Chapter 8
Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

Focus Questions

Q1 Why do so many Americans fail to vote even in important elections like those for Congress, governor, or president?

A1 Compared to other industrialized nations, the United States has very low voter turnout. In the late 1700s, only white males who owned property were able to vote. Suffrage was expanded to all white males with the assistance of the Jacksonian Democrats in the late 1820s. During the nineteenth century, the number of eligible voters increased with passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870 that extended the right to vote to black men. In turn, voter turnout was extremely high in the 1870s and 1880s reaching 80 percent in the 1876 election. The ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment doubled the size of the electorate, but voter turnout actually declined in the decade following the expansion of suffrage to women in 1920. Generally, low voter turnout is attributed to the American system of registering voters, which may be complicated and burdensome. Thus, voter turnout is suppressed by institutional factors (rules, procedures) that make the cost of voting high. Yet, there are other variables explaining lower turnout including access to information, levels of education, socio-economic factors, age, and decreasing social capital in American society.

Q2 How do those who do vote decide which of the parties and candidates to vote for?

A2 Primarily, voters identify with a political party and vote for candidates who run under that party label. These voters behave as strong partisans and are referred to as the party base or party faithful. However, given the contemporary candidate-centered campaigns, voters are slowly becoming less attached to political parties and more apt to vote for a candidate based upon his image, personality traits, perceived competence, and positions on a particular issue or set of issues. Voters may be divided into two groups: sophisticated and unsophisticated voters. Sophisticated voters are individuals who cast their vote based upon an understanding of the issues, knowledge of the political system, and are able to differentiate the candidates’ stances on the salient issues. Conversely, unsophisticated voters tend to vote based upon their perceptions of the candidates, which is not buttressed upon political knowledge. Inevitably, most voters are unable to understand the details of every issue and must rely upon voting cues or heuristics that provide inexpensive yet reliable shortcuts to access political information. Some voting shortcuts include party identification, political endorsements, ideological schemas, polling data, campaign platforms, and the appearance of the candidates.

Q3 Who chooses to run for political office, and how do they organize and structure their campaigns?
Candidates for public office are ambitious. Political parties are vital to the success of any candidate in a national election because of the need to raise money. Consequently, a viable candidate will coordinate his or her campaign with a political party and assemble a professional staff including policy advisors, campaign managers, media consultants, and pollsters. These individuals comprise the candidate’s campaign team.

How does the campaign for the presidency differ from campaigns for other offices that are less visible, powerful, and prestigious?

In order to run a successful presidential campaign, candidates must establish a national political organization at least two years before the actual election. This period of campaigning is called the invisible campaign because successful candidates must raise large amounts of money early and develop a strategy for winning. The presidential selection process of national primaries and caucuses requires a well-funded, well-organized political campaign. The national primary system is becoming increasingly frontloaded, meaning that primaries and caucuses early in the campaign season will determine a front-runner and well-funded candidates have a decided advantage to advertise and get out the vote to receive the necessary support to continue campaigning for the party’s nomination. The candidate must be able to run a national campaign that involves facets of local elections (get out the vote drives, neighborhood canvassing, pressing the flesh) and simultaneously appeal to national audiences for funding and political endorsements. Winning primaries and caucuses increases support by attracting voters (the bandwagon effect) and by eliminating intra-party competitors to position the candidate to receive his or her party’s nomination in the national conventions held in late summer prior to the November general election. During the nationally televised conventions, both major parties have the opportunity to showcase their presidential nominees and party platforms.

Does money dominate presidential elections?

Money plays a huge role in presidential elections but does not assure victory. In a sense, funding allows you to enter and compete within an election. The influence money has on political campaigns prompted Congress to pass the Federal Elections and Campaign Act (FECA) in 1971 establishing limits on how much individuals could contribute to political campaigns and required the disclosure of large contributions. Moreover, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) was established to enforce and punish candidates who do not abide by these campaign laws. Yet, even with reforms and amendments to FECA restricting the amount individuals and organizations may contribute to political campaigns, money dominates presidential elections. Soft money, issue advocacy advertisements, bundling, and free speech issues have prevented effective campaign finance reform. Moreover, as the 2004 election demonstrates, personal income allows candidates a sizable advantage to self-finance campaigns that are not subject to the limits imposed by FECA.
Chapter Outline

I. Voting and Nonvoting in American History

Three aspects of American political behavior: voting, campaigns, and elections are presented in Chapter 8. As we shall see, there have been tremendous changes as to who participates in American politics. Yet, as avenues of political participation have been extended to the common man, women, and minorities, this has not necessarily translated into greater political activity.

