10 Elections and Campaigns

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- ☑ What is the difference between a primary election and a general election?
- ☑ Does the federal government provide funding for political campaigns?
- ☑ How do voters typically decide on a candidate?

WHO GOVERNS?

1. How do American elections determine the kind of people who govern us?
2. What matters most in deciding who wins presidential and congressional elections?

TO WHAT ENDS?

1. Do elections make a real difference in what laws get passed?

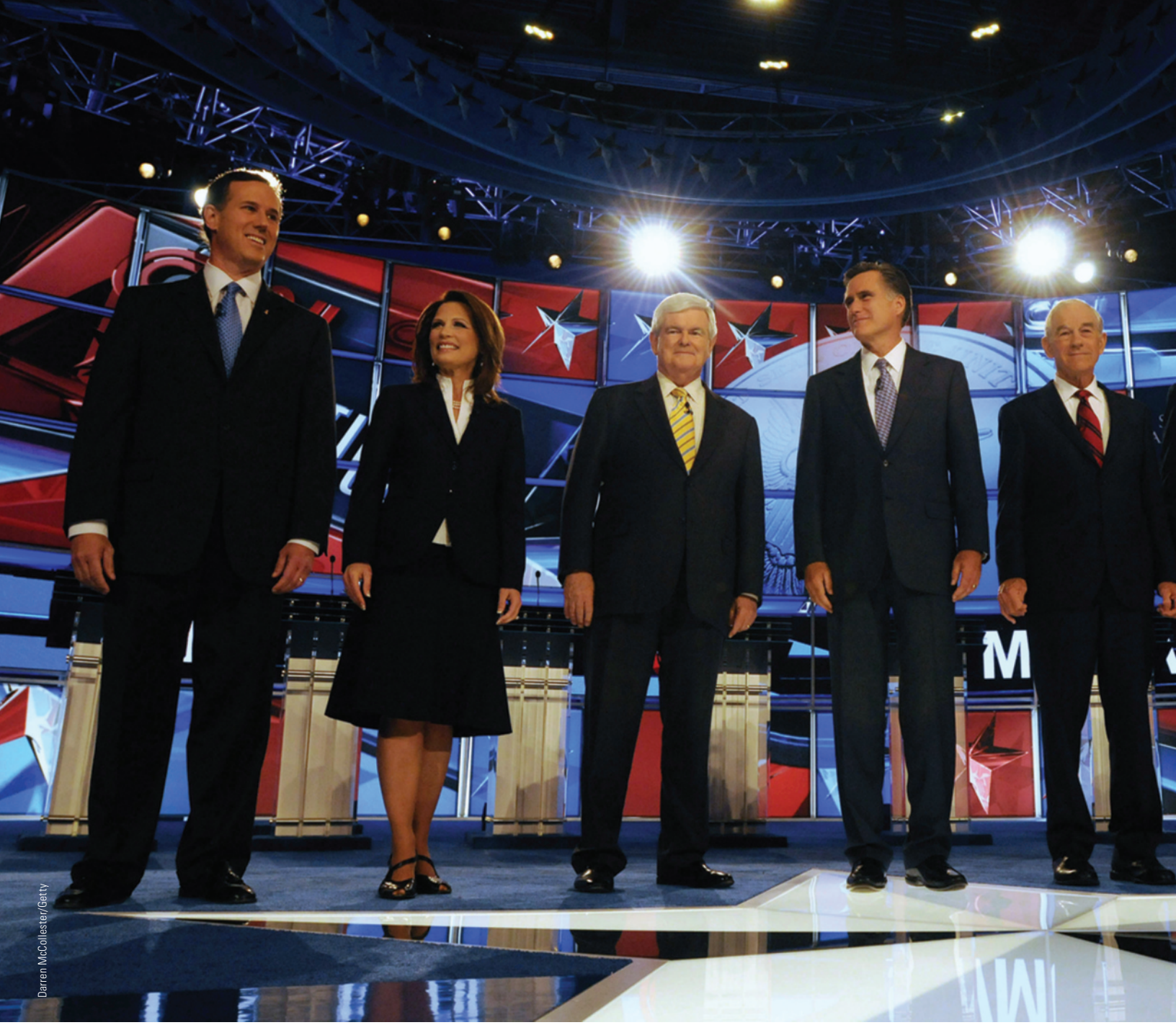
National elections in the United States in the 21st century would be virtually unrecognizable to politicians in the early republic. As we saw in Chapter 9, political parties once determined, or powerfully influenced, who got nominated. In the 19th century, the members of Congress from a given caucus would meet to pick their presidential candidate. After the caucuses were replaced by the national nominating conventions, the real power was wielded by local party leaders, who came together (sometimes in the legendary "smoke-filled rooms") to choose the candidate, whom the rest of the delegates would then endorse. Congressional candidates were also often hand-picked by local party bosses. Most people voted a straight party ticket. This system endured until well into the 20th century.

THEN In 1968, Vice President Hubert Humphrey won the Democratic presidential nomination without competing in a single state primary. His party's bosses pretty much delivered the nomination to him. He competed in a three-way race for president without having to raise nearly as much money as candidates routinely do today. (He lost in a close race to Republican Richard M. Nixon.)

In 1988, Vice President George H. W. Bush won the Republican presidential nomination. He had to win primaries and raise tens of millions of dollars. His party's leaders played a big role in his campaign, but so did consultants, pollsters, and others with no traditional ties to the party organization. (He won in a landslide over Democrat Michael Dukakis.) Still, even his 1988 campaign would not be close to presidential politics in 2008.

NOW The 2008 presidential sweepstakes started in 2006. By early 2007, more than a dozen candidates had come forward, and at least one had declared and then dropped out. For the first time in four-score years, neither a sitting president nor a sitting vice president was in the race. With hundreds of days left to go before election day in November 2008, several frontrunners were each on their way to raising around $100 million. While the 2012 presidential race would not have the same early start, since no incumbent was running for reelection and only one party would hold nominating contests, the cost of participating in those contests would almost certainly match or exceed the 2008 figure.

Many things have changed, but the key changes are related to one another: parties are less important; media (or "media buys") are more important; polling is ubiquitous; and money—or the nonstop fundraising that keeps it coming—matters more than ever.



Darren McCollester/Getty

Campaigns Today

With the parties' ability to control nominations weakened, candidates are now pretty much on their own. Most, however, do not go it alone. Rather, they hire people to perform several separate but related campaign tasks:[1]

- *Media consultants* who create advertisements and buy airtime from stations and networks.
- *Direct-mail firms* that design and produce mailings to promote the candidate or solicit money.
- *Polling firms* to survey voters on their attitudes toward issues and candidates and to run focus groups.
- *Political technology firms* to supply services such as Web site design, online advertising, online fundraising, and voter-targeting.

To pay for all this help, today's candidates must raise and spend enormous sums of money. As Table 10.1 shows, in the 2010 midterm elections, all candidates for national office raised and spent more than $1.8 billion: more than $1 billion in House races, and about $765 million `in Senate races. These campaign finance sums are unprecedented.

In the 2004 elections, all candidates for national office raised and spent "only" about $1.85 billion; the leap to more than $3.7 billion in the 2010 congressional

Table 10.1 The 2010 Midterm Elections: Money Raised and Spent

	Total Raised	Total Spent
House Candidates	$ 1,102,340,257	$ 1,094,911,271
Senate Candidates	$ 766,716,134	$ 764,967,246
Total, All Candidates	$ 1,869,056,391	$ 1,859,878,517

Source: Federal Election Commission, 2010 House and Senate Campaign Finance Summary.

Table 10.2 Presidential Fundraising and Expenditures, 1976–2008

			Percent change from previous election	
Year	$ Raised	$ Spent	Raised	Spent
1976	$171 million	$70 million	–%	–%
1980	$162 million	$92 million	–5.2	+31.4
1984	$202 million	$104 million	+24.6	+13.0
1988	$324 million	$211 million	+60.3	+102.6
1992	$331 million	$192 million	–00.9	–9.00
1996	$426 million	$240 million	+28.7	+25.0
2000	$529 million	$343 million	+24.1	+42.9
2004	$881 million	$718 million	+66.6	+109
2008	$1.81 billion	$1.76 billion	+105	+145
1976–2008 Increase	+$1.63 billion	+$1.69 billion	+853	+2,314
Inflation-Adjusted	+$436 million	+$452 million	+255	+645

Source: Adapted from Federal Election Commission summary reports, January 2009 and May 2009. Dollar figures rounded. Inflation adjustment keyed to consumer price index 1976–2008, 3.74 (i.e., assumes that what cost $1.00 in 1976 cost $3.74 in 2008).

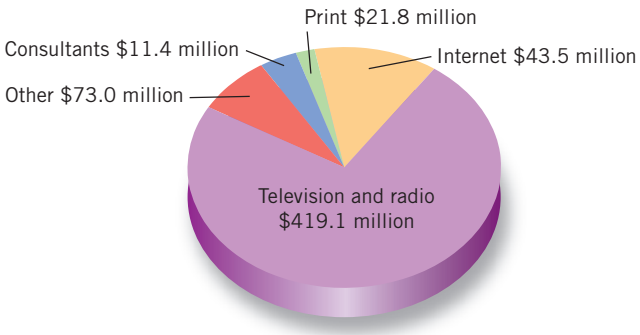
elections more than doubled that amount, and the 2010 figure does not even include costs for a presidential election. Presidential campaign fundraising and expenditures more than doubled between 2004 and 2008; presidential campaign spending in 2008 (about $1.81 billion) rivaled total 2004 House, Senate, and presidential campaign spending (about $1.85 billion). As Table 10.2 shows, even adjusted for inflation, the amounts of money raised and spent by presidential candidates have exploded since 1976.

Today's presidential candidates spend more on media consultants, television and radio ads, and diverse other forms of "media messages" than on any other category of campaign expenses. For example, 2008 presidential candidates spent about $569 million on media, representing about 31 percent of all their campaign expenditures (see Figure 10.1).

With so much money spent by candidates for media outlets and media consultants, you might think there is clear and convincing evidence that media exposure makes a critical difference in who wins elections, or that some types of televised appeals work better than others, or both.

Figure 10.1

2008 Presidential Campaigns' Spending on Media



Total: $568.8 million

Source: Federal Election Commission summary reports, May 2009. Figures rounded.

But you would be wrong. About the only safe generalization one can presently make on the subject is not that "media buys" matter, but how common it is for today's candidates to purchase political ads embodying emotional appeals.

A comprehensive 2006 study carefully analyzed thousands of political ads broadcast from 1999 through 2004.[2] A plurality, it found, were purposely designed (everything from the images used to the music playing in the background) to appeal mainly to voters' fears (impending war, losing a job, and so on). A smaller but significant fraction was more focused on stirring positive emotions (patriotism and community pride). You might suppose that candidates favor ads that appeal to such emotions because they are particularly effective in reaching voters who know little and care less about politics.

Once again, you would be wrong. The political ads, televised and other, that appealed to emotion (fear or enthusiasm, mainly) wielded the greatest influence over voters with the greatest interest in politics and the most information about government.[3] Still, experts do not know how or whether televised political ads influence election outcomes.

BETTER OR WORSE?

There is less mystery in political polling than in trying to determine how campaign ads affect election results. Today, even many candidates running in relatively low-budget local races do extensive pre- and post-election voter polling, and often use the results to shape television ads, other campaign communications, positions on the issues, and even what words candidates repeat (or eschew) and how they dress when in public.

It is, however, still only in the national political big leagues that many candidates do extensive polling designed not merely to test voters' existing attitudes, but also to discover how to change them. And it is still only in presidential races and especially well-funded contests for Congress (mostly for the Senate) that sophisticated surveys, much like those traditionally done by big corporations to identify markets where their goods or services are especially likely to sell, are used to mobilize voters.

In the elections of 2004, 2006, and again in 2008, these survey techniques "micro-targeted" people by using data about their consumer and recreational habits (small car or SUV, drink high-cost coffees or cheap brews, like watching professional sports or loathe it, and more). In 2008, micro-targeting software, databases, and techniques became highly refined and were used intensively by both the Obama and the McCain presidential campaigns.[4]

Of course, it is one thing to know where "your voters" are, but quite another thing to reach them through door-to-door drives like the ones that once were the political parties' chief stock-in-trade. In 2008, both parties' national leaders stressed building or expanding grassroots get-out-the-vote organizations not dissimilar from those that, precinct by precinct, once dominated election days in most American cities. Such "high-tech canvassing," if it continues, may yet re-create something somewhat like the party organizations of old.

