

Campaigns, Elections, and Voting

IN THIS CHAPTER

Summary: Most people think of political participation in terms of voting; however, there are other forms of political participation, and sometimes they are more effective than voting. Political participation includes all the actions people use in seeking to influence or support government and politics.

Key Terms

| | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| suffrage | political efficacy | superdelegates |
| electorate | Motor Voter Law | electoral college |
| Fifteenth Amendment | primary elections | maintaining elections |
| Seventeenth Amendment | closed primary | deviating elections |
| Nineteenth Amendment | open primary | critical elections |
| Twenty-Fourth Amendment | blanket primary | realigning elections |
| Twenty-Sixth Amendment | runoff primary | dealigning elections |
| direct primary | general elections | split-ticket voting |
| recall | off-year elections | Federal Election Commission |
| referendum | mid-term elections | freedom of expression |
| initiative | coattail effect | soft money |
| rational-choice voting | caucus | Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) |
| retrospective voting | presidential preference | <i>Citizens United v. FEC</i> |
| prospective voting | primary | |
| party-line voting | front-loading | |
| | Super Tuesday | |

Participation and Voting



Forms of Political Participation

- voting in elections
- discussing politics and attending political meetings
- forming interest groups and PACs
- contacting public officials
- campaigning for a candidate or political party
- contributing money to a candidate or political party
- running for office
- protesting government decisions

Most of these behaviors would be considered conventional or routine, within the acceptable channels of representative government. Less conventional behaviors have been used when groups have felt powerless and ineffective. Although Americans are less approving of unconventional behaviors, those tactics are sometimes effective in influencing government decisions. The often-violent protests against the Vietnam conflict discouraged Lyndon Johnson from running for reelection in 1968. In the modern era of the internet and other forms of “instant news,” a single verbal gaffe can cause major problems for a candidate; mistakes by candidates are often quickly spread by supporters of the opposing candidate.

The most common form of political participation in the United States is voting. However, Americans are less likely to vote than citizens of other countries.

Participation Through Voting

Democratic government is “government by the people.” In the United States, participation through elections is the basis of the democratic process. According to democratic theory, everyone should be allowed to vote. In practice, however, no nation grants universal suffrage; all nations have requirements for voting.

Expansion of Suffrage

Suffrage is the right to vote. It is a political right that belongs to all those who meet certain requirements set by law. The United States was the first nation to provide for general elections of representatives through mass suffrage. The issue of suffrage is left to the states—the only stipulation found in Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution is that individuals who could vote for “the most numerous branch of the state legislature” could also vote for their congressional representatives.

The composition of the American **electorate** has changed throughout history. Two major trends have marked the development of suffrage: the elimination of a number of restrictive requirements and the transfer of more and more authority from the states to the federal government.

Changes in voting requirements have included:

- elimination of religious qualifications, property ownership, and tax payments after 1800
- elimination of race disqualifications with the passage of the **Fifteenth Amendment** in 1870
- allowing for the direct election of Senators under the **Seventeenth Amendment** in 1913
- elimination of gender disqualifications with the passage of the **Nineteenth Amendment** in 1920
- elimination of grandfather clauses, white primaries, and literacy requirements with the passage of federal civil rights legislation and court decisions (Civil Rights Acts, Voting Rights Act of 1965)

- allowing residents of Washington, D.C., to vote in presidential elections with the passage of the Twenty-Third Amendment in 1961
- elimination of poll taxes in federal elections with the passage of the **Twenty-Fourth Amendment** in 1964 (all poll taxes were ruled unconstitutional in *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections*, 1966)
- lowering the minimum age for voting in federal elections to 18 with the passage of the **Twenty-Sixth Amendment** in 1971

Issue or Policy Voting

The Progressive Movement of the early 20th century was a philosophy of political reform that fostered the development of mechanisms for increased direct participation. These included:

- A **direct primary** allows citizens to nominate candidates.
- A **recall** is a special election initiated by petition to allow citizens to remove an official from office before a term expires.
- A **referendum** allows citizens to vote directly on issues called propositions (proposed laws or state constitutional amendments).
- An **initiative** allows voters to petition to propose issues to be decided by qualified voters.

Although the recall, referendum, and initiative do not exist at the national level, several states allow voters to approve or disapprove ballot initiatives on specific issues.

