Do you vote? Do your friends and family vote? Probably, you know people who consider voting meaningless. Or they consider the process of voting too cumbersome for so little impact. Of course, ask Al Gore if a handful of votes matter. A few more people showing up at the polls across Florida in November of 2000 and the presidential election would not have produced such a questionable and controversial outcome. And had a minor percentage of the total votes cast in the 2004 election in key states shifted because of increased voter turnout, George W. Bush would have moved back to Texas and John Kerry would have moved into the White House in 2005 rather than back to the Senate.

Elections in America allow a peaceful and legitimate transfer of power. The United States has more elections more often than any other country in the world. We also have the lowest turnout of the industrialized countries—fewer than half of our eligible voters vote on a regular basis. There are a wide variety of explanations for nonvoting. There are even those who claim that having a low voter turnout is a good thing and increases stability in the political system. Others argue that reform is necessary to increase voter turnout. After the 2000 presidential election, where some argue the votes of five Republican members of the U.S. Supreme Court rather than the votes of the people of Florida were the final arbiter of who would be president, calls for reform of the Electoral College system were widespread. This chapter will look at those arguments and others related to voting and elections.

This chapter is designed to give you an overview of voting and elections in the United States. The main topic headings of the chapter are:

- Voting Behavior
- Elections in the United States
- Presidential Elections
- Congressional Elections
- The 2006 Midterm Elections
- Reforming the Electoral Process

In each section, there are certain facts and ideas that you should strive to understand. Many are in boldface type and appear in both the narrative and in the glossary at the end of the book. Other ideas, dates, facts, events, people, etc. are more difficult to pull out of the narrative. (Keep in mind that studying for objective tests [multiple choice, T/F] is different than studying for essay tests. See the Study Guide section on test taking for hints on study skills.)
In general, after you finish reading and studying this chapter, you should understand the following:

- voting behavior and distinct patterns in voter turnout and vote choice
- purposes and types of elections and how elections at all levels confer a legitimacy on regimes better than any other method of change
- how presidential elections work, including the primaries, national conventions, and the Electoral College
- how congressional elections work and how they differ from presidential elections (even though they share many similarities)
- the 2006 midterm election and its similarities and differences with other midterm elections
- arguments for reforming the electoral process as well as the potential benefits and unintended consequences of electoral change

| Chapter Outline and Key Points |

In this section, you are provided with a basic outline of the chapter and key words/points you should know. Use this outline to develop a complete outline of the material. Write the definitions or further explanations for the terms. Use the space provided in this workbook or rewrite that material in your notebook. This will help you study and remember the material in preparation for your tests, assignments, and papers.

Tuesday following the first Monday in November every odd numbered year—

the increase in the size of the electorate and the number of elections—

**Voting Behavior**

conventional political participation—

unconventional political participation—

Cindy Sheehan—

**Voting Behavior**

**Patterns in Voter Turnout**

turnout—

why turnout is so important in American elections—

2004 presidential election and the power of a single vote—
factors known to influence voter turnout:

Education—
Income—
Age—
Gender—
Race and Ethnicity—

turnout in 2004 presidential election for minorities—
The South Versus the Non-South for Presidential Voter Turnout (Figure 13.1)—
Voting Rights Act of 1965—
Hispanic vote—
Hispanics elected to office in 2004 and 2006—

Interest in Politics—

**Why is Voter Turnout So Low?**

percentage of U.S. voter participation—
Why People Don’t Vote (Figure 13.2)—

contributing factors for low voter participation rates:

Too Busy—

Difficulty of Registration—
reasons for low U.S. registration rate—
National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (Motor Voter Act)—

Difficulty of Absentee Voting—

Number of Elections—
Voter Attitudes—
Weaken Influence of Political Parties—

Efforts to Improve Voter Turnout

Easier Registration and Absentee Voting—
proposals—
Oregon’s all-mail balloting—
success of motor voter law—
Make Election Day a Holiday—
Strengthen Parties—

Patterns in Vote Choice

Ticket-Splitting—
effect of party affiliation intensity on ticket-splitting—
potential explanations for ticket-splitting—
Race and Ethnicity—
African Americans—
Hispanics—
Chinese Americans and Vietnamese Americans—

Gender—
Income—
Ideology—
liberals—
conservatives—
Issues—
retrospective judgment—

prospective judgment—

how voters retrospectively and prospectively judged recent presidential administrations in reaching their voting decisions:

1992—

1996—

2000—

2004—

two major campaign-specific issues of the 2004 presidential election—

how voters responded to the two major campaign-specific issues of the 2004 presidential election—

**Elections in the United States**

**The Purposes of Elections**

popular sovereignty and elections—

authoritarian systems—

“referenda” in authoritarian systems—

elections in a democratic society—

electorate—

elections and policies—

mandate—

claims to a mandate by presidents—

mandates in midterm elections:

