Tea Party Protest, Washington, D.C., September 12, 2009

10.0 | Political Participation

The above image of a large public demonstration in Washington, D.C., is part of a great tradition of mass public participation in politics that goes back to the colonial days. Do you participate in politics? If so, how have you participated in politics? Political participation in a democracy includes voting—but also much more than just voting. One of the ironies of modern American politics is that it is easier than ever to participate in politics in the digital age, but there are also worries that the public is becoming more disengaged or disillusioned about civic engagement in politics as a way to solve the kinds of problems that people expect government to solve.

Think About It!
What does taking the electronic pulse of civic engagement indicate about the health of American democracy?
Stated in the most basic terms, the power problem is about government authority over individuals: why can the government, the community, or the majority tell someone that they can and cannot do—and punish them if they disobey the law? Democratic theory answers this question by describing democracy as a form of self-government—people agree to govern themselves as an act of self-restraint or self-control. Government of, by, and for the people requires the participation of an informed, active, and engaged citizenry. The term civics education refers to a movement to increase public information about the Constitution, the way the political system works, the way government works, and civil discourse—the ways to talk about divisive or controversial issues that emphasize working toward the formulation of solutions. This chapter examines how voting, elections, and campaigns organize participation in politics and government. Political participation is not limited to voting in elections. It includes a broad range of individual and collective action. The term civic engagement refers to a public that is actively engaged in politics and government. It includes voting, participating in campaigns, volunteerism, writing letters to editors, and contacting government officials or working with local government advisory boards. The chapter begins with voting and other forms of political participation. It concludes by providing resources for “getting” civics education and by providing examples of how to “do” civic engagement. The belief in American Exceptionalism is not limited to conservatives. The National Council for the Social Studies is an organization whose mission is “Preparing Students for College, Career, and Civic Life.” It issued a 2007 report that seeks to perpetuate “An Idea Called America” by promoting civic competence, active citizenry, and participatory democracy through public education about the content, skills, and values associated with American civic engagement.1

10.1 | Voting

Voting is just one form of political participation. There are many other ways to participate in politics: writing a letter to a newspaper; posting to a Web site; making a campaign contribution; contacting a legislator; running for office; campaigning for a candidate; or lobbying government. But voting is the form of political participation that is most closely associated with meeting the responsibilities of citizenship because voting is an act of self-government. Voters select government officials to represent them and cast votes for or against issues that are on the ballot. There are many other forms of political participation: running for office, making campaign contributions, working for a party or candidate or issue, lobbying, or contacting government officials about an issue or problem which interests you. Even non-voting—the intentional refusal to participate in an election as a protest against the political system or the candidate or party choices that are available—can be a form of political participation. All these forms of participation are components of political science measures of how democratic a political system is.  

10.11 | Expanding the right to vote

One of the most important developments in the American system of government has been the expansion of the right to vote. Over time, politics has become much more democratic. The Founders provided for a rather limited right to vote because they were skeptical of
Chapter 10: Political Participation

direct democracy and the ability of the masses to make good decisions about public policy or government leaders. In fact, the Founders were divided on how much political participation, including voting, was desirable. The Federalists generally advocated limited participation where only white male property owners could vote. A leading Federalist, Alexander Hamilton, advocated a system of representative government that resembled “a natural aristocracy” that was run by “gentlemen of fortune and ability.”

The Anti-federalists advocated broader participation. The Anti-federalist author writing under the name The Federal Farmer defined democratic participation as full and equal representation: “full and equal representation is that in which the interests, feelings, opinions, and views of the people are collected, in such a manner as they would be were all the people assembled.” The Anti-federalist Republicus advocated an American democracy that provided for “fair and equal representation,” which he defined as a condition where “every member of the union have a freedom of suffrage and that every equal number of people have an equal number of representatives.”

Over time the right to vote was greatly expanded and the political system became much more democratic. Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address is a memorable political speech because of what it said about democracy and equality. Lincoln famously defined democracy as government of the people, government by the people, and government for the people. He also brought equality back into American political rhetoric by emphasizing the political importance of equality that was first stated so memorably in the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence asserted that all men were created equal and endowed with unalienable rights. The Constitution did not include equality as a political value. It provided for slavery and allowed the states to limit the right to vote. The right to vote was expanded by constitutional amendments and by legislation. The constitutional changes included the following amendments:

- The 14th Amendment (1868) prohibited states from denying to any person with their jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.
- The 15th Amendment (1870) prohibited states from denying the right to vote on the basis of race.
- The 17th Amendment (1913) provided for direct election of Senators.
- The 19th Amendment (1920) gave women the right to vote.
- The 24th Amendment (1964) eliminated the Poll Tax.
- The 26th Amendment (1971) lowered voting age to 18.
One of the most important statutory expansions of the right to vote is the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It made racial discrimination in voting a violation of federal law; specifically, outlawing the use of literacy tests to qualify to register to vote, and providing for federal registration of voters in areas that had less than 50% of eligible minority voters registered. The Act also provided for Department of Justice oversight of registration, and required the Department to approve any change in voting law in districts that had used a “device” to limit voting and in which less than 50% of the population was registered to vote in 1964. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is a landmark civil rights statute that also expanded the right to vote by limiting racial discrimination in voting.

In addition to these government actions, the political system also developed in ways that expanded the right to vote and made the system more democratic. The emergence of political parties fundamentally changed the American political system. Political parties changed the way the president is chosen by effectively making the popular vote, not the Electoral College, determine who wins the presidency. There have been notable exceptions to the rule that the candidate who receives the most popular votes wins the election (the presidential elections of 1824, 1876, 1888) and 2000), but modern political culture includes the expectation that the people select the president.
10.12 | How democratic is the United States?

Democracy is a widely accepted value in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world. As more nations adopt democratic political systems, political scientists are paying attention to whether a country’s political system is democratic as well as how democratic the political system is. Democracy is not an either/or value. There are degrees of democracy: a political system can be more or less democratic. Non-governmental organizations such as Freedom House and publications such as The Economist have developed comparative measures of how democratic a country’s political system is. The Economist ranks the U.S. as 17th in the world. This is a surprisingly low ranking for a nation that extols the value of democracy and promotes it worldwide. The low ranking on democracy is due to several factors:

- Voter Turnout. The U.S. has comparatively low rates of voter turn-out. European countries, for example, have much higher rates of voting.
- A Presidential System. The U.S. has developed into a system of presidential governance system where executive power is dominant rather than the more democratic legislative or parliamentary systems.
- National Security. The U.S. has developed extensive provisions for secrecy and national security and emergency powers which are hard to reconcile with democratic values.

