

Political Participation (Unit 5)

5

BIG IDEAS

- CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN A REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY
- COMPETING POLICY-MAKING INTERESTS
- METHODS OF POLITICAL ANALYSIS

When looking at the interrelationship between government and politics, you need to understand the nature of political participation. Government has an impact on our everyday lives in many ways. Our federal form of government has a huge effect on how we are able to function as part of our society—from how our recycled garbage is picked up to the speed limit on interstate highways. How citizens participate influence many policy decisions.

A working definition of government is those institutions that create public policy. Constitutionally defined, the formal institutions of government on the national level are the executive branch headed by the president, the legislative branch consisting of the Congress, and the judicial branch made up of the Supreme Court and lower courts. A similar structure exists on the state and local levels. In addition to government's defined institutions, modern government is also characterized by those agencies that implement public policy—bureaucracies, including regulatory agencies, independent executive agencies, government corporations, and the cabinet. These institutions, sometimes acting independently, sometimes in concert, create and implement public policy. There are also linkage institutions that encourage political participation and utilize support to influence public policy. By definition, a linkage institution is the means by which individuals can express preferences regarding the development of public policy. Examples of linkage institutions are political parties, special-interest groups, and the media. Preferences are voiced through the political system, and when specific political issues are resolved, they become the basis for policy.

Government, politics, and participation thus can be defined by a formula that combines the three concepts and reaches an end goal: government plus politics and participation equals the creation of public policy. In other words, what government does through politics and participation results in public policy.

The media, through daily newspapers and television newscasts as well as columnists and editorials, attempt to influence the voters, the party, and the candidate's stand on issues. The media have been accused of oversimplifying the issues by relying on photo opportunities (photo ops) set up by the candidates and on 30-second statements on the evening news (sound bites). The interaction of linkage institutions results in the formation of a policy agenda by the candidates running for elected office.

People with similar needs, values, and attitudes will band together to form political parties. Once a political party is formed, in order for the needs, values, and attitudes to translate into actual policy, the party must succeed in electing members to office. Thus, individuals running for office

must have a base of electoral support, a base of political support (the party), and a base of financial support. Obviously, the issue of incumbency comes into play as those elected officials who are reelected become entrenched in the system and have an advantage over young political hopefuls who want to break into the system.

In order to implement their policies, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents have to be elected to public office. Candidates and political parties must assess the nature of the electorate. Is there a significant number of single-issue groups, those special interests that base their vote on a single issue? Or is the candidate's stand on the issues broad enough to attract the mainstream of the voting electorate? The role of the electorate is also crucial in determining the means with which individuals become involved. How the voters perceive the candidate's positions on issues, the way people feel about the party, the comfort level of the voter in relation to the candidate and the party, as well as the influence the media have on the election—these all come into play in the eventual success or failure of the candidate.

The measure of a democracy is open and free elections. In order for a democracy to succeed, these elections have to be open to all citizens, and issues and policy statements of candidates have to be available to the electorate so citizens can form political parties to advocate policies, and elections would be determined by a majority or plurality.

Amendments to the Constitution creating direct elections of senators; voting rights for freed slaves, women, and 18-year-olds; the elimination of poll taxes; and legislation such as the Voting Rights Bill have accomplished this. Participation in government and politics is another indicator. In 2012, many states attempted to pass legislation that would have made voting more difficult: these include voter-identification laws and limiting early-voting opportunities. Proponents of the legislation claimed these restrictive measures would prevent voter fraud. Opponents of these policies viewed it as voter suppression. Ultimately, the courts ruled many of these measures unconstitutional. In 2013, the Supreme Court struck down a key provision of the Voting Rights Act, freeing nine southern states to change their election laws without advance federal approval. As a result, in the presidential election more states passed laws requiring voter IDs and restricting early voting. The courts invalidated many of these laws because they were discriminatory. In those states where the laws were implemented, there was a decrease in voter turnout.

Interest groups and political parties are both characterized by group identification and group affiliation. However, they differ in the fact that interest groups do not nominate candidates for political office. Their function is to influence officeholders rather than to end up as elected officials, and they are responsible only to a very narrow constituency. Interest groups can also make up their own bylaws, which govern how they run their organizations. Because the major function of these groups is the advocacy of or opposition to specific public policies, they can attract members from a large geographic area. The only criterion is that the person joining the group shares the same interest and attitude toward the goals of the organization.

