

CHAPTER Eb

Elections and Politics

Editor: John P. McIver

ELECTIONS AND POLITICS

John P. McIver

Although elections are not a sufficient condition for democracy, competitive elections are necessary for, and often the most visible evidence of, the operation of democratic governments.¹ Certainly, in the United States, competitive elections signal the degree to which American government operates democratically. Nonetheless, the evolution of elections in America and the impact of these elections on the operation of American political institutions yield a story that occasionally raises questions about the success of the grand American experiment. The involvement of state and federal courts in settling the presidential election of 2000 certainly challenged the belief that elections and electoral rules settle all political disputes. But despite these shortcomings, America remains the most visible example worldwide of how democratic elections operate.²

This chapter summarizes American electoral history from its immediate postcolonial days through the end of the twentieth century. In doing so, it explores the determinants of many historical patterns and offers a brief review of the interactions between electoral outcomes and other political developments. The principal sections of this essay detail the expansion of the voting franchise, its exercise by the mass public, and its impact on the operation of the American national government. The final section provides a picture of the American electorate in interelection periods by examining public opinion over the past fifty years.

Voting Rights

The story of the evolution of “universal suffrage” in the United States is a long and somewhat painful tale when told from a

contemporary perspective.³ It is a narrative full of fits and starts that begins with a quite limited conception of government by property owners and evolves through the slow legal enfranchisement of economic, racial, gender, and age groups. The tale proceeds not in a straight line and often not even as one of “two steps forward, one step back.” Rather, each incorporated group ultimately won the right to vote as the culmination of a long series of battles fought in Congress, state legislatures, and state and federal courts, and often on the streets of America through public action.

The history of the U.S. Constitution provides a formal glimpse of the spread of voting rights to different segments of the American populace. In the Constitution (Article 1, Section 4), the power to establish rules governing the participation of voters was left to the states, with the exception that Congress might step in to alter those rules in the future. This provision would play a key role in the many alterations made to the right to vote.

In the ratified Constitution, the public had the right to vote only for members of the House of Representatives. Senators were originally chosen by state legislatures, and the President by electors selected by the states. Only with the ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913 did the American public gain the right to elect their senators. Choosing the President and Vice President, however, remains a task left to the electoral college.⁴ The variety of methods by which the electors were originally chosen is detailed in Table Eb123–148. But by 1836, all states, with the exception of South Carolina, moved to a system of statewide popular elections (the South Carolina legislature continued to choose its electors until 1860). Indirectly, the public, through its selection of state electors, chooses each President.

The opportunity to vote for candidates to national offices has been expanded many times since the approval of the original Constitution. The Fourteenth Amendment (1868) and the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) provide voting rights to male citizens of all races, colors, or previous conditions of servitude. The Nineteenth

¹ Among the many works linking elections and democracy are Dahl (1956, 1989); Gastil (1978); Bollen (1980, 1993); Bollen and Grandjean (1981); and Gurr, Jagers, and Moore (1990).

² Perhaps the claim to “be” a democracy is misplaced, as Czechoslovak President Václav Havel explained in his address to a joint session of the U.S. Congress in February 1990: “As long as people are people, democracy in the full sense of the word will always be no more than an ideal; one may approach it as one would a horizon, in ways that may be better or worse, but it can never be fully attained. In this sense you are also merely approaching democracy” (Mueller 1999).

Acknowledgments

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³ Despite the Founders’ fear that the public might not be up to the task of governing, the importance of the right to vote is emphasized today. Indeed, this right is trumpeted by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. One of the standard 100 questions asked on the citizenship test is, “What is the most important right guaranteed to U.S. citizens?” The official answer is “the right to vote” (Internet site of the U.S. Department of Justice).

⁴ Article 2, Section 1 lays out the original details. Failures of the electoral college (notably the difficult resolution of the election of 1800) led reformers to enact the Twelfth Amendment by 1804. The term “electoral college” does not appear in the Constitution. Article 2 and the Twelfth Amendment refer to “electors,” but not to the “electoral college.” In the early 1800s, the term “electoral college” came into general usage as the unofficial designation for the group of citizens selected to cast votes for President and Vice President.

TABLE Eb-A Constitutional extensions of the right to vote, by state: 1869–1984

State	15th Amendment: male suffrage for all races	19th Amendment: female suffrage	23rd Amendment: presidential electors for Washington, D.C.	24th Amendment: suffrage cannot be denied for failure to pay taxes	26th Amendment: suffrage for 18- to 20-year-olds
Alabama	—	September 8, 1953 ^{1,2}	—	—	June 30, 1971
Alaska	—	—	February 10, 1961	February 11, 1963	April 8, 1971
Arizona	—	February 12, 1920	March 10, 1961	—	May 14, 1971
Arkansas	March 15, 1869	July 28, 1919	— ²	—	March 30, 1971
California	March 4, 1962 ^{1,2}	November 1, 1919	January 19, 1961	February 7, 1963	April 19, 1971
Colorado	—	December 15, 1919	February 8, 1961	February 21, 1963	April 27, 1971
Connecticut	May 19, 1869	September 14, 1920 ¹	March 9, 1961	March 20, 1963	March 23, 1971
Delaware	February 12, 1901 ^{1,2}	March 6, 1923 ^{1,2}	February 20, 1961	May 1, 1963	March 23, 1971
Florida	June 14, 1869	May 13, 1969 ¹	—	April 18, 1963	—
Georgia	February 2, 1870	February 20, 1970 ^{1,2}	—	—	October 4, 1971 ¹
Hawai'i	—	—	June 23, 1960	March 6, 1963	March 24, 1971
Idaho	—	February 11, 1920	January 31, 1961	March 8, 1963	March 30, 1971
Illinois	March 5, 1869	June 10, 1919	March 14, 1961	November 14, 1962	June 29, 1971
Indiana	May 14, 1869	January 16, 1920	March 3, 1961	February 19, 1963	April 8, 1971
Iowa	February 3, 1870	July 2, 1919	March 16, 1961	April 24, 1963	March 30, 1971
Kansas	January 19, 1870	June 16, 1919	March 29, 1961	March 28, 1963	April 7, 1971
Kentucky	March 18, 1976 ^{1,2}	January 6, 1920	—	June 27, 1963	—
Louisiana	March 5, 1869	June 11, 1970 ^{1,2}	—	—	April 17, 1971
Maine	March 11, 1869	November 5, 1919	January 31, 1961	January 16, 1964	April 9, 1971
Maryland	— ²	March 29, 1941 ^{1,2}	January 30, 1961	February 6, 1963	April 8, 1971
Massachusetts	March 12, 1869	June 25, 1919	August 22, 1960	March 28, 1963	March 24, 1971
Michigan	March 8, 1869	June 10, 1919	March 8, 1961	February 20, 1963	April 7, 1971
Minnesota	January 13, 1870	September 8, 1919	January 31, 1961	February 27, 1963	March 23, 1971
Mississippi	January 17, 1870	March 22, 1984 ^{1,2}	—	— ²	—
Missouri	January 7, 1870	July 3, 1919	March 20, 1961	May 13, 1963	June 14, 1971
Montana	—	August 2, 1919	February 6, 1961	January 28, 1963	March 29, 1971
Nebraska	February 17, 1870	August 2, 1919	March 15, 1961	April 4, 1963	April 2, 1971
Nevada	March 1, 1869	February 7, 1920	February 2, 1961	March 19, 1963	—
New Hampshire	July 1, 1869	September 10, 1919	March 29, 1961	June 12, 1963	May 13, 1971
New Jersey	February 15, 1871 ^{1,2}	February 9, 1920	December 19, 1960	December 3, 1962	April 3, 1971
New Mexico	—	February 21, 1920	February 1, 1961	March 5, 1963	—
New York	April 14, 1869 ³	June 16, 1919	January 17, 1961	February 4, 1963	June 2, 1971
North Carolina	March 5, 1869	May 6, 1971 ¹	—	—	July 1, 1971
North Dakota	—	December 1, 1919	—	March 7, 1963	—
Ohio	January 27, 1870	June 16, 1919 ²	March 29, 1961	February 27, 1963	June 30, 1971
Oklahoma	—	February 28, 1920	March 21, 1961	—	July 1, 1971
Oregon	February 24, 1959 ¹	January 13, 1920	January 27, 1961	January 25, 1963	June 4, 1971
Pennsylvania	March 25, 1869	June 24, 1919	February 28, 1961	March 25, 1963	April 27, 1971
Rhode Island	January 18, 1870	January 6, 1920	March 22, 1961	February 14, 1963	May 27, 1971
South Carolina	March 15, 1869	July 1, 1969 ^{1,2}	—	—	April 28, 1971
South Dakota	—	December 4, 1919	February 6, 1961	January 23, 1964	—
Tennessee	— ²	August 18, 1920	March 6, 1961	March 21, 1963	March 23, 1971
Texas	February 18, 1870 ¹	June 28, 1919	—	—	April 27, 1971
Utah	—	October 2, 1919	February 21, 1961	February 20, 1963	—
Vermont	October 20, 1869	February 8, 1921 ¹	March 15, 1961	March 15, 1963	April 16, 1971
Virginia	October 8, 1869	February 21, 1952 ^{1,2}	—	February 25, 1977 ¹	July 8, 1971
Washington	—	March 22, 1920	February 9, 1961	March 14, 1963	March 23, 1971
West Virginia	April 3, 1869	March 10, 1920	February 9, 1961	February 1, 1963	April 28, 1971
Wisconsin	April 9, 1869	June 10, 1919	February 21, 1961	March 26, 1963	June 22, 1971
Wyoming	—	January 27, 1920	February 13, 1961	—	July 8, 1971 ¹

¹ Ratified by state after completion of federal ratification process.

² Rejected proposed amendment during federal ratification.

³ Rejected amendment after previously ratifying.

Source

“U.S. Constitution [Annotated],” in *U.S. Code Annotated* (Westlaw, 1980), annotations to the Constitutional Amendments specified.

Documentation

The amendments shown in this table were ratified by three fourths of the states and then certified by the United States on the following dates:

Fifteenth Amendment: February 17, 1870; certified March 30, 1870

Nineteenth Amendment: August 18, 1920; certified August 26, 1920

Twenty-third Amendment: March 29, 1961; certified April 3, 1961

Twenty-fourth Amendment: January 23, 1964; certified February 4, 1964

Twenty-sixth Amendment: July 1, 1971; certified July 5, 1971

When no date is provided, it means that the state did not ratify (or ultimately rejected) the amendment in question.

Amendment (1920) prevents states from denying women the right to vote. The Twenty-third Amendment (1961) provided representation to the residents of the District of Columbia for the purpose of voting for the President and Vice President. The Twenty-sixth Amendment (1971) extended the right to vote to citizens between the ages of 18 and 20, beginning with the election of 1972 (see Table Eb-A).

But constitutional amendments do not always operate as intended. Although the formal recognition of voting rights by their incorporation into the Constitution of the United States might seem to suggest universal acceptance of the right to vote for all designated groups of citizens, American political history suggests that such actions did not always result in their intended consequences – at least not immediately. The extension of constitutional rights to black men, all women, and young Americans was not uncontroversial.