A. Expanding the Franchise (1789–2008)

1. A democracy relies upon citizen participation in order to function. Yet, exactly who gets to participate in American politics has changed since the inception of our country.

2. To understand any democratic regime, one must ascertain who can vote and who cannot. In the United States, the right to vote, also termed suffrage, has been extended to groups who have historically been excluded from the political process.
   a. The first expansion of the American electorate occurred between the years 1810 and 1850 due to the commitment of the Jacksonian Democrats to grant the right to vote to all white males, regardless of property ownership.
   b. In the aftermath of the Civil War, suffrage was extended to black men through the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870.
   c. The American electorate was expanded even further with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 guaranteeing women the right to vote.
   d. Finally, the ratification of the Twenty-sixth Amendment in 1971 lowered the legal voting age from twenty-one to eighteen years old.

3. It is significant to point out that gaining the right to vote does not translate into political activity. Thus, scholars of voting behavior and political pollsters identify voter turnout as the percentage of the voting-age population (VAP) that actually goes to the polls and votes on Election Day.

B. Managing the Electorate (1880–2004)

1. The year prior to the start of the U.S. Civil War (the 1860 election) and those elections following Reconstruction saw high voter turnout. As a result of an expanding electorate, elites in the South sought ways to limit the influence of freed blacks while Northern elites limited the political activity of “new immigrants” (primarily, Eastern and Southern Europeans) who had become numerous in many urban areas.

2. With the realigning election of 1896, the industrial North was heavily associated with the Republican Party while the agrarian South was solidly Democratic.

3. Both regions sought to limit the political influence of the newly enfranchised groups:
   a. The South enacted Jim Crow laws such as literacy tests, grandfather clauses, poll taxes, and other de facto methods to prevent poor whites and blacks from voting.
   b. In the North, civil service examinations and other voter registration procedures were initiated to limit the influence of political parties and patronage. Yet, these laws also worked to suppress the number of “new” immigrants voting in elections.

4. As was discussed in the last chapter, the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment doubled the size of the electorate, but voter turnout actually declined in the decade following the expansion of suffrage to women in 1920.

C. Is Low Turnout Necessarily a Problem?

1. American voter turnout is lower than many industrial nations even with universal suffrage (citizens aged eighteen years of age or older may register to vote).
2. As political scientists concerned with studying voting behavior, it is necessary to explore why this is the case.

3. Reasons for lower voter turnout rates may be attributed to the following factors:
   a. **Voter registration**: or the process by which members of the voting-age population sign-up, or register to establish their right to cast a ballot on Election Day, is cumbersome. As a result, Congress passed the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, which permits people to register to vote while they are doing other common tasks like getting or renewing their driver’s license.
   
   b. **Socio-economic status**: Individuals with higher incomes are more apt to engage in political activities and tend to be more community oriented than individuals of lower socio-economic status.
   
   c. Individuals who achieve a higher level of education are more likely to vote because:
      (1) Individuals who are more educated are better able to understand political issues and policy-making.
      (2) Individuals are able to predict the consequences of proposed policies, legislation, and campaign platforms and initiatives.
      (3) Individuals who are highly educated tend to be more efficacious. In turn, they view voting as a way to influence government and as the primary avenue by which government must listen and respond to their needs.
      (4) 1972: Turnout for those with less than eight years of schooling was 47.4 percent, while it was 78 percent for those with four or more years of college. Over the next few decades turnout for the college educated dropped 5 percent but it dropped 25 percent for the least educated to 23.4 percent by 2008.
   
   d. Finally, **age** influences voting rates. In general, the older an individual, the more likely he or she is to vote. However, in 2004 and 2008 the youth turnout saw an increase of 11 percent but it still lags behind middle-age voters by a factor of 20 percent.

4. **Gender**: Women tend to vote at a slightly higher rate than men (Women cast 54 percent of all votes in 2008).

