

Political Behavior of
the American Electorate
Eleventh Edition

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A Division of Congressional Quarterly Inc.
Washington, D.C.

Political Culture and American Democracy

SUCCESSFUL DEMOCRACIES rest on the consent of the governed and widespread public support. In representative democracies, regular, free, and fair elections are held to choose political leaders and, when necessary, to turn these leaders out of office. A democratic system of government, at a minimum, affords its citizens the opportunity to organize, to speak freely, and to select its leaders.

Beyond this simple, widely agreed on view, which assumes a crucial role for the people in choosing their representatives and emphasizes the individual as an autonomous actor with inherent political rights, less consensus exists on what is required of citizens. On the one hand is the vision of a well-informed electorate making decisions based on rational calculations of its own best interest or, possibly, a public good. On the other hand is the picture, drawn by some critics, of a deluded public, manipulated by political elites to hold views and support policies that are in the interests of the elites instead of the people. Somewhere in between is the view that the electorate responds to generalized policy promises and symbolic issues in selecting its leaders, setting broad and vague outer limits on decision makers. Specific policies, however, are negotiated between public officials and subsets of the attentive public who are unrepresentative of the general public, both in terms of their degree of interest in a particular policy and in the political resources available to them with which to exert influence. In the chapters that follow, you will have the opportunity to judge for yourself the level of information and capacity for rational decision making that the American public displays.

In this chapter we consider two topics. First, we examine an issue brought starkly into focus by the presidential elections of 2000 and 2004.

What are the requirements for fair and free elections in a democracy and how closely does the U.S. system come to meeting that standard? Second, we look at the cultural and attitudinal requirements for instituting and sustaining a democratic system and examine the extent to which those requirements are met in the United States. How widespread is support for the political system in the United States and for the democratic values on which it is based? How confident are Americans that a democratic system is the best route to satisfactory policy outcomes?

How confident are they that their government is playing by democratic rules? What expectations do citizens have about their own roles in a democratic system? How are democratic values and appropriate citizen roles learned and transmitted from generation to generation?

Fair, Free, and Competitive Elections

Elections are a basic component of a democratic political system. They are the formal mechanism by which the people maintain or alter the existing political leadership. At regular intervals, competitive elections give ordinary citizens the power to choose their leaders and, just as important, to throw them out of office. Although the choices available to voters in a general election may not be numerous or even particularly dissimilar, democratic systems must provide for competition, usually by means of political parties, in presenting alternative candidates.

If elections are to be competitive, political leaders and organizations must be able to compete for the support of voters, and voters should have leaders competing for their support. (If some voters have no leaders competing for their support, the system must be open to the entry of new leaders who will seek the support of these unrepresented voters.)

Competitive elections require that all citizens must be free to participate fully in campaign activities before the election itself. Such campaign activities include the freedom to express one's views and the freedom to organize with others during the nominating phase and the campaign to make preferences known and to persuade others. Implicit in this is the freedom to receive information about the choices before the voters.

Citizens must be free to vote, and the right to vote should not be undermined by substantial economic or administrative barriers. No physical or social intimidation should take place. Citizens legally eligible to vote should have full and convenient access to polling places. The right to vote and the right to express one's choices freely require a secret ballot. In fair elections the ballots cast should reflect the intention of the voters, and the votes should be counted accurately. Votes should be weighted equally in translating votes into representation.

Requirements for Free and Fair Elections

A democratic system requires political leaders to compete for public support in fair and free elections. For elections to be fair and free, they must meet the following conditions.

- Freedom of citizens to form or join organizations in support of candidates
- Freedom to express preferences
- Alternative sources of information
- Ability of new leaders to enter the system and compete for support
- Right to vote without administrative barriers or intimidation
- Votes counted fairly
- Votes translated into representation fairly
- Due process and equal protection under the law

Finally, the requirements of free and fair elections should be established in law and be enforceable through the judicial system. Both citizens and leaders must enjoy equal treatment under the law.

Recent presidential elections provide an opportunity to reassess the extent to which the requirements for being fair and free have been met.

The presidential elections in 2000 and 2004 were close and intensely contested. An impressive array of independent, nonparty groups formed in support of specific candidates. While some such groups were "letterhead organizations," and others not truly independent of the parties or candidates, the number and vigor of groups, such as ACT (Americans Coming Together), MoveOn.org, and the 72-Hour Program, were noteworthy, particularly in 2004. The availability of the Internet as a place for groups to "meet" has facilitated the ability to join with like-minded people in support of one's preferred candidate.

Freedom of political expression is guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and few legal limits are placed on what can be said about a political opponent. Local and state ordinances and ethics commissions keep outright falsehoods from the candidates and their campaigns in check, but citizens, supporters, and talk-show hosts generally can and do get away with expressing all manner of opinions regarding current and potential officeholders. The most critical issue with freedom of expression in the age of television is the imbalance in resources available to get one's views to a wide audience. Although the two major political parties are well funded, candidates seeking the presidential nomination through the primaries, minor-party candidates,

and citizens with views not represented by the major parties may find themselves unable to get a hearing.

Given the vast amounts of money spent on political advertising in presidential election campaigns, much of it highly negative, the focus has often been on how to place limits on it. For years the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that issue advocacy by individuals or independent groups is protected by First Amendment guarantees, and the Court and Congress have wrestled with the problem of placing limits on it. The bigger problem for a democracy such as the United States is reconciling freedom of expression with the disparity of resources that allows some groups to get a hearing for their views and others not.

Concerns have been raised in recent years about the concentration of ownership of mass media outlets in fewer hands. Although this has certainly happened, it is probably more than offset by the proliferation of new sources of information from the Internet and cable and satellite television. The problem likely is not whether alternative information sources exist, but whether consumers can sort through them to find credible sources and whether they will avail themselves of varied and competing views.

Despite the tight competition between the two major-party candidates, the barriers to entry into the competition by other candidates are severe. Although other candidates—Pat Buchanan and Ralph Nader in 2000 and Nader in 2004—were on the ballot in virtually every state, and Buchanan had access to public financing, the obstacles to effectively competing are serious. Both these candidates were denied a place in the nationally televised debates, and the electoral college arrangements encourage voters to see a vote for such candidates as a wasted vote. Many of the rules governing elections in the United States are designed to weed out nuisance candidates and to limit attention to those with some degree of public support. Public financing, participation in the debates, and place on the ballot all require demonstration of some minimum level of support. On an informal level, coverage of a candidate's campaign by the mass media also requires such a demonstration. Unfortunately, minor candidates are faced with a chicken-and-egg dilemma. They cannot gain access to these important resources unless they are competitive, but they cannot become competitive unless they have access to these resources.

Registering to vote has become easier in most states in recent years, and, in fact, registration has increased. (We will treat the topic of voter registration and turnout more fully in Chapter 2.) Efforts also are evident in some states to make it easier for registered voters to vote by allowing vote by mail or easing restrictions on the use of absentee ballots. Administrative problems remain, however, and fall unevenly on the citizenry. In many states, officials have been slow to process new registra-

tions, so that individuals who have correctly followed registration procedures find themselves not registered when they get to the polling place. This problem can rarely be solved in a timely fashion by the election judges at the polling place.

The Help American Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002 was fashioned to deal with some of these problems. One provision, in effect for the election of 2004, was to allow voters who thought they were registered but did not appear on the registration lists to cast a provisional ballot that would be sealed and held, but not counted until the voter's eligibility to vote had been established. Another provision of HAVA was to mandate establishment of a statewide electronic database so problems of verifying registration can be resolved more quickly.

Nevertheless, as the competition between the two major parties has become closer and more intense, the willingness to use measures to restrict participation (or discourage fraud or both) has increased. These tendencies were at work in the presidential election in Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004, both hotly contested states.

An unusual registration problem in Florida in 2000 received a considerable amount of attention from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.¹ Because significant fraud came to light in some recent Florida elections, before the 2000 election the state legislature enacted legislation to purge the registration lists of ineligible voters (such as the dead or otherwise departed). The state contracted with a private firm to purge from the registration lists felons, who are not eligible to vote in Florida. This was done by computer-matching lists of felons from Florida and elsewhere with the voter registration lists. The procedure led many nonfelons to be removed from the lists because the lists were inaccurate and the computer match did not have to be perfect—the computer purged names if there was a 90 percent match of letters. Some people were informed that they had been purged before the election, but the procedures for reinstatement were confusing. Others were not informed beforehand and arrived at their polling place only to be told that they were ineligible to vote.

The Civil Rights Commission also heard testimony of black citizens in Florida who reported being stopped by state police on the way to the polls. If such obstruction was intentional and systematic, it would be a denial of fair access to a polling place.

Simple administrative bungling can have the same effect—for example, providing incorrect or conflicting information to would-be voters. In Ohio in 2004, voting equipment was reallocated to precincts on the basis of turnout in previous elections, not on the basis of number of registered voters. This usually meant sending voting equipment from central city areas to suburban areas. When turnout increased dramatically in 2004, voters in Cleveland and Columbus (areas with high Dem-

ocratic concentrations) stood in line, reportedly, for hours waiting to vote. Doubtless some voters did not stick it out. Also, the Republican secretary of state, Kenneth Blackwell, ruled that provisional ballots, provided under the Help America Vote Act, would be counted only if they were cast in the precinct in which the voter lived. This was a permissible ruling, according to the Federal Election Assistance Commission, but nonetheless was the kind of restrictive interpretation that serves to decrease participation in elections.

Because so much information is available on the vote-counting process in Florida in the aftermath of the 2000 election, it can be used as a test of the requirement that votes be counted accurately. (Focusing on Florida may create unfairly the impression that everywhere else elections are trouble-free. That is certainly not the case. We simply have little information on most other states.)

The 2000 election in Florida demonstrated that voting procedures themselves can deny voters their vote. Voting devices fail to record votes in various ways. On punch-hole ballots the paper chad may not be dislodged and, therefore, would not be counted; on scanned ballots the choices may not be detected; and on most voting devices the voter can inadvertently void the ballot by various kinds of inappropriate marking. (In party primary elections, in which voters are required to vote in only one party's races but the ballot form allows voting in more than one party primary, large percentages of the ballots are invalidated for this reason.)² Voting machines do exist that detect such errors and give the voter another chance to cast a ballot correctly, but the machines are relatively expensive and not widely used. Another provision of the Help American Vote Act, which goes into effect in 2006, is to require that states give voters an opportunity to check and correct their ballots before the ballot is cast.

The marked ballot should accurately reflect the voter's intention. In 2004 in Broward County, Florida, for example, the butterfly ballot, which was enlarged to help elderly voters read it better, seems to have resulted in a considerable number of voters mistakenly casting their votes for Buchanan when they intended to vote for Al Gore. Election officials in different counties used different rules for determining the voter's intent on flawed ballots during the various phases of the recount. Some officials allowed votes to be counted if the voter's intention could be reasonably inferred from the marks or punches on the ballot. In other counties, even ballots with a clear declaration of intent—such as that of the frustrated voter who wrote “I want to vote for Gore” on the ballot—were disallowed.

The counting of votes is overseen by representatives of the competing political parties, and they are expected to keep each other honest. Even so, standardizing procedures in different election districts is

difficult.* For example, in Florida in 2000 the counting of the overseas ballots attracted a great deal of attention. Many months after the election, the Republican Party was revealed to have pursued a two-part strategy: In Republican counties, it insisted that all ballots be counted even if the ballots were flawed in various ways. In Democratic counties, Republican officials followed the strict letter of the law to disallow identically flawed ballots.

Although never a major theme in democratic theory, a fair election must allow for a thorough and accurate recount to ensure that the official results faithfully reflect the voters' choices. All vote-counting procedures are susceptible to error and fraud, so the occasional authentication of official returns is crucial to maintaining the legitimacy of elections in general. Typically in the United States recounts have uncovered a certain amount of clerical error and little fraud. As a consequence, the failure to have a full recount in Florida fueled questions about the legitimacy of the election. In 2004 Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry's campaign insisted that all the provisional ballots cast in Ohio be evaluated and, if valid, counted as part of a statewide recount. The stated purpose was not to challenge the results of the election, but to assert the importance of every vote being counted.

The election of 2000, in which the popular vote winner did not win in the electoral college and did not become president, puts in stark relief the problem of translating votes into representation. How can votes be considered equal if the state in which they are cast determines how much influence they have in determining the winner? The rationale lies in the nature of a federal system. States, as well as individual citizens, are actors in such a system and their role was preserved in the electoral college as a part of the price of establishing the Union. It is one of many ways in which the American system departs from a purely representative democracy. Electoral outcomes such as 2000 are rare, however. The only other presidential elections that have resulted in a popular vote loser winning the electoral college were 1876 and 1888.³ If one wants to consider a far more perverse case of bad translation of votes into representation, one should look at the U.S. Senate, where the votes of 16 percent of the population can elect a majority of that body.

*Following the Florida election controversy, a consortium of eight news organizations was formed to recount the presidential vote for the entire state. They used a number of different rules for counting disputed ballots. They found that systematically following the rules advocated by the Gore advisers would have led to a George W. Bush victory and following the rules preferred by the Bush organization would have produced a Gore victory. All major newspapers, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, carried stories on the recount project on November 9, 2001.