Candidate Voting

Voting for candidates is the most common form of political participation. It allows citizens to choose candidates they think will best serve their interests and makes public officials accountable for their actions. In the United States voters only elect two national office holders—the president and vice president. All remaining candidates represent state or local constituencies.

Models of Voting Behavior

- **Rational-choice voting**—voting based on what voters perceive to be in their own best interest
- **Retrospective voting**—voting based on past performance of the candidate
- **Prospective voting**—voting based on how the voter believes the candidate will perform in office
- **Party-line voting**—voting for candidates based upon the party to which they belong, usually voting a straight ticket



KEY IDEA

Low Voter Turnout

Voting has been studied more closely than any other form of political participation in the United States. Studies have shown that voter turnout in the United States has decreased when compared with other nations and when compared with the United States over time. Voter turnout is higher if the election is seen as important; voter turnout is higher in presidential elections than in off-year elections. Several reasons might account for the low voter turnout:

- *expansion of the electorate*—Increase in the number of potential voters (Twenty-Sixth Amendment).
- *failure of political parties to mobilize voters*—Negative campaigning, numerous elections, frequent elections, lack of party identification.
- *no perceived differences between the candidates or parties*—Both parties and their candidates are seen as virtually the same.



KEY IDEA

- *mistrust of government*—A belief that all candidates are untrustworthy or unresponsive, due in part to the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals.
- *apathy*—A lack of interest in politics; a belief that voting is not important.
- *satisfaction with the way things are*—A belief that by not voting, the status quo will remain in effect.
- *lack of political efficacy*—People do not believe their vote out of millions of votes will make a difference.
- *mobility of electorate*—Moving around leads to a lack of social belonging.
- *registration process*—Differences in registration procedures from state to state may create barriers; the National Voter Registration Act of 1995 (**Motor Voter Law**) was designed to make voter registration easier by allowing people to register at driver's license bureaus and some public offices.

Who Votes?

Several factors affect the likelihood of voting:

- *education*—The higher the level of education, the more likely a person is to vote. This is the most important indicator of voting behavior.
- *occupation and income*—These often depend on education level. Those with white-collar jobs and higher levels of income are more likely to vote than those with blue-collar jobs or lower levels of income.
- *age*—Older people are more likely to vote than younger people.
- *race*—Minorities such as African Americans and Hispanics are less likely to vote than whites, unless they have similar socioeconomic status.
- *gender*—At one time, gender was not a major predictor, but today women are more likely to vote than men.
- *religion*—Those who are more active within their religion are more likely to vote than those who do not attend religious services, or rarely attend.
- *marital status*—Married people are more likely to vote than those who are not married.
- *union membership*—Unions encourage participation, and union members tend to vote regularly.
- *community membership*—People who are well integrated into community life are more likely to vote than those who have moved recently.
- *party identification*—Those who have a strong sense of party identification are more likely to vote.
- *geography*—Residents of states with interparty competition and close elections may be more likely to vote than those who live in states with one-party domination.



KEY IDEA

Factors Influencing Voter Choice

When voters do decide to go to the polls to vote, one or more of these factors may influence how they vote.

- *party identification*—Is the voter a loyal party member or independent?
- *characteristics of candidates*—What personal or professional characteristics of the candidate appeal to voters?
- *contemporary issues*—What issues are important today? What issues are important to the voter?
- *demographic factors*—Age, race or ethnicity, education, occupation, income, gender, and religious views



KEY IDEA

Types of Elections

- **Primary elections** are nominating elections in which voters choose the candidates from each party who will run for office in the general election. There are several major types of primaries:
 - **closed primary**—Only voters who are registered in the party may vote to choose the candidate. Separate primaries are held by each political party, and voters must select a primary in advance.
 - **open primary**—Voters may vote to choose the candidates of either party, whether they belong to that party or not. Voters make the decision of which party to support in the voting booth.
 - **blanket primary**—Voters may vote for candidates of either party, choosing a Republican for one office and a Democrat for another; a form of which is used in California, Washington and Louisiana.
 - **runoff primary**—When no candidate from a party receives a majority of the votes, the top two candidates face each other in a runoff.
- **General elections** are elections in which the voters choose from among all the candidates nominated by political parties or running as independents.
- Special elections are held whenever an issue must be decided by voters before a primary or general election is held, for example, to fill a vacancy in the Senate.

When Elections Are Held

Local, state, and federal laws determine when elections are held. Congress has established that congressional and presidential elections will be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Congressional elections are held every even-numbered year, and presidential elections are held every fourth year.