In some instances, states actively opposed the extension of voting rights. In others, they simply did not act. Even after the ratification of each amendment, some states continued to express their opposition to the extension of voting rights. It took almost 100 years for California and Oregon to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment, and Kentucky took even longer. Every state has now ratified the right of women to vote, but nine bitterly opposed the extension of the franchise in 1920, and others refused to vote on the amendment, certain the outcome would be “no.” These contrarian states only grudgingly accepted this amendment (Mississippi was the last state to approve the Nineteenth Amendment, in 1984). The Old South clearly opposed national intervention into its electoral processes with the passage of the Twenty-fourth Amendment. Few Southern states approved the amendment banning poll taxes, and few have ratified the amendment to this day. Virginia has had a change of heart, finally ratifying this amendment in 1977.

The history of the extension of the franchise to women during the latter half of the nineteenth century up to the final passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 illustrates the slow process by which voting rights are won. Women first gained the right to vote in school elections, where they were presumed to be informed about and able to comprehend the issues. Eventually, property requirements to voting were lifted, which removed barriers to women, whose property was commonly judged to be the property of their husbands. Slowly, women gained the right to vote on tax and bond issues and in municipal and county elections. Presidential suffrage was the last hurdle to universal suffrage. Of course, ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment did not guarantee the right to vote immediately. Although the required thirty-six states approved the amendment by late August 1920, women in at least two states were not permitted to vote in the 1920 election because of state registration laws. Then existing laws of Georgia and Mississippi required voters to register four months prior to the election.

Constitutional amendments do not control all aspects of election law. In the absence of direct federal involvement, states regulate elections. In response to constitutional changes, states restricted access to the ballot box through property and economic qualifications, residency expectations, alien voting restrictions, white-only voting requirements, poll taxes, and literacy tests. But states could also be “first movers” in extending the right to vote, as the history of female suffrage suggests.⁵

⁵ Rusk (2001) provides the state-specific historical details behind these many restrictions and permissions (see especially pp. 13–36).

In the face of state opposition, intervention by the national government to ensure the right to vote was often required. Such actions ranged from informal pressures to the passage of legislation. Executive power, expressed as police and military authority, was occasionally necessary to enforce national laws. The U.S. Congress acted to enfranchise voters denied access to the voting booth by state restrictions. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 (and later extensions) is the most visible expression of legislative power dedicated to protect these constitutional rights. Similarly, the federal courts have acted to prevent the dilution of voting rights.⁶ Numerous court rulings have supported the rights of minorities to be free of state encumbrances to their right to vote.

The U.S. Supreme Court has not only acted to ensure expansion of the franchise to millions of Americans, but also worked to protect the value of that franchise. Throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century, the Court refused to decide “political questions” – in other words, legal disputes that dealt with the operation of the legislative and executive departments of the federal government. Most notably, the Court avoided the issue of apportionment, the manner in which seats in the Congress were distributed (see *Colegrove v. Green*, 328 US 549 (1946)). But beginning in 1960, the Supreme Court became involved in a series of cases that would alter the structure of political competition by mandating adherence to the principle of “one person, one vote.”⁷ The spillover from these initial forays into the reapportionment debate has been to embroil the Court (and the lower federal courts) in a long series of partisan battles over the design of federal, state, and local electoral districts.

Voter Participation

Extending the right to vote to an increasing number of America’s citizens provided *opportunity* for electoral participation. Opportunity does not always translate into action. While more voters did go to the polls in response to constitutional expansion of voting rights, more ballots cast did not necessarily mean that an increasing proportion of eligible voters were participating in elections. The expansion of suffrage may produce declining turnout rates if new voters participate less frequently than longtime voters. In this section, historical participation rates are examined.

Voter turnout is among the most basic statistics reflecting the health of American democracy. Concerns about democracy in the United States arise with the recognition that modern voter turnout is quite low. Barely 50 percent of individuals in the eligible electorate turn out to vote for the President, and many fewer vote in other races and at other times. Whether in historical perspective or in comparison to the voting rates of other democratic nations, modern Americans vote less often.⁸ Some believe low turnout indicates

⁶ Some of the landmark decisions are *Ex Parte Siebold* 100 US 371 (1880), *Smith v. Allwright* 321 US 649 (1944), *South Carolina v. Katzenbach* 383 US 301 (1966), *United Jewish Organization v. Carey* 430 US 144 (1977), and *Rogers v. Lodge* 458 US 613 (1982).

⁷ Some of the important cases are *Gomillion v. Lightfoot* 364 US 339 (1960), *Baker v. Carr* 369 US 186 (1962), *Wesberry v. Sanders* 376 US 1 (1964), and *Reynolds v. Sims* 377 US 533 (1964).

⁸ Comparison of American voter participation in our national elections with the voting behavior of citizens of other major democratic nations shows (with few exceptions) that Americans turn out at much lower rates than voters in other nations. The common explanation for this discrepancy is the more rigid institutional impediments to voting found in American election laws (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Powell 1986; Jackman 1987).

general disengagement of the American public from the political process. Indeed, the low turnout in the last election of the millennium came close to producing a constitutional crisis. Public ambivalence produced an electoral “tie” between George W. Bush and Albert Gore. The public became energized only when the likelihood of a tie became evident.

Turnout: A “Simple” Concept

Operationalizing voter participation is more slippery than it first appears. Voter turnout is effectively reported as a “rate” – a fraction or percentage of the population who participate in an election by casting ballots for candidates.

$$\text{Turnout} = \frac{\text{Voters}}{\text{Population}}$$

where:

Voters = number of voters casting ballots for all candidates

Population = number of individuals eligible to vote in the election

It would seem straightforward to compute both of these counts. It is not – especially in attempting to estimate turnout historically. Furthermore, these two counts may not fully help us to understand why voter turnout rises or declines.

Most explanations of turnout in the United States focus on impediments to voting. Access to the voting booth is provided only to those members of the eligible electorate who choose to register their interest in voting. In this manner, turnout may be conceived as the product of two ratios:

$$\text{Turnout} = \frac{\text{Voters}}{\text{Registered}} \times \frac{\text{Registered}}{\text{Population}}$$

where:

Registered = the number of individuals registered to vote

Conceptualizing turnout as the product of two ratios helps us to understand some of the reasons why voters may not turn out. Of course, recent experience suggests that institutional barriers are not the only obstacles preventing Americans from voting. New national registration laws (for example, the “Motor Voter Law”), the easing of date and time restrictions, alternative registration methods, and campaigns to register voters in many states have failed to stimulate significant increases in turnout in the last several elections. Many new registrants, disinterested in politics, would have been nonregistrants without the easing of registration rules. These individuals, while now registered, have a hard time making it to the polling place on election day.⁹

In any case, attempts to measure voter participation encounter significant problems with both the numerator of the first ratio and denominator of the second.¹⁰ The bottom line in estimating turnout is that we do not have accurate historical counts of either voters or populations.

⁹ For additional commentary and evidence of the effectiveness of the “Motor Voter Law,” see Franklin and Grier (1996), Knack (1995), Knack and White (1998), Timpone (1998), and Martinez and Hill (1999).

¹⁰ This is not to say that registration counts are without problems (Claggett 1990), but here they serve only to illustrate the conceptual underpinnings of turnout rates.

The Numerator: Voters

Lacking a count of the number of *voters*, turnout is typically calculated on the basis of the number of *votes* recorded for the highest office in the jurisdiction counting ballots. The presumption is that the number of votes cast for the most important office reasonably reflects the total number of voters participating. In presidential election years, the total number of votes is typically the number of votes cast for all presidential candidates. What we miss by taking this approach is several different sets of voters whose intents may differ widely.

Voters who participate but do not vote for all offices (especially the one at the top of the ticket).

Disqualified voters: those who appear at the polling place and are not allowed to vote for legal reasons or are prevented from voting by legal or illegal means.

Disqualified ballots: ballots mis-marked by the voter or mis-scored by the counter.

Abstainers: those who intend to make a political statement by their nonparticipation.¹¹

Because none of these voters are systematically recorded by state election officials, the vote count that serves as the numerator in any calculation of turnout is an undercount of the actual number of voters. What we do not know is by what extent this numerator misrepresents the total number of individuals who express their preferences in any given election. Recent research suggests the national undercount is on the general order of 2 to 3 percent, but the percentage may range far more widely in local electorates (McDonald and Popkin 2001; McDonald 2002).

Yet even if we had an accurate assessment of all of the components of the “undercount,” we would have to recognize that the numerator – number of votes cast – is still imperfect. Counts are subject to a variety of recording errors, some intentional and others not. Incomplete counts may be recorded and not corrected. Records may be lost. Voting machines may not work properly. False results may be reported as true vote counts.¹² All of these problems have occurred in American electoral history.

The Denominator: Population

At first blush, this component of turnout is less subject to manipulation. Yet the measure of population used in estimating voter turnout is flawed or misunderstood.

The first issue is conceptual. Whom do we want to consider as the base population for estimating turnout? Should turnout be calculated as a proportion of those eligible to vote during the period for which turnout is calculated? Or, when making historical comparisons of turnout, should the base be some standard against

¹¹ By not choosing, some abstainers wish to indicate that they oppose the choices offered to them by the political system. Anthony Downs (1957) argued for such “rational abstention” as a political critique of the lack of choice among candidates commonly offered by the two-party system.

¹² Vote fraud – whether the stuffing of ballot boxes, the intentional loss of ballots, the certification of ineligible supporters, and the decertification of eligible opponents – produces both over- and undercounts. Believed to be a particularly vexing problem in the nineteenth century, modern examples abound. Republicans often claim deceased Chicagoans won Illinois and the 1960 presidential election for John Kennedy. Democrats will long claim mishandling of ballots from Democratic counties in the 2000 Florida presidential election count.

which all eras can be judged equally? For example, turnout in the 1850s could be calculated as votes cast divided by (1) an 1850 definition of the eligible population, (2) a 2000 definition of the eligible population, or even (3) a “gold standard,” a hypothetical definition of a fully eligible society. Normally, turnout is estimated as current vote count divided by current voting age population, and these estimates are often the basis for concerns about the contemporary turnout rates. But if turnout were calculated as current vote divided by modern definitions of voter eligibility or some ideal eligible population, a much more optimistic view of contemporary turnout would likely emerge.

Operationally, “accurate” population estimates are produced only once per decade. To call the Census Bureau’s decennial census of the U.S. population accurate likely strains credibility, but by treating it as a preliminary approximation, a reasonable estimate of the vote-eligible population may be produced. In modern times, the Census Bureau and local agencies do provide intercensus estimates of some jurisdictions. Typically, intercensus population estimates may rely on the most immediate census, the prior census, or some extrapolation across two or more time periods.

In estimating turnout, it is important to recognize that the population eligible to vote is not the same as the population count produced by the Census Bureau. The first section of this essay outlined the slow legal expansion of franchise. Yet the history of voting is replete with local obstacles that constitutional changes by themselves could not overcome. The passage of laws without enforcement and the enactment of local laws to contradict federal edicts play a large role in establishing who could and could not vote. Only continuing efforts by the federal government served to change practices.