10.13 | Voter Turnout

Voter turnout is the proportion of the voting-age public that participates in an election. Voter turnout is a function of a number of individual factors and institutional factors. Voter turnout is low in the United States. What does low mean? In many elections, less than half of the eligible voters participate in the election. The graph below shows the turnout rate for presidential elections from 1960 to 2008.
Think About It!

Should the U.S. try to increase voter turnout by either paying people to vote or by fining (or otherwise sanctioning) eligible voters who do not vote?

Voter turnout is also low compared to other western industrial democracies. Why is U.S. voter turnout low in absolute numbers (less than half) and comparatively? Some of the explanations focus on the individual while others focus on the electoral system.

10.14 | Individual Explanations

The individual explanations focus on an individual’s motivations. The two main models of individual explanations for voting behavior are the rational choice model and the civic duty model.

The rational choice model of voting was developed by Anthony Downs, who argued that individuals are self-interested actors who use a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether it is in their self-interest to vote. According to the rational choice model, a person’s decision whether to vote is based on an individual’s assessment of whether the vote will affect the outcome of the election, the expected benefit of voting and not voting, and the sense of civic duty (the personal gratification or satisfaction from voting. The rational choice model is based on the assumptions in economic models of human behavior.

The civic duty model describes non-material, non-rational incentives for voting. According to the civic duty model, a person votes out of a sense of responsibility to the political unit, or a commitment to democratic government and the obligations and duties as well as the rights of citizens to maintain self-government. Patriotic values and the commitment to the community or society are familiar expressions of civic duty.

In order to vote, the probability of voting, times the benefit of vote, plus the sense of duty to vote must outweigh the cost (in time, effort, and money) of voting. As the probability of a vote mattering in a federal election almost always approaches zero (because more than 100,000,000 votes are cast), duty becomes the most important element in motivating people to vote. According to the rational choice model, a person will vote if they think it is worth it; a person will not vote if they think it is not worth it. According to this cost-benefit ratio, it may be rational not to vote. An individual with a greater commitment to civic duty or responsibility will weigh the relative costs differently and may conclude that voting is worth it.

The concept of political efficacy is central to understanding voting behavior. Political efficacy is the belief that one’s participation matters, that one’s decision to vote really makes a difference. What is the likelihood that one vote will matter in a presidential election where more than 100, 000,000 votes are cast? The rational choice model suggests that voter turnout in the United States is low because individuals have thought about whether or not to vote and simply concluded that it is not worth their time and effort and money to vote.

Demographic factors affect whether or not someone turns out to vote. Demographic factors that are related to voter turn-out include income, education, race and ethnicity, gender, and age. Wealthy citizens have higher rates of voter turnout than poor citizens. Income has an effect on voter turnout. Wealthy citizens have higher levels
Chapter 10: Political Participation

of political efficacy and believe that the political works and their votes will count. On the other hand, people that make less money and have less wealth are less likely to believe that the political system will respond to their demands as expressed in elections. Race is also related to voter turnout. Whites vote at higher rates than minorities. Gender is also related to voter turnout. Women voted at lower levels than men for many years after gaining suffrage with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, but today women vote at much higher levels than men do. Age is also important. There is a strong relationship between age and voter turnout. Older people vote at higher levels than younger people do, which helps explain why candidates for office and government officials are so sensitive to issues that affect seniors (such as reducing spending on Social Security or Medicare).

Think About It!

What should you expect when you show up at the polls to vote?

“What to Expect Before Heading to the Polls”


System Explanations

The system explanations focus on aspects of the political system that affect voter turnout. These system factors include voter registration laws, the fact that elections are usually held on one day during the week, the large number of elections in our federal system, and the two-party system.

Eligibility. A person’s eligibility for voting is provided for in the U.S. Constitution, state constitutions, and state and federal statutes. The Constitution states that suffrage cannot be denied on grounds of race or color (Fifteenth Amendment), sex (Nineteenth Amendment) or age for citizens eighteen years or older (Twenty-sixth Amendment). Beyond these basic qualifications, the states have a great deal of authority to determine eligibility and to run elections. Some states bar convicted criminals, especially felons, from voting for a fixed period of time or indefinitely. The National Conference of State Legislatures reports on felon voting rights in the states. The Sentencing Project reports that 5.8 million Americans are disenfranchised, denied the right to vote, because of a felony conviction. State felon voting laws have a disproportionate impact on African-Americans: one out of 13 African-Americans are ineligible to vote because of a felony conviction.

Voter Registration. Voter registration is the requirement that a person check in with some central registry in order to be allowed to vote in an election. In the U.S., the individual is responsible for registering to vote—sometimes well before the actual election. Furthermore, each state has different voter registration laws and moving from one state to another state requires reregistering to vote. These registration laws reduce voter turnout. In some countries, the government registers eligible voters and actually fines eligible voters who do not perform their civic duty to vote in an election.

Voter Fatigue. Voter fatigue is the term for the apathy that the electorate can experience when they are required to vote too often in too many elections. The U.S. has a large number of government units (around 90,000) and Americans elect a large number of
government officials—around one for every 442 citizens. Having a large number of elections—in the U.S. there is always an election somewhere—can reduce voter turnout.

**The Two-party System.** Finally, the two-party system can contribute to low voter turnout by increasing the sense that an individual’s vote does not matter very much. In two-party systems, the parties tend to be primarily interested in winning elections. In order to win elections, the parties tend to compete for moderate voters with middle-of-the-road appeals because most of the voters are by definition centrists rather than extremists. This can be a winning electoral strategy, but it sometimes leaves voters thinking there isn’t much real difference between the two major parties which compete by “muddling in the middle.” Why vote if there is no real choice between the two candidates or parties? The two major American political parties tend to be interested primarily in winning elections, and only secondarily in advocating ideologies or issues. In contrast, countries with multiple party systems are more likely to have rational political parties. As used here, a rational party is one whose primary goal is advancing ideas, issues, or ideology; winning an election is secondary.

Listen to Southern Democrat Huey Long’s critique of the Democratic and Republican Parties in the 1940 presidential election. George C. Wallace, the former Governor of Alabama and 1968 presidential candidate of the American Independent Party, famously said of the Democratic and Republican candidates for president: there is “not a dime’s worth of difference between them.”

Does it matter whether one votes for a Republican or Democrat when there really isn’t much choice in a two-party system where the major parties don’t differ much on the issues?

**Election Tuesday?** Why does the U.S. have elections on a Tuesday? The reason for Tuesday elections goes back to the days of horses and buggies when Monday elections would require traveling on the Sabbath and Wednesday was market day. So in 1845 Congress provided for Tuesday elections. Would changing from one-weekday elections to two-day weekend elections increase voter turnout by making it easier for people to fit voting into busy family and work schedules? It has in some countries. The U.S. has comparatively low rates of voter turnout but bills to change to weekend voting die in committee in Congress. Some states now allow early voting and a significant percentage of votes are now cast before prior to the day of the election. Should technology such as electronic voting be used to increase voter turnout?

