

CHAPTER 13 VOTING AND ELECTIONS

Narrative Lecture Outline

The 2004 presidential election was a true horse race, neck and neck to the end at the national level. However, due to the nature and structure of American elections, the real battles were fought only in key “battleground” states, the most important of which were Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Florida. George W. Bush took a lead in Florida and John Kerry was in the lead in Pennsylvania; the election came down to Ohio. Other states mattered, especially other battle ground states, but large proportions of the media and travel budgets went to these three states, with each candidate visiting numerous times.

How did the electoral system contribute to this outcome? How much of the outcome can be explained by issues? Personalities? The Electoral College? And what are the implications of voting and elections for the country, the public good, democracy, and the like? Let’s explore voting and elections in the U.S. to see.

Voting Behavior

Voting is the most common way to participate in politics. It’s also very conventional and easy to do, since it doesn’t take a lot of time and effort. Other forms of participation, such as writing a letter to an elected official, contributing time or money to a campaign, or writing a letter to the editor are also conventional. Unconventional political participation is less common. Techniques include boycotts, protests, and picketing. Since voting is most common, this will be the main topic of our discussion. Research on voting behavior tends to focus on two primary issues: voter turnout and voter choice.

Patterns in Voter Turnout

Turnout refers to the proportion of the voting age public that actually participate. About 40 percent of the eligible adult population votes regularly, 25 percent are occasional voters, and 35 percent rarely or never vote. Worldwide, this is far below the average for advanced industrial democracies, the highest of which are Sweden and Italy that regularly see turnouts of 80 percent. In America, who votes?

Education: The more educated you are, the more likely you are to vote.

Income: People with higher incomes have a higher tendency to vote. In part, this is because income and education are correlated and people with more income tend to have more education. Wealthier citizens are more likely to believe the system works for them and that their votes make a difference. Lower-income citizens are often alienated from politics and appear apathetic.

Age: Older people tend to vote more often. Less than half of eligible 18 to 24 year olds are registered to vote.

Gender: Women have had the right to vote since 1920 and have generally voted less often than men. Since 1980, there has been talk of a gender gap. The size of the gap varies from election to election, but is usually around 5 to 7 percent. This means that women have a higher tendency to vote for Democrats than Republicans. Also, since women are now more than 50 percent of the population, women actually comprise a majority of eligible voters.

Race: In general, whites tend to vote more regularly than African Americans and Hispanics, though this may be due to income and education, not race. However, middle class and wealthy African Americans are also less likely to vote. In 2004, 55 percent of African Americans voted and only 38 percent of Hispanics voted. In general, African Americans tend to vote Democrat, though that is becoming less true of late. Hispanic Americans tend to vote Democrat, except for those of Cuban heritage who vote Republican. Asian Americans have considerably more diversity in their voting choices. For example, Chinese Americans tend to vote Democrat, but Vietnamese Americans tend to vote Republican.

Interest in Politics: People who are interested in politics tend to vote more often than those who are not. This may be socialization—they came from politically active and interested families or related to other socio-economic factors. Only a small number of Americans, about 5 percent, are highly active politically and participate in more time-consuming and costly ways other than simply voting.

Why is Voter Turnout So Low?

Over 90 million eligible voters did not cast a ballot in the 2004 presidential election. Voter turnout is low—and is the lowest in the industrialized world—for a variety of reasons:

Too Busy: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 20 percent of Americans said they didn't vote because they were "too busy" or "had schedule conflicts." Another 15 percent claimed to have been ill, disabled, or dealing with a family emergency, but these could be excuses instead of real reasons.

Difficulty of Registration: In the U.S., the individual must take the initiative and make an effort to register to vote. In many countries, it is automatic or the government does it for you. The Motor Voter Act has made this easier. This federal law now requires that the Department of Motor Vehicles give you the opportunity to register when you get your driver's license or license plates.

Difficulty of Absentee Voting: Absentee ballots are often difficult to acquire in the U.S. Many states require that you apply in person, but then, why would you need an absentee ballot?