5. **Race**: White turnout has declined 5 percent since 1972 and increased among blacks by 8 percent. In 2008, white turnout was 61 percent, black turnout was also 61 percent, and Hispanic turnout was 31 percent.

6. For suggestions to increase voter turnout, see Lecture Suggestions, Behavioral Focus below.

D. How Do Voters Make Up Their Minds?

1. **Party identification** tends to be the strongest influence on individual political behavior.
   a. Partisanship is learned early in life and therefore would naturally be very influential in shaping political attitudes.
   
   b. Strong partisans:
      (1) Less likely to listen to opposing viewpoints and form opinion very early in the election cycle.
      (2) More likely to support a candidate of their chosen political party.
      (3) Tend to be very interested and active in (party) politics.
   
   c. Weak partisans:
      (1) More likely to listen to opposing viewpoints and usually wait to make a decision until later in the election cycle.
      (2) Less likely to vote along a purely party line (straight ticket).
   
   d. While purely Independent voters (i.e. no party affiliation) are only 10 percent of
the electorate, there is a debate among political scholars as to how informed they are regarding political issues and candidates. However, true Independents are more likely not to vote if a candidate or party platform does not appeal to them.

2. Given the strong two-party system in American politics, it has been shown that each political party is associated with certain political positions (political traits) and individuals vote accordingly:
   a. Democrats are viewed as supportive of social programs, minority and women’s issues and more likely to respond to social strife and economic downturns through government intervention.
   b. Republicans are identified with national security and law and order issues, morality, and government intervention to uphold traditional moral values.
   c. Yet, there is some discrepancy as to whether individuals vote consistently based upon these differences (see: Converse’s non-attitudes) and to what extent voters are knowledgeable of the consequences associated with these differences.

3. Candidate Attributes
   a. The public is largely attuned to a political candidate’s image or personal qualities known as a candidate’s political character. In fact, media consultants and campaign managers are paid handsomely to accentuate the positive aspects of a candidate while improving his or her shortcomings to an end of winning an election.
   b. In the age of instant communication, a viable candidate must be conscious of his or her public image. Even if voters are not knowledgeable of the issues or current events, they will judge the competency of the candidate on his or her perceived ability to be successful if elected to public office.
   c. Thus, candidates must overcome inconsistencies and past indiscretions to convince the voters that they are trustworthy, patriotic, intelligent, and otherwise competent to occupy the desired public office.

4. The Result: Volatile Turnout and Polarization
   a. Within past elections, younger single women, the poor, and individuals who are aged 18–24 have voted in smaller numbers than economically well-off, older, well-educated, married individuals.
   b. Also, there is some evidence that negative campaigning actually depresses turnout. While this is debated within the literature (for instance, negative advertisements may actually provide information and therefore educate voters) the money spent on “attack ads” has increased. It may be concluded that going negative may be an effective campaign strategy but also may contribute to low voter turnout in the United States.

II. Political Campaigns: Ambition and Organization

Individuals are motivated to campaign for political office by their own ambitions. In effect, to become a viable political candidate, one needs the support of a political party and a professional staff including policy advisors, campaign managers, media consultants, and pollsters. These individuals comprise the candidate’s campaign team.

A. The Incumbency Advantage

Incumbency provides the greatest advantage to win a political campaign. Since the 1940s, 94 percent of House incumbents were re-elected. In the same period in the Senate, 78 percent of incumbents were re-elected. In general, Senatorial campaigns tend to be more competitive because political parties are highly selective of the candidates they choose to sponsor as compared to House races.
1. **Name Recognition and Advertising**
   a. It is understood that to get elected the candidate must be known by the voters. However, it is also up to the voters to learn as much about the candidates as possible.
   b. Yet, research on voter sophistication (knowledge about specific candidates and political issues) suggests this is not the case.
   c. Once again, incumbent candidates enjoy many resources that challengers do not:
      1. Travel allowances to return to their districts.
      2. Franking privileges (free postage used for newsletters, mailers, and other political information).
      3. Access to institutional offices (legal affairs, research assistants, Senate/House services, etc.).
      4. Funds to staff district offices.
      5. Communication allowances.

2. **Fundraising Opportunities**
   a. Incumbents established networks of organizations and individuals who:
      1. Have contributed to previous campaigns.
      2. Provide networks of support while serving in office that would benefit them during elections.
      3. Financial support from state and national political organizations that are more apt to support incumbents given their past successes.
   b. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, in the 2006 House elections incumbents held a 6:1 advantage over their challengers in campaign resources.