Finally, in 2000 the partisan overtones to the involvement of the Florida Supreme Court (which ruled to benefit the Democrat) and the U.S. Supreme Court (which ruled to benefit the Republican) in deciding the election raise questions about the extent to which elections in the United States are subject to the rule of law. The election of 2000 tested the confidence of the public in the fairness of the American electoral system. The tight competitiveness of the contest led both sides to campaign aggressively for every possible vote—and, in the confused aftermath of the election, to use every conceivable tactic to gain an advantage for their side. The challenge in a democratic electoral system is to be highly competitive without compromising the integrity of the election process. It is hard to say to what degree the election of 2000 undermined confidence in the legitimacy of the electoral process. A few months after his inauguration in 2001, only half the public reported believing that George W. Bush “won fair and square.”⁴ By 2004, little had changed in these feelings. Fifty percent thought the 2000 election was “fair,” whereas 49 percent thought it was not—and most on both sides felt strongly. Nonetheless, most people thought the election of 2004 had been fair. Only about 15 percent thought it was unfair.⁵ A postelection survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that about half of all voters were “very confident” that votes across the country were counted accurately.⁶ After the 2004 election, 77 percent of the public said they were very or fairly satisfied with the way U.S. democracy works. This was about the same percentage as in 1996 and 2000.

Political Culture as a Foundation for Democracy

Political culture is the set of values and beliefs that support (or sometimes undermine) political processes and institutions. In democracy theory, much depends upon those beliefs and values. Citizens need to accept the idea of rule by the majority and, equally, to believe that the rights of the minority should be respected. They should have some sense of their rights and obligations to participate in the political process, at a minimum through exercising the right to vote. The political elite—those who hold elected or appointed office and those involved in putting them there—need to be willing to play by the democratic rules of the game and respect the will of the majority, even when it means the loss of their positions. In the remainder of this chapter we will examine the content of American political culture and assess it as a foundation for the maintenance of democracy. We will of necessity focus attention on the values of the dominant national culture, though you should keep in mind that political subcultures exist that may support contrary values and attitudes.

System Support

Governments, whether democratic or nondemocratic, require some level of support from the public to stay in power. Their holding of power must be seen, in some sense, as *legitimate*. The source of that legitimacy could be the divine right of kings (in hereditary monarchies of the past) or from religious authority (as with the imams of present-day Iran) or from the consent of the people (in modern democracies). An important element in maintaining legitimacy is the belief that officeholders gained their position through the appropriate means (through fair and free elections in the case of democracies) and exercise their power according to prescribed procedures and within prescribed limits. In a simplified scenario, if the public in a democratic system believes in democratic values it will support leaders who come to office through democratic elections and govern according to democratic procedures. Furthermore, it would withdraw support from any leader or would-be leader who attempts to gain office or govern by undemocratic means.

A complicating factor in the consideration of system support is the impact of governmental *effectiveness* on public perceptions of legitimacy. A tyrannical government that makes the trains run on time may gain some measure of legitimacy, despite abuse of persons and procedures. Conversely, a democratically elected government that governs by democratic procedures but is chronically unable to solve its nation's problems may lose its legitimacy. Its citizens might lose faith in democracy as a workable form of government and demand a different system. Support for a political system is thus a combination of belief in the rightness of a system of government and satisfaction with the way that system is working.

On a relatively superficial level, Americans express a strong pride in their country. In response to questions in public opinion polls, 96 percent say that they are proud to be American; 89 percent say they are very patriotic; 89 percent characterize their love of America as “very strong” or “extremely strong”; and 79 percent say their feelings about the flag are “very good” or “extremely good.”⁷

When people are asked about their pride in the United States, they tend to offer political factors as examples. In other countries people are much more likely to give nonpolitical reasons for their pride: their country's economy, culture, or physical beauty. They are not nearly so likely to say they are proud of their political system.⁸ Americans not only give political reasons for their pride in the United States but also cite “freedom” or “liberty” as the aspect of their political system that makes them proud. Thus, not only is there strong patriotic pride in the nation, but a central democratic value also is a prominent feature of that sentiment.

Pride in the nation and its democratic form of government translates into high levels of political system support. Of the respondents to

a national survey 85 percent agree that, "whatever its faults, the United States still has the best system of government in the world." More than half of the public "would not change anything" in the American political system.⁹

Vague principles may be widely endorsed even though, at the same time, specific applications may be opposed. So it should not be surprising that respondents will agree to vague statements of system support while they endorse contradictory specifics. For example, 80 percent of the public say that the Constitution should not be amended.¹⁰ However, majorities also believe that the Constitution should be changed to abolish the electoral college or mandate a balanced budget. Almost certainly none of these answers reveals how people would behave if faced with real choices on amending the Constitution.

Democratic Beliefs and Values

The beliefs and values supporting the American political system are variously referred to as the *American creed*, the *American consensus*, and the *American ethos*.¹¹ Among the most important values making up this creed are beliefs in *freedom*, *equality*, and *individualism*.

Social and political theorists make a distinction between the economic system and the political system. Most would say that the United States has, as an ideal, a democratic political system and a capitalist or free-market economic system. Ordinary citizens are more likely to mix the two and view freedom as a basic value in both. The freedom to own property, fundamental to a capitalist economic system, is considered by ordinary citizens of the United States to be as important as the right to vote, for example.

Although highly valued in American culture, freedom is not considered an absolute. People accept all kinds of limitations on their freedom. For example, when given a choice between government intervention and a wholly free market, the American public is clearly in favor of strong government activity. In the 2004 National Election Study, by a ratio of more than two to one, the public preferred strong government intervention to handle economic problems rather than depending solely on free-market operations. Similarly, majorities of the public support limiting the freedom to read pornography, to own guns, and to smoke cigarettes.

The widespread belief in equality similarly needs to be qualified. Americans believe in "equality before the law" and in "equal opportunity" but are largely uninterested in using government to promote economic and social equality. For example, the public agrees overwhelmingly with the proposition that "our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to suc-

ceed."¹² But a substantial minority of the public believes "we have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country."¹³ In many respects, the value placed on individualism undermines the commitment to equality. Most social groups exhibit widespread support for the idea that people can and should get ahead by virtue of their own hard work.

Belief in Democratic Procedures

A distinction often is made between democratic *goals*, such as equality and individual freedom, and democratic *procedures*, such as majority rule; protection of the political rights of freedom of speech, press, and assembly; and due process of law. The distinction is an important one when the extent to which these ideals are supported in the political culture of a system is under consideration, because democratic goals can be pursued through undemocratic means or democratic procedures can be used for antidemocratic ends. Likewise, mass support may exist for democratic goals but not for democratic procedures or vice versa.

A widely held and perfectly plausible expectation is that the American public supports both these kinds of democratic values. At an abstract level this is true enough. American citizens overwhelmingly subscribe to the basic rules and goals of democracy when the commitment is kept vague. But, as discussed above, the near unanimous support for the democratic goals of freedom and equality disappear when specific applications of these concepts are considered. The same has been true for specific applications of democratic procedures, such as protection of free speech. Majorities historically have been happy to infringe on the right to speak, to organize, and to run for office of unpopular groups such as atheists, Communists, and the Ku Klux Klan.

Rising educational levels in the United States brought an increased willingness on the part of the public to allow free speech on unpopular points of view and permit books with distasteful perspectives to remain in public libraries. Numerous studies document the shift in attitudes occurring from the mid-1950s to the 1970s, and without exception they find a strong relationship between increased tolerance and higher levels of education.¹⁴

Some important qualifications are in order. First, the electorate's responses are attitudes that may have little meaning for it and are not measures of its behavior or of its attitudes under crisis or threat to democratic principles. Second, people may not be more tolerant but the focus of their intolerance may have shifted. People now tolerate speeches by Marxists but object to those of fascists or racists.¹⁵ More broadly, the desire for censorship may have shifted from political speech to other forms of expression, such as art and music, particularly when sexual or sacrilegious themes are involved.

Since the September 11, 2001, attacks, much speculation has arisen about how willing Americans would be to sacrifice rights and freedoms in waging the war on terrorism. Generally, the public is not supportive of provisions of the Patriot Act directed at ordinary citizens but is supportive of activities directed at “terrorists.”¹⁶ For example, 71 percent disapprove of federal agents searching a U.S. citizen’s home without informing the person, yet majorities support a range of similar activities when the target is “terrorists.” Between a quarter and a third of the public believe the Patriot Act “goes too far” in restricting people’s civil liberties, whereas equal numbers think it does not go far enough.¹⁷

When considering public support for civil liberties and other democratic values, it is essential to keep in mind the distinction between mass attitudes and those of the political, social, and economic leaders in American society who consistently support democratic principles more strongly than the general public. Support among leaders is usually so high that it is possible to conclude that the leaders in society defend and maintain democratic procedures. Consensus among leaders on democratic rights and values makes the weakness of the general public’s support less crucial.

Table 1-1 compares the responses of samples of the public with those of “political influentials” to questions about support for the “democratic rules of the game” in the 1960s and in 2004. In both cases, the political influentials were consistently more likely to support maintaining civil liberties and democratic processes than a sample of the electorate.

Presumably, leaders are recruited and educated in such a way that they come prepared with, or develop, agreement on democratic procedures. Leaders apparently make decisions that maintain democratic practices, even without widespread public support. A somewhat less comforting possibility is that political elites are simply sophisticated enough to understand what the “correct” answer is to attitude questions dealing with democratic beliefs. The seemingly greater adherence to these values by the politically active would attest to the prominence of such norms in the mass political culture but would not necessarily suggest any great commitment or willingness to abide by these values. A third possibility exists such that political leaders, like ordinary citizens, are willing to violate the rights of groups and individuals whom they particularly dislike or fear. Enough incidents of undemocratic behavior by public officials have occurred in recent decades—harassment of dissidents during the Vietnam War, “dirty tricks” to undermine the electoral process in 1972, surreptitious aiding of the Nicaraguan contras in violation of the law in the 1980s—to suggest no great depth of appreciation of democratic principles on the part of elites of either political party. The increasing incivility in Congress and the mass media that has ac-

TABLE 1-1 Political Influentials versus the Electorate, Responses to Items Expressing Belief in Democratic Values

Item	Percentage agreeing with item	
	Political influentials	General electorate
There are times when it almost seems better for people to take the law into their own hands rather than wait for the machinery of government to act. (1964)	13	27
The majority has the right to abolish minorities if it wants to. (1964)	7	28
I don't mind a politician's methods if he manages to get the right things done. (1964)	26	42
Almost any unfairness or brutality may have to be justified when some great purpose is being carried out. (1964)	13	33
People ought to be allowed to vote even if they can't do so intelligently. (1964)	66	48
The true American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it. (1964)	13	35
Favor using torture to extract information from suspected terrorists. (2004)	8	27
Favor restricting immigration into the United States to fight terrorism. (2004)	36	76

Source: The 1964 data were adapted from Herbert McClosky, “Consensus and Ideology in American Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 58 (June 1964): 365, Table 1. There were 3,020 influentials and 1,484 in the public sample for 1964. The 2004 data were taken from *Global Views 2004: American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Chicago Council of Foreign Relations, 2004). See www.ccrf.org/globalviews2004. There were 450 influentials, including 100 members of Congress or their senior staff, and 1,195 in the public sample for 2004.

Note: Because respondents were forced to make a choice on each item, the number of omitted or “don’t know” responses was, on the average, fewer than 1 percent and thus has little influence on the direction or magnitude of the results reported in the table.

companied the increased polarization of the society along political lines suggests that the democratic virtue of tolerance of one’s opponent’s views is in short supply among political elites today.

The 2000 election appears to offer examples of elites adhering to the rules of the game in some instances and abandoning the rules in others. Evidence exists of pressure from some members of the elite to abide by the result of the election (whatever that might be) and the rule of law (however interpreted) and a desire to be seen as following democratic rules. At other times, the operating principle seemed to be “do whatever you can get away with.”

To take another example, reaction to the Supreme Court's decisions on flag burning illustrates several aspects of the role of political elites in supporting democratic values. Political dissidents have occasionally burned the American flag to protest policies or governmental actions with which they disagree. In retaliation, Congress and some state legislatures have passed laws making it a crime to desecrate the flag. The Supreme Court has consistently ruled these laws to be an unconstitutional infringement on free speech—classifying flag burning as “symbolic speech” and therefore protected by the First Amendment. Inevitably, such decisions provoke a public outcry and calls to amend the Constitution as a means to circumvent the Court's rulings and punish those who would burn the flag. In these circumstances, various political elites—the Court itself and some congressional leaders—support democratic values by resisting the popular passion for punishing flag burners. At the same time, other political leaders see an opportunity to exploit an issue that plays well among the public, because polls consistently show the public believes, by majorities of three or four to one, that there should be no right to burn or deface the U.S. flag.¹⁸ In the past, proposed constitutional amendments to ban flag burning have been defeated once the issue became rephrased as “tampering with the Bill of Rights,” thus demonstrating the generalized, if vague, support the public has for democratic values and the critical nature of elite leadership. The fact that legislative action to ban flag burning is once again percolating in Congress illustrates the temptations inherent in the superficial public support for civil liberties.

The widespread interest of political analysts in public opinion and democratic beliefs has been based partly on a somewhat mistaken impression. Stable democratic political systems have been assumed to rest on a nearly universal commitment to fundamental principles and their application, but the evidence is inconclusive. A democratic system cannot long survive widespread, intense hostility to democratic values, but positive belief in particular operating procedures among the public is probably unnecessary. Hostility to democratic procedures is fatal, whether among the leaders or the public, but support of specific procedures may prove essential only among leaders. Perhaps the public need not agree on basic principles so long as it does not demand disruptive policies and procedures.

