

Magruder's American Government

CHAPTER 6

Voters and Voter Behavior

Voters and Voter Behavior

SECTION 1 The Right to Vote

SECTION 2 Voter Qualifications

SECTION 3 Suffrage and Civil Rights

SECTION 4 Voter Behavior

The Right to Vote

- How have voting rights changed over time in the United States?
- What constitutional restrictions exist on the States' power to set voting qualifications?



The History of Voting Rights

- The Framers of the Constitution purposely left the power to set suffrage qualifications to each State.
- **Suffrage** means the right to vote. **Franchise** is another term with the same meaning.
- The **electorate** is all of the people entitled to vote in a given election.
- Initially, the right to vote in America was limited to white male property owners.
- Today, the size of the American electorate is greater than 200 million people. Nearly all citizens at least 18 years of age can qualify to vote.



Extending Suffrage

The expansion of the electorate to its present size happened in five fairly distinct stages:

1. During the early 1800s, religious, property, and tax payment qualifications were gradually eliminated.
2. The 15th Amendment (1870) was intended to end race-based voting requirements.
3. In 1920, the 19th Amendment prohibited the denial of the right to vote because of sex.
4. The 1960s:
 - The Voting Rights Act of 1965 guaranteed the right to vote for minorities.
 - The 23rd Amendment (1961) granted citizens of the District of Columbia the right to vote for presidential electors.
 - The 24th Amendment (1964) eliminated the poll tax.
5. The 26th Amendment (1971) lowered the voting age to 18.



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Setting Voter Qualifications

The Constitution sets five limits on the power that States have to set voter qualifications:

1.Any person whom a State allows to vote for members of the “most numerous Branch” of its own legislature must be also allowed to vote for members of Congress.

2.No State can deprive any person the right to vote “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

3.No State can deprive any person the right to vote on account of sex.

4.No State can require the payment of any tax as a condition for voting.

5.No State can deprive any person who is at least 18 years of age the right to vote.



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Section 1 Review

1. Suffrage in the United States

- (a) has been gradually extended to more and more citizens.
- (b) is granted to property owners only.
- (c) is granted to only women.
- (d) has gradually lessened the number of eligible voters.

2. The minimum voting age in the United States today is

- (a) 21 years of age.
- (b) 25 years of age.
- (c) 18 years of age.
- (d) 16 years of age.

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Voter Qualifications

- What are the universal requirements for voting in the United States?
- What other requirements have States used or still use as voter qualifications?



Universal Requirements

There are three factors that States require people to meet to be eligible to vote.

Citizenship

- Most States require United States citizenship in order to vote.

Residence

- One must be a legal resident of a State to vote in elections. Most States require residency for minimum amounts of time in order to vote in the State.

Age

- The 26th Amendment requires that no State set a minimum voting age above 18.