B. **Challengers and Their Challenges**
Quality challengers are those who have experience in elected office. An experienced challenger is four times more likely to beat an incumbent than an inexperienced challenger. Running for national office has become highly competitive and costly. Thus, any candidate must carefully consider the factors needed to win an election.

1. **National Influences**
   a. These influences are two-fold:
      1. The political and economic climate.
      2. The network or system created and maintained by the party including party committees, campaign consultants, political advisors, and interest groups.
   b. As a result of the competitiveness seen in modern political campaigns, the support of national campaign committees is critical to any successful campaign.
      1. Candidates must prove they can successfully raise money and disseminate a cogent campaign message.
      2. National campaign committees will not support a candidate who does not have a chance to win. Instead, they will divert the funds to competitive districts.

2. **Local Considerations**
   a. Candidates who have prior experience in local and state politics usually have resources including financial and electoral support from local organizations.
   b. Furthermore, voters should be familiar with these candidates.

C. **Running the Race**
1. **Campaign Organizations**
a. Campaign activities differ given the level of the office being sought.
   (1) Local campaigns use volunteers and foot soldiers to walk in parades, canvass neighborhoods and go door-to-door to advertise the candidate and mobilize voters.
   (2) National campaigns rely on the activities of local campaigns but must also employ professional campaign managers, pollsters, media, and political consultants. These consultants operate sophisticated organizations that provide the candidate with advice, technical support, and in-depth information on polling, support, and strategy.

b. Also, hiring campaign consultants signals to Washington insiders, political pundits, and special interest groups that the candidate is running a “viable” campaign and is in the race to win.

2. Crafting the Theme
   a. Even before entering the race, prospective candidates must test the water to see how voters will respond to them as a person, as well as their campaign message and stances on the salient issues. Any candidate campaigning for a major office must appeal to a large segment of the polity to attract support, which translates into votes on Election Day.
   b. Campaigns will seek to accentuate the positives and suppress the weaknesses.
   c. Initially, baseline polling, focus groups, and traditional voting patterns will determine if the candidate has a chance to win.
   d. If so, campaign consultants will use micro targeting to analyze demographic, political, and consumer data to formulate a plan (craft a theme or message) that will gain public support for the candidate. Consequently, the message will be designed based upon the particular characteristics and attitudes of the electorate.

3. Raising Money
   a. Money is the life-blood of any political campaign.
   b. A viable campaign must spend a tremendous amount of time raising money and otherwise attracting financial support from individuals and special interest groups.
   c. The need to raise such large sums of money has led to the creation of “permanent campaigns” including:
      (1) A full-time staff
      (2) Extensive fundraising activities
      (3) Professional polling
      (4) Media advertisements.

III. Running for the Presidency
Campaigning for the presidency has changed throughout our country’s history. In the 1800s and early 1900s, influential party members known as party bosses chose presidential candidates during state and national conventions. As we have read last chapter, reforms in nominating procedures provided candidates and voters significant power to select candidates through state primaries and caucuses. The 2008 presidential campaign has further altered the nominated process whereby many states (Nevada, South Carolina, California, Illinois) have changed their primaries to the early weeks of the nomination period (late January and early February), which has traditionally been reserved to states including Iowa and New Hampshire. In effect, the reasoning for this push to earlier primaries is two-fold: early primaries are more influential on whom the nominees will be; and an established nominee enables the party to allocate financial resources effectively and efficiently to increase the chances of that candidate’s victory in November.
A. Early Organization and Fundraising
1. The invisible campaign or pre-campaign is the process where a candidate begins to cultivate support, build an organization, and raise money to mount a successful campaign.
2. During this period, the candidate establishes an exploratory committee to formally submit the paperwork declaring his or her intention to run for the presidency which allows them to campaign, raise money, and file for federal matching funds.