10.2 | Elections

Elections are one way for people to participate in the selection of government officials. Elections also provide a means of holding government officials accountable for the way they use their power. Participation and accountability are two of the main reasons why elections are a measure of whether a political system is democratic and how democratic it is. In most cases, it is not as useful to describe a political system as democratic or non-democratic as it is to determine how democratic it is. Many countries of the world have political systems that are more or less democratic. Some countries are more democratic than others. The existence of free, open, and competitive elections is one measure of whether a country’s political system is democratic.
Chapter 10: Political Participation

10.21 | Three Main Purposes

Elections serve three main purposes in representative democracies (or republics, like the U.S.):

- **Selecting government officials.** The most basic purpose of an election in a democratic system is to select government officials. Elections provide an opportunity for the people to choose their government officials. The fact that voters choose their representatives is one of the ways that democratic or republican systems of government solve the power problem. Voting is part of self-government.

- **Informing government officials.** Elections also provide government officials with information about what the people want, what they expect, and what they think about government. Elections provide an opportunity for the voice of the people to be expressed and heard. Elections thus serve as one of the ways to regularly measure public opinion about issues, political parties, candidates, and the way that government officials are doing their jobs.

- **Holding government accountable.** Elections provide regular or periodic mechanisms for holding elected representatives, other government officials, and even political parties accountable for their actions while in power. The Founders of the U.S. system of republican government provided for elections as part of the system of checks and balances.

The political scientists who study voting and elections describe two theories of elections. One theory is the elections are **forward looking** in the sense that an election provides government officials with information about which direction the public wants the government to go on major issues. The second theory is that elections are **backward looking** in the sense that an election provides government officials with feedback about what has been done—in effect, an election is a referendum on government officials or the political party in power.

10.22 | Too Much of a Good Thing?

In the U.S., voters go to the polls to elect national government officials at all levels of government: national, state, and local. Voters indirectly elect the President (through selection by the Electoral College). Voters directly elect the members of the House of Representatives and the Senate. Voters directly elect state government officials such as governors, legislators, the heads of various executive departments, and in many states judges. And voters elect local government officials such as county commissioners, school board members, mayors and city council members, and members of special governing districts such as airport authorities. In addition, most states provide for referendums, elections where voters decide ballot issues. With more than 90,000 total government units in the U.S., elections are being held somewhere for some office or for some ballot measure almost all the time. Across the whole country, more than one million elected offices are filled in every electoral cycle.
10.23 | Initiative and Referendum

Elections are not limited to those that involve the selection of government officials. In the U.S., many state and local governments provide for ballot initiatives and referendum. A ballot initiative is an election where the voters decide whether to support or reject a proposed law. A referendum is an election where the voters go to the polls to approve or reject a law that has been passed by the state legislature or a local government body. The people vote for or against issues such as state constitutional amendments, county charters, or city charter provisions and amendments.\(^7\)

The increased use of initiatives and referenda in states such as California has raised questions about whether direct democracy is preferable to indirect or representative democracy. In a representative democracy, the elected representatives of the people make the laws; in a direct democracy, the people make the laws. The recent trend toward initiatives and referendum has attracted the attention of people who study American politics. One organization that monitors and reports on what is happening in the states is the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center. This Center acts as a “nerve center” for “progressive” or liberal ballot initiatives in the states. The Initiative and Referendum Institute (IRI) at the University of Southern California studies ballot initiatives and referendums in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world. Technology has made it possible to use this form of direct democracy to make the political system more democratic by allowing the public more opportunities to participate in the adoption of the laws that government them.

10.24 | Regulating Elections

Elections are regulated by both federal and state law. The U.S. Constitution provides some basic provisions for the conduct of elections in Articles I and II. Article I, Section Four provides that “[t]he Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Place of Chusing Senators.” The 13\(^{th}\), 14\(^{th}\), and 15\(^{th}\) Amendments also regulate elections by prohibiting states from discriminating on the basis of race or gender. The 15\(^{th}\) Amendment states that the “right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

However, most aspects of electoral law are regulated by the states. State laws provide for the conduct of primary elections (which are party elections to determine who the party’s nominee will be in the general election); the eligibility of voters (beyond the basic requirements established in the U.S. Constitution); the running of each state’s Electoral College; and the running of state and local elections.
Election campaigns are organized efforts to persuade voters to choose one candidate over the other candidates who are competing for the same office. Effective campaigns harness resources such as volunteers; money (campaign contributions); the support of other candidates; and endorsements of other government officials, interest groups and party organizations. Effective campaigns use these resources to communicate messages to voters.

Political parties have played a central role in election campaigns for most of the nation’s history. However, during the last 30 years there has been an increase in candidate-centered campaigns and, more recently, independent organizations (such as super-PACS). Candidates who used to rely on political parties for information about voter preferences and attitudes now conduct their own public opinion polls and communicate directly with the public.

Before candidates can seek election to a partisan political office, they must get the nomination of their party in the primary election. A campaign for a non-partisan office (one where the candidates run without a party designation on the ballot), does not require getting the party nomination. A primary election is an election to determine who will be the party’s nominee for office. A general election is the election to actually determine who wins the office. A primary election is typically an intra-party election: the members of a party vote to determine who gets to run with the party label in the general election. A general election is typically an inter-party election: candidates from different parties compete to determine who wins the office. Most state and local political parties in the United States use primary elections (abet with widely varying rules and regulations) to determine the slate of candidates a party will offer in the general election. More than forty states use only primary elections to determine the nomination of candidates, and primaries play a prominent role in all the other states.

There are four basic types of primary elections: closed primaries, open primaries, modified closed primaries, and modified open primaries. Closed primaries are primary elections where voters are required to register with a specific party before the election and are only able to vote in the party’s election for which they are registered. Open primary elections allow anyone who is eligible to vote in the primary election to vote for a party’s selection. In modified closed primaries, the state party decides who is allowed to vote in its primary. In modified open primaries, independent voters and registered party members are allowed to vote in the nomination contest.

