

Citizen U Presents:
Ark of Power:
An Appraisal of American Government and Politics
AP U.S. Government and Politics Curriculum
2 Teachers
2019

Big Ideas in U.S. Government and Politics

- 1. CONSTITUTIONALISM:** *The U.S. Constitution establishes a system of checks and balances among branches of government and allocates power between federal and state governments. This system is based on the rule of law that seeks to balance majority rules with minority rights.*
- 2. LIBERTY AND ORDER:** *Governmental laws and policies balancing order and liberty are based on the U.S. Constitution and have been interpreted over time.*
- 3. CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN A REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY:** *Popular sovereignty, individualism, and republicanism are important considerations of U.S. laws and policy-making and assume citizens will engage and participate.*
- 4. COMPETING POLICY-MAKING INTERESTS:** *Multiple actors and institutions interact to produce and implement possible policies.*
- 5. METHODS OF POLITICAL ANALYSIS:** *Using various types of analyses, political scientists measure how U.S. political behavior, attitudes, and ideologies are shaped by a number of factors over time.*

Unit 5: Political Participation

Governing is achieved directly through citizen participation and indirectly through linkage institutions (e.g. political parties, interest groups, and mass media) that inform, organize, and mobilize support to influence government and politics, resulting in many venues for citizen influence on policy making.

- How have changes in technology influenced political communication and behavior?
- Why do levels of participation and influence in politics vary?
- How effective are the various methods of political participation in shaping public policies?

BIG IDEA: Methods of political analysis

5.1 Describe the voting rights protections in the Constitution and in legislation.

Voting is the sine qua non of a representative democracy. Yet when looking at the original U.S. Constitution one might think that our Founding Fathers were ambivalent about voting. The original constitution says little about voting. Article 1, Section 4 says:

The times, places and manner of holding elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each state by the legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by law make or alter such regulations, except as to the places of choosing Senators.

Madison at the Constitutional Convention is said to have worried about imparting too much power over elections to the states. His voice went unheard. The result, according to one historian, is that “the states, left to their own devices, adopted electoral methods best described as higgledy-piggledy.”

Historically the qualifications to vote were determined by state and local governments. Federalism helped to explain the wide variety of voting rules that characterized American political life. In many ways this is still true. Early in our history suffrage, the right to vote was restricted to male property owners. In the first presidential election only six percent of Americans were eligible to vote. This began to change rapidly as our political culture changed. Although laws and amendments have expanded voting rights in the U.S., voting participation varies widely from election to election. **Factors associated with political ideology, efficacy, structural barriers, and demographics influence the nature and degree of political participation.**

The franchise, another term for voting, has been greatly expanded. The 15th Amendment (1870) extended the right to vote to African American males. The 17th Amendment (1913) provided for the direct election of U.S. Senators. The 19th Amendment (1920) gave women the right to vote. The 26th Amendment gave eighteen year olds and older the right to vote. Other federal actions have been taken to make voting easier. The 24th Amendment (1964) eliminated poll taxes. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 not only removed literacy tests as a voting barrier but also gave federal oversight in Southern polling places.

The dramatic impact of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is worth a closer look. Historians remind us that

...The ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1870 prohibited voting discrimination based upon race, southern African Americans faced an onslaught of restrictions on their right to vote throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These individuals struggled against physical, psychological, and economic intimidation, as well as provisions in state law that required them to take literacy tests, pay poll taxes, or endure arbitrary and restrictive registration procedures.

In effect, the privileges associated with federalism allowed southern states to circumvent constitutional law.

With the triumphant passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, President Johnson heralded it as his greatest accomplishment. Appreciable numbers of African Americans were now, for the first time, able to register and vote. There was an increase in seats held by African Americans. With its passage Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote: “Voting is the foundation stone for political action.” Hard fought voting rights, however, should never be seen as a finished issue.

Key provisions found within the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were temporary and required reauthorization. For example, Section 5 mandated federal oversight in those regions with longstanding histories of racial discrimination. Section 5 has been routinely reauthorized, as recently as 2006. Republican president George W. Bush signed the reauthorization enthusiastically. Then in 2013 the U.S. Supreme Court had a different opinion.

In the case *Shelby v. Holder* (2013) our high court ruled that critical sections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were no longer necessary. Reauthorizations were ruled unconstitutional. The court affirmed that “the Constitution intended the States to keep...the power to regulate elections” and that “equal sovereignty” was hindered by the disparate treatment of some states and not other by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Furthermore the court recognized the significant progress that has taken place since the law was first enacted. Federal oversight was no longer deemed necessary.

The lessons here are clear. Voting rights have evolved over the course of our history. Laws making voting more and more accessible have both been passed and repealed. Protections come and go. Despite the expansion of our democracy and the increase in the number of people eligible to vote fewer and fewer Americans choose to, and in some instances, unable to because of institutional obstacles and barriers.

5.2 Describe different models of voting behavior.

Political science has tried to explain voting behavior for a long time. Who votes and why? The question is important to our democracy. Answers have varied greatly. Most theories have proven to be inadequate and vulnerable to criticism. Nevertheless certain models of voting behavior have dominated the political discourse. One early study, *The People's Choice* (1940), argued,

For many voters political preferences may better be considered analogous to cultural tastes – in music, literature, recreational activities, dress, ethics, speech, social behavior...Both have their origin in ethnic, sectional, class, and family traditions. Both exhibit stability and resistance to change for individuals but flexibility and adjustment over generations for the society as a whole. Both seem to be matters of sentiment and disposition rather than ‘reasoned preferences.’ While both are responsive to changed conditions and unusual stimuli, they are relatively invulnerable to direct argumentation and vulnerable to indirect social influences. Both are characterized more by faith than by conviction and by wishful expectation rather than careful prediction and consequences.

This basic model has been challenged more recently by rational choice theory, retrospective voting, prospective voting and Party line voting.

Rational choice theory is a by-product of the work done by Anthony Downs in *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957). Rational choice theory, based in economics, finds “human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses.” Voters’ choices are based in parsimony. Acting rationally is acting efficiently. “Conventional rational choices assume that beliefs arise purely from observable characteristics of the environment and propositions that can logically be deduced from them.” This model suggests that voters use their knowledge, albeit scarce, to make decisions. Voting becomes axiomatic, that is, choices become self-evident based upon the facts. Some have called this rational optimization. Voters make observations, subject to their own environment, and act accordingly. Rational choice theory has become, for many in the field of politics, the “universal grammar of social science.”

Retrospective voting models grew out from a response to rational choice theory. The champion of this model is Morris P. Fiorina who wrote the book *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (1981). Based upon the results from a number of election cycles, Fiorina concluded that voters cast ballots to reward and punish political behavior. Governments’ performance does matter. Voters take notice and act accordingly. According to this theory,

Voters are less concerned with a candidate's or party's promises about future policy than with their past performance in office, particularly their success or failure in achieving such hard, tangible outcomes as peace and prosperity. Whereas information about campaign promises is costly to acquire and difficult to evaluate, most citizens develop relatively solid perceptions about the performance of an incumbent officeholder or administration simply by going about their normal lives and paying minimal amount of attention to the news.

Often strong economic conditions benefit incumbent candidates. Foreign policy crises, on the other hand, have the opposite effect. It is not uncommon for challengers to motivate voters by asking a simple question about incumbent candidates, "Are you better off today than you were four years ago?" This model, retrospective voting, has proven to be an effective explanation for political behavior.

Prospective voting is similar to retrospective voting but for one essential difference. Voters look forward rather than backward. The "funnel of causality," according to this model, emphasizes the role played by voter expectations. Prospective voters are persuaded by lofty promises and compelling visions of the future. The past is past. Voters are more likely to act by choosing a candidate that promises real change. Of course this model is problematic. As Brad Lockberie has argued,

The prospective model of voting behavior does place heavier demands on the voter than does the retrospective model. Instead of looking at just the incumbent party and evaluating its performance, the voter compares both parties' candidates and evaluates the expected utility of having either party win the election. The question is not whether one has prospered because of the actions of the incumbent administration but under which party one will do better in the future.

Both retrospective and prospective voting models are variations of rational choice theory. These models attempt to use empirical study to explain the psychology of political choices.

Party line voting continues to be a popular model of study. Remember *The American Voter* (1960) established party identification as the leading determinant of one's voting behavior. It argued that most voters stand pat with their party loyalties. Voters choose the same party over and over. This attachment was largely affective. Choices based upon strict policy agreement were less common. Party loyalty goes up with age. For many years it was possible in most American elections to cast a party ballot. Voters could simply choose to select all candidates from one party with one stroke of the pen. As our politics has grown increasingly polarized, split ticket voting has declined. Split ticket voters choose candidates from different parties on the same ballot. For example, a voter might choose the Republican candidate for president while voting for a Democratic candidate for Senate. Partisan identification helps explain political behavior.