Number of Elections: The number and frequency of elections in this country may also contribute to low turnout. People simply “burnout” on the many choices: township, city, county, school board, state and national elections, as many as three branches of government, and a variety of other posts.

Voter Attitudes: Voting is not compulsory here. Some voters may choose not to vote because they are alienated; others because they do not like any of the candidates, and others because they see no difference among the choices being offered.

Weak Political Parties: Political parties today do not mobilize voters as well as they once did. Today’s campaigns are more candidate-centered.

Efforts to Improve Voter Turnout?

Easier Registration and Absentee Voting

Making registration and absentee ballot access easier would likely increase voter turnout. In 1993, the Motor Voter Law was such an attempt. This law allows citizens to register to vote at any Department of Motor Vehicles office (DMV), public assistance agency, or military recruitment division. It also allows citizens to register by mail. The law took effect in 1995, and seems to account for some of the increase in participation in 2000 and 2004. Six states allow registration on election day: Minnesota, Maine, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Wyoming, and Idaho. Turnout in these states averages 10 percent higher than other states. Oregon has abolished polling places and all votes are now done by mail, thereby eliminating time and travel constraints on voters. This has increased voter turnout. Some states are also experimenting with early voting and allowing absentee ballots on a more open/easy basis.

Make Election Day a Holiday

Many people claim they have no time to vote. If Election Day is made to be an official holiday, they would no longer have this excuse.

Strengthen Parties

Strengthening parties could help move citizens to vote.

Other Suggestions

Including fewer or mandatory elections, changing to a proportional representation system, and moving to Internet based voting may help.

Does Low Voter Turnout Matter?

Is low voter turnout a problem? Isn’t choosing not to participate a valid choice in a democracy? Low turnout may help the system remain stable. Do we want poor, uneducated people voting? Wouldn’t they make bad decisions? These arguments may have elements of truth, but those who require the most government assistance seem to

have the least political clout and power. Is that fair? Look at the *Join the Debate* box found on page 472 and have the class discuss the issues presented.

Patterns in Vote Choice

What explains the ways people vote? (*link back to public opinion discussions*)

Party Identification
Race and Ethnicity
Gender
Income
Ideology
Issues

Elections in the United States

The Purposes of Elections

Most change in this country comes about on the basis of elections. Popular elections allow us to avoid the unpleasantness of political change. In some countries, riots, strikes, and coups d'état are fairly routine. Elections also serve to make governments legitimate, filling public offices and organizing governments. Elections allow people with different views and policy agendas to come to power. Elections also ensure that a government remains accountable to the people.

The winner of an election often claims a mandate or a command from the people to implement their agenda. Sometimes this claim is true, other times it is not. That is because people may be voting for a candidate based on the promises of their campaign (prospective judgment), or they may have been voting against a candidate's opponent or an incumbent, or a party that was in power (retrospective judgment). In the former case, the winner can claim a mandate; in the latter, it would be difficult to do so.

Different Kinds of Elections

Primary Elections

In a primary election, voters choose who will carry the party's banner in the general election; it is an election that occurs within a party. There are several different types of primaries:

- closed primaries: Only party members are allowed to vote
- open primaries: Allows independents and members of other parties to vote
- blanket primary: Voters may vote in either party's primary, but not both, on an office-by-office basis
- runoff primary: a second-round contest between the two candidates with the most votes.

Closed primaries allow the party maximum control and promote party strength. Open primaries are considered more democratic since participation is open to all voters, regardless of party affiliation.

General Elections

Once the parties have chosen their candidates, the general election is held. The general election is a contest between parties and fills a public office.

Initiative, Referendum, and Recall

Used in 24 states and Washington, D.C., initiative, referendum, and recall are three other types of election. Initiatives and referenda involve voting on issues. Initiatives allow citizens to propose legislation and submit it to popular vote. Each state that has initiative determines the requirements for ballot access, usually a certain number of signatures on a petition. A referendum allows the legislature to submit proposed legislation for popular approval. Some referenda are voluntary—the legislature wants to get voter input. Others are mandatory—more and more states are requiring referenda for tax increases and such.

