VOTING BEHAVIOR

RESEARCH ON VOTING BEHAVIOR seeks primarily to explain two phenomena: voter turnout (that is, what factors contribute to an individual's decision to vote or not to vote) and vote choice (once the decision to vote has been made, what leads voters to choose one candidate over another). Table 13.2 shows some of the choices voters made in 2004 elections. in this section, we will discuss patterns in voter turnout and analyze the recent decline in voter turnout; we will then turn our attention to similar

patterns in vote choice. Finally, we will discuss ticket-splitting, a new development in American politics.

Patterns in Voter Turnout

Turnout is the proportion of the voting-age public that votes. About 40 percent of the eligible adult population in the United States votes regularly, whereas 25 percent are occasional voters. Thirty-five percent rarely or never vote. According to the Federal Election Commission, this places us far beneath nations such as Turkey (77 percent in 2002) and Sweden (80 percent in 2002). Turnout is important because voters have the ability to influence election outcomes. The presidential election of 2000 will forever be the classic example of the power of an individual's single vote. As recount succeeded recount in several states, and the fate of the presidency rested on razor-thin margins representing perhaps a handful of ballots, many nonvoters in Florida, New Mexico, and Oregon must have wished they had taken the trouble to exercise their right to choose their leader. (For the various methods citizens use once they turn out to vote, see Table 13.3.) Some of the factors known to influence voter turnout include education, income, age, race and ethnicity, and interest in politics.

turnout
The proportion of the voting-age public that votes.

Visual Literacy
Voting Turnout: Who Votes?

Education. People who vote are usually more highly educated than nonvoters. Other things being equal, college graduates are much more likely to vote than those with less education. People with more education tend to learn more about politics, are less hindered by registration requirements, and are more self-confident about their ability to affect public life. Therefore, one might argue that institutions of higher education provide citizens with opportunities to learn about and become interested in politics.

Income. There is also a relationship between income and voting. A considerably higher percentage of citizens with annual incomes over $40,000 vote than do citizens with incomes under $10,000. Income level, to some degree, is connected to education level, as wealthier people tend to have more opportunities for higher education, and more education also may lead to higher income. Wealthy citizens are more likely than poor ones to think that the "system" works for them and that their votes make a difference. People with higher income also find the opportunity cost of participation cheaper than do the poor and are more likely to have a direct financial stake in the decisions of the government, thus spurring them into action.[38]

TABLE 13.3 How America Votes

The U.S. voting system relies on a patchwork of machines to tally voters' choices, with different metheods used even within each state. The following table illustrates the type of voting machines used in each of the ten largest counties in Ohio, one of the important battleground states of the 2004 election.

County	Registered Voters	Equipment
Cuyahoga	861,113	Punch card
Franklin	706,668	Electronic
Hamilton	522,307	Punch card
Montgomery	334,787	Punch card
Summit	334,515	Punch card
Lucas	281,500	Optical scan
Stark	246,562	Punch card
Mahoning	177,445	Electronic
Lorain	166,092	Punch card
Lake	150,137	Electronic

Source: "The e-Book on Election Law," Moritz College of Law at Ohio State University, November 2004, http://moritzlaw.osu.edu/electionlaw/.

Join the Debate

Should the Voting Age Be Lowered to Sixteen?

OVERVIEW: In Baltimore, Maryland, hundreds of sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds have registered to vote. Laws governing elections require only that voters be eighteen the day of the election and not when they register. Interestingly, the addition of these young voters could potentially affect the city's future council elections, which have been historically narrow contests: in 1979, Kweisi Mfume, who later seved in the U.S. Congress and as a president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, was elected to the city council by three votes."[a]

In California, some legislators have proposed giving partial voting rights to teens; fourteen-year-olds would receive a one-quarter vote and sixteen-year-olds would receive a half vote. Internationally, Germany and Austria have already lowered their voting ages to sixteen. The Electoral Commission in Great Britain recommended in April 2004 that the voting age for British citizens be lowered from eighteen to sixteen. Students and elected officials in Tanzania have made demands to lower the voting age from eighteen, both because Tanzanians finish their education at fourteen and, sadly, because of falling life expectancy rates due to the African AIDS epidemic.

Throughout its history, the United States has expanded voting rights, starting with removing restrictions based on property ownership and later passing the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Amendments to grant suffrage respectively to African American men and all women. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 put an end to racial restrictions imposed on voters by Jim Crow laws. And, passage of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment lowered the voting age to eighteen. Should we continue to expand voting rights by lowering the voting age still further?

Arguments for Lowering the Voting Age to Sixteen

- **The government must represent the interests of all Americans, but we cannot guarantee that it will if we do not lower the age limit.** There are issues that uniquely affect young voters that the government can overlook unless teens hold it accountable.
- **There is no magical transformation one undergoes when one turns eighteen.** By sixteen, a person has more

By contrast, lower-income citizens often feel alienated from politics, possibly believing that conditions will remain the same no matter for whom they vote. American political parties may contribute to this feeling of alienation. Unlike parties in many other countries that tend to associate themselves with specific social classes, U.S. political parties do not attempt to link themselves closely to one major class (such as the "working class"). Therefore, the feelings of alienation and apathy about politics prevalent among many lower-income Americans should not be unexpected.

