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Chapter 6

Voting and Elections

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

Voting and elections are at the heart and start of representative democracy. Going back to early human civilization, people have been electing leaders for thousands of years. Voting gives people a say in the management of society. Voting can be organized in a number of different ways, each of which alters the potential outcomes of elections.

6.1 Voting

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section, you will learn:

1. Who votes and who doesn't.
2. Requirements for voting.
3. Why people choose to vote or not vote.

Ask yourself this one question: Is it worth your time to vote?

Not everybody thinks so, not all the time. A majority of citizens, in democratic republics around the world, think so when it comes to big elections. Elections for presidents and parliaments attract well over 50 percent of registered voters, all over the world. But fewer people think so in less prominent elections. In the United States, voter turnout drops by at least 10 points in the swing from presidential to non-presidential elections. Across the country, fewer than half the registered voters participate in local elections, which in some ways are the most important elections you face (the president or Congress won't put in or take out that speed camera at the local intersection). Overall, Americans vote less regularly than many of their counterparts in other republics. In fact, according to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the United States, the supposed bastion of democracy, ranks 132nd out of 172 nations in voter turnout. <http://www.idea.int/publications/vt/upload/Voter%20turnout.pdf> The turnout numbers are even worse if you consider not just registered voters but the whole voting-age population. And yet voting is the fundamental act of democratic participation—the thing that makes a nation a true republic. It is the axle on which the wheel of government turns. Especially in the United States—a nation full of people who will tell you it's the greatest country on earth, etc., etc., why don't more people vote? So let's take a moment to explore the question of voting before we ask that question—do you/would you vote?—again.

Who Votes?

The obvious part of the answer is citizens who are old enough. Universally, you have to be a citizen to vote in any country's elections. In most countries, the minimum age is 18. The minimum is 16 in Cuba, Brazil, Nicaragua and Austria; it's 17 in the Seychelles and Senegal, 19 in South Korea and 20 in Japan. Eight countries, including Bolivia, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Dominica, Djibouti, Fiji, Kuwait and Lebanon, have a 21-year-old minimum.

For much of its history, the voting age in the United States was 21. What changed that was the Vietnam War. Young men and women argued that if they could be drafted and sent to die for their country, they should also be able to vote. The debate actually began during World War II. President Dwight Eisenhower, who had been the Allied commander in the war, spoke in favor of the lower age in 1954. With thousands of young Americans being drafted and sent to Vietnam, and nationwide protests against the war growing, Congress was at last moved to act. In 1970, Congress passed amendments to the Voting Rights Act, lowering the minimum voting age to 18. The states of Oregon, Texas and Idaho sued to block that, and, in 1970, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Oregon v. Mitchell* that while the federal government could set the age for federal elections, states could choose minimum ages for their own elections. In March 1971 Congress then passed the 26th amendment (94–0 in the Senate and 401–19 in the House of Representatives), lowering the minimum age to 18. Within four months, three-quarters of state legislatures had approved the amendment, and it became law on July 5, 1971, when signed by President Richard Nixon. Constitutional change doesn't usually happen that fast.

Young people at that time campaigned hard to win the right to vote in the U.S. Ironically, no group of people votes less than young people do today.

Figure 6.1

[To Come] Voter Turnout by Age Group in the U.S.

The Vietnam era was a high point in youth voting; in 1972, 72.5 percent of young people ages 18–29 participated in the presidential election. It's been largely downhill from there. In the 2008 election, when 62.1 percent of that age group voted, it was the highest since 1992. And only 48.7 percent of registered voters ages 18–24 voted in 2008.

Clearly, not having the draft and a war staring you in the face probably took away some of the impetus to vote. But what other factors could be impacting voting?

Age and education: While young people aren't voting as much, older people still vote often. And more-educated people vote more as well. So while 27 percent of those 18–24 who didn't finish high school voted in 2008, 51.9 percent of those age 65 and up with the same level of education voted. Among those with a bachelor's degree or more, 70.2 percent of the 18–24 group voted, versus 82 percent of those 65 and up with at least a bachelor's degree.

What's different between the age groups? The longer you're around, the more you get a sense of what matters and how government might affect you. Older people may have houses and careers, and time to think about them, whereas younger people may be working multiple jobs and trying to finish school. (According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in the 2004 election, 23 percent of 18- to 24-year-old non-voters said they were just too busy.) More educated people may also have a better sense of how elections work, why they matter, how to register and when to vote. More educated people also tend to earn higher incomes, and that's another group that votes more often. In the 2008 election, 51.9 percent of those with less than \$20,000 in household income a year voted, versus 79.8 percent of those with more than \$100,000 in household income.

Race also appears to play a role. White and African-American citizens vote more often than do Hispanic- and Asian-American citizens. Among Asian-Americans, 47.6 percent voted in 2008, versus 49.9 percent of Hispanic-Americans (of any race), 64.7 percent of African-Americans and 66.1 percent of white Americans. The difference there may reflect the larger numbers of relatively recent immigrants among Asian and Hispanic citizens.

Why People Vote, and Why They Don't

So why don't more people vote, especially in the United States? In Australia, it is illegal not to vote—and you get can fined for not voting—and turnout sometimes reaches 95 percent. On the other hand, turnout also hits 95 percent in the Mediterranean island nation of Malta, where voting is not compulsory.

Many other countries make it easier to vote. In Germany, after you turn 18, you get a card in the mail telling about the next election in which you are eligible to vote. Most U.S states require a two-step process—first you register, some time before the election, and then later you get to vote. In many countries, voter-eligibility lists are taken from existing lists such as income tax or birth records (you turn 18, you can vote). Voter registration has been required to prevent voter fraud, such as voting by

people who are no longer living, though it's worth noting that the U.S. has had little if any voter fraud in the last 50 years.http://www.brennancenter.org/content/resource/policy_brief_on_the_truth_about_voter_fraud/

So making that process easier, such as allowing voters to register on election day, also is predicted to raise turnout. Among U.S. states, only North Dakota does not require registration. Ohio and North Carolina allow same-day registration, while Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Wyoming and Washington, D.C. have some form of same-day registration. But those don't always have an appreciably higher percentage of voter turnout; in the 2002 election, for example, only about half of North Dakota's voting-age population bothered to show up at the polls. In 2004 and 2006, however, same-day registration states averaged 10–12 percent higher turnout than traditional registration dates, according to one study. Arizona, Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington all allow voters to register online. More recently, however, a number of states have attempted to make it harder to vote. States such as Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Georgia enacted photo identification requirements for voters, with legislative sponsors arguing this was needed to prevent voter fraud. Critics argue that such requirements will hurt lower income and minority voters. They tend to vote Democrat; the bills were passed by Republican majorities in those state legislatures. In Pennsylvania, in a court case over the law, state officials couldn't produce any incidents of voter fraud as evidence.http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/16/pennsylvania-voter-id-law_n_1790844.html

As for higher or lower turnout in any given election year, correlation is not causality—because two things happen in close proximity doesn't mean that one is influencing the other. For example, a hot local or statewide election can boost the turnout in one community or state, or a lack of pressing elections on the ballot can depress it. Meanwhile, consider the circumstances in which elections take place. A low point in voter turnout came in 1996, when only about half the country voted and Bill Clinton was re-elected president. The economy was growing and the nation was at peace, so people may have been relatively content. It was the lowest turnout since 1924, when the country was also amid a sustained period of peaceful prosperity. Contentment tends to keep people away from the polls. Contrast that with 2008, when turnout was 10 points higher than in 1996. The nation was involved in two not entirely popular wars, the economy was crashing, and Barack Obama, the Democrat nominee, made a big push for young voters.