Many different models have been used to explain voting behavior. Political scientists continue to collect data to substantiate the rational choice theory, retrospective voting, prospective voting and Party line voting. Revisionist variations come and go but the "funnel of causality" for American voting conduct perplexes even our best and brightest.

5.3 Explain the roles that individual choice and state laws play in voter turnout in elections.

When looking at voter turnout in American politics an age-old maxim comes to mind, "politics ain't beanbag." There is no easy way to explain why some vote and why some do not vote. There are plenty of factors behind political participation that political scientists have studied. We commonly look at education,

socioeconomic status, rational decision making theory, personality tests and social networking. Lost in these studies, however, is looking at political efficacy.

Our engagement in the political process is often connected to our feeling that our interest matters. Feelings of efficacy in the political process helps to explain who votes. When young people get involved in civic activity early in life they are more likely to be involved later in life. Alienation from civic activity results in disengagement. Getting citizens to cast that first ballot continues to vex political science.

Turnout rates are higher in most democracies around the world. Here in the United States voting turnout in presidential elections rarely exceeds 60% of eligible citizens. In non-presidential years turnout is much lower. Citizens who are white, older, college educated, with professional jobs tend to vote at higher rates. For this reason conservative Republicans tend to focus on voting integrity. For instance, Republicans favor strict registration laws that also require photo identification of all voters. In contrast, liberal Democrats look for ways to make voting even easier. They are worried that their constituents, citizens less likely to vote, are underrepresented. Democrats push for early voting, same-day registration and touch screen ballots. Undoubtedly there are institutional barriers that do make voting more difficult.

An institutional barrier is a rule or law that prevents eligible adults from voting. One such barrier is the citizenship requirement. Unless you are an American citizen you cannot vote. Registration requirements in most states also make voting more difficult. Unless you have signed up in advance you are prohibited from voting. Most states also prohibit, for a period of time, convicted felons from voting. Our federal election day is always on a workday. This simple fact makes it difficult for many working Americans. Some complain that here in America we have too many elections and that our ballots are too confusing.

Voting turnout is low here. Grassroots efforts, work done at the local level by real citizens, like Suffrage @ 17 in Illinois have worked to increase political efficacy and subsequently increase voter turnout. Energizing the electorate around critical issues, mobilizing prospective voters through like-minded networks, offering compelling candidates, and framing laws and policies that encourage engagement are all a part of increasing voter turnout. Most agree that participating at the grassroots level is often successful at encouraging more Americans to vote. Of course that presumes we want more voters? Right?

One might imagine that universally Americans desire more people to vote. This would be far from the truth. In recent years Democrats and Republicans have focused their civic ends on different means. Democrats have pursued policies that broaden access to voting by easing registration restrictions. Then Democratic president Bill Clinton pushed the Motor Voter Bill in 1993. Liberals have fought in court any attempt to make voting more difficult. Republicans, in contrast, look to assure voting integrity. Republican president George W. Bush signed into law the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) in 2002. This law modernized voting procedures in hope of reducing any Election Day shenanigans. HAVA modernized voting by replacing old punch card technologies with touch screen voting machines. In the end both goals are noble yet reflect the interests of each political party. It is argued that Democrats are advantaged when turnout is higher while Republicans are helped by the turnout of more traditional voters.

More recently Voter ID laws and early voting opportunities have inspired both debate and legal actions. State laws that require voters to have photo-identification, it is argued, depresses turnout. Voters without a photo ID tend to be poor, urban and a member of a minority group. Democrats representing this demographic have been the loudest critics. The evidence of voter suppression, however, is unclear. The Supreme Court has upheld voter ID laws, particularly those in Indiana, by declaring the “valid interest in protecting the integrity and reliability of the electoral process.” Republicans cheered the Court’s decision.

Republicans are less cheery about early voting laws. States have always made provisions for absentee ballot voting. Now majorities of states offer opportunities to vote early, to vote before the official Election Day. Facilitating early access to voting would appear to advantage those groups of people who are less likely to vote on Election Day. This would appear to advantage Democrats. The evidence is less clear. Most scholars have concluded that the most important help when trying to increase voter turnout is not through easier access to the ballot but through easier access to registration.

Still present in most states is a two-step process to casting a vote. Before you can vote you must register, most often not on Election Day. Many states require voter registration weeks in advance of Election Day. Such laws impose institutional barriers to voting. Even types of elections affect turnout. We turn out for presidential elections but tend to stay home for mid-term and local elections.

Angus Campbell and Philip Converse wrote the book on voting back in 1960, its simple title – *The American Voter*. In their “funnel of causality” the authors of *The American Voter* recognized that ultimately political decisions were made based upon attitudes toward the parties and the candidates. Membership in social groups, population movement and personality were important but less so. Issues mattered little. Voters were portrayed less as rational agents and more as conduits to exogenous factors. Voters in this study showed “a long term psychological attachment to a political party.”

The American Voter established party identification as the leading determinant of one’s voting behavior. Additionally these authors found that most voters stand pat with their party loyalties. Voters choose the same party over and over. This attachment, they argued, was largely affective. Choices based upon strict policy agreement were less common. Party loyalty goes up with age.

One need not be concerned that *The American Voter* was written over fifty years ago. Its basic claims appear as true today as they were in 1960. Though we may teach the demise of the political party and the rise of the independent voter, party identification continues to be the wellspring of electoral victory. Though one might imagine that political efficacy and engagement correlate, political science appears to suggest that voting is a muscle memory. Once you vote, you will vote again and again. Voting is a civic habit. For many this habit has not yet formed. Whether or not we make voting easier may not in the end make much difference. Only you can make that difference. Vote.

There are many factors that influence voter choices. Political science demonstrates that party ID and candidate characteristics primarily determine voting decisions. Little has changed on these two fronts. Yet more and more research is beginning to suggest that voters care about specific issues as well. The lack of familiarity with issues has often been cited as a characteristic of American voters. New evidence appears to give “we the people” more credit in making educational choices when casting our ballot.

In the political jungle, your behavior is greatly influenced by who raised you. If raised by Democrats, you are more likely to behave like a Democrat. The same would be true for those raised by Republicans. It has been a long held belief in political science that party identification best helps us understand civic activity. It is argued that family provides the primary means of political socialization. These familial influences serve as a catalyst to group identity and subsequently to political action. Most political science would say,

Partisanship is a powerful influence on people’s perception of politics. One’s identification with a political party strongly informs candidate choice during campaigns. When information levels are low, people use their partisanship as a decision heuristic to fill in the blanks. When faced with new political information, people’s partisan priors bias how this information is interpreted. In other words, party identification is central to understanding how citizens interpret public affairs and make political decisions.

For many of us these partisan biases were formed in our adolescence. They prove to be stable over time. Partisan identification must be seen as a primary factor when trying to explain voter choices in American politics. If you cannot understand a friend's political outlook, look at where their tree fort was located in their youth.

Partisan identification, however, should not be seen as the only factor that influences voter choices. Candidate characteristics continue to take on an ever more important role. Candidate-centered campaigns can now be seen as a game changer. As our nominating process has become more democratic with the rise of direct primaries individual candidates make direct appeals to voters. Technology advancements as well help explain how candidate characteristics are more and more important. Radio, television and the Internet all provide greater intimacy between candidate and voter. We no longer need Party bosses to filter candidates. We assess competency and character for ourselves. Voters now demand to see their candidates on TV talk shows, up close in town hall meetings and even as guests on popular entertainment outlets. Our candidates now create viral videos, they Tweet and use Instagram. Voters now increasingly make visceral decisions based on personal preference rather than simply relying on elites. This allows for a new type of candidate, often unfiltered and more extreme.

Popular studies have claimed that “widespread ignorance and indifference over many matters of policy” characterize the American voter. Worse, independent voters appear “devoid of policy interests or concerns.” To the contrary, issue salience appears to be growing. Contemporary political issues now can be shown to be an important factor in determining voter choices. In his classic study David E. RePass has argued,

What is important to observe from this study is that by and large the voting public has at least a few substantive issues in mind at the time of an election, and the voters seem to be acting more responsibly than had previously been thought. To be sure, images of the presidential candidates are still the most important factor in the electoral decision; at least this was true in 1964. But this personal feeling about a candidate is not the only basis for choice there are substantive concerns as well. Furthermore, when we allow voters to define their own issue space, they are able to sort out the differences between parties with a fair degree of accuracy. It would probably be going too far to say that the public has contextual knowledge upon which to base its decision. But we have shown that the public is in large measure concerned about specific issues, and that these cognitions have a considerable impact on electoral choice.

Put simply voters have certain issues that energize political activity. When counting ballots we discover the impact of single-issue voters. For example, Democrats have historically mobilized around abortion rights and health care. And Republicans have mobilized around gun rights and tax policy.

