Elections and Voting Behavior
How American Elections Work

• Three types of elections:
  – Select party nominees (primary elections)
  – Select officeholders (general elections)
  – Select options on specific policies

• Referendum:
  – State voters approve or disapprove proposed legislation.
  – Often used for constitutional amendments.
How American Elections Work

• Initiative petition:
  – Voters in some states propose legislation to be voted on.
  – Requires a specific number of signatures to be valid.
  – Can still be voted down by the people.
A Tale of Three Elections

• 1800: The First Electoral Transition of Power
  – No primaries, no conventions, no speeches
  – Newspapers were very partisan.
  – Campaigns focused on state legislatures - they were the ones that chose the Electoral College.
  – After many votes in the House, power was finally transferred to Jefferson peacefully.
A Tale of Three Elections

• 1896: A Bitter Fight over Economic Interests
  – Democrat’s main issue: Unlimited coinage of silver.
  – William Jennings Bryan won the Democratic Party nomination with speeches about the virtues of silver.
  – McKinley won the election, and the Republicans became the party of power.
A Tale of Three Elections

• 2004: The Ratification of a Polarizing Presidency
  – George W. Bush became the fourth Republican since McKinley to win a second term.
  – The intensity of the election was in part due to the controversy of the 2000 election.
  – 2004 campaign was characterized by negative campaigning.
  – Leadership in war on terrorism and “moral values” proved to be the key issues.
A Tale of Three Elections
Whether to Vote: A Citizen’s First Choice

• Deciding Whether to Vote
  – U.S. typically has low voter turnouts.
  – Some argue it is a rational choice to not vote.
  – Political Efficacy: The belief that one’s political participation really matters.
  – Civic Duty: The belief the in order to support democratic government, a citizen should always vote.
Whether to Vote: A Citizen’s First Choice

- The Decline of Turnout: 1892-2004 (Figure 10.2)
Whether to Vote: A Citizen’s First Choice

• Registering To Vote
  – Voter Registration: A system adopted by the states that requires voters to register well in advance of the election day.
  – Registration procedures differ from state to state.
  – Motor Voter Act: Requires states to permit people to register to vote when they apply for their driver’s license.
Whether to Vote: A Citizen’s First Choice

• Who Votes?
  – Education: More education = more likely to vote. Most important factor.
  – Age: Older = more likely to vote.
  – Race: Caucasian = more likely to vote. BUT, other ethnicities are higher with comparable education.
  – Gender: Female = more likely to vote.
Whether to Vote: A Citizen’s First Choice

• Who Votes? (continued)
  – Marital Status: Married = more likely to vote.
  – Union Membership: Union member = more likely to vote.
  – Traits are cumulative - possessing several adds up.
How Americans Vote: Explaining Citizens’ Decisions

• Mandate Theory of Elections
  – The idea that the winning candidate has a mandate from the people to carry out his or her platforms and politics.
  – Politicians like the theory better than political scientists do.
How Americans Vote: Explaining Citizen's Decisions

• Party Identification
  – People generally vote for a party they agree with.
  – Rise of candidate-centered politics has changed this view.
  – Now many voters are individualistic.
  – Characteristics of each candidate have become more important than party.
How Americans Vote: Explaining Citizen's Decisions

• Candidate Evaluations: How Americans See the Candidates
  – Candidates want a good visual image.
  – Most important dimensions are integrity, reliability, and competence.
  – Personality still plays a role.
How Americans Vote: Explaining Citizen's Decisions

• Policy Voting
  – Basing your vote choice on issue preferences.
  – Must know where they and the candidates stand on issues and see differences between candidates.
  – Candidates can be ambiguous on the issues.
  – The press tends to focus on the “horse race” not the issues.
  – Today candidates are forced to take a clear stand in the party primaries.
The Last Battle: The Electoral College

• Electoral College actually elects the President - founders wanted him chosen by the elite of the country
• States choose the electors
• Winner-Take-All system gives bigger emphasis to more populated states
The Last Battle: The Electoral College

• How it works today:
  – Each state has as many votes as it does Representatives and Senators.
  – Winner of popular vote typically gets ALL the Electoral College votes.
  – Electors meet in December, votes are reported by the vice president in January.
  – If no candidate gets 270 votes (a majority), the House of Representatives votes for president, with each state getting ONE vote.
Understanding Elections and Voting Behavior

• Democracy and Elections
  – Voters can steer government only when there are noticeable policy differences between the candidates.
  – Candidates who vow to continue popular policies are more likely to win elections.
  – Policies affect voting behavior through retrospective voting.
  – Bad economies make politicians nervous.
Understanding Elections and Voting Behavior

• Elections and the Scope of Government
  – Elections generally support government policies and power.
  – Voters feel they are sending a message to government to accomplish something.
  – Thus, the government expands to fill the needs of the voters.