CHAPTER 10

Elections and Voting Behavior

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Introduction (pp. 305-306)
   A. It is difficult for elections to be a faithful mechanism for expressing the public’s desires concerning what government should do.
   B. Elections socialize and institutionalize political activity and provide regular access to political power, thus establishing legitimacy.

II. How American Elections Work (pp. 306–307)
   A. A referendum gives voters the chance to approve or disapprove some legislative act or constitutional amendment.
   B. Initiative petitions enable voters to put proposed legislation on the ballot.

III. A Tale of Three Elections (pp. 307–311)
   A. 1800: The First Electoral Transition of Power
      1. This campaign focused on state legislatures.
   B. 1896: A Bitter Fight over Economic Interests
      1. This campaign entrenched Republicans as the majority party.
   C. 2008: An Election about Change

IV. Whether To Vote: A Citizen's First Choice (pp. 312–317)
   A. Suffrage is the legal right to vote.
   B. Deciding Whether to Vote
      1. The costs of voting may rationally outweigh the benefits.
      2. People who see policy differences in the parties are more likely to vote.
      3. People with a high sense of political efficacy are more likely to vote.
      4. People with a high sense of civic duty are more likely to vote.
   C. Registering to Vote
      1. Voter registration procedures currently differ greatly from state to state.
      2. The 1993 Motor Voter Act requires states to permit people to register at the same time they apply for driver's licenses.
   D. Who Votes?
      1. People with a higher education vote more regularly.
      2. Older people vote more regularly than younger people.
      3. African Americans and Hispanics vote less regularly.
      4. Women vote slightly more regularly than men.
      5. Married people are more likely to vote than nonmarried.
V. How Americans Vote: Explaining Citizens' Decisions (pp. 317–321)
   A. The mandate theory of elections suggests that the winner has a mandate to carry out promised policies.
   B. Party Identification
      This provides a perspective through which voters can view the political world.
   C. Candidate Evaluations: How Americans see the Candidates
   D. Policy voting occurs when people base their choices in an election on their own issue preferences.

VI. The Last Battle: The Electoral College (pp. 322–323)
   A. The founders created the electoral college so that the president would be chosen by the nation’s elite.
   B. The electoral college introduces a bias into the campaign.

VII. Understanding Elections and Voting Behavior (pp. 323–325)
   A. Democracy and Elections
      1. The greater the policy differences between the candidates, the more likely voters will be able to steer government policies by their choices.
      2. People who feel better off than before will vote for candidates who pledge to continue the status quo; those who feel worse off will vote for the opposition (retrospective voting).
   B. Elections and the Scope of Government

VIII. Summary (pp. 325–326)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying Chapter 10, you should be able to:

1. Explain the functions and unique features of American elections.
2. Describe how American elections have evolved using the presidential elections of 1800, 1896, and 2008 as examples.
3. Discuss the factors that affect a citizen's choice of whether or not to vote.
4. Explain how Americans vote and what factors influence how they vote.
5. Explain how the electoral college works and what biases it can introduce.
The following exercises will help you meet these objectives:

Objective 1: Explain the functions and unique features of American elections.

List three major functions of elections in American society.

1.

2.

3.

2. List the three kinds of elections found in the United States and their purpose.

1.

2.

3.

3. What is the difference between an initiative petition and a referendum?
Objective 2: Describe how American elections have evolved using the presidential elections of 1800, 1896, and 2008.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Candidates and Party</th>
<th>Winner</th>
<th>Major Issues</th>
<th>Campaign Style</th>
<th>Significance of Election</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
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<tr>
<td>1896</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. What were the major reasons why people voted for either Barack Obama or John McCain in the 2008 presidential election?

Barack Obama:

John McCain:

Objective 3: Discuss the factors that affect a citizen's choice of whether or not to vote.

1. List and explain three major reasons why people might vote.

1. 

2. 

3. 

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2. What is the major provision of the 1993 Motor Voter Act?

3. List and explain six demographic factors that are related to voter turnout.
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 
   4. 
   5. 
   6.

Objective 4: Explain how Americans vote and what factors influence how they vote.

1. What is meant by the "mandate theory of elections"?

2. How has the influence of party identification on voting changed since the 1950s?

3. What are the three most important dimensions of candidate image?
   1. 
   2. 
   3.

4. What are the four conditions necessary for true policy voting to take place?
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 
   4.
Objective 5: Explain how the electoral college works and what biases it can introduce.