There is no easy way to explain who votes and why. Political science has grounded many of our choices in Party ID and candidate centered campaigns. Increasingly, however, voters have grown savvier by recognizing salient issues. A more educated American electorate with greater access to information technology should make our elections the result of rational choices. Nevertheless, a picture is still worth a thousand words.

BIG IDEA: Competing policy-making interests

5.4 Describe linkage institutions.

Numerous institutions link the people to their government. Linkage institutions are channels that allow individuals to communicate their preferences to policy-makers. The leading linkage institutions in our democracy are political parties, interest groups, elections and media. **Political parties, interest groups and social movements provide opportunities for participation and influence how people relate to government.**

Political parties form for the expressed purpose of winning elections. In this way, when our political party candidates win elections “we the people” feel connected to our government. When party leaders pass critical pieces of legislation, or when our president follows through on campaign promises or even when courts rule favorably to our ideological liking we feel linked to the government. In doing so political parties live up to their calling. Political parties provide labels; issue platforms and most importantly choose candidates that represent our wishes. It is difficult to change government on our own but by joining political parties we can, or at least we feel we can.

Interest groups form for the expressed purpose of impacting the policy-making process. In this way, when interest groups that we have joined help to pass or block pieces of legislation, influence presidential decision-making or even affect court outcomes we feel linked to the government. In doing so interest groups live up to their calling. Interest groups provide us a way to focus our political attention on single issues or policy priorities. There is strength in numbers. Interest groups are an important linkage institution to our democracy. They are vital in building any civil society.

Elections are another form of linkage institution. Elections give “we the people” the most direct way to influence our government and its decisions. When our candidates win elections we feel that our interests will be represented. In this way we are connected to our government. Here in America we are election crazy. No democracy has as many elected positions to fill as we do. Seemingly there are elections all of the time. Elections at the national, state and local levels fulfill an important function – they link us to the government. We are after all “a government of the people, by the people and for the people.”

Media is another critical linkage institution. The role of the media is to inform us about our government. They are gatekeepers, scorekeepers and watchdogs. Media sets priorities and helps to become agenda setters when deciding what to cover. Media tells us who is winning and losing in the political process at any given time. But perhaps most importantly the media holds our government accountable. They police the government for us. With the help of media we feel connected to our government.

Political parties, interest groups and social movements provide opportunities for participation and influence how people relate to government.

5.5 Explain the function and impact of political parties on the electorate and government.

Political parties play an important function in our democracy even though our Founders were afraid of their baneful effects. Political parties link the people to government. Political parties educate us and most importantly they help recruit and choose our candidates. Political party operatives also manage campaigns. Party leaders help to raise money and provide media strategies. Political scientists, however, tell us that political parties have grown weaker as mass media has given greater power to personal followings.

Political parties have one primary goal and that is to win elections. By winning elections political parties and their voters get to act upon their wishes because they now run the government. The more successful political parties are the more likely it is for their issues to become public policy. Despite not being mentioned in the

U.S. Constitution and feared by the likes of George Washington and James Madison, American democracy is unthinkable without political parties.

Political parties in America play an important role not only in winning elections but in governing as well. The United States Congress is structured around political parties. The political party that holds the majority of the House and Senate respectively controls the chamber. For example, if Democrats make up the majority of the House of Representatives they hold the primary leadership positions including the Speaker role and all of the committee chairs. This means that political party platforms, the issues they fight for, become more likely to pass when parties hold majorities in both the House and the Senate. Sitting presidents as well are considered the Chief of their Party. They are expected to advocate for party platforms, candidates and fundraising efforts. Political parties through governing help deliver on the promises made during their campaigns.

In addition to winning elections and staffing the government political parties hope to educate the public. Political parties try to raise money to support candidates. They nominate candidates. In this way political parties play an important function as a filter in our electoral process. By nominating candidates political party prestige provides an important stamp of credibility. Political parties also provide a simple label for a broad based coalition of voters. For this reason we have in America a two-party system.

There are two major political parties in the United States – Democrats and Republicans. Both are broad based coalitions with the expressed purpose of attracting enough voters to win elections. Partisan identification is the number one determining factor of a person's vote. Partisan ID, however, is not as strong as it once was. More and more Americans, now close to 40%, see themselves as independent voters. This is clear when looking at the rise of split ticket voting. Many Americans on any single ballot will vote for candidates from both parties.

5.6 Explain why and how political parties change and adapt.

As we have seen, political parties, in theory, play a vital role in our government and politics. In practice, however, that role seems to have diminished. Most political scientists have recognized a weakening of political parties over time. Gary C. Jacobson has written,

A fundamental factor [in the decline of parties] is clearly institutional: the rise and spread of primary elections as the method for choosing party nominees for the general election... Primary elections have largely deprived parties of their most important source of influence over elected officials. Parties no longer control access to the ballot and, therefore, to political office. They cannot determine who runs under their label and so cannot control what the label represents... parties typically have few sanctions and little influence [on nominations].

Similarly, James E. Campbell suggests,

Since the 1960s the role of the political parties in American politics has fundamentally changed. A series of technological, institutional, legal, and cultural shifts diminished their once central function as the organizers and inclusive mobilizers of American elections. They ceded control over nominations and were pushed aside by new candidate-centered campaigns. Technological advances allowed candidates to speak directly to the people, and the parties lost their monopoly.

Political parties have been weakened by changes to the nomination process and changes in technology. The result is a more candidate-centered political process. The partisan has been replaced by the personal. Direct primaries replaced party caucuses. This put the power of nominating candidates directly in the hands of the people. Candidates now increasingly create their own brand, relying less on party symbols and messaging. Yet without a nomination from one of the two major parties, any candidate, regardless of brand, is practically un-electable. To remain competitive, parties modify their policies and messaging in order to appeal to various demographic coalitions.

Structurally political parties have always reflected our commitment to federalism. Party organization was never fully centralized. Rather, state and local coordination of political interests varied significantly. A Democrat in New York might actually be quite different than a Democrat in Texas. Likewise, a Republican in South Carolina is certainly different than a Republican in California. There are regional differences. As these differences manifest themselves in real ways, our political parties weaken. Certain regions have realigned their political loyalties. The South, once deeply loyal to the Democratic Party, is now solidly Republican. There was a time when California was consistently conservative, siding with Republicans. Democrats now control our most populous state. When political parties realign, political scientists call this a critical election. Political parties have had to adapt to these structural and regional changes.

Historically political parties used to run like machines. Highly structured, they were the engines of our government. Loyalty was driven by patronage. New technologies like radio and television, however, challenged the historic party control over messaging. With direct primaries bypassing party bosses, candidates now choose to broadcast their unique messages through new technologies. As information technology changes so too does our politics, often at the expense of certain institutions like political parties.

Campaign finance laws, as well, help explain the weakening of our political parties. When parties were machine-like, unrestricted money flowed generously. Money is the mother's milk of politics. Candidates once were dependent upon political party resources. New campaign finance reforms, however, have turned candidates into independent operators. Donors now face significant limits when giving money to political parties. It is easier for candidate-centered campaigns to access money outside of political party channels. Independent expenditures face far fewer restraints than those faced by political parties. This change in campaign finance also helps to explain why our political parties have grown weaker.

As parties weaken, our attachment to them as well is weakened. More and more of us claim no party. We have grown more independent. Parties have become less relevant. Political parties, therefore, have had to adapt to these new political realities. Their influence over the nomination process has changed. Their structure has changed. They reflect more and more popular influence. Even so, American democracy is unthinkable without political parties. Political parties still endorse and nominate candidates. This legitimizes candidates. Political parties can raise vast sums of money to support candidates. Political parties can mobilize campaign volunteers from state to state. Party messaging educates us. But perhaps most importantly, partisan identification still provides the single greatest clue as to who will get our vote. Political parties may have grown weaker, but they will always play a critical role both in our government and in our politics.

5.7 Explain how structural barriers impact third party and independent candidate success.

Representative democracies can take on many different forms. Parliamentary governments, for instance, are often characterized by a multi-party system. With proportional elections minor parties have the ability to get their voices heard within the government. In these systems a political party that receives just a small number

of votes may still earn seats in the legislative chamber. Election law helps to explain why American politics has but two major political parties. Although it can be argued that minor parties still play an important role in American politics.

We continue to have only two major parties for a couple of important reasons. There are structural barriers to third party success in American politics. The rules governing our elections reinforce our two-party system. We have single member districts. In each election there is only one winner. Elections outcomes here are usually determined by a plurality. This means the most votes win. You do not need a majority to win in most elections, just more votes than your opponent. With two parties, however, winners in plurality elections are guaranteed a mathematical majority. This is also reflected in the Electoral College's winner-take-all rule.