People vote when it seems to matter, but they have a lot of other reasons for voting: They vote to show support for the system, an act of patriotism. They vote because they can. People vote to support a candidate, or vote because they don't like one. They vote to make a statement. They vote because they care about what happens to their neighborhoods and communities.

Some people vote by party. If there's an R or a D after a candidate's name on the ballot, that's who they choose. Here's a true story from my neighborhood. A few years back, an incumbent Democrat state senator was seeking re-election. She was attractive, well-regarded, in a fairly Democrat-leaning district. The Republicans were unlikely to put forth a serious candidate when they had so little chance of winning.

But one Republican filed. He was a quiet, pleasant guy from my neighborhood, known mostly for looking a bit like Keith Richards and for frequently walking to the local market for a latte. One of my students actually interviewed him—apparently the only person who ever bothered to do so. The candidate informed my student that the Russians had tried to shoot him with a laser rifle (he knew it was the Russians because they're the only ones with a laser rifle), but that the shot had bounced off his belt buckle. They had tried to kill him because they couldn't abide the thought of the son of God becoming president of the United States.

This guy didn't campaign much, but it got out that he was, in fact, mentally ill (although, by all accounts, harmless). Nonetheless, in the general election, he got 30 percent of the vote. That many people, that year, were determined to vote Republican, probably not knowing much about the candidate they had chosen.

The candidate might have had a better-sounding name than his opponent, which also seems to make a difference. I tried to convince a friend of mine to run for judge, but he said his name—Lamb—wouldn't probably fly with the voters. I then tried to convince him to change his name to “Lamb-of-God” to pick up the religious conservative vote, but he wouldn't go for that either.

The list of reasons for not voting is a bit longer than reasons why people do vote:

First, voting is not free. It costs time—to actually vote, to become even the slightest bit informed on candidates and issues—and even a little money if you drive to the polling place or stick a stamp on your mail-in ballot. On top of which, you have to register to vote, which, until Motor Voter registration, required you to go to a public library or other public facility and fill out a form. With motor voter, you can easily register when you renew your driver's license. But either way, you have to take a step to be able to vote.

It's a longer process than that required in many other countries. On top of that, the United States has lots of elections and very long ballots—lots of races to decide—further complicating voters' task when they sit down to choose.

In some U.S. states, jury pools are chosen from voter registration lists, so some people do not register to vote so they can avoid jury duty. One study showed that the threat of jury duty reduced voter registration by 11 percent. <http://www.electionstudies.org/resources/papers/documents/nes002296.pdf>

People also don't vote because they feel uninformed. Not having followed politics and elections, they may feel as though they are so uninformed that they would be voting blind. People also may not vote because they don't like any of the candidates; as a form of protest; for religious reasons; or the classic, traditional excuse: "My vote doesn't count."

An Argument for Voting

This is the point where I tell my students, "This is what I think, and I think you should vote." And, like I also tell my students, you will have to decide for yourself. But most of the arguments against voting don't make a lot of sense, at least to me.

First, it's not difficult to become informed enough to make a sensible choice based on what you believe and what matters to you in your own life. Many state election departments send out information on candidates; candidates themselves make substantial effort to contact voters with information. Granted, it's all biased in favor of the candidate, but it usually tells you something about which way the candidate leans. Looking at which groups endorse candidates can tell us even more. Are they supported by business, labor or environmental groups? And, in the age of the internet, candidates and interest groups provide lots of information about who's for what and why. You don't have to be an expert to make an informed vote.

If you don't like the candidates, find one you do like, or run yourself. And if you do a little research, you should be able to distinguish between the bad and the not-so-bad. We should never expect to agree 100 percent with any candidate.

As a form of protest, it's one of the weakest. If you're trying to make a statement by boycotting an election, how can we tell if this is a protest or if you're just lazy?

Finally, voting gives you the right to complain. If you don't vote, and you don't like what government is doing, who can you blame but yourself? That's because your vote always counts.

At this point, you should be asking, how can that be true? In elections in the U.S., with frequently thousands and millions of voters casting ballots, what difference

can one vote make? Sometimes not much, but sometimes a lot. Sometimes elections are very close: In September 1996, in King County, Washington, voters faced a ballot measure to impose a local sales tax to fund a new baseball stadium and keep the Seattle Mariners from fleeing town. The measure failed by 20 votes—you and your friends could have tipped the election one way or the other had you been there to vote. The Mariners subsequently went on a big winning streak and nearly made the World Series (which, for Mariner fans, is about as good as it gets), and in October the state Legislature came up with a new funding package for the stadium. The team's success helped, but if the vote hadn't been so close, the Legislature might not have made the moves it did.

And that points to another way in which your vote counts: **Margin of victory**¹ matters greatly in electoral outcomes. If a candidate wins by a lot, say, more than 60 percent, she or he is less likely to get serious opposition next time around. Conversely, if the candidate just squeaks by, opponents will be lining up for the next go-round, because that's a vulnerable candidate. Voting is an aggregate function: It's the total that matters, not the individual vote. So even if your candidate seems like a safe bet to win, adding to that total helps them in the future. And even if your candidate seems likely to lose, the closer her or she gets, the more likely it is that the candidate you don't like gets a stronger, better funded opponent the next time around.

Margin of victory clearly matters after the election as well. When Bill Clinton was first elected president in 1992, he won with only 43 percent of the popular vote. In part that was because of the third-party candidacy of billionaire H. Ross Perot, who got nearly 19 percent, leaving incumbent President George H.W. Bush with 31 percent. Although later research showed that Perot voters were pretty evenly split between people who would have otherwise voted for Bush or Clinton, so that the outcome would not have changed without Perot in the race, Clinton's low vote total had an impact on his relations with Congress. Why listen to a president whose popular mandate was clearly so weak? That left the new president with a somewhat rocky road to travel with the legislative branch, and gave Republicans an opening to call for action in the 1994 elections. And in those elections, they took majorities in both the House and the Senate.