Congressional Elections

Since congressional elections are held every even-numbered year, **mid-term elections** occur during the year when no presidential election is held. Voter turnout in off-year elections is generally lower than during presidential election years. During presidential election years, the popularity of a presidential candidate may create a **coattail effect**, allowing lesser-known or weaker candidates from the presidential candidate's party to win by riding the "coattails" of the nominee.

Presidential Elections

The road to the White House and the presidency begins months and even years prior to the election. Some candidates begin the process as soon as the previous election is over. Phases of a candidacy include:

- *exploration*—In deciding whether to run for president, individuals must determine whether they have enough political and financial support to win against other possible candidates. Often a possible nominee will form an exploratory committee to begin lining up support and finances, as well as to attract media coverage and gain widespread recognition.
- *announcement*—Once a candidate has decided to run, an announcement is generally made in a press conference. This announcement is a formal declaration that the candidate is seeking the party's nomination.

- *presidential primaries and caucuses*—In the past, state party officials would meet in a **caucus** to endorse the party candidate prior to presidential primaries. Abuses of the caucus system led to many states abandoning its use. Iowa still uses caucuses to nominate presidential candidates; however, today they are open to all members of the party. Most states today use the **presidential preference primary** to determine whom the state delegates to the national party convention will support. Voters vote in a primary election, and party delegates to the conventions support the winner of the primary election. As more states began using the primaries to choose delegates, states have been **front-loading**, or choosing earlier and earlier dates to hold their primaries. **Super Tuesday** occurs in early March when the greatest number of states hold presidential preference primaries on the same day.
- *nominating conventions*—Each political party holds a national nominating convention in the summer prior to the general election. The convention is composed of delegates from each state, with each party determining its method of selecting delegates. Elected party officials, **superdelegates**, in the Democratic Party attend the national convention as unpledged delegates. They are seated automatically and choose for themselves for whom to vote. The purpose of the nominating convention is to choose the party's presidential and vice-presidential nominees, write the party platform, and bring unity to the party in support of their chosen nominees.
- *campaigning and the general election*—After the conventions are over, each candidate begins campaigning for the general election. Generally, candidates travel to swing states (those in which neither major party has overwhelming support) and often appear more moderate in an effort to win the largest possible number of votes. Since 1960, the candidates have faced each other in televised debates. The general election is then held to determine which candidate wins the electoral college vote for that state.
- *electoral college*—When voters go to the polls on election day they are casting the popular vote. This vote is actually for electors. Each state has a number of electors equal to its senators and representatives in Congress. Also, Washington, D.C., has three electoral votes. The entire group of 538 electors is known as the electoral college. After the general election, the electors meet in their respective state capitals on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December. The candidate who wins a majority of popular votes in a state in the general election wins all the state's electoral votes in the electoral college (winner-take-all). Although the electors are not required to vote for their party's candidate, only rarely do they cast a vote for someone else. The votes cast in the electoral college are then sent to Congress, where they are opened and counted before a joint session. The candidate who receives a majority (270) of electoral votes is declared the winner. If no candidate for president receives a majority of electoral votes, the House of Representatives chooses the president from the top three candidates. If no candidate for vice president receives a majority of electoral votes, the Senate chooses the vice president from the top two candidates.


 KEY IDEA

Partisanship in Elections

- **Maintaining elections** occur when the traditional majority power maintains power based on the party loyalty of voters.
- **Deviating elections** occur when the minority party is able to win with the support of majority-party members, independents, and new voters; however, the long-term party preferences of voters do not change.
- **Critical elections** indicate sharp changes in existing patterns of party loyalty due to changing social and economic conditions; for example, elections of 1860, 1896, and 1932.


 KEY IDEA

- **Realigning elections** occur when the minority party wins by building a new coalition of voters that continues over successive elections. This is usually associated with a national crisis such as the Great Depression, when Franklin D. Roosevelt was able to create a new coalition of southerners, African Americans, the poor, Catholics and Jews, labor union members, and urban dwellers.
- **Dealigning elections** occur when party loyalty becomes less important to voters, as may be seen with the increase in independents and **split-ticket voting**.

Campaign Finance

Campaigning for political office is expensive. For the 2000 elections the Republican and Democratic parties raised more than \$1.1 billion.

Campaign Finance Regulations and Reforms

Prior to the 1970s candidates for public office received donations from businesses, labor organizations, and individuals to finance campaigns.

