

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



Chapter 18 Voting and Elections

Lesson 2 Influences on Voters

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What factors influence voters and election campaigns?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

occupation a job; a vocation

predict to tell in advance of an event

Content Vocabulary

midterm election a Congressional election that takes place halfway through the president's term in office

legislative referendum a special election in which the legislature refers a measure to the voters for their approval

popular referendum a special election in which voters can vote to approve or repeal the laws passed by the legislature

initiative a method by which citizens propose a constitutional law or amendment

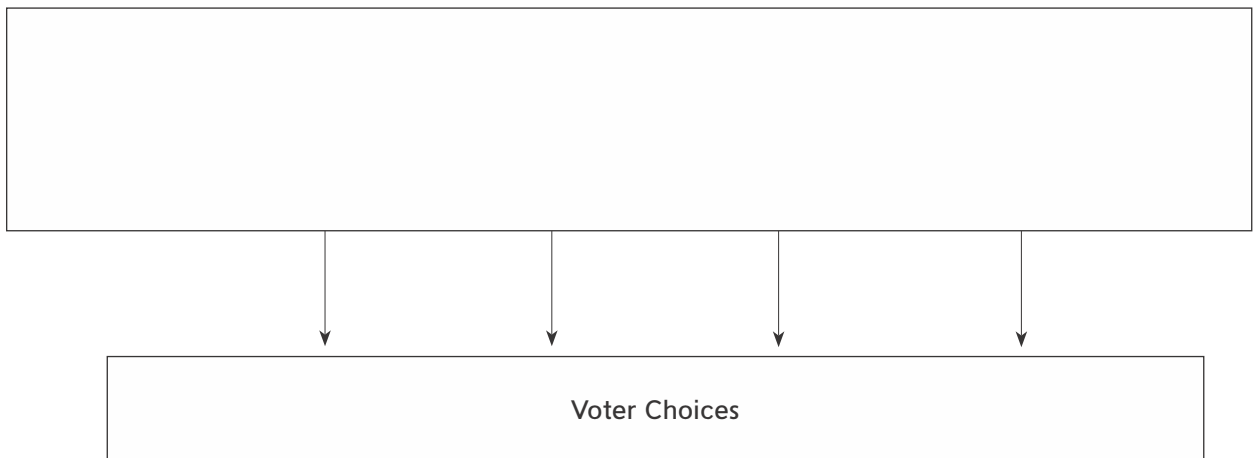
cross-pressured voter a voter who is caught between conflicting elements in his or her identity

straight party ticket a ticket where a voter has selected candidates of his or her own party only

TAKING NOTES: *Key Ideas and Details*

EXPLAINING Use this graphic organizer to identify the major influences on voting choices.

Influences on voting choices



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**networks**

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ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What factors influence voters and election campaigns?

To cast an informed vote, you need to know how to choose your elected officials and how candidates and campaigns attempt to persuade you and other voters. What qualities, skills, or experiences do you look for in a candidate? Rank the following qualifications.

- Job experience in government or specific fields
- Age
- Gender
- Education level
- Health
- Party affiliation
- Personality
- Stance on specific issues
- Chance of winning

Discuss and compare your rank order with several of your classmates. Based on your discussion, would you change the order? If so, what persuaded you to switch your priorities?

The Structure of Elections

Guiding Question *How do election cycles, term limits, and ballot issues influence voting?*

Both federal and state guidelines structure the U.S. electoral system. Voter choices at the polls are influenced by election cycles, term limits for elected officials, and ballot issues.

Election Cycles

The Constitution dictates the length of the terms of members of Congress, the president, and the vice president. Members of the House of Representatives serve two-year terms. Senators have a six-year term and the president serves a four-year term.

The federal election cycle ensures that the whole government will not change to new people all at the same time. Federal elections are held every two years for members of Congress. Every house member and one-third of the U.S. senators stand for election at this time. We have a presidential election every four years. Congressional elections held in the middle of a president's term are called **midterm elections**.

The Constitution says that states may determine the time, place, and manner of elections. However, Congress may make or change those regulations at any time. Since 1845, Election Day has been on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

States determine the dates of their elections. Most states hold their state general elections on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. This means the state election would be on the same day as the federal election. Doing this helps the states save money. It is also more convenient for voters. It increases the number of people who will vote. States also have the power to determine the length of terms for their governor, legislators, and other state officials.

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Exploring The Essential Question

Applying Find out the term lengths of office holders in your state. Are there limits on the number of terms a candidate can serve? Which offices are being contested in the next election? Who are the incumbents in those offices?