French sociologist Maurice Duverger, more than any other, has codified this "law" of two party systems. Duverger's Law states,

In cases where there are three parties operating under [a single member district, plurality election system] the electors soon realize that their votes are wasted if they continue to give them to the third party: whence their natural tendency to transfer their vote to the less evil of its two adversaries in order to prevent the success of the greater evil. This 'polarization' effect works to the detriment of a new party so long as it is the weakest party but is turned against the less favored of its older rivals as soon as the new party outstrips it.

Put simply, the barrier to third party success can be explained in structural barriers. Where plurality elections exist alongside single member districts you should expect to find a two party political system.

More pragmatically, we have a two-party system because our political parties do not hold on to rigid platforms. Favored issues and positions on public policy shift over time. The parties want to attract voters. Holding on to dogmatic positions does not do this. Most issues in America have a binary characteristic; they are either/or and yes/no positions. American government is represented by a two-party system.

There are still minor parties who attempt to attract voters. Third parties are certainly allowed but they usually are not effective. Plurality elections make it almost impossible for third party candidates to win. Minor parties can play important roles. They often champion new issues in their platforms. If these new issues resonate with voters they generally do not propel a minor party but rather induce one of the two major parties to take it on as their own. For example, when a minor party in the 1990s championed fiscal responsibility, an issue that gained wide support, the Republican Party saw an opportunity and began to herald it in order to win elections more broadly. In this way third parties are often compared to bees. Once they sting they die. So it is with minor parties. Once a minor party gets noticed one of the two major parties begins to proclaim its cause making the third party's existence mute.

Third parties along with independent candidate success is limited in American politics. This should not be explained simply by their lack of resonance. Structural barriers along with the malleability of dominant party platforms best explain why third parties have a difficult time getting their candidates elected. And without winning elections even weakened parties find their survival dubious.

5.8 Explain the benefits and potential problems of interest-group influence on elections and policy-making.

Interest groups try to influence public policy for a group of people with common concerns. Called by many different names these “special interests” or factions are organized to “lobby” or effect change at every entry point of public policy. Remember James Madison in Federalist 10 said such activity was natural. “The causes of faction,” Madison wrote, are “sown in the nature of man.” Nevertheless a vast majority of Americans, close to 75%, believe interest groups have too much power and authority over Washington DC. Perhaps this is true because people with better than average incomes are the most likely to join interest groups. Yet our pluralistic political system allows for the free flow of competing interests. Many of the largest lobbying firms have offices on K Street in Washington. For this reason interest groups are often referred collectively as K Street.

Interest groups have proliferated in the United States because of social diversity, federalism, weak political parties and fragmented institutions. Interest groups are more common here than in other democracies because of our unique American political culture. Feelings of civic duty and high levels of political efficacy help to explain the large number of interest groups in America. Interest groups are another example of a linkage institution.

Do not forget that we are “a nation of joiners.” Guided by self-interest, we naturally join groups that share our concerns. The First Amendment protects us when advocating for issues and appealing to our government for assistance. Free speech and the right to petition are fundamental to our civil liberties and civil rights. Though we may cringe a bit when we learn that interest group activity last year spent almost \$4 billion “lobbying” or influencing the federal government, our political efficacy is strengthened when our government acts responsively to our collective requests.

The act of influencing is called lobbying. A professional who works for any given interest group is called a lobbyist. Political scientist Bryce Harlow has studied lobbyists. He stated,

The coin of lobbying, as of politics, is trust . . . truth telling and square dealing are of paramount importance in this profession. If [one] lies, misrepresents, or even lets a misapprehension stand uncorrected—or if someone cuts his corners too slyly—he is . . . dead and gone, never to be resurrected or even mourned.

One can imagine why lobbyists are often portrayed in sleazy ways. Yet the policy making process depends upon the expertise and connections provided by lobbyists. Nicholas W. Allard has argued, “Lobbying is an Honorable Profession.” Allard wrote,

The most basic function of the lobbyist is to educate by providing information, and it is axiomatic that legislators benefit when they can consider information from a broad range of interested parties. The increasing scope and complexity of legislation and regulation as the United States evolves and becomes ever more entwined in a global community has further magnified the importance of lobbyists’ expertise. As Thomas Susman explains, ‘Government has become sufficiently complex that, without the information lobbyists bring to legislators, decision making would be—at best—poorly informed.’ It is true, as one former highly regarded Senate aide and now chief lobbyist for a major university points out, that members of Congress and staff are not dependent on lobbyists’ information and often do their own research. However, lobbyists often have information not available to members and staff, and they perform a critical function by confirming information and even informing lawmakers of unintended consequences of their proposals. Without such feedback, legislators and regulators might fail to achieve their objectives and could even do more harm than good. It is sometimes the case that

without input from the erstwhile 'beneficiary' of a new law or regulation, the provision would produce unwelcome results.

Though the First Amendment protects their behavior is closely regulated not unlike campaign finance. All lobbyists must register with the government and file regular statements that itemize their activity. In addition to money and gift limits there are restrictions placed upon the “revolving door” of lobbying. The revolving door describes those elected officials and bureaucrats who are hired by lobbying firms to influence their former office. Nevertheless, many of our democratic values protect lobbyists against draconian restrictions.

Of course hiring a lobbyist is not the only way to influence policy. Through letter writing, demonstrating and other like-minded activities anybody can play the role of an interest group. When everyday citizens participate as an interest group this is called grassroots. Too many of us are free riders, we want to enjoy the privileges of interest group activity without participating ourselves.

There are many techniques that interest groups use to influence policy. They write policy proposals that later are introduced as bills; they conduct important research; they testify before important Congressional committees; use ballot initiatives; write amicus briefs; litigate by filing lawsuits; and they help candidates campaign. Interest groups can affect litigation by writing amicus briefs. By far the single most important commodity held by interest groups is information. Notice making a lot of noise by demonstrating is not a strategy used often. Flying under the radar actually works best. If public opinion is aroused the work of interest groups can often be harder. This is why many interest groups try to remain bipartisan. They want to influence policy in both Democratic and Republican Administrations. Lobbyists are checked from misrepresenting too many facts because they fear losing a particular Congressman’s trust and confidence. Without access interest groups cannot influence.

In addition to working within party coalitions, interest groups exert influence through long-standing relationships with bureaucratic agencies, Congressional committees, and other interest groups; such relationships are described as “iron triangles” and issue networks and they help interest groups exert influence across political party coalitions.

Interest groups can exert public policy influence through “iron triangles.” “Iron triangles” have been called sub-governments. “Iron triangles” are commonly defined as, “...A coalition of key policy makers including members of Congress, powerful special interest lobbies, and key career bureaucrats.” Together these three agents of power and influence coalesce around a narrow issue. “Iron triangles” are tightknit and rigid relationships between common interests. Dairy farmers, for instance, represented by members of Congress on the House Agriculture Committee hire American Dairy Association lobbyists to influence rule making in the Department of Agriculture. All three components share a vital interest, protecting dairy farmers. As long as these “iron triangles” operate outside of the public eye reform is difficult. Longstanding policy benefits stay in place. With the advent of information technology, “iron triangles” have grown more and more out of favor. Political scientists now prefer using the term “issue networks.”

Hugh Hecló coined the theory of “issue networks.” “Issue networks” are “much more fluid coalitions in which sometimes anonymous participants from both inside and outside of government coalesce around a particular issue on an ad hoc basis...[Issue networks] are temporary coalitions whose members are motivated by passion and ideals as much as by the chance of some economic gain from involvement in the policy process.” “Issue networks” involve more players, casting wider webs of influence and strategy. In our time, educational policy has been impacted in this way. National, state and local agents along with reformers, publishers and educators have teamed up to institute new standards and assessment tools.

5.9 Explain how variation in types and resources of interest groups affects their ability to influence elections and policy making.

Unfortunately money all too often provides the currency of gaining access to our decision makers. It has been said “the mother’s milk of politics” is money. Interest groups allocate money to candidates running for office by creating PACS, political action committees. Ordinarily PACs face strict limits. Today, however, 527 groups or Super PACs can raise large sums of unlimited cash. 527 money cannot be given directly to candidates. Clearly interest groups with lots of monetary resources are advantaged when trying to affect election outcomes. It is for this reason that people with above average incomes participate in interest groups more than others. There are more interest groups that represent big business than any other sector in our economy.

E.E. Schattschneider gave voice to this realist view of democracy in America. Whereas theory argues for a pluralist political system where competing groups equally influence our politics political scientists like E.E. Schattschneider observed a more elite polity. In his classic work, *The Semi-sovereign People* (1960), Schattschneider criticized group theory. Hoping for public interests too often a select few gain private interests. The aggregate sum of interest group activity fails to deliver the common good. The majority remain less represented than those few able to muster the resources to gain access and change public policy. “The flaw in the pluralist heaven,” Schattschneider wrote, “is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent.” It is no surprise when we discover that most Americans hold interest groups in contempt. These “special interests” all too often, most of us think, inhibit true democracy.

