American Government

CHAPTER 6

Voters and Voter Behavior
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SECTION 1  The Right to Vote

SECTION 2  Voter Qualifications

SECTION 3  Suffrage and Civil Rights

SECTION 4  Voter Behavior
The History of Voting Rights

• The Framers of the Constitution purposely left the power to set suffrage qualifications to each State.

• **Suffrage** means the right to vote. **Franchise** is another term with the same meaning.

• The **electorate** is all of the people entitled to vote in a given election.
• Initially, the right to vote in America was limited to white male property owners.

• Today, the size of the American electorate is greater than 200 million people. Nearly all citizens at least 18 years of age can qualify to vote.
Extending Suffrage

The expansion of the electorate to its present size happened in five fairly distinct stages:

1. During the early 1800s, religious, property, and tax payment qualifications were gradually eliminated.
The expansion of the electorate to its present size happened in five fairly distinct stages:

2. The *15th Amendment (1870)* was intended to end race-based voting requirements.
The expansion of the electorate to its present size happened in five fairly distinct stages:

3. In 1920, the 19th Amendment prohibited the denial of the right to vote because of sex.
4. The 1960s:

- The *Voting Rights Act of 1965* guaranteed the right to vote for minorities.

- The *23rd Amendment (1961)* granted citizens of the District of Columbia the right to vote for presidential electors.

- The *24th Amendment (1964)* eliminated the poll tax.
Extending Suffrage (continued)

The expansion of the electorate to its present size happened in five fairly distinct stages:

5. The 26th Amendment (1971) lowered the voting age to 18.
Setting Voter Qualifications

The Constitution sets *five limits* on the power that States have to set voter qualifications:

1. Any person whom a State allows to vote for members of the “most numerous Branch” of its own legislature must be also allowed to vote for members of Congress.
The Constitution sets five limits on the power that States have to set voter qualifications:

2. No State can deprive any person the right to vote “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”
The Constitution sets *five limits* on the power that States have to set voter qualifications:

3. No State can deprive any person the right to vote on account of sex.
Setting Voter Qualifications (continued)

The Constitution sets *five limits* on the power that States have to set voter qualifications:

4. No State can require the *payment of any tax* as a condition for voting.
The Constitution sets *five limits* on the power that States have to set voter qualifications:

5. No State can deprive any person who is at least *18 years of age* the right to vote.
1. Suffrage in the United States
   (a) has been gradually extended to more and more citizens.
   (b) is granted to property owners only.
   (c) is granted to only women.
   (d) has gradually lessened the number of eligible voters.
2. The minimum voting age in the United States today is
(a) 21 years of age.
(b) 25 years of age.
(c) 18 years of age.
(d) 16 years of age.
Universal Requirements

There are three factors that States require people to meet to be eligible to vote.

Citizenship

• States require United States citizenship in order to vote.
Universal Requirements (continued)

There are three factors that States require people to meet to be eligible to vote.

Residence

• One must be a legal resident of a State to vote in elections. Most States require residency for minimum amounts of time in order to vote in the State.
There are three factors that States require people to meet to be eligible to vote.

**Age**

• The 26th Amendment requires that no State set a minimum voting age above 18.
Governor Nikki R. Haley of South Carolina
Other Qualifications

• All states except North Dakota require citizens to register to vote.

• Registration is a procedure of voter identification intended to prevent fraudulent voting.
• **Literacy**—a person’s ability to read or write—is no longer required in any State to vote, but had been by several States at times in our nation’s history.
Other Qualifications (continued)

• At one time, poll taxes, or a special tax payment required to vote, were prevalent in the South.

• Poll taxes are now forbidden by the 24th Amendment.
Other Qualifications (continued)

• States also have restrictions on the right to vote on certain members of the population, such as those found to be mentally incompetent or people convicted of serious crimes.
Political Participation and Awareness in America

Percentage of Americans who...

- Care who won the presidential election
- Watched the campaign on television
- Care who won the congressional election
- Approve of the way Congress has been handling its job
- Think government officials are honest
- Think people have a say in what the government does
- Trust the Federal Government most of the time
- Read magazine articles on the campaign
- Were contacted by either major party
- Gave money to a campaign
- Wore a button or put a sticker on their car in the last election
- Worked for a party or candidate in the last election

1. The three universal requirements States use for a person to be eligible to vote are

(a) residence, gender, and income.

(b) citizenship, property ownership, and gender.

(c) citizenship, residence, and age.

(d) income, employment, and age.
2. The 24th Amendment forbids the use of

(a) poll taxes.