Patrick Caddell pioneered present-day political polling techniques when he served as Jimmy Carter's consultant in the mid-1970s. By the time Ronald Reagan followed Carter as president in 1980, pollsters like Caddell were the new political bosses, at least in presidential campaigns. As veteran political reporter Joe Klein has reflected, when they "endorsed" a candidate, "fund-raising, media buzz, and support from the party's special interests suddenly became easier."[5]

In 2006, republican presidential hopeful Senator John McCain hired into his campaign political consultants who had previously worked against him and developed harshly negative ads that he had in years past objected to as dishonest (and worse). But nobody who knows how the game is played today was really surprised. Today, candidates in both parties, whether ideologically liberal, conservative, or in between, routinely practice what the political professionals preach and purchase what they produce.

This is the main reason for the unceasing spiral in campaign spending, and hence for the fact that "campaigning" has become largely synonymous with "fundraising." Candidates for major offices have two top needs: money for television ads, followed by time for fundraising to generate the cash needed to pay for the ads.[6] Once elected, the permanent fundraising campaign continues for House members, and almost as much for senators and even for the president (who, especially when popular, also makes many trips to raise money for his party's candidates).

The American Association for Political Consultants (AAPC) is a trade association. In 1980, it had about 50 members. By 1990, it had around 700 members. Today, it has more than 1,100 members representing a campaign industry with more than 2,500 firms.[7] The industry's expansion coincided with decreased political participation, and—the only development that can definitely be laid at its door—a dramatic rise in negative, slick, and super-costly political ads. If that leads you to wonder whether, all told, campaigns were better for democracy when party bosses in smoke-filled rooms were more common than political consultants in high-tech firms, you are not alone.

HERE AND ABROAD

Even the best American political consultants probably would have trouble exporting their wares. A campaign plan that will work here would be useless in almost any other democratic nation; one that would work abroad would be useless here.

Unlike in many other democratic nations, in America, elections have not one but two crucial phases—getting nominated and getting elected. Getting nominated means getting your name on the ballot. In the great majority of states, winning your party's nomination for either the presidency or Congress requires an *individual* effort—*you* decide to run, *you* raise money, *you* and your friends collect signatures to get your name on the ballot, and *you* appeal to voters in primary elections on the basis of your personality and your definition of the issues. In most European nations, winning your party's nomination for parliament involves an *organizational* decision—*the party* looks you over, *the party* decides whether to allow you to run, and *the party* puts your name on its list of candidates.

American political parties do play a role in determining the outcome of the final election, but even that role involves parties more as labels in the voters' minds than as organizations that get out the vote. By contrast, many other democratic nations conduct campaigns almost entirely as a contest between parties as organizations. In Israel and the Netherlands, the names of the candidates for the legislature do not even appear on the ballot; only the party names are listed there. And even where candidate names are listed, as in Great Britain, the voters tend to vote "Conservative" or "Labour" more than they vote for Smith or Jones. European nations (except France) do not have a directly elected president; instead, the head of the government—the prime minister—is selected by the party that has won the most seats in parliament.

incumbent
The person already holding an elective office.

g36/g36/ZUMA Press/Newscom

Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska held onto her seat in 2010 despite losing the Republican primary—she successfully ran in the general election as a write-in candidate, the first person to do this in any state since 1954.

Presidential versus Congressional Campaigns

Presidential and congressional races differ in important ways. The most obvious, of course, is size: more voters participate in the former than the latter contests, and so presidential candidates must work harder and spend more. But there are some less obvious differences that are equally important.

First, presidential races are more competitive than those for the House of Representatives. In the 39 elections from 1932 to 2008 the Republicans won control of the House only eight times (20 percent of the time); in the 20 presidential elections during the same period the Republicans won the White House on nine occasions (45 percent of the time). In the typical presidential race, the winner gets less than 55 percent of the two-party vote; in the typical House race, the **incumbent** wins with over 60 percent of the vote.

Second, a much smaller proportion of people vote in congressional races during off years (that is, when there is no presidential contest) than vote for president. This lower turnout (around 36 percent of the voting-age population) means that candidates in congressional races must be appealing to the more motivated and partisan voter.

Third, members of Congress can do things for their constituents that a president cannot. They take credit—sometimes deserved, sometimes not—for every grant, contract, bridge, canal, and highway that the federal government provides the district or state. They send letters (at the government's expense) to large factions of their constituents and visit their districts every weekend. Presidents get little credit for district improvements and must rely on the mass media to communicate with voters.

Fourth, a candidate for Congress can deny that he or she is responsible for "the mess in Washington," even when the candidate is an incumbent. Incumbents tend to run as individuals, even to the point of denouncing the very Congress of which they are a part. An incumbent president cannot get away with this; rightly or wrongly, he often is held responsible for whatever has gone wrong, not only in the government but in the nation as a whole.

These last three factors—low voter turnout, services to constituents, and the ability to duck responsibility—probably help explain why so high a percentage of congressional incumbents get reelected. But they do not enjoy a completely free ride. Members of Congress who belong to the same party as the president often feel voters' anger about national affairs, particularly economic conditions. When the economy turns sour and a Republican is in the White House, Republican congressional candidates lose votes; if a Democrat is in the White House, Democratic congressional candidates lose votes.

coattails The alleged tendency of candidates to win more votes in an election because of the presence at the top of the ticket of a better-known candidate, such as the president.

At one time the **coattails** of a popular presidential candidate could help congressional candidates in his or her own party. But there has been a sharp decline in the value of presidential coattails; indeed, some scholars doubt they still exist.

The net effect of all these factors is that, to a substantial degree, congressional elections have become independent of presidential ones. Though economic factors may still link the fate of a president and some members of his or her party, by and large the incumbent members of Congress enjoy enough of a cushion to protect them against whatever political storms engulf an unpopular president. This fact further reduces the meaning of party—members of Congress can get reelected even though their party's "leader" in the White House has lost popular support, and nonincumbent candidates for Congress may lose despite the fact that a very popular president from their party is in the White House.

RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT

The first task facing anyone who wishes to be president is to get "mentioned" as someone who is of "presidential caliber." No one is quite sure why some people are mentioned and others are not. Journalist David Broder once suggested that somewhere there is "The Great Mentioner" who announces from time to time who is of presidential caliber (and only The Great Mentioner knows how big that caliber is).

But if The Great Mentioner turns out to be as unreal as the Easter Bunny, you have to figure out for yourself how to get mentioned. One way is to let it be known to reporters, "off the record," that you are thinking about running for president. Another is to travel around the country making speeches (Ronald Reagan, while working for General Electric, made a dozen or more speeches *a day* to audiences all over the country). Another way is to already have a famous name (John Glenn, the former astronaut, was in the public eye long before he declared for the presidency in 1984). Another way to get mentioned is to be identified with a major piece of legislation. Former Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey was known as an architect of the Tax Reform Act of 1986; Representative Richard Gephardt of Missouri was known as an author of a bill designed to reduce foreign imports. Still another way is to be the governor of a big state. Former New York governors, such as Mario Cuomo, often are viewed as presidential prospects, partly because New York City is the headquarters of the television and publishing industries.

Once you are mentioned, it is wise to set aside a lot of time to run, especially if you are only "mentioned" as opposed to being really well known. Ronald Reagan devoted the better part of six years to running; Walter Mondale spent four years campaigning; Howard Baker resigned from the Senate in 1984 to prepare to run in 1988 (he finally dropped out of the race). However, many post-1988 candidates—senators Bob Dole, John Kerry, John McCain, and Barack Obama; governors Michael Dukakis, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush; vice presidents George Bush and Al Gore; and House members Ron Paul and Dennis Kucinich—made the run while holding elective office.

Though presidential candidates come from various backgrounds, in general the voters tend to prefer those with experience as governors or military leaders rather than those who come immediately from Congress. Some candidates, such as John F. Kennedy, have been elected president directly after being a senator, but most are either war heroes (Dwight Eisenhower), former governors (George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, and Franklin D. Roosevelt), or former members of Congress who have already had experience as vice

Tomas Muscionico/Contact Press Images

Political campaigns are hard work, even when you get to fly on the vice president's airplane.

presidents (Gerald Ford, Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, and Harry Truman).

Money

One reason why running takes so much time is that it takes so long to raise the necessary money and build up an organization of personal followers. As we shall see later in this chapter, federal law restricts the amount that any single individual can give a candidate to $2,000 in each election. (A **political action committee,** or **PAC,** which is a committee set up by and representing a corporation, labor union, or other special-interest group, can give up to $5,000.) Moreover, to be eligible for federal matching grants to pay for your primary campaign, you must first raise at least $5,000, in individual contributions of $250 or less, in each of 20 states.

political action committee (PAC) A committee set up by a corporation, labor union, or interest group that raises and spends campaign money from voluntary donations.

Organization

Raising and accounting for money to campaign requires a staff of fundraisers, lawyers, and accountants. You also need a press secretary, a travel scheduler, an advertising specialist, a direct-mail company, and a pollster, all of whom must be paid, plus a large number of volunteers in at least those states that hold early primary elections or party caucuses. These volunteers will brief you on the facts of each state, try to line up endorsements from local politicians and celebrities, and put together a group of people who will knock on doors, make telephone calls, organize receptions and meetings, and try to keep you from mispronouncing the name of the town in which you are speaking. Finally, you have to assemble advisers on the issues. These advisers will write "position papers" for you on all sorts of things you are supposed to know about (but probably don't). Because a campaign usually is waged around a few broad themes, these position papers rarely get used or even read. The papers exist so you can show important interest groups that you have taken "sound" positions, so you can be prepared to answer tough questions, and so journalists can look up your views on matters that may become topical.

Strategy and Themes

Every candidate picks a strategy for the campaign. In choosing one, much depends on whether you are the incumbent. Incumbents must defend their records, like it or not. (An incumbent ran for president in 1964, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1992, 1996, and 2004.) The challenger attacks the incumbent. When there is no incumbent (as in 1960, 1968, 1988, 2000, and 2008), both candidates can announce their own programs; however, the candidate from the party that holds the White House must take, whether or not the candidate thinks he deserves it, some of the blame for whatever has gone wrong in the preceding four years. Within these limits, a strategy consists of the answers to questions about tone, theme, timing, and targets:

- What *tone* should the campaign have? Should it be a positive (build-me-up) or negative (attack-the-opponent) campaign? In 1988, George H. W. Bush began with a negative campaign; Michael Dukakis followed suit.
- What *theme* can I develop? A theme is a simple, appealing idea that can be repeated over and over again. For Jimmy Carter in 1976, it was "trust"; for Ronald Reagan in 1980, it was "competence" and in 1984, it was "it's morning again in America"; for Bush in 1988, it was "stay the course"; for Clinton in 1992, it was "we need to change"; for George W. Bush in 2000, it was "compassionate

Stephen Brashear/Getty Images

Barack Obama campaigned on the slogan "Change We Can Believe In."

conservatism"; for Barack Obama in 2008, it was "yes we can" and "change you can believe in."

- What should be the *timing* of the campaign? If you are relatively unknown, you will have to put everything into the early primaries and caucuses, try to emerge a frontrunner, and then hope for the best. If you are already the frontrunner, you may either go for broke early (and try to drive out all your opponents) or hold back some reserves for a long fight.
- Whom should you *target?* Only a small percentage of voters change their vote from one election to the next. Who is likely to change this time—unemployed steelworkers? Unhappy farmers? People upset by inflation?

GETTING ELECTED TO CONGRESS

A president cannot serve more than two terms, so at least once every eight years you have a chance of running against a nonincumbent; members of Congress can serve for an unlimited number of terms, and so chances are you will run against an incumbent. If you decide to run for the House, the odds are very much against you. Since 1962, over 90 percent of the House incumbents who sought reelection won it.

But the incredible incumbency advantage enjoyed by modern-day House members is hardly the whole story of getting elected to Congress. Who serves in Congress, and what interests are represented there, is affected by how its members are elected. Each state is entitled to two senators who serve six-year terms and at least one representative who serves a two-year term. How many more representatives a state has depends on its population; what local groups these representatives speak for depends in part on how the district lines are drawn.