B. The Nominating Process
1. Candidates begin to campaign for delegates in state primaries and caucuses.
   a. Twelve states and the District of Columbia use caucuses to choose presidential candidates. A caucus is a face-to-face meeting in which rank and file party members discuss and vote on candidates to stand for election to offices under the party label in the general election.
   b. Thirty-seven states use the primary system to select presidential candidates. A primary is a preliminary election in which voters select candidates to stand under their party label in the general election.
   c. There are two types of primaries:
      (1) Closed primaries only allow registered members of the party to vote.
      (2) Open primaries permit all registered voters to participate.
2. Caucuses and primaries are occurring earlier in the nominating cycle prompting candidates to scramble for delegates and the necessary donations to gain their respective party’s nomination. The crowding of presidential primaries and caucuses into early weeks of the nomination period is known as frontloading. Subsequently, through frontloading individual states have a significant influence on selecting presidential candidates; while candidates must campaign in these early primary states to attract voters and build financial support to achieve frontrunner status.
3. Per Article I, section 4, of the U.S. Constitution, states have the power to establish the time, manner, and place of elections and therefore also determine the dates for caucuses, primaries, and state conventions who nominate party candidates.
4. Political party delegates (as well as many minor political parties) meet in a national convention every four years prior to the general election to choose a presidential candidate and adopt a party platform. These national party conventions are largely scripted and use the national media exposure to advertise their candidates and party platforms to solidify support from the party faithful and attract undecided voters. Also, vice-presidential candidates are chosen during these conventions.

C. The General Election Campaign
1. The general election is the final election occurring in the first Tuesday of November every four years by which voters indirectly select the president.
2. In fact, when individuals vote for a presidential candidate, they are actually choosing among electors who will then cast their vote for the candidate based upon the winner of the popular vote by state. Consequently, the public does not select the president directly; instead members of the Electoral College representing each state (equal to the state’s number of congressional seats: House plus the Senate) select the president.
3. The Framers constructed the Electoral College as a check to the election system. The exact composition of the Electoral College is enumerated in Article II, section 1 (see: Lecture Suggestions below for a more detailed description of the Electoral College).
   a. A candidate must receive 270 electoral votes to win the presidency.
   b. Electors are selected by the various state parties.
c. The electors cast their votes for president in their state capitals on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December.
d. After the electors cast their votes, if no candidate receives 270 or more, the House of Representatives is charged with deciding who is president (per the Twelfth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution).

4. Given the general election is designed as a “winner takes all” system even the slightest majority allows a candidate to capture all of the state’s electoral votes.
   a. Thus, a successful campaign strategy is to campaign to get the necessary electoral votes and not just accumulate popular votes.
   b. As a result of the winner takes all system, a candidate can win a majority of the popular vote and still lose the election by not attaining the necessary 270 electoral votes needed to be elected president. This is exactly what occurred in the 1824, 1876, 1888, and 2000 presidential elections.
   c. Given the competitiveness of the last two presidential elections, candidates spend a majority of their time campaigning in key states or battleground states that are competitive and hold substantial electoral votes to propel the candidate to victory.

5. In the 2008 general election, Democrat Barack Obama with Joe Biden defeated Republican John McCain with Sarah Palin 365 to 173 electoral votes. Obama garnered 69.5 million votes to McCain’s 59.9 million.

D. The Campaign Organization
   1. Campaigns are generally organized as a hierarchy with the campaign chairman acting as a conduit between the candidate, the party, and other campaign committees to coordinate the necessary fundraising events and other campaign activities.
   2. Modern presidential campaigns also include a legion of media consultants, a lead pollster, technicians, speechwriters, and fundraisers.
   3. A campaign has a scheduling team that coordinates appearances at political events and uses an advance team that prepares the candidate.
   4. Each candidate employs media consultants, pollsters, opposition researchers, professional campaign consultants, policy experts, web administrator, and numerous support staffers to run the campaign offices.
   5. Each presidential campaign also operates a “ready response team” or a group within the campaign staff that is assigned to respond immediately to any charge or negative comment made by the opposition.

IV. Money and the Road to the White House
   A. The need to raise such large sums of money has led to the creation of permanent campaigns: Politicians and political parties must carefully prevent any and all unexpected issues and opponents from emerging and gaining surprise victories.
   B. Money plays a huge part in successful political campaigns.
      1. In response to the huge donations in the 1968 presidential election, the Federal Election Campaign Act was passed by Congress in 1971 to imposed rules for full reporting of campaign contributions and expenditures.
      2. In 1974 Congress created the Federal Election Commission (FEC) to oversee campaign spending and contributions. In addition, individual campaign contributions were limited to $1,000 per campaign cycle and established a presidential election fund to support public financing of presidential elections.
      3. Yet, there were challenges to these restrictions:
a. In the case *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976), the Supreme Court ruled that an absolute restriction on an individual or group’s ability to spend money on campaigns is a violation of free speech. In turn, spending money on a campaign is equated to protected political speech per the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

b. In 1979, Congress passed an amendment to FECA allowing political parties to raise and spend money on party building activities that did not technically support or endorse any particular candidate. These unrestricted funds are known as *soft money*.