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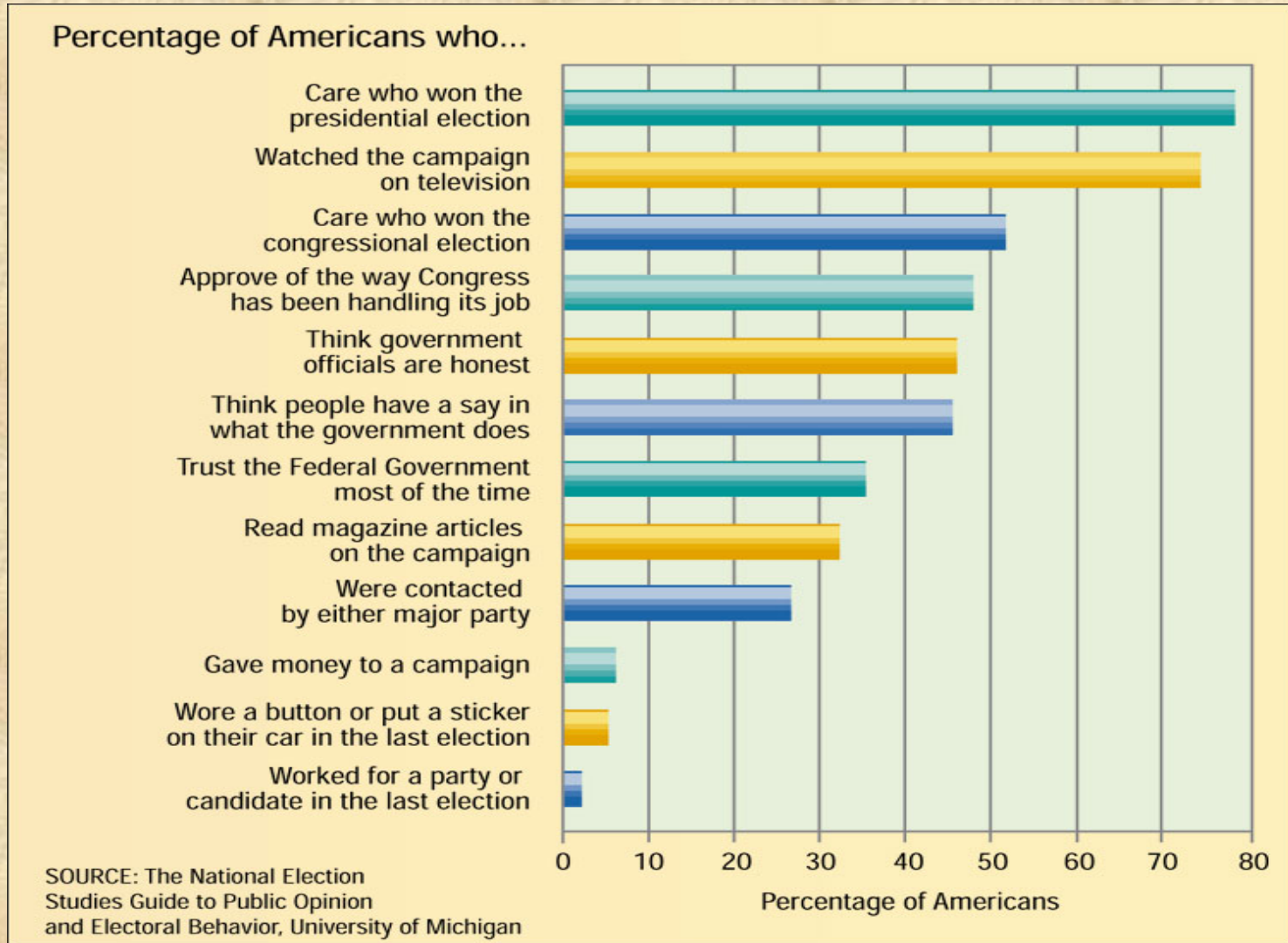
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Other Qualifications

- All states except North Dakota require citizens to register to vote. **Registration** is a procedure of voter identification intended to prevent fraudulent voting.
- **Literacy**—a person's ability to read or write—is no longer required in any State to vote, but had been by several States at times in our nation's history.
- At one time, **poll taxes**, or a special tax payment required to vote, were prevalent in the South. Poll taxes are now forbidden by the 24th Amendment.
- States also have restrictions on the right to vote on certain members of the population, such as those found to be mentally incompetent or people convicted of serious crimes.



Political Participation and Awareness in America



Section 2 Review

1. The three universal requirements States use for a person to be eligible to vote are
 - (a) residence, gender, and income.
 - (b) citizenship, property ownership, and gender.
 - (c) citizenship, residence, and age.
 - (d) income, employment, and age.

2. The 24th Amendment forbids the use of
 - (a) poll taxes.
 - (b) alcohol.
 - (c) literacy tests as a means of voter qualification.
 - (d) the death penalty.

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Suffrage and Civil Rights

- What rights are guaranteed by the 15th Amendment, and what tactics were used in the past to circumvent those rights?
- How significant was early civil rights legislation passed in 1957, 1960, and 1964?
- What are the provisions and effects of the Voting Rights Act of 1965?