The Constitution says very little about how representatives will be selected except to require that they be inhabitants of the states from which they are chosen. It says nothing about districts and originally left it up to the states to decide who would be eligible to vote for representatives. The size of the first House was set by the Constitution at 65 members, and the apportionment of the seats among the states was spelled out in Article I, section 2. From that point on, it has been up to Congress to decide how many representatives each state would have (provided that each had at least one).

Initially, some states did not create congressional districts; all their representatives were elected at large. In other states, representatives were elected from multimember as well as single-member districts. In time, all states with more than one representative elected each from a single-member district. How those district boundaries were drawn, however, could profoundly affect the outcomes of elections. There were two problems. One was **malapportionment,** which results from having districts of very unequal size. If one district is twice as populous as another, twice as many votes are needed in the larger district to elect a representative. Thus, a citizen's vote in the smaller district is worth twice as much as a vote in the larger.

malapportionment Drawing the boundaries of legislative districts so that they are unequal in population.

gerrymandering Drawing the boundaries of legislative districts in bizarre or unusual shapes to favor one party.

The other problem was **gerrymandering,** which means drawing a district boundary in some bizarre or unusual shape to make it easy for the candidate of one party to win election in that district. In a state entitled to 10 representatives, where half the voters are Democrats and half are Republicans, district lines could be drawn so that eight districts would have a slight majority of citizens from one party and two districts would have lopsided majorities from the other. Thus, it can be made easy for one party to win eight of the 10 seats.

Malapportionment and gerrymandering have been conspicuous features of American congressional politics. In 1962, for example, one district in Texas had nearly a million residents, while another had less than a quarter million. In California, Democrats in control of the state legislature drew district lines in the early 1960s so that two pockets of Republican strength in Los Angeles separated by many miles were connected by a thin strip of coastline. In this way, most Republican voters were thrown into one district, while Democratic voters were spread more evenly over several.

Hence, there are four problems to solve in deciding who gets represented in the House:

1. Establishing the total size of the House
2. Allocating seats in the House among the states
3. Determining the size of congressional districts within states
4. Determining the shape of those districts

By and large, Congress has decided the first two questions, and the states have decided the last two—but under some rather strict Supreme Court rules.

In 1911, Congress decided the House had become large enough and voted to fix its size at 435 members. There it has remained ever since (except for a brief

period when it had 437 members owing to the admission of Alaska and Hawaii to the Union in 1959). Once the size was decided, it was necessary to find a formula for performing the painful task of apportioning seats among the states as they gained and lost population. The Constitution requires such reapportionment every 10 years. A more or less automatic method was selected in 1929 based on a complex statistical system that has withstood decades of political and scientific testing. Since 1990, under this system 18 states have lost representation in the House and 11 have gained it. Florida and California posted the biggest gains, while New York and Pennsylvania suffered the largest losses (see Table 10.3).

The states did little about malapportionment and gerrymandering until ordered to do so by the Supreme Court. In 1964, the Court ruled that the Constitution requires districts be drawn so that, as nearly as possible, one person's vote would be worth as much as another's.[8] The Court rule, "one person, one vote," seems clear but in fact leaves a host of questions unanswered. How much deviation from equal size is allowable? Should other factors be considered besides population? (For example, a state legislature might want to draw district lines to make it easier for African Americans, Italian Americans, farmers, or some other group with a distinct interest to elect a representative; the requirement of exactly equal districts might make this impossible.) And the gerrymandering problem remains: districts of the same size can be drawn to favor one party or another. The courts have struggled to find answers to these questions, but they remain far from settled.

sophomore surge
An increase in the votes congressional candidates usually get when they first run for reelection.

Winning the Primary

However the district lines are drawn, getting elected to Congress first requires getting one's name on the ballot. At one time, the political parties nominated candidates and even printed ballots with the party slates listed on them. All the voter had to do was take the ballot of the preferred party and put it in the ballot box. Today, with rare exceptions, a candidate wins a party's nomination by gathering enough voter signatures to get on the ballot in a primary election, the outcome of which often is beyond the ability of political parties to influence. Candidates tend to form organizations of personal followings and win "their party's" nomination simply by getting more primary votes than the next candidate. It is quite unusual for an incumbent to lose a primary: from 1990 through 2008, only about 10 percent of incumbent senators and 5 percent of incumbent representatives seeking reelection failed to win renomination in primaries. These statistics suggest how little opportunity parties have to control or punish their congressional members.

Most newly elected members become strong in their districts very quickly; this is called the **sophomore surge.** It is the difference between the votes candidates get the first time they are elected (and thus

Table 10.3 Changes in State Representation in the House of Representatives

	Number of Seats			
States	**After 1990 Census**	**After 2000 Census**	**After 2010 Census**	**Change**
Gained/Maintained Seats				
Arizona	6	8	9	+3
California	52	53	53	+1
Florida	23	25	27	+4
Georgia	11	13	14	+3
North Carolina	12	13	13	+1
Texas	30	32	36	+6
Lost Seats				
Illinois	20	19	18	–2
Michigan	16	15	14	–2
New York	31	29	27	–4
Ohio	19	18	16	–3
Pennsylvania	21	19	18	–3

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

become freshman members) and the votes they get when they run for reelection (in hopes of becoming sophomore members). Before the 1960s, House candidates did not do much better the second time they ran. Beginning then, however, the sophomore surge kicked in, so that today freshman candidates running for reelection will get 8 to 10 percent more votes than when they were first elected. Senate candidates also benefit now from a sophomore surge, though to a lesser degree.

The reason for this surge is that members of Congress have figured out how to use their offices to run *personal* rather than party campaigns. They make use of free ("franked") mail, frequent trips home, radio and television broadcasts, and the distribution of services to their districts to develop among their constituents a good opinion of themselves, not their party. They also cater to their constituents' distrust of the federal government by promising to "clean things up" if reelected. They run *for* Congress by running *against* it.[9]

To the extent that they succeed, they enjoy great freedom in voting on particular issues and have less need to explain away votes that their constituents might not like. If, however, any single-issue groups are actively working in their districts for or against abortion, gun control, nuclear energy, or tax cuts, muting the candidates' voting record may not be possible.

Staying in Office

The way people get elected to Congress has two important effects. First, it produces legislators closely tied to local concerns (their districts, their states), and second, it ensures that party leaders will have relatively weak influence over them (because those leaders cannot determine who gets nominated for office).

The local orientation of legislators has some important effects on how policy is made. For example:

- Every member of Congress organizes his or her office to do as much as possible for people back home.
- If your representative serves on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, your state has a much better chance of getting a new bridge or canal than if you do not have a representative on this committee.[10]
- If your representative serves on the House Appropriations Committee, your district is more likely to get approval for a federal grant to improve your water and sewage-treatment programs than if your representative does not serve on that committee.[11]

Former House Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill had this in mind when he said, "All politics is local." Some people think this localism is wrong; in their view members of Congress should do what is best for "the nation as a whole." This argument is about the role of legislators: are they supposed to be *delegates* who do what their district wants or *trustees* who use their best judgment on issues without regard to the preferences of their district?

Naturally, most members are some combination of delegate and trustee, with the exact mix depending on the nature of the issue. But some, as we shall see, definitely lean one way or the other. All members want to be reelected, but "delegates" tend to value this over every other consideration and so seek out committee assignments and projects that will produce benefits for their districts. On the other hand, "trustees" will seek out committee assignments that give them a chance to address large questions, such as foreign affairs, that may have no implications at all for their districts.

Primary versus General Campaigns

When you run for federal office, you must run in two elections, not just one. The first consists of primary elections designed to choose each party's nominee, and the second is the general election that picks the winner who will hold office. If you are running for president, some states, such as Iowa, hold caucuses instead of primary elections. A caucus is a meeting of people, often in an auditorium or church basement, where they vote on who they would like for their party's nominee.

Each election or caucus attracts a different mix of voters. What may help you win a primary or a caucus may be very different from what will help you win the general election. To win a primary or a caucus, you must mobilize political activists who will give money, do volunteer work, and attend local caucuses. As we saw in Chapters 7 and 8, activists are more ideologically stringent than the voters at large. To motivate these activists, you must be more liberal (if you are a Democrat) in your tone and theme than rank-and-file Democrats, or more conservative (if you are a Republican) than rank-and-file Republicans.

Consider the caucuses held in Iowa in the winter preceding a presidential election year. This is the first real test of the candidates vying for the nomination. Anyone who does poorly here is at a disadvantage, in terms of media attention and

clothespin vote
The vote cast by a person who does not like either candidate and so votes for the less objectionable of the two, putting a clothespin over his or her nose to keep out the unpleasant stench.

position issue
An issue about which the public is divided and rival candidates or political parties adopt different policy positions.

contributor interest, for the rest of the campaign. The several thousand Iowans who participate in their parties' caucuses are not representative of the followers of their party in the state, much less nationally. In 1988, Senator Robert Dole came in first and evangelist Pat Robertson came in second in the Iowa Republican caucus, with Vice President George Bush finishing third. As it turned out, there was little support for Dole or Robertson in the rest of the country.

Democrats who participate in the Iowa caucus tend to be more liberal than Democrats generally. Moreover, the way the caucuses are run is a far cry from how most elections are held. To vote in the Republican caucus, you need not prove you are a Republican or even a voter. The Democratic caucus is not an election at all; instead, a person supporting a certain candidate stands in one corner of the room with people who also support that candidate, while those supporting other candidates stand in other corners with other groups. There is a lot of calling back and forth, intended to persuade people to leave one group and join another. No group with fewer than 15 percent of the people in attendance gets to choose any delegates, so people in these small groups then go to other, larger ones. It is a cross between musical chairs and fraternity pledge week.

Suppose you are a Democrat running for president and you do well in the Iowa caucus. Suppose you go on to win your party's nomination. Now you have to go back to Iowa to campaign for votes in the general election. Between 1940 and 2008, Iowa has voted Republican in every presidential election but seven (1948, 1964, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2008). Your Republican opponent is not going to let you forget all of the liberal slogans you uttered nine months before. The Republican candidate faces the mirror image of this problem—sounding very conservative to get support from Republican activists in states such as Massachusetts and New York and then having to defend those speeches when running against his or her Democratic opponent in those states.

The problem is not limited to Iowa but exists in every state where activists are more ideologically polarized than the average voter. To get activist support for the nomination, candidates move to the ideological extremes; to win the general election, they try to move back to the ideological center. The typical voter looks at the results and often decides that neither candidate appeals to him or her very much, and so casts a "**clothespin vote.**"

Early in the 2004 presidential caucuses and primaries, John Kerry claimed he was an opponent of the American invasion of Iraq in order to defeat Howard Dean, the Vermont governor who seemed to be capturing the antiwar vote among Democrats. But after he won his party's nomination, Kerry backed away from an antiwar stance in order to be more attractive to centrist voters. He had learned a lesson that George McGovern did not understand in 1972. McGovern maintained his liberal views on the war in Vietnam, decriminalizing marijuana, and providing amnesty for draft dodgers.[12] His opponent, Richard Nixon, defeated him easily by taking more centrist positions.

One last thing: if you decide to run for president as a Democrat, do not trust too much in the early polls indicating the frontrunner for the nomination. Edmund Muskie (1972), George Wallace (1976), Ted Kennedy (1980), Gary Hart (1988), Mario Cuomo (1992), and Joseph Lieberman (2004) were all early frontrunners among Democrats, but none got the party's nomination. Only frontrunners Walter Mondale (1984) and Al Gore (2000) prevailed (though neither went on to win the office). By contrast, since 1972, every early Republican frontrunner except one has won the nomination. In 2007, the Republican frontrunner was former New York City Mayor Rudolph Guiliani, and the Democratic frontrunner was then New York State Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. By early 2008, Guiliani faded, and Arizona Senator John McCain went on to win the Republican nomination. McCain lost the general election to Illinois Senator Barack Obama following Obama's protracted nomination battle with Clinton.

TWO KINDS OF CAMPAIGN ISSUES

In election campaigns, there are two different kinds of issues.[13] A **position issue** is one in which the rival candidates have opposing views on a question that also divides the voters. For example, in the 2008 election, John McCain wanted to let people put some of their Social Security money into private savings accounts; Barack Obama opposed this.

Since 1860, many of the great party realignments have been based on differing position issues. After the Civil War, the question was whether African Americans should be slaves or free. In the 1890s, it

How Things Work

Qualifications for Entering Congress and Privileges of Serving in Congress

Representative

- Must be 25 years of age (when seated, not when elected)
- Must have been a citizen of the United States for seven years
- Must be an inhabitant of the state from which elected (*Note:* Custom, but *not* the Constitution, requires that a representative live in the district that he or she represents.)