If the majority in Congress swings one way or another, or especially if a president wins by a lot, that sends a message that the electorate wants change, and maybe even wants it pointing in one a particular direction. Anyone who's watched Congress for any length of time will see those results in action; conservative or liberal agendas have more success if elections point toward conservatism or liberalism. And it's not just who's in Congress as a result of the elections (although that obviously makes a big difference). The Democrats still held a commanding majority in the U.S. House of Representatives after the 1980 elections, but passed

1. The amount one candidate wins an election by. This is important in determining how much opposition the candidate will see in the following election.

President Reagan's tax cuts after seeing how well he did in the 1980 vote. And in fact, research shows that, over time, Congress generally votes in accord with the broadly expressed will of the people.

Finally, voting is a unique experience. It is the one time in your life when you can say you are absolutely the equal of everybody else. Your vote counts no more or no less than anybody else's—you, me, Bill Gates and the president are all on equal footing at the ballot box.

So, now, ask yourself again: Is it worth your time to vote?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- People vote to support the system, to have a say, and to support or oppose a particular candidate.
- People don't vote because they say they lack the time, lack motivation, and lack information.
- Voter turnout varies from year to year and from group to group. Older, richer, more educated people tend to vote more often than do younger, poorer, less educated people.

EXERCISES

1. Is it worth your time to vote? List the reasons why you would or wouldn't vote in a given election.
2. Find out what it would take to register voters in your state. Set up a table on campus and see how many people you can convince to register.
3. Students on campus on how many are registered to vote; how many plan to vote in the next election; and how many voted in the last election. Compare your results with those of national surveys.

6.2 Electoral Systems

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section you will learn:

1. How elections are structured in the U.S. and elsewhere.
2. How we choose presidential candidates in the U.S.
3. How the Electoral College works and why it's there.

Elections are how officials get chosen in nations all around the world. States use a variety of systems to organize elections. First, let's talk about what we do in the United States, and then compare that with happens elsewhere.

Elections in the United States

The U.S. has one of the longest, most complicated electoral systems on the planet. There's an election for something every year, and most elections involve a two-step process—a primary election followed by a general election. You probably know the broad details: Every four years we elect a president. Every two years, we elect members of the House of Representatives. Also every two years, approximately one-third of the seats in the U.S. Senate are up for election, as senators serve six-year terms.

On top of this, states typically also elect governors, state legislators, and other statewide officials on even-numbered years. Some states elect governors in non-presidential years, some at the same time as the presidential election. Odd-numbered years tend to be for local elections, such as city and county councils, with elections for judges thrown in there somewhere in states where judges are elected.

The primary election process varies from state to state. Most primary elections reduce numbers of candidates to no more than one per party. Progressive reformers in the U.S. in the early 20th century pushed for primary elections as a

way to challenge the power of political machines, state and local party organizations that controlled the nominating process and thereby who could run for office. By 1917, all but four states had adopted primaries for state and local elections.

Each method of choosing candidates, either through primary elections or by party meetings or conventions, has its advantages. When parties were in charge, they were able to exert some discipline on candidates and to push for particular agendas. Then again, parties tended to at least look like they were under the thumb of interest groups such as railroads, and the system as whole was not very democratic. Primary elections, in contrast, invite a much higher level of political participation and offer more popular control of the electoral system. It also makes election seasons longer, and may have made the party system more polarized, as the people who do show up to vote in primaries tend to be more liberal or more conservative than the general electorate.

Either system can distort the outcome. In the presidential election of 1912, former President Theodore Roosevelt decided to challenge his successor, incumbent President William Howard Taft. Roosevelt won nine state primaries and Taft only one, but since the party still controlled the nominating process, Taft was the nominee. Roosevelt ran as an independent, splitting the vote with Taft and handing the election to Democrat Woodrow Wilson. Contrast that with the 1972 election, when the Democratic Party might have preferred someone other than U.S. Sen. George McGovern to run against Richard Nixon, but McGovern's strong showing in state primaries pushed him to the nomination. Nixon won handily in the general election.

Primary elections have the advantage of making it more likely that the winner will be elected with a majority of the votes cast, especially in **winner-take-all elections**². If there was no primary, and anybody could file for the general election, the winner would be the candidate gets a plurality—the most votes, not the majority of votes. So, in a three-person race, the winner could have as few as 34 percent of the votes—not a very democratic outcome. A primary election, by limiting who's on the general-election ballot, tends to produce winners who get more than 50 percent of the vote. If, as in some states, one candidate from any registered party ends up on the general election ballot, there still could be multiple candidates from which to choose. In the U.S., however, if two of the candidates are a Democrat and a Republican, one of them is more likely to end up with more than half the vote.

2. Elections in which one candidate with the most votes is chosen to represent an electoral district.

In 39 states, voters must register to vote by party. So, if you register as an independent, you may or may not get to vote in the primary election (state rules

vary). Choice of party can happen when you first register to vote, or, as in eight states, you choose which party you will vote for on the day you vote in the primary (sometimes called a Montana-style primary, or the pick-a-party primary). Any primary election where you have to declare a primary is called a **closed primary**³, because voters can only choose among the candidates of their declared party. Parties prefer a closed primary because A. it gives them access to people who say they are Republicans or Democrats and B. it prevents **crossover voting**⁴. The fear among party leaders is that members of the other party will “cross over” and change the outcome of one party’s nomination process—say, for example, a bunch of Republicans cross over and vote for a Democrat. The fear is that it will result in the nomination of a weaker candidate, but there’s not much evidence that this happens. In 1980, Washington state voters did appear to cross over to vote against incumbent Gov. Dixy Lee Ray, but not because they thought state Sen. (now U.S. Rep.) Jim McDermott was the weaker candidate. As voters said at the time, that election was about “ABD—Anyone But Dixy.” McDermott lost to a Republican in the general election.

The opposite of a closed primary is an **open primary**⁵, in which voters can choose whichever candidate of whichever party they find most appealing. So you might vote for a Republican in one race and a democrat in the next. One variation of this system is called a Cajun primary, after the state of Louisiana, where the top two candidates advance to the general election, regardless of party. Louisiana adopted this system in 1975; there’s a general election run-off only if no candidate gets more than 50 percent of the vote.

Washington state is a bit of an anomaly among state election systems. From 1935 to 2003, Washington had a blanket primary, a system later adopted in California. Under a blanket primary, voters were not required to register by party, and could vote for any candidate of any party in a primary election. The top vote getter of each party advanced to the general election.