Unlike political parties who want to win elections, interest groups simply want to influence policy. Group theory, including the study of interest groups in American politics, would suggest that there are many benefits to such activity. Yet clearly there are potential problems. We all may have the legal right to speak our minds in hopes of influencing our policy makers. An elite few, however, seem to have the necessary resources to access an amped up microphone.

5.10 Explain how various political actors influence public policy outcomes.

Interest groups come in all shapes and sizes. They activate and empower individuals and groups across the political spectrum. Democrats may unite with Republicans on certain issues. Special interests may act in a bipartisan fashion. Then again, factions often divide. Pit us against each other. Our Founders feared the “baneful effect” of factions. Today it is common place for various political actors, in the form of interest groups, professional organizations, social movements, the military, and bureaucratic agencies, to influence the policy making process. In our democratic republic they all operate as special interests.

There are interests groups that represent vast numbers of people, like the AARP, the American Association of Retired Persons who advocate for the elderly. There are single-issue groups, like EMILY’S List, an advocacy group who works to get pro-choice candidates elected. Or there are those groups who simply are formed to protest against injustice like Black Lives Matter. This movement hopes to attract attention to and change unwarranted and excessive uses of state violence against black youth. Protest politics in American society is found in our DNA. The spirit of dissent gave birth to the United States. In our Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson wrote,

That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Additionally, the First Amendment codified our rights to free speech, free press, free exercise of religion, while given the right to assemble and petition our government. The government, after all, is not bricks and mortar but people provided with authority to represent our will. And when that will is challenged or neglected by our elected officials we have been empowered to protest.

Think how the civil rights movement not only impacted our society but greatly affected policy making. African Americans organized when working to overcome the residual affects of slavery. Kate Masur, in *An Example for All the Land*, writes,

Beginning during the Civil War, black Washingtonians insisted on a remarkably expansive interpretation of racial equality. The black population was anything but homogeneous. Existing black residents, the majority of whom had been free before the war, were joined by thousands of fugitives from slavery and by migrants from the North who came in search of work, education, and opportunities for political activism. In their private lives, African Americans observed distinctions in wealth, education and place of origin. When it came to making demands in public, however, they were strikingly allied across classes in the pursuit of a broad definition of equality. Using a variety of tactics, including written petitions, individual protests, and mass demonstrations, black Washingtonians demanded much more than basic equality in legal proceedings. They sought recognition as members of the civic body and full and equal access to streetcars, theaters, public schools, and the proceedings of Congress. They demanded fair treatment by the police and a fair share of public works employment, equal access to trade unions, and official recognition of their militia organizations.

Change did not come easy for African Americans seeking equality but it would have taken a lot longer had they not joined together. In succeeding generations groups like the NAACP, SCLC and SNCC were formed to advance the cause of civil rights.

Through litigation the NAACP was able to affect legal outcomes. No better example than the case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Through the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., SCLC was able to use boycotts and marches to draw attention to the plight of black America. Their efforts resulted in such landmark pieces of legislation as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. SNCC mobilized Freedom Rides throughout the south helping to raise the stakes in participatory democracy by registering thousands of African Americans to vote.

These voters, today, are a major force in determining electoral outcomes. Political scientists have labeled such shifts as critical elections. Critical elections, also called realignments, involve large groups shifting their alliance from one party to another. In the case of African Americans they were once considered loyal to the Republican Party. The civil rights movement changed this. As Republicans increasingly became the party of the South, African Americans realigned and became ardent supporters of the Democratic Party.

As we have seen political actors influence public policy outcomes, like in the area of civil rights. Political actors have proven to be successful agents of change. Representative democracy is built to be responsive. Certain institutional changes have resulted in weakened political parties. Election rules along with campaign finance reforms have restricted the activity of our two major political parties. Unfettered interest groups, however, using a variety of means and methods continue to successfully link American citizens to their government. Advocating for their own self-interests, these pressure groups and movements have proven again and again that “we the people” can in fact change public policy.

Another great example of the role played by various pressure groups is the budget of the United States government. Now close to \$4 trillion dollars, the federal government's budget process is a political science lesson in influence peddling. Competing actors such as interest groups, professional organizations, social movements, the military and even bureaucratic agencies all participate in influencing final outcomes. "Show me the money" is the rallying cry of the political class in America.

The stage upon which public policy is played out is made up of many competing actors and groups. To varying degrees throughout American history policy outcomes have been impacted by elections, public opinion, interest groups and political parties. No one group or strategy owns the policy making process. Pluralities of voters along with competing groups across the political spectrum vie for the policy agenda here.

The political science community has recognized that "influence is to the study of decision-making what force is to the study of motion." The forces that move public policy in America include elections, public opinion, interest groups and political parties. In a representative democracy like ours, one rooted in pluralism, we can only hope that competing interests keep us all equally active in governing ourselves.

BIG IDEA: Civic participation in a representative democracy

5.11 Explain how the different processes work in a U.S. presidential election.

Institutional rules along with campaign norms go a long way in explaining American government and politics. The outcomes of federal elections are greatly impacted by process. **The impact of federal policies on campaigning and electoral rules continues to be contested.** With representative democracy as the standard, many political scientists wonder if our current electoral process delivers the best results. To win an election here, candidates must navigate through a maze of rules, regulations and practices many of which are rooted in traditions rather than best practice. Nevertheless, many would argue today that the process of federal elections has grown increasingly democratic. This too is contested.

The federal election process has two important stages.

The first stage of any electoral process is winning a political party's nomination. Party candidates used to be selected by the party bosses in small caucuses. Party caucuses were nothing more and nothing less than conversations between small groups of empowered citizens. Benefits were doled out by and for party loyalists. This was called a spoils system. Everyday citizens were left out of the process. Early elites were fearful of common passions. The average person was not trusted to make important party decisions. It did not take long for this to change.

As suffrage rights expanded voters demanded more and more power in voicing their candidate preferences. This first manifested itself in political party conventions. These conventions were held so that many more citizens could participate in the nominating process. In time, these conventions grew inadequate. Today the modern nominating process is characterized by primary elections. A primary election is like any other election. Primary ballots, however, do not choose winners but candidates. Primary elections invite all eligible voters to participate in helping political parties choose their candidates. Most states hold closed primaries. Closed primaries stipulate that only registered party members can participate. In open primaries any registered voter can participate. Because most states hold closed primaries, and more and more Americans see themselves as independent, turnout tends to be quite low [as low as 25% in many states]. Nevertheless this first stage in any electoral process is of utmost importance. In the first stage political parties nominate their candidates.

The process of nominating presidential candidates tends to be frontloaded. This means that the earliest primaries often carry the most significance. The first primary has traditionally been held in New Hampshire. Because it is the first primary it often establishes important momentum. Iowa, however, can still claim an important role. Iowa is one of the few states that still hold a nominating caucus. Remember a Party caucus is nothing more and nothing less than a conversation between small groups of like-minded citizens. Turnouts are much lower in a caucus. Traditionally the Iowa caucus is held just prior to the New Hampshire primary. Because it is the first showcasing of the candidates it garners tremendous media coverage. The Iowa caucus often can boast that it catapulted the frontrunner.

After months and months of state caucuses and primaries, the major political parties still hold quadrennial national conventions to crown their presidential candidates. Though the primary elections make the conventions somewhat moot the parties continue to put on these political pageants. Free media coverage, given by the major news outlets, often provides an expected bounce to each respective candidate. The conventions also allow for the major candidates to showcase their message, announce their Vice Presidential choice and begin branding their image.

These party conventions were originally held to expand the input of the common man's voice. So it still is today. However, certain party rules have been implemented to assuage the fickle nature of public opinion. Both parties have what is called "Super Delegates." These Super Delegates made up of party leaders and elected officials, cast votes at the conventions. These Super Delegates can correct fatal mistakes that perhaps were made by primary voters. They are around to insulate from the possibility of radical candidates, unable to win in a general election, from being chosen by the party rank and file.

Primary and caucus elections ultimately choose delegates to a party's national conventions. It is those delegates who cast the final tally that makes the nomination official. Though primary election results make the national convention anti-climatic, these assemblies provide an important display of both the party platform and its prized candidate. Slick images and choreographed speeches at the national convention kick-off the general election campaign. Due to falling TV ratings, the lack of any newsworthy events and the staged nature of modern party conventions many foresee a day when these quadrennial cattle shows will come to an end.

The second stage of any campaign is winning the general election. General election campaigns begin immediately following a political party's national convention. In the end the general election determines who will fill the government office at stake. Primaries and caucuses pick candidates. General elections pick political winners.

Winning primary and general elections require more than just candidates. The modern campaign today involves an army of paid and volunteer staff. Presidential candidates rent office space in all fifty states. But most importantly use all forms of media to run ads. Consequently, the modern campaign requires vast sums of money.