The United States has a presidential system of government. In presidential systems, the executive and the legislature are elected separately. Article I of the U.S. Constitution requires that the presidential election occur on the same day throughout the country every four years. Elections for the House of Representatives and the Senate can be held at different times. Congressional elections take place every two years. The years when there are congressional and presidential elections are called presidential election years. The congressional election years when a president is not elected are called midterm elections.
The Constitution states that members of the United States House of Representatives must be at least 25 years old, a citizen of the United States for at least seven years, and be a (legal) inhabitant of the state they represent. Senators must be at least 30 years old, a citizen of the United States for at least nine years, and be a (legal) inhabitant of the state they represent. The president must be at least 35 years old, a natural born citizen of the United States and a resident in the United States for at least fourteen years. It is the responsibility of state legislatures to regulate the qualifications for a candidate appearing on a ballot paper. “Getting on the ballot” is based on candidate's performances in previous elections.

2008 Presidential Ballot in Palm Beach County, Florida
Chapter 10: Political Participation

10.31 | Presidential Elections

The president and vice-president run as a team or ticket. The team typically tries for balance. A balanced ticket is one where the president and the vice-president are chosen to achieve a politically desirable balance. The political balance can be:

- Geographical. Geographical balance is when the President and Vice-president are selected from different regions of the country—balancing north and south, or east and west—in order to appeal to voters in those regions of the country.
- Ideological. Ideological balance is when the President and Vice-president come from different ideological wings of the party. The two major parties have liberal and conservative wings, and the ideological balance broadens the appeal of the ticket.
- Experience. A ticket with balanced political experience is one that includes one candidate with extensive experience in federal government and the other a political newcomer. Sometimes political experience (being a Washington insider, for instance) is considered an advantage; sometimes it is considered a handicap. Incumbency can be a plus or a minus. Balance can try to have it both ways.
- Demographics. Demographic balance refers to having a ticket with candidates who have different age, race, gender, or religion. Once again, demographic balance is intended to broaden the ticket’s appeal.

The presidential candidate for each party is selected through a presidential primary. Incumbent presidents can be challenged in their party’s primary elections, but this is rare. The last incumbent President to not seek a second term was Lyndon B. Johnson. President Johnson was mired in the Vietnam War at a time when that war was very unpopular. The presidential primary is actually a series of staggered electoral contests in which members of a party choose delegates to attend the party’s national convention which officially nominates the party’s presidential candidate. Primary elections were first used to choose delegates in 1912. Prior to this, the delegates were chosen by a variety of methods, including selection by party elites. The use of primaries increased in the early decades of the 20th Century then they fell out of favor until anti-war protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.
Currently, more than eighty percent of states use a primary election to determine delegates to the national convention. These elections do not occur on one day: the primary election process takes many months. The primary election process is long, drawn-out, complex, and has no parallel in any other nation in the world. The presidential candidates begin fundraising efforts, start campaigning, and announce their candidacy months in advance of the first primary election.

It is purely historical accident that New Hampshire and Iowa have the first primary elections and are thus the focus on candidate attention for months prior to their January elections. New Hampshire had an early primary election in 1972 and has held the place of the first primary since that time. Iowa’s primary is before New Hampshire, although the state uses a caucus to select delegates. Generally, the Iowa caucus narrows the field of candidates by demonstrating a candidate’s appeal among party supporters, while New Hampshire tests the appeal of the front-runners from each party with the general public.
Chapter 10: Political Participation

Dates of primary elections in 2008.

The unprecedented president. The unconventional president. During the campaign he broke all the rules. He ignored all the conventional wisdom about what to do and not to do to have a successful campaign. He even broke the eleventh commandment—Ronald Reagan’s commandment “Thou shalt not speak ill of another Republican.” And he called Americans losers?

10.32 | The Electoral College

The president is not directly elected by the people. The popular vote does not actually determine who wins the presidency. When the voters in a state go to the polls to cast their votes for president (and vice president), they are actually voting for members of the Electoral College. The winner of a presidential election is the candidate who receives a majority vote of the members of the Electoral College.

With the possible exception of the Federal Reserve Board, the Electoral College may be the least-understood government body in the U.S. system of government. Each member of the Electoral College cast her or his vote for a presidential and vice-presidential candidate. Each state’s members of the Electoral College are chosen by the state political party at that state’s party convention. The state parties choose party loyalists to be the party’s members of the Electoral College if that party wins the popular vote in the state. This is why the members of the Electoral College almost always vote for the presidential candidate who wins the popular vote in that state. On rare occasion, a “faithless” Elector will not vote for the candidate who won the popular vote in their state. When voters in a state go to the polls to vote for a president, they actually each cast their votes for a slate of electors that is chosen by a party or a candidate. The presidential and vice-presidential candidate names usually appear on the ballot rather than the names of the Electors. Until the passage of the Twelfth Amendment in 1804, the runner-up in a
presidential election (the person receiving the second most number of Electoral College votes) became the vice-president.

The winner of the presidential election is the candidate who receives at least 270 Electoral College votes. The fact that it is possible for a candidate to receive the most popular votes but lose the election by receiving fewer Electoral College votes than another candidate is hard to reconcile with democratic principles. It also does not seem fair in modern American political culture which includes an expectation that voters choose government officials. Abolishing the Electoral College and replacing it with a national direct system would also prevent a candidate from receiving fewer votes nationwide than their opponent, but still winning more electoral votes, which last occurred in the 2000 Presidential election.

State law regulates how the state’s Electoral College votes are cast. In all states except Maine and Nebraska, the candidate that wins the most votes in the state receives all its Electoral College votes (a “winner takes all” system). From 1969 in Maine, and from 1991 in Nebraska, two electoral votes are awarded based on the winner of the statewide election, and the rest (two in Maine, three in Nebraska) go to the highest vote-winner in each of the state’s congressional districts.

The Electoral College is criticized for a variety of reasons:

- It is undemocratic. The people do not actually elect a president; the president is selected by the Electoral College.
- It is unequal. The number of a state’s Electors is equal to the state’s congressional delegation. This system gives less populous states a disproportionate vote in the Electoral College because each state has two senators regardless of population (and therefore two members of the Electoral College). The minimum number of state Electors is three. Wyoming and California have the same number of senators. Wyoming has a population of 493,782 and 3 EC votes, 164,594 people per EC vote. California has a population of 33,871,648 and 55 EC votes, 615,848 people per EC vote.

Map of Electoral College Votes
• It spotlights swing states. The Electoral College system distorts campaigning because the voters in swing states determine the outcome of the election. As a result, voters who live in states that are not competitive are ignored by the political campaigns. Abolishing the Electoral College and treating the entire country as one district for presidential elections eliminate the campaign focus on swing states.

• It is biased against national candidates. The Electoral College also works against candidates whose base of support is spread around the country rather than in a state or region of the country which would enable them to win the popular vote in one or more states. This is what happened to Ross Perot. In 1992, Perot won 18.9% of the national vote, but received no Electoral College votes because his broad appeal across the country did not include strength in one or a few states.