Congress passed the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) in 1971, restricting the amount of campaign funds that can be spent on advertising, requiring disclosure of campaign contributions and expenditures, and limiting the amounts candidates and their families can donate to their own campaigns. It also allowed taxpayers to designate a donation on their tax return to the major political party candidates, beginning in the 1976 presidential election.

In 1974, after the Watergate scandal, Congress amended the Federal Election Campaign Act to establish a Federal Election Commission (FEC) to enforce the Act, and established public financing for presidential candidates in primaries and the general election. The measure also restricted contributions by prohibiting foreign contributions, limiting individual contributions, and restricting the formation of PACs and their contributions. It was further amended in 1976 and 1979.

In 1976 the Supreme Court ruled in *Buckley v. Valeo* that spending limits established by the FECA Amendments of 1974 were unconstitutional, finding that those restrictions were in violation of the First Amendment's guarantees of **freedom of expression**. *Buckley v. Valeo* also declared that the FECA ban on self-financed campaigns was unconstitutional.

In 1996 new questions arose over the use of "**soft money**," donations to political parties that could be used for general purposes. Originally, the money was supposed to be used for voter registration drives, national party conventions, and issue ads. Political parties were allowed to raise unlimited amounts of money because it was not to be used for campaigning. However, soft money has generally been spent in ways that ultimately help individual candidates. By the 2000 election, soft money donations had exceeded \$400 million between the two major parties.

Campaign finance reform has been a major issue in Congress. In 2002, Congress passed the **Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA)** banning the use of soft money in federal campaigns and increasing the 1974 limits on individual and group contributions to candidates. A result of the BCRA in the campaign of 2004 was the formation of "527" political organizations. A 527 political organization is a largely unregulated interest group that focuses on a single policy and attempts to influence voters. After the 2004 election, new rules governing 527 organizations regulated their use of soft money and allowed the FEC to examine their expenditures. In *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010), the Supreme Court ruled that limiting the ability of businesses, unions, and other groups to fund their own efforts to elect or



defeat candidates for office is unconstitutional. As a result, critics of the decision worried that the financial influence of big corporations on campaigns would be able to overpower the influence of the citizenry. In 2014 the Supreme Court ruled in *McCutcheon v. FEC* that the government cannot prevent citizens from giving campaign contributions to as many different candidates and political parties as they want. Previously, they had been limited under the “aggregate limit” rule.


KEY IDEA

Characteristics of Modern Campaigns

- **Professional Consultants/Managers**

A political campaign is an organized effort that seeks to influence voters. In a modern political campaign, the campaign organization must have a clear structure and staff to carry out campaign operations. Major campaigns in the United States are often long; campaigns may start anywhere from several months to several years before election day, depending on the office being sought. People have made careers out of working full time for campaigns and groups that support them. However, in other campaigns, much of the staff might be unpaid volunteers.

- **Campaign Costs**

Campaigns cost money. In recent years, those costs have been increasing, forcing candidates to engage in more fundraising activities. These high costs can limit opportunities for individuals to run for office and gives an advantage to wealthier candidates. Rising campaign costs have led to reform of campaign finance laws, but have also led to interest groups having a larger influence in campaign through donations to candidates and encouraged the development of PACs and superPACs.

- **Election Cycles**

An election cycle is the time frame in which an election occurs. The duration of an election cycle lasts depends upon the office being sought. The election cycle for members of the House of Representatives is quite short—they run for election every two years—while the election cycle for members of the Senate is much longer.