Declining Trust in Government

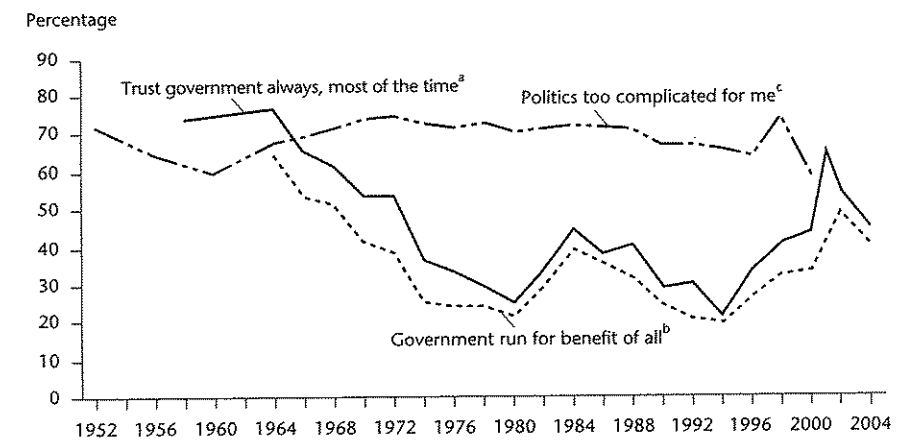
In general, the public has considerable confidence in the *institutions* of government but not much confidence in the *individuals* charged with operating these institutions. Thus, virtually no popular support is found for abolishing the presidency or the Supreme Court or Congress,

although disenchantment is widespread with the way the nation's political leadership is performing in the major branches of government. By early 2005, a little more than 10 percent of the public had “a great deal” of confidence in Congress, and roughly one quarter had “a great deal” of confidence in the presidency and the Supreme Court.¹⁹ Such low levels of confidence, with some variations, have existed since the early 1970s and represent a noticeable drop from the levels of confidence characteristic of earlier years.

John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse argue, in their book *Congress as Public Enemy*, that it is the very openness to public scrutiny of congressional activities that generates distaste.²⁰ This may explain the higher level of confidence in the more secretive executive and Supreme Court decision making. In short, when the people see democracy in action, they do not like it very much.

Figure 1-1 shows another indicator of declining public confidence in the political system. For years, the National Election Studies have asked respondents whether they thought “the government in Washing-

FIGURE 1-1 Attitudes toward Politics and the Political System, 1952–2004



Source: National Election Studies, available at www.umich.edu/~nes.

External efficacy

^a“How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time or only some of the time?”

^b“Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?”

Internal efficacy

^cAgree with the statement: “Sometimes politics and government seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.”

ton could be trusted to do the right thing." Figure 1-1 shows an overall decline from high levels in the 1950s and early 1960s to the point in the early 1990s where only a third of the public believed the government will do what is right "all of the time" or "most of the time." Short-term reversals in this downward trend have been associated with policy successes or popular incumbents. President Ronald Reagan created an upbeat mood in the 1980s that translated into a modest restoration of confidence in government, as did the booming economy in the mid-1990s. After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, a *Washington Post* poll reported an upward spike in the level of trust in government, shown at the right on Figure 1-1. Of the people questioned, 64 percent of the public said they trusted the government all or most of the time.²¹ This level had not been seen since the 1960s. The unusually high level of trust began to fall almost immediately. Commercial polls show that a month later the percentage had dropped from 64 percent to 55 percent.²² Further decline was seen over the next year or so. By January 2005, a *Los Angeles Times* poll showed the same low level of trust as one of its earlier polls in March 2001.²³

Because the steepest decline in trust in government officials occurred between 1964 and 1976, it is easy to blame the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. Although no doubt contributing factors, the decline in trust had already begun before Vietnam became an issue and continued after Richard M. Nixon's resignation from office. Furthermore, the pattern of declining trust extends to many nongovernmental institutions, such as the news media, schools, the professions, and to people in general. It is paralleled by similar trends outside the United States in many of the developed nations of the world.

The Role of the Citizen

Measures such as the "trust in government" indicator or agreement that "government is run for the benefit of all," both shown in Figure 1-1, are sometimes referred to as measuring *external political efficacy*, or the extent to which citizens believe that their government is working the way it should—which, in a democratic system, involves responding to the will of the people. In contrast, the concept of *internal political efficacy* refers to the degree to which individuals see themselves as capable of influencing the political process because of their own abilities and competence. The two may sometimes be difficult to disentangle in practice, but in theory they are distinct. A person may think, "I'm a capable, knowledgeable person, but the system is so corrupt that I don't get a fair hearing" (high internal efficacy but low external efficacy). Another person might have the opposite set of feelings: "This is the greatest country

in the world; if only I had an education I could run for office, too" (high external efficacy but low internal efficacy). A democratic system requires confidence in its institutions and processes. It also requires citizens who feel competent to involve themselves in politics.

A measure of internal political efficacy, the percentage of respondents over the years who agreed with the statement "Politics and government is too complicated for people like me to understand," is also included in Figure 1-1. A high proportion of the sample has agreed with the statement over the years, suggesting low internal political efficacy, although different measures would produce different results. Internal political efficacy is highly related to education, so increases in education probably account for the slight downward trend in Figure 1-1 (or upward trend in internal political efficacy) in recent years.

Despite apparent misgivings about their own political competence and the willingness of officeholders to listen, most Americans understand the basic obligations of citizens in a democracy. About 90 percent of all adults believe that good citizens have a duty to vote in elections, although many of them do not act on that commitment at every election. Although Americans also believe in the importance of informing themselves about political and governmental affairs, they readily concede that in most cases they personally are not as well informed as they should be.

The most common form of political participation is exercising the right to vote. (We will discuss voter turnout in Chapter 2, including the impact of declining levels of trust on citizens' willingness to participate.) Maintaining a representative democracy involves more than voting, however. Because the message or mandate of an election is seldom clear, specific policy concerns must be communicated to one's elected representatives. Organizing with like-minded individuals increases the chances that one's interests will be heard. Participation in voluntary associations—political and nonpolitical—has long been noted as an important contributor to democratic politics. Alexis de Tocqueville, writing in the nineteenth century, commented on Americans' proclivity toward joining organizations of all sorts. Not only do participants in voluntary associations learn useful political skills, but the existence of many organizations with overlapping memberships also tends to moderate conflict. People whose interests conflict on one set of issues may find themselves working together as allies on some other set of issues. Membership in organizations links people to each other and to their communities. In a study of Italian states, Robert D. Putnam showed that the most significant difference between those with effective democratic politics and those without was the existence of a strong associational life.²⁴

Putnam has recently raised the alarm over what he refers to as the "declining social capital" in the United States. Americans, he argues, are

now less likely to join organizations of all kinds—from bowling leagues to labor unions to political parties. This he attributes to women in the workforce, increased residential mobility, and technological innovations, such as television, the personal computer, and the video cassette recorder, all of which allow individuals to work and play in isolation.²⁵

In a major study of political participation in the United States, Sidney Verba, Kay L. Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady seem to counter Putnam's claim, finding organizational participation in America "lively and varied."²⁶ In a comparison with a similar study in 1967, they find a decline in some forms of political activity, such as voting and membership in political clubs, but similar levels of participation in community activities and sizable increases in political contributions and contacting public officials about issues. Putnam would agree with the last contention, also noting increases in the membership in tertiary—or mass membership—organizations. Such organizations, however, usually do not involve the face-to-face interaction that fosters cooperation and builds community.

Verba, Schlozman, and Brady also conclude that the pattern of participation in America distorts the voice of the people. Those with education and money participate; the poor and uneducated do not. As a consequence, the interests of the affluent are well represented in government, and those of the less advantaged are not. Participation in religious institutions does not have this social class bias, and Verba, Schlozman, and Brady conclude that religious organizations are an important mechanism for developing political skills among the less advantaged citizenry.²⁷

More intense forms of political activity, such as working on political campaigns, have remained much the same over this time period—although the levels of involvement have never been high. Many individuals who contribute financially to campaigns are not involved in any other way. When all forms of campaign activity, including financial contributions, are counted, somewhat more than 10 percent of the electorate is involved in some way.

Childhood Socialization

Most social groups, particularly those with distinctive sets of norms and values, make some effort to teach appropriate attitudes and expected behaviors to their new members. In a democracy, this would include teaching beliefs and values supportive of majority rule, tolerance for diverse opinions, and an understanding of the role of citizens as participants in the political process.

In most societies the process of socialization is focused primarily on the largest group of new members: children. Through the process of political socialization the political culture of a society is transmitted from

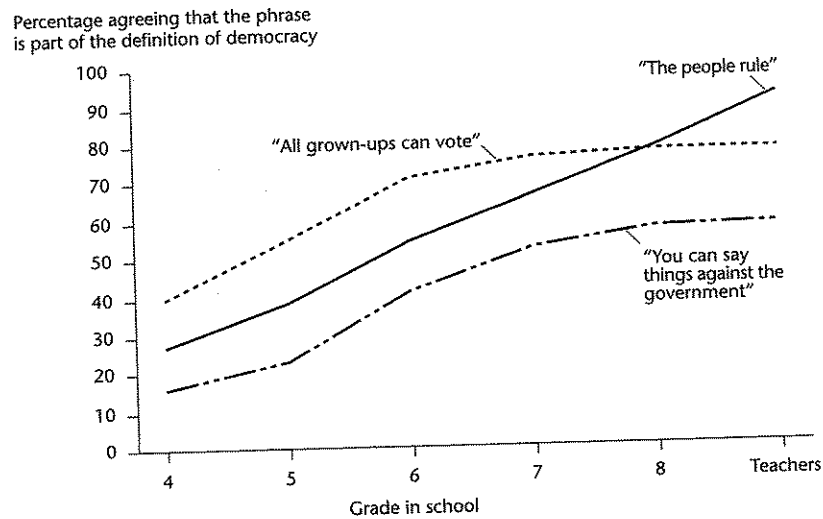
one generation to the next, but this socialization is also an important mechanism through which change in the political culture can take place.

In societies in which most learning about politics occurs in the home, the prevailing political culture probably changes no faster than the attitudes of the adult population as a whole, in response to varied personal experiences and changing circumstances in the environment. In modern societies other agents of political socialization also are involved, particularly the educational system and, increasingly, the mass media. To the extent that these institutions instill a different set of values and norms compared with those held by the adult population as a whole, an opportunity exists for changing the political culture. Under the Communist regimes in the People's Republic of China and, formerly, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the official ideology dominated both the schools and the mass communications system. Massive changes in values took place within the span of a generation. (The fact that contrary attitudes survived the indoctrination attests to the multiplicity of agents of socialization, even in totalitarian states.) More diversity in views is permitted in the United States, but the prevalence of middle-class values among both teachers and the media guarantees that these orientations will continue to be widespread in the population as a whole.

Given the importance of the socialization process in the transmission of the fundamental beliefs and values of the political culture, it is surprising that socialization studies have not paid more attention to the development of attitudes supportive of democratic goals and procedures. Data collected in the 1950s by David Easton, Robert D. Hess, and others show that children develop an affective attachment to the term *democracy* early (by about the third grade), but the concept acquires meaning much more slowly.²⁸ The progress of learning from the fourth grade to the eighth grade is shown for several concepts in Figure 1-2. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the data in the figure is the high level of disagreement among teachers over the correctness of including the right of dissent in the meaning of democracy.

In 1999 an elaborate cross-national Civic Education Study directed by Judith Torney explored attitudes toward democratic culture among teenagers in twenty-eight countries. The data in Table 1-2 display knowledge of the concept of democracy among American ninth graders. The top of Table 1-2 shows one-sided agreement that it is very good for democracy "when everyone has the right to express their opinions freely" and "when citizens have the right to elect political leaders freely." Fifty-five percent believe the first item is "very good for democracy," only 2 percent think it is "very bad for democracy." (When the "very good" and "somewhat good" responses are added together, the total is 83 percent, as shown in parentheses in the table.)

FIGURE 1-2 Children's and Teachers' Understanding of the Concept of Democracy



Source: Adapted from Robert D. Hess and Judith V. Torney, *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children* (New York: Anchor Books, 1968), 75, Table 13.

Collectively, ninth graders are not nearly so sure of other tenets of democracy listed in Table 1-2. For example, only 24 percent believe it is very good for democracy for political parties to have different positions on issues or for newspapers to be free of government control. Young people may absorb the ambivalence that many adults, especially their teachers, feel toward political parties and a free press, a situation also reflected in the Easton and Hess studies forty years before. (In the 1999 study, teachers divided half and half in thinking participation in political parties was a good idea in a democracy.) Ninth graders were fairly evenly divided on preventing newspapers from printing stories that might offend ethnic groups. They were even less supportive of the idea that the separation of church and state is a good idea in a democracy. All of this suggests the schools are stronger in teaching some principles of democracy than others.

The development of the child's thinking about the institutions of government and about his or her own role as a citizen has also been studied. The child's first view of government and governmental leaders casts the leaders as all-powerful and benevolent, undoubtedly the result of the twin objectives of parents and teachers to instill an acceptance of authority and to shield young children from the harsher realities of political life. Gradually, the child acquires a more realistic and more cyni-

TABLE 1-2 Ninth Graders' Views on What Is Good and Bad for Democracy, 1999

	Percentage saying	
	Very bad for democracy	Very good for democracy
When everyone has the right to express their opinions freely	2 (9)	55 (83)
When citizens have the right to elect political leaders freely	5 (12)	61 (81)
When political parties have different positions on important issues	6 (25)	24 (59)
When newspapers are free of all government control	10 (37)	24 (51)
When people participate in political parties in order to influence government	10 (29)	22 (55)
When newspapers are forbidden to publish stories that might offend ethnic groups	19 (38)	27 (50)
When there is a separation between the church and the state	24 (49)	15 (32)

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Civic Education Study, 1999. See www.wam.umd.edu/~iea.

Note: The percentages in parentheses combine "very bad for democracy" responses with the "somewhat bad" and the "very good" with the "somewhat good."

cal view of the world. Children also begin with a personalized view of government. Government means the president or, for some, the police officer. In time these images are replaced or supplemented with more abstract ideas about Congress and the election process.²⁹

During the elementary grades, children develop a set of attitudes toward their own roles as citizens. Initially, the emphasis is on obedience: The good citizen obeys the law, just as good children obey their parents. In the American socialization process, this is gradually replaced by a view of oneself as a more active participant in the political system: The good citizen is one who votes. Still later, the child adds the notion that the government can be influenced through the voting process.