Despite these long-standing criticisms of the Electoral College, abolishing it is unlikely because doing so would require a constitutional amendment—and ratification of a constitutional amendment requires three-quarters of the state legislature to support it. The less populous states are not likely to support an amendment to abolish the Electoral College in favor of direct popular election of the president because doing so would decrease the voting power of the less populous states. Small states such as Wyoming and North Dakota would lose power and more populous states such as California and New York would gain power.

10.33 | Congressional Elections

Congressional elections take place every two years. Each member of the House of Representatives is elected for a two-year term. Each Senator is elected for a six-year term. About one-third of the Senate is elected in each congressional election. Until the Seventeenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1913, Senators were elected by state legislatures, not the electorate of states.

10.34 | House Elections

Elections to the United States House of Representatives occur every two years on the first Tuesday after November 1 in even years. If a member dies in office or resigns before the term has been completed, a special House election is held to fill the seat. House elections are first-past-the-post elections—meaning the candidate who gets the most votes wins the election regardless of whether that person receives a majority of the votes cast in the election. The winner is the one who receives a plurality of the votes. Plurality means the most votes. It is not necessary for the winner to receive a majority (50% plus one) of the votes.
Every two years congressional elections coincide with presidential elections. Congressional elections that do not coincide with presidential elections are called mid-term elections—because they occur in the middle of a President’s four-year term of office. When congressional elections occur in the same year as a presidential election, the party whose presidential candidate wins the election usually increases the number of congressional seats it holds. This is one of the unofficial linkages between presidential and congressional elections. The president and members of Congress are officially elected separately, but some voters go to the polls to vote for or against Republicans and Democrats so the president’s popularity has an impact on congressional elections.

There is a historical pattern that the incumbent president’s party loses seats in mid-term elections. In mid-term elections, the president is not on the ballot. The president’s party usually loses seats in mid-term elections. One reason for mid-term losses is the president’s popularity has slipped during the two years in office. Another cause of mid-term election losses is the fact that voter turnout is lower in mid-term elections, and members of the president’s party are less likely to vote in an election when their president is not on the ballot. These patterns of voting behavior illustrate the partisan linkages between congressional and presidential elections.

In 2010, Allen West (R) challenged incumbent and Ron Klein (D) in Florida District 22. West emphasized his military experience. A neighborhood campaign supporter produced a sign which framed the choice as “The Wimp or the Warrior.”

10.35 | Gerrymandering

Over time, congressional districts have become far less competitive. Congressional districts are drawn to protect individual incumbents and political parties. Another way to describe this is that congressional districts are drawn to create safe districts. A safe district is one that is not competitive; it is a safe district for the Republican Party or a safe district for the Democratic Party because the district boundaries are drawn to ensure that it contains a majority of Republicans or Democrats. One consequence of drawing safe districts is a reduction in voter choice. The Constitution requires that congressional districts be reapportioned after every census. This means that reapportionment or redistricting is done every ten years. The reapportionment is done by each state. In most cases, the political party with a majority in the state legislature controls redistricting. The fact that either one or the other major party controls the reapportionment encourages partisan gerrymandering.
Gerrymandering is drawing electoral district lines in ways that advantage one set of interests and disadvantage others. Historically, gerrymandering advantaged rural interests and disadvantaged urban interests. Voters in rural districts were over-represented and voters in urban districts were under-represented. Racial gerrymandering is done to advantage one race and to disadvantage others. Historically, racial gerrymandering over-represented white voters and under-represented Black voters. Racial gerrymandering is illegal because the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits states from denying people the equal protection of the laws. Partisan gerrymandering is drawing electoral lines to benefit the majority party and hurt the minority party. It is still practiced as a way for the majority party to use its political power.

One of the ways that the two major parties cooperate is in the creation of safe electoral districts. The Democratic and Republican parties have a vested interest in reducing the number of competitive districts and increasing the number of safe seats. The fact that more than nine out of ten Americans live in congressional districts that are not really competitive, but are safe seats for one party or the other, means that elections are not really very democratic. Redistricting to create safe seats for incumbents (those in office) gives an incumbent a great advantage over any challenger in House elections. In the typical congressional election, only a small number of incumbents lose their seat. Only a small number of seats change party control in each election. Gerrymandering to create safe districts results in fewer than 10% of all House seats actually being competitive in each election cycle—competitive meaning that a candidate of either party has a good chance of winning the seat. The lack of electorally competitive districts means that over 90% of House members are almost guaranteed reelection every two years.

This is a significant development because competitive elections are one measure of how democratic a political system is. The large number of safe districts makes a political system less democratic because there are fewer competitive elections. Creating safe seats for 1) Republicans and Democrats; and 2) incumbents in either party, results in conditions that resemble one-party politics in a large number of districts. If one party almost always wins a district, and the other party almost always loses, the value of political competitions is greatly diminished.

10.36 | A Duopoly (or Shared Monopoly)

The two major parties collude to create these political monopolies (technically they are duopolies because the two major parties control the political marketplace). The creation of a large number of safe seats makes districts more ideologically homogeneous, thereby making negotiating, bargaining, and ultimately the need to compromise less likely. A candidate who does not have to run for office in a politically diverse district is less likely to have to develop campaign strategies with broad public appeal, and once in office such a legislator is less likely to have to govern with much concern about accommodating different interests or representing different constituents.

10.4 | Campaigns

A political campaign is an organized effort to influence the decisions of an individual, group, organization, or government institution. Campaigns are one way that individuals, political parties, and organizations compete for popular support. Campaigning is political advertising that provides the public with favorable information about candidates, parties, and issues—this is positive campaigning—or unfavorable information about the opposition—this is negative campaigning. Campaigns have three elements: message, money, and machine.

10.41 | The Message

An effective campaign message is one that creates a strong brand that the public identifies with. Some examples of campaign messages include the following:

- John Doe is a business man, not a politician. His background in finance means he can bring fiscal discipline to state government.
- Crime is increasing and education is decreasing. We need leaders like Jane Doe who will keep our streets safe and our schools educating our children.
- Jane Doe has missed over 50 congressional votes. How can you lead if you don’t show up to vote?
- Jane Doe is not a Washington politician. She remembers where she came from and won’t become part of the problem in Washington.
- Jane Doe knows how to keep Americans safe from terrorism.
- John Doe is an experienced leader.
- Vote Yes on Number Four to Protect Traditional Marriage.
Chapter 10: Political Participation

- Make America Great Again!