3. A primary election in which voters are restricted to choosing among candidates from the party of their choice.
4. A situation where voters from one party vote in another party’s primary, distorting the results.
5. A primary in which voters can choose among candidates of any party represented on the ballot.

In 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that California’s blanket primary was unconstitutional, because it violated the parties’ right to freedom of association. Washington’s law was similarly invalidated in 2003. Interest groups and voters filed an initiative to restore the primary that year, while the state used a Montana-style primary in the interim. The initiative passed, but the measure was eventually again struck down by the federal courts. The state Legislature passed a top-two primary in 2004. If you think that elected officials don’t care what people think, consider this: While state party organizations, of which the legislators were effectively members, were dead set against an open primary, 76 percent of voters surveyed said they were for it. A legislator would have to be unconscious to not see which way that wind was blowing, and most were wide awake for that vote.

Nonetheless, the state governor vetoed the legislation. In the meantime, another initiative passed, and in 2008, the U.S. Supreme Court overruled the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and let the new law stand. In 2008, Washington state had its first truly open primary, with several state legislative races in which the top two vote getters were either both Republicans or both Democrats, and who advanced to a run-off in the general election. California, also by initiative, adopted a top-two system in 2010. Alaska had an open primary from 1947 until 2000. The legislature there replaced it with a closed primary; voters now must request a primary ballot for the party of their choice.

Primary elections are followed by general elections, in which the winner is chosen from however many candidates qualified via the primary. In the United States, the election system is generally by district or state and is called winner-take-all or first-past-the-post. If there are more than two candidates, the winner need only have a plurality—more votes than anyone else. This doesn't happen with a top-two primary, where the winner, by definition, has taken 50 percent of the votes plus one. This has one important effect on U.S. politics, namely the two-party system. Winner-take-all elections effectively narrow voters' choices, as a typical voter is more likely to vote for a candidate who has a reasonable chance of winning. So you may lean Libertarian or socialist or something else entirely, but unless you just want to make a statement, you're more likely to vote for a Republican or a Democrat. The parties, as a result, are quite broad in the range of ideologies they encompass. At various times in American political history, Republicans (and Democrats) have been elected who were actually more liberal (or more conservative) than the Democrats (or Republicans) they were replacing. As the comedian Will Rogers once said, "I am not a member of an organized party. I am a Democrat."

There are alternatives to this system. Some countries use **proportional representation**⁶. Under this system, if a party gets 5 percent of the vote, they get five percent of the seats in the national legislature. Israel's national elections are conducted entirely in this way—there are no district elections for the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. There are a number of modified versions of this system, so that, for example, there might be a series of 10-member districts, and in that district, parties get seats according to the percentage of votes they receive. This encourages multi-party systems, because unlike in a winner-take-all system, your candidate doesn't have to win—your party just has to get some percentage of the vote to get seats in the legislature. This system has further variations. In a closed-list system, voters are confronted with a party-selected list of candidates, ordered by the party's preference. If Party A wins 60 percent of the vote, the top six people on its list will get 6 of the 10 seats in that district. In an open-list system, voters may also choose which of the party's candidates they would prefer to see in office. This latter system is more common in Europe and is also used in South Africa. In some

6. An electoral system in which parties are allocated legislative seats based on the party's percentage of the total vote.

countries, such as Germany, Mexico and New Zealand, a mixed system is employed: Some seats are awarded via district elections, others by proportional representation.

Yet another system is called the **single transferrable vote**⁷. This requires multi-member districts. Voters are presented a list of candidates from all parties; they then rank the candidates in order of preference. Voters don't have to choose more than one. A formula is used (dividing the total valid vote by the number of seats to be filled, plus one, and then adding one vote) to determine the minimum number of votes needed to take office. If, say, that number is 10,001, any candidate reaching the threshold is elected. If the candidate gets more than that number of votes, the remaining votes are redistributed to the voters' second choice. The least popular candidate is eliminated outright, and her or his votes are redistributed to the remaining candidates who were somebody's No. 2 pick. This process is repeated until all the seats are filled. This system is designed to address "wasted votes," which rather ignores the importance of margin of victory in influencing both policy and future elections. Nonetheless, it is used in some elections in Australia, India, and Ireland, and in Cambridge, Mass.

The upside of proportional representation is that more particular viewpoints get represented in government. Also, in winner-take-all elections, a legislative majority may effectively be chosen by less than 50 percent of the total vote, thus not truly reflecting the preferences of the overall majority of voters. The downside of proportional representation is that no party may have a majority in the legislature and hence not much may get done. Italy, using a party-based proportional system, has had nearly 60 governments since 1946, as it has been rare for any coalition of parties to maintain a stable majority for very long. Germany, however, employing a multi-party system for about the same period of time, has had fairly stable governments despite no one party ever having an outright majority in the Bundestag.

One recent electoral reform has been term limits, or the idea that anyone should only be able to serve for so long in a particular office. The United States passed the 22nd amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1947, imposing a two-term limit on the presidency. More recently, however, 15 states successfully adopted term limits for state legislators. Several attempted to limit the terms of their congressional delegations, but federal courts concluded that would put the states in the position of unilaterally amending the Constitution, and said no.

The argument for term limits is that "career politicians," who may serve for some decades, become too out of touch with the voters and too beholden to special interests. The argument against term limits is that 1. it's undemocratic because it

7. A voting system sometimes used in multi-member districts. Voters rank candidates in order of preference; candidates not receiving enough votes are eliminated and their votes are reallocated according to voters' preferences. The goal is to provide representation proportional to voters' preferences for different political parties.

doesn't allow voters to vote for whom they want and 2. it actually strengthens special interests. This is because policymaking typically involves three groups: legislators, interest groups, and appointed public officials, who run state or federal agencies who implement the laws. Term limits, by limiting the experience of legislators, actually makes the other two groups—bureaucrats and lobbyists—more powerful, and you don't get to vote for them. Whatever their faults, veteran legislators are more likely to know when they're being fed a line of bovine effluent. Legislatures where term limits have been imposed have lost a lot of institutional knowledge and leadership, with less than happy results. <http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/legisdata/legislative-term-limits-overview.aspx>

U.S. Presidential Elections

We should take a moment to discuss U.S. presidential elections, if only because there's not really anything else like it on earth, and many people find it confusing.

The election of the president starts with the nomination process. To be elected, a presidential candidate typically has to be nominated by a major party, although John Anderson in 1980, H. Ross Perot in 1992 and 1996, and Ralph Nader in 2000 were able to mount national campaigns as independents.