Senator

- Must be 30 years of age (when seated, not when elected)
- Must have been a citizen of the United States for nine years
- Must be an inhabitant of the state from which elected

Judging Qualifications

Each house is the judge of the "elections, returns, and qualifications" of its members. Thus, Congress alone can decide disputed congressional elections. On occasion, it has excluded a person from taking a seat on the grounds that the election was improper. Either house can punish a member—by reprimand, for example—or, by a two-thirds vote, expel a member.

Privileges

Members of Congress have certain privileges, the most important of which, conferred by the Constitution, is that "for any speech or debate in either house they shall not be questioned in any other place." This doctrine of "privileged speech" has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to mean that members of Congress cannot be sued or prosecuted for anything that they say or write in connection with their legislative duties.

When Senator Mike Gravel read the Pentagon Papers—some then-secret government documents about the Vietnam War—into the *Congressional Record* in defiance of a court order restraining their publication, the Court held that this was "privileged speech" and beyond challenge (*Gravel v. United States*, 408 U.S. 606, 1972). But when Senator William Proxmire issued a press release critical of a scientist doing research on monkeys, the Court decided the scientist could sue him for libel because a press release was not part of the legislative process (*Hutchinson v. Proxmire*, 443 U.S. 111, 1979).

valence issue
An issue about which the public is united and rival candidates or political parties adopt similar positions in hopes that each will be thought to best represent those widely shared beliefs.

was whether tariffs should be high or low and whether the dollar should be made cheaper. In the 1960s, it was whether broad new civil rights legislation was needed.

But sometimes voters are not divided on important issues. Instead, the question is whether a candidate fully supports the public's view on a matter about which nearly everyone agrees. These are called **valence issues.** For example, everybody wants a strong economy and low crime rates, and so no candidate favors high unemployment or more crime. What voters look for on valence issues is which candidate seems most closely linked to a universally shared view.

Valence issues are quite common. In 1968, Richard Nixon seemed more supportive of anticrime measures than his rival; in 1976, Jimmy Carter seemed more likely to favor honesty in government than his opponent; in 1984, Ronald Reagan seemed more closely identified with a strong economy than his opponent; in 1988, George H. W. Bush seemed more closely linked to patriotism than his opponent. Notice that we have said "seemed." This is how voters perceived the winners; it does not mean the opponents favored crime, corruption, unemployment, or anti-Americanism.

In 1992, Bill Clinton was beset with charges that he was guilty of dodging the draft, marital infidelity, and

smoking pot. But his strategists decided to focus the campaign on the valence issue of the economy, and they went about rescuing Clinton from the other criticisms. One observer later reported, "Retooling the image of a couple who had already been in the public eye for five battering months required a campaign of behavior modification and media manipulation so elaborate that its outline ran to 14 single-spaced pages."[14] Bill and Hillary Clinton made joint appearances on television during which they demonstrated their affection for each other. The plan even called for staging an event where Bill Clinton and his daughter would surprise Hillary Clinton on Mother's Day.[15]

The 2008 campaign relied on both valence issues (Obama and McCain supported "reforming" the health care system to make it more "affordable," while differing on many details related to government-paid health insurance) and position issues (McCain supported tax cuts while Obama favored increasing taxes for people earning over $200,000 a year).

Campaigns usually combine both position and valence questions, but the latter have increased in importance in recent years. This has happened in part because presidential campaigns are now conducted largely on television, where it is important to project popular symbols and manipulate widely admired images. Candidates try to show they are likable, and they rely on televised portraits of their similarity to ordinary people.

general election
An election held to choose which candidate will hold office.

primary election
An election held to choose candidates for office.

closed primary
A primary election in which voting is limited to already registered party members.

open primary
A primary election in which voters may choose in which party to vote as they enter the polling place.

TELEVISION, DEBATES, AND DIRECT MAIL

Once campaigns mostly involved parades, big rallies, "whistle-stop" train tours, and shaking hands outside factory gates and near shopping centers. These types of activities still occur, but increasingly presidential and senatorial candidates (and those House candidates with television stations in their districts) use broadcasting to reach potential voters.

Television can be used in two ways—by running paid advertisements and by getting on the nightly news broadcasts. Short television ads are called *spots,* and a campaign activity that appears on a news broadcast is called a *visual.* Much has been written about the preparation of spots, usually under titles such as "the selling of the president" or "packaging the candidate" (and mostly by advertising executives, who are not especially known for underestimating their own influence). No doubt spots can have an important effect in some cases. A little-known candidate can increase his or her visibility by frequent use of spots (this is what Jimmy Carter did in the 1976 presidential primaries).

The effect of television advertising on general elections is probably a good deal less than its effect on primaries; indeed, as we shall see in Chapter 12, most scientific studies of television's influence on voting decisions have shown that either it has no effect or the effect is subtle and hard to detect. Nor is it surprising that this should be the case. In a general election, especially one for a high-visibility office (such as president or governor), the average voter has many sources of information—his or her own party or ideological preference, various kinds of advertising, the opinions of friends and family, and newspaper and magazine stories. Furthermore, both sides will use TV spots; if well done, they are likely to cancel each other out. In short, it is not yet clear that a gullible public is being sold a bill of goods by slick Madison Avenue advertisers, whether the goods are automobiles or politicians.

Visuals are a vital part of any major campaign effort because, unlike spots, they cost the campaign little and, as "news," they may have greater credibility with the viewer. A visual is a brief, filmed episode showing the candidate doing something that a reporter thinks is newsworthy. Simply making a speech, unless the speech contains important new facts or charges, often is thought by TV editors to be uninteresting: television viewers are not attracted by pictures of "talking heads," and in the highly competitive world of TV, audience reactions are all-important determinants of what gets on the air. Knowing this, campaign managers will strive to have their candidates do something visually interesting every day, no later than 3:00 P.M. (if the visual is to be on the 6:00 P.M. news)—talk to elderly folks in a nursing home, shake hands with people waiting in an unemployment line, or sniff the waters of a polluted lake. Obviously, all these efforts are for naught if a TV camera crew is not around; great pains therefore are taken to schedule these visuals at times and in places that make it easy for photographers to be present.

Ironically, visuals—and television newscasts generally—may give the viewer less information than commercial spots. This, of course, is the exact opposite of what many people believe. It is commonplace to deplore political advertising, especially the short spot, on the grounds that it is either devoid

How Things Work

Kinds of Elections

There are two kinds of elections in the United States: general and primary. A **general election** is used to fill an elective office. A **primary election** is used to select a party's candidates for an elective office, though in fact those who vote in a primary election may not consider themselves party members. Some primaries are closed. In a **closed primary,** you must declare in advance (sometimes several weeks in advance) that you are a registered member of the political party in whose primary you wish to vote. About 40 states have closed primaries.

Other primaries are open. In an **open primary,** you can decide when you enter the voting booth which party's primary you wish to participate in. You are given every party's ballot; you may vote on one. Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin have open primaries. A variant on the open primary is the **blanket** (or "free love") **primary**—in the voting booth, you mark a ballot that lists the candidates of all the parties, and thus you can help select the Democratic candidate for one office and the Republican candidate for another. Alaska and Washington have blanket primaries.

The differences among these kinds of primaries should not be exaggerated, for even the closed primary does not create any great barrier for a voter who wishes to vote in the Democratic primary in one election and the Republican in another. Some states also have a **runoff primary:** if no candidate gets a majority of the votes, there is a runoff between the two with the most votes. Runoff primaries are common in the South.

A special kind of primary, a presidential primary, is used to pick delegates to the presidential nominating conventions of the major parties. Presidential primaries come in a bewildering variety. A simplified list looks like this:

- **Delegate selection only** Only the names of prospective delegates to the convention appear on the ballot. They may or may not indicate their presidential preferences.
- **Delegate selection with advisory presidential preference** Voters pick delegates and indicate their preferences among presidential candidates. The delegates are not legally bound to observe these preferences.
- **Binding presidential preference** Voters indicate their preferred presidential candidates. Delegates must observe these preferences, at least for a certain number of convention ballots. The delegates may be chosen in the primary or by a party convention.

In 1981, the Supreme Court ruled that political parties, not state legislatures, have the right to decide how delegates to national conventions are selected. Thus, Wisconsin could not retain an open primary if the national Democratic Party objected (*Democratic Party v. La Follette,* 101 S. Ct. 1010, 1981). Now the parties can insist that only voters who declare themselves Democrats or Republicans can vote in presidential primaries. The Supreme Court's ruling may have relatively little practical effect, however, since the "declaration" might occur only an hour or a day before the election.

of information or manipulative, and to praise television news programs, especially longer debates and interviews, because they are informative and balanced. In fact, the best research we have so far suggests that the reverse is true: news programs covering elections tend to convey very little information (they often show scenes of crowds cheering or candidates shouting slogans) and make little or no impression on viewers, if indeed they are watched at all. Paid commercials, on the other hand, especially the shorter spots, often contain a good deal of information that is seen, remembered, and evaluated by a public quite capable of distinguishing between fact and humbug.[16]

A special kind of television campaigning is the campaign debate. Incumbents or well-known candidates have little incentive to debate their opponents; by so doing, they only give more publicity to lesser-known rivals. Despite the general rule among politicians never to help an opponent, Vice President Nixon debated the less-well-known John Kennedy in 1960, and President Gerald Ford debated

blanket primary
A primary election in which each voter may vote for candidates from both parties.

runoff primary
A second primary election held when no candidate wins a majority of the votes in the first primary.

the less-well-known Jimmy Carter in 1976. Nixon and Ford lost. Lyndon Johnson would not debate Barry Goldwater in 1964, nor would Nixon debate Humphrey in 1968 or McGovern in 1972. Johnson and Nixon won. Carter debated the equally well-known Reagan in 1980 (but refused to join in a three-way debate with Reagan and John Anderson). Carter lost.

It is hard to know what effect TV debates have on election outcomes, but poll data suggest that in 1980 voters who watched the debates were reassured by Reagan's performance; after the second debate with Carter, he took a lead in the polls that he never relinquished.[17] In 1984, most people thought that Mondale did better than Reagan in the first debate, but there is little evidence that the debate affected the outcome of the election. In 1992 and 1996, Clinton was probably the better debater, but he most likely would have won even if he had stumbled. In 2008, Barack Obama and John McCain held three televised debates. Opinions differ as to who did better, but there is little evidence that these encounters affected the election results.

Though TV visuals and debates are free, they are also risky. The risk is the slip of the tongue. You may have spent 30 years of your life in unblemished public service, you may have thought through your position on the issues with great care, you may have rehearsed your speeches until your dog starts to howl, but just make one verbal blunder and suddenly the whole campaign focuses on your misstep. In 1976, President Ford erroneously implied that Poland was not part of the Soviet bloc. For days, the press dwelt on this slip. His opponent, Jimmy Carter, admitted in a *Playboy* interview that he sometimes had lust in his heart. It is hard to imagine anyone who has not, but apparently presidents are supposed to be above that sort of thing. In 1980, Ronald Reagan said trees cause pollution—oops, here we go again.

Library of Congress

In the 1888 presidential campaign, supporters of Benjamin Harrison rolled a huge ball covered with campaign slogans across the country. The gimmick, first used in 1840, gave rise to the phrase "keep the ball rolling."

Because of the fear of a slip, because the voters do not want to hear long speeches about complex issues, and because general-election campaigns are fights to attract the centrist voter, the candidates will rely on a stock speech that sets out the campaign theme as well as on their ability to string together several proven applause-getting lines. For reporters covering the candidate every day, it can be a mind-numbing experience. Nelson Rockefeller spoke so often of the "brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God" that the reporters started referring to it as his BOMFOG speech. Occasionally this pattern is interrupted by a "major" address—that is, a carefully composed talk on some critical issue, usually delivered before a live audience and designed to provide issue-related stories for the reporters to write.

If you dislike campaign oratory, put yourself in the candidate's shoes for a moment. Every word you say will be scrutinized, especially for slips of the tongue. Interest group leaders and party activists will react sharply to any phrase that departs from their preferred policies. Your opponent stands ready to pounce on any error of fact or judgment. You must give countless speeches every day. The rational reaction to this state of affairs is to avoid controversy, stick to prepared texts and tested phrases, and shun anything that sounds original (and hence untested). You therefore wind up trying to sell yourself as much as or more than your ideas. Voters may *say* they admire a blunt, outspoken person, but in a tough political campaign they would probably find such bluntness a little unnerving.