QUESTIONS STUDENTS MUST ANSWER

1. What type of technological changes impact how politicians communicate and how they behave?
2. Why and how does voter turnout vary? What are the different levels of political participation?
3. How do you measure which method of political participation is successful in shaping public policy?

Big Ideas

How **Civic Participation in a Representative Democracy** drives elections and is impacted by the various kind of media.

How **Competing Policy-Making Interests** is driven by linkage institutions, the media, special-interest groups, political parties, and participation in elections, which are essential to the development and implementation of public policy.

How **Methods of Political Analysis** are used to measure public opinion.

KEY TERMS STUDENTS MUST KNOW

Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002	Party convention
Caucus	Party identification
Closed primary	Party realignment
Coalitions	Party-line voting
Critical elections	Political efficacy
Demographic	Political platforms
Electoral College	Proportional voting
Fifteenth Amendment	Prospective voting
Free rider	Rational choice voting
Incumbency	Retrospective voting
Iron triangle	Seventeenth Amendment
Issue network	Single-issue group
Linkage institutions	Social movement
Midterm election	Twenty-fourth Amendment
Nineteenth Amendment	Twenty-sixth Amendment
Open primary	Winner-take-all voting

REQUIRED SUPREME COURT CASE STUDENTS MUST KNOW

Citizens United v Federal Election Commission (2010)

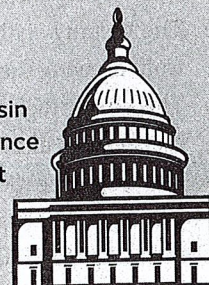
KEY CONCEPT 5.A: VOTING

Political Participation is determined by voting, the level of one's faith and trust in government, also called political efficacy, political socialization, political identification, political ideology, demographics, and laws that result in either the encouragement of or restrictions in voting.

The **Big Idea**, **Civic Participation in a Representative Democracy**, is reflected by this concept.

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTION

After the close presidential election in 2016, voter ID laws in Wisconsin were scrutinized to determine whether that law had made the difference in the outcome. An analysis by the Washington Post determined that it did not. That law and other laws, such as the Texas voter ID law, have been challenged in court.



POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Participation in the political process is the key gauge of how successful political parties are in involving the average citizen. If you develop the actual vote as the key criteria, the future is certainly not bright. Unlike in many foreign countries, the American electorate has not turned out in droves in local or national elections. The reasons why people either vote or decide not to participate in the process depends on a number of factors. Then what does the future hold for the Democrats and Republicans? To answer this question, you must look at the continuum of political involvement.

There is no doubt that statistically the majority of the electorate participates in the political process in conventional ways. From those areas the majority of people participate in, to those areas that a minority participates in, the population as a whole generally is involved in one or more of the following:

- discussing politics;
- registering to vote;
- voting in local, state, and national elections;
- joining a specific political party;
- making contact with politicians either by letter, phone, or social media;
- attending political meetings;
- contributing to political campaigns;
- working in a campaign;
- soliciting funds; and
- running for office.

Yet one of the ironies of conventional political participation is that less than half of those who are eligible actually vote in most elections.

QUICK REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL BASIS OF SUFFRAGE

- Article I Section 2 Clause (1) required each state to allow those qualified to vote for their own legislatures to qualify as well to vote for the House of Representatives.
- Article II Section 1 Clause (2) provided for presidential electors to be chosen in each state with the manner determined by state legislatures.
- The Reserved Power clause of the Tenth Amendment gave the states the right to determine voting procedures.
- The Fifteenth Amendment gave freed slaves the right to vote.
- The Seventeenth Amendment changed the meaning of Article I Section 2 to allow eligible voters to elect senators directly.
- The Nineteenth Amendment made it illegal for the states to discriminate against men or women in establishing voting qualifications.
- The Twenty-fourth Amendment outlawed the poll tax as a requirement for voting.
- The Twenty-sixth Amendment prohibited the federal government and state governments from denying the right of 18-year-olds to vote in both state and federal elections.
- The Voting Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1965 increased the opportunities for minorities to register and allowed the attorney general to prevent state interference in the voting process.
- The Supreme Court decision in *Baker v Carr* (1962) established the one-man, one-vote principle.
- Supreme Court decisions in the 1990s established that gerrymandering resulting in “majority-minority” districts was unconstitutional.

