

Government in America: People, Politics, and Policy  
Thirteenth Edition, and Texas Edition  
Edwards/Wattenberg/Lineberry

Chapter 10  
**Elections and Voting Behavior**

# How American Elections Work

- Three types of elections:
  - Select party nominees (primary elections)
  - Select officeholders (general elections)
  - Select options on specific policies
    - Referendum: state-level method of direct legislation that gives voters a chance to approve proposed legislation or constitutional amendment
    - Initiative petition: process permitted in some states whereby voters may put proposed changes in the state constitution to a vote, given a sufficient number of signatures

# A Tale of Three Elections

- 1800: The First Electoral Transition of Power
  - No primaries, no conventions, no speeches
  - Newspapers were very partisan.
  - Campaigns focused not on voters but on state legislatures who chose electors.
  - After many votes in the House, the office of the presidency was transferred to Jefferson peacefully.

# A Tale of Three Elections

- 1896: A Bitter Fight over Economic Interests
  - Democrats' main issue: unlimited coinage of silver
  - William Jennings Bryan won the Democratic Party nomination with speeches about the virtues of silver.
  - McKinley won the election and the Republicans regained majority status.

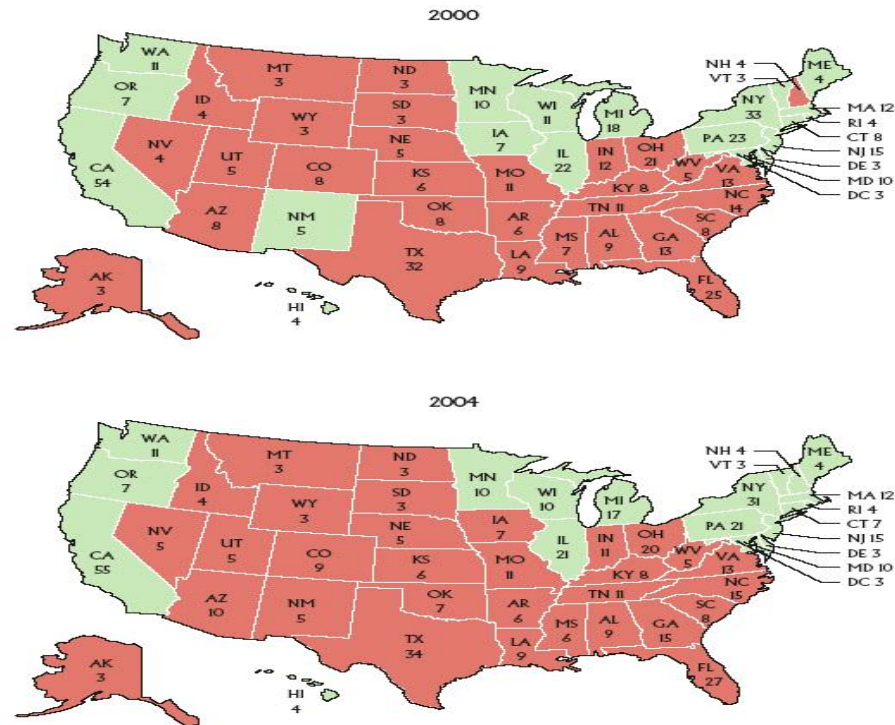
# A Tale of Three Elections

- 2004: The Ratification of a Polarizing Presidency
  - George W. Bush became the fourth Republican since McKinley to win a second term.
  - The intensity of the election was in part due to the controversy of the 2000 election.
  - The 2004 campaign was characterized by negative campaigning.
  - Leadership of the War on Terrorism and “moral values” proved to be key issues.

# A Tale of Three Elections

**Figure 10.1 The Electoral College Results for 2000 and 2004**

The two maps show the number of votes each state had in the electoral college in 2000 and 2004 and which states were carried by the Democrats (green) and Republicans (rose).



