WHO VOTES?

- Voting rates are higher among those with higher socioeconomic status (SES):
  - Income
  - Occupational prestige
  - Education
- Other factors affecting likelihood of voting, aside from SES:
  - Age
  - Race and ethnicity

LEGAL FACTORS DEPRESSING TURNOUT

- Potential voters must register in advance in most states.
- National Voter Registration Act (“Motor Voter”).
- Recent voter identification laws may lower turnout.
OTHER FACTORS REDUCING TURNOUT

- Registration and voting is optional.
- Elections normally held on workdays in most states.
- Limited opportunities for early or absentee voting.
  - All voting by mail only in a few states.
- Decline of social connectedness.

MOBILIZATION AND TURNOUT

- Turnout depends on mobilization by parties and campaigns: get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts.
- Turnout lower in midterm and off-year elections.
- Turnout lowest in primary elections and runoffs.
- Frequent elections and lengthy ballots may lead to voter fatigue.
OTHER FORMS OF PARTICIPATION

Most people do not participate in politics beyond voting.

- Donating to, working on political campaigns.
- Contacting elected officials.
- Attending rallies and political meetings.
- Participating in strikes.
- Boycotting businesses or government services.
- Attending political protests.
- Political violence, including armed conflict.

WHY DO PEOPLE VOTE?

- Paradox of voting since chances of affecting election outcomes are small.
- Costs of voting appear to exceed the expected benefits.
- However, sense of fulfilling one's civic duty may be considered a benefit.
PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATIONS

- Goal of presidential candidates: earn party nomination by capturing a majority of the delegates available.
- Parties allocate delegates to states and territories using complex formulas, including party support and population.
- Minor parties tend to use state conventions to choose delegates to national convention.
- Some states use precinct caucuses to choose delegates to county, regional, and state conventions who then choose delegates for major parties. Notably, Iowa.

PARTY PRIMARIES

- Most states use primary elections to select delegates for major parties.
  - Open primaries allow any registered voter to participate, regardless of party affiliation.
  - Semi-open primaries (or modified open primaries) are limited to registered voters from the party and independent voters.
  - Closed primaries are limited to registered voters from the party only.
DELEGATE SELECTION RULES

- Democrats require proportional allocation of delegates; generally candidates must get 15% of the vote to receive any delegates.
- Republicans tend to favor winner-takes-all rules: whoever gets the most votes statewide wins all delegates available.
- Both parties reserve some delegate positions for party leaders and elected officials (PLEOs); Democrats tend to have many more of these superdelegates.
- Democrats require quotas of women, minorities, and young people among delegates; Republicans don't.

WHY SO COMPLEX?

- Discontent with Democratic Party nomination process boiled over at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.
- Popular anti-war candidate Eugene McCarthy bypassed for vice president Hubert Humphrey, favored by party leaders.
- After election, Democrats formed the McGovern-Fraser Commission to reform their nomination process; changes in state laws led to more primaries for Republicans too.
CRITIQUES OF THE NOMINATION PROCESS

- **Front-loading** of primary calendar has stretched out the presidential nomination campaign; Iowa caucus now in early January.
- Privileged positions of Iowa and New Hampshire; neither state is very representative of Democrats’ base in particular.
- Expense of campaign has led to fundraising starting years before election; the *invisible primary* contributes to the “permanent campaign.”

THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

President chosen via the **Electoral College**:

- Each state has at least three electors.
- 48 states and DC use “winner-takes-all” rule:
  - Candidate with most votes gets *all* electoral votes.
- Maine and Nebraska are different:
  - Winner in each congressional district gets one electoral vote each; statewide winner gets two more.
- If no majority (winner needs 270 of 538): president chosen by House, VP chosen by the Senate.
THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE SINCE 2012

EFFECT OF THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

- Electoral College system means candidates focus their campaigns on a few **battleground states** and ignore most of the country.
- May distort politics by causing parties to focus on interests of battleground states rather than nation as a whole.
- Candidate with most **popular** votes does not necessarily win the electoral vote.
ELECTIONS TO THE HOUSE AND SENATE

- Senators elected statewide (“at large”) since ratification of 17th Amendment; only face reelection every six years.
- House members elected from districts every two years (except in small states with only one seat, where they too are elected “at large”).
- Most states use direct primaries to choose major party nominees; some states use caucus systems.
- Most states use plurality elections: candidate who receives the most votes wins the seat.

ELECTORAL REFORM?

- Directly elect the president?
  - Plurality winner (e.g. National Popular Vote Compact).
  - Alternatives: run-off voting; instant run-off; approval.
- Proportional Representation in Congress?
HOW VOTERS DECIDE

- Most important factor is **party identification** (or partisanship): one's sense of attachment to one of the two major parties.
  - Political scientists use seven-point scale.
  - “Strong” partisans particularly loyal.
  - Voters' partisanship can change over time.
  - Partisanship appears to “update” based on changing political conditions and circumstances.

MORE FACTORS AFFECTING VOTING

- **Retrospective voting**: evaluating candidates based on past performance.
  - **Economic voting** in particular.
- Relatively little **issue voting** due to information costs. More likely for *salient* or *valence issues*.
- **Candidate attributes**: “character”; temperament; appearance; personality.
WHO WINS PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATIONS?

- Building a “war chest” is important early on, before contests start: the **invisible primary**.
- Biggest factor in nomination contests appears to be **momentum**.
- Other factors matter too: party factions, media coverage and “expectations,” etc.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS

Four key factors identified by political scientists forecasting elections:

- Partisan breakdown of the electorate.
- Approval ratings of the incumbent party’s president.
- State of the economy leading up to the election.
- Incumbency.