1. Briefly explain how the electoral college works.

2. What are the two reasons why the electoral college is important to presidential elections?
   1.
   2.

Objective 6: Understand how elections affect democracy, public policy, and the scope of government.

1. What are the two tasks that elections accomplish, according to democratic theory?
   1.
   2.

2. According to the text, what is the clearest way in which elections broadly affect public policy?

3. What is retrospective voting?
KEY TERMS

Identify and describe:

legitimacy

referendum

initiative petition

suffrage

political efficacy

civic duty

voter registration

Motor Voter Act

mandate theory of elections

policy voting

electoral college

retrospective voting
**Compare and contrast:**

- initiative petition and referendum
- suffrage and voter registration
- voter registration and Motor Voter Act
- policy differences and civic duty
- mandate theory of elections and policy voting

**Name that term:**

1. This term is used to describe elections that are almost universally accepted as a fair and free method to select political leaders.

   ______________________

2. This enables voters in 23 states to put proposed legislation on the ballot.

   ______________________

3. This varies among the states and tends to dampen voter turnout.

   ______________________

4. This reflects the belief that one's vote can make a difference.

   ______________________

5. Politicians are more attracted to this idea than are political scientists.

   ______________________

6. This unique American institution was created by the Constitution.

   ______________________
7. This is when voters essentially ask the simple question, "What have you done for me lately?"

_________________________

USING YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. The text points out that the United States has one of the lowest voter turnout rates among all democratic nations. Examine the reasons why voter turnout is so low and outline a comprehensive plan to increase voter turnout in the United States. What policies need to be changed to accomplish this? How might incentives be used to get people to vote? You might want to look at voting laws in other countries with high turnout rates to get ideas. Also include an examination of the Motor Voter Act. Speculate on how the Motor Voter Act might increase participation. What are the main criticisms of the Motor Voter Act? Comment on how your suggestions might be implemented.

2. Find out about electoral turnout in your state for the 2004 and 2008 elections. How did the participation rates for various population groups (based on race, income, region, etc.) differ? Compare your state's voting rate to the national turnout rate and to that of other states. How well does your state fare? See if you can identify some of the demographic features of your state that might help explain its rate of turnout, such as its size, urbanization, or population composition. How did participation rates differ between 2004 and 2008 and why? How might the voter registration system in your state affect turnout? Briefly describe what you found and suggest ways to improve electoral participation.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Circle the correct answer:

1. Which of the following functions do elections LEAST serve?
   a. Selecting public officials
   b. Making and coordinating public policy
   c. Providing regular access to political power
   d. Providing legitimacy to the political system
   e. Connecting citizens to government officials

2. Daniel Smith argues that initiatives typically stem from
   a. broad public demand for the policy.
   b. the actions of a dedicated policy entrepreneur.
   c. the natural emergence of policy issues.
   d. responsive elected officials, working in a coalition.
   e. None of the above

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3. Of the following, which is the most direct form of democracy?
   a. Initiative
   b. Referendum
   c. Direct primary
   d. Presidential election
   e. Recall

4. The election of 1800 was
   a. decided by the direct vote of the people.
   b. decided by the Electoral College.
   c. decided by the House of Representatives.
   d. overturned by the Supreme Court.
   e. decided by the full Congress.

5. What was the focus of the election of 1896?
   a. Economics
   b. Slavery
   c. The religious beliefs of Jefferson
   d. World War I
   e. The Great Depression

6. All of the following factors helped catapult Barack Obama to victory in the 2008 presidential election EXCEPT
   a. His perceived experience in foreign policy issues.
   b. The credit crisis that rocked the financial markets in late September.
   c. The intense focus on the economy during the campaign.
   d. The perception that vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin was not qualified to assume the presidency.
   e. The ability of Obama to link McCain to President George W. Bush.

7. Which of the following is TRUE about American elections over the past 100 years?
   a. The suffrage has broadened, and the turnout has increased.
   b. The suffrage has broadened, and the turnout has decreased.
   c. The suffrage has narrowed, and the turnout has increased.
   d. The suffrage has narrowed, and the turnout has decreased.
   e. Suffrage has broadened, but there has been no change in turnout.

8. Which of the following statements about voting is FALSE?
   a. In many cases, your vote will not make a difference to the outcome of the election.
   b. It might not be rational to spend time becoming informed, deciding who to vote for, and turning out on Election Day.
   c. The costs of voting frequently outweigh the benefits of voting.
   d. If there is little difference in the policy positions of the candidates, it is not rational to vote.
   e. None of the above
9. What new way to register to vote was implemented with the passage of the Motor Voter Act?
   a. By checking a box on your driver’s license application or renewal form.
   b. After you take driver’s education classes.
   c. When you buy or lease a car, by checking off a voter registration form.
   d. In an approved drive-through motor vehicles’ bureau.
   e. By filling out a form that is driven to your house.