Television is the most visible example of modern technology's effect on campaigns. Since 1960, presidential elections have been contested largely through television. Without television, the campaign waged in 1992 by independent candidate Ross Perot might not have happened at all. Perot launched his candidacy with successive appearances on Cable News Network's call-in program "Larry King Live," and he bought several half-hour chunks of television time to air his views on the federal budget deficit. In early October, before the first of three televised debates featuring Perot, Republican incumbent

George H. W. Bush, and Democratic challenger Bill Clinton, most national polls showed Perot with only 10 percent of the vote. But after the debates, Perot's support in the polls doubled, and he ended up with about 19 percent of the votes cast on election day.

In 1996, the big television networks agreed to make some free television time available to the major presidential candidates. The Federal Communications Commission approved the plan to limit the free TV to "major" candidates, thus denying it to minor third-party nominees.

Less visible than television but perhaps just as important is the Internet. The computer makes possible sophisticated direct-mail campaigning, and this in turn makes it possible for a candidate to address specific appeals to particular voters easily and rapidly solicit campaign contributions. In the 2004 presidential campaign, Vermont Governor Howard Dean, at first largely unknown, raised a huge amount of money from Internet appeals in which he emphasized his opposition to our war in Iraq. Other candidates will no doubt do the same. However, the Internet lends itself to ideological appeals that motivate small contributions, and not every candidate will want to make such arguments.

Whereas television is heard by everybody—and thus leads the candidate using it to speak in generalities to avoid offending anyone—direct mail is aimed at particular groups (college students, Native Americans, bankers, autoworkers) to whom specific views can be expressed with much less risk of offending someone. So important are the lists of names of potential contributors to whom a computer may send appeals that a prized resource of any candidate, guarded as if it were a military secret, is "The List." Novices in politics must slowly develop their own lists or beg sympathetic incumbents for a peek at theirs.

AP Images

Alaska Governor Sarah Palin debates Senator Joe Biden during the 2008 campaign.

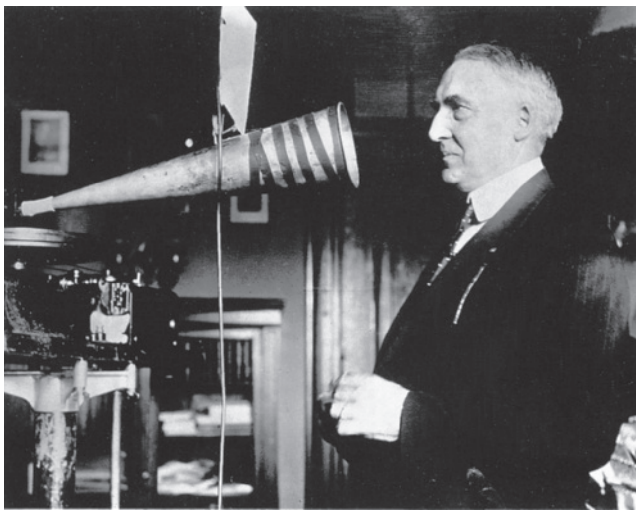
The chief consequence of the new style of campaigning is not, as some think, that it is more manipulative than old-style campaigning (picnics with free beer and $5 bills handed to voters can be just as manipulative as TV ads); rather, it is that running campaigns has become divorced from the process of governing. Previously, the party leaders who ran the campaigns would take part in the government once it was elected, and since they were *party* leaders, they had to worry about getting their candidate *re*elected. Modern political consultants take no responsibility for governing, and by the time the next election rolls around, they may be working for someone else.

Money

As we outlined earlier in this chapter, all these consultants, TV ads, and computerized mailings cost money—lots of it. A powerful California politician once observed that "money is the mother's milk of politics," and many people think that our democracy is drowning in it. In Chapter 11, we will consider what, if anything, interest groups get for the money they give to politicians; in Chapter 12, we shall summarize what we know about the effects of television advertising on elections. Here let us try to answer four questions: Where does campaign money come from? What rules govern how it is raised and spent? What has been the effect of campaign finance reform? What does campaign spending buy?

THE SOURCES OF CAMPAIGN MONEY

Presidential candidates get part of their money from private donors and part from the federal government; congressional candidates get all of their money from private sources. In the presidential primaries, candidates raise money from private citizens and interest groups. The federal government will provide matching funds, dollar for dollar, for all monies raised from individual donors who contribute no more than $250. (To prove they are serious candidates, they must first raise $5,000 in each of 20 states from such small contributors.) The government also gives a lump-sum grant to each political party to help pay the costs of its nominating convention. In the general election, the government pays all the costs (up to a legal limit) of major-party candidates and part of the costs of minor-party candidates (those winning between 5 and 25 percent of the vote).



Candidates first made phonographic recordings of their speeches in 1908. Warren G. Harding is shown here recording a speech during the 1920 campaign.

John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon debate during the 1960 presidential campaign.

Congressional candidates get no government funds; all their money must come out of their own pockets or be raised from individuals, interest groups (PACs), or the political parties. Contrary to what many people think, most of that money comes from—and has always come from—individual donors. Because the rules sharply limit how much any individual can give, these donors tend not to be fat cats but people of modest means who contribute $100 or $200 per person.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE RULES

During the 1972 presidential election, men hired by President Nixon's campaign staff broke into the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate office building. They were caught by an alert security guard. The subsequent investigation disclosed that the Nixon people had engaged in dubious or illegal money-raising schemes, including taking large sums from wealthy contributors in exchange for appointing them to ambassadorships. Many individuals and corporations were indicted for making illegal donations (since 1925, it had been against the law for corporations or labor unions to contribute money to candidates, but the law had been unenforceable). Some of the accused had given money to Democratic candidates as well as to Nixon.

When the break-in was discovered, the Watergate scandal unfolded. It had two political results: President Nixon was forced to resign, and a new campaign finance law was passed.

Under the new law, individuals could not contribute more than $1,000 to a candidate during any single election. Corporations and labor unions had for many decades been prohibited from spending money on campaigns, but the new law created a substitute: political action committees. A PAC must have at least 50 members (all of whom enroll voluntarily), give to at least five federal candidates, and must not give more than $5,000 to any candidate in any election or more than $15,000 per year to any political party. In addition, the law made federal tax money available to help pay for presidential primary campaigns and for paying all of the campaign costs of a major-party candidate and a fraction of the costs of a minor-party candidate in a presidential general election.

The new law helped increase the amount of money spent on elections and, in time, changed the way money was spent. There are now more than 4,000 PACs (see Figure 10.2). In each election since 2002, PACs have given over $250 million to congressional candidates. But PACs are not a dominant influence on candidates because they give rather little (often no more than $500). A small contribution is enough to ensure that a phone call to a member of Congress from a PAC sponsor will be returned but not enough, in most cases, to guarantee that the member will act as the PAC wishes.

Moreover, most money for congressional candidates still comes from individuals. But since the limit until 2002 was $1,000 per election (a limit set in the early 1970s), candidates had to devise clever ways of reaching a lot of individuals to raise the amount of money they needed. This usually meant direct-mail and telephone solicitations. If you are bothered by constant appeals for campaign funds, remember—that's what the law requires.

How Things Work

Major Federal Campaign Finance Rules

General

- All federal election contributions and expenditures are reported to a Federal Election Commission.
- All contributions over $100 must be disclosed, with name, address, and occupation of contributor.
- No *cash* contributions over $100 or foreign contributions.
- No ceiling on how much candidates may spend out of their own money (unless they accept federal funding for a presidential race).

Individual Contributions

- An individual may not give more than $2,000 to any candidate in any election.
- An individual may not make federal political gifts exceeding $95,000 every two years, of which only $37,500 may go to candidates.

Political Action Committees (PACs)

- Each corporation, union, or association may establish one.
- A PAC must register six months in advance, have at least 50 contributors, and give to at least five candidates.
- PAC contributions may not exceed $5,000 per candidate per election or $15,000 to a national political party.

Ban on Soft Money

- No corporation or union may give money from its own treasury to any national political party.

Independent Expenditures

- Corporations, unions, and associations may use their own money to fund "electioneering communications." PACs may fund electioneering communications up to their expenditure limits.

Presidential Primaries

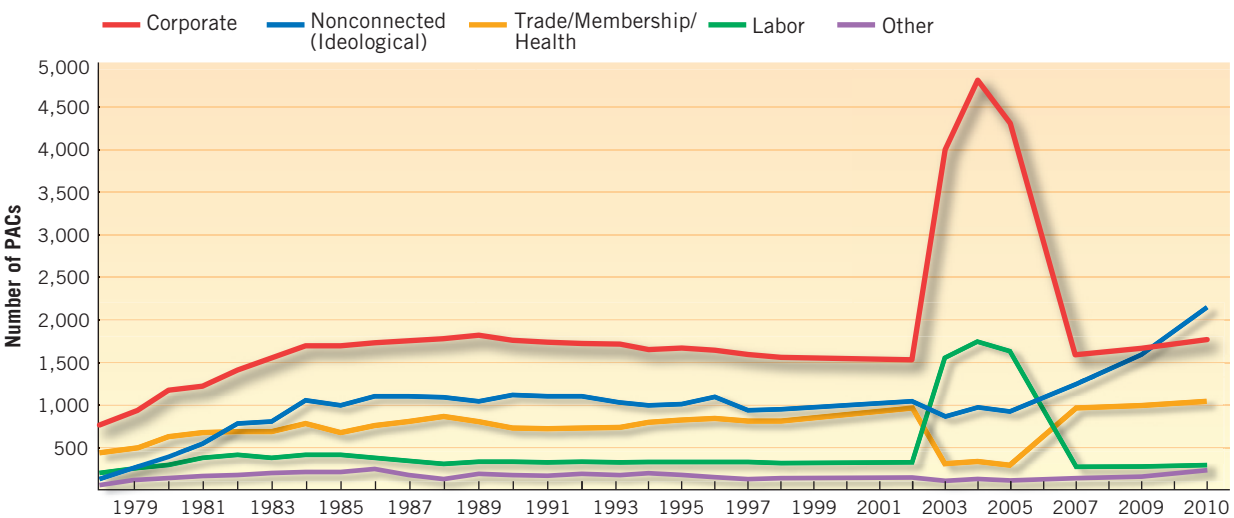
- Federal matching funds can be given to match individual contributions of $250 or less.
- To be eligible, a candidate must raise $5,000 in each of 20 states in contributions of $250 or less.

Presidential Election

- The federal government will pay all campaign costs (up to a legal limit) of major-party candidates and part of the costs of minor-party candidates (those winning between 5 and 25 percent of the vote).

Figure 10.2

Growth of PACs 1979–2010



Source: Federal Election Commission.

By contrast, when George McGovern ran against Richard Nixon in 1972, he was chiefly supported by the large contributions of one wealthy donor, and when Eugene McCarthy ran against Lyndon Johnson in 1968, he benefited from a few big donations and did not have to rely on massive fundraising appeals.

A candidate gets federal money to match, dollar for dollar, what he or she has raised in contributions of $250 or less. But a presidential candidate can decide to forgo federal primary funding and raise his or her own money. In 2000, George W. Bush relied entirely on his own fundraising, while his chief rival, John McCain, used federal matching funds. In 2004, Bush, Kerry, and Dean all declined federal matching funds in the primary elections. In 2008, John McCain declined public financing for the primaries but accepted it for the general election; Barack Obama relied entirely on his own fundraising for both the primaries and the general election.

If you are a minor-party candidate, you can get some support from the federal government provided you have won at least 5 percent of the vote in the last election. In 2000, both Pat Buchanan (Reform party) and Ralph Nader (Green party) got partial support from Washington because their parties had won more than 5 percent of the vote in 1996. But no minor party won more than 5 percent in either 2004 or 2008, so none received partial support.

independent expenditures Spending by political action committees, corporations, or labor unions to help a party or candidate but done independently of them.

soft money Funds obtained by political parties that are spent on party activities, such as get-out-the-vote drives, but not on behalf of a specific candidate.

The 1973 campaign finance law produced two problems. The first was **independent expenditures.** A PAC, a corporation, or a labor union could spend whatever it wanted supporting or opposing a candidate, so long as this spending was "independent," that is, not coordinated with or made at the direction of the candidate's wishes. Simply put, independent expenditures are ordinary advertising directed at or against candidates.