Age. A strong correlation exists between age and voter participation rates. The Twenty-Sixth Amendment, ratified in 1971, lowered the voting age to eighteen. While this amendment obviously increased the number of *eligible* voters, it did so by enfranchising the group that is least likely to vote. A much higher percentage of citizens age thirty and older vote than do citizens younger than thirty, although voter turnout decreases over the age of seventy, primarily because of physical infirmity, which makes it difficult to get to the polling location. Regrettably, less than half of eligible eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds are even registered to vote. The most plausible reason for this is that younger people are more mobile; they have not put down roots in a community. Because voter registration is not automatic, people who relocate have to make an effort to register. Therefore, the effect of adding this low-turnout group to the electorate has been to lower the overall turnout rate. As young people marry, have children, and settle down in a community, their likelihood of voting increases.[39]

Race and Ethnicity. Another pattern in voter turnout is related to race: whites tend to vote more regularly than do African Americans. This was evident in the 2004 presidential election. Although turnout was up for both races—from the 51 percent of 2000 to a little over 51 percent in 2000—turnout increased less among African Americans than among whites. Turnout among whites was slightly over 60 percent

or less developed intellectually, and some sixteen-year-olds have more maturity than some adults, so they should not be bound by an arbitrary date.

- **The earlier young people are exposed to politics, the more likely they will participate when they're older.** We should socialize American youth into better citizens by introducing them to the great ceremony of democracy, the election, to try to raise future turnout.

Arguments Against Lowering the Voting Age to Sixteen

- **In most states, the age of legal majority, or the age when one acquires the rights and respnsibilities of an adult, is currently eighteen years.** In a strict legal sense, young people are not recognized as independent members of society until they turn eighteen, after which the right to vote is a natural entitlement.
- **High School Students often do not complete their civics and American government education until their junior and senior years in high school.** Participation in the political process, especially voting, is only effective if individuals have a proper foundation in the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. Youth civic engagement must be improved before consideration can be given to a lower voting age.
- **Lowering the voting age will not make any difference in the outcomes of elections.** Most sixteen-year-olds are not interested in politics and certainly would not vote. It would be worse if they did, since they would have no idea what they were doing.

Selected Readings

Patricio Aylwin Azocar et al., *Youth Voter Participation: Involving Today's Young in Tomorrow's Democracy*. Stockholm: International IDEA, 1999.

Henry A. Giroux, *The Abandoned Generation: Democracy Beyond the Culture of Fear*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Selected Web Sites

http://www.youthrights.org/votingage.shtml.
http://votesforadults.typepad.com/votes_for_adults/2004/04/.

[a]Robert Redding Jr., "Baltimore 16-year-olds to Vote," *Washington Times* August 21, 2003, http://www.washtimes.com/metro/20030820-094324-4992r.htm.

in 2004; among African Americans, it hovered in the mid-50-percent range, depending on the locality.

This difference is due primarily to the relative income and educational levels of the two racial groups. African Americans tend to be poorer and have less formal education than whites; as mentioned earlier, both of these factors affect voter turnout. Significantly, though, highly educated and wealthier African Americans are as likely to vote as whites of similar background, and sometimes more likely.

Race also helps explain why the South has long had a lower turnout than the rest of the country (see Figure 13.5). In the wake of Reconstruction, the southern states made it extremely difficult for African Americans to register to vote, and only a small percentage of the eligible African American population was registered throughout the South. The Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 helped to change this situation. The VRA was intended to guarantee voting rights to African Americans nearly a century after passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. Often now heralded as the most successful piece of civil rights legislation ever passed, the VRA targeted states that had used literacy or morality tests or poll taxes to exclude blacks from the polls. The act bans any voting device or procedure that interferes with a minority citizen's right to vote and requires approval for any changes in voting qualifications or procedures in certain areas where minority registration was not in pro-

■ Maria Gonzales Mabbutt, Director of Idaho Latino Vote, holds a sample ballot flyer from Nampa, Idaho. The project "Get the Vote Out" was created to inform the Hispanic community where and when to vote, as well as who the candidates are.