The Fifteenth Amendment

The Fifteenth Amendment (1870) declares that the right to vote cannot be denied to any citizen of the United States because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.



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Early Civil Rights Legislation

Civil Rights Act of 1957

- Created the United States Civil Rights Commission
- Investigated and reported voter discrimination
- Gave the Attorney General the power to require federal courts to issue orders to prevent any interference with a person's right to vote

Civil Rights Act of 1960

- Created federal voting referees who helped correct conditions to prevent voter discrimination



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The Civil Rights Act of 1964

The Law

- More far-reaching than the **Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960**, the **Civil Rights Act of 1964** abolished the use of voter registration or a literacy requirement to discriminate against any voter.
- Its enforcement relied on judicial action and the use of **injunctions**—court orders that either force or restrain specific acts.

The Aftermath

- The violent response of civilians and police and state troopers to a voter registration drive mounted by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma, Alabama showed that the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960 and 1964 were still not enough to ensure voter equality.



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The Voting Rights Act of 1965

<i>Provisions of Voting Rights Act of 1965</i>	<i>Court Decisions Upholding the Voting Rights Act of 1965</i>
Led to the abolishment of the poll tax	<i>Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections</i> , 1966
Outlawed the use of any kind of literacy test	<i>Oregon v. Mitchell</i> , 1970
Mandated preclearance	<i>South Carolina v. Katzenbach</i> , 1966
Later amendments added a language-minority provision	Not challenged



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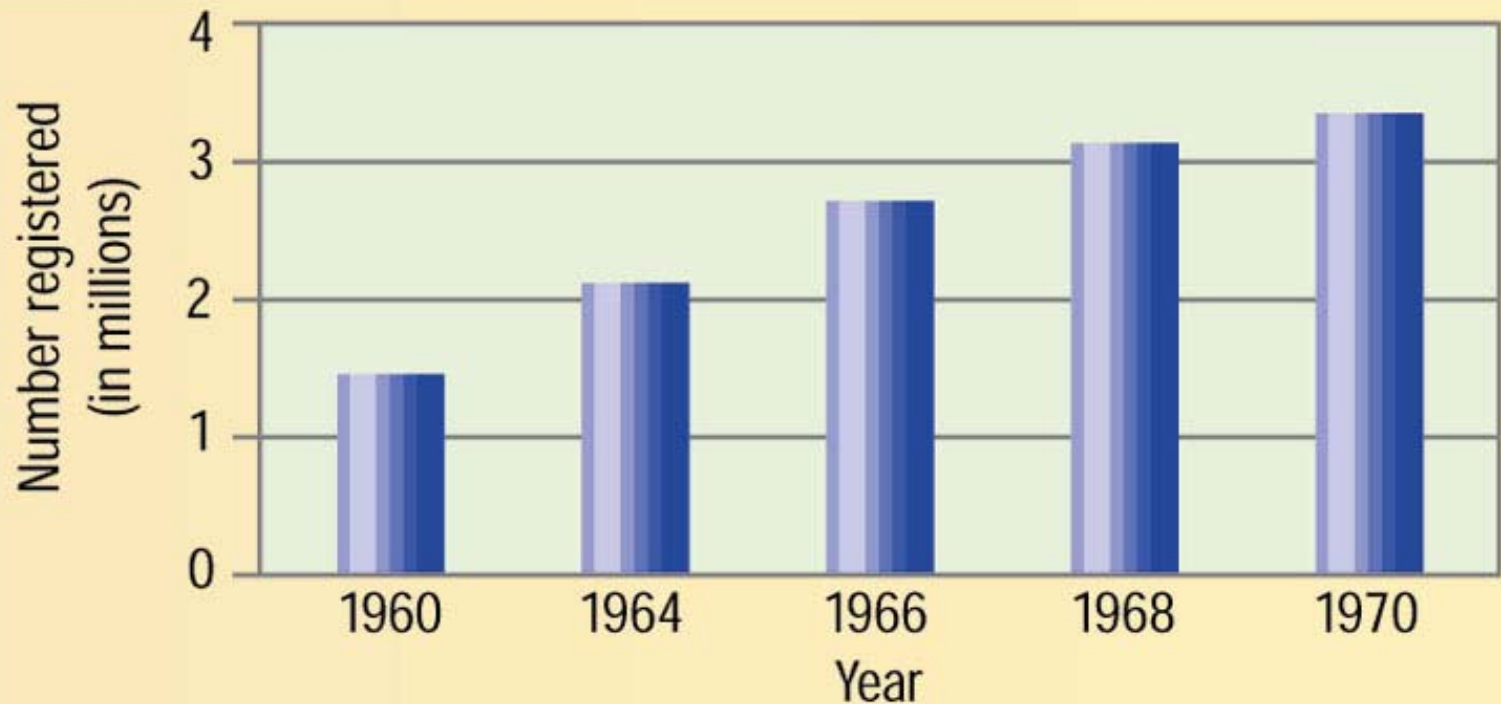
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African Americans at the Polls