Although modern America operates on the premise that universal suffrage exists, not all residents or even all citizens of the United States have the right to vote. Most of those without the right to vote have little political voice and consequently little chance of having this right extended to them. Commonly overlooked is the startlingly large number of American citizens who have been disenfranchised by their criminal activity.¹³ Institutionalized persons may not be eligible, or may not be able to vote if eligible. Other residents are not enfranchised because of their lack of citizenship. Both legal and illegal immigrants reside in the United States without access to the basic opportunity to decide who will make the laws governing their lives (Harper-Ho 2000). In addition, a popular movement today lobbies for the “rights of the disabled.” Such voters are not legally barred from voting, yet simple obstacles often block their access to the voting booth (Schriener, Ochs, and Shields 1997). Finally, residents of the District of Columbia have no representation in Congress.¹⁴ Additional counting errors arise in mis-identifying the residential location of military personnel. All of these sources of population may or may not be included in the population figures used to estimate turnout. Errors committed in estimating voter populations impact assessments of voter turnout.

¹³ For a history of the disenfranchisement of felons and a debate over the impact of this policy, see Harvard Law Review (1989), Shapiro (1993), Harvey (1994), Love and Kuzma (1996), Fellner and Mauer (1998), and Preuhs (1999).

¹⁴ On October 16, 2000, the Supreme Court summarily affirmed a decision by a special three-judge panel denying the residents of the District of Columbia the right to vote for members of the House of Representatives. See *Alexander v. Mineta* (69 USLW 3268) and *Adams v. Clinton* (69 USLW 3268).

Consequently, a recent set of papers argues that the denominator typically used in estimating voter turnout – voting age population (VAP) – is simply not adequate. McDonald and Popkin insist that the appropriate theoretical denominator is voting *eligible* population (VEP) (McDonald and Popkin 2001; McDonald 2002). After adjustment of official population figures for ineligible citizens located in the states who are counted and eligible citizens residing abroad who are not counted, the dramatic falloff in presidential turnout observed during the past thirty years disappears. The decline is due to the sharp increase in recent years in the number of persons of voting age population who are not eligible. McDonald notes that an “astonishing” 19.8 percent of the California VAP are noncitizens (McDonald 2002). But the number of noncitizens varies widely by state, with eighteen states having noncitizen populations that total less than 2 percent of the VAP.

Estimates of Voter Turnout

Voter turnout estimates for American presidential elections based on Walter Dean Burnham’s work are presented in Table Eb62–113. Table Eb114–122 reports competing estimates of presidential turnout offered by Jerrold Rusk, who makes a special effort to incorporate the history of voter eligibility exclusions and inclusions to more closely approximate VAP (Rusk 2001).

All turnout estimates have their imperfections. They are based on imperfect counts and approximating assumptions. Different historical estimates of both the numerator (the number of voters) and the denominator (population) affect the results.¹⁵ But most track quite closely, and none give a decidedly different image of the approximate turnout and turnout trends of American voters.¹⁶ Again, the exception here is the work of McDonald and Popkin, which offers a more optimistic assessment of voter turnout, one that quite reasonably reflects a reassessment of the population component of turnout estimates (McDonald and Popkin 2001; McDonald 2002).

Presidential turnout rates rise and decline throughout American history. More than 80 percent of enfranchised Americans participated during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Only about 50 percent turned out to vote in the 2000 election. Most contemporary commentary focuses on this recent “failure” of the American electorate to exercise their franchise by participating in presidential elections. Yet modern turnout rates, although low, are not uncommon historically. The next section offers some specific insights into why rates are high or low during particular periods, but a broad-brush understanding of turnout motivated by political interest is appropriate here. Anthony Downs offers an analytic explanation captured more fully by Benjamin Page. Downs insists that turnout is a rational act: if there are benefits to be gained from voting, individuals will vote. If not, voters will not turn out (Downs 1957). Page picks up this theme in investigating American presidential elections (Page 1978). When the presidential race consists of a

¹⁵ Table Eb149–153 presents one estimate of the national vote count from which different estimates of voter turnout could be computed with alternative estimates of the voting population.

¹⁶ The U.S. Census Bureau also estimates voter turnout. Their turnout figures are consistently lower, in large part a function of a less restrictive definition of VAP. Since 1964, the Census Bureau has provided a second, survey-based estimate of voter participation based on the Current Population Survey (CPS). These data produce turnout rates significantly higher than the Rusk or Burnham estimates. One interpretation – consistent with National Election Survey findings – is that survey respondents exaggerate their voting activity.

contest between Tweedledum and Tweedledee, voters have no incentive to vote. The outcome, regardless of who is elected, will be the same. In contrast, when the candidates offer widely different programs to the voters such that who is elected does matter, voters have a reason to pay attention to the campaign and participate on election day. Throughout history, political parties have offered different options. “Choices” offered to the public matter. When one candidate’s campaign “echoes” another’s, elections do not matter and voters do not turn out.

Turnout for nonpresidential elections falls well below presidential election turnout, particularly in the modern era. Table Eb260–263 extends the congressional vote count series reported in the previous edition of *Historical Statistics of the United States* (1975). Table Eb114–122 reports Rusk’s estimates of turnout for congressional races. Rusk’s narrower conception of VAP produces a slightly higher turnout rate each year, but the trends are the same.¹⁷ Relatively few Americans participate in midterm elections today, with turnout rates hovering around 40 percent. Yet the historical record shows a different picture in early times. From the 1830s through the First World War, more than half of all eligible voters turned out for midterm elections. It was not uncommon for two thirds of the electorate to participate in these races.

Series Eb208 and Eb260 allow comparison of total votes cast in presidential and “midterm” congressional election years.¹⁸ Voters consistently cast fewer votes for House candidates than they do for the presidential contestants. Commenting on the “saw blade” pattern of voter turnout from one presidential election to the next with interspersed midterm elections, Campbell invoked the theory of “surge and decline” of electorates to explain the participation pattern so regularly observed among Americans (Campbell 1966; also see Kramer 1971; Kernell 1977; Campbell 1987; Erikson 1990; Jacobson 1990; Coleman 1997). This theory is consistent with the Downs and Page perspectives on presidential voting: as voter interest peaks during presidential elections, so too does voter turnout. With less excitement to pull marginal voters to the polls, core and typically partisan constituencies dominate participation in midterm elections.

Ultimately, commentary on American voter turnout turns on a “glass half-empty or glass half-full” assessment of contemporary participation. Voter turnout in modern American presidential elections hovers around 50 percent of the electorate, and turnout in most other races at most other times is a fraction of presidential election turnout. Yet in contrast to the few citizens who were both eligible to vote and willing to do so 200 years ago, more than 100 million Americans voted for George W. Bush, Albert Gore, Ralph Nader, or the several minor party candidates in the 2000 election.

Figure Eb-B dramatically illustrates these two patterns and the conundrum for analysts. It is easy to be critical of the decline in voter turnout. Yet the history of the expansion of the franchise, although difficult at times, has broadened the definition of the electorate far beyond the comprehension of the Founding Fathers.

The two-sided assessment of turnout continues in comparisons made to other democratic countries. U.S. turnout appears to be quite low. Indeed, if the United States operated under election rules existing in other nations, it would fall perilously close to having

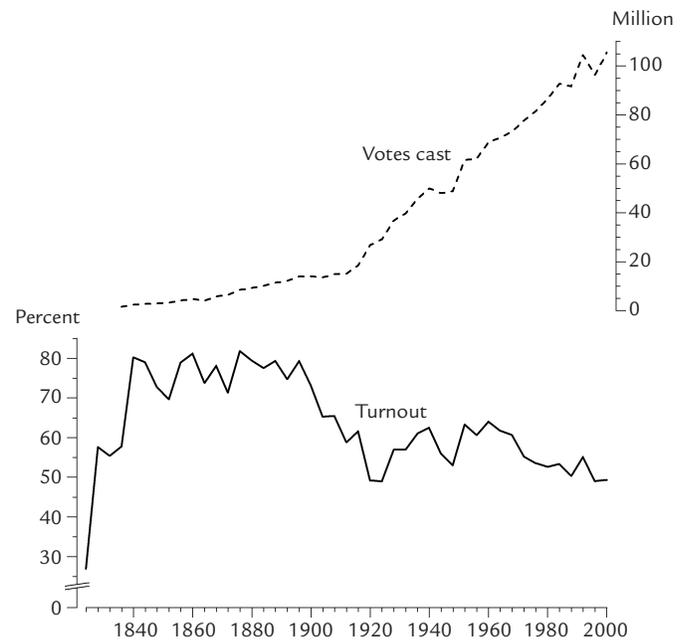


FIGURE Eb-B Voter participation in presidential elections: 1824–2000

Sources

Series Eb62 and Eb208.

elections without results. For example, Serbia’s 2002 presidential election was declared null and void because turnout fell below 50 percent. Yet if we consider turnout by just those voters who are registered to vote, U.S. turnout is substantially higher. Overall turnout by registered Americans in recent elections hovered between 65 and 70 percent, with turnout in some states approaching levels equivalent to European participation rates. Yet even a more positive view of voter participation rates based on registered voters leaves the United States near the bottom in comparison to established democracies in Western Europe. Interestingly, however, voter turnout declined throughout the world during the 1990s (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2003).

Explaining Historical Variations in Turnout

The turnout roller coaster that is Figure Eb-B represents not only the impact of legal changes to the franchise but also the inner workings of national, state, and local politics combined with the wide assortment of exogenous shocks to the American political system. The surge in national voter turnout observed in the 1828 election of Andrew Jackson clearly represents the impact of a shift in state election laws to adult white male suffrage. The subsequent development of mass-based parties during the 1830s produced a sea change in electoral competition from the narrow elite-based era that preceded it. This new party system supported and encouraged the participation of American white males. Slavery, and the economic, social, and moral issues that accompanied it, polarized the nation and spurred further partisan competition. Dramatic demographic changes – a consequence of westward expansion, economic opportunity, and immigration – also altered the nature of political competition. Periods of economic hardship and competition between groups spurred political struggles and inspired public participation.

¹⁷ For more discussion of VAP, see the text for Table Eb114–122.

¹⁸ Alternatively, series Eb114 and Eb117 allow comparison of turnout rates between presidential and “midterm” congressional election years.

Internal, regional, and finally world war inspired lively debate and fueled interest in politics.

Changes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, seemed to stifle public involvement. The period from 1890 to 1920 represents an era of massive immigration (rivaled only by the influx of new immigrants during the last twenty years of the twentieth century) in which new citizens – not socialized to participation in politics – joined the ranks of the American electorate. Turnout fell from 80 percent down to 50 percent in thirty years. Voter turnout during the 1920s rivals modern voting patterns. Low turnout and declining partisan allegiances seen during this era set the stage for the politically tumultuous 1930s and the rewriting of the American party system. The onset of the Great Depression shifted the balance of political power from Republicans to Franklin Roosevelt and Congressional Democrats and sparked a revival of relevance of the parties as their differences came to be seen more starkly. Over the last forty years, however, public involvement in national elections gradually declined as campaigns became “candidate-centered” (Wattenberg 1987, 1991) and parties withered as objects of voter attachment to the political system. Whether the limited turnout rates observed in the late twentieth century presages new changes in political competition remains for future assessment.

