniels today announced the launch of a new mobile application that will allow Arkansas residents to verify their voter registration information with the convenience of a smartphone.

The new Voter View Mobile application, the first of its kind in the country, is accessible from the Arkansas Secretary of State's mobile website at the following link: www.sos.ar.gov/m. The application is available on all smartphone operating platforms, including iPhone, Blackberry, Google Android, Windows Mobile, and Palm.

To use this service, Arkansans need only enter their name and date of birth to view their registration status and listed address. If they are registered to vote, district and polling place information for their listed address will appear. Users will be able to immediately call their county clerk from the number provided if any changes to their voter registration information are needed, or to instantly map the nearest early voting polling location, for example.

"I am proud to offer this exciting new voter service to Arkansans," Secretary Daniels said. "I think most people would be glad to find out sooner rather than later if they are not on the voter rolls or if their address is not up-to-date. I encourage all Arkansans to make use of this new tool before the upcoming voter registration deadline on April 19."

The Secretary of State's office maintains the Network of Voters in Arkansas (NOVA), which is a centralized database of all the state's registered voters. NOVA provided the resources needed for Secretary Daniels to launch the Voter View search engine in October 2006. The new mobile version of Voter View was created by the Information Network of Arkansas, which is a collaborative effort between the state of Arkansas and Arkansas Information Consortium that helps state government entities web-enable their information services.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of electronic voting machines?

Electronic voting machines can be very user-friendly, as seen here. They may also be more susceptible to tampering and voter fraud.



Photo courtesy: Chris Rank/Corbis

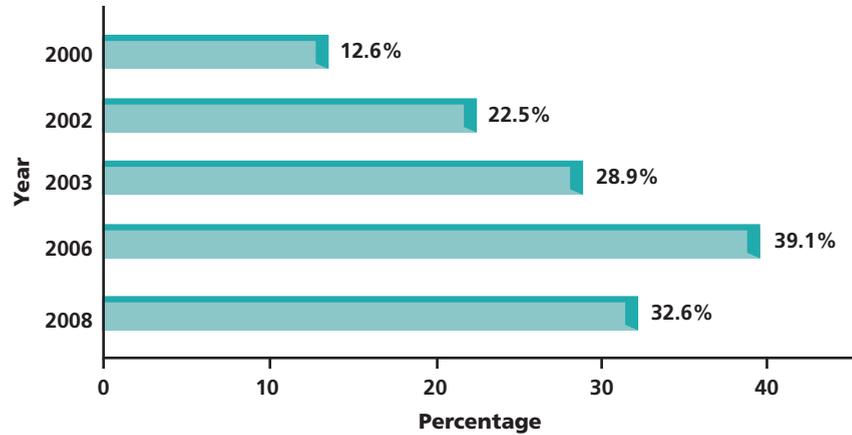
organizations in the United States most successful at mobilizing citizens to vote. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the country's "Golden Age" of powerful political parties, one of their primary activities was getting out the vote on Election Day. Even today, the parties' Election Day get-out-the-vote drives increase voter turnout by several million people in national contests. The challenge is how to go about enacting reforms that strengthen parties. One way, for example, would be to allow political parties to raise and spend greater sums of money during the campaign process. Such a reform, however, raises ethical questions about the role and influence of money in politics. Another potential change would be to enact broader systemic reforms that allow for a multiparty system and facilitate greater party competition. But, these reforms would be very difficult to pass into law.

Ultimately, the solution to ensuring greater levels of voter turnout may lie in encouraging the parties to enhance their get-out-the-vote efforts. Additional voter education programs, too, may show voters what is at stake in elections, and inspire higher levels of turnout in future elections.

Figure 13.5 *Is electoral technology modernizing?*

Beginning in 2002, many areas throughout the country adopted electronic voting machines. With concerns about reliability and fraud growing, however, some localities are abandoning the new technology in favor of old-fashioned paper ballots.

Source: Election Data Services, "Nation Sees Drop in Use of Electronic Voting Equipment for 2008—A First," www.electiondataservices.org/images/File/NR_VoteEquip_Nov-2008wAppendix2.pdf.

**What Should I Have LEARNED?**

Now that you have read this chapter, you should be able to:

★ **13.1** Trace the roots of American elections, and distinguish among the four different types of elections, p. 420.

Elections are responsible for most of the political changes in the United States. Regular elections guarantee mass political action, create governmental accountability, and confer legitimacy on regimes. There are four major types of elections in the United States: primary elections, general elections, initiatives and referenda, and recall elections.

★ **13.2** Outline the electoral procedures for presidential and general elections, p. 423.

No U.S. election can compare to the presidential contest, held every four years. The parties select presidential candidates through either primary elections or caucuses, with the primary process culminating in each party's national convention, after which the general election campaign begins. The American political system uses indirect electoral representation in the form of the Electoral College.

★ **13.3** Compare and contrast congressional and presidential elections, and explain the incumbency advantage, p. 430.