# Whether to Vote: A Citizen's First Choice

- Suffrage: the legal right to vote
  - Extended to African-Americans by the Fifteenth Amendment
  - Extended to Women by the Nineteenth Amendment
  - Extended to people over 18 years of age by the Twenty-Sixth Amendment

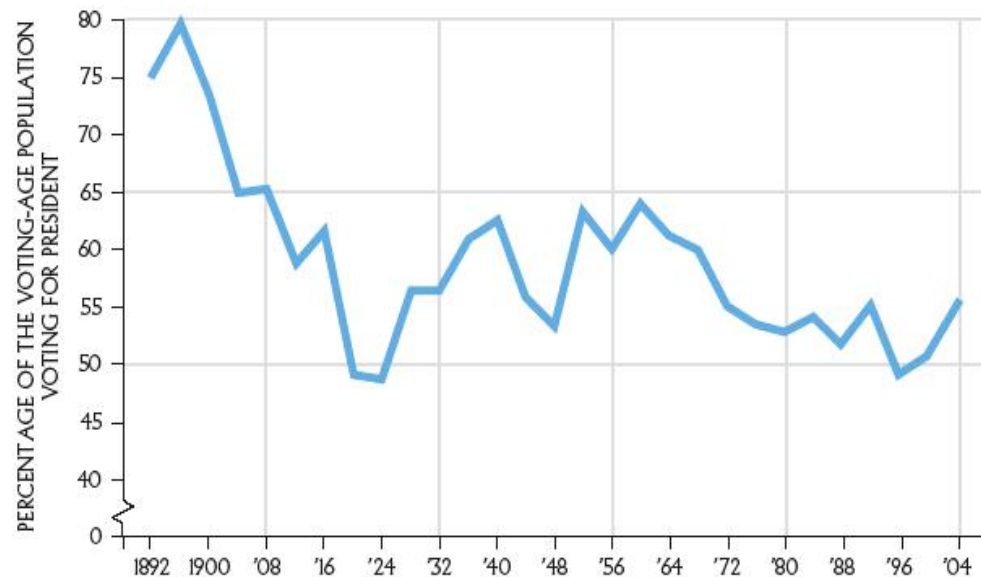
# Whether to Vote: A Citizen's First Choice

- Deciding Whether to Vote
  - U.S. has low voter turnout
  - Downs: it is rational to not vote
    - Those who see clear differences between parties are likely to vote.
    - If indifferent, then one may rationally abstain from voting.
  - Political Efficacy: the belief that one's political participation really matters
  - Civic Duty: the belief that in order to support democratic government, a citizen should always vote



# Whether to Vote: A Citizen's First Choice

**Figure 10.2 The Decline of Turnout: 1892–2004**



*Sources:* For data up to 1968, *Historical Statistics of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), part 2, 1071. For 1972–1988, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), 264. Subsequent years from census reports and authors' calculations.

# Whether to Vote: A Citizen's First Choice

- Registering To Vote
  - Voter Registration: a system adopted by the states that requires voters to register well in advance of the election day
  - Registration procedures differ by state.
  - Motor Voter Act: passed in 1993, requires states to permit people to register to vote when they apply for their driver's license

# Whether to Vote: A Citizen's First Choice

- Who Votes?
  - Education: More education = more likely to vote. Most important factor
  - Age: Older = more likely to vote
  - Race: Caucasian = more likely to vote. BUT, other ethnicities are higher with comparable education
  - Gender: Female = more likely to vote

# Whether to Vote: A Citizen's First Choice

- Who Votes? (continued)
  - Marital Status: Married = more likely to vote
  - Union Membership: Union member = more likely to vote
  - Traits are cumulative - possessing several adds up

# Whether to Vote: A Citizen's First Choice

**Table 10.1** Reported Turnout Rate in 2004

SOCIAL GROUPS	PERCENT
18-20	41
21-24	42
25-44	52
45-64	67
65 and over	69
No high school diploma	30
High school	52
Some college	66
College	74
White	66
African American	56
Hispanic citizens	47
Asian American citizens	44
Men	56
Women	60
Married	65
Single	47
Government workers	75
Self-employed	64
Work in private industry	57
Unemployed	46

*Source:* Authors' analysis of 2004 U.S. Census Bureau survey.

# How Americans Vote: Explaining Citizens' Decisions

- Mandate Theory of Elections
  - The idea that the winning candidate has a mandate from the people to carry out his or her platforms and politics
  - Politicians like the theory better than political scientists do.

# How Americans Vote: Explaining Citizens' Decisions

- Party Identification
  - People still generally vote for a party they agree with.
  - With the rise of candidate-centered politics, parties' hold on voters declined in the 1960s and 1970s.
  - Many more voters make an individual voting decision and are up for grabs each election, (so-called floating voters).