Hidden in the big picture are a variety of subplots. The emancipation of blacks and their enfranchisement was very quickly followed by new restrictions. “Jim Crow” laws were written to discriminate against blacks. Given full support by the Supreme Court’s infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 US 537 (1896)), white supremacy movements throughout the South prevented many blacks from fully participating in the political system until the 1960s.

Explanations for the rise and decline of voter participation throughout American history range far beyond simply identifying the legal and extralegal expansions and contractions of the franchise. They also unfortunately range far beyond the scope of this essay. Even an answer to the restricted question “Did changes to the franchise increase aggregate participation while lowering participation rates?” is not easy to come by. Many believe the expanding right to vote has had precisely the effect of lowering turnout rates while increasing turnout. Academic debate over the decline in voter turnout during the early years of the twentieth century broadly pits social conditions against legal and institutional restrictions as the key explanation for the downturn in voter participation.¹⁹ Likely both perspectives are right – and wrong. The explanations are complex, and single-variable answers are not viable.

Explanations of turnout rates based solely on legal shifts in the right to vote have been criticized as inadequate or incomplete. For example, was enfranchisement of women the reason why turnout declined precipitously in the 1920s? Kleppner argued, to the contrary, that political context, most reasonably operationalized as electoral competition, is the basis for a significant portion of the 1920 reduction in voter turnout.²⁰ Turnout by men as well as women declined during this era. Furthermore, the lack of a common pattern of reduced voting across states and across time

suggests that female suffrage is not the definitive explanation for the downturn in turnout.

Similarly, recent declines in voter turnout are often blamed on the 1972 expansion of the franchise, the granting of voting rights to 18- to 20-year-olds. Historically, the youngest cohorts in the electorate have turned out at significantly lower rates than other age groups. The enactment of the Twenty-sixth Amendment exacerbated this tendency, although the campaign of 1992 appeared to have energized young voters more than any election in the last thirty years. Sole blame for recent declines in turnout cannot be placed at the feet of young voters.

Of recent institutional changes that have had positive effects on voter turnout, none may have been so important as the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which produced major changes in voter registration in the South. From 1960 to 1970, voter registration rose 8.1 percentage points among white voters (from 61.1 to 69.2 percent). But the real impact of this law was to improve opportunities for minority voters. During this decade the proportion of black citizens registered to vote more than doubled, rising from 29.1 percent to 62.0 percent. These changes were not uniform. The largest improvements occurred in states with very low black registration rates at the start of the decade. South Carolina and Alabama registration figures for blacks rose 309 percent and 382 percent, respectively. In Mississippi the percentage of black citizens registered to vote rose from 5.2 percent to 71 percent, an astounding 1,265 percent increase in registered voters over the decade. By the end of the decade, most of the South continued to show higher white registration rates, although the differences between races shrank markedly. The lone exception was Texas, in which the proportion of black voters exceeded the registration rates of white voters by 1970.

Yet progress toward racial neutrality in voter registration of the 1960s was short lived. During the next decade, minority registration rates fell, while white registration rates increased, tripling the gap between white and black voter registration by 1980. White registration increases may be attributable to “backlash” against newly enfranchised blacks. Mississippi, for one, engaged in patently illegal registrations. According to the statistics of the Southern Regional Council’s Voter Education Project, more than 100 percent of white Mississippians were registered to vote in 1980 (*Statistical Abstract*, 1981, p. 495).

While institutional explanations do not always satisfy, it is not the case that social and demographic change is the alternative explanation for turnout decline. For example, despite the apparent correlation between immigration and voter turnout, Tuckel and Maisel find little evidence directly tying immigration to the reduced participation by electorates at the turn of the century (Tuckel and Maisel 1994). Although county-level data point to low turnout in areas populated by immigrants, these data capture primarily patterns in rural voting. Examination of ward data in urban areas indicates, in fact, that voting rates were higher in places with large foreign-born populations. The potential to grab control of power in urban areas created justification for voters to participate in the political arena.

Apportionment and Popular Votes versus Electoral Votes

Despite the popular perception that the public chooses the President, Article 2, Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution establishes electors for that task in a process referred to by most as the “electoral

¹⁹ Burnham (1965, 1970, 1974), as compared to Converse (1972, pp. 263–337) and Rusk (1970). Also see Dugan and Taggart (1995).

²⁰ Kleppner (1982b). Kleppner would be a kindred spirit to Page.

college.”²¹ At present, each state selects, by popular vote, a group of electors equal in number to its total of members of Congress. The District of Columbia also has three presidential electors granted by the Twenty-third Amendment, adopted in 1961. After the general election, those selected as electors meet in their respective states to vote for President and Vice President. The 2000 election again shows the relevance of the electoral college vote. For the fourth time in U.S. history, a candidate who did not win the popular vote was elected President.

A state's representation in both the electoral college and the U.S. House of Representatives is governed by its share of the national population, which is affected by population growth and interstate migration. Relative changes in population – together with the principle of “one person, one vote” – produce a reapportionment of the House and the electoral college each decade (for apportionment, see Tables Eb1–61; for votes in the electoral college, see Tables Eb149–207).

Research on American Elections: Realignment to Divided Government

The voting statistics reported in Tables Eb62–122 and Eb149–267 tell a second critical story about American political history, a story about the ebb and flow of support for the major political parties. With the publication of V. O. Key's influential papers on “critical elections” and “secular realignments,” the study of elections turned to focus on theories of realignment (Key 1955, 1959). Realignments – shifts in the balance of partisan power in the electorate and the institutions of government – were observed to occur with predictable regularity: forty-year cycles of one-party dominance broken or confirmed by cataclysmic “critical” elections (Burnham 1965, 1970; Ladd and Hadley 1978; McCormick 1982, 1986). The elections of 1860, 1892, and 1932 changed the face of Washington politics. The observed periodicity of realignments has spawned a variety of hypotheses to explain their strength and duration. By the late 1960s a new realignment was expected.

It never happened – at least not in the way realignments had occurred previously. As a result, many political scientists and historians questioned the value of realignment theories (Lichtman 1982; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Shafer 1991; Aldrich and Niemi 1996; Aldrich 1999; Shea 1999). The failure of cyclical theories to predict the next period of party dominance has yielded to alternative visions of the future, with political scientists offering a menu of dealignment, the end of realignment, punctuated equilibria, a sixth-party system, and a “baseless” party system among the options. Historians have taken the failures of realignment theory in a different direction. Silbey, drawing on his earlier collaborations with Benson and Field, finds “political eras” a more satisfying construct capable of extending analysis to normal periods of American politics. In a similar vein, Shafer offers the notion of “electoral order” as a concept capable of bringing coherence to the discussion of American political history (Silbey 1991; Shafer 1991).

In place of realignment, the focus in political science has shifted to the study of “divided” government, the control of the executive by one party sharing power with the other major party in

command of one or both of the chambers of the legislature. Attention is directed primarily at the partisan control of the institutions of government, although those seeking explanation for patterns of divided government still look to elections and the behavior of voters to explain the reasons why governments cannot be unified under the direction of a single political party.

Some may see this shift to divided government as simply a shift in the historical focus point. Rather than study the periods immediately after critical elections when government is unified behind a dominant party, scholars now look to the end of periods of party dominance and focus on those times when competition becomes more heated and control by a single party is not a given. Yet the picture political history offers up is not so obvious, especially as our attention moves from the national level to state political competition. The first half of the twentieth century, a period of unified government, tends to dominate expectations of “normalcy.” Yet this period is unique in American history. Fiorina notes the common occurrences of divided government throughout the nineteenth century, in contrast to the unified governments of the first half of the twentieth century (Fiorina 1996). The last thirty years are more typical than we often believe (see Table Eb296–308 for the partisan divisions within the national government).

Whether we study American political history from the perspective of realignment and critical elections, from the perspective of political periods, or with divided government the common pattern for periods of normal politics, we are looking at the same data with different lenses. The Gestalt principle of figure and ground (most often recognized in visual form as optical illusion – a picture of two faces or a vase) serves as a reasonable analogy for our perception of American political history as one “most usefully” examined as critical elections, stable party periods, or shared control of national government. Each perspective offers a different insight into the operation of the American democracy.

Institutional Time Series

A realignment perspective on American political history is not based solely on the behavior of the voting public. The operation of government over broad periods of American history can be traced by examining major changes in national and local institutions, changes most typically represented by the extensive and dramatic shift in power within our governing institutions from one major political party to another. Certainly authors describing realignments recognize this institutional component (Burnham 1965; Lowi 1967; Huntington 1981; Sundquist 1983; Lichtman 1976; Clubb, Flanagan, and Zingale 1980; Brady 1988; Morone 1990; Jillson 1994).

Examination of the control of the institutions of the national government focuses attention on the partisan divisions within the U.S. Congress, as well as the party affiliation of the sitting President (see Table Eb296–308).²² Although the President often has a different perspective on public policy than his colleagues in the Congress, it is quite clear that party is the glue that holds the federal system together. It is simply far easier to find common ground in

²¹ According to Vile (1996), the constitutional provision establishing the electoral college has been the focus of more constitutional amending activity than any other, except for the often-proposed equal rights for women amendment.

²² Similarly the study of state policy making concentrates on the partisan divisions in the state legislature and the party affiliation of the governor (Fiorina 1996).

enacting laws when both institutions are populated by members of the same political party with similar ideological preferences.²³

Partisan control presumably has some impact on the nature of government policy. Both chambers of the U.S. Congress are organized by their respective majorities. Seat margin in the House of Representatives and Senate influences the composition of committees as well as the flexibility with which leadership can attend both to programmatic direction and to constituency needs of its members. The importance of party unity for the passage of legislative agendas increases when majority status grows more tenuous.

Congressional Bills and Resolutions

Do realignments presage policy shifts (Brady 1988)? Is unified government critical for advancing legislative agendas (Sundquist 1988–1989)? Does divided government promote deadlock (Burns 1963, 1966)? The evidence is surprisingly mixed, and the debate is likely to continue (Mayhew 1991; Jones 1994).

Simple questions about congressional activity in the face of interchamber party division or division between the party controlling the Congress and the party of the President may be answered by comparing Tables Eb268–278 and Eb296–308. Table Eb268–278 provides information on the number of bills and resolutions considered and enacted in each Congress.

Care must be exercised in comparing counts of bill and resolution introductions and enactments across historical periods. Significant differences exist in the length and breadth of the subject matter covered at different points in time. A single omnibus bill may substitute for many individual topic bills. The abrupt reduction in the number of private bills enacted into law beginning with the 60th Congress was the result of combining many private bills, particularly pension bills, into omnibus enactments.

The number of bills enacted is also affected by the nature and timing of congressional reforms (Adler 2002). In 1855 Congress established the U.S. Court of Claims to examine and resolve contractual claims made against the United States government. In 1946, in response to the dramatic rise in private legislation following the First World War, Congress banned several types of private legislation in the Legislative Reform Act.²⁴ Prior to then, private legislation had occupied considerable congressional time, precluding consideration of public legislation. Its virtual elimination dramatically shifted the balance of activity back to a focus on public bills and resolutions.