For much of the history of the country, the nominating process was controlled by the parties, with national nominating conventions often becoming battlegrounds where rival candidates jockeyed for favor among state delegations. Progressive reformers early in the 20th century began to push for democratizing the process, leading states to increasingly adopt primaries and caucuses as methods for choosing presidential nominees. But as recently as 1968, Hubert Humphrey won the Democrat nomination for president without entering a single primary.

Now, no candidate could get the nomination without entering most if not all of the primaries. They begin in January of election year with the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary, and stretch on into the early summer. States have been steadily moving their primaries up so as to attract more attention from the candidates—having an early primary means candidates visit, spend money and make promises. In some ways, that's what politics is all about.

Most states have primary elections for presidential nominees, but about a dozen states still use caucuses. Texas uses both, choosing some delegates through the primary and some via the caucus. The **caucus system**⁸ involves a series of meetings, starting at places such as schools and people's homes, leading up to district and state conventions, where delegates ultimately decide who gets the nod for that state. The state convention chooses a slate of representatives to go to the national

8. A meeting of citizens to choose delegates as part of the process of writing a party platform and choosing a presidential candidate.

convention, who will cast their ballots (each state gets so many votes, largely based on population) to decide who will be the party's standard-bearer in November.

Primaries, by contrast, are pretty simple: People vote, and candidates are awarded convention delegates on the basis of that vote. Some states use winner-take-all rules—the top vote getter gets all the delegates—party regulars and activists who will attend the national convention, pledged to vote for the winner. Some award delegates proportionally based on the vote.

Primary turnout is pretty low—usually less than 50 percent. Caucus turnout is even lower, but it does invite a deeper level of participation among voters, and brings people together in their neighborhoods to talk politics. Because caucuses are a multi-stage process, the results at the precinct level are both hard to judge and sometimes misreported. In 1976, despite having spent much of the last two years there, little-known Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter came in second behind “uncommitted” in the opening round of the Iowa caucuses. Somehow this got reported as a victory, and propelled Carter to the nomination and the presidency. Caucuses also can be overrun by a committed group, as when televangelist Pat Robertson won the Washington state caucuses in 1988. The low turnout in both primaries and caucuses usually means that the people who show up are more liberal or more conservative than the voters at large. The people who really care about issues are the ones who will more often make the effort to vote or otherwise get involved. This makes it more difficult for moderate candidates to win the nomination. So a successful presidential candidate often has to appeal to a more conservative or liberal element within her or his party, and then dance back toward the middle once the nomination is locked up.

The nominating campaign is wrapped up by spring. As candidates carve out victories among the states, they get more attention, and funds dry up for the also-rans. No Democrat or Republican nominee hasn't had the nomination locked up well before the convention since 1972. The conventions have become, instead, elaborate dog-and-pony shows designed to boost the nominees' chances heading into the November election. This has made the national party conventions not just tedious but largely pointless. In 2004, John Kerrey and George W. Bush had their nominations nailed down well before the conventions, leading the television networks to cover very little of the convention proceedings.

Earning a Degree from the Electoral College

After the nomination comes the general election, on the first Tuesday in November every four years. As you may know, in the United States citizens elect a president through the Electoral College. This is one of the oddest features of American

politics, and worth explaining if only because it confuses so many people. The easy explanation is that we have 51 separate, winner-take-all elections for president—50 states plus the District of Columbia. Each state gets electoral votes equal to the total size of its congressional delegation—senators (two) plus representatives. So for the 2012 election, California had the most electoral votes, 55, because it has the most people of any state (37.6 million) and hence the biggest House delegation. Alaska, D.C., Delaware, Montana, Vermont, Wyoming and the Dakotas all have the minimum, three.

The electors are real people—typically Republicans or Democrats who are chosen by their respective parties. They may be high party officials or big donors. The only requirements are that an elector cannot be a currently sitting elected official, and cannot have engaged in an insurrection against the United States, or assisted with one (part of the 14th amendment to the Constitution, following the Civil War). In December they gather in state capitals to cast their ballots, which are subsequently counted in the U.S. Senate and the election is certified in January.

There are 538 total electoral votes, and a candidate has to get at least 270 to win. So he or she has to win enough states to get to 270. This changes how candidates pursue their campaigns, because all of them are smart enough to realize that a state such as Texas likely will vote Republican, while California will vote Democrat. The election then tends to come down to “**swing states**”⁹—states that can go either way depending on the year. Candidates thus concentrate their efforts on those states, while not completely neglecting the others. On the other hand, the states with only three electoral votes don’t get as much attention. So in 2012, it was expected that the election would come down to a handful of states: Nevada, Colorado, Iowa, Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Virginia, North Carolina and Florida.

How did the U.S. decide to use this somewhat confusing system? It was a compromise between letting the people choose the president and letting Congress do it. The Founding Fathers didn’t have total faith in the citizens, a problem compounded by the fact that the new nation was just under 4 million—less than New York City today—spread all up down the East Coast, without any form of rapid transportation or mass communication. They feared that voters would turn only to candidates they knew—“favorite sons”—making it harder for anyone to get elected nationally. Letting the Congress elect the president would upset the balance of power created in the Constitution—the president would owe his office to Congress, making it less likely that he could stand up to them. So the **Electoral College**¹⁰, originally to be a college of learned persons, chosen by the people, was the compromise. States were allowed to decide their own method of choosing electors, but by 1860, only South Carolina wasn’t letting the people choose their electors (they still had electors chosen by the state legislature). As soon as political parties

9. States presumed to be likely to go (“swing”) either way in a presidential election, as opposed to states presumed to be solidly Republican or Democrat. Also used in local elections with reference to “swing districts,” which do not appear to lean heavily toward one party or another.

10. The system by which the United States chooses a president. Candidates in effect face 51 separate state-level elections, including the District of Columbia. Each state gets electoral votes equal to the size of its total congressional delegation. In all but two states—Maine and Nebraska—the result is a winner-take-all election so that the winning candidate gets all of those electoral votes. The overall winner must get 270 electoral votes to become president.

began to germinate—basically, after the election of George Washington, the electors rapidly came to stand for one candidate or another.

The Electoral College is apportioned in part by population, and therefore depends on the Census taken every 10 years. Because if a state grows enough in population to gain a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives (or loses enough people to lose a seat), they gain not only congressional clout but also more attention from candidates. Washington state and Massachusetts literally went to court over the apportionment from the 1990 census, which Washington won by virtue of being able to count members of the Armed Forces officially stationed in Washington and though temporarily assigned elsewhere in the world. That's how far states will go to get that extra congressional seat and electoral vote.