Photo courtesy: Matt Lilley/AP/Wide World Photos

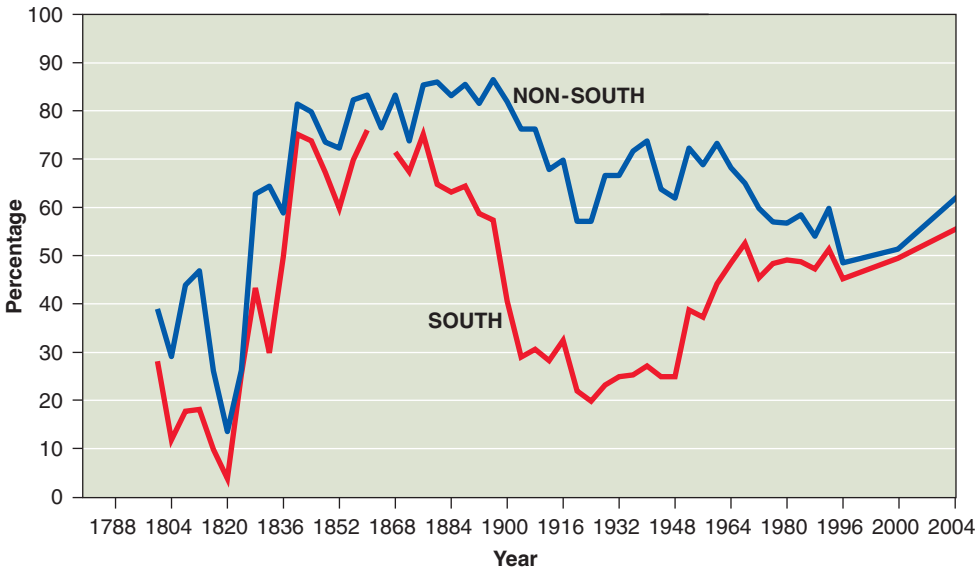


FIGURE 13.5 The South Versus the Non-South for Presidential Voter Turnout
After a century-long discrepancy caused by discrimination against African American voters in the South, regional voting turnouts have grown much closer together with the increasing enfranchisement of these voters. ■

Source: Compiled from data contained in the Center for the Study of the American Electorate 2004 Election Report, November 4, 2004, http://www.fairvote.org/reports/CSEA2004electionreport.pdf.

portion to the racial composition of the district. It also authorized the federal government to monitor all elections in areas where discrimination was found to be practiced or where less than 50 percent of the voting-age public was registered to vote in the 1964 election.

The impact of the act was immediate. African American voter registration skyrocketed, as did the number of African Americans elected to office. For example, in 1965 there were 280 black elected officials at any level in the United States. Since 1965, African American voters have used their strength at the ballot box to elect more black officials at all levels of government. But, while the results have been encouraging, the percentage of elected offices held by African Americans in the eleven southern states covered by the VRA remains relatively small.

The 2000 Census revealed that the Hispanic community in the United States is now about equal in size to the African American community; thus, Hispanics have the potential to wield enormous political power. In California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New York, five key electoral states, Hispanic voters have emerged as powerful allies for candidates seeking office. However, just as voter turnout among African Americans is historically much lower than whites, the turnout among Hispanics is much lower than that among African Americans. In 2004, 55 percent of African Americans voted in the presidential election; only 38 percent of Hispanics turned out to vote.[40]

Like any voting group, Hispanics and Latinos are not easily categorized and voting patterns cannot be neatly generalized. However, several major factors play out as key decision-making variables: one's point of origin, length of time in the United States, and income levels. Although Hispanics and Latinos share a common history of Spanish colonialism and similar nation building, they differ in political processes and agendas. Despite having citizenship, Puerto Ricans can vote in a presidential election only if they live on the mainland and establish residency. Cuban Americans are concentrated in south Florida and tend to be conservative and vote for GOP candidates. Mexican American voting patterns are very issue-oriented, divided according to income levels and generation.[41]

As more Hispanic candidates run for office, the excitement level and participation of Hispanic voters is likely to increase. The 2004 elections featured several high-profile Hispanic candidates, including Colorado's Salazar brothers, Ken, who won a Senate seat, and John, who won a seat in the House. Mel Martinez ran for a Senate seat in Florida and won as well.

Interest in Politics. Although socio-economic factors undoubtedly influence voter participation rates, an interest in politics must also be included as an important factor for voter

turnout. Many citizens who vote have grown up in families interested and active in politics, and they in turn stimulate their children to take an interest. Additionally, research has determined that interest in politics does not depend on an especially mobilizing candidate. Those citizens involved in the process remain so even if their favored candidate loses; as one political scientist observes, "preconvention mobilization into presidential politics tends to increase participation on behalf of House candidates," even if the candidate for which the individual was mobilized lost the party's presidential nomination.[42] Voters become mobilized for later party work and support after participating in presidential nominating campaigns, whether their favored candidate won or lost. Such workers care more about the outcome of elections and the political process than they do about individual candidates.[43] Conversely, many nonvoters simply do not care about politics or the outcome of elections, never having been taught their importance at a younger age.

People who are highly interested in politics constitute only a small minority of the U.S. population. For example, the most politically active Americans—party and issue-group activists—make up less than 5 percent of the country's more than 285 million people. Those who contribute time or money to a party or a candidate during a campaign make up only about 10 percent of the total population. On the other hand, although these percentages appear low, they translate into millions of Americans who contribute more than just votes to the system.