Presidential Vetoes

Conflict between Congress and the President is most visible in the veto process represented in Table Eb279–284. The number of bills vetoed is often a function of the partisan division across these institutions (Copeland 1983; Shields and Huang 1995). Periods of divided government typically presage more vetoes than eras

in which a single political party claims both Congress and the presidency. Yet intraparty disagreements also promote conflict over legislation even when Congress and the President are of the same partisan affiliation.

In modern times, presidential vetoes have come most often when a Republican President has faced off against a Democratic Congress. Presidents Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford, and Reagan confronted Congress over a number of important bills (Watson 1993; Cameron 2000). Only Eisenhower carried the day without significant losses. While Congress was able to override Eisenhower's veto only twice, the other modern Republican Presidents lost approximately 25 percent of their constitutional disagreements with Congress over legislation.

The subsequent success or failure of Congress to override the presidential veto is a function not only of partisan differences between President and Congress but also of the magnitude of partisan divisions within each chamber (Rohde and Simon 1985). Presidents who face an extraordinary majority of the opposing party face long odds in vetoing legislation. But such majorities are rare. The loyalty of members of the President's party makes building the two-thirds vote necessary to override a veto quite difficult under most circumstances.

Presidential Success

Summary measures of the President's success in passing his program are reported in Table Eb285–295. Scores are constructed by Congressional Quarterly Press based on roll call votes on bills for which the President has taken a stand in favor or in opposition. A number of caveats must be acknowledged when using such scores to infer how good a job the President is doing, how well the President and Congress work together, or which chamber works best with the President. Problems affecting inferences of presidential success include:

- Bills killed in committee are not counted.
- Bills passed or defeated on voice vote are not counted.
- All votes are equally weighted, regardless of importance.
- Bills are weighted by the number of votes taken.
- The two chambers of Congress may disagree on a bill (which may not be the same bill).
- Amendments will differ across chambers.

Owing to such considerations, the operational "presidential success" score has been roundly criticized, but few simple alternatives exist (Edwards 1985; Pritchard 1986; Collier and Sullivan 1995).

Nonetheless, many scholars substitute alternative measures in their attempts to examine the interactions between President and Congress. Peterson, Mayhew, Jones, Howell, and others have identified different classes of legislation as more or less important and hence worth more or less in interpreting how successful the branches of government are in working together or legislating "alone" (Peterson 1989; Mayhew 1991; Jones 1994; Howell, Adler, et al. 2000). Typically this work evaluates legislation subjectively and ordinally, ranking bills on a simple scale from "landmark" to "mundane."

Contemporary research on presidential success focuses on the conditions underlying success or failure – for example, control of the Congress by the President's party, or the magnitude of a Congressional majority. Consequently, the discussion of presidential

²³ There are, of course, exceptions to this general rule. The inability of New Deal Democrats to enact civil rights legislation lay in the split within the Democratic party. Similarly, the precursors to realigning elections have often been a result of a political party's inability to deal with intraparty disagreements over the key issue of the day.

²⁴ "Private bills deal with specific individuals, corporations, institutions, and so forth, as distinguished from public bills which deal with classes only" (Sensenbrenner 1999).

success highlights the link between divided government (Table Eb296–308) and the passage of the presidential program (Table Eb285–295). The conclusion of this literature is that no single conclusion exists (Chamberlain 1946; Moe and Teel 1970; Edwards 1989; Peterson 1989; Mayhew 1991; Jones 1994). At different points in time, the Congress is shown to be more or less supportive and the President more or less successful.

More constructively, Peterson and Jones recognize that no institution can enact law on its own: lawmaking proceeds best when the President and Congress “work together” (Peterson 1989; Jones 1994). Indeed, a focus on institutional success may misread the reality of American government. Such a perspective is simply myopic. Furthermore, the inability of any single institution to be successful on its own does not preclude all politicians from claiming credit for political successes. And with the apparent exception of Harry Truman – who famously declared “the buck stops here” – all elected officials seek to avoid blame for policy failures.

Public Opinion on Politics

The advent of public opinion polling – first as commercial enterprise and later as academic and scientific exercise – has transformed our ability to understand the nature of the aggregate political statistics that have been collected since the founding of the Republic. Beginning with the regular efforts of Gallup, Harris, Crossley, and Roper in the 1930s, Americans have faced a steady barrage of pollsters wondering about their assessments of the state of the nation, the performance of the President, and myriad problems that have faced the nation, from the condition of the economy to the world at war (Converse 1987). Following World War II, academic survey researchers, many of them recruited from the federal bureaucracy, joined commercial pollsters in the streets and later on telephones to query Americans about their opinions on political and social issues of the day.

Early public opinion research concentrated on current events. More recently, academic researchers and commercial survey firms have recognized the value of time series survey data for assessing contemporary opinions (Page and Shapiro 1992; Mayer 1993). Only with the perspective offered by prior opinions can the current mood of the country be evaluated. The answer to the question “Is the glass half full or half empty?” is partially answered by knowing whether it used to be full or empty.

This short discussion cannot do full justice to the many facets of public opinion that have been the focus of study by survey researchers. Rather, it offers a brief history of the basic partisan attachments of the public, a summary of popular stands on issues in broad ideological terms, and a description of public judgments of presidential performance in office over the past fifty years.

Party Identification

The occasional subject of speculation prior to the Second World War, the partisan and ideological leanings of Americans moved to center stage in the postwar era. Both political and academic interest in the hearts and minds of Americans stimulated this data collection. McCarthy-era investigations into the political preferences of Americans – particularly the radical, fascist, and communist tendencies of some – reinforced perceptions that underlying political predispositions play an important role in the decisions Americans made in going to the polls on election day.

Although questions about the political predispositions of the public have been asked in public opinion polls for almost seventy years, attention to the critical nature of party identification is largely the result of the emphasis placed on it by researchers at the University of Michigan. The defining moment for this tradition was the 1960 publication of *The American Voter* by Campbell, Converse, et al., who insisted on the centrality of party attachment in the decisions of Americans facing the ballot box (also see Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Campbell, Converse, et al. 1966; and Miller and Shanks 1996).

The standard survey approach to measuring party identification is the question “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?” Academic researchers with the flexibility of asking more questions than commercial surveyors typically add one of two follow-ups. For those who respond to the initial question that they believe themselves to be a member of one major party or the other, the second question is “Do you believe yourself to be a strong [Democrat/Republican] or a weak [Democrat/Republican]?” For those who declare their independence from the two dominant parties in response to the first question, the next question is, “Do you lean toward the Democratic Party or the Republican Party?” The combination of these three questions produces a seven-point index ranking party identification from strong Democrat at one extreme to strong Republican at the other (see Table Eb309–316). These three questions can also serve to rank respondents on the strength of their partisan identification: a “pure” independent, an independent leaning toward a party, a weakly identified party member, or a strong supporter of a party.

The post–World War II era began with a plurality of Americans identifying with the Democratic Party. Representing the continuance of the New Deal coalition, almost twice as many Americans identified with the Democratic Party as with the Republican Party throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The high point of Democratic Party support among the general public occurred during the Johnson landslide of 1964, when 52 percent of Americans claimed to identify with the party of the President. It should be emphasized that party identification does not by itself determine election outcomes. For example, despite these general predispositions of the electorate, the immense popularity of Dwight David Eisenhower led to Republican control of the White House for almost half of these two decades. Election outcomes hinge on turnout rates among party groups, as well as success in attracting independents and members of the opposition while retaining party identifiers.

The late 1960s and early 1970s represent a watershed period in modern American politics. Public dissatisfaction with government, reflected in concerns about civil rights, the environment, the war in Vietnam, and election tactics produced significant shifts in the attachments of the public to the major parties. Within the span of eight years, both parties lost supporters and the number of “Independent” Americans grew dramatically. By 1974, Democrat and Independent were the responses of about 40 percent of the public, while barely one fifth of those polled identified with the Republican Party, an apparently unattractive alternative in the wake of the resignation of President Nixon in August 1974.

The Republican Party won back some of their support and gained adherents among new voters during the next twenty years. However, 1994 proved to be the high point of Republican support. Despite recent success in both chambers of Congress, the party has not won more converts. The 2000 electorate is composed of a

plurality of Independents. Democrats remain the larger party, with Republican support falling to barely one fourth of the public.

Elections have changed over time, and parties seem to play a lesser role in the decisions of voters today. Candidates themselves emphasize this change. Recognizing the strategic need to capture the independent voter, rarely do candidates advertise their party affiliation. Campaigns promote voting for the candidate. Consequently, “the person, not the party” is the rationale underlying many voter decisions in this candidate-centered era (Wattenberg 1998). Nonetheless, in less visible races, lack of information means that party remains a key clue for voters.

Political Ideology and Policy Mood

The ideological identification of the American public has been investigated by pollsters in a variety of ways. Modern questions vary from the Gallup and media versions (for example, “How would you describe your views on most political matters? Generally, do you think of yourself as liberal, moderate, or conservative?”) to academic versions that solicit greater variation.

Contemporary America is populated by citizens who describe themselves as “conservative” far more often than they call themselves “liberal.” Yet more popular than either choice is the American preference for “moderate” or “middle of the road.” The self-identified ideological preferences of Americans shift very slowly, with only minor aggregate change over time.²⁵

Yet citizen ideological self-identification does not always point definitively to the public’s preferences for individual policies. The mass public is rarely as constrained as political elites in the clustering and consistency of their attitudes about political actors, institutions, and policies (Converse 1964; Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002; Stimson 1999).

Recently, Stimson has provided a classification of the ideological “mood” of the American public based on their issue positions (see series Eb317) (Stimson 1999). This series is much more volatile than ideological self-identification and clearly shows the ebb and flow of public anticipation of and reaction to public policy. Stimson argues that American public opinion defines a zone of acceptable behavior for its political leaders, with public preferences regulating the extremes to which government officials may go. As policies near the extremes, public pressures pull them back toward the mainstream. Thus, we see in these policy mood data a tendency for public opinion to swing against what is often seen as the prevailing political tendency. As an example, the public mood swung in a decidedly liberal direction throughout the Reagan presidency.

Presidential Approval

For better or worse, the “buck” often stops at the White House. Americans typically judge their government by their President. This perspective – which might be thought of as government personalized – is commonly found among children (Greenstein 1965; Easton and Dennis 1969), and even though adults have much more complex images of the government, their impressions are often formed in response to presidential action or inaction in national and world events.

²⁵ Fifty years of these self-identifications can be found within the Continuity Guide to the American National Elections, available at the Internet site of the National Election Studies (NES).

Since the mid-1930s, public opinion polls have regularly asked Americans what they thought about the performance of the incumbent President (Edwards and Gallup 1990). Although individual assessments of a sitting President can be quite detailed, the query used by the Gallup organization throughout this period is straightforward: Do you approve or disapprove of the way President [name of incumbent] has handled his job as President? Despite the limitations of this question (and two follow-up questions often asked of his specific handling of the economy and of foreign affairs), it remains a key indicator of general levels of public support for the President and an indicator of presidential “power” (Neustadt 1960; Brace and Hinckley 1992).