(b) alcohol.

(c) literacy tests as a means of voter qualification.

(d) the death penalty.
Mayor Terence Roberts of Anderson
The Fifteenth Amendment (1870) declares that the right to vote cannot be denied to any citizen of the United States because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.
Early Civil Rights Legislation

Civil Rights Act of 1957

• Created the United States Civil Rights Commission
• Investigated and reported voter discrimination
• Gave the Attorney General the power to require federal courts to issue orders to prevent any interference with a person’s right to vote
Civil Rights Act of 1960

• Created *federal voting referees* who helped correct conditions to prevent voter discrimination
Senator Timothy Scott
The Law

• More far-reaching than the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 abolished the use of voter registration or a literacy requirement to discriminate against any voter.
The Law (continued)

• Enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 relied on *judicial action* and the use of *injunctions*.

• *Injunctions* - court orders that either force or restrain specific acts.
The Aftermath

• The violent response of civilians and police and state troopers to a voter registration drive mounted by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma, Alabama showed that the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960 and 1964 were still not enough to ensure voter equality.
The Voting Rights Act of 1965

- Led to the abolishment of the *poll tax*
- Outlawed the use of any kind of *literacy test*
• Mandated *prec clearance* – the prior approval by the Justice Department of changes to or new election laws by the States.
The Voting Rights Act of 1965 (continued)

- Later amendments added a *language-minority provision* which stated in areas with a minority-language population of 10,000 or more persons (1992 revision), all ballots and other official election materials must be printed both in English and in the language of the minority, or minorities, involved.
African Americans at the Polls

Southern Black Voters, 1960–1970

Number registered (in millions)

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SOURCE: Historical Statistics of Black America
Section 3 Review

1. The Fifteenth Amendment

(a) protects the voting right of adult male citizens of every race.

(b) gives women the right to vote.

(c) forbids denying any citizen under the age of 18 the right to vote.

(d) calls for members of the U.S. Senate to be elected directly by the people.
2. Which piece of Civil Rights legislation was the most effective and influential?

(a) The Civil Rights Act of 1957
(b) The Civil Rights Act of 1960
(c) The Civil Rights Act of 1964
(d) The Voting Rights Act of 1965
Nonvoters

• Millions of Americans do not vote when elections are held.

• Only 50.1 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in the 2000 presidential election, and only 46.3 percent of the electorate voted for the members of the House of Representatives.
• Voter turnout significantly decreases in *off-year elections*, congressional elections held in years when there is no presidential election.
Some people cannot vote for various reasons, such as physical or mental illness, unexpected travel, and resident alien citizenship status.
However, most nonvoters do not vote because

- voting is in some way inconvenient,
- they do not believe that their vote will make a difference, or
- they distrust politics and political candidates.
Voters and Voting Behavior

Voting is studied more than any other form of political participation in the United States. We learn about voting behavior from:

• The results of elections — information can be gleaned by studying the results of confidential voting compared to the population make-up of a particular sector
Voting is studied more than any other form of political participation in the United States. We learn about voting behavior from:

- The field of survey research — data can be gathered by conducting polls across specific cross sections of the population, as the Gallup Organization does.
Voting is studied more than any other form of political participation in the United States. We learn about voting behavior from:

• *Studies of political socialization* — studying *political socialization*, the process by which people gain their political attitudes and opinions, can also be useful in predicting voting behavior.
Voter preferences can’t be predicted by just one sociological factor. Voter opinion is a combination of all of these factors and more.

- Income and Occupation
- Education
- Gender and Age
Voter preferences can’t be predicted by just one sociological factor. Voter opinion is a combination of all of these factors and more.

- Religious & Ethnic Background
- Geography
- Family and Other Groups
Psychological Factors

Voters’ perceptions of their party, the candidates, and the issues significantly affects their voting.

**Party Identification**

• The loyalty of people to a particular political party is the single most significant and lasting predictor of how a person will vote.
Candidates and Issues

- Candidates and issues are two short-term factors that can influence even the most loyal Democrat or Republican. People may vote out of their chosen party if they dislike a candidate or the party’s stand on a particular issue.
Section 4 Review

1. The reason why most nonvoters do not vote is

   (a) they are too ill.

   (b) they believe that their vote will not matter.

   (c) they are not officially United States citizens.

   (d) they are unexpectedly out of town on election day.
2. Voters’ choices are affected by
   (a) their income and occupation.
   (b) their education.
   (c) their religious and ethnic background.
   (d) all of the above.