The message is one of the most important aspects of any political campaign, whether it is an individual’s campaign for office or a referendum on an issue. The media (radio, television, and now the new social media such as Twitter) emphasize short, pithy, memorable phrases from campaign speeches or debates. These “sound bites” are the short campaign slogans or catchy messages that resemble bumper-stickers. Sound-bite campaigns and campaign coverage reduce political messages to slogans such as “Peace through Strength” (Ronald Reagan), “Its Morning in America” (President Reagan), and “Change We Can Believe In” (Barack Obama). The Museum of the Moving Image has archived presidential campaign ads. A memorable campaign slogan from the 1984 Democratic primary campaign was Walter Mondale’s ad dismissing his main Democratic challenger, Gary Hart, with the catch phrase from a popular Wendy’s commercial: “Where’s the beef?” The implied charge was that the photogenic Hart lacked substance, particularly when compared to the dull but experienced Mondale. The mantra of Bill Clinton’s presidential campaign in 1992 was “It’s the economy stupid.” This slogan stressed the importance of keeping the campaign focused on the state of the economy rather than other issues that sometimes distract Democrats. Candidate George W. Bush’s campaign used the slogan “compassionate conservatism” to appeal to both conservatives and those who worried that conservatives did not care about the poor or disadvantaged.

Today’s national and state campaigns are typically professional, sophisticated, carefully crafted campaigns to develop and control the image of a candidate. The marketing of political campaigns has been described as the “packaging” of a candidate and the “selling” of a candidate—even “The Selling of a President.” The reference to selling a president is from Joe McGinniss’s The Selling of the President (1968). McGinniss described how candidate Richard Nixon used Madison Avenue marketing professionals and strategies to win the White House. At the time, the idea that a political campaign could, or should, market and sell a candidate the way that beer, deodorant, and bars of soap were marketed and sold other products like beer or deodorant or a bar of soap was controversial. The idea of corporate advertising expertise being applied to democratic politics in order to influence what citizens thought of the president seemed inappropriate and threatening. Bringing marketing values to politics seemed to demean or diminish politics by treating people as consumers rather than as citizens. Political advertising also seemed threatening in the sense that it used psychology to manipulate or control what people think.

In the years since 1968, the marketing and advertising of candidates is widely accepted as the way to conduct a successful national campaign. Presidential campaigns develop a message or candidate brand. After the Watergate Scandal exposed President Nixon’s dishonesty, the Jimmy Carter campaign brand was honesty: “I will not lie to you.” During the Carter Administration the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, Americans were taken hostages during a revolution in Iran that overthrew the Shah of Iran who was an ally of the United States, and a hostage rescue mission failed. These events, coupled with the loss of the Vietnam War, allowed presidential candidate Ronald Reagan to portray President Carter, the Democrats, and liberals as weak on national defense. The Reagan campaign theme “Peace through Strength” successfully branded Carter, Democrats, and
liberals as weak on national defense and Reagan, Republicans, and conservatives as strong on national defense.

The comparison of campaigning and advertising is appropriate because Madison Avenue marketing techniques and strategies have entered mainstream politics. It is no longer shocking or controversial to refer to selling candidates the way products and services are sold, or to refer to voters as consumers who have to be convinced to buy the political product. In order to be successful, national campaigns spend a great deal of money on gathering information about political consumers so that candidates and parties can craft and present a message that is appealing.

10.42 | Money

During the 2016 presidential Campaign, Donald Trump repeated called the political system rigged or unfair. The political system rigged or unfair in the sense that rules favor certain players and styles of play. For example, the system is rigged in favor of the two major parties—the Republican and the Democratic Parties. The system is also rigged in favor of those with money. Americans have historically been suspect of the influence of money in politics, government, and public policy. Money is associated with distorting public opinion, buying influence, and even corruption. This is why campaign finance laws are typically enacted after political scandals create political reform movements that are intended to purify politics or to inoculate politicians and government officials by regulating the amount of money in campaigns, the spending of money, and the disclosure of those who give it and who spend it. What is the problem with money?

Crime fiction is a very popular genre. Popular film and television crime stories are overwhelmingly about “ordinary” or street crime: murder, assault, robbery, and other violent crimes. White collar crime—crime in the suites as opposed to crime in the streets—is less popular. White collar crime stories are usually limited to organized crime (e.g., The Godfather films; the television series The Sopranos) where the main characters are compelling figures. What about other kinds of economic crime, such as political corruption or tax fraud?

The New York Times article “Offshore Money, Bane of Democracy” describes the political and social damage caused by international criminal operations that move money around the world, principally via real estate investments. Corporations create shell companies that make it hard for any single country to do anything about what it considers dirty money—money belonging to international criminal enterprises involved with drugs, weapons, sex trafficking, or money laundering. Even legitimate multi-national organizations present challenges for the enforcement of tax laws, for example. Dirty money is a rising high tide that distorts local markets and enabled international criminal organized enterprises that are legal only through the legal accounting. So what is the problem with money? Economic power can be used to get political power to rig the system in favor of those with the money to rig the system to further tilt the playing field.

Is there a “moneyball” strategy to level the political playing field? The term moneyball was coined to describe how a baseball team without a big budget could use big data analytics to assess the talents of baseball players rather than relying on the judgment of teams of seasoned baseball scouts or just buying players by signing them to big contracts. Michael Lewis described the strategy in Moneyball: How to win in an Unfair Game (2003). Money has always been called the mother’s milk of politics. This is why
the government adopted campaign finance regulations. The Supreme Court’s decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* (2010) removed almost all limits on campaign contributions. One result of this deregulation of campaign finance is the decreased influence of political parties and the increased influence of very wealthy individuals, particularly billionaires who invest in candidates or fund issue campaigns. Some are liberal, and therefore Democratic, while others are conservative, and therefore Republican. As wealthy individuals, they also sometimes have libertarian streaks that include belief that individual responsibility for success (or failure) rather than government social welfare programs.

Campaign finance has become more important as campaigns have changed from traditional *retail politics* to *wholesale politics*. The term retail politics refers to campaigns where candidates actually meet voters one-on-one, in small groups or communities, at town hall meetings, or other face-to-face settings such as walking a neighborhood. The term wholesale politics refers to campaigns where candidates address large audiences often using the print and electronic mass media.

The change to wholesale politics has increased the cost of campaigning by shifting from labor-intensive campaigning—where friends and neighbors and campaign workers and volunteers canvas a district or city or make personal telephone calls to individual voters—to capital-intensive campaigns where money is used to purchase television air time or advertising. The change from campaigns as ground wars to air wars has increased the cost of campaigning.

Fundraising techniques include having the candidate call or meet with large donors, sending direct mail pleas to small donors, and courting interest groups who could end up spending millions on the race if it is significant to their interests. The financing of elections has always been controversial because money is often considered a corrupting influence on democratic politics. The perception is that the wealthy can purchase access to government officials or pay for campaigns that influence public opinion. The fact that private sources of finance make up substantial amounts of campaign contributions, especially in federal elections, contributes to the perception that money creates influence.