Annual averages of public responses to the Gallup presidential job approval question for the period 1948–2000 are reported in Table Eb318–328. The degree of variation around these annual averages is reflected in the highest and lowest support reported for any individual poll for each year. Although the individual polls are not reported in the series, Figure Eb-C does show the intra-annual variation in public support for the President and highlights the degree of variation surrounding the annual averages.

Common patterns in this series have been observed by many scholars. With few exceptions, to be popular as President is to be popular early in the administration. The political “honeymoon” of newly elected leaders is quite visibly captured in the graph of public support for each administration from Truman to Clinton. This initial approval is usually followed by a decline in popularity. George Herbert Walker Bush is the clear exception. Unlike the common pattern with other Presidents, Bush’s approval rating steadily increased during his first three years in office. His fourth-year crash in the polls, from the highest job approval rating ever recorded, was closely followed by only the second electoral defeat of an incumbent President in the last seventy years.

In addition to the commonly noted deterioration of support as the President’s electoral coalition gradually unwinds, a “rally round the flag” effect has often been observed at times of international crisis (Mueller 1970; Hurwitz and Peffley 1987). Upturns in presidential approval occur during wars and external threats to American national security. That this public response is widely recognized often breeds cynicism about presidential decisions to participate in foreign affairs.

As Neustadt observed, the power of the President is the “power to persuade” (Neustadt 1960). This power to persuade Congress is often a function of the standing the President has with the general public. In both the examination of presidential support and in the passage of particular legislation, public opinion has often been considered a key explanatory variable.²⁶

The Future of Survey Data

Clearly, the value of survey data will increase as the collection of these data expands over time. A number of common difficulties arise in the use of public opinion time series data. Often unconsidered, but perhaps the most common difficulty, is the lack of easily accessible data archives for polling data. Some of these data are

²⁶ The work of Mueller (1973), Zeidenstein (1983, 1985), Ostrom and Simon (1985), Rivers and Rose (1985), Edwards (1989), Bond and Fleisher (1990), Canes-Wrone and de Marchi (2002), and Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson (2002) provides a small sample of the research examining the interrelationships of public preferences and national government policies mediated by the critical standing of the President.

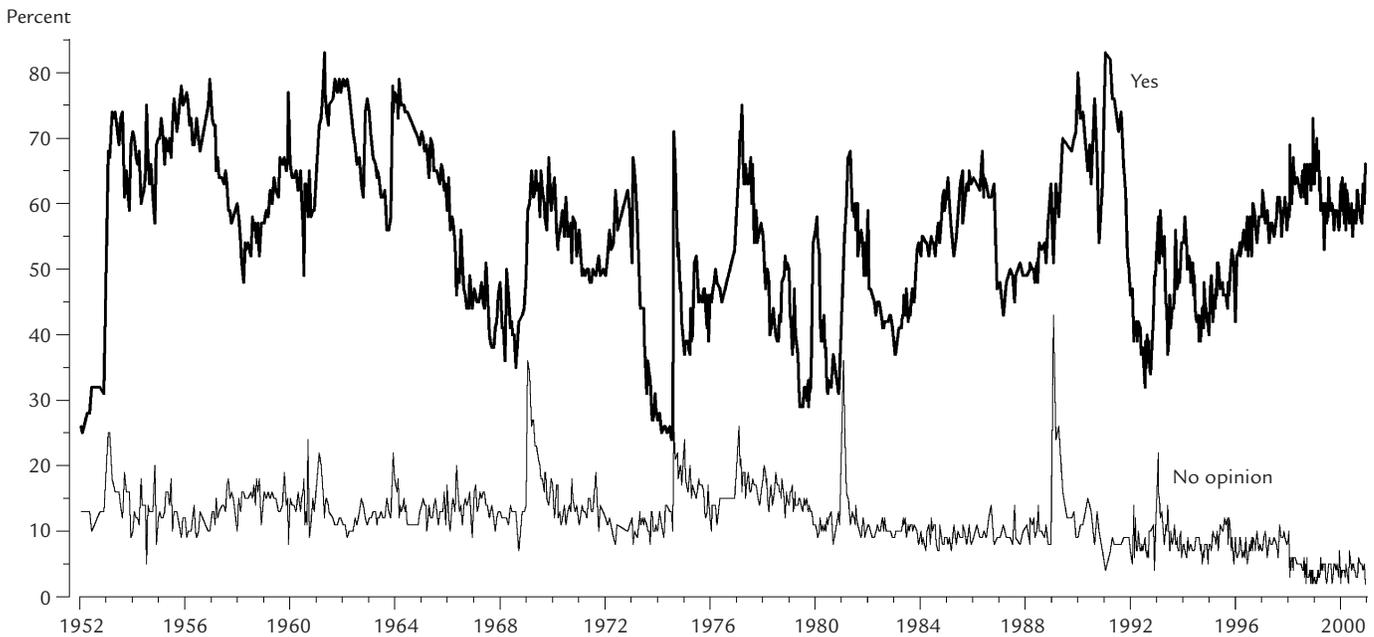


FIGURE Eb-C Presidential approval: 1952–2000

Sources

George C. Edwards III and Alec M. Gallup, *Presidential Approval: A Sourcebook* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Lyn Ragsdale, *Vital Statistics on the*

Presidency: Washington to Clinton (Congressional Quarterly Press, 1996); *The Gallup Poll Monthly* (October 2000): 10–12.

lost, while others are merely lost from easy public access. Other common problems arising in the analysis of public opinion data collected over long periods of time include the following: lack of consistent wording; alteration of word meaning; changing sampling techniques; changing interviewing techniques; and “house” (survey organization) effects (Converse and Schuman 1984; Smith 1987).

Each of these problems arises in the analysis of any of the extended time series of public opinion. Indeed, the reader will notice that many of the series reported here could have begun with the first Gallup surveys of 1935 and 1936. They do not, in large part, because these early surveys suffer from enough weaknesses that they were set aside as potentially not comparable with more contemporary data. Early polls, especially those conducted prior to the 1948 campaign, often chose samples with less scientific rigor than we insist on today. Early surveys did not strive for simple demographic balance. Some Southern samples, for example, exclude black respondents. Other surveys did not use probability sampling strategies that allow reasonable inferences to be drawn from the collected survey responses.

But despite their limitations, these time series of public preferences provide critical insights that are simply not observed in the historical time series of elections and institutional control that dominate discussions of political periods in American history. These series help to define the context within which political parties compete for votes. Similarly, they define for the party in office, as well as for their future challengers, the nature of the public agenda to which successful politicians must speak. This is not to insist that public preferences are exogenous in all instances. Politicians by their words and by their actions can affect both the centrality and evaluation of government for the public agenda. But politicians evade the majority of the public at their own peril over the long haul.

Conclusion

The statistical series reported in this chapter represent the story of American politics over the past 200 years. Elections serve as mechanisms linking voter preferences with government officials whose decisions produce public policies. Party groups act as key aggregators of those preferences and the principal means by which governments are organized and policies enacted. For this reason alone, many of the series are about the behavior or preferences of partisans, either in the general public or the political elite.

Multiple stories may be told with these data. Some observers take the position that politicians in government lead the public into accepting the outcomes of the political process. This process may be viewed as benign (with citizens educated by their political leaders) or malevolent (where leadership manipulates citizens). In either case, elections may be seen to follow the decisions of political elites. Others will find a more optimistic image within the details of these historical trends: elections select leaders who deliver democratically chosen policy outcomes. From this perspective, politicians, feeling the call of the reelection imperative, respond to the preferences of their constituents. Within the diverse community that is America, majority preferences are enacted without fear of majority tyranny, as once expressed by the authors of the *Federalist Papers*. A third set of scholars may find that these data only produce further evidence of the “paradox of modern democracy”: despite a mostly uninformed public, the United States has survived as a relatively stable democracy for more than 200 years (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

These data will not definitively answer the question, “Which portrayal is correct?” But there is enough here to stimulate both sides of the debate. The degree to which the American experiment has successfully produced a democratic polity remains an open and important question.

At the same time, American political history is not well represented as a straight-line extrapolation of trends. Unique events have played (and will continue to play) enormously important roles in defining opportunities for parties and political leaders, while influencing the public's view of their generation's problems and successes. Some of these events are set out in Table Eb-D. The assassination of Presidents, the clash of

armies, the crash of markets and economies, and the attack of terrorists seem destined to define eras in American politics. Extraordinary events complicate our explanations of historical paths. They do not, however, make drawing inferences about political history impossible. These data provide the basis for expectations and baselines for understanding deviations from the past.

TABLE Eb-D Chronology of U.S. elections and politics: 1775–2000

1775	The Revolutionary War begins.
1776	The Second Continental Congress adopts the Declaration of Independence.
1781	The Articles of Confederation are ratified.
1783	The Treaty of Paris ends the Revolutionary War.
1787	Shay's Rebellion in western Massachusetts.
1787	Constitutional Convention convenes in Philadelphia.
1788	The Constitution is ratified.
1789	George Washington is elected as the first President of the United States.
1789	The First Congress convenes in New York City.
1789	The Federal Judiciary Act establishes a six-member U.S. Supreme Court, as well as a district and circuit court system. John Jay is chosen as the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.
1791	The Bill of Rights is ratified.
1791	Washington, D.C., is established as the site for the U.S. capital.
1792	The Democratic–Republican Party organizes in opposition to the “Federalist” establishment.
1794	The Whiskey Rebellion breaks out in western Pennsylvania among farmers who oppose the collection of the tax on liquor and stills.
1795	Jay's Treaty provides for withdrawal of British forces from the Northwest Territory by June 1, 1796, in exchange for payments of war debts to British citizens.
1795	In response to the Supreme Court's 1793 decision in <i>Chisholm v. Georgia</i> , the Eleventh Amendment is ratified to prevent citizens of one state from suing another state in the federal courts.
1795	John Rutledge serves as acting Chief Justice following Jay's resignation, but the Senate refuses to confirm him.
1796	Oliver Ellsworth is confirmed as Chief Justice.
1796	John Adams (Federalist) is elected President.
1798	The Alien and Sedition Acts are enacted.
1800	Congress convenes in Washington, D.C., for the first time.
1800	Thomas Jefferson is chosen as the President over incumbent John Adams in a contested election that is decided in the House of Representatives.
1801	The War with Tripoli begins and will last until 1805.
1801	John Marshall begins 34 years as Chief Justice.
1803	In <i>Marbury v. Madison</i> , the Supreme Court rules that an act of Congress is null and void when it conflicts with provisions of the U.S. Constitution.
1803	The Louisiana purchase (\$15 million) doubles the land area of the United States.
1804	Passage of the Twelfth Amendment: election of President and Vice President on separate ballots.
1804	The House of Representatives votes to impeach Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase, but the Senate does not convict.
1808	The Osage, a Sioux tribe, sign the Osage Treaty ceding their lands in what is now Missouri and Arkansas to the United States.
1808	James Madison (Democratic–Republican) is elected President.
1810	The Supreme Court declares a state law unconstitutional for the first time (<i>Fletcher v. Peck</i>).
1812	The War of 1812 begins.
1816	In <i>Martin v. Hunter's Lessee</i> , the Supreme Court asserts its authority over state courts as interpreter of the Constitution and acts of Congress.
1816	James Monroe (Democratic–Republican) is elected President.
1819	In <i>McCulloch v. Maryland</i> , the Supreme Court interprets the “necessary and proper” clause of Article 1 to provide the implied power to carry out the duties of the federal government enumerated in the Constitution. This case dramatically defines the distribution of power in the federal system: when state and federal law conflict, federal law is supreme.
1820	The Missouri Compromise balances slave and free states admitted to the union. Missouri is admitted as a slave state, but no slavery will be permitted anywhere north of Missouri's southern border.
1823	President Monroe announces the Monroe Doctrine: the United States will not tolerate European interference in the Western Hemisphere.
1824	John Quincy Adams (Democratic–Republican), son of John Adams, is elected President in a contested election that ends in the House of Representatives. Speaker of the House Henry Clay uses his influence to elect Adams, an action bitterly resented by candidate Andrew Jackson, whose 99 electoral votes make him a logical choice. Adams names Clay his Secretary of State.