As with other attitudes, the development of confidence in one's own ability to influence government is related to social class and intelli-

gence among children, just as it is related to social class and education in adults. Some other aspects of the view of the citizen's role that children develop in the later elementary years might conceivably hinder their effectiveness or willingness to participate in the real world of politics later. The role of the individual in influencing government is stressed; the role of organized group activity in politics is downgraded. In the same way, American children develop a low tolerance for conflict, believing, for example, that it hurts the country when the political parties disagree.

In the past, the youngest voters were typically the most trusting of government, a tendency one would expect, given their recent exposure to an educational process that tries to build support for the system. In the 1950s and early 1960s, when most of the major socialization studies were undertaken, young people entered adulthood with strong affective feeling toward the government and a positive orientation toward themselves as participants in it.

A study of high school seniors and their parents, carried out in 1965 by M. Kent Jennings, showed that trust and confidence in government were fairly high among the students.³⁰ As learning continues into adulthood, substantial modification of attitudes can occur through a variety of personal experiences with politics, new group membership, and the like. The original students in the Jennings study have been reinterviewed at intervals over the years. Their level of trust in government declined from 93 percent in 1965, to 67 percent in 1973, 51 percent in 1982, and 49 percent in 1997.

Maintaining a Democracy

Belief in democratic ideals is essential to the preservation of a democratic system, both because such beliefs inhibit citizens from undemocratic actions and because the public will demand proper behavior on the part of political leaders. Belief that the system and its leaders meet democratic expectations in adhering to democratic procedures and responding to the wishes of the public is also important. A third factor is perhaps less obvious. A democratic system must meet some standard for effectiveness in solving societal problems. If not, the public may conclude that democracy does not work, that some other form of government—such as a dictatorship—is needed to maintain order, fend off an enemy, or provide economic well-being.

When expectations are not met in the behavior of political leaders or in the experiences individuals have in the political process, disappointment, cynicism, or hostility may result. Americans come to hold high expectations for the political system and, as a consequence, are sub-

ject to considerable disenchantment with the performance of government and their own role in politics. Although no direct evidence on this point is available, nothing has been found to suggest that the value Americans place on the ideals of democracy, majority rule, or the importance of participation in politics has declined. Instead, events over the past thirty years have led to a larger perceived discrepancy between the specific American political institutions (and their incumbents) and the ideal.

Ideals, combined with the generally high expectations Americans hold for the political system, can lead to cynicism and mistrust of political leadership when scandals occur or policies appear not to work. But another form of disenchantment operates at the individual level. The American ethos and the content of the political culture lead individuals to expect a wide range of conditions and values. They expect to enjoy freedom, justice, and equality; they expect to enjoy personal economic success; and they expect to be safe from violence.

If individuals find that what is happening to them is far different from these expectations, they may react with resentment. Many individuals, to be sure, respond to adversity in personal terms and do not view their problems from a collective or political perspective. Others, however, may engage in disruptive political activities. In a society such as the United States, the people who suffer economic hardship or are victims of social injustice are oftentimes minorities that are isolated by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or some other identifiable characteristic. Under these circumstances such a group may develop a set of subcultural values that is different from the values of the dominant culture. The group may passively withdraw from political activity or it may become actively disruptive of the system. The bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995 or the anthrax attacks in 2001 illustrate that a disruptive, antisystem sentiment can emerge. The rioting in Seattle, Washington, at the World Trade Organization meetings in 2000 may represent a new capacity to mobilize large numbers of people with different agendas. The Internet has created an unprecedented opportunity for communication and mobilization of individuals who would not have been so well connected in the past.

Public opinion polls indicate considerable variation in Americans' assessment of their society. One general question that has been used for many years asks whether the country is going in the "right direction" or has gotten on the "wrong track." For most of the last three decades, the public has been more dissatisfied than satisfied with the way the country is going. In the fall of 2004, 38 percent of the public said the country was going in the "right direction" and 59 percent said the country was on the "wrong track," a relatively negative assessment by historical standards.³¹ At the same time, when asked to agree or disagree with the statement, "Whatever its faults, the United States still has the best system of gov-

ernment in the world," 89 percent agreed—and most of those agreed strongly.³²

Given the lack of sophistication in the public's understanding of democratic values and procedures, along with the declining levels of trust in government and its leaders, some uneasiness emerges about public support for American democracy—and perhaps for any democratic regime. The United States can be seen as a democratic system that has survived without a strong democratic political culture because governmental policies have gained continual, widespread acceptance. If that satisfaction erodes, however, the public has no deep commitment to democratic values and processes that will inhibit support of antidemocratic leaders or disruptive activities.

Democratic theory implies that the public should demand values and procedures embodying democratic principles. The hope or expectation is that the public in a democratic society will insist on certain values and processes. A mass public demanding democratic values and procedures would provide strong support for a democratic regime. However, a democratic system could survive with much lower levels of support, given other conditions.

In our view, a distinction should be made between the factors necessary for establishing a democracy and those contributing to maintaining one. The example of contemporary Russia, to mention only one case, suggests that stronger public support probably is required for the successful launching of a democracy than it is for maintaining an already established democracy. Possibly, preserving a regime simply requires that no substantial proportion of the society be actively hostile to the regime and engage in disruptive activities. In other words, absence of disruptive acts, not the presence of supportive attitudes, is crucial.

However, leaders' positive support for a political system is essential to its existence. If some leaders are willing to oppose the system, it is crucial that there be no substantial number of followers to which such leaders can appeal. The followers' attitudes, as opposed to their willingness to act themselves, may provide a base of support for antisystem behavior by leaders. In this sense, unanimous public support for democratic principles would be a firmer basis for a democratic system.

The high levels of dissatisfaction, accompanied by a lack of strong commitment to democratic values in the American public, appear to create some potential for public support of undemocratic leaders. As shown in subsequent chapters, many Americans feel an attachment to one or the other of the established political parties, an attachment that inhibits their embracing new political leaders. The parties and the public's attachment to them are often seen as preventing political change. They can also be seen as encouraging stability and preserving a democratic system by lessening the likelihood of a demagogue's rise to power.

Notes

1. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "Voting Irregularities in Florida during the 2000 Presidential Election," available at www.usccr.gov/vote2000/stdraft1/main.htm. See especially chap. 5.
2. In party primary elections voting in both primaries invalidates up to one-third of the ballots.
3. Arguably, 1960 is another case. See note to Figure 2-1.
4. Gallup Poll, April 20–22, 2001, Roper Center of the University of Connecticut, accession number 0381385.
5. 2004 National Election Study, available at www.umich.edu/~nes.
6. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, www.people-press.org.
7. "Opinion Roundup," *Public Perspective* 3 (May/June 1992): 7–9; and 2004 National Election Study.
8. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963). These patterns have been evident in cross-national public opinion polls since Almond and Verba first recorded them in 1963.
9. ABC News/*Washington Post* Poll, December 14–15, 2000, Roper Center of the University of Connecticut, accession number 0375554.
10. ABC News/*Washington Post* Poll, December 14–15, 2000.
11. For a major effort to capture this fundamental aspect of political culture, see Herbert McClosky and John Zaller, *The American Ethos* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).
12. 2004 National Election Study.
13. 2004 National Election Study.
14. For the major study of the 1950s, see Samuel Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955). For a more recent work, see C. Z. Nunn, H. J. Crockett, and J. A. Williams, *Tolerance for Nonconformity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978).
15. John L. Sullivan, James Piereson, and George E. Marcus, *Political Tolerance and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); and George E. Marcus, John L. Sullivan, Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, and Sandra L. Wood, *With Malice toward Some* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
16. Gallup, CNN, *USA Today* Polls, February 2004, Roper Center of the University of Connecticut, accession number 0449108, 0449109, and 0449110, respectively.
17. Gallup Poll, November 2003, Roper Center of the University of Connecticut, accession number 1600423.
18. In April 2000 the Freedom Forum found 25 percent agreed that "people should be allowed to burn or deface the American flag as a political statement" and 74 percent disagreed. The public was evenly divided on amending the Constitution to prohibit desecration of the flag. See Roper Center of the University of Connecticut, accession numbers 0367822 and 0367832.
19. Harris Poll, February 2005, Roper Center of the University of Connecticut, accession numbers 1619470 and 1619479.
20. John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Congress as Public Enemy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chap. 3.
21. Stephen Barr, "Trust in Government Surges during Crisis," *Washington Post*, September 30, 2001, C02.
22. CBS News/*New York Times* Poll, October 25–28, 2001, Roper Center of the University of Connecticut, accession number 0390700.
23. *Los Angeles Times* Poll, January 2005, Roper Center of the University of Connecticut, accession number 1614922.

24. Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
25. Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6 (January 1995): 65–78.
26. Sidney Verba, Kay L. Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 509.
27. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, chap. 17.
28. The results of this study have been reported in several articles and in Robert D. Hess and Judith V. Torney, *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children* (New York: Anchor Books, 1968); and David Easton and Jack Dennis, *Children in the Political System: Origins of Political Legitimacy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969).
29. David Easton and Jack Dennis, "The Child's Image of Government," in *Socialization to Politics: A Reader*, ed. Jack Dennis (New York: Wiley, 1973), 67.
30. The findings of this study are most extensively reported in M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Niemi, *The Political Character of Adolescence: The Influence of Families and Schools* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); and M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Niemi, *Generations and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
31. 2004 National Election Study.
32. ABC News/Washington Post Poll, December 14–15, 2000, Roper Center of the University of Connecticut, accession number 0375554.

Suggested Readings

- Almond, Gabriel, and Sidney Verba. *The Civic Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963. A classic study of political culture in five nations, including the United States.
- Hibbing, John R., and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs about How Government Should Work*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002. A provocative analysis of the public's attitudes toward American political processes.
- Marcus, George E., John L. Sullivan, Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, and Sandra L. Wood. *With Malice toward Some*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995. An innovative study of the public's tolerance of unpopular groups.
- McClosky, Herbert, and John Zaller. *The American Ethos*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984. An analysis of the public's attitudes toward democracy and capitalism.
- Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000. An analysis of the decline of participation in civic affairs.
- Rosenstone, Steven J., and John Mark Hansen. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan, 1993. An analysis of the interaction between the strategic choices of political elites and the choices of citizens to participate in politics.
- Skocpol, Theda, and Morris P. Fiorina, eds. *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1999. A collection of readings on civic engagement in historical perspective.
- Verba, Sidney, Kay L. Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press,

1995. A survey of various forms of political participation, their determinants, and the impact on representative democracy.

Internet Resources

The Web site of the National Election Studies, www.umich.edu/~nes, offers extensive data on topics covered in this chapter. Click on "Support for the Political System." Some of the attitudinal data cover 1952 to the present. For all items, additional information is presented on numerous social groupings in each election year.

If you have access to LexisNexis through your school, click on "Academic Universe," then "Reference," and then "Polls and Surveys." This will give you access to the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, which has a keyword search capability. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of items related to political culture can be found there from surveys taken from the 1930s to the present.

For a rich collection of data on American ninth graders, see the Civic Education Study at www.wam.umd.edu/~iea.

Suffrage and Turnout

IN 2004 THE OFFICIAL VOTING turnout rate in the presidential election was 58 percent, one of the highest in fifty years and up 8 percentage points from 2000. Turnout had been in a steady decline over the last four decades, from a high of more than 60 percent in the 1960s, interrupted only by a jump to 55 percent in the three-candidate contest of 1992.

The decline in the voting turnout rate since 1960 was accompanied by a great deal of commentary and concern about the future of American democracy. The decline in turnout appeared paradoxical, because it occurred at a time when the legal impediments to voting have been eliminated or eased and the education levels of American citizens are reaching all-time highs. Despite greater opportunities to vote, Americans seemed to be doing so less frequently. A favorite theme of editorial writers focused on the declining turnout rate as a symbol of the growing disenchantment of voters with the political system.

Whether 2004 represents a reversal in the overall decline in turnout is too soon to tell. In this chapter, we will put the downward trend in turnout—along with the reversals in 1992 and 2004—into a broader historical context. We will look at the factors that make some individuals more likely to vote than others and examine how changes in the political environment can affect whether people vote. We will also look at the way in which voting turnout is estimated and, in doing so, raise some questions about whether the concern over declining turnout is justified.

Extensions of Suffrage

Suffrage, or the *franchise*, means the right to vote. Originally, the U.S. Constitution gave the determination of who should have the right to vote entirely to the states. Later, amendments were added to the Con-

stitution that restricted the states' abilities to deny the right to vote on the basis of such characteristics as race, gender, or age. However, the basic constitutional provision that gives states the right to set the qualifications for voting remains, and over the years states have used such things as the ownership of property, literacy, and length of residency as criteria for granting or withholding the right to vote.

