Chapter 9: Elections, Campaigns, and Voting

American Democracy Now, 4/e
Elections, campaigns, and voting are fundamental aspects of civic engagement.

These activities represent concentrated forms of civic engagement and are important both for the polity as a whole and for the individuals who participate.

Elections offer a wealth of opportunities for citizen involvement.
Elections in the United States

- Every state holds at least two types of elections.
- A *primary election* comes first and determines the party’s nominees—those who will run for office.
- In a *general election*, the parties’ respective nominees run against each other, and voters decide who should hold office, since the person with the most votes wins.
Nominations and Primary Elections

In a primary election, voters decide which nominees the political parties should run in the general election. But which voters decide varies greatly from state to state.

In U.S. presidential primaries, voters do not vote directly for the candidate whom they would like their party to nominate. Instead, the popular vote determines which candidate’s delegates will attend the party’s nominating convention and vote for that party’s nominee.
Nominations and Primary Elections

- The two major U.S. parties made reforms to the earlier delegate-selection process after the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.
- The reforms, many of which both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party adopted, significantly increased the influence of party voters.
Types of Primary Elections

- In an **open primary** election, any registered voter can vote in any party’s primary, as can independent voters not registered with a party.

- In a **closed primary** election, voting in a party’s primary is limited to members of that party.
Presidential Primaries

- States determine the timing of primary elections.
- Historically, states that held their presidential primary earlier in the year had a greater say in determining the nominee than did states with later primaries.
- **Super Tuesday** is the day in early March on which the most presidential primary elections take place, many of them in southern states.
General Elections

- Most general elections are held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.
- General elections for Congress and most state legislatures feature a winner-take-all system.
- Some states require a runoff election when no candidate receives the majority of the votes cast.
Referendum, Initiative, and Recall

- A **referendum** is an election in which voters in a state can vote for or against a measure proposed by the state legislature.

- An **initiative** is a citizen-sponsored proposal that can result in new or amended legislation or a state constitutional amendment.

- A **recall** election allows voters to cut short an officeholder’s term of office.
The Act of Voting

The process of voting begins when a voter registers to vote. Voting registration requirements vary greatly from state to state.

In the United States, the voters use an **Australian ballot**, a secret ballot prepared by the government, distributed to all eligible voters, and, when balloting is completed, counted by government officials in an unbiased fashion, without corruption or regard to individual preferences.
The 2000 Election and Its Impact

- In the 2000 presidential election between Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W. Bush, an enormous controversy erupted over the voting in Florida.
- In the end, the U.S. Supreme Court had the final say.
- Indignation surrounding the 2000 election resulted in federal policy changes to the conduct of elections by the states. The key policy revision came through the passage of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA).
- HAVA allocated $650 million to assist states in changing from punch card ballots to electronic voting systems and set a deadline of 2005 for states to comply, although some states have not yet done so.
Types of Ballots

- The **party-column ballot**, organizes the candidates by party, so that all of a given party’s candidates for every office are arranged in one column.
- Party-column ballots increase voters’ tendency to vote the “party line.”
- Party-column ballots also increase the **coattail effect**.
- The **office-block ballot** arranges all candidates for a particular office under the name of that office.
- Office-block ballots are more likely to encourage ticket splitting.
Why Ballot Design Matters

- The 2000 presidential election voting in Florida provides evidence that not only the voting process but also the design of ballots can make a difference in outcomes.

- In Florida’s Palm Beach County, where voters push a button on their voting machine ballot to register their vote, critics charge that the ballot in use, the *butterfly ballot*, was particularly confusing to voters.
Voting by Mail

- Traditionally, **absentee voting**, in which voters cast their ballots in advance by mail, was allowed only when disability, illness, school, work, service in the armed forces, or travel prevented voters from casting a ballot in their voting precinct.

- But increasingly, many states accept mail-in ballot applications simply because absentee voting is more convenient for the voter.

- Oregon’s experience with mail-in voting.
Elections, Campaigns, and Voting

Where Do You Stand?

How confident are you that votes cast in a national election will be accurately cast and counted?

a. Very confident
b. Somewhat confident
c. Not that confident
d. Not at all confident

Source: “Is Public Confident That Votes Will Be Accurately Counted Nov. 4?”
Running for Office: The Choice to Run

Four types of motivation are generally in play when a person decides to declare a candidacy:

1. a sense of civic responsibility
2. a sense of party loyalty
3. personal goals (politics as a career)
4. interest in increasing the candidate’s name recognition and stature in the community, often for business reasons
Formal Eligibility Requirements

- President: Natural born citizen, 35 years old, resident of US for 14 years
- Vice president: Natural born citizen, 35 years old, must not be resident of same state as president
- U.S. senator: citizen of 9 years, 30 years old, resident of state
- U.S. representative: citizen of 7 years, 25 years old, resident of state
Informal Eligibility Requirements

- Voters expect candidates for the House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and the presidency to have higher qualifications than candidates for state and local offices.