Despite an apparent "anti-partisan realignment" modern democracy still holds on to its republican ideals. This means that political parties are still responsible for the selection of our candidates. The process for doing so looks remarkably old fashioned. It is for this reason that debates still rage over its legitimacy. Experts who study this process along with voters who participate continue to question the influence of anachronistic two-party systems, outrageously long campaigns, the obscene amounts of money required to win both stages, caucus and primary rules and reliance upon old technologies. The impact of federal policies on campaigning and electoral rules continues to be contested. Though American voters have a greater role to play in this process the proverbial "smoke filled room" is still around, albeit a little bit bigger than what was once true.

5.12 Explain how the Electoral College impacts democratic participation.

The Electoral College is the indirect way “we the people” select our president. An Electoral College was created to provide a filter between the direct votes of citizens and the selection of our chief executive.

As expressed in our Constitution the Electoral College reflects the Framers reluctance to put the office of president in the hands of a direct vote. Mirroring checks and balances the Electoral College allows the people to vote for electors who then cast their vote for a president. The electors, however, are not bound by the people’s votes. The electors serve as a filter supposedly protecting the nation from the whims of an irrational mob.

The Electoral College also reflects federalism. The electors in the Electoral College are selected state-by-state. The total number of electors in each state is allocated by the total number of votes each state has in Congress. Illinois, for example, has 18 representatives in the House and 2 in the Senate. Therefore Illinois will receive 20 total electoral votes in the 2020 election. If you do the math that means there are 538 total electoral votes in the Electoral College [435 members in the House, 100 members in the Senate plus the District of Columbia is allotted 3 electors since the passage of the 23rd Amendment in 1961 for a total of 538].

To win in the Electoral College you must win a simple majority of the 538 electors. To win the presidential election you must win 270 or more electoral votes. If no one candidate wins a majority in the Electoral College the House of Representatives is constitutionally designated to choose the winner with each state delegation receiving one vote.

One curious rule governing the Electoral College is winner-take-all. The candidate who wins the most votes in any given state wins all of that state’s electoral votes. This winner-take-all rule affects campaign strategies. Most campaigns will spend most of their time focusing on those few battleground states like Ohio and Florida. This also affects the issues of a campaign. Candidates will focus on issues that resonate in the few battleground states. The winner-take-all rule makes it especially hard for third parties to win. Third parties may score votes but rarely enough to win a majority in any given state.

Why have we kept the Electoral College? Political science has observed over the years a number of functions of the Electoral College:

...It would provide an intermediary between the voters and the office of the presidency to ensure that the President would not be elected simply by the ‘extraordinary or violent movements’ of an election campaign...The electors chosen on a state-by-state basis insulated them from the ‘heat and ferments’ that might sway them if they convened in one place for a vote...The electors would rarely reach a majority decision and turn the process over to the House of Representatives...The Electoral College was founded upon a kind of republican vision of virtual representation in which a number of residents [including women, children, aliens, non-property owners and, in part, slaves] would be included in a state’s population tally for the allocation of electoral votes [and for that state’s representation in the House of Representatives].

Certainly tradition helps explain why we do not get rid of the Electoral College. But a more democratic process is never far from bubbling up to the service. Passing a constitutional amendment, however, is not easy. Whereas there are many who complain about the Electoral College there is no clear consensus on an alternative. Some small states think that the Electoral College benefits them. The battle ground states would

hate to lose the attention the current system gives them. Finally the Electoral College reinforces our two-party system. After all, most people do not understand the Electoral College. It is difficult to change something many do not know about.

The Electoral College's state-by-state, winner-take-all allocation of candidate votes versus the majority outcome of a national popular vote continues to reflect the tension of federalism and debate over whether the Electoral College facilitates or impedes democracy.

5.13 Explain how the different processes work in U.S. Congressional elections.

Political legitimacy in our political process relies on free and fair elections. Certain institutions help to link the people to this process. These important linkage institutions are political parties, campaigns and elections. G.K. Chesterton was right, "Democracy is like blowing your nose – you may not do it very well, but you ought to do it yourself."

The sine quo non of any democracy are competitive elections. In our democracy national elections are held every two years. Every four years we hold a presidential election. In presidential election years there are also Congressional elections. Midterm elections are held two years into a president's term. These elections are reserved primarily for Congressional offices. State and local elections are held even more frequently. Before elections are held there are political campaigns. Campaigns serve the purpose of introducing candidates to the voters. They tend to be long, require large amounts of campaign finance and often are characterized by nasty and negative television ads. Without campaigns, however, we would not be able to accurately judge the character of our candidates.

Yet there is a pink elephant in the room on most election days, particularly when electing candidates to our Congress. It is the most important word associated with our electoral politics. That word is incumbency. An incumbent is the current office holder running for reelection. Incumbency is when the current office holder wins at a disproportionate rate. In other words, incumbency means once you win the likelihood is you get to stay in power for as long as you want.

Incumbency rates tend to increase as number of constituents decreases. Incumbency rates in the House of Representatives are higher than the Senate and much higher than when seeking reelection as president.

Incumbents have a number of advantages. They are: name recognition, ease of raising money, ability to campaign on a record of service, protection through favorably drawn district lines and relatively low turnout rates.

Some would say incumbency threatens the legitimacy of American democracy. Others say it merely reflects the kind of stability American voters desire. Like our constitution, incumbency would appear to reflect that American citizens find dramatic change worrisome.

Beyond incumbency our Congressional elections are impacted by gerrymandering, the party nomination process and campaign finance laws. Gerrymandered districts often make competition highly unlikely. The party nomination process often utilizes closed primaries that make it difficult to mount serious challenges. But perhaps most importantly campaign finance laws severely limit the ability of challengers to raise the kinds of money necessary to unseat long held incumbents. Unless a nationalized wave election takes place our Congress stays fairly static despite its low approval ratings.

When congressional elections are nationalized, meaning focused attention on a major issue, turnout tends to be higher. So too is the rate of incumbent defeat. More often elections are localized focusing on local issues.

When this is so incumbent rates are quite high. Incumbency is the likelihood of winning reelection. Incumbency rates in the House of Representatives often reach 90% though a little lower in the Senate. We may hold our Congress in disregard but most tend to be reelected anyway. More than anything else this is due to turnout in the primaries. Remember most of us stay home for this phase. The party base dominates primary election turnout.

Voter turnout in elections remains low. In presidential years one hopes to exceed 50% of eligible voters in the general election. Turnout in the primaries is much lower. Voter turnout in midterm elections rarely exceeds 40%. Today's elections have too many under votes and over votes. Under votes are those who choose not to vote. Over votes are those who have spoiled their ballots by improperly marking them.

The process and outcomes in U.S. Congressional elections are impacted by a variety of factors. Federal policies on campaigning and electoral rules continue to impact our democratic process. E.E. Schattschneider wrote:

Democracy is a competitive political system in which competing leaders and organizations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision making process Conflict, competition, organization and leadership are the ingredients of a working definition of democracy.

As citizens we must remain vigilant in protecting our democratic heritage. Do we see competition in our elections? Are we free to organize as we wish? Have we forged the necessary leadership to steer our ship of state through difficult seas? It is always easy to criticize but in the end these democratic essentials are up to us to maintain.

5.14 Explain how campaign organizations and strategies affect the election process.

The structure and function of election campaigns have changed with the times. As the process of electing candidates to government office has grown more democratic so too have campaign strategies changed. Technology as well has required campaigns to “use 21st century tools to assimilate lessons from 19th century politics.”

Historically, the political parties ran national and local campaigns. Party elites chose the candidates, funded their campaigns and orchestrated election strategies. For most of our early political history the candidates themselves were not even seen on the campaign trail. But as new technologies emerged in the early twentieth century, like radio and film, so too new election techniques were developed. Candidate centered campaigns began to replace party control over elections. Weakened parties had its problems. Candidates still needed help running their marketing campaigns. Professional campaign consultants filled this vacuum.

Becoming ever more important in the modern era, campaign consultants have emerged as a robust industry of professionals and experts. They bring discipline and direction to candidates and their campaigns. Political scientists agree that a campaign consultant is,

...A professional who is engaged primarily in the provision of advice and services, such as polling, media, creation and production, and direct mail fundraising, to candidates, their campaigns and other political committees.

Consultants have been called “the middle men of politics.” Often they are referred to as “handlers.” The modern campaign demands much more than a few whistle stops and posters. Handlers coordinate advance

work, scheduling, speech writing, media, polling, finance and spin. Running a campaign is now a career choice.

Campaigns are unthinkable without a stable of professional campaign consultants. As a result our election campaigns have grown more sophisticated and more expensive. With handlers ever present, the blur between policy and politics is ever apparent. Presidential handlers have been called “the most powerful political figures America has never heard of.” Electability once anchored on character, with modern day marketers handling candidates, winning now depends more on likeability. With a voyeuristic media and a savvy electorate, candidates need to be cautious of their image at all times. They need proper handlers.