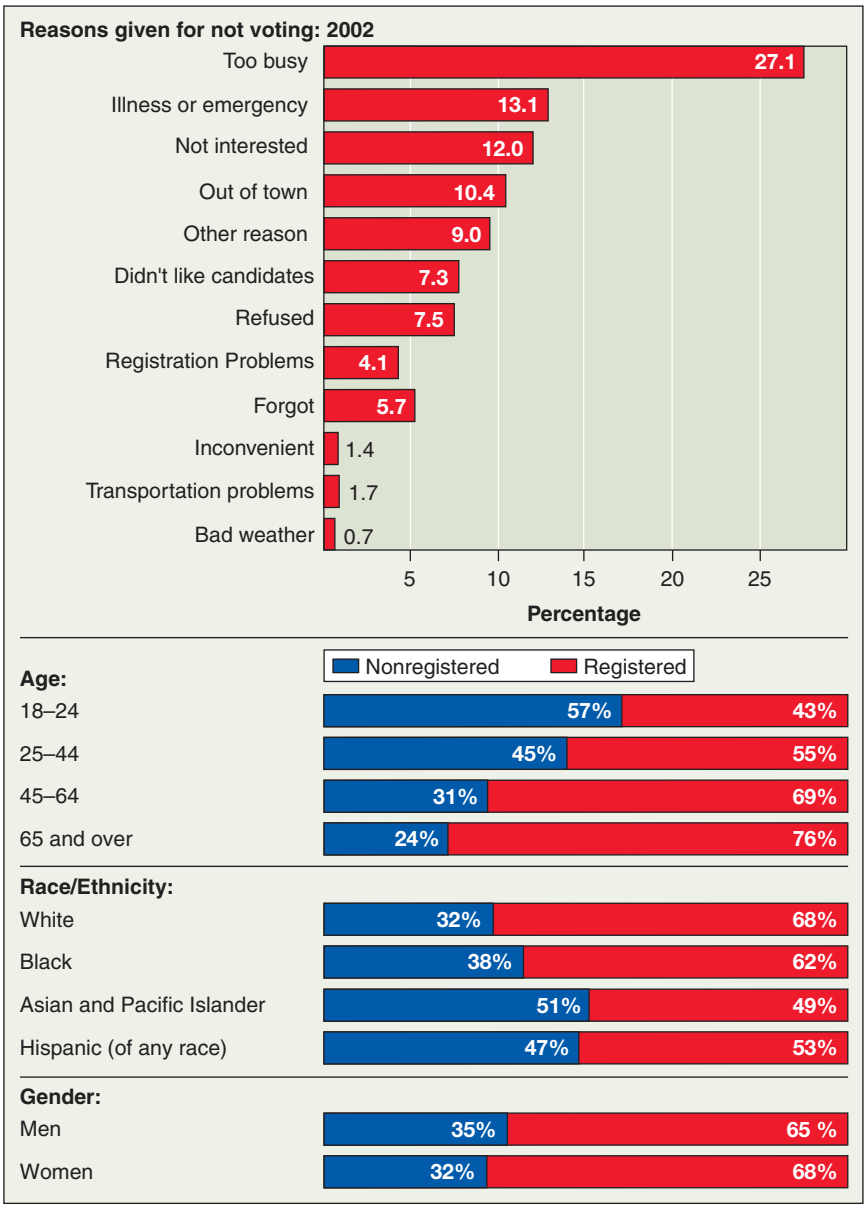
Why Is Voter Turnout So Low?

The United States has one of the lowest voter participation rates of any nation in the industrialized world. In 1960, 62 percent of the eligible electorate voted in the presidential election, but by 1996, American voter participation had fallen to a record low of 48.8 percent—the lowest general presidential election turnout since 1824. In 2004, participation climbed to 59 percent, the highest it has been since 1968. In contrast, turnout for postwar British elections has fluctuated between 72 percent and 84 percent. Figure 13.6 shows several reasons U.S. nonvoters give for not voting. A number of contributing factors are discussed below.

Too Busy. Over 39 million eligible voters did not cast a ballot in the 2002 midterm elections. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 27 percent of registered non-voters surveyed said that they did not vote because they were too busy or had conflicting work or school schedules. Another 13 percent said that they did not vote because they were ill, disabled, or had a family emergency. While these reasons seem to account for a large portion of the people surveyed, they may also reflect the respondents' desire not to seem uneducated about the candidates and issues or apathetic about the political process. Although some would-be voters are undoubtedly busy, infirm, or otherwise unable to make it to the polls, it is likely that many of these nonvoters are offering an easy excuse and have another reason for failing to vote.

Difficulty of Registration. Of those citizens who are registered, the overwhelming majority vote. The major reason for lack of participation in the United States seems to be that a relatively low percentage of the adult population is registered to vote. There are several reasons for the low U.S. registration rate. First, while nearly every other democratic country places the burden of registration on the government rather than on the individual, in the United States the registration process requires individual initiative—a daunting impediment in this age of political apathy. Thus, the cost (in terms of time and effort) of registering to vote is higher in the United States than it is in other industrialized democracies. Second, many nations automatically register all of their citizens to vote. In the United States, however, citizens must jump the extra hurdle of remembering on their own to register. Indeed, it is no coincidence that voter participation rates dropped markedly after reformers pushed through strict voter registration laws in the early part of the twentieth century. Correspondingly, several recent studies of the effects of relaxed state voter registration laws show that easier registration leads to higher levels of turnout. When states

FIGURE 13.6 Why People Don't Vote
According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey taken after the 2002 elections, "too busy" was the single biggest reason Americans gave for not voting on Election Day. Anger toward politicians and disenchantment with the current political system also drove Americans away from the polls. ■



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, July 2004.

