

# American election

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Proponents also point out that, far from diminishing minority interests by depressing voter participation, the Electoral College actually enhances the status of minority groups. This is so because the votes of even small minorities in a state may make the difference between winning all of that state's electoral votes or none of that state's electoral votes. And since ethnic minority groups in the United States happen to concentrate in those states with the most electoral votes, they assume an importance to presidential candidates well out of proportion to their number.

The same principle applies to other special interest groups such as labor unions, farmers, environmentalists and so forth. Most states use a winner-take-all system, in which the candidate with the most votes in that state receives all of the state's electoral votes. This gives candidates an incentive to pay the most attention to states without a clear favorite, such as Pennsylvania, Ohio and Florida.

For example, California, Texas and New York, in spite of having the largest populations, have in recent elections been considered safe for a particular party; Democratic for California & New York; Republican for Texas, and therefore candidates typically devote relatively few resources, in both time and money, to such states. It is possible to win the election by winning all of eleven states and disregarding the rest of the country. In the close elections of 2000 and 2004, these eleven states gave 111 votes to Republican candidate George W.

Bush and 160 votes to Democratic candidates Al Gore and John Kerry. Part 2. How the Electoral College system in the general election fail to ensure that the presidential candidate who wins the most votes becomes president. One

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way in which a minority president could be elected is if the country were so deeply divided politically that there were three or more presidential candidates split the electoral votes among them such that no one obtained the necessary majority. This occurred in 1824 and was successfully attempted in 1948.

Those who object to the Electoral College system and favor a direct popular election generally do so on four grounds: the possibility of electing a minority president, the risk of so-called faithless electors, the possible role of the Electoral College in depressing voter turn out and its failure to accurately reflect the national popular will. A faithless voter is one who pledge to vote for his or her party's candidate for president but nevertheless votes for another candidate.

In this way the Electoral College may fail to ensure that the presidential candidate who has the most votes becomes president. On the concern of the possible role of the Electoral College in depressing voter turn out critics argue that since each state is entitled to the same number of electoral votes regardless of its voter turnout, there is no incentive to encourage voter participation. The college fails to accurately reflect the national popular will in at least two respects. First the distribution of Electoral votes in the college tends to over-represent people in rural states.

This is because the number of Elector for each state is determined by the number of members it has in the House (which more or less reflects the state's population size) plus the number of members it has in the senate (which is always two regardless of the states population). A second way in which the Electoral College fails to accurately reflect the national popular will

stem primarily from winner-take-all mechanism whereby the presidential candidate who wins the most popular votes in the state wins all the Electoral votes of that state.

One effect of this mechanism is to make it extremely difficult for third-party or independent candidates ever to make much of showing in the Electoral College. If for example, a third party or independent candidate were to win the support of even as many as 25% of the voters nationwide, he might still end up with no Electoral College votes at all unless he won a plurality of votes in at least the state. And even if he managed to win a few states, his support elsewhere would not be reflected.

By thus failing to accurately reflect the national popular will, the argument goes, the Electoral College reinforces a two party system, discourages third party or independent candidates and thereby tends to restrict choice available to the electorate. Part 3 How some groups have much higher turnout rates than? Low turnout is often considered to be undesirable and there is much debate over the factors that affect turnout and how to increase it. Its case has been attributed to a wide array of economic, demographic, cultural, technological and institutional factors.

A high turnout is generally seen as evidence of the legitimacy of the current system. Socioeconomic factors significantly affect whether or not individuals vote. The most important socioeconomic factor in voter turnout is education. The more educated a person, the more likely he or she is to vote, even when controlled for other factors such as income and class that are closely associated with education level. Income has some effect independently.

Wealthier people are more likely to vote regardless of their educational background.

Other demographic factors have an important influence: young people are far less likely to vote than the elderly and single people are less likely to vote than those who are married. Occupation has little effect on turnout with the notable exception of higher voting rates among government employees in many countries. Generally speaking, the lower voters' education level and lower voters' income level, the less likely they are to vote. For example, college graduates in some recent election have had turnout levels nearly twice that of those who have not finished high school.

Some individuals possess more politically relevant sources, like income and education, than others, some are more interested in public affairs and some are more likely to be recruited to participate. These factors arise from early socialization at home and in school and from affiliations with voluntary associations, workplaces and religious institutions. Public policies can confer resources, motivate interest in government affairs by tying well-being to government action, define groups for mobilization and even shape the content and meaning of democratic citizenship.

These effects are positive for some groups, like senior citizens, raising their participation levels. A surge in black voters' turnout is often cited as a central factor in Jimmy Carter's 1976 election victory. Beginning with Parenti (1967), many scholars advanced an "ethnic community" theory to explain why members of major ethnic groups in American cities (particularly the Irish, Italians and Jews) participated politically at rates much higher than their levels of education and income would predict.

According to this theory, socially marginalized groups developed strong communal norms of participation to which there is considerable pressure within the group to conform. Political and social participation in elections asserts the importance of minority groups within the larger society. As such, all members of the group are expected to have interest. Part 4 How campaign contributions from Political Action Committees may tilt the political system toward big moneyed interests.