The structure and function of the modern campaign is different for another reason as well. Not only have campaign consultants changed our politics but so too has new technology. Sasha Issenberg in *Victory Lab* (2012) detailed how new digital metrics and high tech analytics have changed the modern political campaign:

The Obama 2012 campaign used data analytics and the experimental method to assemble a winning coalition vote by vote. In doing so, it overturned the long dominance of TV advertising in U.S. politics and created something new in the world; a national campaign run like a local ward election, where the interests of individual voters were known and addressed.

Crunching data, however, is not the only way technology is being used to win political offices today. Door-to-door canvassers can now find walk sheets without reporting to a campaign office. Everything can be coordinated online. Volunteer activities have now been gamified. Campaign workers compete online against other campaign workers. Social media can be used to micro-target prospective voters. Issenberg claimed,

Obama’s campaign began the election year confident it knew the name of every one of the 69,456,897 Americans whose vote had put him in the White House.

Get out the vote (GOTV) activity, once considered an art, has now become a science. So it can be said of our politics. The modern election campaign looks more and more like selling a product on the shelf. We market our candidates like we sell the latest fashion accessory. Technology allows the process to go digital and mobile. We once talked about local political machines running the neighborhoods. Today modern machines seemingly run our politics in new and sophisticated ways. To say we have virtually transformed our democracy can now be taken literally.

Remember candidate characteristics continue to take on an ever more important role. Candidate-centered campaigns can now be seen as a game changer. As our nominating process has become more democratic with the rise of direct primaries, individual candidates make direct appeals to voters. Technology advancements as well help explain how candidate characteristics are more and more important. Radio, television and the Internet all provide greater intimacy between candidate and voter. We no longer need Party bosses to filter candidates. We assess competency and character for ourselves. Voters now demand to see their candidates on TV talk shows, up close in town hall meetings and even as guests on popular entertainment outlets. Our candidates now create viral videos, they Tweet and use Instagram. Voters now increasingly make visceral decisions based on personal preference rather than simply relying on elites. This allows for a new type of candidate, often unfiltered and more extreme.

There are both benefits and drawbacks to candidate-centered campaigns.

Candidate centered campaigns have led to an increased dependence on professional consultants. Political handlers are paid to market candidates like any other product in the market place. Consultants come with a variety of talents and expertise. Some bring vision, others specialize in polling, while others know how to raise money or create catchy slogans and catch phrases. TV ads are created to sell personality, likeability, authenticity and most importantly electability. Images have increasingly outplayed content. Consultants often come with little to no ties to party traditions, wishes and protocols. The dependence upon professional consultants clearly reflects the weakening of political parties in our electoral process. For some weakened political parties is a benefit but to others a drawback.

Candidate centered campaigns have also given rise to campaign costs and intensive fundraising efforts. Now that the political parties no longer play the role of financial conduit, candidate centered campaigns must spend tremendous energies raising monies on their own. Campaign finance rules do not make this easy. A few billionaire friends cannot bank role a campaign. Candidates are required to raise nickels and dimes each and every day. Even if fortunate to win the election, this glad-handing needs to continue. With campaign independence, however, candidates are now able to choose their own consultants, media experts and speechwriters. The modern political campaign now requires tremendous resources to build a winning personal following. Some critics see money as the root of all that is wrong in our politics. Others, however, delight in watching the ways in which the American people get engaged in politics, even with their check books.

Election cycles in American politics have grown longer and longer. Many political scientists speak of “the permanent campaign.” Some blame candidate centered campaigns. It takes longer to raise the large sums of money required to run a national campaign. Name recognition also takes time. Today’s candidates need more time to build winning teams of consultants, media mavens and pollsters. Campaigns also require more time to meet the candidates. We now expect many debates, town hall meetings and guest spots on TV and radio. Candidate centered campaigns help to explain why our political season appears to be every season.

The modern candidate centered campaign has also witnessed the impact of and reliance on social media for communications and fundraising. Viral videos and viral marketing now play an important role in campaign agenda setting. All campaigns now use Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and Snap chat. The rise of social media along with the rise of personal followings in politics is no coincidence. Political science suggests:

The rise of social media platforms is interlinked with heightened processes of individualization. The experience of increased personal autonomy and expressions of this are among the most debated trends in our time...In accounts of the late modern era, processes of individualization are given priority over collectively shared cultural frames of references that dominated social spaces and their organization in modernity (such as family, nation, class, party affiliation et cetera).

As we engage more and more via modern technologies so too is our politics framed less by traditional linkage institutions and more through social media outlets. An individualized process goes hand-in-hand with a more individualized candidate. This has resulted in greater access to new forms of political participation. Social media has also created new ways for campaigns to tap into fresh sources of revenue.

When assessing candidate centered campaigns political scientists and voters alike have recognized both benefits and drawbacks.

5.15 Explain how the organization, finance, and strategies of national political campaigns affect the election process.

The mother's milk of politics is money. Debates over the role of money in campaigns reveal the continuing tension between money and its sources versus democratic principles of competitive and fair elections. Federal legislation and case law pertaining to campaign finance demonstrate the ongoing interaction of money and democratic principles in elections. For most of our history money entered the political process without limit.

Democracy is not cheap. With escalating campaign costs the role of money in politics has increasingly grown muddled at best. Traditionally politics has been perceived of as a haven for fat cats. The perception that graft and corruption reign has always been close to the surface. The fear of a plutocracy, a government by the rich, has prompted our Congress more recently to pass campaign finance laws. These campaign finance laws were intended to assure a level playing field for all. They also emphasize the importance of transparency. Full and complete disclosure allows media watchdogs to police the relationship between our politicians and the moneyed class. These laws have been met by skepticism and suspicion.

The Federal Election Campaign Act [FECA] of 1971 was the first major piece of legislation that addressed money in politics. In addition to creating the Federal Elections Commission [FEC] that regulates campaign money this law put in place strict limits on both hard money and soft money. Hard money is money given directly to a candidate's campaign. This law limited that amount to \$1,000. No single person could give more than \$1,000 to a candidate's campaign. Soft money is money directed to the national political party. Though unlimited, the party could only use soft money for issue advocacy and get out the vote efforts.

This opening salvo to campaign finance limits was challenged in the court case Buckley v. Valeo (1976). The Supreme Court seemed to find valid arguments on both sides. The Court recognized that campaign money was protected under the First Amendment's free speech clause. Yet recognized the need for limits so as to assuage the perception that money unfairly benefitted a few in our political process. Not too surprising this law did not reduce money in the process nor did it reduce the perception of money's corrupting influence.

The formation of political action committees (PACs) quickly became a loophole to circumvent these new apparent limits. New money began to pore into thousands of PACs. These new PACs gave their newly raised money to the candidates. In the end money had not been limited at all. It had only been redirected.

The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act [BCRA] of 2002 was intended to address the apparent loopholes that provided for big money influence. Hard money limits were actually increased to \$2,000 and indexed to inflation rates. Unlimited soft money was banned entirely. Often called by its nickname, McCain-Feingold hoped to improve upon the intentions of the previous legislation. The Court upheld these new provisions in the case McConnell v. FEC (2003). But again the result was the same. An unintended consequence was that political parties grew weaker. It also spurred the growth of outside independent expenditures.

Outside independent expenditures took on the form of 527 groups. These independent groups cannot work directly with the candidates nor can they funnel money to their respective campaigns. They can, however, collect unlimited amounts of money and use it to run ads that promote political candidates and their positions. Today these 527 groups have grown more and more significant to the political process.

The U.S. Supreme Court in *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010) accentuated the volatile split over those who see campaign money as an absolute First Amendment right and those who see money as a danger to fair elections. In their majority opinion, the Court essentially endorsed both individual and corporate participation with independent Super PACs. Justice Kennedy, writing for the majority said:

There is simply no support for the view that the First Amendment, as originally understood, would permit the suppression of political speech by media corporations. The

Framers may not have anticipated modern business and media corporations...Yet television networks and major newspapers owned by media corporations have become the most important means of mass communication in modern times. The First Amendment was certainly not understood to condone the suppression of political speech in society's most salient media. It was understood as a response to the repression of speech and the press that had existed in England and the heavy taxes on the press that were imposed in the colonies...The great debates between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists over our founding document were published and expressed in the most important means of mass communication of that era—newspapers owned by individuals...At the founding, speech was open, comprehensive, and vital to society's definition of itself; there were no limits on the sources of speech and knowledge...The Framers may have been unaware of certain types of speakers or forms of communication, but that does not mean that those speakers and media are entitled to less First Amendment protection than those types of speakers and media that provided the means of communicating political ideas when the Bill of Rights was adopted...

When Government seeks to use its full power, including the criminal law, to command where a person may get his or her information or what distrusted source he or she may not hear, it uses censorship to control thought. This is unlawful. The First Amendment confirms the freedom to think for ourselves.