During the colonial period and the early years of the Republic, suffrage was commonly restricted to white males possessing varying amounts of property. In effect, only a small proportion of the adult population was eligible to vote. The severity of the impact of property requirements varied from state to state, and their enforcement differed perhaps even more. Gradually, the required amount of property held or the amount of taxes paid to obtain suffrage was reduced. Sometimes these changes were hard-won reforms enacted by state legislatures or by state constitutional amendment; at other times practical considerations led to substantial reforms. For example, delays in acquiring final title to land holdings in the western frontier areas during the 1800s made establishing property requirements for suffrage impractical. Often during the early years of American history, candidates in local elections would simply agree among themselves that all white males could vote instead of trying to impose complicated restrictions on the electorate. Only in more settled communities could complex restrictions on suffrage be effectively enforced. In sections of the East, however, wealthy landlords sometimes supported the enfranchisement of their poorer tenants with the expectation of controlling their votes.¹

After the eventual granting of suffrage to all white males, the next major change was the enfranchisement of black males by constitutional amendment following the Civil War. Even though the change was part of a set of issues so divisive that it had led to war, the numerical impact of adding black males was slight in the nation as a whole. However, unlike other changes in suffrage, it had a geographical bias: The impact of enfranchising black males was felt almost entirely in the South. (Their subsequent disfranchisement in the South will be discussed later.) The next major constitutional extension of voting rights was suffrage for women in 1920. It created by far the most dramatic increase in the number of eligible voters, roughly doubling the size of the potential electorate. In the early 1970s, through a combination of federal statutory law and state laws followed by constitutional amendment, the definition of citizenship for purposes of voting was lowered to age eighteen, accomplishing another major extension of suffrage.

These extensions of suffrage, which have not been easy or inevitable, may be explained by the existence of certain political forces. In stable political systems such as the United States, the extension of suffrage will result from (1) a widely shared commitment to moral prin-

ciples that entail further grants of suffrage and (2) the expectation among political leaders that the newly franchised will support the political preferences of the leaders.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the political culture and political rhetoric of America carries strong themes of individualism and equality. These values are reinforced in the educational system, in the media, and throughout popular culture. As a result, the commitment most Americans have to equality, individualism, and democracy has provided a basis for supporting extensions of voting rights.

But more than idealism contributed to the expansion of the electorate. In the two most dramatic extensions of suffrage, to blacks and to women, political leaders expected the newly enfranchised to support certain policies. Republicans—the party of abolition—anticipated that black voters in the South after the Civil War would help to secure Republican domination of the southern states. Perhaps most southern states passed through a period during which at least some chance existed of combining the votes of blacks and poor whites into a governing majority. The intense prejudice of whites and the difficulty in maintaining the enfranchisement of blacks kept the strategy from working under most circumstances, but a significant element in Republican enthusiasm for black suffrage was the knowledge that Republican voters were being added to the rolls.

The same mixture of idealism and self-interest that was behind the efforts to enfranchise blacks appears to have supported suffrage for women as well. Women were expected to clean up politics once they had the vote. They were seen optimistically as the cure for corruption in government, as unwavering opponents of alcohol, and as champions of virtue in the electorate. Reformers of all sorts encouraged the enfranchisement of women as a means of promoting their own goals.

No doubt similar factors were at work in the most recent extension of suffrage to eighteen- to twenty-year-olds. But perhaps more important was the widespread feeling that a system drafting young people to fight in the unpopular Vietnam War ought to extend to them the right to participate in the electoral process.

A unique aspect of the extension of suffrage in the United States was the addition of states in the frontier expansion across the continent. During the decades immediately preceding the Civil War, the politics of slavery dominated political decisions about additions of states, with accompanying expectations about the policy impact of expansion. Here, too, the question of the enlargement of the electorate was dominated mostly by concern over the political persuasion of the newly enfranchised voters.

Because throughout American history different state and local election practices have existed, no single set of eligibility requirements can be used as a basis for deciding who belonged to the electorate at any

one time. For example, individual states had granted suffrage to blacks, women, and young voters, either in law or in practice, before these groups' nationwide enfranchisement. In some states, women had previously been allowed to vote in local and school elections but not in statewide or federal contests. Thus, many different eligible electorates existed with different characteristics.

Restrictions on Suffrage

Under the provisions of the U.S. Constitution, the states set the qualifications for voters. The three extensions of suffrage by constitutional amendment did not alter this but prohibited the states from using certain criteria (race, gender, or age) to deny the right to vote. Because states retained the right to impose other restrictions, they have at times used these restrictions to prevent whole classes of people from voting. The most notorious of these efforts was the effective disfranchisement of blacks in the southern states during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Several techniques for disfranchising blacks have been used during the past century in the South, and from time to time some of these techniques were applied in the North on a more limited basis to restrict the electoral participation of immigrants. The most common methods included white primaries, the poll tax, literacy tests, discriminatory administrative procedures, and intimidation. In some southern states only whites were allowed to vote in party primaries (the crucial election in one-party states), under the rationale that primaries to nominate candidates were internal functions of a private organization. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled such white primaries unconstitutional in 1944 on the grounds that the selection of candidates for election is a public function in which discrimination on the basis of race is prohibited. The now illegal poll tax, whereby each individual was charged a flat fee as a prerequisite for registration to vote, was used for years and no doubt disfranchised both poor blacks and poor whites. In some states the effect was cumulative, because poll taxes had to be paid for all previous years in which the individual had not voted. The poll tax eventually became unpopular with the white voters who had to pay it whereas the blacks, disfranchised by other means, did not. The literacy test gave local officials a device that could be administered in a selective way to permit registration of whites and practically prohibit the registration of blacks. The standards of literacy applied to blacks in some cases—for example, reading and interpreting the state constitution to the satisfaction of the white registrar—made it impossible for even highly educated blacks to register, whereas whites might be required to know only how to sign

their names. To remain effective over long periods of time, these and other similar administrative devices probably depended on intimidation or the use of violence against blacks. Detailed analysis by Jerrold D. Rusk and John J. Stucker of the impact of the poll tax and literacy tests from 1876 to 1916 suggests that the poll tax was the more effective device, and its efficacy was greatest where the tax rate was highest and its application most cumulative.²

A study of black registration in 1958 by Donald R. Matthews and James W. Prothro indicated that southern states using poll taxes and literacy tests still inhibited black voter registration after World War II.³ The poll tax has since been outlawed by amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and the use of federal voting registrars in the South under the terms of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 has eliminated the worst excesses in the application of literacy tests. Registration rates in the South for whites and blacks were approximately equal by 1980, and turnout rates have concurrently increased to the point that little difference in turnout is evident now between the North and South in presidential voting.

The outlawing of the poll tax through constitutional amendment and the suspension of literacy tests by the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its extensions have eliminated two important restrictions on the right to vote. Other state restrictions on suffrage remain, although there is great variation from state to state. In all but four states, prison inmates cannot vote. In many states, convicted felons cannot vote until they have served their entire sentence—in other words, completed probation or parole; in some, a felony conviction entails a permanent forfeiture of voting rights. With the prison population growing, this amounts to a sizable restriction of the franchise. Because of longer sentences and higher rates of incarceration among blacks, the restriction falls more heavily on the black population. A recent study by the Sentencing Project estimates that 13 percent of black males are disfranchised under these requirements.⁴

Residency requirements are another common restriction on suffrage. In the past such requirements were often highly restrictive. Some states mandated up to two years of residence in the state before one was eligible to vote. Highly mobile segments of the population were thus often disfranchised intermittently as each move required a reestablishment of residence. In the 1970s the Middle Atlantic states, with their mobile populations and traditionally rigorous residency requirements, had as high a rate of unregistered citizens as did the states of the former Confederacy with their legacy of racial discrimination.

In 1972 the Supreme Court linked the imposition of a residency requirement to the length of time needed to prepare lists of registered voters before an election, suggesting that thirty days was sufficient to do this. Since then the Court has allowed state laws requiring fifty days to stand.

By the early 1990s the legal barriers to voting had been reduced, for the most part, to the requirement that voters be registered to vote in advance of an election. The inconvenience of administrative arrangements for voter registration and the frequent need to reregister have offered greater obstacles to voting than has the imposition of other eligibility standards. Some states have moved toward same-day registration and vote by mail in an effort to remove impediments to voting and to increase electoral turnout. The Help American Vote Act of 2002 provided a federal mandate to the states to adopt a system of provisional ballots and a statewide electronic database of registered voters in an effort to overcome glitches in registration procedures.

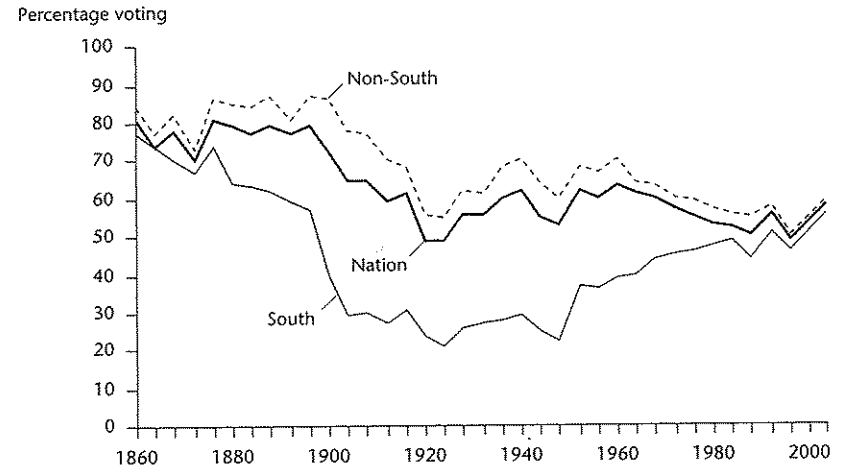
Nevertheless, as was discussed in Chapter 1, the close presidential elections of 2000 and 2004 showed that at least as many forces are at work trying to use suppression of turnout for partisan advantage as there are efforts to increase turnout. The presidential election in Florida in 2000 and, to a lesser extent, Ohio in 2004 revealed an impressive array of means whereby voters were denied the right to vote. After its investigation following the election in Florida, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights wrote that its "findings make one thing clear: widespread voter disenfranchisement—not the dead-heat contest—was the extraordinary feature in the Florida election."⁵

Turnout in American Elections Historically

One of the most persistent complaints about the current American electoral system is its failure to achieve the high rates of voter turnout found in other countries and common in the United States in the nineteenth century. U.S. voter turnout was close to 80 percent before 1900 (see Figure 2-1); modern democracies around the world frequently record similarly high levels. Turnout in the United States since the start of the twentieth century, in contrast, has exceeded 60 percent only in presidential elections, and in recent years the figure has often fallen below 50 percent.

These unfavorable comparisons are somewhat misleading. The *voting turnout rate* is the percentage of the eligible population that votes in a particular election. It is ideally calculated as the number of votes cast divided by the total number of eligible adult citizens. The definition of *eligible adult* takes into account the historical changes in eligibility occasioned by the extension of suffrage to blacks, women, and eighteen-year-olds, but it does not take into account state restrictions on eligibility, such as residency requirements. As discussed, these restrictions may be substantial. Thus, some of those included in the eligible population

FIGURE 2-1 Estimated Turnout of Eligible Voters in Presidential Elections in the South, Non-South, and the Nation, 1860–2004



Source: Robert Lane, *Political Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 20; Walter Dean Burnham, "The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe," *American Political Science Review* 59 (March 1965): 11, Figure 1; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, bicentennial ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 1078–1080; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1996*, 116th ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), 287; and www.census.gov.

manner, appears lower than it actually is. And in some states, blacks, women, and eighteen-year-olds were given the right to vote before suffrage was extended to them by amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Not including them in the denominator makes the turnout rate in earlier years appear higher than it actually was.

Even today in the United States, the calculation of the voting turnout rate is difficult. The total number of ballots cast throughout the country is unknown; only the total vote for particular races is reported. For example, not included are the people who went to the polls but skipped the presidential race. And the numbers who inadvertently invalidated their ballots are not counted. Even worse, no official count exists of citizens, because the decennial census no longer asks about citizenship. Thus, all noncitizens are counted as if they were eligible to vote. An analysis by Ruy A. Teixeira suggests an underestimate of turnout of about 4 percent in 1988.⁶ Recently, the U.S. Bureau of the Census has published recalculated estimates of the turnout rate since 1978, using citizenship and reported vote from its Current Population Survey. The estimates are considerably higher than the "official rate," in part

because they are based on reported vote—which may be inflated because individuals are reluctant to admit they did not vote—and in part because they are able to exclude noncitizens, who are ineligible to vote, in the denominator. (The Census Bureau estimates the number of noncitizens at eighteen million.) According to the Census Bureau estimate, turnout in 2004 was 63.8 percent. For 1992, the estimate is even higher—67.7 percent. Estimates in presidential elections since 1980 are in the high 50 percent to mid-60 percent range.⁷

Nevertheless, the data in Figure 2-1 show some dramatic changes occurred historically in the rate of voter turnout. Each major extension of suffrage—in 1868, 1920, and 1971—was marked by a drop in the proportion of the electorate voting. Perhaps this is not surprising, because the newly eligible voters might be expected to take some time to acquire the habit of exercising their right to vote. Furthermore, the drop in the turnout rate occasioned by the extension of suffrage was, in each case, the continuation of a downward trend.

During the nineteenth century, national turnout appears to have been extremely high—always more than 70 percent. The decline in national turnout from shortly before 1900 to 1916 is in part attributable to the restriction of black voting in the South. This decline in voting in the South also resulted from the increasing one-party domination of the region. In many southern states the real election was the Democratic primary, with the Republicans offering only token opposition, or none at all, in the general election. Turnout was often extremely low in the general election—far lower than can be accounted for simply by the disfranchisement of blacks.

Explaining the voting record shown in Figure 2-1 for the northern states presents a more difficult problem. Turnout declined substantially in the first two decades of the twentieth century and has not returned to its previous levels. The disfranchisement of blacks and whites in the South cannot account for northern nonvoting.

Two different explanations have been offered for the decline in voting in the North that commenced in the late 1890s. A persuasive set of arguments has been made by E. E. Schattschneider and Walter Dean Burnham in their individual studies of this period.⁸ They contend that a high level of party loyalty and political involvement during the last quarter of the nineteenth century caused high turnout and great partisan stability. Then, during the 1890s, electoral patterns shifted in such a way that the South became safely Democratic, and most of the rest of the nation came under the domination of the Republican Party. Schattschneider's analysis emphasizes the extent to which this alignment enabled conservatives in both regions to dominate American politics for many years. According to this line of argument, one consequence of declining competition and greater conservatism throughout the electoral

system was a loss of interest in politics accompanied by lower turnout and less partisan loyalty in the early twentieth century. Burnham emphasizes the disintegration of party voting with more ticket-splitting and lower turnout in off-year elections.