(continued)

TABLE Eb-D Chronology of U.S. elections and politics: 1775–2000 *Continued*

1824	In <i>Gibbons v. Ogden</i> , the Supreme Court expands the scope of federal authority by defining the government's ability to regulate interstate commerce.
1828	Andrew Jackson (Democrat) is elected President.
1830	President Andrew Jackson signs the Indian Removal Act authorizing the move of several tribes to western lands.
1831	Nat Turner leads a slave uprising in which 70 whites are killed; 100 blacks are killed in a search for Turner.
1831	Alexis de Tocqueville and his friend Gustave de Beaumont spend nine months touring America. The book that de Tocqueville writes after this trip, <i>Democracy in America</i> , would be published in 1835.
1832	South Carolina Ordinance of Nullification. Based on John Calhoun's theory of states' rights, South Carolina attempts to nullify certain acts of the Congress of the United States.
1834	The Whig Party is formed.
1836	Roger Taney is confirmed as Chief Justice.
1836	Santa Anna leads 3,000 men in a siege of the Alamo, killing all 187 Texans inside.
1836	Martin Van Buren (Democrat) is elected President.
1838	The Underground Railroad is organized.
1839	The Spanish slave ship <i>Amistad</i> , carrying fifty three slaves, is taken over in a mutiny by their leader, Cinque. Before the Supreme Court, John Quincy Adams argues their right to be freed.
1840	William Henry Harrison (Whig) is elected President but catches pneumonia during his inauguration. He survives only one month.
1841	Vice President John Tyler (Whig) assumes the presidency on Harrison's death in April.
1844	James K. Polk (Democrat) is elected President.
1846	At President Polk's request, on May 11 Congress declares the United States at war with Mexico.
1848	The Mexican War ends with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In exchange for \$15 million and the settling of \$3.25 million in American claims, Mexico cedes some 500,000 square miles of its territory in the western and southwestern United States.
1848	Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton organize the first American women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, where the Declaration of Sentiments was signed.
1848	Zachary Taylor (Whig) is elected President.
1849	Harriet Tubman (1820–1913) escapes to the North and begins working with the Underground Railroad.
1850	The Fugitive Slave Act provides for the return of slaves brought to free states.
1850	The Compromise of 1850 admits California as a free state and Texas as a slave state; New Mexico and Utah are organized with no restrictions on slavery.
1850	Millard Fillmore (Whig) assumes the presidency with the death of Zachary Taylor.
1852	Franklin Pierce (Democrat) is elected President, defeating the last significant Whig presidential candidate, Winfield Scott.
1854	The Kansas–Nebraska Act passes, allowing "popular sovereignty"; the net effect was to negate the Missouri Compromise (1820).
1854	The Republican Party is established (Ripon, Wisconsin).
1856	James Buchanan (Democrat) is elected President.
1857	<i>Dred Scott v. Sandford</i> decision by the Supreme Court. After being brought to free territory by his owner, Scott sued for his freedom, but the Court ruled that he had never ceased to be a slave, denied that he was a citizen, and denied him the right to sue.
1859	John Brown leads an abolitionist raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia.
1860	Abraham Lincoln is elected President.
1860	South Carolina votes to secede from the Union.
1861	An attack on Fort Sumter off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina, on April 12 signals the beginning of the Civil War.
1863	The Emancipation Proclamation is signed January 1.
1864	Salmon Chase is confirmed as Chief Justice.
1865	The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) is founded to maintain white supremacy through intimidation and violence.
1865	The Freedmen's Bureau is formed during Reconstruction to assist freed slaves in the South.
1865	The Civil War ends when Lee surrenders to Grant at Appomattox Court House.
1865	On April 14th, Lincoln is shot by John Wilkes Booth and dies the following day. Andrew Johnson becomes President.
1865	The Thirteenth Amendment abolishes slavery.
1866	The Civil Rights Act grants citizenship to native-born Americans, except Indians.
1867	Secretary of State Seward purchases Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million. Congressional critics call this "Seward's Folly."
1867	Congress passes the Reconstruction Acts of 1867. The ten ex-Confederate states still without federal representation must eliminate all racial barriers to suffrage as a precondition for readmission.
1868	The Fourteenth Amendment grants full citizenship to all individuals born or naturalized in the United States, except Native Americans. It precludes states from making laws to restrict the rights of citizens of the United States.
1868	The impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson ends in his acquittal.
1868	Civil War veteran General Ulysses S. Grant (Republican) is elected President.
1869	The Union Pacific–Central Pacific transcontinental railroad is completed as the two lines meet at Promontory Point, Utah.
1869	Wyoming territory passes the first woman's suffrage act.
1869	The number of justices on the Supreme Court rises from seven to nine.
1869	Elizabeth Cady Stanton is elected president of the National Woman Suffrage Association, which demands federal voting rights for women. Susan B. Anthony is elected president of the American Equal Rights Association.
1870	The Fifteenth Amendment establishes the right of African-American men to vote.

TABLE Eb-D Chronology of U.S. elections and politics: 1775–2000 *Continued*

1870	Congress enacts the “Ku Klux Klan Act of 1870” or “Enforcement Act” to stop Southern white resistance to the power African Americans have gained during Reconstruction.
1870	The Department of Justice is created.
1874	Morrison Waite becomes Chief Justice.
1875	The Civil Rights Act grants equal access to public accommodations.
1875	The Supreme Court decision of <i>Minor v. Happersett</i> allows states to set suffrage requirements and denies women voting rights.
1876	Ignoring warnings of a massed Sioux army of 2,000 to 4,000 men, Custer and 250 soldiers attack the forces of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse at the Little Big Horn. Custer and all of his men die in the attack.
1876	The presidential election fails to produce a decisive outcome, sending the contest to the House of Representatives.
1877	The Electoral Commission Bill authorizes a committee of fifteen to decide the election between Hayes and Tilden. The committee’s votes split along party lines. On March 3, Hayes is announced as President after House Republicans agree, among other concessions, to pull out federal troops from the South.
1880	James A. Garfield (Republican) is elected President.
1881	President Garfield is shot on July 2. After Garfield’s death on September 19, Chester A. Arthur becomes President.
1883	The Pendleton Civil Service Act is passed to reform the corruption in the civil service.
1883	In what are known as the Civil Rights cases, the Supreme Court declares the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional.
1884	Grover Cleveland (Democrat) is elected President (for the first time).
1886	To celebrate the centennial of the Declaration of Independence, the Statue of Liberty is dedicated in New York harbor as an international symbol of political freedom.
1887	The Interstate Commerce Act is passed.
1888	The Senate confirms Melville Fuller as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.
1888	Benjamin Harrison (Republican) is elected President.
1890	The Sherman Anti-Trust Law is enacted.
1890	The last major armed conflict between Native Americans and the U.S. Army takes place at Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota.
1891	The Populist Party is formed in Cincinnati, Ohio.
1891	The Judiciary (Evarts) Act establishes the U.S. Courts of Appeals.
1892	Ellis Island opens as a federal immigration station. More than twelve million immigrants will pass through its doors during its sixty-two years in operation.
1892	Grover Cleveland (Democrat) is elected President (for the second time).
1893	Panic of 1893. This economic crisis and the three-year depression that follows produce a realignment of the political parties, solidifying Republican control over the presidency and Congress.
1893	In Hawai’i, Queen Liliuokalani’s government is overthrown; Hawai’i becomes a U.S. protectorate despite President Cleveland’s opposition.
1894	In Chicago, after the Pullman Palace Car Company reduces wages, workers strike (May 11 to August 3). A general sympathy strike ensues on June 26. Despite protests by Illinois Governor John P. Altgeld, deputy marshals and U.S. troops are called out to quell the strikers.
1896	The Supreme Court validates the principle of “separate but equal” in <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> .
1896	William McKinley (Republican) defeats William Jennings Bryan to win election as President of the United States.
1898	The explosion and sinking of the battleship <i>Maine</i> in Havana harbor results in 260 deaths. It becomes a justification for the Spanish–American War.
1901	President McKinley is shot by Leon Czolgosz in Buffalo, New York. He dies of his wounds on September 14, and Vice President Theodore Roosevelt is sworn in as President.
1903	The Hay–Bunau–Varilla treaty establishes the Panama Canal Zone.
1905	The Niagara Movement is founded to fight for school integration and voting rights and to assist African-American political candidates; forerunner of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).
1906	Race riot in Greensburg, Indiana – the first of many in reaction to the migration of African Americans to the North.
1908	William Howard Taft (Republican) is elected President.
1909	W. E. B. DuBois founds the NAACP to fight for civil rights through legal action and education.
1910	Associate Justice Edward White is promoted to Chief Justice.
1910	Speaker of the House Joseph Cannon is stripped of most of his powers. Committees, party caucuses, and seniority play important new roles in the organization of Congress.
1912	The <i>Farm Journal</i> magazine straw poll predicts the presidential election.
1912	Woodrow Wilson (Democrat) is elected President.
1913	The Sixteenth Amendment is ratified, providing for a graduated national income tax. The Underwood–Simmons Tariff Act implements the newly approved income tax.
1913	The Seventeenth Amendment is ratified, providing for the direct election of senators.
1913	The Federal Reserve Act establishes a regional federal bank system to promote economic development and stabilization.
1914	The Clayton Antitrust Act and the Federal Trade Commission Act are enacted to define the scope of federal intervention in the economy.