It's a complicated system, and not always popular with voters. And, on several occasions, the winner of the popular vote doesn't actually win the election, most recently in 2000. The alternative would be a national election by popular vote. Proponents of the Electoral College say that would allow one region of the country to dominate elections, which is questionable. So why don't we change? Big states think it helps them, and small states think it helps them. Big states like the influence a lot of electoral votes generates: Candidates show up, spend money, and make promises. Small states, meanwhile, claim to see the same advantage. In a contest where the magic number of 270 is achieved by piecing together enough state victories to get there, every state counts. So, in the 2012 election, states such as New Hampshire (four votes) and Vermont (three) mattered in what was expected to be a close election.

In the United States, Election Season Never Ends

No, it doesn't. The character of U.S. elections is to some extent defined by our rather broad conception of freedom of speech. We can't, for example, limit the campaign season, as they do in the United Kingdom. And as long as the courts equate spending money with freedom of speech, it is difficult to limit the amount of money that can be spent on an election campaign.

In a parliamentary system, governments have to have elections every so often, such as every five years. But elections can come sooner—majority parties sometimes try to call for elections when things are going well for them, or a no-confidence vote in parliament can force a new election.

That means in the United Kingdom, for example, the whole campaign season can last only a month. An election is called, and with a matter of weeks, people vote. In the United States, in contrast, candidates for the 2016 presidential election will

start visiting Iowa and New Hampshire in 2013. With political speech the most protected form of speech in the U.S., it is virtually impossible to keep anyone from campaigning for any office at any time. As a consequence, election campaigns go on for months and years, which may actually give voters a feeling of burnout long before it's time to cast their ballots. It also means you can say anything you want, no matter how egregiously false it might be (such as Republican claims that President Obama's health care plans included federal "death panels" who would decide who lives or dies. There was, in fact, nothing of the sort in the bill).

Money and Elections

If you want to run for office, you need money. Jesse Unruh, a California political operator with a talent for a pithy phrase, famously said, "Money is the mother's milk of politics." Money makes campaigns possible and campaigns successful. But like oxygen for fire, it's a necessary but insufficient ingredient. Hillary Clinton spent \$250 million pursuing the Democrat nomination in 2008 and lost. Magazine publisher Steve Forbes spent \$86 million—seven times what George W. Bush had spent by the time Forbes dropped out of the campaign in February 2000—and didn't win a single primary. Michael Huffington spent \$28 million to run for the U.S. Senate in California in 1994, and lost. So having a lot of money is not a guarantee of victory. But without some money, it's very hard to get elected.

Money can do a lot of things for a candidate:

Advertising: Advertising gets your name out there, and your ideas, and, quite often, something about how wrong your opponent is. The bigger the race, the more the candidate will need broadcast media—radio, TV and the internet—to reach voters across the state and the country. The more local the race, the less that makes sense. Broadcast advertising in an urban area, for example, will reach a lot of voters who don't live in your district and can't vote for you anyway. So that's effectively a waste of resources. Candidates may also advertise on billboards, transit placards, and in print media such as newspapers and magazines. Not as many people subscribe to newspapers as once did. On the other hand, the people who do subscribe tend to be more educated and therefore more likely to vote.

Candidates used to spend money on doo-dads—buttons, combs, pens, emery boards—small items with the candidate's name and something about what they're running for. People don't wear campaign buttons so much anymore, but items such as pens and emery boards might still catch somebody's eye. Nonetheless, they're increasingly rare in contemporary campaigns.

Money can also buy direct mail, which, in local races, can be very effective. Candidates, their allies and their opponents all buy lists of registered voters and mail to them directly, touting the candidate's virtues, and telling you how wrong her or his opponent is. Usually this comes in the form of a postcard of some size, featuring a picture of the candidate, attractively posed with children, pets (and usually a dog as opposed to a cat or an iguana) and/or old people, and the printed equivalent of a few sound bites about what a great person she or he is. The advantage of direct mail is that it can reach people in your district at home. The disadvantage is that it's still junk mail, and potentially lost amid the ads, credit card offers and pleas for money that clutter a typical mailbox.

Hire consultants and staff: Hiring a good consultant can help a candidate polish her or his message, say the right things, and look a little more polished. Good staff is essential to a campaign—people who can organize events, get them filled up with your supporters—people who can get you to the church on time, as it were.

Travel: The bigger the race, the more you're going to have to travel. So a national campaign will spend a certain amount of money just driving and jetting around the country, meeting voters, giving speeches, kissing babies and shaking hands.

Hiring pollsters: Candidates in bigger races regularly pollsters to find out where their support is among voters, which issues matter most in this election, and trying to figure out where their own and their opponents' weaknesses are. Like a big company test-marketing a new product, candidates in major races, if they have the money, try to leave little to chance. Nonetheless, one suspects, that the tiniest bit of common sense ought to tell you if, say, the economy is the big issue in the campaign. If there isn't a war, it usually is.

Whether you need all this, depends upon the arena. A statewide or national campaign might require millions of dollars just to be competitive, but a local race typically costs much less. And at the street level of local politics, getting elected often is a question of who you know and how much you're known. Somebody who's been working in the community for a long time, in business and in civic activities such as charities, will be known by more people. If they've made a favorable impression, those folks will tell their friends that Candidate X is a pretty good guy (or woman), a solid citizen and a straight shooter.

The other key campaign component at the local level is doorbelling. Nothing apparently beats the candidate walking the neighborhoods, knocking on doors and meeting the voters. Candidates who've pounded the pavement to get elected say they meet all kinds of people, from the literally naked to the nominally nasty, but

report that most people are fairly normal and are actually pleased to meet the person who represents them.

Where does the money come from? All over, but from some folks more than others. For example, in the 2010 U.S. congressional elections, 40–50 percent (depending on whether it was a House or Senate race and which party) came from large individual donors, followed by 10–30 percent from political action committees, 10–20 percent from small individual donors, and 3–20 percent from the candidates' own funds. Political action committees are organizations that solicit money from members, who may be businesses, individuals or unions, and contribute to campaigns. U.S. federal election law still prohibits direct corporate contributions to candidates, and the size of donations is severely limited—\$2,500 per election to one candidate from one individual, and \$5,000 per election to one candidate from one PAC. So the most a PAC could give would be \$10,000—\$5,000 for the primary and \$5,000 more for the general election. There are no limits on how much of their own money candidates can spend.

Reforms in the 1970s and 1980s created this rule, but it was rather like squeezing a balloon. Money in politics is like electricity—it seeks the path of least resistance. As barriers to direct contributions grew, individuals and organizations turned to independent spending. Most recently, the U.S. Supreme Court in a case called *Citizens United* voted 5–4 that the government could not limit any kind of election expenditure anyone wanted to make on their own behalf. So corporations and individuals can give as much money as they want to organizations that are technically separate from any candidate. And the organizations no longer have to report who their donors are, circumventing one of what had been one of the positive features of American campaign finance—transparency. It seems like a pretty thin line; it shouldn't be hard to figure out which organizations support your candidate and oppose the other one. And even though such organizations aren't supposed to consult with candidates or their campaign staff, it shouldn't be too difficult to figure out what's needed to support the campaign.