Contract with America in 1994—
Iraq War and Bush in 2006—

Types of Elections

Primary Elections—

closed primary—

open primary—

crossover voting—

raiding—

runoff primary—

General Elections—

Initiative, Referendum, and Recall—

ballot measures—

initiative—

referendum—

recall—

1990 California election and referenda and initiatives—

2003 California gubernatorial recall and election—

Presidential Elections

sequential events in the presidential election process—

methods state party organizations use to elect national convention delegates and ultimately select the candidate who will run in the general election:

winner-take-all primary—

proportional representation primary—

caucus—
**Primaries Versus Caucuses**

trend from caucuses to primary elections—

which states use primaries and which use caucuses to select presidential delegates—

Methods of Selecting Democratic Party Presidential Delegates (Figure 13.4)—

characteristics of caucuses—

characteristics of primaries—

“sophisticated voting”—

critics of presidential primaries—

earliest primary—

front-loading—

important effects of front-loading on the nomination process—

2004 and Internet fund-raising’s effect of softening fund-raising advantages of front-loading—

2008 addition of Nevada’s caucus between the contests in Iowa and New Hampshire by Democratic Party—

**The Party Conventions**

which party traditionally holds its national convention first?—

characteristics of the national conventions—

three ways national party conventions are different today—

1) 

2) 

3) 

delegate selection—
unit rule—

Democratic Party rule regarding state delegates selection in proportion of votes cast in primary or caucus, the effect and consequence—

before 1972, most delegates to Democratic National Convention were not bound by primary results to support a particular candidate for nomination and the effect of this freedom to maneuver at the convention—

superdelegates—

percentage of minorities and women at 2004 national Democratic convention—

contrast in the delegation make-up at the Democratic and Republican national conventions—

Historic Moments for Women at the Conventions (Table 13.1)—

National Candidates and Issues—

News Media and National Conventions—

how television has shaped the business of the convention—

pros and cons of extensive media coverage of the convention—

The Electoral College: How Presidents Are Elected

Electoral College—

electors—

number of electors—

magic number for winning the Electoral College vote—

Electoral College was result of compromise between two groups—
three essentials reasons why the Framers constructed the Electoral College—

1)

2)

3)

complex nature of Elector College as originally designed and implemented by the Framers—

system was designed by Framers for the America they (erroneously) foresaw lasting in perpetuity—

why Electoral College worked well when elections were nonpartisan—

Electoral College in the Nineteenth Century

Twelfth Amendment (1804)—

1876 race between Hayes and Tilden—

The Electoral College Today

1976 presidential election—

2000 presidential election—

Bush v. Gore (2000)—

reapportionment—

implications of reapportionment after 2000 census—

The States Drawn in Proportion to their Electoral College Votes (Figure 13.5)—

recent reapportionment favored which party?—

The Electoral College Reconsidered—

1) Popular Vote—

2) Congressional District Plan—
3) Keep the College, Abolish the Electors—

**Congressional Elections**

attention given congressional elections compared to presidential elections—

celebrity nominees for Congress—

the vast majority of party nominees for Congress—

**The Incumbency Advantage**

incumbency—

congressional reelection rates—

Staff Support—

size of staffs—

free mass mailings—

constituency services—

Media and Travel—

The “Scare-off” Effect—

Redistricting—

how used by the majority party in the state—

Texas redistricting in 2003 and protests of Texas Democratic legislators—

gerrymandering—

U.S. Census—

Supreme Court rulings on redistricting:

1) 

2)
3)

4)

dominant party’s use of redistricting to make incumbents safer—
effect of Supreme Court’s consideration of political redistricting based on partisan consideration as a political question and not a judicial question—

Countervailing Forces to the Incumbency Advantage

four major reasons the few incumbent members of Congress lose their election bids—

Redistricting—

Scandals—

2006 midterm election results and impact of scandals—

Presidential Coattails—

Midterm Elections

midterm elections—

why the president’s party usually loses seats in Congress during midterm elections—

Congressional Election Results, 1948-2006 (Table 13.2)—

sixth year of a two-term presidency—

six year itch and the second term of George W. Bush—

Senate elections and off-year patterns—

Voter Turnout in Presidential and Midterm Elections (page 498)—

The 2006 Midterm Elections

results in the fourteen midterm elections before 2002—

2002 midterm election—
2006 midterm election—
scandals and Bush Iraq policy in 2006 midterm elections—
Results of Selected Elections, 2006 (Table 13.3)—
Democratic Party control of Congress—

Reforming the Electoral Process
legitimacy of the electoral outcomes—
Protecting the Electoral Process—
effects of Electoral College’s ability to distort public input—
least likely reforms to succeed—

Regional Primaries
regional primaries—
twofold goal of this reform—

Campaign Finance Reform
McCain-Feingold Campaign Finance Reform of 2002—
soft money donations—

Online Voting
quest for a secure, reliable, fraud-free voting mechanism—
state boards of election—
use of voting machines—
Internet voting and instant democracy—
2000 experiment in Arizona with Internet voting—
2004 Michigan attempt with presidential caucus—
2004 U.S. military attempt at Internet voting—
Voting by Mail

mail-in ballots—
Oregon’s entirely mail-in election vote—
absentee balloting—
late reporting of mail-in votes and other concerns—