Term Limits

The Twenty-second Amendment limits a president to two terms. The Constitution does not limit the number of terms a member of Congress can serve. There have been proposals to limit their terms. However, efforts to amend the Constitution to impose term limits have failed.

Some officials on the state and local level also have term limits. Governors in 36 states are limited in the number of terms they may serve. Legislators and a few locally elected officials also face term limits in some states. Officials may serve more than one term if the terms are not consecutive in some cases.

Supporters say term limits reduce corruption. They also say that term limits remove the advantages current officials have in re-election campaigns. Supporters argue that term limits reduce the difficulty and stress of campaigning for people in elected positions. Opponents say that term limits force more experienced leaders out of office. Opponents think these more experienced leaders would be better officials if they were allowed to stay in office. Opponents also say corruption can happen in a system even with term limits. Opponents also think that voters should be the ones to decide if someone has been in office too long or has too much power. The voters can choose another candidate in the next election.

Ballot Questions

Many states also allow citizens to vote directly on issues or laws. The citizens vote in a popular referendum, a legislative referendum, or an initiative. All of these measures are examples of direct democracy, where voters have a more direct say in their own laws.

A **legislative referendum** is when the legislature refers a measure to the voters for their approval. A **popular referendum** is when voters gather signatures to put specific laws passed by the legislature on the ballot. Citizens can vote to approve or repeal the laws. An **initiative** is when voters who gather enough signatures can place their own proposed laws or state constitutional amendments on the ballot. Successful initiatives can either force a state legislature to consider an issue or can avoid the legislature completely. Voters have approved or rejected bans on abortion, same-sex marriage, tax increases, and collective bargaining by public employee unions using the initiative or referendum process in various states.

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Reading Progress Check

Explaining What are some arguments in favor of term limits? What are some arguments against term limits?

Exploring The Essential Question

Identifying Perspectives Interview two adults who voted in the last election. Ask them who they voted for and to explain the influences that led them to vote for that candidate. Ask them about their party affiliation, family influences, and other aspects of their personal background. Then write a paragraph summarizing the traits of the people you interviewed and identifying possible influences on their candidate choice.

Voters' Election Choices

Guiding Question *How do personal backgrounds, party loyalty, candidate image, and campaign issues influence voters?*

There are four major factors that tend to direct voters' election choices. They are the personal background of the voter, the degree of loyalty to a political party, issues in the campaign, and the voter's perception of the candidates. These factors help determine whether a citizen will vote and who he or she will vote for.

Personal Background

Voters' personal backgrounds affect their decisions. A person's background includes such things as family, age, education, religion, **occupation** (job), income level, where they live, and general attitude about life.

Think about how a person's age might affect his or her vote. A 68-year-old senior citizen might prefer a candidate who promised an increase in Social Security payments. Compare that senior citizen with someone much younger. A voter who is 23 might not want more money deducted from her paycheck for Social Security and vote against this candidate.

Geography may also affect how someone votes. People who live in cities may be more likely to vote for a candidate who wants to invest in public transportation. People who live in more rural areas may

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not need public transportation. They might not vote for that candidate. The U.S. population is becoming more urban and suburban. This change could affect how people vote.

Individuals may have several traits that match them with different positions on issues or candidates. For this reason, it is difficult to **predict**, or tell in advance, how they will vote. These **cross-pressured voters** face conflicting pressures from different elements of their identity. Those elements could be their religion, ethnicity, income level, or peer group. For example, Latino Catholics are generally more inclined to vote Democratic than Republican. Suppose that a Latino Catholic voter is strongly opposed to same-sex marriage. Opposition to same-sex marriage is a position often taken by Republicans. How might this person vote? Can you think of any cross-pressures that you might be faced with when voting?

Party Loyalty

Another influence on voters' decisions is their loyalty to one of the political parties. A voter's lack of loyalty to one of the political parties can also be important. The majority of American voters consider themselves either Republicans or Democrats. Most voters vote for their party's candidates.

Strong party voters are those who select their party's candidates without caring about the specific issues or candidates in any specific election. Strong party voters usually vote a **straight party ticket**. This means that they choose all candidates from their party on the ballot.

Weak party voters are different from strong party voters. Weak party voters are more likely to change their votes based on the issues or candidates. People who do not identify with a specific party are known as *independent voters*. In the 2008 election, about 40 percent of the voters were either independent or weak party voters. These voters are important in presidential elections because the strong party voters from both major parties usually balance each other out. Candidates often adjust their messages to attract independent voters.