adopted Election Day registration of new voters, large and significant improvements in turnout occurred among younger voters and the poor.[44] States with a "motor voter" law (allowing citizens to register to vote at the Department of Motor Vehicles) had significantly higher levels of registration and turnout than did states lacking such a law.[45]

Difficulty of Absentee Voting. Stringent absentee ballot laws are another factor in low voter turnout for the United States. Many states, for instance, require citizens to apply in person for absentee ballots, a burdensome requirement given that one's inability to be present in his or her home state is often the reason for absentee balloting in the first place. Recent literature in political science links liberalized absentee voting rules and higher turnout. One study, for instance, concluded that lax absentee voting restrictions reduced the "costs of voting" and increased turnout when the parties mobilized their followers to take advantage of new lenient absentee voting laws.[46]

Comparative
Comparing Voting and Elections

Number of Elections. Another explanation for low voter turnout in this country is the sheer number and frequency of elections, which few if any other democracies can

match. Yet, an election cornucopia is the inevitable result of federalism and the separation of powers, which result in layers of often separate elections on the local, state, and national levels.

Photo courtesy: Ron Edmonds/AP/Wide World Photos

■ Citizen Change was one of many organizations that endeavored to educate, register, and turn out young voters in 2004. Here, Sean "P. Diddy" Combs is seen wearing a shirt featuring the group's much-publicized slogan.

Voter Attitudes. Although some of the reasons for low voter participation are due to the institutional factors we have just described, voter attitudes play an equally important part. Some nations, such as Australia and Belgium, try to get around the effects of voter attitudes with compulsory voting laws. Not surprisingly, voter turnout rates in Australia and Belgium are often greater than 95 percent. Other nations fine citizens who do not vote.

As noted previously, some voters are alienated, and others are just plain apathetic, possibly because of a lack of pressing issues in a particular year, satisfaction with the status quo, or uncompetitive (even uncontested) elections. Furthermore, many citizens may be turned off by the quality of campaigns in a time when petty issues and personal mudslinging are more prevalent than ever. Divided government affects voter turnout, with turnout declining by 2 percent in each consecutive election conducted when the presidency and Congress are controlled by different parties.[47] Finally, perhaps turnout has declined because of rising levels of distrust of government. More and more people are telling pollsters that they lack confidence in political leaders. In the past, some scholars argued that there is no correlation between distrust of political leaders and nonvoting. But, as the levels of distrust rise, these preliminary conclusions might need to be revisited.

Weak Political Parties. Political parties today are no longer as effective as they once were in mobilizing voters, ensuring that they are registered, and getting them to the polls. As we discussed in chapter 12, the parties once were grassroots organizations that forged strong party-group links with their supporters. Today, these bonds have been stretched to the breaking point for many. Candidate-centered campaigns and the growth of expansive party bureaucracies have resulted in a somewhat more distant party with which most people do not identify very strongly.

How Can the United States Improve Voter Turnout?

Reformers have proposed many ideas to increase voter turnout in the United States. Always on the list is raising the political awareness of young citizens, a reform that inevitably must involve our nation's schools. The rise in formal education levels among Americans has played a significant role in preventing an even greater decline in voter turnout.[48] No less important, and perhaps simpler to achieve, are institutional reforms, though many of the reforms discussed below, if enacted, may result in only a marginal increase in turnout.

The Prepared Voter Kit

Easier Registration and Absentee Voting. Registration laws vary by state, but in every state except North Dakota, people must register before they can vote. Many observers believe that voter turnout could be increased if registering to vote were made simpler for citizens. The typical thirty-days-before-an-election registration deadline could be shortened to a week or ten days. After all, most people become more interested in voting as Election Day nears. Indeed, allowing citizens to register on the same day as they vote would boost national turnout by five percentage points.[49] Better yet, all U.S. citizens could be registered automatically at the age of eighteen. States could make it easier to obtain absentee ballots by eliminating the in-person requirement.

On Campus

Students and Voting

In the 2004 presidential election, young voters—those between eighteen and twenty-nine years old—made up only 17 percent of the electorate.[a] This should disturb young voters, since their low turnout directly impacts what issues state and federal governments address. Now that the United States has intervened militarily with nations suspected of harboring or assisting terrorists, the government may need to increase the number of soldiers in the military, perhaps by resurrecting the draft. Many state governments are still recovering from the one-two punch of the economic recession resulting from the 9/11 attacks and technology boom-gone-bust, forcing them to cut back or not increase higher education spending. That forces state universities to raise tuitions, a move that might force students to start a (second) job, take out more loans, or even drop out. The stakes are high for young voters, so why aren't they voting?

According to one survey, young voters said they did not vote because they believed their vote does not make a difference, they did not have enough information to make a decision, or they were too busy.[b] Furthermore, nearly half of the students sampled claimed not to discuss politics with their parents, and over half of them believe that schools did not sufficiently educate them on how to vote! Of course, if you do not know how to vote, then you do not vote, and if you never vote, then you never discover that your vote does make a difference.