4. In response to the soft money loophole, the McCain-Feingold Act (2002), formerly known as the 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Contribution Reform Act (BCRA), was passed by Congress. The legislation:
   a. Restricted individual campaign contributions to $2,000 per election cycle, per candidate; $25,000 aggregate per party committee.
   b. Limited PAC contributions to $10,000 ($5,000 for a primary, $5,000 per election cycle per candidate).
   c. Mandated audio and visual “approval” of ads to track who sponsors the advertisement for accuracy and fairness.
   d. However, as a caveat to these contribution limits, the 2008 presidential contributions are adjusted based upon inflation (for example: individual donations will be capped at $2,300).

5. However, BCRA placed no limits on independent “527” groups and was upheld by the Supreme Court in the 2003 case of *McConnell v. F.E.C.*

6. Yet, as laws are passed to limit the influence of money in politics, campaign contributions continue to increase.

7. What is not regulated:
   a. Issue advocacy advertisement: political advertising that avoids endorsement of a candidate for office.
   b. 501/527 iii ads: non-profit ads (illegal to advertise sixty days prior to a general election/thirty days prior to primary).
   c. State party expenditures and donations.
   d. National Election Committees (DNCC, RNCC) for “party building activities” and “get out the vote,” i.e. voter registration drives.
   e. Personal finances: the candidate’s own money.

C. Where Does the Money Come From?

1. The majority of campaign contributions originate from private sources such as political parties, campaign committees, interest groups, individuals, unions, businesses, non-profit organizations. These contributions are limited per the BCRA.

2. However, candidates for president may receive federal matching funds if:
   a. the candidate raises $100,000; $5,000 of which is raised in twenty different states in increments of $250.
   b. to retain eligibility for matching funds, the candidate must win 10 percent of the vote in two consecutive primaries and 20 percent of the vote in one primary.

3. Despite the appeal of federal matching funds, the majority of campaign donations come from private contributions. Both John Kerry and George W. Bush did not even accept matching funds in the 2004 election. This practice was continued by Obama in the 2008 election.

4. Obama’s camp raised $742 million while McCain’s raised $353 million, the Democratic Party raised over a billion dollars and the Republicans raised $609.2 million.
V. Conclusion
This process of selecting competing political candidates through public campaigns is indicative of
the American political system. However, one must remember that the Framers of the Constitution
sought to balance the impulses and passions attributed to public opinion with institutional stability.
Ultimately, the choice of who serves in public office is based upon the will of the people, which is
the bedrock of republican liberty. America’s universal suffrage allows individuals eighteen years of
age and older to cast a ballot expressing their political opinion by voting for a preferred candidate.
Yet, the United States is well below other industrialized countries regarding the percentage of
citizens who choose to vote. Many consider this lack of political activity as an indication that U.S.
democracy is ineffective and does not represent the will of the people; instead, just those who vote.
Others disagree. Nevertheless, efforts to increase voter participation by decreasing the
“burdensome” voter registration process have been implemented by introducing the Motor Voter
Bill in 1993. Yet, just because an individual is registered to vote does not indicate that he or she
will actually go to the polls on Election Day. Given the low approval ratings Congress and the
president currently receive from the public, we shall see if this further depresses voting or spurs
more individuals to higher degrees of political participation.
Lecture Suggestions