Party Identification

If we assume party identification is a key factor in determining voter turnout and voter preference, then we would assume the Democrats would have the edge. This was definitely true in Congress, where Democrats dominated both houses from World War II until 1994, when the Republicans gained control of the House as well as the Senate. When you look at presidential elections, personality and issues rather than party have been conclusive factors in determining the outcome of the election. In many elections, ticket splitting occurred more than straight party-line voting. This was especially evident in 1996, 2010, and 2014 when the voters kept in office a Democratic president and a Republican Congress. In order to vote, you must be registered. Historically, this was an important factor explaining why voter turnout was low. Party identification in 2016, according to the Gallup Poll, had 36 percent of the electorate identify themselves as Independent, 32 percent Democratic, and 27 percent Republican. In 2016 there was very little ticket splitting as Republican candidates running for reelection won in red states and Democratic candidates won in blue states.

Voting Declines

Even though it is easier for people to vote due to early voting opportunities in many states and a greater number of people have registered, there has been a consistent downward trend in voting from 1968 to 2014. The number of people of voting age has more than doubled since 1932. Yet after reaching a high in 1960, the percentage of eligible voters who voted actually declined (except for a small increase in 1984 and 1992). Because of the increase in young voters and successful efforts to enroll minorities and get them to vote, there was a significant increase in the 1992 election when close to 55 percent of the registered voters turned out. In 1996, because of negative voter reaction to the campaign issues raised by President Clinton and Senator Robert Dole, the voter turnout was again below 50 percent. In 2000 the percentage rose to a little above 50 percent. In 2004, there was a record voter turnout that translated into a 60 percent turnout. The 2008 presidential election saw an increase in voter registration and voter turnout. A little more than 62 percent of eligible voters turned out. In 2012 and 2016, the turnout was 58 percent. Since 1932 the highest presidential turnouts (60 percent or more) were in the three elections that took place in the 1960s. National and international events, as well as new legislation that increased voting opportunities for minorities, were probably responsible for the higher numbers. After Watergate the percentage of voters dropped dramatically. It is interesting to note that in off-year congressional elections, voter turnout is significantly lower. From 1974 to 2014 turnout in midterm congressional elections averaged around 40 percent.

There is a real inconsistency between voter participation and the amount and type of media election coverage provided during campaigns. Everything from presidential debates to town meetings and an increased use of the mass media should result in an increased voter turnout. But because of a decline in party identification and a distrust of politicians, it seems that many eligible voters would rather sit out elections.

The Right to Vote, Also Known as Suffrage

The country has seen a tremendous change in the legal right to vote. When the Constitution was ratified, franchise was given to white male property owners only. Today there is a potential for over 234 million people who are at least 18 years old to vote. It has been a long struggle to obtain suffrage for individuals who were held back by such considerations as property ownership, race, religious background, literacy, ability to pay poll taxes, and gender. In addition, many state restrictions lessened the impact of federal law and constitutional amendments.

The aftermath of the Civil War provided a major attempt to franchise the freed blacks. However, the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment was countered by the passage of literacy laws and poll taxes in most Southern states. The progressive era of the early twentieth century saw the passage of two key amendments, the Seventeenth instituting the direct election of senators and the Nineteenth granting voting rights to women. After the *Brown* decision in 1954, Congress began formulating voting rights legislation such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and these changes were backed by the passage of the Twenty-fourth Amendment, eliminating the poll tax (or any other voting fee). The final groups to receive the vote were Washington, D.C., voters, as a result of the Twenty-third Amendment in 1961, and 18-year-olds, as a result of the passage of the Twenty-sixth Amendment in 1971. In 1992 Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition increased minority voter registration. To make voter registration easier for all groups, the Motor Voter Act of 1993 was signed into law by President Clinton. This law enabled people to register to vote at state motor vehicle departments. In fact, not since the Voting Rights Act of 1965 have so many new voters registered: more than 600,000 registered to vote.