- In races for the U.S. Senate and the presidency, the popular press examines the minutest details of candidates’ professional and educational background.
The Nature of Political Campaigns Today

- Campaigns today are different from the campaigns of the 1980s or even the early 1990s.

- The main reasons for the changes are the professionalization of campaign staffs, the dramatically expanded role of the media and the Internet, and the changing nature of campaign finance.
The Professionalism of Political Campaigns

- One of the most significant changes in the conduct of campaigns is the rise in prominence of campaign consultants, paid professionals who specialize in the overall management of political campaigns or an aspect of campaigns, such as fund-raising or advertising.

- Key campaign professionals include the campaign manager, the pollster, fundraising consultant, and media consultant.
Media and New Technologies: Transforming Political Campaigns

- Today, with the presence everywhere of the media in all its forms—television, Internet news sites, blogs, Twitter, radio, podcasts, newspapers, magazines—citizens’ access to information is unprecedented.

- Given the abundance of information disseminated today, and in light of its diverse and sometimes questionable sources, engaged citizens have a greater responsibility to be discerning consumers of the news.
Personality versus Policy

In sorting through the abundance of “news,” citizens must also contend with changes in how information is presented by the media.

Because of the many (and sometimes endless) hours that networks and 24-hour cable news shows must fill, the focus has shifted more and more from the policy stances of candidates and government officials to the personalities of these individuals.
Revolutionizing the Campaign: New Technologies

- New technologies have dramatically changed the conduct of political campaigns in recent years.
- Through texting, tweeting, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, candidates can use technologies to communicate with voters, mobilize supporters, and interact with the media.
Where Do You Stand?

What would you say is the source of the majority of the information you learn about a presidential campaign?

- a. Television
- b. Newspapers
- c. Internet
- d. Magazines
- e. Radio
- f. Other

Money is essential in electoral races today.

Federal regulations require any group that contributes to candidates’ campaigns to register as a political action committee (PAC), and these organizations are subject to constraints in the amount of money that they can contribute to candidate campaigns.

But today, in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling *Citizens United v. The Federal Election Commission* in 2010, these regulations are being circumventing through the increasing use of a new class of super PACs.
Early Efforts to Regulate Campaign Finance

- The Federal Corrupt Practices Act of 1925
- The Hatch Act of 1939 banned partisan political activities by all federal government employees except the president, the vice president, and Senate-confirmed political appointees.
- In 1971, Congress passed the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA).
- FECA placed considerable limitations on both campaign expenditures and campaign contributions, and it provided or a voluntary tax-return check-off for qualified presidential candidates.
Early Efforts to Regulate Campaign Finance

- In 1974, FECA was amended to place more stringent limitations on individual contributions and to limit expenditures by PACs, and it revamped the presidential election process by restricting spending and providing public financing for qualified candidates who abided by the limits.
- The act also required public disclosure of contributions and expenditures by all candidates for federal office.
- Most important, the act created an enforcement mechanism in the Federal Election Commission.
The Court Weighs In: Money = Speech

- *In Buckley v. Valeo* (1976), the Supreme Court ruled that placing limitations on the amount an individual candidate could spend on his or her own campaign violated First Amendment protections of free speech.

- This ruling paved the way for the subsequent explosion in the formation of PACs by recognizing political expenditures as a protected form of speech and removing limits on overall campaign spending, on personal expenditures by an individual candidate, and on expenditures not coordinated with a candidate’s campaign and made by independent interest groups.
The Growth of PACs

- After *Buckley v. Valeo* in 1976, the number of political action committees shot up dramatically.
- The ballooning of the number of PACs over time is indicative of the increased power that PACs have wielded in campaigns for federal office since 1980, and, in light of the 2010 Supreme Court decision, many campaign finance analysts predict that PACs will continue to increase both in numbers and in influence.
Independent Expenditures

- Because expenditures are protected from limitations, many PACs now use independent expenditures to spend unlimited sums for or against political candidates.

- **Independent expenditures** are outlays, typically for advertising supporting or opposing a candidate, that are uncoordinated with a candidate’s campaign.
The Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002

- The McCain-Feingold Act, formally known as the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act (BCRA) of 2002, banned nearly all soft money contributions.