Southern Black Voters, 1960–1970



SOURCE: *Historical Statistics of Black America*

Section 3 Review

1. The Fifteenth Amendment

- (a) protects the voting right of adult male citizens of every race.
- (b) gives women the right to vote.
- (c) forbids denying any citizen under the age of 18 the right to vote.
- (d) calls for members of the U.S. Senate to be elected directly by the people.

2. Which piece of Civil Rights legislation was the most effective and influential?

- (a) The Civil Rights Act of 1957
- (b) The Civil Rights Act of 1960
- (c) The Civil Rights Act of 1964
- (d) The Voting Rights Act of 1965

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Voter Behavior

- What is the nonvoting problem and what is its scope?
- Why do people not vote?
- How can we compare the voting behavior of voters and nonvoters?
- What are the sociological and psychological factors that affect voting?

Nonvoters

- Millions of Americans do not vote when elections are held.
- Only 50.1 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in the 2000 presidential election, and only 46.3 percent of the electorate voted for the members of the House of Representatives.
- Voter turnout significantly decreases in **off-year elections**, congressional elections held in years when there is no presidential election.



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Why People Do Not Vote

- Some people cannot vote for various reasons, such as physical or mental illness, unexpected travel, and resident alien citizenship status.
- However, most nonvoters do not vote because
 - voting is in some way inconvenient,
 - they do not believe that their vote will make a difference, or
 - they distrust politics and political candidates.



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Voters and Voting Behavior

Voting is studied more than any other form of political participation in the United States. We learn about voting behavior from:

- **The results of elections**—information can be gleaned by studying the results of confidential voting compared to the population make-up of a particular sector
- **The field of survey research**—data can be gathered by conducting polls across specific cross sections of the population, as the Gallup Organization does
- **Studies of political socialization**—studying **political socialization**, the process by which people gain their political attitudes and opinions, can also be useful in predicting voting behavior



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Sociological Factors

Voter preferences can't be predicted by just one sociological factor. Voter opinion is a combination of all of these factors and more.

<i>Income and Occupation</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Gender and Age</i>
<i>Religious and Ethnic Background</i>	<i>Geography</i>	<i>Family and Other Groups</i>



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Psychological Factors

Voters' perceptions of their party, the candidates, and the issues significantly affects their voting.

Party Identification

- The loyalty of people to a particular political party is the single most significant and lasting predictor of how a person will vote.

Candidates and Issues

- Candidates and issues are two short-term factors that can influence even the most loyal Democrat or Republican. People may vote out of their chosen party if they dislike a candidate or the party's stand on a particular issue.



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Section 4 Review

1. The reason why most nonvoters do not vote is
 - (a) they are too ill.
 - (b) they believe that their vote will not matter.
 - (c) they are not officially United States citizens.
 - (d) they are unexpectedly out of town on election day.

2. Voters' choices are affected by
 - (a) their income and occupation.
 - (b) their education.
 - (c) their religious and ethnic background.
 - (d) all of the above.

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