Recall is different. Recall elections allow citizens to remove an official from office. They are very rare, but allow for another level of accountability for public officials.

All three types of elections are often referred to as “direct democracy” and were first proposed during the Progressive era. They are democratic, but not problem-free. Several problems occur. First, the number of initiatives and referenda on ballots can be mind-numbing. In California, there are so many that they need to produce a two-volume guide in order to explain them. Additional choices, particularly ones that are often poorly worded and controversial, may not be a good thing. People often vote on the basis of highly emotional campaign commercials and slogans without ever reading the actual proposed initiative or referenda. Laws can end up on the books with no debate and no real understanding. Courts have struck down, or stopped via injunction, several initiatives on constitutional grounds. Can you think of some other drawbacks to direct democracy? How about the benefits of these processes? Is there a clear-cut conclusion on whether these are good, bad, or indifferent?

Presidential Elections

Held every four years, the presidential election is the biggest and most popular of all American elections. The presidential election is actually 50 separate state elections in which delegates to each party’s national convention are allotted. Following the national conventions, at which the party’s candidate and running mate are appointed, another set of 50 state elections are held on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November. It is a long, exhilarating, and exhausting process that often begins even before the previous election has ended!

Convention delegates, selected at state primaries and caucuses from January through early summer of election year, are chosen in a variety of ways, based on rules enacted by each party:

- winner take all: Primary win gets all delegates

- proportional representation (PR): Candidates are awarded delegates according to the percentage of the vote they won, provided they reached a minimum threshold (usually 15 percent)
- three other ways, used rarely:
 1. PR with bonus delegates: awards delegates according to popular vote, with a bonus delegate to each district
 2. beauty contest with separate delegates: Primary gives direction as to public opinion but delegate selection is not bound by the election results
 3. delegate selection with no beauty contest: Delegates are chosen by election but are not linked to any one candidate
- caucus: The oldest, most party-oriented method of choosing delegates, a caucus is usually a closed-party meeting to select delegates.

Primaries versus Caucuses

In recent years, the trend in pre-convention contexts has been away from caucuses and toward primary elections. In 2004, there were 38 presidential primaries compared to only 17 in 1968.

Primaries are often seen as more democratic because they allow and encourage a broader range of people to participate in selecting the parties' candidates for president. They measure a candidate's popularity with the rank and file, thus better approximating the candidate's likely support in the general election. They also require candidates to campaign broadly and serve as a rigorous test.

But, not everyone agrees. Critics of primaries argue that caucuses are better because participation is deliberative and thoughtful. In a primary, voters who know nothing about the candidates, and who are overly swayed by 30-second sound bites, cast ballots. In a caucus, people invest several hours in meeting, discussing the election and issues, and generally offer higher-quality participation than a primary election. These critics also argue that the scheduling of primaries affects their outcome and that New Hampshire's place as first primary state skews the results, since NH is hardly representative of the country at large. Critics also say that primaries merely test a candidate's media appeal and skills, as well as his/her stamina. A successful president needs more than stamina and media appeal to govern well. Another critique is that primaries favor the "base" of a party; usually the more extreme party members who are worried about wedge issues rather than winning the general election.

So far, the consensus seems to favor the primaries as a vehicle for choosing presidential candidates. The debate continues, as does the debate over the schedule for primaries. States are clamoring to be first in an already front-loaded primary system.

One proposal suggests regional primaries. There would be five or six regions—such as Midwest and South—and all states in the region would hold their primary on the same day. There would be one regional election each month from February through June of election year. This would cut down on candidate fatigue, and may reduce costs by reducing travel expenses. It might also inspire a focus on regional issues, though some argue that costs would remain about the same. Some also argue that the system would intensify rifts among the nation's regions, and thus be a poor choice.

Occasionally, a regional plan is adopted. In 1988, 14 Southern states, sponsored by conservative Democrats, began Super Tuesday to maximize the impact of the South on presidential politics. The plan did not work out as expected because primary voters in the Democratic Party tend to be more liberal than the rank and file, even in the South. In 1996, a Yankee primary was scheduled with five New England states and New York holding primaries on the same day.