And so a lot of money gets spent, especially in the United States, on election campaigns. A lot of money. In 2008, U.S. candidates spent \$5.3 billion, including more than \$1 billion in the race for the presidency. Around \$4 billion was spent on the 2010 elections, and 2012 spending was expected to reach nearly \$10 billion. It's a lot of money, but we should put this in some perspective. Businesses in the United States spend more than \$100 billion a year on advertising; the automobile industry alone spends as much in six months as the candidates spend in an entire two-year campaign cycle.

Does this matter? Clearly, underfunded candidates don't get elected. Repeated research shows that vote totals tend to track fundraising totals, to a point. At some point, a candidate just needs to have enough money. So, outspending your opponent by a factor of 5 or 6 to 1 means you have a much better chance of winning. But the more that margin falls, the worse your odds become. If candidates have enough money to run a campaign and get their message out there, who has the most money won't matter quite as much.

Aside from who wins, the other concern is whether campaign contributions affect how sitting legislators vote. The evidence tends to be inconclusive. First, contributors tend to give money to people who agree with them anyway. Under those circumstances, the campaign contribution may have some influence on who gets elected, but it may not actually be changing anybody's mind when they get there. Then again, lobbying organizations and interest groups who can make campaign contributions are probably more effective than those who can't.

One reform that has been tried has been public funding of elections, so that candidates don't have to rely on private donations to run their campaigns. In U.S. states where the amount of money offered was substantial, such as Minnesota and Wisconsin, candidates comply with the program and raise and spend less money. In states where the system is not well-funded, such as Hawaii and Arizona, serious candidates decline to participate, since adhering to the spending limits and taking the public money effectively disarms you in the face of your opponent, who can spend whatever he or she wants (more than you).

Presidential campaigns were briefly publically funded in the United States. Beginning with the 1976 campaign, major party candidates took advantage of the law and accepted public money in exchange for limiting the amount of outside contributions they received. But by 2000, candidates increasingly turned down public money in favor of private fundraising, which allowed them to raise and spend much more money than they could otherwise. Consider that President Obama spent \$240 million in the 2008 primary campaign alone, while the federal spending limit for those accepting public funds was \$10 million.

Although the data are incomplete, the United States spends more per capita on campaign finance than do other democracies. For 2008, we spent about \$17 per person; Canadians spent \$12 per person and in Australia they spent only \$7. In other countries, such as Sweden and Mexico, campaigns are largely publically financed. Three quarters of the money spent on elections in Norway is public money, and political ads are banned from TV and radio. This kind of approach is, in fact, very common in Europe and South America.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The United States has a two-party system because of its winner-take-all elections.
- Proportional representation systems tend to produce multiparty states.
- Money is a necessary but insufficient ingredient for electoral success.

EXERCISE

1. What are the election laws in your state? What kind of primary does your state have? Do you have to register to vote by party? Does your state have a website for campaign finance information? How much did candidates in your area spend on the last election? Who were the big donors to those campaigns?

6.3 Political Parties

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

Another important feature of electoral politics is parties. **Political parties**¹¹ are a basic way in which the conduct of politics is organized. Parties are in some sense political factions, a broad-based form of interest group. They are formal organizations of like-minded individuals who unite in pursuit of common political objectives.

Parties are not mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, and yet much of American politics is built around them, as is politics in pretty much every democratic state in the world. Even in the rare instances in which legislative bodies are organized on a non-partisan basis, party-like factions emerge. Parties evolved first in Great Britain and the United States, although there have been party-like factions in government dating back to Ancient Athens.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section you will learn:

1. How parties have evolved.
2. What functions parties perform.

The Evolution of U.S. Parties

We have been through a number of what political scientists call party systems. After George Washington's terms in office, the new nation's politically active citizens began to divide into two parties, the Federalists and the Republicans. Scholars sometimes refer to them as the Democratic-Republicans, since the party eventually became known as the Democrats, but they apparently never referred to themselves as this. The Federalists were the business party, the mercantile party; the Republicans were the party of agricultural interests and ordinary workers. Being regionally and commercially based at a time when most of the country was made up of farmers, the Federalists were quickly overwhelmed and became a footnote in political history. By the election of 1824, all the candidates were of the same party.

11. Groups of individuals who unite in pursuit of common political goals.

But the party split in 1828, into a new party calling itself the Democrats and another group that called itself the National Republicans (changing to the Whigs after 1835. The term whig may come from a British party of the same name, or from a group of American revolutionaries). This was the Second Party System, and it lasted until near the start of the Civil War. The Democrats continued to be the party of agrarian interests and of states' rights, as in just say no to the federal government. The Whigs were the party of commerce and industry, and of a strong federal government. While the Whigs elected a couple of presidents, they fell apart over the issue of slavery in the 1850s.

The Whigs were replaced by the Republicans in 1854, with the Republicans becoming the first and only successful third-party movement in the history of the country. The Republicans were avowedly anti-slavery, which helped make them the dominant party in the U.S. after the north won the Civil War. Until 1930–32, Republicans dominated national politics, except in the American South, where Democrats predominated. Some scholars divide this era into two periods, the first one ending in 1896 and then succeeded by the Progressive era, but either way, Republicans were often in control.

Republican dominance was ended by the Great Depression, which saw huge electoral gains for Democrats in 1930 and 1932. Under Franklin Roosevelt, Democrats forged what became known as the New Deal Coalition, combining working-class citizens, people of color, and Southern Democrats to become the major force in American politics for the next 50 years. Remember that politics make strange bedfellows: The coalition included northern African-Americans, who could vote, and Southern Democrats, who wanted to keep them from voting. Somehow, it worked.

The election of 1980 changed that once again. Ronald Reagan won the presidency and the South finally forgave the Republican party for the Civil War. Control of the presidency and Congress has since swung back and forth between the parties. Political historians will someday give this era a coherent name, but probably not before one of you is teaching this class. As for now, we're in the middle of it. It is an era of divided government.