### Campaign Finance Rules under the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act, 2014 Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>INDIVIDUAL MAY GIVE</strong></th>
<th><strong>TO EACH CANDIDATE OR CANDIDATE COMMITTEE PER ELECTION</strong></th>
<th><strong>TO NATIONAL PARTY COMMITTEE PER CALENDAR YEAR</strong></th>
<th><strong>TO STATE, DISTRICT, AND LOCAL PARTY COMMITTEE PER CALENDAR YEAR</strong></th>
<th><strong>TO ANY OTHER POLITICAL COMMITTEE PER CALENDAR YEAR</strong></th>
<th><strong>SPECIAL LIMITS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$2,600*</td>
<td>$32,400*</td>
<td>$10,000 (combined limit)</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$123,200* overall biennial limit: $48,600* to all candidates; $74,600* to all PACs and parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NATIONAL PARTY COMMITTEE MAY GIVE</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,000</strong></td>
<td>No limit</td>
<td>No limit</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$45,400* to Senate candidate per campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STATE, DISTRICT, AND LOCAL PARTY COMMITTEE MAY GIVE</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,000 (combined limit)</strong></td>
<td>No limit</td>
<td>No limit</td>
<td>$5,000 (combined limit)</td>
<td>No limit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PAC (MULTI CANDIDATE) MAY GIVE</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,000</strong></td>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>$5,000 (combined limit)</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>No limit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PAC (NOT MULTI CANDIDATE) MAY GIVE</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2,600</strong>*</td>
<td>$32,400*</td>
<td>$10,000 (combined limit)</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>No limit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUTHORIZED CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE MAY GIVE</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2,000</strong></td>
<td>No limit</td>
<td>No limit</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>No limit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These contribution limits are increased for inflation in odd-numbered years.

**A contribution earmarked for a candidate through a political committee counts against the original contributor’s limit for that candidate. In certain circumstances, the contribution may also count against the contributor’s limit to the PAC, 11 CFR 100.6. See also 11 CFR 110.19.

No more than $46,200 of this amount may be contributed to state and local party committees and PACs.

This limit is shared by the national committee and the Senate campaign committee.

A multicandidate committee is a political committee with more than 50 contributors that has been registered for at least 6 months and, with the exception of state party committees, has made contributions to five or more candidates for federal office; 11 CFR 100.5(e)(3).

A federal candidate’s authorized committee(s) may contribute no more than $2,000 per election to another federal candidate’s authorized committee(s); Z U.S.C. 432(e)(3)(B).

Circumventing the Rules: 527s and 501(c)4s

- Loopholes in the campaign finance law became apparent with the emergence of new forms of political groups, so-called 527s and 501(c)4s.

- Named after the section of the Internal Revenue Service tax code that regulates such organizations, a **527** is a tax-exempt group that raises money for political activities, much like those allowed under the soft money loophole.
Circumventing the Rules: 527s and 501(c)4s

- **501(c)4s** are nonprofit organizations operated exclusively for the promotion of social welfare including lobbying or engage in political campaigning.
- These nonprofits go largely unregulated by the Federal Election Commission, and their activities are not subject to the transparency requirements that regulated entities are.
The Court Weighs In (Again): The Birth of Super PACs

- In the 2010 *Citizens United* decision, the Supreme Court ruled that corporations and labor unions are entitled to the same free speech rights that individuals enjoy, and thus their expenditures to influence the outcome of elections cannot be limited.

- The impact of the *Citizens United* decision could be seen in 2012’s presidential campaign, as candidates courted wealthy donors who might fund a super PAC to advocate for their candidacy.

- Super PACs also played a large role in the 2014 elections.
Presidential Campaigns

- In presidential election years, nonstop campaigning affords ample opportunities for the public to learn about the candidates and their positions.
- Campaigns also provide avenues for participation by the people.
Party Conventions and the General Election Campaign

- Political parties hold conventions in presidential election years to select their party’s nominee for president of the United States.
- The delegates to the national conventions are chosen by citizens in each state who vote in their party’s primary election.
- After the conventions are over and the nominees have been decided, the nominees and their vice-presidential running mates begin their general election campaign.
Fall preceding election year—January of election year—Campaigning by candidates for party nomination in early primary and caucus states, especially Iowa and New Hampshire

- January of election year—Early caucuses and primaries held
- January—February—early primaries and caucuses continue
- March 6—Super Tuesday, other primaries and caucuses follow later in month
- March—July—Primaries and caucuses continue
- August—early September—Party conventions
- September—early November—General election campaign

First Tuesday after the first Monday in November—Election Day, including election of electors

Monday following the second Wednesday of December—Electoral College voting in state capitals
- December—Votes transported to the House of Representatives

Early January following the election—Votes announced at a joint session of Congress

January 20—Inauguration of president
The Electoral College

- There are 538 electors in the Electoral College because the number of electors is based on the number of members of Congress.
- A presidential candidate needs a simple majority of votes (270) to win.
Who Votes?
Factors in Voter Participation

1. Education Level—the Number One Predictor of Voting
2. The Age Factor
3. Race and Voter Participation
4. Income—a Reliable Predictor of Voting
5. Party Competitiveness and Voter Turnout
Education Level—the Number One Predictor of Voting