The primary season is now “front-loaded” and the trend seems to be earlier and earlier primaries as states vie for maximum effect on the process. Early primaries also favor front-runners who might not stand up to the scrutiny by the electorate and the media in longer contests, and might prevent the emergence of dark horse candidates. This amplifies the importance of the “invisible primary”—electoral activity prior to the official opening of primary season.

For the 2008 presidential election, the Democratic National Committee has announced that Nevada will have their caucus between Iowa and New Hampshire, with South Carolina occurring soon after.

The Party Conventions

The out-of-power party generally holds its convention in late July and the party-in-power holds its convention in August. Conventions have become four-day-long media extravaganzas with few surprises and tight scripts, designed to emphasize party unity and consensus. They are a huge prime-time electioneering event to kick off the general election season. Conventions were, at one time, more deliberative and surprising. Today, they tend to ratify the choices made during the primary season.

Changes in pre-convention political processes have lessened the importance of the national convention and reduced the control of local and state party leaders on the process.

Delegate Selection

Delegate selection is no longer the province of party leaders and smoke-filled rooms. Today, it is generally done through primary elections. Most delegates are committed to a candidate at the convention, thus the deliberative nature of traditional conventions is hampered.

National Candidates and Issues

Voters are now looking at national issues and candidates. This has also diminished the control of local and state party leaders.

The News Media

The mass media have also changed the nature of conventions. They provide minute-by-minute information about committed delegates and nomination politics. Their scrutiny prevents backroom deals and forces the party to consider how they “look” on television. Debate within the party may look divisive, and that appearance may weaken it in the public eye. Conventions have become stage-managed public relations campaigns geared to play in prime time. The ironic thing about this is, as the parties have tried to package their candidates and conventions for TV, TV has started to decide that the conventions have no surprises and are not as newsworthy as they once were.

Who are the Delegates?

Delegates are, as a whole, an unusual and unrepresentative collection of people. They tend to be keenly interested in politics and more ideologically pure than the rest of us. Democratic delegates tend to be more liberal than the rank and file, and Republican delegates tend to be more conservative. Delegates tend to be better educated and wealthier than the average American.

The Electoral College: How Presidents Are Elected

The object of the presidential election is to win a majority in the Electoral College. This is a unique institution created by the Framers to ensure that the president was chosen intelligently and with the input of the states. Like most decisions at the Constitutional Convention, the Electoral College is the result of compromise. In this case, it is compromise between those who wanted direct popular election of the president and those who wanted Congress to choose the president. Electors were to be men of character, with a solid knowledge of national politics, who would choose a prominent national statesman for president, and not a mere politician. The Framers designed the Electoral College to work without political parties, to cover both the nomination and general election phase of the president's selection, and it was constructed to choose a nonpartisan statesman-like president.

The election of 1800 revealed a serious flaw in the method of choosing a president. The original method led to a tie for the presidency between Aaron Burr and Thomas Jefferson because electors were not allowed to designate their choice of president and vice president. The Constitution says that in the case of a tie, the House of Representatives chooses the president. This resulted in the Twelfth Amendment that provides for separate elections for president and vice president.

The number of electors is determined by the federal representation for each state. For example, California has 53 members of the House of Representatives and 2 Senators—54 electoral votes. Ohio has 18 Representatives and 2 Senators—21 electoral votes. Delaware has 1 Representative and 2 Senators—3 electoral votes. This is what you see on election night on TV. The anchors are reporting state electoral votes. There are a total of 538 electoral votes (535 members of Congress and 3 for the District of Columbia), a majority of 270 wins the presidency.

Despite the Twelfth Amendment, the process is still not perfect. Third parties could potentially throw the election into the House of Representatives as happened in the 2000 election, where a candidate won a majority of electoral votes but a minority of popular votes. Given that most Americans are unaware of the role of the Electoral College, either of these could be quite unpopular occurrences and election 2000 was definitely unpopular, in some circles, because of the contested nature of the win.