Candidate Qualifications and Image

Voters look for a variety of qualifications in candidates for local, state, or national office. Some voters want to know if candidates have specific experience in government. They might also want to know if the candidate was an entrepreneur or a business leader. Other voters are looking for someone who is new to politics or has a new viewpoint. Some voters might want a presidential candidate to have experience in the military. It might be important for a candidate for statewide office to have lived and worked in that state for a long time. Some voters might want a candidate with an impressive education. Other voters prefer a candidate whose experiences more closely match their own.

Candidates do their best to portray an image they believe voters value. Candidates want to appear to be strong and trustworthy leaders. Candidates may want their opponents to appear weak or unprepared for the job. Campaigns help candidates improve their messages and images to appeal to potential voters. Political parties and interest groups are also part of this process.

Issues

Today's voters have more opportunities to become better informed about a candidate's stand on issues than the voters of earlier years. This is due to advances in education and access to new media technology. However, many voters are still not informed about all of the issues in a campaign. Voters are usually most concerned with issues that directly affect them. In the past, important issues have included Social Security, health care, taxes, education, affirmative action, abortion, gun rights, and the environment. Different issues are important to different groups of people and in different

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geographic areas. For example, voters in the West might be much more concerned with water rights and resource management. Rural voters might be more concerned with aid to farmers.



Reading Progress Check

Assessing Compare the influence of party loyalty and candidate image on voters' choices. Which do you think is more important? Why?

Voter Participation

Guiding Question *Who votes in U.S. elections?*

The percentage of Americans voting in presidential elections declined from about 69 percent in 1964 to 56 percent in 2012. Even fewer Americans vote in congressional, state, and local elections. For example, in 2010 about 41 percent of the voting age population cast a ballot. Voter participation in the United States is quite low compared to many other democracies around the world.

Why People Don't Vote

Why is it that so many eligible Americans do not go to the polls? One major reason is our complicated registration practices. In most European nations, the government automatically registers every eligible citizen to vote. In the United States, each citizen is responsible for registering to vote. Voters in the United States must also re-register if they move.

Another reason few people vote has to do with the changing role of political parties. Parties used to help people find jobs, places to live, and interact with government agencies. They no longer do many of those things. As a result, parties may be less successful in their voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts than in years past.

The large number of elections we hold can cause low voter turnout. The United States holds twice as many national elections as other Western democracies and even more at the state and local level. Americans might vote for governors, lieutenant governors, state treasurers, public utility commissioners, judges, sheriffs, school board members, and more. All this voting requires a lot of time and attention.

New laws passed in several states require voters to show photo identification (ID). These laws are very controversial and may affect future voter turnout. Many Republican lawmakers argue that the laws are needed to prevent voter fraud. Supporters say that photo ID is necessary for many parts of modern life. Many Democrats argue that voter fraud is only a very small problem. They oppose the laws because they say it makes it much harder for people without a photo ID to exercise their right to vote. Those without photo ID are often poor, minority, and elderly people who vote Democratic.

The Voting Rights Act designated certain states and communities where voter discrimination had occurred in the past. This meant that those places needed special attention. The law gave the federal government the authority to approve or disapprove changes in voting laws or procedures in those

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The logo for 'networks' features the word 'networks' in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic of a network or starburst, consisting of several thin lines radiating from a central point, with some lines extending further outwards.

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states and communities. The federal government has used this power to prevent some state and local voter ID laws from taking effect. For example, in 2012 a federal lower court blocked a Texas voter ID law. The court said that the law was unfair to Hispanics and African Americans and that it put burdens on poor, minority voters.

In 2013 the Supreme Court declared parts of the Voting Rights Act that determined which places needed federal pre-approval to be unconstitutional. In effect, it removed the requirement that states seek permission before changing voting laws. Several previously covered states put voter ID laws into effect.

Increasing Voter Turnout

Citizens who vote regularly have positive attitudes toward government and citizenship. Some researchers study voting habits. They say that education, age, and income are all important factors in predicting which citizens will vote. The more education a citizen has, the more likely it is that he or she will vote regularly. Middle-aged citizens have the highest voting turnout of all age groups.

People who are concerned about the low percentage of people who vote have called for reforms to make voting more convenient. One suggestion is to move Election Day from Tuesday to Saturday or Sunday. Another suggestion is to leave the polls open for several days and for longer hours. Another idea is to have a national registration system. Then people's registrations would follow them when they moved to a new state. Some areas are already trying early voting or making absentee balloting easier in order to encourage participation.



Reading Progress Check

Summarizing What are some of the barriers to voting in the United States?