The second was **soft money.** Under the law, individuals, corporations, labor unions, and other groups could give unlimited amounts of money to political parties provided the money was not used to back candidates by name. But the money could be used in ways that helped candidates by financing voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives. Over half a billion dollars in soft money was spent during each of the last three presidential campaigns (2000, 2004, 2008).

A SECOND CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAW

Reform is a tricky word. We like to think it means fixing something gone wrong. But some reforms can make matters worse. For example, the campaign finance reforms enacted in the early 1970s helped matters in some ways by ensuring that all campaign contributors would be identified by name. But they made things worse in other ways by, for example, requiring candidates to raise small sums from many donors. This made it harder for challengers to run (incumbents are much better known and raise more money) and easier for wealthy candidates to run because, under the law as interpreted by the Supreme Court, candidates can spend as much of their own money as they want.

After the 2000 campaign, a strong movement developed in Congress to reform the reforms of the 1970s. The result was the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002, which passed easily in the House and Senate and was signed by President Bush. After the 1970s laws were passed, the Supreme Court, in *Buckley v. Valeo* (424 U.S. 1, 1976), upheld federal limits on campaign contributions even as it ruled that spending money to influence elections is a form of constitutionally protected free speech (hence candidates were free to give unlimited amounts of money to their own campaigns). That precedent had pretty much held, but the new law made three important changes.

First, it banned "soft money" contributions to national political parties from corporations and unions. After the federal elections in 2002, no national party or party committee can accept soft money. Any money the national parties get must come from "hard money"—that is, individual donations or PAC contributions as limited by federal law.

Second, the limit on individual contributions was raised from $1,000 per candidate per election to $2,000.

Third, "independent expenditures" by corporations, labor unions, trade associations, and (under certain circumstances) nonprofit organizations are sharply restricted. Now none of these organizations can use their own money to refer to a clearly identified federal candidate in any advertisement during the 60 days preceding a general election or the 30 days preceding a primary contest. (PACs can still refer to candidates in their ads, but of course PACs are restricted to "hard money"—that is, the amount they can spend under federal law.)

Immediately after the law was signed, critics filed suit in federal court claiming it was unconstitutional. The suit brought together a number of organizations that rarely work together, such as the American

The 2010 Elections

Just four years after they regained control of Congress, Democrats faced devastating results in the 2010 midterm elections. They lost more than 60 seats and majority control in the House, and they narrowly kept control of the Senate (though they already had lost their filibuster-proof majority after a special race in January 2010). What happened?

Although President Barack Obama was not running for election in 2010, many viewed the congressional election results as a referendum on his first two years in office. Exit polls showed that voters were concerned about what the White House and Congress were doing—Obama's popularity had dropped below 50 percent before the elections, and Congress's approval ratings were just half of that. Despite Obama's success in enacting his top policy priority, health care reform, less than 20 percent of voters viewed health care as the country's top priority, while more than 60 percent said the economy was the most important issue. Nearly 90 percent said they were concerned about the direction of the economy in the coming year.

Additionally, the youth voters who turned out in high numbers for Obama in 2008 did not return to the polls as strongly in 2010. Only about one-tenth of voters were in the 18–29 age group, while more than two-thirds of voters were 44 and older. So-called "swing" voters—those who will shift party loyalties and thus can be decisive in an election—including women, independents, and suburban voters, largely voted for Republican candidates. Voters were roughly divided over whether the next generation would fare better than its predecessors.

The Tea Party movement, which gained traction in 2009 by opposing the White House's stimulus package and calling for major reductions in government spending, also played a role in the 2010 elections. About 4 in 10 voters expressed support for the movement, with the overwhelming majority of those voters in the Republican Party. Candidates with Tea Party support won key Senate races in Wisconsin and Kentucky, as well as the gubernatorial race in South Carolina. But Tea Party candidates also suffered major losses in states where they had prevailed in Republican primaries and subsequently gained significant national attention, including Delaware and Nevada.

After the 2010 elections, Obama famously admitted in a press conference that his party had suffered a "shellacking," and he promised to pursue bipartisanship more vigorously in the rest of his term. But as the president prepared to run for reelection, he faced the challenge of working with the opposition party while campaigning to keep his most faithful supporters and draw in independents who had turned away from the Democrats in 2010. The delicate balance of campaigning and governing would be critical in 2012, with the president's name on the ballot.

Sources: National Public Radio, "2010 Exit Polls: What Happened Election Night"; CNN exit polls; Clint Hendler, "Six Nuggets from the 2010 Exit Polls: Who Voted for Whom, and What Did They Think?," *Columbia Journalism Review*, November 3, 2010; ABC News, "Which Tea Party Candidates Won?"; PBS NewsHour, "Obama on Midterm Shellacking: 'It Feels Bad,'" November 3, 2010.

Civil Liberties Union and the National Right to Life Committee. The suit claimed that the ban on independent spending that "refers to" clearly identified candidates 60 days before an election is unconstitutional because it is an abridgement of the right of free speech. Under the law, an organization need not even endorse or oppose a candidate; it is enough that it mention a politician. This means that 60 days before an election, an organization cannot say it "supports (or opposes) a bill proposed by Congresswoman Pelosi."

Newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations are not affected by the law, so they can say whatever they want for or against a candidate. One way of evaluating the law is to observe that it shifts influence away from businesses and unions and toward the media.

In *McConnell v. Federal Election Commission* (2002), the Supreme Court decided to uphold almost all of the law. As we saw in Chapter 5, it rejected the argument of those who claimed that speech requires money and decided it was no violation of the free speech provisions of the First Amendment to eliminate the ability of corporations and labor unions (and the organizations that use their money) to even *mention* a candidate for federal office for 60 days before the national election. In 2007, however, the Court

Table 10.4 2010 Congressional Exit Poll Results

	Voted for Democrat (D)	Voted for Republican (R)
SEX		
Male 48% of Respondents	44%	56%
Female 52% of Respondents	49	51
RACE AND ETHNICITY		
White 72% of Respondents	40	60
Black 12% of Respondents	85	15
Hispanic/Latino 8% of Respondents	54	46
Asian 3% of Respondents	50	50
Other 5% of Respondents	50	50
AGE		
18–29 17% of Respondents	54	46
30–44 29% of Respondents	46	54
45–64 39% of Respondents	46	54
65+ 15% of Respondents	42	58
EDUCATION		
No high school diploma 22% of Respondents	48	52
High school graduate 20% of Respondents	46	54
Some college/assoc. degree 21% of Respondents	45	55
College graduate 21% of Respondents	46	54
Postgraduate study 16% of Respondents	48	52
RELIGION		
Protestant/Other Christian 35% of Respondents	45	55
Catholic 12% of Respondents	49	51
Jewish 11% of Respondents	46	54
Something Else 29% of Respondents	47	53
None 13% of Respondents	49	51
APPROVE/DISAPPROVE OF HOW OBAMA IS DOING HIS JOB		
Approve 42% of Respondents	73%	27%
Disapprove 53% of Respondents	26%	74%
APPROVE/DISAPPROVE OF HOW CONGRESS IS DOING ITS JOB		
Approve 54% of Respondents	46%	54%
Disapprove 41% of Respondents	45%	55%
FEELING ABOUT TEA PARTY MOVEMENT		
Support 41% of Respondents	11%	86%
Neutral 24% of Respondents	47%	50%
Oppose 30% of Respondents	86%	12%
WHICH OF FOUR ISSUES IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACING THE COUNTRY		
The War in Afghanistan 7% of Respondents	58%	40%
Health Care 18% of Respondents	51%	47%
The Economy 63% of Respondents	43%	54%
Illegal Immigration 8% of Respondents	26%	68%

Source: ABC News/Politics 2010 National Exit Poll, November 2, 2010, reporting data on more than 17,000 respondents.

backed away from this view. An ad by a right-to-life group urged people to write to Senator Russell Feingold to convince him to vote for certain judicial nominees, but it did not tell people how to vote. The Court decided this was "issue advocacy" protected by the First Amendment and so could not be banned by the McCain-Feingold law. Three years later, the Court narrowly decided, in a 5-4 decision, to overturn the ban on corporate and union funding of campaign ads.

If the past is any guide, neither recent changes nor the existing legal maze will do much to keep individuals, PACs, party leaders, and others from funding the candidates they favor. Nor should we be surprised if groups continue to steer contributions much as one might expect.

For instance, PACs dedicated to a party, a policy position, or a cause (for example, pro-choice PACs that favor Democrats and pro-life PACs that favor Republicans) generally do not change how they give to candidates depending on who is in power. By contrast, trade and corporate PAC money tends to follow power: after the Democrats regained the House in 2006, scores of trade and corporate PACs started giving Democrats far more money and Republicans far less. The Wine and Spirits Wholesalers PAC gave 23 percent of its money to Democrats in 2005 and 65 percent of its money to Democrats in 2007; the Home Depot Inc. PAC gave 13 percent of its money to Democrats in 2005 and 46 percent of its money to Democrats in 2007—and so it went for numerous other trade or corporate PACs (see Table 10.5 for a list of the top 20 PAC contributors in 2009–2010). With the Republican Party winning control of the House in 2010, shifts in PAC spending will happen again.

NEW SOURCES OF MONEY

If money is, indeed, the mother's milk of politics, efforts to make the money go away are not likely to work. The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, once enforced, immediately stimulated people to find other ways to spend political money.

527 organizations Organizations under section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code that raise and spend money to advance political causes.

The most common were **527 organizations.** These groups, named after a provision of the

Table 10.5 Top 20 PAC Contributors to Candidates, 2009–10

PAC Name	Total Amount	Democratic	Republican
National Assn of Realtors	$3,791,296	55%	44%
Honeywell International	$3,654,700	54	45
National Beer Wholesalers Assn	$3,300,000	53	47
AT&T Inc.	$3,262,375	45	55
Intl Brotherhood of Electrical Workers	$2,993,373	98	2
American Bankers Assn	$2,880,154	32	68
American Assn for Justice	$2,820,500	97	3
Operating Engineers Union	$2,799,220	88	11
National Auto Dealers Assn	$2,483,400	44	55
International Assn of Fire Fighters	$2,372,500	82	18
Credit Union National Assn	$2,367,846	57	43
American Federation of Teachers	$2,361,250	99	0
Teamsters Union	$2,330,900	97	2
American Fedn of St/Cty/Mun Employees	$2,314,000	99	0
Carpenters & Joiners Union	$2,275,375	88	12
Laborers Union	$2,220,500	96	4
Boeing Co	$2,215,000	53	47
National Education Assn	$2,169,800	95	4
American Crystal Sugar	$2,147,500	68	32
National Assn of Home Builders	$2,131,000	37%	63%

Source: Center for Responsive Politics, based on FEC data.

Internal Revenue Code, are designed to permit the kind of soft money expenditures once made by political parties. In 2004, the Democrats created the Media Fund, America Coming Together, America Votes, and many other groups. George Soros, the wealthy businessman, gave more than $23 million to organizations pledged to defeat George Bush. The Republicans responded by creating Progress for America, The Leadership Forum, America for Job Security, and other groups. Under the law, as it is now interpreted, 527 organizations can spend their money on politics so long as they do not coordinate with a candidate or lobby directly for that person. In 2004, 527 organizations raised and spent over one-third of a billion dollars. So far, the lesson seems to be this: campaign finance laws are not likely to take money out of politics.

MONEY AND WINNING

In the general election for president, money does not make much difference, because both major-party candidates have the same amount, contributed by the federal government. During peacetime, presidential elections usually are decided by three things: political party affiliation, the state of the economy, and the character of the candidates.

For all the talk about voting for "the person, not the party," history teaches that at least 80 percent of the presidential vote will go to the candidates of the two main parties. This means that a presidential election will normally be decided by the 20 percent of voters who cannot be counted on to vote either Democratic or Republican.

In good economic times, the party holding the White House normally does well; in poor times, it does badly. This is sometimes called the "pocketbook vote." But it is not clear whose pocketbook determines how a person will vote. Many who are doing well financially will vote against the party in power if the country as a whole is not doing well. A person doing well may have friends or family members who are doing poorly. Or the well-off voter may think that if the country is doing poorly, he or she will soon feel the pinch by losing a job or losing customers.