The Electoral College Today

Throughout the 2000 presidential campaign, pundits warned that it was likely to be the closest since the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon election. Few realized that it would take five weeks for a winner to be declared or that the entire election would come down to the

state of Florida and a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court. Al Gore became only the fourth person in history to win the popular vote but lose the Electoral College.

The representation in the Electoral College changes with every census to reflect population shifts. Each census requires a redistricting to meet the principle of one man-one vote. Over the last several decades, there has been a decisive population shift from the Northeast to the South and West. Recent reapportionments have favored the Republicans.

There have been calls for Electoral College reforms in the past. A bill is introduced in almost every session of Congress calling for its abolition, but it never passes. Given the hotly contested 2000 election, calls for change may gain strength. There are three basic reform ideas:

Abolish the EC: 2000 was the fourth election in which a president was elected without a popular majority. Many believe the EC is archaic and anti democratic, and the U.S. should have a popularly elected president. This is unlikely given the process by which it would have to occur...the House and Senate would have to pass an amendment or the state legislatures could do it. Neither is a likely occurrence.

Congressional District Plan: Each candidate would receive one electoral vote for each congressional district he or she wins in a state. The winner of the popular vote in the state would get two bonus votes (remember, the number of electors is determined by adding up federal representation, so House districts get one, and there are two Senators). Maine and Nebraska currently do this and it would not take a constitutional amendment to implement. It would change the winner-take-all nature of the EC, and thus make sure that popular majorities elect the president.

There are some drawbacks, however. First, it could further cause candidates to focus on a few competitive districts and ignore huge swaths of the country. It might further politicize the redistricting process following the census. Also, it would dilute state power which would not be popular in large states, and it would have to be adopted state-by-state, meaning a patchwork quilt of differing laws for years.

Keep the College, Abolish the Electors: No longer designating actual electors would remove the problem of “faithless electors,” those who change their votes on the day they are supposed to cast them. But this is a rare occurrence and wouldn’t solve the real problems of the system.

Congressional Elections

Congressional elections differ from presidential elections because:

- congressional candidates tend to labor in obscurity
- the vast majority of candidates are little-known state legislators
- name recognition is often the most important battle of the campaign
- they receive little media coverage.

The Incumbency Advantage

Incumbency, the condition of already being in the office, is often an electoral advantage because incumbents have:

- taxpayer funds that can enhance their profiles and prospects; \$750,000 to run an office in the House
- the franking privilege—free mass mailings
- constituency service—helping constituents unravel red tape
- they are highly visible in the district
- they have easy access to local media
- they speak frequently at events and meetings.

In the House, reelection rates for incumbents are above 90 percent in most years.

Redistricting

The Constitution requires that representation in the House be based on state population. Every ten years the Census counts the people of the United States. The House is then redistricted according to the population shifts so that each legislator represents approximately the same number of people.

State legislatures redraw the districts (though in some cases courts do so if the legislatures did it poorly). The party that controls the state legislature tries to gain political advantage in the redistricting process, but if the process is too political, it is called *gerrymandering*. This is when courts often end up drawing new boundaries. Sometimes, an incumbent ends up in the same district as another incumbent. In some cases, the new district may have a different partisan make-up, and sometimes the redistricting is unfavorable in other ways.

Countervailing Forces to Incumbency Advantage

Of those few in the House who lose reelection bids, most do so because of redistricting, scandals, and coattails. We just discussed redistricting, which can make seats safer or more competitive. Scandals can also defeat incumbents. Some have been bribery, other monetary crimes, personal impropriety (sex scandals), and conflicts of interest. Incumbents can also lose if a successful presidential candidate pulls his party along on his coattails. However, the coattail effect seems to be weakening in modern times.

Mid Term Elections

An off-year election occurs in the middle of a presidential term, hence the synonym “midterm elections.” In off-year elections, it is incumbents in the president’s party who are at risk of losing. The president’s party often loses seats in off-year elections.