Even though these trends resulted in an increase in the potential pool of voters, it was still left up to the individual states to regulate specific voting requirements. Such issues as residency, registration procedures, availability of voting machines and voting places, and voting times affect the ability of people to vote. However, federal law and Supreme Court decisions have created more and more consistency in these areas. For instance, the Supreme Court has ruled that a 30-day period is ample time for residency qualifications. The Motor Voter Act does provide for the centralization of voter registration along with local registration regulations. Some states have permitted 17-year-olds to vote in some primary elections. Literacy tests have been outlawed in every state as a result of the Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1970 and Supreme Court decisions.

Important Legislation That Advanced Voting Rights

The two significant pieces of modern legislation increasing voting opportunities were the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, previously discussed.

There are some cases where restrictions can exist on a person's right to vote. People in mental institutions, the homeless, convicted felons, and dishonorably discharged military have been denied the right to vote in some states. Many states have increasingly passed different kinds of voter identification laws to ensure voter integrity. Opponents of these laws claim that the real reason they were passed was to reduce voter turnout among minorities and other groups who traditionally vote Democratic. The Justice Department has stepped in, and many of these laws have been ruled unconstitutional. Although the impact on presidential elections has been negligible, laws that are implemented could potentially reduce turnout in future elections.

Models of Voting Behavior

The different methods of voting behavior include:

- **Retrospective voting**—refers to the decisions people make on voting based on how political parties perform, how elected officials perform, and the extent to which an elected administration achieves its goals. Retrospective voters are more concerned with policy outcomes than the tactics used to achieve policy.
- **Rational Choice Voting**—refers to voting based on decisions made after considering alternative positions.
- **Prospective Voting**—refers to voters deciding that what will happen in the future is the most important factor. If the voter feels the party in power has done a poor job, that voter will vote

for the other party. That is why, in a campaign, candidates stress what they will do for the voter if they get elected.

- Party-line voting—refers to voting for the same party for every office that candidates are running for. Those voters who have the strongest party identification are most likely to vote the party line. A 2014 survey found that only 34 percent of voters voted on a straight party line.

Why People Vote

There are many factors that explain how attitudes, perceptions, and viewpoints individuals hold about politics and government impact voting. Some political scientists view this process as one of political socialization. It is interesting to see the parallels between the factors that influence voting patterns and the factors that shape public opinion and political socialization. They include:

- the family,
- the schools,
- the church,
- models of public opinion, and
- the mass media.

People internalize viewpoints at a very early age and act on them as they grow older. “Family values” has become an overused phrase, but in fact it is the primary source of the formulation of political opinions. When Vice President Dan Quayle made family values an election issue in 1992, he touched a chord that set off a debate. The reality is that children internalize what they hear and see within their family unit. If a child lives with a single parent, that child will certainly have strong attitudes about child support. If parents tend to speak about party identification, most children will tend to register and vote for the same party as their parents. Schools and the church play a secondary role in the formation of political views. There is no doubt that the Catholic Church’s position on abortion has had a tremendous impact on Catholics taking a stand for the “right to life.” However, the family unit reinforces the viewpoint.

Schools and teachers inculcate the meaning of citizenship at very early ages. Children recite the Pledge of Allegiance and sing the national anthem. Depending upon how open the educational system is, students will also learn how to question the role of government.

Voting Patterns Influenced by Political Socialization, Party Identification, and Political Ideology

In order to understand why people vote, you must look first at the potential makeup of the American electorate. Demographic patterns are determined every ten years when the census is conducted. Besides establishing representation patterns, the census also provides important information related to the population’s

- age,
- socioeconomic makeup,
- place of residence and shifting population movement,
- ethnicity, and
- gender.

The 2010 Census

Key aspects of the 2010 census reflect an increase in the aging of America, a population shift to the Sunbelt states, and a decrease in those who would be classified as earning an income close to or

below the poverty level. The 2010 U.S. census results released by the Census Bureau indicated major changes in the population of the United States and in population shifts from large industrial states to the Sunbelt of the South and Southwest. Specifically:

- the official U.S. population count is 325.7 million in 2017. In 2000 the population was 281,421,906. That is a growth rate of 9.7 percent, the lowest growth rate since the Great Depression.
- minorities, especially Hispanics, make up a growing share of the U.S. population and are the largest ethnic group.
- children are much more likely to be racial/ethnic minorities than adults.
- the fastest-growing states are in the South and West.
- southern and western states gained seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, while northeastern and midwestern states lost seats.
- metropolitan areas with the fastest rates of growth are mostly in the South and West; the fastest rates of decline tend to be in the Northeast and Midwest.
- most U.S. population growth during the past century has taken place in suburbs, rather than in city centers.
- the states of Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania lost congressional seats. New York and Ohio lost two seats.
- the states that gained seats were Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Nevada, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Washington. Texas gained four seats. Florida gained two seats.