Voters also care about character, and so some money from presidential campaign coffers goes to fund "character ads." *Character* here means several things: Is the candidate honest and reliable? Does the candidate think as the voter thinks about social issues such as crime, abortion, and school prayer? Does the candidate act presidential? Acting presidential seems to mean being an effective speaker, displaying dignity and compassion, sounding like someone who can take charge and get things done, and coming across consistently as a reasonable, likable person. Rash, disagreeable extremists need not apply.

Since both major candidates usually get the same amount of federal money for the general election campaign, money does not make much of a difference in determining the winner. Other factors that also do not make a difference include the following:

- *Vice-presidential nominee:* There has rarely been an election in which his or her identity has made a difference.
- *Political reporting:* It may make a difference in some elections, but not in presidential ones.
- *Religion:* Being a Catholic was once a barrier, but since John F. Kennedy was elected president in 1960, this is no longer true. Still, no president or vice president to date has had a non-Christian religious affiliation (though some have had no religious affiliation at all).
- *Abortion:* This probably affects who gets a party's nomination, but in the general election ardent supporters and ardent opponents are about evenly balanced.

Landmark Cases

Financing Elections

- ***Buckley v. Valeo* (1976):** Held that a law limiting contributions to political campaigns was constitutional but that one restricting a candidate's expenditures of his or her own money was not.
- ***McConnell v. Federal Election Commission* (2002):** Upheld 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (popularly known as "McCain-Feingold" law) prohibiting corporations and labor unions from running ads that mention candidates and their positions for 60 days before a federal general election.
- ***Federal Election Commission v. Wisconsin Right to Life, Inc.* (2007):** Held that issue ads may not be prohibited before a primary or general election.
- ***Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010):** Overturned part of 2002 law that had prohibited corporate and union funding of campaign ads.

In congressional races, however, in general it seems that money does make a decisive difference. Scholars are not entirely agreed on the facts, but strong evidence suggests that how much the challenger spends is most important, because the challenger usually must become known to the public. Buying name recognition is expensive. Gary Jacobson has shown that, other things being equal, in every congressional election from 1972 to the mid-1980s, challengers who spent more money did better than those who spent less.[18] Jacobson also suggested that how much the incumbents spent was not very important, presumably because they already had all the name recognition they needed (as well as the other benefits of holding office, such as free mail and travel). Other scholars, applying different statistical methods to the same facts, have come to different conclusions. It now seems that, other things being equal, high-spending incumbents do better than low-spending ones.[19] "Million-dollar challengers" are becoming more common in House races, but it remains to be seen if that will continue, and if so, whether it narrows the gap with incumbents.

Incumbents find it easier to raise money than challengers; incumbents provide services to their districts that challengers cannot; incumbents regularly send free ("franked") mail to their constituents, while challengers must pay for their mailings; incumbents can get free publicity by sponsoring legislation or conducting an investigation. Thus, it is hardly surprising that incumbents who run for reelection win in the overwhelming majority of races.

How We Compare

Public Funding for National Political Campaigns

In the United States, national political campaigns are funded primarily through private donations by individuals, political parties, and interest groups. Only presidential campaigns are eligible to receive public funding, and even there, candidates may decide not to accept the funds so they are not restricted by a federal cap on spending. Despite efforts to regulate campaign contributions since the 1970s, American democracy has a longstanding tradition of applying the First Amendment protection of free speech to campaign spending, a position recently endorsed by the Supreme Court. Other advanced industrialized democracies take a different view.

Many democracies around the world rely much more heavily on public funding for elections than the United States, and have stricter regulations on campaign contributions and expenditures. Australia, Germany, France, and Israel all provide public funds for political campaigns, typically granting funds to parties that received a certain percentage of votes in the previous election. France and the United Kingdom ban paid political ads, and both countries as well as Israel provide free broadcasting time for candidates. All three countries also impose limits on campaign spending.

How do campaign finance rules affect elections? In many ways, campaigns in the United States run much longer than in other democracies—the countries listed above typically hold national elections in about six weeks, whereas the 2008 presidential race in the United States began two years earlier. This is because public funding typically strengthens political parties, whose leaders decide which candidates they will support. Unlimited campaign contributions may permit relatively unknown candidates to prevail in party nominating contests without initial support from the top leadership. But winning requires time and money in the United States, and the financial costs increase in every election cycle. Is money a form of free speech? Democracies disagree.

Sources: Law Library of Congress, "Campaign Finance: Comparative Summary;" Brennan Center for Justice, "Breaking Free with Fair Elections: A New Declaration of Independence," March 2007; Debate between Bradley Smith and Thomas E. Mann, "Campaign Finance Reloaded," *Los Angeles Times*, July 2007.

What Decides the Election?

To the voter, it all seems quite simple—he or she votes for "the best person" or maybe "the least-bad person." To scholars, it is all a bit mysterious. How do voters decide who the best person is? What does "best" mean, anyway?

PARTY

One answer to these questions is party identification. People may say they are voting for the "best person," but for many people the best person is always a Democrat or a Republican. Moreover, we have seen in Chapter 7 that many people know rather little

about the details of political issues. They may not even know what position their favored candidate has taken on issues the voters care about. Given these facts, many scholars have argued that party identification is the principal determinant of how people vote.[20]

If it were only a matter of party identification, though, the Democrats would always win the presidency, since usually more people identify with the Democratic than the Republican party. But we know that the Democrats lost seven of the 11 presidential elections between 1968 and 2008. There are three reasons for this.

First, those people who consider themselves Democrats were less firmly wedded to their party than Republicans. Table 10.6 shows how people identifying themselves as Democrats, Republicans, or independents voted in presidential elections from 1960 to 2008. In every election except 1992, at least 80 percent of Republican voters supported the Republican candidate in each election. By contrast, there have been more defections among Democratic

Table 10.6 Percentage of Popular Vote by Groups in Presidential Elections, 1960–2008

		National	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
1960	Kennedy	50%	5%	84%	43%
	Nixon	50	95	16	57
1964	Johnson	61	20	87	56
	Goldwater	39	80	13	44
1968	Humphrey	43	9	74	31
	Nixon	43	86	12	44
	Wallace	14	5	14	25
1972	McGovern	38	5	67	31
	Nixon	62	95	33	69
1976	Carter	51	11	80	48
	Ford	49	89	20	52
1980[a]	Carter	41	11	66	30
	Reagan	51	84	26	54
	Anderson	7	4	6	12
1984	Mondale	41	7	73	35
	Reagan	59	92	26	63
1988	Dukakis	46	8	82	43
	Bush	54	91	17	55
1992	Clinton	43	10	77	38
	Bush	38	73	10	32
	Perot	19	17	13	30
1996	Clinton	49	13	84	43
	Dole	41	80	10	35
	Perot	8	6	5	17
2000	Gore	49	8	86	45
	Bush	48	91	11	47
2004	Kerry	49	6	89	49
	Bush	51	93	11	48
2008	Obama	52	9	89	52
	McCain	46	89	10	44

[a]The figures for 1980, 1984, 1988, and 1996 fail to add up to 100 percent because of missing data.

voters—in 1972, a third of Democrats supported Nixon, and in 1984, 26 percent supported Reagan.

The second reason, also clear from Table 10.6, is that the Republicans did much better than the Democrats among the self-described "independent" voters. In the dozen presidential elections since 1960, the Democratic candidate won a large share of the independent vote five times (1964, 1992, 1996, 2004, and 2008) while the Republican candidate won it seven times (1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, and 2000).

Finally, a higher percentage of Republicans than Democrats vote in elections. In every presidential contest in the past 34 years, those describing themselves as "strongly Republican" have been more likely to vote than those describing themselves as "strongly Democratic."

ISSUES, ESPECIALLY THE ECONOMY

Even though voters may not know a lot about the issues, that does not mean issues play no role in elections or that voters respond irrationally to them. For example, V. O. Key, Jr., looked at those voters who switched from one party to another between elections and found that most of them switched in a direction consistent with their own interests. As Key put it, the voters are not fools.[21]

Moreover, voters may know a lot more than we suppose about issues that really matter to them. They may have hazy, even erroneous, views about monetary policy, business regulation, and the trade deficit, but they likely have a very good idea about whether unemployment is up or down, prices at the supermarket are stable or rising, or crime is a problem in their neighborhoods. And on some issues—such as abortion, school prayer, and race relations—they likely have some strong principles they want to see politicians obey.

Contrary to what we learn in our civics classes, representative government does not require voters to be well informed on the issues. If it were our duty as citizens to have accurate facts and sensible ideas about how best to negotiate with foreign adversaries, stabilize the value of the dollar, revitalize failing industries, and keep farmers prosperous, we might as well forget about citizenship and head for the beach. It would be a full-time job, and then some, to be a citizen. Politics would take on far more importance in our lives than most of us would want, given our need to earn a living and our belief in the virtues of limited government.

To see why our system can function without well-informed citizens, we must understand the differences between two ways in which issues can affect elections.

Prospective Voting

Prospective means "forward-looking"—we vote prospectively when we examine the views the rival candidates have on the issues of the day and then cast our ballots for the person we think has the best ideas for handling these matters. **Prospective voting** requires a lot of information about issues and candidates. Some of us vote prospectively. Those who do tend to be political junkies. They are either willing to spend a lot of time learning about issues or are so concerned about some big issue (abortion, school busing, nuclear energy) that all they care about is how a candidate stands on that question.

Prospective voting is more common among people who are political activists, have a political ideology that governs their voting decision, or are involved in interest groups with a big stake in the election. They are a minority of all voters, but (as we saw in Chapters 7 and 8) they are more influential than their numbers would suggest. Some prospective voters (by no means all) are organized into single-issue groups, to be discussed in the next section.

Retrospective Voting

Retrospective means "backward-looking"—**retrospective voting** involves looking at how things have gone in the recent past and then voting for the party that controls the White House if we like what has happened and voting against that party if we do not like what has happened. Retrospective voting does not require us to have a lot of information—all we need to know is whether things have, in our view, gotten better or worse.

prospective voting Voting for a candidate because you favor his or her ideas for handling issues.

retrospective voting Voting for a candidate because you like his or her past actions in office.

Elections are decided by retrospective voters.[22] In 1980, they decided to vote against Jimmy Carter because inflation was rampant, interest rates were high, and we seemed to be getting the worst of things overseas. The evidence suggests rather clearly that they did not vote *for* Ronald Reagan; they voted for *an alternative to* Jimmy Carter. (Some people did vote for Reagan and his philosophy; they were voting prospectively, but they were in the minority.) In 1984, people voted for Ronald Reagan because unemployment, inflation, and interest rates were down and because we no longer seemed to be getting pushed around overseas. In 1980, retrospective voters wanted change; in 1984, they wanted continuity. In 1988, there was no incumbent running, but George H. W. Bush portrayed himself as the candidate who would continue the policies that had led to prosperity

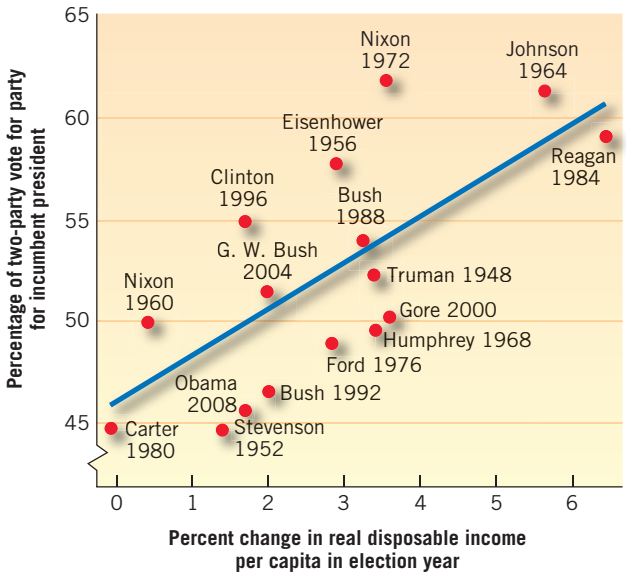
and depicted Michael Dukakis as a "closet liberal" who would change those policies. In 1992, the economy had once again turned sour, and so voters turned away from Bush and toward his rivals, Bill Clinton and Ross Perot.