- **Social Media**

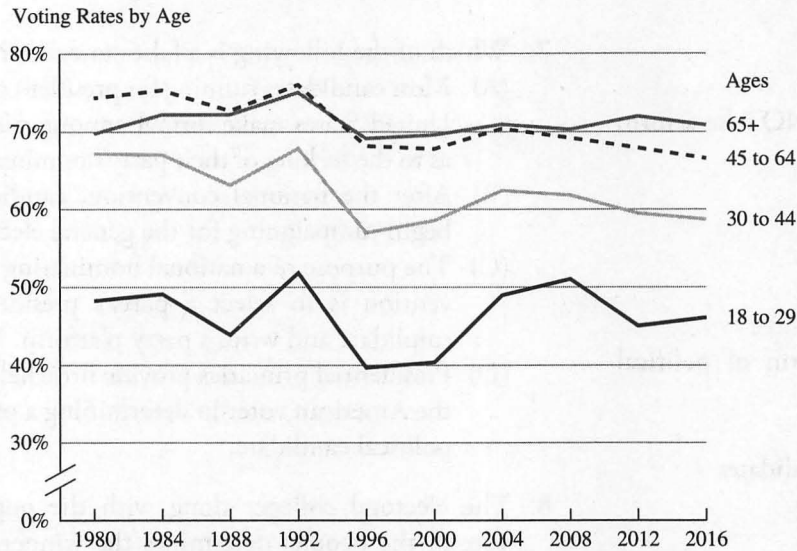
The use of social media in politics has changed the way campaigns are run and how Americans interact with elected officials. It has made elected officials and candidates for public office more accountable and accessible to voters. It provides the means to reach millions of people instantaneously at virtually no cost. Social media provides politicians the ability to speak directly to voters without paying for advertising. Campaigns can produce political commercials and publish them for free. Social media sites allow voters to share political information and campaign events with each other. It allows candidates to adapt and customize their message for the groups who are following them. Social media provides the means for fundraising, raising substantial amounts of money in very short periods of time. Candidates can use social media to gauge public opinion about certain issues or events. Social media is also popular among young people and may be an effective way to engage and interest voters in an election. President Obama did this successfully during both presidential campaigns.

› Review Questions

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Which of the following would NOT be a form of political participation?
 - (A) voting in elections
 - (B) contacting public officials
 - (C) paying taxes
 - (D) forming an interest group
2. What is the most common form of political participation in America?
 - (A) voting
 - (B) contributing money for candidates
 - (C) working for a political party
 - (D) running for office
3. Which of the following best defines a recall?
 - (A) Recall allows voters to petition proposed issues presented before them.
 - (B) Recall is a form of direct primary.
 - (C) Recall is a form of indirect primary.
 - (D) Recall is a special election allowing the voters to remove public officials from office before the end of their term.
4. Which of the following is a drawback of modern campaigns?
 - (A) increased use of social media
 - (B) rising campaign costs
 - (C) decreased use of social media
 - (D) decreasing campaign costs
5. Which of the following primaries is used by the fewest number of states?
 - (A) closed primary
 - (B) open primary
 - (C) blanket primary
 - (D) presidential preference primary
6. Which of the following is NOT true concerning the expansion of suffrage in the United States?
 - (A) Religious qualifications and property ownership requirements were abolished after the Civil War.
 - (B) The Fifteenth Amendment eliminated race disqualifications in voting.
 - (C) The Nineteenth Amendment eliminated gender disqualifications.
 - (D) The Twenty-Sixth Amendment lowered the voting age in federal elections to 18.
7. Which of the following is a false statement?
 - (A) Most candidates running for president of the United States make formal announcements as to the seeking of their party's nomination.
 - (B) After the national convention, candidates begin campaigning for the general election.
 - (C) The purpose of a national nominating convention is to select a party's presidential candidate and write a party platform.
 - (D) Presidential primaries provide little help for the American voter in determining a party's political candidate.
8. The electoral college, along with the popular vote of the people, determines the winner of a presidential election. What majority of the electoral vote is needed in order to be declared the winner?
 - (A) 538
 - (B) 435
 - (C) 100
 - (D) 270
9. The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971
 - (A) limited the number of candidates who could run for any one office
 - (B) restricted the amount of campaign funds that could be spent on a single election
 - (C) restricted the amount of campaign donations to \$1 per person
 - (D) restricted the amount of campaign contributions to \$400 million for the major political parties
10. In 1976, the Supreme Court ruled that spending limits established by the Federal Election Campaign Act were unconstitutional. Which Supreme Court case validated this ruling?
 - (A) *U.S. v. Nixon*
 - (B) *Gibbons v. Ogden*
 - (C) *Buckley v. Valeo*
 - (D) *McCulloch v. Maryland*

Use the graph below to answer question 11.



11. Which of the following is an accurate statement about the information in the line graph?
- (A) Those 65 and older are more likely to vote than those 45 to 64.
 - (B) The only age group to see a voter increase since 2012 was the 30 to 44 age group.
 - (C) The age group with the lowest voter turnout is those 65 and older.
 - (D) Since 2000, all age groups have seen an increase in voter turnout.