- An individual’s level of education is the best predictor of whether that person will vote.
- As education increases, so, too, does the likelihood of voting, with measurable differences even among those who have only attended college and those who have graduated.
### U.S. Voters’ Rates of Registering and Voting by Educational Attainment, 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT</th>
<th>REGISTERED (%)</th>
<th>VOTED (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 9th grade</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th to 12th grade, no diploma</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or Associate’s degree</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced degree</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Age Factor

- Young adults are less likely to vote than Americans who are middle-aged and older, though that figure has increased in recent years.
Race and Voter Participation

- Today, voter participation among African Americans is about equal to that of whites.
- Voting participation among Hispanics and Asian Americans lags behind that of whites and African Americans.
Voter Turnout Rates in Presidential Elections, 1988-2012

Voter turnout rates in presidential elections, 1988–2012

- Whites
- Blacks
- Hispanics
- Asians


Percent: 64.1, 47.0, 49.9, 64.1, 65.2, 66.1, 66.2

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Income—a Reliable Predictor of Voting

Besides education, income is one of the best predictors of whether an American will vote.

Typically in recent presidential election years, U.S. citizens with the lowest income level have had voter turnout levels of 50–60 percent, whereas those with the highest income level have had turnout levels above 85 percent.
Party Competitiveness and Voter Turnout

- Close races usually bring higher voter turnout.
  - Voter efficacy is higher: one vote could make the difference.
  - Close races usually bring much higher media attention.
  - 2012 presidential election turnout rates were highest in states where the race was closest.
How Voters Decide

- Some voters evaluate candidates on the basis of their positions on issues and then cast their ballots for those who best represent their views. Called **prospective voting**, this method of candidate evaluation focuses on what the candidates will do in the future.

- A more common form of candidate evaluation is **retrospective voting**, in which a voter evaluates an incumbent candidate on the basis of whether the incumbent’s past decisions and actions are satisfactory to the voter.
How Voters Decide

- The most important factor that plays into how a voter decides on a candidate and perceives specific candidates, however, is the voter’s party identification.
### Party Loyalty in the 2012 Presidential Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voted for Romney (%)</th>
<th>Voted for Obama (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Major Factors in Voter Decision Making

- Often a significant determinant in why people vote the way they do, policy priorities are to a certain extent aligned with party identification.

- National issues that top the list of concerns among voters have remained consistent over many years and include several domestic policy matters.

- **Incumbency** is also a key factor influencing how people vote.
Campaign Influences on Voter Choice

- Modern campaign trends, include a far deeper reliance on paid professional staffers and the prevalence of the media as a tool for communicating with voters.
- Voter choices are also affected by increasingly negative campaigns.
- Research shows that negative campaigning can suppress voter turnout in several ways.
Why Some People Do Not Vote

- Lack of Efficacy
- Voter Fatigue and Negative Campaigns
- The Structure of Elections
- The Rational Abstention Thesis
- The Consequences of Nonvoting
Why Some People Do Not Vote: Lack of Efficacy

- Many nonvoters lack efficacy.
- They do not believe that the government listens to people like them or that their vote actually matters in determining the outcome of elections and the business of government.
- Poorer people are more likely than better-off individuals to feel that the government does not listen to people like them.
Why Some People Do Not Vote: Voter Fatigue and Negative Campaigns

- In the United States, campaigns tend to be long-drawn-out affairs.
- Some scholars say that the lengthiness of the campaigns leads to **voter fatigue**.
Why Some People Do Not Vote: The Structure of Elections

- For years, voting rights activists claimed that the registration requirements in many states were too complicated and discouraged people from voting by making it too difficult to register.
- The impact of the 1993 “Motor Voter” legislation, however, has been negligible.
- Critics of the structure of elections also point to their frequency.
- The timing of elections also affects voter participation.
Why Some People Do Not Vote: The Rational Abstention Thesis

The **rational abstention thesis** states that some individuals decide that the “costs” of voting—in terms of the time, energy, and inconvenience required to register to vote, to become informed about candidates and elections, and actually to vote—are not worth the effort when compared with the expected “benefits,” or what the voters could derive from voting in light of these cumulative “costs.”
The Impact of Nonvoting

- From a civic engagement perspective, nonvoting is both a symptom and a result of a lack of civic involvement on the part of individuals.
- When relatively few people vote in a given election, the outcome is likely to represent the will of only that subset of the electorate who voted.
- Some scholars assert that democracies with low voter turnout are more likely to generate threats to their own well-being.
The Impact of Nonvoting

- Other researchers, however, contend that nonvoting is not a big problem, especially in cases where large numbers in the electorate are relatively uninformed about candidates and issues.

- Other scholars who claim that low voter turnout is not a problem argue that low voting rate are simply a function of people’s satisfaction with the status quo.

- However, nonvoters’ best chances of having their views reflected in the policy process is to articulate them through voting.