

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

Figure 10.1

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 that 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.