(continued)

TABLE Eb-D Chronology of U.S. elections and politics: 1775–2000 *Continued*

1914	The Panama Canal opens for shipping.
1915	Refounding of the Ku Klux Klan.
1916	The <i>Literary Digest</i> begins predicting elections based on magazine straw polls.
1916	The first Jewish Supreme Court justice, Louis Brandeis, is confirmed.
1917	Saying that “the world must be made safe for democracy,” Wilson asks Congress to declare war on Germany (April 2).
1917	Rule XXII (cloture) is adopted by the Senate to limit debate.
1919	Signing of the Versailles Treaty, which the Senate later refuses to ratify.
1920	The Eighteenth Amendment goes into effect January 16, prohibiting the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors.
1920	The Nineteenth Amendment grants voting rights to women.
1920	The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is established.
1920	Warren G. Harding (Republican) is elected President.
1921	William Howard Taft becomes the first former President to serve as Chief Justice.
1921	With the Budget and Accounting Act, Congress creates the General Accounting Office as a legislative agency and the Bureau of the Budget (later the Office of Management and Budget) as an executive agency.
1923	President Harding dies in office. Calvin Coolidge is sworn in as President on August 3.
1923	The Teapot Dome scandal erupts as the deal between Harry F. Sinclair of Mammoth Oil and Secretary of the Interior Albert B. Fall is revealed. Fall is the first cabinet member in U.S. history to go to jail.
1924	American Indians are granted citizenship and the right to vote.
1925	Judiciary Act of 1925. Congress grants the Supreme Court control of its docket through writs of certiorari.
1928	Herbert Hoover (Republican) is elected President of the United States, defeating Democratic Party challenger Alfred E. Smith.
1929	The stock market crash marks the beginning of the Great Depression.
1930	Charles Evans Hughes replaces Taft as Chief Justice.
1932	In an election that changes the face of American politics, Franklin D. Roosevelt (Democrat) is elected President and the Democratic Party wins the majority of both chambers of the Congress.
1933	The Twentieth Amendment is adopted, reducing the “lame duck” period, with Congress to assemble January 3 and presidential terms to begin January 20. Also, presidential succession is modified.
1933	The Twenty-first Amendment is ratified, repealing the Eighteenth Amendment.
1933	Roosevelt’s “First 100 Days” begins the establishment of a new federal bureaucracy. Among the agencies established are the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the National Resources Planning Board, the Rural Electrification Administration, and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).
1934	Additional pieces of the New Deal bureaucracy established this year include the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the National Archives, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and the National Mediation Board.
1935	The American Institute of Public Opinion (AIPO) is founded by George Gallup.
1935	The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Bureau of Labor Relations, the Federal Power Commission, and the Social Security Board are established.
1936	<i>Literary Digest</i> pre-election straw poll mispredicts Alf Landon as the winner. New pollsters Gallup, Roper, and Crossley, employing scientific samples, correctly predict Roosevelt’s reelection.
1937	President Roosevelt’s “Court packing” plan is announced.
1937	In a series of decisions, the Supreme Court upholds key elements of Roosevelt’s New Deal (<i>West Coast Hotel v. Parrish</i> ; <i>NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel</i> ; <i>Steward Machine Co. v. Davis</i> ; and <i>Helvering v. Davis</i>).
1938	<i>United States v. Carolene Products</i> announces the standards for the selective incorporation of the Bill of Rights. The Court asserts the power to carefully scrutinize laws that threaten the integrity of the political process or deny due process on the basis of “suspect classifications” such as race, religion, and gender.
1939	Congress passes the Reorganization Act, expanding the White House staff and giving Roosevelt authority to create the Executive Office of the President and reorganize the federal departments.
1941	Japan attacks U.S. ships at Pearl Harbor, and the United States enters World War II.
1941	Harlan Stone becomes Chief Justice.
1942	Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) is founded to fight for civil rights using nonviolent, direct-action protests.
1942	Executive Order 9066 forces more than 100,000 Japanese Americans into detention camps.
1944	In <i>Smith v. Allright</i> , the Supreme Court declares the Southern Democratic “all white primary” unconstitutional and invalidates the doctrine that political parties, being private associations, could exclude blacks (or any others they chose to exclude) from their nominating processes.
1944	In <i>Korematsu v. United States</i> , the Supreme Court permits citizens to be imprisoned based on their race.
1945	President Franklin Roosevelt dies. Vice President Harry Truman succeeds him in office.
1945	The U.S. drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. World War II ends.
1945	Harry S. Truman (Democrat) is elected President.
1946	Fred Vinson becomes Chief Justice.
1946	The Legislative Reorganization Act restructures the congressional committee system.

TABLE Eb-D Chronology of U.S. elections and politics: 1775–2000 *Continued*

1947	Congress passes the Taft–Hartley Act (also known as the Labor–Management Relations Act) over Truman’s veto. This law restricted union access to the workplace and union political activity. It also permitted the federal government to seek injunctions against any work stoppage that threatened “national health or safety.”
1947	The Marshall Plan is announced to help rebuild postwar Europe.
1948	Harry S. Truman is reelected President, contrary to the predictions of opinion pollsters famously captured in a “Dewey Wins” newspaper headline.
1948	President Truman ends segregation in the U.S. military.
1949	The North Atlantic Treaty is approved by the U.S. Senate.
1950	The Korean War begins.
1951	The Twenty-second Amendment is ratified: Presidents are limited to two elected terms.
1952	Dwight D. Eisenhower is elected President.
1953	Earl Warren becomes Chief Justice.
1954	In <i>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka</i> , the Supreme Court overturns the principle of “separate but equal” that had been established by <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> .
1955	Rosa Parks begins the Montgomery bus boycott.
1957	President Eisenhower sends U.S. Army troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to enforce the desegregation of schools.
1957	The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is founded to coordinate localized Southern efforts to fight for civil rights.
1960	Sit-in at the F. W. Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina (February 1).
1960	Hundreds of university students stage a sit-in at downtown stores in Nashville, Tennessee, to protest segregated lunch counters.
1960	The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is founded to coordinate student-led efforts to end segregation.
1960	The Civil Rights Act reaffirms voting rights for all Americans.
1960	The first televised presidential debates match Republican Vice President Richard Nixon against Democratic Senator John F. Kennedy.
1960	John F. Kennedy (Democrat) is elected President.
1961	The Twenty-third Amendment extends suffrage to the District of Columbia for presidential elections.
1961	Integrated groups of protesters join Freedom Rides on buses across the South to protest segregation.
1962	The Supreme Court asserts the right to establish standards for voting districts in <i>Baker v. Carr</i> .
1962	Cuban Missile Crisis.
1962	César Chávez establishes the National Farm Workers Association.
1963	Hundreds of thousands of Americans take part in the March on Washington to call for racial equality.
1963	President Kennedy is assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald, and Lyndon Johnson is sworn in as President.
1964	The Twenty-fourth Amendment prohibits laws that used failure to pay taxes (notably poll taxes) as a reason for denying individuals the right to vote; the amendment applies to national elections.
1964	The Civil Rights Act outlaws discrimination in public accommodations and by employers.
1964	The Organization for Afro-American Unity (OAU) is formed to promote closer ties between African Americans and Africa.
1964	Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.
1964	In <i>Wesberry v. Sanders</i> and <i>Reynolds v. Sims</i> , the Supreme Court establishes the principle of “one person, one vote” in reapportioning congressional and state legislative districts.
1965	The Voting Rights Act nullifies local laws and practices that prevent minorities from voting.
1965	Malcolm X is assassinated.
1966	In <i>South Carolina v. Katzenbach</i> , the Supreme Court upholds the constitutionality of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
1966	In <i>Harper v. State Board of Elections</i> , the Supreme Court extends the Twenty-fourth Amendment (prohibition against denying voting rights on the basis of the failure to pay taxes); the amendment now applies not just to national elections, but to state and local elections as well.
1967	The Twenty-fifth Amendment modifies presidential and vice presidential succession and establishes procedures for presidential disability.
1967	Thurgood Marshall becomes the first black citizen to serve as a Supreme Court justice.
1968	Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated.
1968	The Civil Rights Act outlaws discrimination in the sale or rental of housing.
1968	Richard M. Nixon (Republican) defeats Vice President Hubert Humphrey to win election as President.
1969	Warren Burger becomes Chief Justice.
1970	The Civil Rights Act of 1970 prohibited the use of literacy tests as a requirement for voting lowered the minimum voting age from 21 to 18 in all federal and state elections, and lowered the minimum residence requirement for voting in presidential elections to a uniform thirty days. The Act is upheld by the Supreme Court in <i>Oregon v. Mitchell</i> .
1970	The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 encouraged open committee meetings, required written rules and public or recorded votes, permitted media coverage of committee hearings, and safeguarded the rights of minority party members.
1971	Ratification of the Twenty-sixth Amendment, which lowers the voting age minimum from 21 to 18.
1971	Congress consolidates earlier efforts at campaign finance reform in passing the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA).

(continued)

TABLE Eb-D Chronology of U.S. elections and politics: 1775–2000 *Continued*

1972	The bungled burglary of the Democratic Party headquarters at the Watergate Hotel during the Nixon reelection campaign haunts the President and the Republican Party for many years.
1973	The War Powers Act is passed by Congress over the veto of President Nixon.
1973	The Supreme Court expands a right to privacy with its decision in <i>Roe v. Wade</i> , legalizing abortion.
1973	The House of Representatives accepts a subcommittee “Bill of Rights,” decentralizing power by granting subcommittees the authority to hold hearings and act on matters referred to them.
1974	President Richard Nixon resigns in the wake of congressional investigations. Vice President Gerald R. Ford assumes office.
1974	Congress amends the 1971 FECA to set limits on campaign contributions by individuals, political parties, and political action committees (PACs). The 1974 amendments also establish an independent agency – the Federal Election Commission (FEC) – to enforce the law, facilitate disclosure, and administer the public funding program.
1974	Congress passes the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act to reassert the role of the House and Senate in the budget process.
1975	The Senate changes its cloture rule, loosening the requirement to end filibusters from two thirds to three fifths of those present and voting.
1976	In <i>Buckley v. Valeo</i> , the Supreme Court rules that federal government limits on campaign spending violate First Amendment guarantees of free speech.
1976	James Earl (“Jimmy”) Carter Jr. (Democrat) defeats President Gerald Ford in the first post-Watergate presidential election.
1979	The American embassy in Tehran is seized by Iranian students on November 4, 1979. A rescue attempt fails (April 24, 1980), and the ensuing stalemate over American hostages at the embassy is not resolved until Ronald Reagan’s inauguration.
1980	Ronald Reagan (Republican) defeats incumbent Jimmy Carter to become President.
1981	Sandra Day O’Connor becomes the first woman member of the Supreme Court.
1983	The legislative veto is ruled unconstitutional in <i>Immigration and Naturalization Service v. Chadha</i> .
1986	Associate Justice William Rehnquist is promoted to Chief Justice.
1988	Vice President George Herbert Walker Bush (Republican) is elected President.
1991	U.S. success in the Gulf War against Iraq pushes President Bush’s public approval to the highest level recorded for an American President since the end of the Second World War.
1992	The Twenty-seventh Amendment is ratified, requiring a built-in delay for any law affecting the pay of members of Congress; such laws do not take effect until after the next election for the House of Representatives.
1992	George H. W. Bush loses his reelection bid, and William Clinton (Democrat) is elected President.
1993	Congress passes the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (“Motor Voter Law”), to become effective January 1, 1995.
1994	Republicans win control of Congress for the first time in forty years.
1996	Congress authorizes a “line item” veto for the President.
1998	President William Clinton becomes the second President to be impeached by the House of Representatives; he is acquitted in the Senate trial.
1998	In <i>Clinton v. City of New York</i> , the Supreme Court declares the presidential line item veto unconstitutional.
2000	Texas Governor George W. Bush (Republican) defeats Democrat Vice President Albert Gore in a presidential election conceded only after the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 5–4 decision, prevented ballot recounts in Florida.

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