Some elements of this account are undeniably accurate. Electoral patterns did change somewhat around the turn of the century, with many regions of the nation changing from competitive to one-party areas. Throughout areas previously characterized by high turnout, straight-ticket voting, and stable voting patterns, turnout and partisan stability suffered greater fluctuations.

An alternative set of arguments gives these patterns a different interpretation.⁹ The high rate of turnout in the nineteenth century may not have resulted from political involvement by an interested, well-informed electorate. On the contrary, it may have been possible only because of low levels of information and interest. During the last half of the nineteenth century, a largely uninformed electorate was aroused to vote by means of extreme and emotional political appeals. Presumably, in the absence of more general awareness of the political situation, these alarmist arguments produced firm commitments to vote. By and large, the parties manipulated the electorate—a manipulation possible because the electorate was not well informed.

Furthermore, proponents of this argument allege that the party organizations “delivered” or “voted” substantial numbers of voters during this period, by party loyalists casting multiple votes, “voting tombstones,” or buying votes. Thus the remarkable stability of party voting may be a testimony to the corruption of the party organizations. The decline of stable party voting in the early twentieth century coincides with attacks on political corruption and party machines. The resultant weakening of party machines and increased honesty in electoral activities could have reduced turnout. In fact, the apparent hostility of the electorate to the parties throughout this period seems inconsistent with strong party loyalty. A study by Jerrold D. Rusk shows dramatic changes in voting patterns associated with electoral reform laws, especially the introduction of the Australian ballot.¹⁰ Before the introduction of electoral reforms, voting was often not secret. Distinctively colored ballots prepared by the political parties and limited to one party were distributed to voters, marked, and openly placed in the ballot box. The Australian ballot provided for secret voting and an official ballot with all candidates' names appearing on it.

Another of the reforms instituted during the early twentieth century to combat corruption was the imposition of a system of voter registration. Besides limiting the opportunity for fraudulent voting, registration requirements created an additional barrier to the act of voting that had the effect of causing the least motivated potential voters to drop out

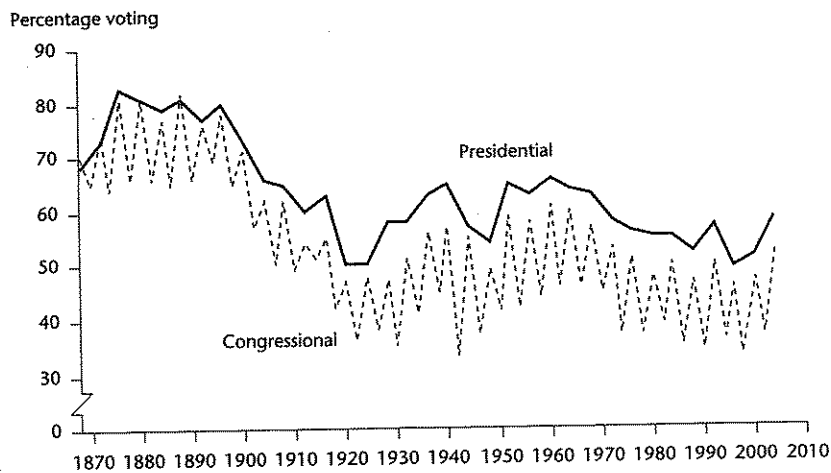
of the electorate. Many states introduced permanent or semipermanent forms of registration that involved only a one-time effort by the voter. However, in others, such as New York, where annual registration was required in many cities, the barrier to voting could be formidable.

After reaching an all-time low in the early 1920s, turnout in national elections increased steadily until 1940. A substantial, though temporary, drop in turnout occurred during World War II and its aftermath, and since 1960 there has been a gradual decline. Great differences in turnout among the states are concealed within these national data. Rates of voting in the South, as shown in Figure 2-1, were consistently low until recently when they nearly converge with northern turnout. Regional differences in turnout in presidential voting have almost disappeared. State variation within regions, however, is still considerable.

High- and Low-Stimulus Elections

Elections vary in the amount of interest and attention they generate in the electorate. As can be seen in Figure 2-2, presidential elections draw

FIGURE 2-2 Turnout of Eligible Voters in Presidential and Congressional Elections, 1868–2004



Source: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, Historical Data Archive; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States*, 1973, 94th ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), 379; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1996, 116th ed. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), 287; U.S. House of Representatives, Office of the Clerk, clerk.house.gov; and www.census.gov.

higher turnout, whereas off-year congressional elections are characterized by lower levels of turnout. Even in a presidential election year, fewer people vote in congressional elections than vote for president. The most dramatic decline in turnout is the 10 to 20 percent drop in voting experienced in off-year elections. Primaries and local elections elicit still lower turnout. Most of these differences in turnout can be accounted for by the lower visibility of the latter elections. When less information about an election is available to the voter, a lower level of interest is produced.

The differences in level of interest from presidential elections to congressional elections to local elections can be viewed as a result of five factors.

1. Differences in media coverage given the election
2. Significance attached by voters to the office
3. Importance of issues raised in the campaign
4. Attractiveness of the candidates
5. Competitiveness of the contest

Variation in these factors leads to what Angus Campbell called *high-stimulus* and *low-stimulus elections*.¹¹

Newspapers and television give far more coverage to the activities and speeches of presidential candidates than to those of congressional candidates. Even the most indifferent citizen comes to possess impressions and some information about presidential candidates and their campaigns. Such bombardment through the mass media awakens the relatively uninterested and often provides them with some reason to vote. This is not nearly so likely to happen in other election campaigns, where only the motivated citizens will become informed and concerned to any degree. Even so, a week or so after the election, a substantial proportion of the voters will not recall the name of the congressional candidate for whom they voted.

The factors of media coverage, the significance of the office, and the importance of the issues do a better job of explaining the differences in the levels of turnout in presidential elections versus other kinds of elections than they do among presidential elections themselves. None of these factors can account for the decline in turnout in presidential voting over the past four decades. Media coverage and campaigning through the media have increased; no evidence suggests that the significance attached to the presidency has declined; and critical issues have been intensely debated, such as civil rights and the Vietnam War in 1968, the Vietnam War again in 1972, and the Iranian hostage crisis and inflation in 1980. Yet a steady erosion in turnout occurred throughout these years.

The lack of attractiveness of the presidential candidates has often been cited as a possible explanation, contrasting the enormously popular Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956 with the lesser-of-two-evils

contests of later years. Certainly low-turnout elections have taken place in which both candidates were viewed unfavorably (the Michael S. Dukakis–George Bush contest in 1988 and the 1996 match-up between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, for example). But a candidate viewed very negatively by a portion of the electorate may also increase turnout by bringing large numbers of voters to the polls to vote in opposition. George W. Bush seems to have had that effect in 2004. His polarizing presidency had the effect of motivating both supporters and opponents, resulting in higher than usual turnout.

Something a bit different appears to have happened in 1992. Although none of the three candidates, the senior Bush, Clinton, or Ross Perot, was viewed particularly favorably in personal terms by the electorate, the fact that there were three alternatives brought more people to the polls. If some people do not vote because they do not like either of the candidates, then having more candidates in the race increases the chances that one candidate will be deemed worthy of a vote.

Another factor often thought to raise the level of turnout in an election, perhaps by increasing the level of interest, is the degree of competition between the parties. Presumably, the closer and more uncertain the outcome, the more people will see their vote as potentially decisive. Undeniably, the virtual absence of party competition in the South during the period of black disfranchisement was associated with extremely low levels of turnout, even among white voters. Both turnout and competition in the South have increased since blacks joined the electorate.

However, the elections of 1968, 1976, 1980, and 1988 suggest that the expectation of a close race does not invariably lead to heightened turnout, whereas the 1984 election that reelected the popular Ronald Reagan shows that the expectation of a landslide does not necessarily depress turnout. Conversely, the expectation that Clinton would easily win in 1996 is widely interpreted as having depressed turnout in that election.

The high turnout in 2004 surely resulted in part from the competitiveness of the race nationwide. It probably resulted also from the sense of urgency that people had, on both sides, about the war in Iraq and the threat of terrorism, and the sense on the part of Bush's opponents that the 2000 election had been unjustly taken from them. An unprecedented effort was made on the part of the political parties and many other organizations to get out the vote in 2004. Most organizations concentrated their efforts in the so-called battleground states where both sides had a chance to win. The Republican Party, however, also made a big effort to turn out supporters in safe Republican states. The strategy was so successful that safe southern states—some of which had their highest turnout ever—were the engine behind the popular vote victory for Bush. Without this boost in turnout from safe southern states, Bush

would have once again won the electoral college vote while losing the popular vote, an outcome he wanted to avoid.

Another aspect of competitiveness also has a relationship to the level of turnout, especially in congressional and state elections. The decision to allow a race to remain uncontested or to offer only a “sacrificial lamb” can dramatically reduce turnout. In contrast, a hotly contested race with strenuous activity by party organizations is likely to get more voters to the polls on election day, even though the final outcome may not be particularly close.

Voters and Nonvoters

All but a small proportion of the eligible electorate vote at least occasionally, but individuals vary in the regularity with which they cast their ballots. Individual interest in politics is one factor creating such differences. In the previous section, the level of interest in a campaign was treated as a characteristic of the political environment, generated by the importance of the office at stake, the amount of media coverage, and so on. But interest and involvement in politics are also characteristics of individuals, and individuals vary substantially in the attention they pay to politics, their involvement in politics, and the amount of information about candidates and issues they acquire. As one would expect, the probability of voting increases at each level of expressed interest and involvement in political campaigns. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 2-3. The highly interested, involved, and informed citizens (a combination of characteristics highly valued in the belief system of a democratic society) turn out to cast their ballots on election day, whereas the apathetic, uninvolved, and ill-informed stay at home.

Two deviant cases that run contrary to the expected pattern can also be seen in Figure 2-3. The first deviant condition, *alienation*, de-

FIGURE 2-3 Relationship between Electoral Participation and Interest, Involvement, and Information

Level of interest, involvement, and information	High	Alienation or intimidation	Model citizenship
	Low	Apathy	Manipulation
		Low	High
Likelihood of voting			

scribes voters characterized by high interest and low turnout. The situation may be one of voluntary alienation in which individuals withdraw from political participation purposefully. Their high level of interest and information implies some reason for their withdrawal. They are dissatisfied with, or offended by, the political system. *Nonvoluntary alienation* refers to situations in which interested potential voters are prevented from participating, perhaps through intimidation. Both situations are dangerous to the political system because highly interested and informed citizens who do not participate have the potential for extremely disruptive activities. Alienation in this form is thought to be uncommon in American politics. In the United States, the interested and informed are consistently the most likely to participate even though they are somewhat more cynical about the political system. Furthermore, a study focusing primarily on the causes of nonvoting in the 1976 election found voters and nonvoters to be similar in their levels of alienation and cynicism toward politics. For only 6 percent of the nonvoters was rejection of politics the main explanation of their nonvoting.¹² Studies have consistently shown no relationship between cynicism or alienation and nonvoting in elections.

The second deviant case, *manipulation*, describes voters characterized by low interest and high turnout. It refers to a situation in which individuals with little information or interest become involved in voting. Presumably, this manipulation is achieved by getting individuals to vote either through coercion or by highly stimulating and arousing appeals. Coercive methods for ensuring turnout may range from police-state orders to fines for failure to vote. More common in the American political system are exceptionally moving or alarming appeals, bringing to the polls people so unsophisticated that they are easily swayed. Very high levels of turnout can be inspired by emotional, inflammatory appeals—which offer one possible explanation for the high turnout levels in the United States for many years after the Civil War. Campaigns were marked by extreme appeals, and, because education levels were low, it is reasonable to suspect that there were lower levels of interest, involvement, and information than during the campaigns of the twentieth century.

Even though interest in politics is strongly correlated with voting, about half of those who say they have hardly any interest do vote in presidential elections, suggesting that still other factors are also at work. One of these is a sense of civic duty—the attitude that a good citizen has an obligation to vote, that voting is important, regardless of the expected impact on the outcome. Because such feelings are usually a prime focus of the political socialization fostered by the American educational system, turnout is the highest among those with the longest exposure to this system. Length of education is one of the best predictors of an in-

Because education is so closely associated with relative affluence and social status, people who vote are usually slightly better off in socioeconomic terms than the population as a whole. This bias is likely to increase in low-stimulus elections as greater numbers of occasional voters drop out of the electorate, leaving the field to the better educated and more affluent who rarely miss an election. In analyzing voting in presidential primaries, Barbara Norrander found voters in the 1988 Super Tuesday primaries to be older, better educated, and wealthier than their counterparts who did not vote. However, the common assumption that this leads to drastic political differences between primary voters and the general electorate is unfounded. In studying the 1980 presidential primaries, she discovered no substantial ideological or issue differences between primary voters and general election voters.¹³

Another important factor contributing to nonvoting is age. A relatively large proportion of young people pass up their first opportunities to vote. This situation has been magnified in presidential elections since 1972. The extension of the franchise to eighteen-year-olds enlarged the pool of eligible voters, yet since then turnout has, on average, declined. Figure 2-4, based on survey data from the 2004 presidential election, shows that the likelihood of voting increases from young adulthood through middle age.* In most presidential years, including 2004, a slight decline in turnout was evident among the most elderly portion of the population.