As a result, *voluntary public funding* for candidates willing to accept spending limits was introduced in 1974 for presidential primaries and elections. The *Federal Elections Commission* was created in the 1970s to monitor campaign finance. The FEC is responsible for monitoring the disclosure of campaign finance information, enforcing the provisions of the law such as the limits and prohibitions on contributions, and overseeing the public funding of U.S. presidential elections.

A good source of information about money matters in American campaigns and elections is The Center for Responsive Politics. The Center tracks money in politics as part of an “*open secrets project*.” The recommendation to “Follow the money” has become all-purpose slogan that is applicable to criminal investigations and investigations of political influence and campaign ads. The saying comes from the Hollywood film *All the President’s Men* which tells the story of how Washington Post reporters investigated the Watergate scandal. A secret source named Deep Throat advised the reporters to “Follow the Money.”

The *National Institute on Money in State Politics* is still following the money trail to determine political influence in state politics. The U.S. Supreme Court’s rulings in campaign finance cases has made “Follow the money” even more relevant in today’s
politics. In a series of rulings, the Court has said that campaign contributions are speech that is protected by the First Amendment and that government restrictions on campaign contributions are subject to strict scrutiny—which means that the government has to show that campaign finance laws serve a compelling interest in order to be upheld. As a result, corporations can make unlimited independent campaign expenditures. Even the existing requirements that contributions be publicly disclosed are now being challenged. The Campaign Finance Information Center’s mission is to help journalist follow the campaign money trail in local, state, and national politics.

10.43 The Machine

The third part of a campaign is the machine. The campaign machine is the organization, the human capital, the foot soldiers loyal to the cause, the true believers who will carry the run by volunteer activists, the professional campaign advisers, pollsters, voter lists, political party resources, and get-out-the-vote resources. Individuals need organizations to campaign successfully in national campaigns. Successful campaigns usually require a campaign manager and some staff members who make strategic and tactical decisions while volunteers and interns canvass door-to-door and make phone calls. Campaigns use all three of the above components to create a successful strategy for victory.

One continuity in American politics is that conservatives and Republicans are considered tougher on national security than liberals and Democrats. This actually creates a perverse political incentive for Republicans to increase worries about national security threats because enemies are politically useful. Does this mean that some wars are not meant to be won? Political campaigns that are described in rhetorical terms as wars (e.g., culture wars) can create a sense of alarm that motivates the public and sustains its interest. But actual wars and sustained national security threats and emergencies can also be politically useful.

10.5 The Media

Modern campaigns for national offices—the presidency, the Senate, and the House of Representatives—are largely media campaigns. They are conducted using the print media, electronic media, and social media. Communication technology has fundamentally altered campaigns. The development of the broadcast media (radio and television) changed political campaigns from “ground wars” to “air” wars. The term ground war refers to a campaign that relies heavily on candidates and their campaign workers meeting voters and distributing campaign literature. The term air war refers to campaigns that rely heavily on the mass media.

The following two quotes from the Museum of the Moving Image archive of presidential campaign ads illustrate the change in thinking about television campaign advertising:
“The idea that you can merchandise candidates for high office like breakfast cereal is the ultimate indignity to the democratic process.”
—Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson (1956)

“Television is no gimmick, and nobody will ever be elected to major office again without presenting themselves well on it.” —Television producer and Nixon campaign consultant (and later President of Fox News Channel) Roger Ailes (1968)

10.51 | Who Uses Whom?

Campaign organizations have a complicated relationship with the media. They need and use each other but they have different, sometimes conflicting needs. The media like good visuals and compelling personal interest stories which capture the attention of the public and turn the general public into an audience. Campaigns like to provide such visuals. But the media (and campaigns) also like to play “gotcha.” The media consider it a good story to catch a candidate’s ignorance, mistake, or gaffe—or even to ask a question that might cause a candidate to make a mistake. The mistake might be

- Misspelling a word. Vice-presidential candidate Dan Quale spelled “potato” “potatoe.”
- Ignorance. Not knowing the name of a foreign leader. Presidential candidate George W. Bush did not know the name of the leader of Pakistan.
- Misrepresentation. During the presidential primary campaign, Hillary Clinton misrepresented a trip to Kosovo as one where she landed at an airport under fire to convince voters that she had the experience to be commander in chief.
- Math problems. Announcing budget numbers that do not add up.
- Ignorance. Vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin did not know the name of any Supreme Court decision that she disagreed with.

As a candidate and early in his presidency, Trump commanded the attention of the media: the traditional press (television and radio), the Internet, and the social media. He made headlines as a compelling figure, an international celebrity, a “riveting spectacle.” He started fights with the “fake” news media as a strategy that relies on continuous warfare to motivate his supporters and to force his critics and political opponents to talk about his story lines. Political analysts tended to dismiss his antics as little more than drivers rubber-necking as they pass a car crash on the side of the road. But media spectacles are not just accidents or unforced errors or gaffes or political theater. The spectacles may be a political strategy to get public attention by getting inside our heads. The erratic behavior; the unpredictable speech; the breaking of established norms; sometimes apparently almost random ideological positions; the frequency with which as strong statement is following in rather short order by another contradicting the former, may be a “variable reward schedule” analogous to the slot machine payouts that keep gamblers playing the machines. The risk is that this strategic focus on getting and keeping public attention, which is conventionally a means to public policy end, may become an end in itself. After all, presidential success is conventionally measured in terms of accomplishments, not just attention or public approval ratings. Getting
“mindshare” is important because efforts to “get inside” peoples’ heads typically have a goal in mind. Advertisers want to get inside peoples’ heads to purchase the products being advertised. Campaigners want to get inside voters’ heads to build the support for policies. “The Attention Merchants: The Struggle to Get Inside Our Heads.”

10.52 | The Social Media

Communication technology has changed national campaigns from primarily ground wars (walking the neighborhoods; kissing babies; shaking hands) to air wars (broadcast radio and television ads). Campaigns are now using social media to post material on Tumblr (videos and photos) or Spotify or Pinterest. According to Adam Fletcher, deputy press secretary for the Obama re-election campaign, “It’s about authentic, two-way communication.” This may be true, but it may also be about a campaign strategy to try to reach people where they are: Online using social media. A presidential campaign that shares songs with the public may be less interested in actually creating two-way communication with the public than it is in establishing social connections with people by appearing to share tastes. Familiarity (with songs, photos and videos that are posted on Spotify, Flickr, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) creates trust. Socialbakers, a social media analytics group, says the campaigns have to try to reach people wherever they are, and young people in particular are on-line more than reading newspapers or watching broadcast television networks.