Free-Response Question

12. Campaign finance reform has been a major issue in recent years.
- (A) Describe the Supreme Court decision in each of the following cases:
 - *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976)
 - *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (FEC)* (2010)
 - *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission (FEC)* (2014)
 - (B) Explain how the decisions in two of the cases in Part A have affected campaign finance today.

› Answers and Explanations

1. C. Paying taxes is not a method of political participation. Voting in elections, contacting public officials, and forming interest groups are methods of political participation.
2. A. Voting is the most common form of political participation in the United States. The remaining answer choices are forms of political participation in which fewer party members participate.
3. D. A recall is an election that allows voters the opportunity to remove a public official from office prior to the end of a term.
4. B. The increased use of social media is a benefit to modern campaigns (A, C). There has been an increase in the costs of campaigns (D).
5. C. The blanket primary is used only in California, Washington, and Louisiana. Closed primaries (A), open primaries (B), and presidential preference primaries (D) are used by many states.
6. A. Religious qualifications and property ownership requirements were abolished after 1800. The other answer choices are correct.
7. D. Presidential primaries are often preference primaries where voters choose which candidate their party should support at the nominating convention. The other answer choices are correct.
8. D. Candidates must win at least 270 electoral votes to win a majority and therefore election as president or vice-president.
9. B. The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 limited the amount of money that could be spent in federal election campaigns. The remaining answer choices were not provisions of the FECA.
10. C. In *Buckley v. Valeo* the Supreme Court declared spending limits established by the Federal Election Campaign Act unconstitutional. *U.S. v. Nixon* (A) declared that President Nixon did not have executive privilege over information in a criminal proceeding. *Gibbons v. Ogden* (B) expanded the powers of Congress over interstate commerce. *McCulloch v. Maryland* (D) upheld the Supremacy Clause.
11. A. The graph illustrates that those 65 and older are more likely to vote than any other age group. The only age group to see a voter increase since 2012 was the 18 to 29 age group (B). The age group with the lowest voter turnout is those 18 to 29 (C). Since 2000, all age groups except those 18 to 29 have seen a decrease in voter turnout.
12. A. In *Buckley v. Valeo*, the Supreme Court ruled that spending limits established by the FECA Amendments of 1974 were unconstitutional because they violated the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of expression. They also ruled that the FECA ban on self-financed campaigns was unconstitutional. In *Citizens United v. FEC*, the Supreme Court ruled that limiting the ability of businesses, unions, and other groups to fund their own efforts to elect or defeat candidates for office is unconstitutional. In *McCutcheon v. FEC*, the Supreme Court ruled that the government cannot prevent citizens from giving campaign contributions to as many different candidates and political parties as they want.

B. The ruling in *Buckley v. Valeo* tied campaign finance contributions to the First Amendment's freedom of speech and now allows candidates to fund their own campaigns or citizens to contribute to campaigns as a form of free speech. The ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC* opened the door for businesses, unions, and other groups to contribute to political campaigns. The ruling in *McCutcheon v. FEC* allows citizens to participate in the electoral process by donating to as many candidates as they want, even though there are still limits on how much can be donated to any one candidate.

> Rapid Review

- Political participation includes all the actions people use in seeking to influence or support government and politics.
- Voting is the most common form of political participation in the United States.
- According to democratic theory, everyone should be allowed to vote.
- Suffrage is the right to vote. The expansion of suffrage has allowed a larger number of voters.
- In the early 20th century the Progressive Movement helped bring about an increase in direct participation.
- The president and vice president are the only two nationally elected office holders.
- Voter turnout in the United States has been decreasing for numerous reasons.
- Various characteristics have been attributed to those who are more likely to vote.
- Primary elections are intraparty elections held to narrow down the field of candidates.
- General elections are interparty elections where voters choose the office holders.
- Federal, state, and local laws determine the holding of elections.
- Congressional elections that take place in years when no presidential election is occurring are called off-year or mid-term elections.
- The presidential election process includes exploration, announcement, primaries, nominating conventions, campaigning, the general election, and the electoral college vote.
- An electoral college elects the president and vice president.
- Partisanship allows for elections to be maintaining, deviating, critical, realigning, or dealigning in scope.
- The Federal Election Campaign Act and its amendments regulate campaign finances. Reforms of campaign financing include the passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act that bans the use of “soft money” in federal campaigns. The Supreme Court ruled in *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010) that limiting the ability of businesses, unions, and other groups to fund their own efforts to elect or defeat candidates for office is unconstitutional.