In congressional elections incumbents have a strong advantage over their challengers because of staff support, the visibility they get from being in office, and the "scare-off" effect. Redistricting, scandals, presidential coattails, and midterm elections serve as countervailing forces to the incumbency advantage and are the main sources of turnover in Congress.

★ **13.4** Identify seven factors that influence voter choice, p. 433.

Seven factors that affect vote choice are party identification, ideology, income and education, race and

ethnicity, gender, religion, and issues. Democrats, liberals, those who are poor or uneducated, African Americans, women, younger Americans, and Jews tend to vote Democratic. Republicans, conservatives, those who are wealthy and moderately educated, whites, men, older Americans, and Protestants tend to vote Republican.

★ **13.5** Identify six factors that affect voter turnout, p. 437.

Voter turnout in the United States is much lower than in other industrialized democracies. It is higher, however, among citizens who are white, older, more educated, have higher incomes, belong to civic organizations, and attend religious services more frequently. Whether they are casting ballots in congressional or presidential elections, partisan identification is the most powerful predictor of voter choice.

★ **13.6** Explain why voter turnout is low, and evaluate methods for improving voter turnout, p. 440.

There are several reasons why Americans do not vote, including other commitments, difficulty registering to vote, difficulty voting by absentee ballot, the number of elections, voter attitudes, and the weakened influence of political parties. Suggestions for improving voter turnout include making Election Day a holiday, enabling early voting, allowing for mail and online voting, making the registration process easier, modernizing the ballot, and strengthening political parties. Each of these suggested reforms has both pros and cons associated with it.

Test Yourself: Elections and Voting

★ **13.1** Trace the roots of American elections, and distinguish among the four different types of elections, p. 420.

The method of primary election that gives the political parties the greatest power is the _____ primary.

- A. general
- B. open
- C. blanket
- D. crossover
- E. closed

★ **13.2** Outline the electoral procedures for presidential and general elections, p. 423.

Abolishing the Electoral College

- A. has been ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.
- B. would require a constitutional amendment.
- C. can be done by executive order.
- D. would be likely to pass the Senate but not the House.
- E. receives strong support from the smaller states.

★ **13.3** Compare and contrast congressional and presidential elections, and explain the incumbency advantage, p. 430.

Which of the following is NOT an explanation for why many incumbents lose reelection?

- A. Redistricting
- B. Partisanship
- C. Scandals
- D. Presidential coattails
- E. Midterm elections

★ **13.4** Identify seven factors that influence voter choice, p. 433.

The most powerful predictor of vote choice is

- A. age.
- B. party identification.
- C. gender.
- D. race.
- E. ethnicity.

★ **13.5** Identify six factors that affect voter turnout, p. 437.

In general, voter turnout is higher among those who are

- A. older and wealthier.
- B. less educated with a moderate income.
- C. male.
- D. African American.
- E. in the 18-24 age bracket.

★ **13.6** Explain why voter turnout is low, and evaluate methods for improving voter turnout, p. 440.

The most common reason why people don't vote is

- A. they were not contacted by a political party.
- B. the difficulty they experience with absentee voting.
- C. they are too busy.
- D. they are uninterested.
- E. they are disabled or ill.

Essay Questions

- How can citizens use initiatives, referenda, and recall elections to influence politics? How often are these procedures used?
- What are the consequences of front-loading?
- What are some of the observable patterns in vote choice? How do these patterns affect electoral outcomes?
- Discuss two remedies for low voter turnout. What are the pros and cons of each?

myPoliSciLab Exercises

Apply what you learned in this chapter on MyPoliSciLab.

 **Read** on mypoliscilab.com

eText: Chapter 13

✓ **Study** and **Review** on mypoliscilab.com

Pre-Test

Post-Test

Chapter Exam

Flashcards

 **Watch** on mypoliscilab.com

Video: Dissecting Party Primaries

Video: State Primary Race

Video: Who Are the Super Delegates?

 **Explore** on mypoliscilab.com

Simulation: You Are a Campaign Manager: Countdown to 270!

Simulation: You Are Redrawing the Districts in Your State

Comparative: Comparing Voting and Elections

Timeline: Nominating Process

Timeline: Close Calls in Presidential Elections

Visual Literacy: The Electoral College: Campaign Consequences and Mapping the Results

Visual Literacy: Voting Turnout: Who Votes in the United States?

Key Terms

- closed primary, p. 421
 conventional political participation,
 p. 433
 crossover voting, p. 421
 elector, p. 425
 Electoral College, p. 425
 electorate, p. 421
 front-loading, p. 424
 general election, p. 421
 incumbency, p. 430
 initiative, p. 422
 mandate, p. 421
 midterm election, p. 432
 open primary, p. 421
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 ticket-splitting, p. 434
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 participation, p. 433

To Learn More About Elections and Voting

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On the Web

- To learn more about elections, go to CNN at www.cnn.com/elections.
- To learn more about election reform, go to the Pew Center on the States at www.electiononline.org.
- To learn more about civic learning and engagement, go to CIRCLE at www.civicyouth.org.
- To learn more about voting, go to Project Vote Smart at www.vote-smart.org.