A number of get-out-the-vote efforts (GOTV) focus on informing young voters about how to vote. Rock the Vote, for instance, provides young voters registration kits and election schedules. However, those with the most to gain from securing the young vote, the two major political parties, remain on the sidelines. Another study shows that over 53 percent of undergraduates claim that neither party contacted them during the 2004 presidential campaign.[c] If one of the parties chooses to fill this gap, it could tilt the balance in their favor in future elections. That would not just be good for the party; it would be good for young voters, since they could use their influence to affect legislation.

[a]National Election Pool exit poll, http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/states/US/P/00/epolls.0.html.

[b]http://www.stateofthevote.org/factsheet.html.

[c]CIRCLE Fact Sheet: College Students in the 2004 Election, Richard Niemi and Michael Hamner, http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_College_Voting.pdf.

In 1993, Congress, with support from President Clinton, passed the so-called motor-voter bill, which required states to permit individuals to register by mail, not just in person. The law also allows citizens to register to vote when they visit any motor vehicles office, public assistance agency, or military recruitment division. Proponents of the law said at the time that it would result in the registration of roughly 49 million Americans of voting age with driver's licenses or identification cards. Opponents claimed the law was yet another unfunded federal mandate burdening state governments. Motor-voter registration has not increased voter turnout but rather has slowed the rate of decrease. Recently, states with motor-voter registration have experienced a 6 percent decrease in voter turnout, while those without experienced nearly a 10 percent decrease.[50] Although not the definitive solution for decreasing voter turnout, motor-voter registration still helps while proving the value of innovative election reform for state and federal lawmakers.

Make Election Day a Holiday. Besides removing an obstacle to voting (the busy workday), making Election Day a national holiday might focus more voter attention on the contests in the critical final hours.

Strengthen Parties. Reformers have long argued that strengthening the political parties would increase voter turnout, because parties have historically been the organizations in the United States best suited for and most successful at mobilizing citizens to vote. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the country's "Golden Age" of powerful political parties, one of their primary activities was getting out the vote on Election Day. Even today, the parties' Election Day get-out-the-vote drives increase voter turnout by as many as several million in national contests.

■ A worker at a state motor vehicles office displays the form that makes it easy to register to vote.

Photo courtesy: Dennis Brack/Black Star

Other Suggestions. Other ideas to increase voter turnout are less practical or feasible. For example, holding fewer elections might sound appealing, but it is difficult to see how this could be accomplished without diluting many of the central tenets of federalism and separation of powers that the Framers believed essential to the protection of liberty. Still other reforms might increase voter turnout, including proportional representation of the congressional vote to encourage third parties and combat voter apathy toward the two major parties, changing Election Day to Saturday or Sunday, and making voting mandatory, which has benefits that far outweigh most Americans' aversion to the idea.[51]

Does Low Voter Turnout Matter?

Some political observers have argued that nonvoting is not a critical problem. For example, some believe that the preferences of nonvoters are not much different from those who do vote. If this is true, the results would be about the same if everyone voted. Others contend that because laws forbid the denial of the vote to previously disfranchised groups—African Americans, women, Hispanics—nonvoting is voluntary. Some say that nonvoters are indicating their acceptance of things as they are, or that we should not attempt to make voting easier for people characterized as apathetic and lazy. Finally, some claim that low voter turnout is a positive benefit, based on the dubious supposition that less-educated people are more easily swayed. Thus, low turnout supposedly increases the stability of the system.

We should not be too quick to accept these arguments, which have much in common with the early nineteenth-century view that the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution (which enfranchised women) need not be passed because husbands could protect the interests of their wives. First, voters do not represent nonvoters; the social make-up and attitudes of present-day nonvoters are significantly different from those of voters. Nonvoters tend to be low income, younger, blue collar, less educated, and more heavily minority. Even if their expressed preferences about politics do not look very distinctive, their objective circumstances and their need for government services

differ from the majority of those who do vote. These people—who require the most help from government—currently lack a fair share of electoral power. A political system that actively seeks to include and mobilize these people might well produce broader-based policies that differ from those we have today.

In 2004, nationwide voter turnout was just under 60 percent of the voting-age population, nearly 9 percentage points up from 51 percent in 2000. The sudden surge invoter turnout surprised no one. The major political parties and nonpartisan groups had been registering voters throughout the year and in unprecedented numbers. Voters also had much to motivate them with the election predicted to be as close as in 2000 and featuring critical issues such as the war in Iraq, the fate of Social Security, and possible appointments to the Supreme Court (an issue highlighted after Supreme Court Justice William H. Rehnquist underwent thyroid cancer surgery a week before the election). With nearly 60 million viewers watching the first presidential debate, voters also acquainted themselves with the candidates and their stances on the issues. For the first time in decades, the American people seemed politically engaged, and the stakes were high.

This significant improvement from the 2000 election is encouraging, and hopefully the beginning of a trend toward an increased level of participation. The 2000 outcome had offered a mixed message of idealism and cynicism, and we learned anew how one vote really can make a difference. An older generation of Americans learned this in 1960 in the extremely close election where an average of one vote per precinct in the United States made John F. Kennedy the president of the United States. This was so few votes in a handful of states that the power of the individual vote became clear, and perhaps this is a lesson that Americans need to learn and relearn.