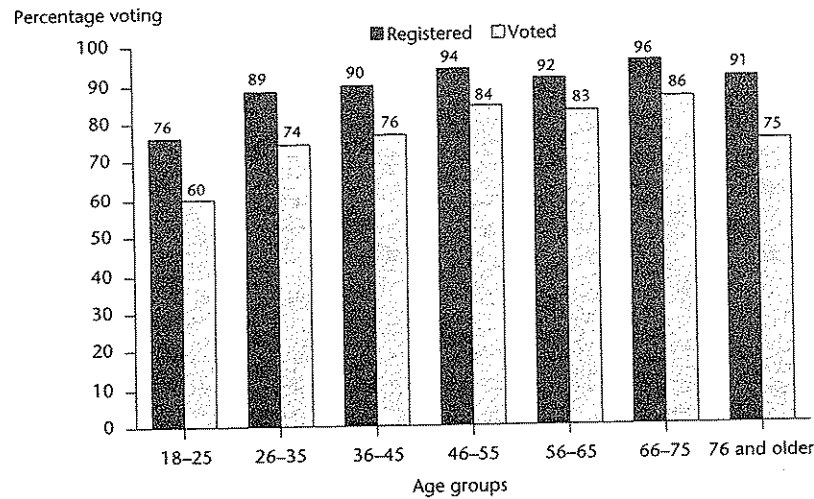
The tendency of young people not to vote is partially offset by their generally higher levels of education. Although the turnout of middle-aged people is higher at each educational level than that of young adults, the gap narrows among the better educated (see Figure 2-5).

Reported turnout increased in all age groups, except the oldest, in 2004. The increase was most impressive among the youngest group of eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds whose turnout increased from 48 percent in 2000 to 60 percent in 2004. College-educated young people were almost as likely to vote as their elders in 2004. In his assessment of turnout in 2004, Thomas E. Patterson notes that voters under thirty-five were much more likely to say that they “really disliked” one of the candidates, lending support to the hypothesis that the *unattractiveness* of the candidates may be an incentive to turn out to vote.¹⁴

*The reported vote obtained in surveys, including surveys by the Bureau of the Census, is consistently higher than that of official statistics. Validation studies suggest that more than 10 percent of the respondents claim to have voted when they did not. Bias in survey samples—that is, interviewing disproportionate numbers of voters—is also a factor contributing to the difference. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Current Population Reports,” *Studies in the Measurement of Voter Turnout*, Series P-23, No. 168 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990).

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FIGURE 2-4 Percentage of the Electorate Reporting Having Registered and Voted in the 2004 Presidential Election by Age



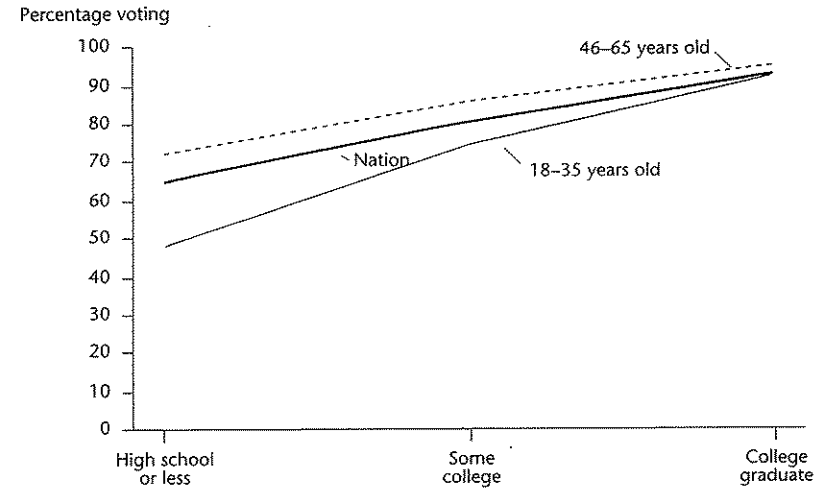
Source: 2004 National Election Study, available at www.umich.edu/~nes.

Much of the nonvoting among young people may be attributed to the unsettled circumstances of this age group rather than to simple disinterest in politics, although young people are slightly less interested than older people of similar educational levels. Military service, being away at college, geographic mobility with the possible failure to meet residence requirements, and the additional hurdle of initial registration all create barriers to voting for young citizens that are less likely to affect older ones. Efforts to promote voter registration have affected the young, with about three-fourths of the youngest members of the electorate having registered to vote. But registering is not the same as turning out to vote. As can be seen in Figure 2-4, on election day in November 2004 young people who were registered were more likely not to vote than older people who were registered.

By age thirty-five, most people have joined the voting population at least on an occasional basis. A small proportion of the middle-aged and older group remains outside the voting public. These habitual nonvoters, who have passed up several opportunities to vote, are less than 5 percent of the total electorate, according to current survey research estimates.**

** This "best estimate" of individuals outside the political system is unquestionably low. First, a disproportionately large number of people outside the political system would not even be included in the population of households from which the sample is drawn. Second, many of those in the sample who were never contacted or who refused to be interviewed would probably be classified as outside the political system.

FIGURE 2-5 Turnout in the 2004 Presidential Election by Age and Education



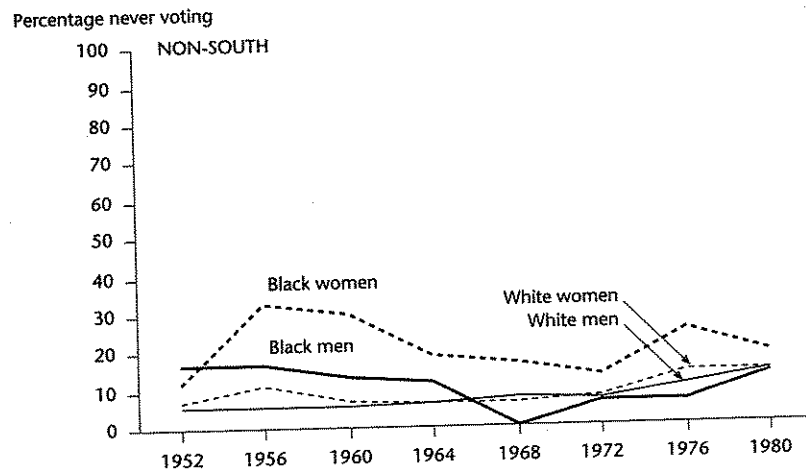
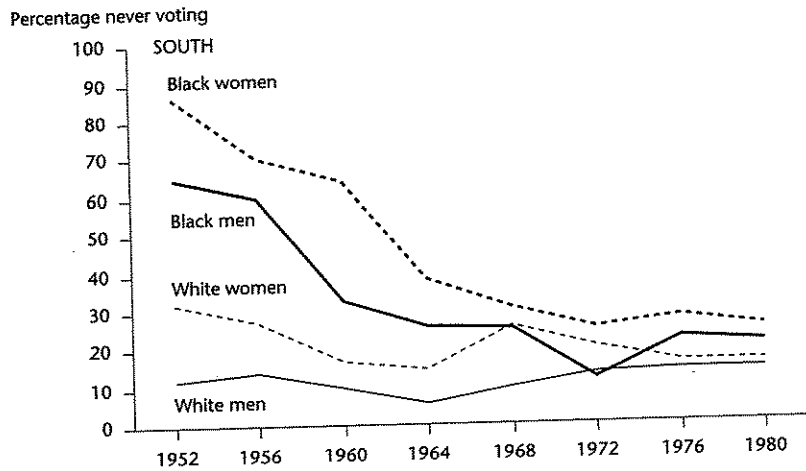
Source: 2004 National Election Study, available at www.umich.edu/~nes.

This group has steadily decreased in size, and the social forces that brought about the decrease will likely reduce it still further. In the past, habitual nonvoters were disproportionately southern, black, and female. Restrictions against black suffrage, coupled with a traditional culture that worked against active participation of women in civic life, meant that fifty years ago in the South large proportions of blacks of both genders, as well as white women, had never voted in a presidential election. Figure 2-6 shows the historic changes that took place as a result of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In 1952 large percentages of black women and men and, to a lesser extent, white women in the South had never voted. These percentages fell dramatically in the next two decades. By the late twentieth century, turnout patterns were similar in the North and South.

Registration as a Barrier to Voting

Registration requirements are the last major legal impediment to voting. Registration poses barriers to voting in several ways. In most parts of the country, an unregistered citizen must go to the courthouse several weeks before the election, during working hours, and fill out a form. Although not a horrendous burden, it does take time and some ability to deal with a governmental bureaucracy. Regulations also typi-

FIGURE 2-6 Percentage of Adults Who Have Never Voted by Race and Gender for the South and Non-South, 1952-1980



Source: National Election Studies, available at www.umich.edu/~nes.

Note: The states in the South are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. The remainder are the states in the non-South.

cally cancel the registration of people who fail to vote in a few consecutive elections. In addition, residential mobility annually relocates millions of citizens in new precincts in which they must reregister. All of

significant number of citizens will choose not to assume. Furthermore, voter registration is not always purely an electoral matter: An unknown number of Americans prefer to remain off registration lists to avoid jury duty or bill collectors or a former spouse.

Not surprisingly, individuals with little or no interest in politics lack the motivation to overcome registration barriers on their own. Voter registration drives, in which volunteers go door to door or register voters at shopping malls and on college campuses, capture many politically uninvolved people. A certain proportion of these people will not have the interest or incentive to bear the additional costs of getting to the polls on election day. The Census Bureau reported that 72 percent of all citizens were registered to vote in the 2004 election. About one out of nine failed to vote.¹⁵

Table 2-1 illustrates differences between unregistered citizens, registered nonvoters, and registered voters in terms of their level of interest in the election campaign and their partisanship. The registered nonvoters generally fall between the two other groups. In 2004 a clear partisan impact can be seen in the failure of large numbers of potential voters to vote. Whereas Democrats narrowly outnumber Republicans in the electorate as a whole, Republicans outnumber Democrats among those who voted. Democrats far outnumber Republicans among those who registered but did not make it to the polls on election day.

In recent years, various plans have been introduced to reduce the difficulty in registration as a way to boost voter turnout. Some state gov-

TABLE 2-1 Interest and Partisanship of Registered Voters and Nonvoters and Unregistered Citizens, 2004

	Unregistered	Registered	
		Nonvoters	Voters
Very much interested	10%	22%	48%
Somewhat interested	49	46	43
Not interested at all	41	32	10
Total	100%	100%	101%
Strong Democrat	4%	17%	18%
Weak Democrat	11	22	14
Independent Democrat	26	16	16
Independent	24	17	6
Independent Republican	17	12	11
Weak Republican	7	10	14
Strong Republican	4	5	21
Other, don't know, apolitical	7	1	1
Total	100%	100%	101%
(N)	(111)	(136)	(812)

ernments have implemented same-day registration, whereby individuals can register at the polls on election day. Most notably, in 1993 Congress passed, and President Clinton signed into law, the "motor voter" bill, which provides that registration forms will be available at a variety of governmental agencies that citizens visit for other purposes. These include agencies where motor vehicles are registered and driver's licenses are obtained, though, because of a Republican-sponsored amendment, states are not required to provide them at unemployment and welfare offices. The purpose of the bill is clearly to make it easier for all citizens to exercise their right to vote, but Democratic support and Republican concerns point to a potential side effect. Because the unregistered tend to be poorer and less well educated, Democrats, who traditionally represent such groups, hope (and Republicans fear) that reducing registration obstacles will increase the number of Democratic voters.

Many of the same political considerations were at play in the passage of the Help American Vote Act of 2002, which mandated that states provide provisional ballots for those citizens who believe they are registered to vote but whose names are not on the registration rolls. Much of the debate in Congress involved the form of identification that voters seeking to cast provisional ballots would need to produce at the polls. Republican legislators sought more rigid standards to prevent voter fraud; Democrats generally argued for keeping the barriers to a minimum.¹⁶ As in the historical extensions of the suffrage, these efforts to facilitate voter registration mix philosophical concerns with political motivations.

Registration requirements are one reason that the United States has significantly lower turnout rates than other western democracies, where governments take responsibility for maintaining registration lists instead of placing the burden of registration on the individual.¹⁷ Reducing registration requirements is a logical and fairly easy means to increase the turnout rate, but it should not be expected to have an astounding effect. The best estimate of the impact of reducing registration barriers suggests it will increase turnout about 8 percentage points.¹⁸ Although this is significant, the resulting turnout rate would still be substantially below that of other industrialized nations. Similarly, the Federal Election Commission estimates that the 1993 motor voter law resulted in an increase of less than 2 percent in registration in 1996 over 1992.¹⁹ In part, the impact was so small because many states had already implemented aspects of the law so their practices and procedures did not change. During 1995 and 1996, almost one-third of all registrations were by mail and one-third came through some form of motor voter program. Public assistance offices were the source of a little more than 6 percent of the registrations, even though not all states provided registration forms in these offices.

Despite Republican fears that easing registration requirements would bring more Democrats to the polls, the main impact of making it

easier to register seems to have been a decline in the proportion of the officially registered who vote. Failure to register prohibits voting, but registering does not ensure turnout. More of those only casually interested in politics and government register—because it is so easy. But when election day arrives, it takes the same amount of energy to get to the polling place as it always did.

The minimal impact of lessening registration requirements has led some states to experiment with easing the act of voting itself—by mailing ballots to registered voters and allowing them to vote by mail. Other states have loosened the conditions under which voters can request absentee ballots. Oregon has pursued these possibilities most aggressively, with the entire electorate receiving mail-in ballots in the 2004 election. Interest in using absentee ballots rose in many states in 2004, in part because of fears of long lines, concern about the absence of a paper trail with electronic ballot arrangements, and other issues. About 20 percent of the eventual voters nationwide cast their ballots before election day, with most of these voting by absentee ballot more than a week before election day. Although an unprecedented number of early ballots were cast in 2004, the procedure apparently was more a convenience or safeguard for voters who would have voted anyway than a means to draw the marginal voter to the polls.