Modernizing the Ballot

electronic voting machine use—

Percentage of Voters Using Electronic Voting Machines, 2000-2006 (Figure 13.7)—

beliefs of supporters of electronic voting—

beliefs of opponents of electronic voting—

Research Ideas and Possible Paper Topics

1) Many reform proposals argue that the U.S. should adopt proportional representation. In this method of election, voters choose a party list as opposed to an individual candidate. This method strengthens parties and tends to increase voter turnout and the number of parties in the political system. Among those countries that use PR are: Holland, Poland, and others. Research the nature of PR and how it might work, or why it would not work, in the United States.

2) Accusations of voter irregularities in Ohio and Florida surfaced soon after the November 2004 presidential election, some of which were tied to the new electronic voting technologies which critics claimed lacked sufficient verification procedures for recount and accuracy. What were some of the allegations of fraud in Ohio and with regard to electronic voting? What measures, if any, do you think should be taken to secure the integrity of electronic voting procedures? What measures should be taken to assure voters that their votes count in an election?

3) Many scholars argue that low voter turnout is due to electoral rules, frequency of elections, apathy, etc. Discuss how you would change these impediments to voting and discuss the impact increased voter turnout would have on the electoral process.
4) Look at several sources discussing the Electoral College. What reforms have been proposed? How useful is the Electoral College now? Would you advocate a different approach? Does it matter that a presidential candidate can lose the popular vote and still become president as in the 2000 election? Hold a debate in class on the merits of the various routes to reform.

5) The recall of Governor Grey Davis of California in 2003 and the subsequent election of Arnold Schwarzenegger as the new governor was an unprecedented example of the use of voter recall in recent times. What is a recall election? What precipitated this recall in California and what were the partisan factors involved? Was this a harbinger for the future of elections or a unique event politically? What impact has this had on electoral politics?

### Web sites

**BlackBoxVoting.Org** is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, 501c(3) organization which states that it is “the official consumer protection group for elections, funded by citizen donations.” It focuses on information about irregularities in electronic voting technology.

[http://www.blackboxvoting.org](http://www.blackboxvoting.org)

**Project Vote-Smart** is a nonpartisan information service funded by members and nonpartisan foundations. It offers “a wealth of facts on your political leaders, including biographies and addresses, issue positions, voting records, campaign finances, evaluations by special interests.” It also offers “CongressTrack,” a way for citizens to track the status of legislation, members and committees, sponsors, voting records, clear descriptions, full text, and weekly floor schedules, as well as access to information on elections, federal and state governments, the issues, and politics. Includes thousands of links to the most important sites on the Internet.

[www.vote-smart.org](http://www.vote-smart.org)

The **American National Election Studies** Web site is a key source of data on voting behavior.

[http://www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org)

**Campaigns and Elections** magazine's Web site is oriented toward campaign professionals but is also useful to teachers and students. It offers articles, their table of contents from the print version, job opportunities, and more.

[www.campaignline.com](http://www.campaignline.com)

The **Federal Election Commission (FEC)** website offers campaign finance information, a citizens' guide to political contributions, news and information about elections and voting. Includes data about state regulations on voting (registration and residency rules, etc.) as well as elections data from a variety of elections.

[www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov)
**Rock-the-Vote** is an organization dedicated to getting young people involved in politics. [www.rockthevote.org](http://www.rockthevote.org)

The **League of Women Voters** provides information to voters across the country on state, federal, and local elections and works to encourage election reform and campaign finance reform. Their Web site offers an interactive section on election information. [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

The **Office of the Federal Register** coordinates the functions of the Electoral College on behalf of the Archivist of the United States, the States, the Congress and the American people. This site assembles a variety of information and statistics on the Electoral College, past and present. [http://www.archives.gov/federal_register/electoral_college/index.html](http://www.archives.gov/federal_register/electoral_college/index.html)

The **Census Bureau** has information on voter registration and turnout statistics. [www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html)

The **Electronic Freedom Foundation** is a donor-supported non-profit agency and activist group working to defend free speech, privacy, innovation, and consumer rights today by championing the public interest in every critical battle affecting digital rights. Their **E-Voting** page provides extensive information about this issue and the EEF’s efforts in this area. [http://www.eff.org/Activism/E-voting](http://www.eff.org/Activism/E-voting)

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**Practice Tests**

**MULTIPLE CHOICE**

1) Which of the following is not a requirement for voters to engage in prospective voting?
   a. voters must have an opinion on an issue
   b. voters must have an idea of what action, if any, the government is taking on an issue
   c. voters must have a personal, immediate, and direct stake in the outcome of the election
   d. voters must see a difference between the two parties on the issue

2) A primary election that is held to choose a party’s candidate and that allows only registered party members to vote is called a
   a. simple primary.
   b. closed primary.
   c. blanket primary.
   d. open primary.