On the other hand, the carelessness with which the media handled the 2000 election in its early stages, especially in Florida, did nothing to dispel the doubly false belief of many Americans that their votes would be no more important than usual. Of course, there is bitterness from the realization that for many Americans who did trouble to vote, their vote went uncounted. Thousands of ballots were discarded because of machine or human error; several thousand ballots from Americans living overseas or serving in the military were not counted in the initial tabulation; some polling stations may have unfairly turned away rightful voters. Some of the same problems occurred in 2004 as well.

Turnout in some states exceeded even the national average in 2004. South Dakota experienced a 78 percent turnout of registered voters, very likely because of the high-stakes race between the then Senate minority leader and a popular challenger. Even states with fewer high-profile races saw a huge increase in voter turnout. Maine reached a 73 percent voter turnout, only the third time the state passed the 70 percent mark in its history. Such a sharp increase in voter participation is exciting and undoubtedly good for democracy, but it is uncertain whether such gains are permanent or simply unique to this highly contested presidential race. One test is the level of turnout in the 2006 midterm elections.

Patterns in Vote Choice

Just as there are certain predictable patterns when it comes to American voter turnout (discussed above), so, too, are there predictable patterns of vote choice. One of the most prominent and consistent correlates of vote choice is partisan identification, which is discussed in the previous chapter. Some other consistent and notable correlates of vote choice include race and ethnicity, gender, income, ideology, and issues and campaign-specific developments.

Race and Ethnicity. Different racial and ethnic groups vote differently from each other. While whites have shown an increasing tendency to vote Republican in recent elections, African American voters remain overwhelmingly Democratic in both their

partisan identification and in their voting decisions. Despite the best efforts of the Republican Party to garner African American support, this pattern shows no signs of waning. In 2004, for example, 88 percent of the votes cast by African Americans were cast for Kerry, while Bush received a mere 11 percent of the African American vote.[52]

Hispanics also tend to identify with and vote for Democrats, although not as monolithically as do African Americans.[53] In 2004, for example, Kerry received 53 percent of the votes cast by Hispanics; Bush received only 44 percent. These exit poll data indicate that, in fact, Bush is closing the Democratic lead among Hispanics; however, new research has raised questions as to whether the exit poll data may have been skewed.

The Asian American segment of the electorate is less monolithic and more variable in its voting than either the Hispanic or the African American communities. It is worth noting the considerable political diversity within this group: Chinese Americans tend to prefer Democratic candidates, but Vietnamese Americans, with a strong anticommunist leaning, tend to support Republicans. A typical voting split for the Asian American community in general, though, might run about 60 percent Democratic and 40 percent Republican, though it can reach the extreme of a 50–50 split, depending on the election.

Gender. There have been elections throughout the twentieth century in which gender was a factor, although precise data are not always available to prove the conventional wisdom. For example, journalists in 1920 claimed that women—in their first presidential election after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment granted women suffrage—were especially likely to vote for Republican presidential candidate Warren G. Harding. In the sexist view of the day, women were supposedly taken in by the handsome Harding's charm. Recent evidence indicates that women act and react differently form men to some candidacies, including those of other women. For instance, Democratic women were more likely than Democratic men to support Walter Mondale's presidential ticket in 1984 because of former Vice President Mondale's selection of Representative Geraldine Ferraro (D–NY) for the second slot on his presidential ticket. However, Republican women at the time were more likely than GOP men to support Ronald Reagan's candidacy because of Ferraro's presence on the Democratic ticket; Republican women were opposed to Ferraro's liberal voting record and views. Since 1980, the so-called "gender gap" (the difference between the voting choices of men and women) has become a staple of American politics.

Simply put, in most elections today, women are more likely to support the Democratic candidate and men are more likely to support the Republican candidate. The size of the gender gap varies considerably from election to election, though normally the gender gap is between 5 and 7 percentage points. That is, women support the average Democrat 5 to 7 percent more than men support the average Republican candidate. Some elections result in an expanded gender gap though, such as the presidential election of 1996, where the gender gap was an enormous 17 percentage points, about 10 points larger than in 1992. Bob Dole narrowly won among men in 1996, while Bill Clinton scored a landslide among women. In 2004, Bush won 55 percent of the male vote, while Kerry received 51 percent of the female vote. Of importance here is the fact that women now constitute a majority of the adult population in all the American states, and they are a majority of the registered electorate in virtually all of those states. This trend has made it increasingly important for both Democrats and Republicans to seek the votes and support of women.

Income. Over the years, income has been a remarkably stable correlate of vote choice. The poor vote less often and more Democratic, the well-to-do vote more often and heavily Republican.[55] Indeed, in the 2004 presidential election, those voters who earned less than $15,000 yearly voted for Kerry over Bush by 63 percent to 36 percent, whereas those voters who earned more than $100,000 yearly supported Bush over Kerry by 59 to 41 percent.[56]

Ideology. Ideology represents one of the most significant cleavages in contemporary American politics. Liberals, generally speaking, favor government involvement in society to try to solve problems, and they are committed to the ideals of tolerance and diversity. Conservatives, on the other hand, think individuals and private organizations, *not* government, should be responsible for solving most problems, and they are dedicated to the promotion of traditional and family values. Moderates, as the name implies, lie somewhere between liberals and conservatives on the ideological spectrum.