# How Americans Vote: Explaining Citizens' Decisions

**Table 10.2 Changing Patterns in Voting Behavior: 1960 and 2004 Compared**

The demographic correlates of presidential voting behavior have changed in a number of important ways since 1960. When Kennedy was elected in 1960, Protestants and Catholics voted very differently, as Kennedy's Catholicism was a major issue during the campaign. Although John Kerry was the first major party nominee since Kennedy to be of the Catholic faith, Catholics were only slightly more likely to support him than Protestants. Today, the major difference along religious lines involves how often one attends religious services, with those who attend regularly being substantially more likely to support Republican presidential candidates. The least likely group to support Republicans these days is African Americans. As you can see in data here, Kerry clearly drew more support from African Americans than did Kennedy. Another advantage that Democrats now enjoy is with female voters, who preferred Kerry by 7 percent more than men. Interestingly, women were actually slightly less likely than men to have supported the handsome JFK in 1960. Finally, the rapidly expanding Hispanic population in the U.S. has reshaped the electoral scene with their tendency to support Democratic candidates. Hispanics numbered only about 1 percent of voters in 1960.

	KENNEDY	NIXON	KERRY	BUSH
Protestant	36	63	40	59
Catholic	83	17	47	52
Jewish	89	11	74	25
Regularly attend religious services	49	50	39	60
Often attend religious services	36	64	49	50
Seldom attend religious services	55	44	54	45
Never attend religious services	51	49	62	36
White	48	52	41	58
African American	71	29	88	11
Hispanic	NA	NA	57	40
Male	52	48	44	55
Female	47	53	51	48
18-29	53	47	54	45
30-44	51	49	46	53
45-64	50	50	47	52
65+	39	61	47	52
No high school diploma	55	45	50	49
High school diploma	52	48	47	52
Some college	33	67	46	54
College degree	38	62	49	50

Source: 1960 National Election Study and 2004 National Voter Exit Poll.



# How Americans Vote: Explaining Citizens' Decisions

- Candidate Evaluations: How Americans See the Candidates
  - Candidates want a good visual image.
    - Especially on dimensions of integrity, reliability, and competence
  - Personality plays a role in vote choice, especially if a candidate is perceived to be incompetent or dishonest.

# How Americans Vote: Explaining Citizens' Decisions

- Policy Voting

- Basing your vote choice on issue preferences and where the candidates stand on policy issues
- Policy voting may occur if :
  - Voters know where they and the candidates stand on issues and see differences between candidates
- Unlikely to occur because:
  - Candidates can be ambiguous on the issues.
  - Media tend to focus on the “horse race” not issues.
- Today candidates are forced to take a clear stand in the party primaries increasing chances for policy voting.

# The Last Battle: The Electoral College

- Electoral college actually elects the president—founders wanted him chosen by the elite of the country
- States choose the electors
- Winner-Take-All system gives bigger emphasis to more populated states

# The Last Battle: The Electoral College

- How it works today:
  - Each state has as many votes as it does Representatives and Senators.
  - Winner of popular vote typically gets all the Electoral College votes for that state
  - Electors meet in December, votes are reported by the vice president in January
  - If no candidate gets a majority (270 votes), the House of Representatives votes for president, with each state casting one vote.

# The Last Battle: The Electoral College

**Table 10.3 Presidential Vote in 2000 by State Representation in the Electoral College (in percents)**

States with less than seven electoral votes are overrepresented in the electoral college. Therefore, the fact that George W. Bush did especially well in these states in 2000, as shown in this table, helped him to win the presidency without winning the popular vote—the first time a candidate accomplished this feat since 1888.

	BUSH	GORE	NADER	OTHERS
Electoral votes <7	52.5	42.3	3.7	1.5
7–18	48.9	47.6	2.5	1.0
>18	45.7	50.7	2.7	0.9

*Source:* Calculated by the authors from official election returns.

# Understanding Elections and Voting Behavior

- Democracy and Elections
  - The greater the policy differences between candidates, the more likely voters will be able to steer government policy by their choices.
    - Unlikely—candidates do not always clarify issues positions
  - Candidates who vow to continue popular policies are more likely to win elections.
  - Retrospective voting: voters cast a vote based on what a candidate has done for them lately
    - Those who feel worse off are likely to vote against incumbents.
    - Bad economies make politicians nervous.

# Understanding Elections and Voting Behavior

- Elections and the Scope of Government
  - Elections generally support government policies and power.
  - Voters feel they are sending a message to government to accomplish something
  - Thus, the government expands to fill the needs of the voters.

# Summary

- Voters make two basic decisions at election time:
  - Whether to vote
  - Who to vote for
- Party identification, candidate evaluations, and policy positions drive vote choice.
- Elections are fundamental to a democracy.