10. Political efficacy refers to the belief that
    a. the costs of voting outweigh the benefits.
    b. significant policy differences exist between the parties.
    c. one should always support democratic government.
    d. ordinary people can influence the government.
    e. government is very inefficient and needs to be streamlined.

11. Which of the following countries has the lowest voter turnout rate?
    a. Australia
    b. United States
    c. Italy
    d. France
    e. Bulgaria

12. Which of the following characteristics would make one more likely to vote in an election?
    a. Having a college degree
    b. Being a young adult
    c. Having a low income
    d. Being a college student
    e. Being a welfare recipient

13. The mandate theory of elections is the idea that
    a. a candidate must get at least sixty percent of the vote to win.
    b. a candidate must get a majority of the votes cast (fifty percent plus one) in order to take office.
    c. the election winner has authorization from the voters to carry out his or her promised policies.
    d. in order to improve turnout rates in the United States, voting must be made a legal requirement of all citizens, with the failure to vote resulting in a small fine.
    e. a candidate must get at least 75 percent of the vote to win.

14. Which of these is the least important dimension of a candidate's image?
    a. Intelligence
    b. Integrity
    c. Reliability
    d. Competence
    e. Experience
15. Research on voting behavior has shown that
   a. policy voting has become somewhat easier than in the past.
   b. a candidate's image is not as important today as it was in the past.
   c. Americans tend to identify with the underdog.
   d. party identification has become more important in voting decisions.
   e. policy voting has become harder than in the past.

16. Studies have shown that during the 1960s and 1970s,
   a. voting according to political party identification increased.
   b. Democrats voted along party lines more than Republicans.
   c. the hold of the parties on voters eroded substantially.
   d. political party identification no longer affected voting behavior.
   e. large numbers of people who had been eligible to vote but never voted surged into the electorate.

17. The "electors" in the Electoral College are
   a. the members of Congress from each state, who vote strictly according to who won the majority of their state's votes.
   b. the members of the House from each state, who vote strictly according to who won the majority of their district's votes.
   c. selected by state parties, usually as a reward for faithful service to the party over the years.
   d. a bipartisan group of political scientists, public officials, jurists, and other respected individuals chosen by the governor of each state.
   e. selected by state legislatures well in advance of the presidential election, and each elector votes his or her own conscience as to who would be the best president.

18. Retrospective voting refers to voting for
   a. a candidate who promises to continue policies that have made you feel better off.
   b. a candidate because of his or her past stands on the issues.
   c. the same party and candidates election after election.
   d. different parties and candidates election after election.
   e. candidates for nostalgic reasons because they promise to return the country to some golden age in its past.

19. While the threat of electoral punishment constrains policymakers, it also helps to increase generalized support for
   a. the private sector.
   b. individualistic, rather than, collective policy solutions.
   c. government and its powers.
   d. incumbents who have done a good job.
   e. unelected government officials in the bureaucracy.
20. Individuals who believe that they can influence government are also more likely to believe
   a. that government should have more power.
   b. that government should be cut back.
   c. that the president should have more power.
   d. that the courts should be a much smaller part of the governmental system.
   e. that elections should be held more often.

**TRUE/FALSE QUESTIONS**

*Circle the correct answer:*

1. California’s Proposition 13 is an example of an initiative petition. T / F
2. Nearly 80 percent of the voting eligible population voted in the election of 1896. T / F
3. Barack Obama was relatively unknown when he announced his presidential candidacy in 2007 and had virtually no national constituency. T / F
4. Rational people might decide that the costs of voting outweigh the benefits. T / F
5. The Motor Voter Act made voter registration easier. T / F
6. Less than 30 percent of the population votes. T / F
7. Single people are more likely to vote than are married people. T / F
8. It is possible to manipulate a candidate’s appearance in a way that affects voters. T / F
9. State parties are responsible for choosing their slate of electors. T / F
10. The president and vice president are selected by the American people. T / F

**SHORT ANSWER/SHORT ESSAY QUESTIONS**

1. Explain the difference between an initiative petition and a referendum?
2. Why, according to Anthony Downs, would an individual decide that it was rational to vote?
3. Explain and evaluate the mandate theory of elections.
4. Compare and contrast voting behavior between 1960 and 2008, paying particular attention to the role of religion, race, gender, age, and education.