Not surprisingly, ideology is very closely related to vote choice. Liberals tend to vote for Democrats, and conservatives tend to vote for Republicans. In 2004, 85 percent of self-described liberals voted for Kerry, whereas only 13 percent voted for Bush. Conservatives, on the other hand, voted for Bush over Kerry at a rate of 84 to 15 percent.[57]

Issues and Campaign-Specific Developments. In addition to the underlying influences on vote choice discussed above, issues and campaign-specific developments can have important effects on vote choice in any given election year. In the 1992 presidential election, aid to the disadvantaged and the admission of open homosexuals to the military were issues critical to a voter's choice between Bill Clinton or George Bush.[58]

The 2004 election had two major campaign-specific issues, Iraq and the war on terrorism. Early in the campaign, George W. Bush attempted to link the two issues together with the hope that the general support he received in his handling the war on terrorism could help boost flagging ratings for his handling of the war in Iraq. The Kerry campaign's efforts to keep the two issues separate, however, succeeded. Exit polls showed that voters who considered terrorism the most important issue voted 86 to 14 percent for Bush, while those who considered Iraq the most important issue voted 73 to 26 percent for Kerry. Amazingly, while terrorism and Iraq dominated the 2004 election, and even the 2004 Democratic primaries, voters actually cited the economy (20 percent of respondents) and moral values (22 percent) as the most important issues. Terrorism and Iraq were cited by 19 and 15 percent, respectively. Those voters citing the economy as most important voted 82 to 18 percent in favor of Kerry, and those stating moral values as most important voted 80 to 20 percent in favor of Bush. In the end, the campaign-specific issues ran side by side with the perennial problems Americans and their representatives face every day.

ticket-splitting
Voting for candidates of different parties for various offices in the same election.

Ticket-Splitting

Citizens have been increasingly deserting their party affiliations in the polling booths. The practice of **ticket-splitting,** voting for candidates of different parties for various offices in an election, rose dramatically since the 1950s, but has leveled off and started to decline since the early 1990s.[60] The evidence of this development abounds. As already mentioned, Republican presidential landslides in 1956, 1972, 1980, and 1984 were accompanied by the election of substantial Democratic majorities in the House of Representatives. Divided government, with the presidency held by one party and one or both houses of Congress held by the other party, has never been as frequent in U.S. history as it has been recently. From 1920 to 1944, about 15 percent of the congressional districts voted for presidential and House candidates of different parties. But, from 1960 to 1996, at least 25 percent of the districts cast split tickets in any presidential year; in 1984, nearly 50 percent of the districts did so.

Similarly, at the statewide level, only 17 percent of the states electing governors in presidential years between 1880 and 1956 elected state and national executives from different parties. Yet, from 1960 to 1992, almost 40 percent of states holding simultaneous presidential and gubernatorial elections recorded split results. (In 1992 and 1996, this proportion was somewhat lower, just 25 percent and 27 percent, respectively.) Whereas the proportion of states voting for a governor of a party different from that of

the president was up in 2000 (to 45 percent), the proportion of congressional districts that voted for a presidential candidate of one party and a congressional candidate of a different party was down to 18 percent,[61] an indication that some voters are increasingly willing to vote a straight party ticket. The 2004 election saw a continued decline in ticket-splitting, resulting in a greater coattail effect for President Bush.

These percentages actually understate the degree of ticket-splitting by individual voters. The Gallup poll has regularly asked its respondents, "For the various political offices, did you vote for all the candidates of one party, that is, a straight ticket, or did you vote for the candidates of different parties [ticket-splitting]?" Since 1968, the proportion of voters who have ticket-split in presidential years has consistently been around 60 percent of the total.[62] Other polls and researchers have found reduced straight-ticket balloting and significant ticket-splitting at all levels of elections, especially since 1952.

Not surprisingly, the intensity of party affiliation is a major determinant of a voter's propensity to split the ticket. Strong party identifiers are the most likely to cast a straight-party ballot; pure independents are the least likely. Somewhat greater proportions of ticket-splitters are found among high-income and better-educated citizens, but there is little difference in the distribution by gender or age. African Americans exhibit the highest straight-party rate of any population subgroup; about three-quarters of all black voters stay in the Democratic Party column from the top to the bottom of the ballot.

Scholars have posited several potential explanations for ticket-splitting. One explanation is that voters split their tickets, consciously or not, because they trust neither party to govern.[63] Under this interpretation, ticket-splitters are aware of the differences between the two parties and split their tickets to augment the checks and balances already present in the Constitution. Alternatively, voters split their tickets possibly because partisanship has become less relevant as a voting cue.[64] Other explanations for ticket-splitting abound. The growth of issue-oriented politics, the mushrooming of single-interest groups, the greater emphasis on candidate-centered personality politics, and broader-based education are all often cited. A strong independent presidential candidacy also helps to loosen party ties among many voters. So, too, does the marked gain in the value of incumbency. Thanks in part to the enormous fattening of congressional constituency services, incumbent U.S. representatives and senators have been able to attract a steadily increasing share of the other party's identifiers.[65]