Behavioral Focus: Approaches to Understanding Voting Behavior

I. Three Schools of American Voting Behavior
   A. Columbia School: Stresses the role of group influences (sociological factors) on voting:
      1. Relies on group identification (remember collective action from Chapter 6).
      2. Individual preferences have little impact on voting.
      3. Political campaigns are unlikely to persuade voters to change their support or radically alter their choices of candidates.
   B. Rational Choice Theory: Individuals vote for those candidates who will maximize benefits; conversely, the cost of voting must be reduced. This is premised on a rational voter.
      1. The voter evaluates a candidate based upon retrospective voting (one election cycle) to determine if he or she will maximize self-interests (the benefits).
      2. Considers voting myopic or concerned with short-term benefits.
      3. The probability of supporting a candidate is determined by the sum of subtracting the Benefits from the Costs. Therefore:
         a. If the sum is positive, the voter will support the candidate.
         b. If the sum is negative the candidate will not receive the individual’s vote.
      4. The civic duty (social responsibility) of a citizen voting is considered a benefit.
      5. However, rational choice theory states it is rational for a person to abstain from voting if the costs of voting outweigh the benefits of supporting any one candidate.
   C. University of Michigan School: Attitudes (psychological attachments) affect voting
      1. Party identification significantly influences an individual’s vote.
      2. Psychological attachments are formed early in life and thus party attachment and voting trends may be seen as long-term associations.
      3. Yet, short-term factors (economic down turns or other crisis) may also influence voting

II. How do Voters Make Up Their Minds?
   A. Two types of voting:
      1. Sophisticated voters: Individuals cast their vote based upon understanding the issues and knowing the candidate’s stance on the issues. In turn, they vote accordingly.
      2. Unsophisticated voters: Individuals vote, not according to issues, but based upon their perceptions of the candidate.
   B. Information: Heuristics—voting cues; shortcuts to gain information on a candidate’s position or ideology.
      1. Party identification
      2. Ideology schema—an established “package” of ideas re: candidate
      3. Candidate appearance
      4. Endorsements (newspaper editorials, organizations, individuals)
      5. Polling (issues)
      6. Issue knowledge.

III. What are Some Ways to Improve Voting?
   A. If we premise that a democratic government relies upon citizen participation to be successful (as the book asserts, this is debatable) political scientists believe that voter turnout will be more likely to increase if the cost of voting is reduced. The following are some institutional changes or mechanisms that have led to increased voter turnout in other countries:
      1. Compulsory voting
      2. Fines for not voting
3. Changing the day of voting
4. Multiple days for voting
5. Have all elections on one day per year
6. Accessibility of information
7. Increase the numbers of political parties
8. Easier voter registration.

B. Registering to vote has been accepted as the most significant impairment to increased levels of voting in the United States. Consequently, Congress reduced the burden of registering to vote by passing the National Voter Registration Act (Motor Voter Bill) of 1993 allowing people to register to vote when applying for a driver’s license or official state identification card.

C. So, what are other avenues to increase voter turnout in the United States?

Institutional Focus: The Electoral College

I. Do We Need the Electoral College?
A. Supporters of the Electoral College argue that it should be kept—because it works. Even though it failed to elect a president in four elections—1800 (Thomas Jefferson), 1824 (John Quincy Adams), 1876 (Rutherford B. Hayes), and 2000 (George W. Bush)—Congress and the Supreme Court, in the 2000 election, were able to resolve the disputes peaceably.
B. Critics of the Electoral College point out that the process is undemocratic, because it permits the candidates to win the presidency despite having not received a majority of the popular votes, and dangerous because if thrown into the House of Representatives the choice must be made from the three top candidates. From time to time, critics of the electoral system demand its abolition; instead, they advocate a system of direct elections for the position of president and vice-president.