The 2002 election bucked the conventional wisdom. The incumbent president’s party, the Republican Party, won big. It was the first time, since 1934, that a first-term sitting president’s party gained seats in both houses of Congress at midterm.

How can we explain that result? Some possible factors include: President George W. Bush did huge amounts of campaigning in key battleground states; Bush and vice president Cheney raised over \$141 million for the party and Republican candidates; the war on terrorism and the media coverage of impending war on Iraq gave the president’s party large amounts of free media time; the D.C. sniper dominated the news for weeks, thus squeezing out other news, and all of these things meant the Democrats had a very

hard time getting the word out about their issues: a weak economy, corporate scandals, and other domestic issues.

The 2006 Midterm Elections

In the 2006 election, Republicans lost 30 seats in the House and 6 in the Senate. Both houses flipped from Republican control to Democratic Party control. House elections tend to follow this pattern, they call it the sixth year itch. During midterm elections in the sixth year of an eight year presidency, voters tend to favor the out party. But in 2006, this effect was more pronounced than usual. Many analysts attribute the results to Bush's low popularity and the voters' attitudes towards the war in Iraq. Senate elections are less prone to following this model but six incumbent senators lost their seats in this election.

Fundraising hit record levels in 2006. Congressional candidates spent over \$1.14 billion (a 30 percent increase over 2004). 527 committees spent over \$320 million (a 40 percent increase from the 2002 midterm elections).

The House of Representatives in the 109th Congress had 232 Republicans and 203 Democrats. The 110th has 202 Republicans and 233 Democrats. That's a pretty significant change. Democrats defeated 22 GOP incumbents and eight seats vacated by Republicans.

The Senate was a less drastic change. In 2006, 33 seats were contested and Democrats needed to hold several seats in very competitive states and unseat at least six of seven Republicans running for reelection. They did so and managed a very close majority of 51 to 49.

Reforming the Electoral Process

Most reform proposals center on the Electoral College. After the election of 2000 and to a lesser extent 2004, a number dealt with election technology. However, there are other proposals floating out there as well.

Reforming the nomination process is one such reform. Regional primaries could consolidate the election cycle and end permanent campaigning. One proposal for regional primaries calls for five regional primaries beginning during the first week of February in a presidential election year. One would be held each week for five weeks. Alternative proposals call for one regional election each month starting in February. This would end permanent campaigning, especially in Iowa and New Hampshire, and focus issues on a regional level.

Campaign finance reform has been widely debated as well. Soft money contributions to political parties are now limited by the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act (formerly McCain-Feingold). This law also restricts some political advertising and increases contribution limits for private individuals. Unfortunately, people have already found ways around the new limits.

Internet voting may be coming of age. In 2000, Arizona pioneered Internet voting in the state's Democratic primary. There are also proposals for a national ballot (perhaps unconstitutional?), different styles of state ballots (say goodbye to the butterfly), and a massive, federally sponsored, updating of electoral equipment.

Web Sites for Instructors

American National Election Studies are a key source of data on voting behavior.
www.electionstudies.org/

Cal State Chico has a **Directory of Political Advocacy Groups**. The list is alphabetical by issue and includes contact information and annotations. If you click on the “about” tab, you get footnotes from whence all the information comes, as well as an explanation of why you should care about political advocacy groups.
www.csuchico.edu/~kcfount/

C-Span shows up-to-date information about the workings of Congress and includes information on elections.
www.c-span.org

Campaigns and Elections magazine’s Web site is oriented toward campaign professionals, but is also useful to teachers and students. It offers articles, their table of contents from the print version, job opportunities, and more. They also have a new blog.
www.campaignline.com/

Federal Election Commission (FEC) Web site offers campaign finance information, a citizens’ guide to political contributions, news and information about elections and voting. Includes data about state regulations on voting (registration and residency rules etc.), as well as elections data from a variety of elections.
www.fec.gov

Richard Kimber’s **Worldwide Index of Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Other Social Movements**
www.psr. Keele.ac.uk/parties.htm

