

### TEXT SUMMARY

Millions of Americans who are qualified to vote do not. Voter turnout is low for presidential elections and lower still for **off-year elections**, the congressional elections that are held between presidential elections.

Those who choose not to vote often lack a feeling of **political efficacy**. That means they do not feel that their votes make a difference. They are convinced that “government by the people” has been taken over by politicians, powerful special interests, and the media.

Studies of voter behavior focus on the results of particular elections, polls, and **political socialization**—the process by which people gain their political attitudes and opinions. These sources show that certain sociological factors—income, occupation, education, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, region of residence, and

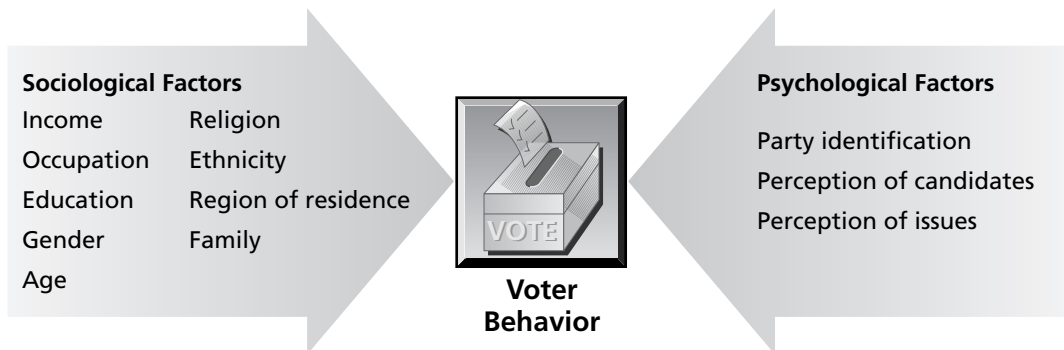
family—influence each person’s voting choices. For example, there are measurable differences between the electoral choices of men and women, a phenomenon known as the **gender gap**.

Psychological factors—including party identification and perception of the candidates and issues—also contribute to voter behavior. **Party identification** is loyalty to a political party. A person loyal to one party may vote only for candidates of that party, a practice called **straight-ticket voting**. Many recent voters call themselves **independents**, or people not identified with a party. They may vote for candidates from both major parties in the same election, which is called **split-ticket voting**.

### THE BIG IDEA

**While low voter turnout is a serious problem, many factors influence the Americans who do vote.**

### GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Factors Influencing Voter Behavior



All kinds of factors influence the Americans who do vote.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How does political efficacy affect whether people choose to vote?
2. **Diagram Skills** Name five sociological factors that influence voter behavior.