Is the Level of Turnout in the United States a Cause for Concern?

A great deal of editorial ink has been spilled to lament, and academic analysis undertaken to explain, the generally low level of turnout in the United States in recent decades. The spikes in turnout in 1992 and again in 2004 offer food for thought but no clear indication whether these are aberrations or the possible reversal of a trend. In this section we will look at some of the explanations that have been offered for the overall decline in turnout and then suggest some alternative ways of looking at the issue.

Part of the difficulty analysts have had in understanding the overall decline in turnout over the past forty years is that it has happened at the same time that legal restrictions on voting have eased and education levels have increased. These circumstances should be expected to increase turnout. One explanation for the decline in the face of these factors has focused on the expansion of the electorate in 1971 to include eighteen-year-olds. Because young people are less likely to vote than older people, their inclusion in the electorate would be expected to decrease turnout, other things being equal. However, this can account for only a small portion of the decline.

Another possibility, raised by political commentators in 1972, 1980, and 1984, is that calling the election early in the evening, before the polls have closed in all states, especially western states, reduces turnout. Once potential voters learn that a television network has declared a winner in the race for president, the argument goes, they will no longer be interested in voting for president or any other office. However, the 1976 and 2000 elections were so close that the winner was not known until long after the polls had closed in all fifty states, and no appreciable impact was seen on turnout. Public concern about calling the election too early, together with congressional threats of regulation, led the networks to restrict their reporting voluntarily in 1988 and thereafter. However, if public opinion polls before the election all point to a clear winner, as they did in 1996, the impact on turnout may be the same. Persuasive as the idea is, the evidence on this matter is inconclusive, and no one has clearly demonstrated that these factors have influenced turnout in a significant way.²⁰

A somewhat more sweeping form of this argument—and one harder to test—suggests that the style of media coverage of campaigns has turned elections into a spectator sport that voters watch with varying degrees of interest but feel no need to engage in. The prediction of the winners in polls, the focus in presidential debates on who “won” instead of on substance, the attention to the “horse-race” aspects of the primary campaigns, and the networks’ competition to call the election first are all alleged factors in the withdrawal of the voter from active participation.

In a major study of nonvoting, Ruy Teixeira offers two general explanations for the decline in turnout since 1960.²¹ First, he cites a set of circumstances that he calls *social connectedness*—that is, the extent to which individuals are socially integrated into their community. This is similar to Putnam’s idea of *social capital*, which was discussed in Chapter 1. Older people, married people, those who attend church and are settled in the community are more socially connected than young, single, mobile people who do not belong to community organizations. Over the past few decades, the proportion of socially unconnected people has increased. Teixeira estimates that about one-third of the decline in turnout is associated with the decline in social connectedness.

The second factor is the extent of *political connectedness*—that is, the degree to which people feel interested and involved in government and believe government is concerned and responsive to them. The decline in political connectedness over the past three decades is manifested in a loss of trust in government, a lower sense of political efficacy, a decline in interest in politics, and a diminished sense of civic duty, many of the same trends noted in Chapter 1. These changing attitudes toward government and politics account for more than half of the decline in turnout, according to Teixeira’s estimates.

Turnout rose sharply in 1992, and examining the possible reasons for it would be worthwhile. The presence of Ross Perot in the 1992 presidential race contributed to the higher turnout. An atypically high level of turnout emerged among voters most attracted to Perot’s candidacy: the young, the nonpartisan, and those disenchanted with government and political leadership. These groups, in fact, are the socially and politically disconnected whose increased numbers, Teixeira argues, have been responsible for the recent declines in turnout. Perhaps Perot’s candidacy gave these voters an alternative that allowed them to connect with the political world. By 1996 Perot looked less like the outsider who could fix the system and he drew fewer of the unconnected into the electorate.

Beyond this, the 1992 campaigns of Perot, Clinton, and, to a lesser degree, George Bush used new means for reaching the voters. Talk-show appearances, Perot’s infomercials, town meetings, and MTV’s Rock the Vote initiative were all efforts to establish connections with the public in the age of cable television. In subsequent elections, this trend continued, with candidates making multiple appearances on the talk shows hosted by Jay Leno, David Letterman, and Oprah Winfrey. Presidential candidates clearly differ in how well they come across in these venues, but none can now avoid them. In a book on electoral participation, Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen make the point that another aspect of participation is *mobilization*.²² If candidates and parties fail to mobilize potential voters—or fail to find appropriate means to reach them—then it is not surprising that people do not vote. The declining turnout rate may have been a failure of party elites rather than a fault of citizens. The mobilization efforts of both parties as well as other organizations in 2004 surely contributed to the sharp increase in turnout in that election.

Throughout the discussion of turnout, we have implied the need for an explanation of nonvoting. We have assumed voting is normal or to be expected. However, the topic could be approached differently. The question could be asked, “Why do people bother to vote?”—as if nonvoting were the natural pattern or expected behavior and voting required explanation. The answer that one vote can determine the outcome of an election and that most people vote anticipating that their vote may be crucial is not reasonable, even after an extremely close election such as in 2000. One vote rarely decides an election, although many races are close; no voter should expect to cast the deciding vote in an election. However, “votes count” in an election in another sense—as an expression of preference for a candidate or for a party, regardless of whether that candidate ultimately wins or loses. Elections are more than simply a mechanism for selecting public officials; they are also a means for communicating, albeit somewhat dimly, a set of attitudes to the gov-

ernment. For most Americans, voting remains the only means of influence regularly used. Many see it as the only avenue open to ordinary citizens to make the government listen to their needs. The desire to be counted on one side of the fence or the other and the feeling that one ought to be so counted are perhaps the greatest spurs to voting. If this is true, then perhaps the most disturbing lesson that comes from examining electoral procedures in Florida in 2000 was the realization that your vote may not even get counted—let alone make a difference.

Our discussion—and most such discussions—also assumes that a high level of turnout is a good thing, and declining turnout is something to be concerned about. Exercising one's right to vote is seen as support for the political system, embracing of one's role as a citizen, and willingness to endorse one or another of the candidates. Failure to vote is taken as alienation from politics or apathy about the fate of the nation. Over the years, a few commentators have pointed out another possibility. Some people may not vote because of basic satisfaction with the way things are going or a feeling that things will be all right no matter which of the candidates is elected. While hardly model citizens, such people do not pose much of a problem for the political system. But then suppose that these people begin to feel that the outcome of the election will impact their lives, that one of the candidates will take the country in a direction they do not want to go. With their comfortable existence being threatened, they might decide to vote. If enough people felt this way, turnout would go up.

Something like this may have happened in 2004. The issues facing the country are urgent, but just as important, significant portions of the politically active public take a polarized view of politics. They distrust and dislike those with whom they disagree on a variety of issues. They do not want to see government in the hands of their opponents. They worked hard to mobilize like-minded people to get them to the polls to prevent the other side from winning. Turnout went up.

The point is twofold. Rising turnout is not an unmixed blessing. Although more engaged citizens may be good from a civics perspective, it can also mean that people are angry, worried, or threatened by events or by the prospect of one or another candidate holding office. Second, whether turnout remains elevated in the future or settles back to its recent levels will depend in great part on whether the current deep division in the politically active segment of the society remains.

Notes

1. Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage from Property to Democracy: 1760–1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), especially 131–181.

2. Jerrold D. Rusk and John J. Stucker, "The Effect of the Southern System of Election Laws on Voting Participation," in *The History of American Electoral Behavior*, ed. Joel Silbey, Allan Bogue, and William Flanigan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). For a treatment of these and many additional topics, see also J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).
3. Donald R. Matthews and James W. Prothro, "Political Factors and Negro Voter Registration in the South," *American Political Science Review* 57 (June 1963): 355–367.
4. "Losing the Vote: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States," Sentencing Project, October 1998, available at www.sentencingproject.org.
5. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "Executive Summary," in "Voting Irregularities in Florida during the 2000 Presidential Election," available at www.usccr.gov/vote2000/stdraft1/exsum.htm.
6. Ruy A. Teixeira, *The Disappearing American Voter* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1992), 10.
7. U.S. Bureau of the Census, www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html#hist.
8. E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960), especially chap. 5; and Walter Dean Burnham, "The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe," *American Political Science Review* 59 (March 1965): 7–28.
9. The most general statement of this argument is found in Philip E. Converse, "Change in the American Electorate," in *The Human Meaning of Social Change*, ed. Angus Campbell and Philip E. Converse (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1972), 263–337. For an analysis that alters the estimates of turnout, see Ray M. Shortridge, "Estimating Voter Participation," in *Analyzing Electoral History*, ed. Jerome M. Clubb, William H. Flanigan, and Nancy H. Zingale (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1981), 137–152.
10. Jerrold D. Rusk, "The Effect of the Australian Ballot Reform on Split Ticket Voting: 1876–1908," *American Political Science Review* 64 (December 1970): 1220–1238.
11. Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, eds., *Elections and the Political Order* (New York: Wiley, 1966), 40–62.
12. Arthur T. Hadley, *The Empty Polling Booth* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 20, 41.
13. Barbara Norrander, *Super Tuesday: Regional Politics and Presidential Primaries* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992); and Barbara Norrander, "Ideological Representativeness of Presidential Primaries," *American Journal of Political Science* 33 (August 1989): 570–587.
14. Thomas E. Patterson, "Young Voters and the 2004 Election," *The Vanishing Voter Project*, press releases, 2004, available at www.vanishingvoter.org.
15. U.S. Bureau of the Census, www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html.
16. *CQ Almanac Plus 2002* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003), 143.
17. G. Bingham Powell Jr., "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 80 (March 1986): 17–44.
18. Teixeira, *The Disappearing American Voter*, chap. 4.
19. "Executive Summary of the Federal Election Commission's Report to the Congress on the Impact of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 on the Administration of Federal Elections," available at www.fec.gov/votregis/nvrasum.htm.

20. See Laurily K. Epstein and Gerald Strom, "Election Night Projections and West Coast Turnout," *American Politics Quarterly* 9 (October 1981): 479–491; and Raymond Wolfinger and Peter Linquti, "Tuning In and Turning Out," *Public Opinion* (February–March 1981): 56–60.
21. Teixeira, *The Disappearing American Voter*.
22. Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

Suggested Readings

- Conway, M. Margaret. *Political Participation in the United States*, 3d ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2000. A good introduction to the study of turnout and other forms of political participation.
- Patterson, Thomas E. *The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. An analysis of political participation based on a huge, yearlong survey in 2000.
- Powell, G. Bingham, Jr. "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective." *American Political Science Review* 80 (March 1986): 17–44. A careful analysis of the institutional and attitudinal factors that depress American turnout rates compared with those of other industrialized democracies.
- Rosenstone, Steven J., and John Mark Hansen. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan, 1993. An analysis of the interaction between the strategic choices of political elites and the choices of citizens to participate in politics.
- Rusk, Jerrold D., and John J. Stucker. "The Effect of the Southern System of Election Laws on Voting Participation." In *The History of American Electoral Behavior*, edited by Joel Silbey, Allan Bogue, and William Flanigan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978. A sophisticated analysis of the disfranchisement of voters in the South in the nineteenth century.
- Teixeira, Ruy A. *The Disappearing American Voter*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1992. A sophisticated and thorough analysis of the factors that have contributed to the decline in turnout in the United States and a discussion of the impact of proposed reforms.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1992*. Series P-20, No. 466. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1993. A report of findings on turnout and registration based on a huge survey that allows complex analysis of many subgroups within the U.S. population.

Internet Resources

The Web site of the National Election Studies, www.umich.edu/~nes, offers data on turnout in both presidential and off-year elections since 1952. Click on "Political Involvement and Participation in Politics." You also can examine on the Web site turnout of numerous social groups from 1952 to the present.

Turnout and registration data for the nation and the states are available at the U.S. Census Bureau Web site, www.census.gov. Click on "V" under the subject headings and then find "Voting."

For large quantities of data and commentary on the 2000 and 2004 elections, visit www.vanishingvoter.org. This is the best Web site for the analysis of current levels of turnout.

Partisanship

THE DIVISION OF POWER between the political parties in the United States is currently very close. George W. Bush won in 2004 with a margin of victory that was narrow for an incumbent president seeking reelection—the narrowest margin since Woodrow Wilson won a second term in 1916. However, it was still an improvement over his showing in 2000 when he lost the popular vote and won the electoral college by four votes. At the beginning of the 109th Congress in 2005, the Republicans held a reasonably comfortable majority in the House of Representatives (231, with 202 Democrats, 1 Independent who caucused with the Democrats, and 1 vacancy). The Republicans held 55 Senate seats; the Democrats held 44; and 1 Independent caucused with the Democrats. The majority was up from the 51–49 edge that Republicans held after the 2002 midterm elections, though not a large enough majority to prevent the Democrats from blocking legislation through the use of the filibuster. As a result of the 2002 elections, the Republicans had control of both houses of Congress as well as the presidency. Republicans held unified control of government for the first time since the 1950s, setting aside the six months at the beginning of 2001 before Vermont senator James M. Jeffords switched from Republican to Independent. Besides being narrow, the partisan division between the two political parties is contentious. After the 2003 session, *Congressional Quarterly* reported that its measure of party polarization was the highest since 1960.¹

This situation reflects *partisanship*—the sense of attachment or belonging that an individual feels for a political party. In this and the next two chapters we will explore the concept of partisanship and its implications for political behavior. In this chapter we will discuss the meaning of partisanship and how the partisanship of Americans has changed over the course of the country's political history. In Chapter 4 we will ex-