Citizens with lower or moderate incomes speak with a whisper that is lost on the ears of inattentive government officials, while the advantaged roar with a clarity and consistency that policy-makers readily hear and routinely follow. As people become more concentrated and the flow of money into elections has grow campaign contributions give the affluent a means to express their voice that is unavailable to most citizens. Government is expected to help ensure equal opportunity for all, not to tilt toward those who already have wealth and power. Even more clearly, Americans celebrate and expect equal democratic rights.

Americans fervently believe that everyone should have an equal say in our democratic politics, helping to shape what government does. They embrace whole-heartedly the ideal enunciated by the U. S. Declaration of Independence that " all men are created equal, " which in our time means that every citizen regardless of income, gender, race, and ethnicity should have an equal voice in representative government. The government is run by a few big interests looking out only for themselves. Campaign contributors do not represent the interests of the majority citizens.

In 2000, an income of over \$ 100, 000 was found only in 12 percent of American households. 95 percent of campaign contributors were from these households. Political contributors or moneyed interests are not bribing politicians directly. What moneyed interests and wealthy citizens do gain from contributing hugely is influence on the people who run for office and an audience with these people once they get to power. Essay #2 Part 1 Why the US has only two parties represented in its legislature unlike other established democracies. Too much partisanship can be fatal to democracy.

The weakness of parties can also pose dangers. In a legislature with weak party attachments, it may prove impossible to pass needed legislation. The result, as in Yeltsin's Russia is often resort to presidential decrees or even the forcible disbanding of the legislature. Conversely, legislators may be easily wooed by a president through patronage or less savory means. In countries with weak parties like the Philippines and Korea, it has been common for presidents elected without a legislative majority to acquire one through massive party defections.

Indeed, one of the areas in which the dozens of new democracies established in the past two decades have been least successfully is the creation of strong and stable political parties committed to democracy. In part, this reflects the impossibility of crafting a party system unlike most other key democratic political institutions, parties cannot be legislated into existence. At the same time it reflects a global trend, as political parties seem to be increasingly enfeebled institutions in the more established democracies as well.

Almost everywhere, parties no longer command the loyalty or confidence they once did and the number of independent voters and ticket-splitters has grown. The US uses the principle of proportional representation which in essence means that parties or blocks of like minded voters should win seats in legislative assemblies to their share of the popular vote. A two party system is the only way to practice this principle. The cultural diversities in US are well catered for in a two party system. Having many parties in such a diverse society would mean that the real views of the people would not be reflected.

More over a majority would be hard to achieve with many parties being represented in the legislature. Part 2 Why turnout in the US is so low compared to other established democracies? The US is one of the few countries require citizens to get themselves registered to vote, rather than having the government pro-actively making sure that all voters are on the electoral rolls, usually through some form of automatic and permanent registration on achieving voting age. On the one hand, in the United States, registration requirements are a serious barrier to political participation.

There are many reasons why turnout in the US is as low as it is. Voters have to want to go to the polls and believe that their votes will matter. Many voters are disaffected from two political parties, turned off by negative campaigning, intimidated by the long ballots, and bothered by the lack of clear accountability in the crazy quilt federal system. The election laws themselves make it more difficult for people to participate. For example Election Day is usually on a weekday (the first Tuesday in November for



presidential and congressional elections) and it may be difficult for people to get away from work to vote.

A more direct reduction in participation is brought about by laws in many states that bar convicted criminals from the political process. Approximately five millions Americans are unable to participate in the elections for these reasons. Other countries have found more direct ways to ensure high voter turnout such as making voting compulsory. In Australia, citizens who do not vote are subject to paying a fine and in Belgium, repeated failure to vote can lead to having your right to vote permanently cancelled. In America voting is not compulsory.

The governments of most established countries take the responsibility of registering as many eligible voters as possible. In the US it is the sole responsibility of the individual to register for voting. If the costs and benefits that Americans encounter are markedly different than those encountered by citizens of other countries, then that should explain why the US turnout rate is so low. America's unique registration laws accounted for roughly half the difference between US turnout rates and those of other advanced industrialized democracies in the 1960s and 1970s.

Part 3. Advantages and disadvantages of the American style of candidate centered politics. The decline of American political parties in recent decades has made strength of partisanship even more important in predicting who votes. The rise of candidate-centered politics and the decline of partisanship can explain this phenomenon. When the focus of campaigns was on two parties rather than many candidates for many offices, everyone gained at

least somewhat from picking choosing ones favorite candidates from both parties.

Thus even those who did not identify with a party in the past could benefit from the partisan manner by which the campaigns were conducted. In the candidate-centered environment now, by contrast, the mobilizing effects of party competition have been felt more disproportionately according to ones level of party identification. The result has been rising inequality of turnout rates according to partisan strength. Voters in parliamentary systems are becoming more candidates centered in their voting, compared to voters in presidential systems.

At the same time, it would appear that voters in presidential systems are evaluating candidates in a more instrumental and less partisan way. More so than in the past, candidates' campaigns are self sufficient organizations indirectly dependent on political parties. And as agents of information, campaigns are replacing parties as the primary source of information about the candidates. Reference: Franklin, Mark (2001) " The Dynamics of Participation in the Electoral Process". In Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective 2, ed. Laurence Leduc, Richard Niemi and Pippa Norris. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, in press