On the contrary, Justice Stevens for the minority wrote:

The majority's approach to corporate electioneering marks a dramatic break from our past. Congress has placed special limitations on campaign spending by corporations ever since the passage of the Tillman Act in 1907...We have unanimously concluded that this "reflects a permissible assessment of the dangers posed by those entities to the electoral process," ...and have accepted the "legislative judgment that the special characteristics of the corporate structure require particularly careful regulation" ... Court today rejects a century of history when it treats the distinction between corporate and individual campaign spending as an invidious novelty...Relying largely on individual dissenting opinions, the majority blazes through our precedents, overruling or disavowing a body of case law...The Court's ruling threatens to undermine the integrity of elected institutions across the Nation.

Debates over the role of money in campaigns, like in the *Citizens United* case, reveal the continuing tension between money and its sources versus democratic principles of competitive and fair elections.

Money, and we are talking about a lot of money, continues to flow into our political system. In our recent presidential campaign over \$1 billion dollars was spent. Though some might say compared to our \$6 billion spent annually on potato chips, electing a president is worth it.

Other campaign finance reforms have been suggested. The most frequently mentioned reform is replacing the current system of private money with publicly financed campaigns. This means that candidates would no longer need to solicit money. The federal government would underwrite the expenses of all national campaigns. A variation of this reform involves the federal government matching privately raised money. If a candidate chooses to accept federal money for their campaign they also agree to abide by stricter limitations on how and when that money is spent. Because most candidates can now raise more money than the federal government provides, they often choose not to accept the federal matching funds.

Money has always been the mother's milk of politics. For the foreseeable future, it still is.

BIG IDEA: Civic participation in a representative democracy

5.16 Explain the media's role as a linkage institution.

When we talk about the media we are talking about the means of mass communication. We are talking about the way we receive the news. **The various forms of media provide citizens with political information and influence the ways in which they participate politically.** The media is an example of an important linkage institution. Media links the public and its elected officials. The media you and I now use to obtain our news is vastly different, even from a few years ago, its role, however, is still fundamentally important to a healthy democracy.

Freedom of the press, one of our most sacred rights, is guaranteed in the First Amendment. Famed newspaper publisher Joseph Pulitzer underscored the reason for such reverence best. He wrote:

“Our Republic and its press will rise and fall together. An able, disinterested, public spirited press, with trained intelligence to know the right and courage to do it can preserve that public virtue without which popular government is a sham and mockery. A cynical, mercenary, demagogic press will produce in time a people as base as itself. The power to mold the future of the republic will be in the hands of the journalists of future generations.”

And these hands, once reserved for trained journalists using print media, have now come to include anyone with a phone or Internet connection. Whereas media once was reserved for newspapers, radio and television today media has grown increasingly digital, social and mobile. There are many different formats, platforms and devices that deliver news. Media consultants tell us that we expect our news to be “portable, personalized and participatory.”

Despite all of these changes, it is not uncommon for every day common Americans to hold the media in contempt. The American polity can often be heard saying – “Blame the media.” Vast majorities of citizens believe news sources are biased in their coverage. The relationship between journalists and politicians as well is a love-hate relationship. Politicians love journalists when their work assists in building positive public opinion. No modern campaign can be successful without positive coverage in the press. Yet the love does not last long. Journalists love to expose faults. Soon into any elective official's term journalists begin to expose apparent weaknesses.

These revolutionary changes have not affected the basic roles played by the media in today's political arena. We expect fair and honest reporting, investigative journalism, election coverage and political commentary. Whether it was two hundred years ago or today our independent media has played and continues to play the following roles:

GATEKEEPER. The media serves as gatekeeper. The emphasis played by a headline or lead story push public discourse. What we talk about everyday is in no small way a by-product of the national and local media coverage. It can be said that mainstream media is an agenda setter.

SCOREKEEPER. The media is characterized by horse-race journalism. Our cultural attention deficit has impacted the way we learn about the news. Media is less likely to cover stories in depth. Rather they take

short cuts by simply telling us who the winners and losers are. Analysis may be wanting but we know more quickly the score of our most current campaigns.

WATCHDOG. This role has grown to be the single most important function of the media today. When serving as our watchdog, we count on the media to expose political scandals. The media serves in this role the important function of a check on our elected officials. Today's media can be described as a junkyard dog. The most salacious of stories now gain the greatest audience. Muckraking has always been a national pastime.

Media plays an important role in providing citizens with political information, including news events, investigative journalism, elections coverage, and political commentary. Though there have been many changes in how media delivers political information, it continues to link every day citizens to a government designed to be responsive to the will of the people.

5.17 Explain how increasingly diverse choices of media and communication outlets influence political institutions and behavior.

American government and politics has always given a preferred position to free speech and free press. Our First Amendment rights demand free and independent channels of communication. The Supreme Court said as much in the case *Associated Press v. United States* (1945):

...The indirect possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public.

From the earliest days of our representative democracy we took measures to assure diverse channels of communication. As early as 1792 our Postal service subsidized newspaper distributions. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) consistently has regulated against concentrated control of broadcast ownership. But most importantly, today we are experiencing an uninhibited Information Revolution.

Today's global citizen has access to an unprecedented number of media options and outlets. Political participation is influenced by a variety of media coverage. Newspapers, radio and television continue to provide political communication but we now have access to electronic media outlets too numerous to count. The Internet provides an unparalleled number and variety of means to get educated about policy and to exchange ideas. These choices polarize our preferences in new ways.

Political scientists rightfully hesitate to simply blame our polarized politics on partisan media outlets. They suggest, "Greater media choice polarized elections even before choices began to include more partisan news and opinion formats." We have become more polarized, in part, because we pay less attention to political messaging. Electronic media has provided us with more distractions. We have access to new forms of mobile entertainment. Well over 150 million watch the Super Bowl while less than 2 million turn on a cable news program each night. The least informed citizenry in history might characterize this Information Age.

Cable news, talk radio and the Internet have brought more partisan formats into our daily lives. An objective press was probably never a realized standard. Democratic debates along with levels of political knowledge are now at our fingertips. Because of increased media choices, we select the information we like. Ideologically oriented programming along with consumer driven media outlets increasingly make centrist policy choices elusive. Increasingly we struggle with the uncertainty over the credibility of news sources and information. There are indeed consequences for our insatiable desire for more and more media options.

Presciently forecasting about the future of electronic media, Zbigniew Brzezinski opined about the coming of a Technetronic Era:

The technotronic era involves the gradual appearance of a more controlled society. Such a society would be dominated by an elite, unrestrained by traditional values. Soon it will be possible to assert almost continuous surveillance over every citizen and maintain up-to-date complete files containing even the most personal information about the citizen. These files will be subject to instantaneous retrieval by the authorities...

...In the technotronic society the trend would seem to be towards the aggregation of the individual support of millions of uncoordinated citizens, easily within the reach of magnetic and attractive personalities exploiting the latest communications techniques to manipulate emotions and control reason.

Sounding a bit like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931), the development, implications and consequences of modern media is changing our politics in ways we are still trying to process. One thing is certain, with unprecedented numbers of media options available to all of us, "we the people" have increasingly taken on the role of gatekeeper. Whether or not this advances public policy to a higher ground is subject to debate. Stay tuned.

Throughout this course we have studied the ark of power. It has been an appraisal of American government and politics. Life is a power struggle. Collectively government reflects how we as a people resolve that struggle. The essence of our government has been codified in the words of the United States Constitution. Our limited government was and is rooted in historical tradition, theory, conflict and compromise. Both the writers of our constitution and the vast majority of voters today have settled upon a representative democracy. **A balance between governmental power and individual rights has been a hallmark of American political development.** Political disputes invariably collide at the intersection of power and rights, legitimacy and authority. If "we the people" are to overcome life's struggles together, if our democracy is to succeed at all, it will depend upon putting into practice the knowledge and skills learned here.

Our biggest ideas, as studied here, include:

1. **CONSTITUTIONALISM:** *The U.S. Constitution establishes a system of checks and balances among branches of government and allocates power between federal and state governments. This system is based on the rule of law that seeks to balance majority rules with minority rights.*
2. **LIBERTY AND ORDER:** *Governmental laws and policies balancing order and liberty are based on the U.S. Constitution and have been interpreted over time.*
3. **CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN A REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY:** *Popular sovereignty, individualism, and republicanism are important considerations of U.S. laws and policy-making and assume citizens will engage and participate.*
4. **COMPETING POLICY-MAKING INTERESTS:** *Multiple actors and institutions interact to produce and implement possible policies.*
5. **METHODS OF POLITICAL ANALYSIS:** *Through various types of analyses political scientists measure how U.S. political behavior, attitudes, and ideologies are shaped by a number of factors over time.*

The words of the wise seem appropriate here: *Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.* Look forward to exercising your voice in our political process. Act on your political sentiments even today. A two hundred year old document has empowered you. Here we have no kings, just citizens.