Third Party Movements

Why do we have a two-party system, especially when you hear so many people decry what they see as a lack of options when there are only two choices? Remember that it's the nature of U.S. elections that makes it so. In winner-take-all elections, there's little reward for voting for a third-party candidate, and starting a new party is no small (or cheap) endeavor. As a result, serious candidates and most

voters gravitate toward one of the two major parties, because to do otherwise is to waste one's time and effort. Nonetheless, U.S. third parties do play an important role: bringing new ideas into politics. The Populists and Progressives of the late 19th and early 20th centuries pushed for a number of reforms, and as those movements had success at the polls, they were adopted and absorbed by the major parties. The DNA of the Populists and the Progressives is wound into that of the Democrats and Republicans of the 21st century. For example, in Minnesota, Democrats appear on the ballot as DFL—Democratic-Farmer-Labor—so named for a 1944 merger between Democrats and the Farmer-Labor Party. It would be difficult to predict whether a growing party movement such as the Libertarians will someday influence the future of Republicans or Democrats, but that is how things get started. Libertarians believe in the least amount of government possible, so their economic ideals are closer to what some Republicans say they believe, but their social concerns align more closely with what some Democrats profess.

American parties used to be stronger. Before electoral reforms in the 20th century, they controlled who ran for office and who got the money to do so. Voters' only real say in the system came in the general election, where it was not uncommon, for example, to get a ballot that allowed you to check one box and vote a straight Republican or straight Democrat ticket.

What Parties Do

U.S. parties still perform a number of important functions, however:

They recruit and train candidates. Especially in legislative races, each party wants a candidate in every district. This is so that even if someone is the candidate of the dominant party in a “safe” (leaning heavily) Republican or Democrat district, the majority party candidate will have to spend time and resources campaigning. This means they can funnel less support (money) to candidates in more competitive (“swing”) districts.

Parties, therefore, also provide financial support for candidates. Party officials will talk to potential donors and steer money toward those candidates who stand the best chance of winning.

Parties try to mobilize voters at election time, spending money on direct mail, e-mail and social media, traditional advertising and telephone banks to find and get voters to the polls (or mail in their ballots in states where that's the norm). They try to identify likely Democrat or Republican voters and make sure that they vote.

Parties organize legislative politics. In Congress, and in every state except Nebraska, which has a non-partisan legislature, legislative bodies, such as the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, are organized by party. Party members meet in caucus as a group, where they plan legislative strategy and make assignments for things such as floor debates over bills. The majority party will control the chamber, and the minority party will try to figure out how to slow them down.

Parties also write **platforms**¹², which are statements of general principles of the party. Platforms are serious, but they're also a bit of window dressing, as they don't have the force of law and don't compel any elected officials to adhere to the platform. And as the people who get involved in party politics enough to get elected, say, to the state or national platform committee, tend to be either Really Republican or Diehard Democrat, the platforms that emerge tend to be a bit to the right or to the left of where the average voter (and many candidates and officials) might be. In 2012, the Texas state Republican platform, for example, advocated barring the teaching of critical thinking skills. One state reason was that it might make young people disagree with their parents. A number of Texas Republican officials backpedaled away from that plank as soon as it got out, but it's in fact not atypical of what ends up in the platforms of both parties. When Harry Truman was running for re-election in 1948, he introduced the Republican party platform as legislation in Congress, then gleefully watched as the Republican majority voted down their own platform.

In a two-party system, the parties tend to be pretty broad. Until the 1990s, it was not uncommon in U.S. politics to find Republicans who were effectively more liberal than some Democrats, and Democrats who might be more conservative than many Republicans. Parties in many other democratic states tend to be more narrowly focused, however, especially in states where proportional representation is the rule. Remember that under such electoral rules, a party need only get so many votes—not necessarily winning individual seats—to get seats in the national or regional legislature. That encourages multiple parties, because it rewards voters who choose any party, not just the top two.

Parties Outside of the United States

One thing we don't have in the United States is a true labor party, a standard feature in most European democracies. This is because we have no aristocratic tradition. We don't have the longstanding class divisions that still define a lot of European politics. Democrats tend to be more pro-labor than Republicans, but in such a broad party organization, labor is only one of many factions under the party umbrella. In Europe in particular, the ancient echoes of aristocracy and opposition to it are still heard in more class-based politics of the present. The British Labor Party, which has grown more centrist in the last few decades, was for much of its

12. Statements of policy principles drafted and approved at party conventions.

history the unapologetic voice of the working person. European democracies also are more likely to have an avowedly socialist party, such as the Social Democrats. Although they have shifted rightward in recent decades, they still tend to advocate for more government involvement in the economy. Nations from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe have parties that either call themselves or adhere to Social Democratic principles.

Communist parties still exist in nearly every nation, and in some, such as Brazil, Bangladesh, Denmark and Uruguay, they hold enough legislative seats to participate in the coalitions that rule the country. Like the Social Democrats, communist parties have tended to soften their stances a bit since the collapse of the Soviet Union. “Green” parties that advocate more concern for the environment are sprouting up, along with libertarian-flavored parties that argue for the least amount of government possible.

Opposite them we often find the Christian Democrats, who had religious roots but have become more of a market-oriented party in recent years. Nations from Albania to Venezuela have variants of this kind of party. Liberal parties are also right of center, leaning toward markets and away from government control of the economy, but without the religious roots of the Christian Democrats. Conservative parties are farther right still, campaigning for unfettered markets and what they see as greater economic opportunity.

Voters in other countries may face quite a few more real choices than do voters in the United States. So, for example, Germany has seven active parties: the Christian Democrats, the Christian Social Union, the Social Democrats, the Free Democrats, the Left, and the Greens. Canada has five parties: the Conservatives, the Liberals, the left-leaning New Democrats, the Parti Quebecois, which advocates Quebec leaving Canada, and the Greens. Brazil has four major and 15 medium-sized parties, and more than half a dozen other minor parties.

Wherever we find parties, we do find partisanship, which can be both good and bad for the body politic. Party politics can lead to pursuit of partisan advantage over sound policy; parties in legislative bodies sometimes spend more time trying to make the other side look bad than trying to get something positive done. Parties also can get stuck in ideological ruts, and hence fail to pursue needed reforms.

But despite their challenges, parties will never fade away. Some cities and local governments in the west have non-partisan elections, but it's usually not difficult to figure out what stripes every tiger has. Uganda recently experimented with party-free politics; the fact that the experiment didn't last ought to tell you something.

James Madison, in campaigning for the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, warned against the evils of factions. But within a decade, he was leading one.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Political parties are a broad form of interest group.
- Parties recruit, train and fund candidates; they educate and mobilize voters; they organize the legislative process.
- U.S. parties are not as powerful as they once were, but still perform important functions in American politics.

EXERCISES

1. Which party do you more closely align with? Why? Visit that party's website and look at their most recent political platform. Does it match what you believe about politics and government?
2. Interview an elected official, and ask them why belong to one party instead of another?

EXERCISES

1. How do you register to vote where you live? What would it take for you and your classmates to register people to vote? Do it, and keep track of how many people say no, and why they say no.
2. Survey people on campus: Are they registered to vote? Do they intend to vote in the next election?

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