II. The Electoral College Process
A. The Electoral College consists of 538 electors, who on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December of a presidential election year (the next will be in 2016) officially elect the president and vice-president of the United States. Each state chooses in the November general election—in a manner determined by its legislature—a number of electors equal to the total of its senators and representatives in Congress (in Illinois it is twenty-one in total; two Senators and Representatives from the nineteen congressional districts).
B. In Illinois, the political parties at large choose electors during state party conventions (i.e. Democratic/Republican). These individuals are usually party members who have demonstrated strong party loyalty and an understanding of party platforms. In the general election, the names of the electors are printed within brackets alongside the names of the candidates for president and vice-president.
Example: Candidates for President:
   Jan Floss [John Kerry]
   Joe Finkey [George W. Bush]
C. When voting, the individual checks the box of the elector whom he/she wishes to support. In doing so, the voter indirectly casts his/her vote for a presidential candidate.
D. The results need to be reported to the state’s Board of Elections within two days. The Electoral College never meets as a whole; instead individual state electors meet in their state's capital. The votes are certified by the state's chief executive, the governor, and sent to Washington, DC, to be counted before a joint session of the newly elected Congress, who meets the first week of January. If no one candidate receives 270 votes, the House, voting by
III. The Future of the Electoral College
Reformers have sought to eliminate the Electoral College (especially after the 2000 presidential election) with little success. In fact, the cures may be worse than the perceived institutional deficiencies. Reforms include abolishing electoral votes and replacing them with aggregate popular voting for president, changing the current single-member congressional districts to a proportional representative arrangement and awarding each congressional district being awarded one electoral vote to be cast based upon the popular vote (or possibly cast based upon party line). Nevertheless, if the Electoral College is abolished and replaced with a system to elect a president determined by popular voting, political campaigns will be concentrated solely in the most populated areas of the Northeast, West, and industrial Midwestern states. In effect, less populated states will be ignored which would bring the fears of many Anti-Federalists and representatives of the smaller states during our country’s founding to fruition.
Projects, Exercises, and Activities

1. As an assignment, have the students select (either randomly or purposively) a political campaign and address the following issues within a comprehensive research paper or presentation:
   a. The economic, social, and political context of the district or state race you are covering.
   b. Trace the activities and events of the campaigns through the campaign season.
   c. Describe the campaign organizations.
   d. Examine the fundraising efforts of the candidates.
   e. Explore media coverage of the race.
   f. What issues are the candidates stressing in the race?
   g. What role are the party organizations at different levels playing?
   h. Identify the various interest groups involved in the campaign.
   i. Who does the local media endorse and why?
   j. Watch any debates that you can on CSPAN. What is the candidate’s video style?
   k. Finally, develop an electronic relationship with a member of the campaign and a political reporter who is following the campaign to provide you with information about the campaign.

2. Invite a member of the state assembly, Congress, or a candidate running for public office to speak to the class. Have the students ask questions following the presentation. Finally, have them write a paper on the presentation.

3. Wedge issues are issues that one political party uses to divide the voters in another party. As a class exercise or for a research paper, have the students identify relevant wedge issues (abortion, gun control, stem cell research, affirmative action, etc.) and evaluate the effects these may have (or have had) on political campaigns, voter turnout, and lobbying activity. Also, identify which political party or candidate will benefit the most from the issue being introduced in the campaign. Finally, did an event prompt the candidates to respond to the particular issue? If so, investigate the changes in public opinion as a result of the event occurring. Does this help one party or candidate more than the other given a prior stance on the issue? If so, how has this issue resonated with the voters?

4. Before the students have read the chapter, ask them to conduct an interview with a parent, co-worker, or other older adult who actively votes. Students should ask the voter to explain how they voted in a previous election and why they made those voting decisions. After you have lectured on American Voting Behavior, ask your students to break up into groups and discuss with one another the theory of voting behavior that most closely explains the answers they received from their interviewee. Draw the students back into a unified conversation and explore the three theories further.

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Additional Resources

Supplemental Readings


Websites

CNN Politics
Good site for political news. It is geared specifically toward electoral politics.

FEC
Access this site for voting resources such as election results, campaign laws, and voter turnout statistics.

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Open Secrets
This site is operated by the Center for Responsible Politics. Information on this site includes campaign donations by businesses, PACs, non-profit organizations, and individuals. Also included is information regarding campaign expenditures.

Electoral College
A good website for information regarding the Electoral College.

Project Vote Smart
This site has a plethora of information concerning political campaigns, candidates’ biographies, interest group ratings, and voting records.

Fox News Politics
This site provides political news that is geared specifically to electoral politics.

JFK campaign commercial
This is an interesting commercial done for JFK’s successful 1960 presidential campaign which utilizes music as a device to promote a candidate. Use this ad in contrast to later presidential campaign ads.

McCain versus Obama
This news clip discusses the debate between McCain and Obama over negative campaigning in the 2008 election in particular McCain’s portrayal of Obama as a celebrity rather than a true politician.

Vote Matt Schultz
This is an interesting example of a local TV campaign ad, use it in contrast to federal or state ads.

Congressional Campaign Ad
This is an excellent example of the local orientation to congressional campaigns, use this in contrast to presidential ones.