10.53 | The Age of Digital Campaigns

The digital age is fundamentally changing campaign advertising. In the age of mass media, campaign ads that aired on the major television and radio networks were intended for the general audiences that were watching or listening to national programs. The digital age allows targeted advertising. Political intelligence companies such as Aristotle gather large files of detailed information about a person’s behavior from commercial companies that keep track of consumption patterns or Internet searches, and then sell that data to campaigns. The campaigns, which then know where a person lives; what their demographics are; what they purchase; what they read; what their hobbies are; and other factors that might be related to how they think about politics, can tailor ads to very specific audiences. This digital information is very good for campaigns, but is it good for us? See the following PBS story about “How Campaigns Amass Your Personal Information to Deliver Tailored Political Ads.” The digital campaigns are also developing ways to target “off the grid” voters, the voters who do not get their public affairs information from the traditional media sources (papers, television, and radio). Identifying such voters is one thing. Getting them to vote is another. Having a good ground game—people in neighborhoods, cities, districts, and states who can actually contact voters and get them out to vote—is still an important element of a successful presidential campaign strategy. President Obama’s reelection campaign was successful because it combined air wars with a solid ground game in the states that it identified as the key swing states in the 2012 presidential election.
Campaign Fact Checking

Candidates, parties, and organizations supporting or opposing a candidate, or an issue, say things which may not meet the standard of “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” In an age of electronic communications, it is even more likely that Mark Twain, the American humorist, was right when he said, “A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes.” As a result, a number of organizations have developed campaign fact-checking operations to hold campaigners accountable for what they claim as facts. One of these organizations is Factcheck.org. Its Web site provides running description and analysis of inaccurate campaign statements. Some of the more interesting false statements that they fact-checked were claims that Democratic presidential candidate Barack Hussein Obama was a radical Muslim who refused to recite the Pledge of Allegiance and took the oath of office as a U.S. Senate swearing on the Koran, not the bible.

Political Futures Market

One of the more innovative and interesting perspectives on the measurement of public opinion as a predictor of the outcome of an election involves the application of economic perspectives. The “political futures” markets are designed to provide an economic measure of support for a candidate as a predictor of whether the candidate will win an election. One example of this approach is The Iowa Electronic Markets. These are real-money futures markets in which contract payoffs depend on economic and political events such as elections. These markets are operated by faculty at the University of Iowa as part of their research and teaching mission.

How to “Do” Civic Engagement

The importance of fostering civic engagement in higher education is described in Civic Responsibility and Higher Education (2000). Thomas Ehrlich, one of the book’s editors, works to promote including civic engagement along with the traditional academic learning in the mission of universities. The American Association of Colleges and Universities stresses the role that higher education plays in developing civic learning to ensure that students become an informed, engaged, and socially responsible citizenry. These efforts emphasize the importance of connecting classroom learning with the community. The connection has two points: usable knowledge and workable skills. The emphasis on usable knowledge includes promoting social science research as problem solving. The term usable knowledge refers to knowledge that people and policy makers can apply to solve contemporary social problems. (Lindblom and Cohen) The emphasis on workable skills is even more directly related to civic
engagement. Today there are many organizations that advance the cause of linking academic study and social problem solving. One of these organizations is the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. This Foundation was created by the cereal company magnate. The Foundation emphasizes the importance of developing the practical skills that will enable individuals to realize the “inherent human capacity to solve their own problems.” These skills include dialogue, leadership development, and the organization of effort. In effect, civic engagement develops the practical skills that can help people help themselves. How can you “do” civic engagement?

- Contact a government official. Contact a local, state, and national government official. Ask them what they think are the major issues or problems that are on their agenda. Contacting your member of Congress is easy. (See the Chapter on Congress.)
- Attend a government meeting. Attend the public meeting of a local government: a neighborhood association; a city council meeting; a county commission meeting; a school board meeting; or a state government meeting (of the legislature or an executive agency).
- Contact an organization. Contact a non-government organization to discuss an issue of your concern, community interest, or the organization’s mission. These organizations, political parties, and interest groups represent business, labor, professional associations, or issues such as civil rights, property rights, the environment, immigration, religion, and education.

10.7 | Summary

One aspect of the power problem is the government’s control over individuals. Laws are commands that are backed by sanctions. Individuals must obey the law or risk punishment. The government’s control over individuals is legitimate if the government is based on the consent of the governed. Consent is the difference between authority and power. Democracy is a system of self-government that requires an active and engaged citizenry in order to make government control over individuals legitimate. Political participation is one of the measures of how democratic a political system is. Therefore, political participation is also a measure or indicator of government legitimacy. Voting, elections, and campaigns provide opportunities for individuals to be active and engaged citizens.

10.8 | Additional Resources

10.81 | In the Library


Chapter 10: Political Participation


McGinniss, Joe. 1968. The Selling of the President.


10.82 Online Resources

Each state has primary responsibility for conducting and supervising elections. For information about Florida elections go to the My Florida Web site http://www.myflorida.com/ and click on government, then executive branch, then state agencies, then department of state, then http://election.dos.state.fl.us/. Or you can learn about Florida election laws by going directly to the Florida Department of State Web site which provides information about voter registration, candidates, political parties, and constitutional amendment proposals.

Votesmart provides basic information about American politics and government. It is, in effect, American Government 101.

C-SPAN election resources are available at http://www.c-span.org/classroom/govt/campaigns.asp.

The U.S. Elections Project provides data on voting. http://www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout/demographics


Project Vote-Smart is a nonpartisan information service funded by members and non-partisan foundations. It offers “a wealth of facts on your political leaders, including Biographies, addresses, issue positions, voting records, campaign finances, evaluations by special interests.” www.vote-smart.org/

The U.S. Census Bureau has information on voter registration and turnout statistics. www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html

C-Span produces programs that provide information about the workings of Congress and elections. www.c-span.org
Key Terms:
voter fatigue
open primaries
closed primaries
presidential primary
caucus
voter turnout
rational choice model
civic duty model
political efficacy
Individual explanations
System explanations
Voter registration
“Air” campaigns

10.9 | STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the rational choice theory of voting?
2. What are the primary factors at the individual level that influence whether someone turns out to vote?
3. What are the institutional factors that depress voter turnout in the United States?

3. For the methodology and results, see http://www.economist.com/markets/rankings/displaystory.cfm?story_id=8908438
5. Declare Yourself has information on each state and the requirements for voter registration at http://www.declareyourself.com/voting_faq/state_by_state_info_2.html
7. The National Conference of State Legislatures provides detailed information about ballot initiatives in F