Immigrant patterns and these factors have public-policy consequences and are therefore important to the political process. Other factors, such as whether it is a presidential election or a midterm congressional election, impact voter turnout. There is a greater turnout in presidential elections than midterm elections. Voter turnout in presidential elections since 1960 is between 50 and 60 percent compared to around 40 percent in congressional elections.

Optional Readings

***Issue Salience and Party Choice*, by David RePass**

Key Quote:

“As the parties move farther apart on the liberal-conservative spectrum, cross pressured voters—those who pair left-wing economic positions with right-wing social attitudes and vice versa—face a starker choice between the two primary issue dimensions in American politics.”

***Stepping Up: The Impact of the Newest Immigrant, Asian, and Latino Voters*, by Rob Parel**

Immigration Policy Center (2013)

“Across both Democratic and Republican congressional districts, demographics shifts are taking place that will significantly alter the composition of the electorates. Author Rob Parel points out that young Asian and Latino teenagers coming of age, as well as newly naturalized immigrants, will have a major impact on the profile of newly eligible voters in upcoming elections. Using data from the U.S. Census and the Department of Homeland Security, the paper finds that about 1.4 million newly naturalized citizens and 1.8 million first-time Asian and Latino voters will participate in each two-year election cycle, and together these groups will constitute 34 percent of all new eligible voters

in the 2014 elections alone. Congressional districts across the country but particularly in California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, New York, New Jersey and New Mexico will see substantial increases in the Asian and Latino composition of new voters. As a result, Parel suggests that representatives must be cognizant of how their decisions today and in the future on matters such as comprehensive immigration reform will impact not only the current electorate but also the electorate in the 2014 and future elections.”

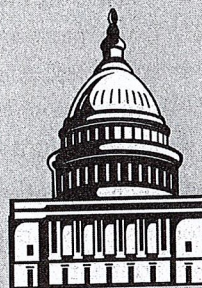
KEY CONCEPT 5.B: LINKAGE INSTITUTIONS

The linkage institutions of special-interest groups, political parties, and the social movements they generate create the means for political participation and impact how people identify with and relate to the Government and officials who make public policy.

The **Big Idea, Competing Policy-Making Interests**, is reflected by this concept.

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTION

An example of how linkage institutions work is the 2010 midterm elections. As a result of the rise of the grassroots movement that called itself the “Tea Party” (named after the colonists who dumped tea in Boston Harbor in 1773), most of its members voted Republican in the midterm election, resulting in a gain of 63 seats and control of the House of Representatives for the Republicans. The trend continued in 2014 as the Republicans gained 13 seats in the House and took control of the Senate. In 2016, Republicans kept control of the Congress, but lost six seats in the House and two seats in the Senate.



Today, the test to determine whether our democracy is working still relies on how the individual determines who runs the government and how policy is determined. Through linkage institutions and sovereignty, individuals must have a forum and a vote to determine their elected officials. The four main linkage institutions are political parties, elections, the media, and interest groups. To fully understand the function of these informal institutions of government, you should view them as input agents that result in output from the policy-making institutions covered in the last section.

POLITICAL PARTIES

The first linkage institution, political parties and how they influence policy making through political action, will be developed in this chapter. We will cover the major tasks, organization, and components of political parties. We will contrast the party organization with its actual influence on the policy makers in government. Then we will look at the history of the party system in America, evaluating the major party eras. The impact of third parties on the two-party system will also be discussed.

We will also analyze the ideology of the two major parties by looking at their platforms versus the liberal/conservative alliances that have developed. These coalitions may be the first step in the breakdown of the two-party system as we know it.

The Two-Party System

The nature of the party system in America can be viewed as competitive. Since the development of our first parties—the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans—different philosophies and approaches to the development and implementation of public policy have determined which party and which leaders control the government. Our system has been one of the few two-party systems