Project Vote-Smart is a nonpartisan information service funded by members and nonpartisan foundations. It offers “a wealth of facts on your political leaders, including biographies and addresses, issue positions, voting records, campaign finances, evaluations by special interests.” It also offers “CongressTrack,” a way for citizens to track the status of legislation, members & committees, sponsors, voting records, clear descriptions, full text, and weekly floor schedules, as well as access to information on elections, federal & state governments, the issues, and politics. Includes thousands of links to the most important sites on the Internet.
www.vote-smart.org/

Rock-the-Vote is an organization dedicated to getting young people involved in politics. They even have a FaceBook page.
www.rockthevote.org/

Unity 08 is a bipartisan group advocating a united ticket in 2008. They plan to hold an online primary to determine their candidates. This is an online community that addresses

issues of particular salience to moderates and those unhappy with some of the aspects of the two party system. You can also play “Democracy Land” in which you try to help your voter get across a hazardous playing field of lobbyists, political parties, and special interests trying to run you down.

www.unity08.com/

The **U.S. Census Bureau** has information on voter registration and turnout statistics.

www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html

Web Activities for Classes

- 1) Have students look at several sources discussing the Electoral College (there are many on the Web). What reforms have been proposed? How useful is the Electoral College now? Would you advocate a different approach? What is the impact of the 2000 election in which one candidate, George W. Bush, won the Electoral College but not the popular vote? Hold a debate in class on the merits of the various routes to reform.
- 2) Citizens ages 18 to 24 are the least likely to vote. Have students search the Web and locate sites that they find appealing and persuasive and other sites that “turn them off” to politics. Hold a class discussion of why certain sites engage them and others don’t and how politicians can hope to connect with their generation.
- 3) Have students do research on how campaigns are financed in the United States and abroad, as well as proposals to “fix” campaign financing. Have them discuss whether the passage of the McCain/Feingold reform has, or will, work to address the problems of financing campaigns. Hold a discussion on what they find.
- 4) Using the Internet, have students identify and analyze the appeal of each of the possible political contenders for the 2008 presidential election. Which Web sites are best? To whom do they address their messages, and why? What are their messages? And so on.
- 5) Have students compare political blogs by using Google Blog Search or Technorati. Discuss what they find.

General Class Activities and Discussion Assignments

- 1) Hold a class discussion on the following: What impact could regional primaries and front-loading have on the process of nominating the president?
- 2) Many reform proposals argue that the U.S. should adopt proportional representation. In this method of election, voters choose a party list as opposed to an individual candidate. This method strengthens parties and tends to increase

voter turnout and the number of parties in the political system. Countries that use PR are: Holland, Poland, and others. Have students research the nature of PR, and how it might work in the United States.

- 3) Some theorists argue that low voter turnout is due to electoral rules, frequency of elections, and other causes. Hold a class discussion of how you would change these impediments to voting and the impact of increased voter turnout on the electoral process. And is that a good thing?
- 4) Hold a class discussion on the proposal to have five regional primaries with order determined by lottery. What are the costs and benefits of this method? What problems does the reform address, and what new ones might crop up if it is adopted? If time permits, discuss the following: How else might you change the primary system? Consider the issue of campaign finance (shorter primary seasons cost less), the ideal of democracy (competition is good and everyone should have a fair chance to win), the way the media tend to cover elections, and other issues.
- 5) Assign Robert Dahl's book, *How Democratic is the U.S. Constitution*, and discuss the merits of majoritarian and proportional representation systems in comparative perspective.

Possible Simulations

- 1) Run a party convention in class. Nominate candidates, write a platform, and deal with media coverage of the event. Compare various methods of running a party convention and discuss which ones work "best."
- 2) Puerto Rico (or a fictitious entity) becomes the 51st state. Have the class debate what type of primary election system they would like to have. Assign sides for the debate (Democratic pro-caucus, Democratic pro-open primary, Republican pro-closed primary, and so on). Afterward, hold a discussion on why the choices were made.
- 3) Revisit the 2000 presidential election. Have students role play the various stages from the Florida courts to the U.S. Supreme Court. Then, discuss what happened from an institutional and a partisan perspective.

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