Though most incumbent members of Congress get reelected, those who lose do so, it appears, largely because they are the victims of retrospective voting. After Reagan was first elected, the economy went into a recession in 1981–1982. As a result, Republican members of Congress were penalized by the voters, and Democratic challengers were helped. But it is not just the economy that can hurt congressional candidates. In most midterm elections, the party holding the White House has lost seats in Congress. Just why this should be is not entirely clear, but it probably has something to do with the tendency of some voters to change their opinions of the presidential party once that party has had a chance to govern—which is to say, a chance to make some mistakes, disappoint some supporters, and irritate some interests.

Some scholars believe that retrospective voting is based largely on economic conditions. Figure 10.3 certainly provides support for this view. Each dot represents a presidential election (16 of them, from 1948 to 2008). The horizontal axis is the percentage increase or decrease in per capita disposable income (adjusted for inflation) during the election year. The vertical axis is the percentage of the two-party vote won by the party already occupying the White House. You can see that, as per capita income goes up (as you move to the right on the horizontal axis), the incumbent political party tends to win a bigger share of the vote.

Figure 10.3

The Economy and Vote for President 1948–2008



Notes: (1) Each dot represents a presidential election, showing the popular vote received by the incumbent president's party. (2) 1992 data do not include votes for independent candidate H. Ross Perot. (3) 2004 value on RDI is projection from data available in December 2004.

Source: From *American Public Opinion,* 5th ed., by Robert S. Erikson and Kent L. Tedin. Copyright © 1995 by Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc. 2008 update from Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce.

Other scholars feel that matters are more complicated than this. As a result, a small industry has grown up consisting of people who use different techniques to forecast the outcome of elections. If you know how the president stands in the opinion polls several months before the election and how well the economy is performing, you can make a pretty good guess as to who is going to win the presidency. For congressional races, predicting the result is a lot tougher because so many local factors affect these contests. Election forecasting remains an inexact science. As one study of the performance of presidential election forecasting models concluded: "Models may be no improvement over pundits."[23]

THE CAMPAIGN

If party loyalty and national economic conditions play so large a role in elections, is the campaign just sound and fury, signifying nothing?

No. Campaigns can make a difference in three ways. First, they reawaken the partisan loyalties of voters. Right after a party's nominating convention selects a presidential candidate, that person's standing with voters of both parties goes way up in the polls. The reason is that the just-nominated candidate has received a lot of media attention during the summer months, when not much else is happening. When the campaign gets under way, however, both candidates get publicity, and voters return to their normal Democratic or Republican affiliations.

Second, campaigns give voters a chance to watch how the candidates handle pressure, and they give candidates a chance to apply that pressure. The two rivals, after promising to conduct a campaign "on the issues" without mudslinging, immediately start searching each other's personal histories and records to find acts, statements, or congressional votes that can be shown in the worst possible light in newspaper or television ads. Many voters don't like these "negative ads"—but they work. Careful statistical studies based on actual campaigns (as opposed to voter surveys or laboratory-like focus group studies) suggest that negative ads work by stimulating voter turnout.[24] As a result, every politician constantly

AP Images

Union members were once heavily Democratic, but since Ronald Reagan began winning white union votes in 1980, these votes have been up for grabs.

worries about how an opponent might portray his or her record, a fact that helps explain why so many politicians never do or say anything that cannot be explained in a 30-second television spot.

Third, campaigns allow voters an opportunity to judge the character and core values of the candidates. Most voters don't study in detail a candidate's positions on issues; even if they had the time, they know you can't predict how politicians will behave just from knowing what a campaign manager has written in a position paper. The voters want some guidance as to how a candidate will behave once elected. They get that guidance by listening not to the details of what a candidate says but to the themes and tone of those statements. Is the candidate tough on crime and drugs? Are his or her statements about the environment sincere or perfunctory? Does the candidate favor having a strong military? Does the candidate care more about not raising taxes or more about helping the homeless?

The desire of voters to discern character, combined with the mechanics of modern campaigning—short radio and television ads and computer-targeted direct mail—lend themselves to an emphasis on themes at the expense of details. This tendency is reinforced by the expectations of ideological party activists and single-issue groups.

Thematic campaigning, negative ads, and the demands of single-issue groups are not new; they are as old as the republic. In the 19th century, the theme was slavery and the single-issue groups were abolitionists and their opponents; their negative ads make the ones we have today sound like Sunday school sermons. At the turn of the century, the themes were temperance and the vote for women; both issues led to no-holds-barred, rough-and-tumble campaigning. In the 1970s and 1980s, new themes were advanced by fundamentalist Christians and by pro- and antiabortion groups.

What has changed is not the tone of campaigning but the advent of primary elections. Once, political parties picked candidates out of a desire to win elections. Today, activists and single-issue groups influence the selection of candidates, sometimes out of a belief that it is better to lose with the "right" candidate than to win with the wrong one. In a five-candidate primary, a minority of the voters can pick the winner. Single-issue groups can make a big difference under these conditions, even though they may not have much influence in the general election.

FINDING A WINNING COALITION

Putting together a winning electoral coalition means holding on to your base among committed partisans and attracting the swing voters who cast their ballots in response to issues (retrospectively or prospectively) and personalities.

There are two ways to examine the nature of the parties' voting coalitions. One is to ask what percentage of various identifiable groups in the population

AP Images

At a public meeting, Samuel Joseph Wurzelbacher challenged Barack Obama on his tax plan and quickly became known as "Joe the Plumber."

supported the Democratic or Republican candidate for president. The other is to ask what proportion of a party's total vote came from each of these groups. The answer to the first question tells us how *loyal* African Americans, farmers, union members, and others are to the Democratic or Republican party or candidate; the answer to the second question tells us how *important* each group is to a candidate or party.

For the Democratic coalition, African Americans are the most loyal voters. In every election but one since 1952, two-thirds or more of all African Americans voted Democratic; since 1964, four-fifths have gone Democratic. Usually, Jewish voters are almost as solidly Democratic. Most Hispanics have been Democrats, though the label "Hispanic" conceals differences among Cuban Americans (who often vote Republican) and Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans (who are strongly Democratic). The turnout among most Hispanic groups has been quite low (many are not yet citizens), so their political power is not equivalent to their numbers.

The Democrats have lost their once strong hold on Catholics, southerners, and union members. In 1960, Catholics supported John F. Kennedy (a Democrat and fellow Catholic), but they also voted for Eisenhower, Nixon, and Reagan—all Republicans. Union members deserted the Democrats in 1968 and 1972, came back in 1980 and 1988, and divided about evenly between the two parties in 1952, 1956, and 1980. White southerners have voted Republican in national elections but Democratic in many local ones (see Table 10.7).

Table 10.7 Who Likes the Democrats?

	1968[a]	1972	1976	1980[c]	1984	1988	1992[d]	1996	2000	2004	2008
Percentage of various groups saying they voted for the Democratic presidential candidate, 1964–2008											
Sex											
Men	41%	37%	53%	37%	37%	41%	41%	43%	42%	45%	49%
Women	45	38	48	45	42	49	46	54	54	52	56
Race											
White	38	32	46	36	34	40	39	43	42	42	43
Nonwhite	85	87	85	82	90	86	82	84	90	89	95
Education											
College	37	37	42	35	40	43	44	47	45	47	50
Graduate school	52	49	58	43	49	56	55	52	52	55	58
Age											
Under 30	47	48	53	43	41	47	44	53	48	54	66
50 and over	41	36	52	41[e]	39	49	50	48[g]	48	49	48
Religion											
Protestant	35	30	46	NA	NA	33[f]	33	36	42	41	45
Catholic	59	48	57	40	44	47	44	53	50	48	54
Jewish[b]	85	66	68	45	66	64	78	78	79	76	78
Southerners	31	29	54	47	36	41	42	46	NA	41	45

[a]1968 election had three major candidates (Humphrey, Nixon, and Wallace).

[b]Jewish vote estimated from various sources; since the number of Jewish persons interviewed often is less than 100, the error in this figure, as well as that for nonwhites, may be large.

[c]1980 election had three major candidates (Carter, Reagan, and Anderson).

[d]1992 election had three major candidates (Clinton, Bush, and Perot).

[e]For 1980–1992, refers to age 60 and over.

[f]For 1988, white Protestants only.

[g]For 1996, refers to age 45 and over.

Sources: For 1964–1976: Gallup poll data, as tabulated in Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, "Changing Patterns of Electoral Competition," in *The New American Political System*, ed. Anthony King (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), 254–256. For 1980–1992: Data from *New York Times*/CBS News exit polls. For 1996: *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report,* 1997, p. 188. For 2000: Exit polls supplied by ABC News. For 2004 and 2008: CNN exit polls.

The Republican party often is described as the party of business and professional people. The loyalty of these groups to Republicans is strong: only in 1964 did they desert the Republican candidate to support Lyndon Johnson. Farmers usually have been Republican, but they are a volatile group, highly sensitive to the level of farm prices—and thus quick to change parties. In sum, the loyalty of most identifiable groups of voters to either party is not overwhelming. Only African Americans, businesspeople, and Jews usually give two-thirds or more of their votes to one party or the other; other groups display tendencies, but none that cannot be overcome.

The contribution that each of these groups makes to the party coalitions is a different matter. Though African Americans are overwhelmingly and persistently Democratic, they make up so small a portion of the total electorate that they have never accounted for more than a quarter of the total Democratic vote. The groups that make up the largest part of the Democratic vote—Catholics, union members, southerners—are also the least dependable parts of that coalition.[25]

When representatives of various segments of society make demands on party leaders and presidential

RESEARCH FRONTIERS

Candidate Positions Drive Voter Choices

When asked why they voted for one candidate over another, most people will say they chose the best person for the job. But how do voters decide who the "best person" is?

In a 2008 article, political scientists Michael Tomz and Robert P. Van Houweling address this question with surveys and other data regarding candidate positions and voter choice. Their focus is mainly on health care policy, but their research spans dozens of studies of how voters make decisions and tests three leading theories—proximity, discounting, and direction:

Proximity: Voters believe candidates will deliver on campaign pledges and prefer candidates whose positions on the issues are closest to their own.

Discounting: Doubting candidates will deliver on campaign pledges, voters discount pledges and prefer candidates who—whatever their positions—voters think might get something good done in government.

Direction: Voters see issues as essentially two-sided; prefer candidates who take their side or "direction"; and, given a choice between two candidates who are both on their side, will prefer the candidate whose position is most intense.

As Tomz and Van Houweling emphasize, each theory yields a different prediction about the relationship between candidate positioning and voter choice. For example, if a voter has a position on an issue (abortion, for example), but does not feel strongly about it (say the voter is moderately pro-choice), proximity theory predicts that the voter will choose the candidate closest to his or her position even if that candidate is on the opposite side (say a candidate who is moderately pro-life). Direction theory predicts that the voter will instead choose the competing candidate who advocates his or her side of the issue most intensely (say, a candidate who is very strongly pro-choice).

And the winner is?

Proximity: Tomz and Van Houweling find proximity voting about twice as common as discounting and four times as common as direction voting. Thus, a voter who favors a 5 percent increase in government spending on health care will most likely prefer a candidate who advocates much the same position.

- **Does that finding surprise you, and just how inclined are you to behave like a proximity voter?**
- **Do you strongly prefer candidates whose positions on the issues are closest to your own? Or might you vote for a candidate who—though he or she espouses positions at odds with your own—seems more likely than an opponent whose positions more nearly mirror your own to "get things done" in government?**
- **Do you think candidates who advocate extreme positions are more likely to stay committed if elected than candidates who advocate more moderate positions on the same issues?**
- **In sum, what most influences your way of deciding who is the "best person" for the job?**

Source: Michael Tomz and Robert P. Van Houweling, "Candidate Positioning and Voter Choice," *American Political Science Review* 102 (August 2008): 303–318.

candidates, they usually stress their numbers or their loyalty, but rarely both. African American leaders, for example, sometimes describe the black vote as of decisive importance to Democrats and thus deserving of special consideration from a Democratic president. But African Americans are so loyal that a Democratic candidate can almost take their votes for granted, and in any event they are not as numerous as other groups. Union leaders emphasize how many union voters there are, but a president will know that union leaders cannot "deliver" the union vote and that this vote may go to the president's opponent, whatever the leaders say. For any presidential candidate, a winning coalition must be put together anew for each election. Only a few voters can be taken for granted or written off as a lost cause.

The Effects of Elections on Policy

To the candidates, and perhaps to the voters, the only interesting outcome of an election is who won. To a political scientist, the interesting outcomes are the broad trends in winning and losing and what they imply about the attitudes of voters, the operation of the electoral system, the fate of political parties, and the direction of public policy.

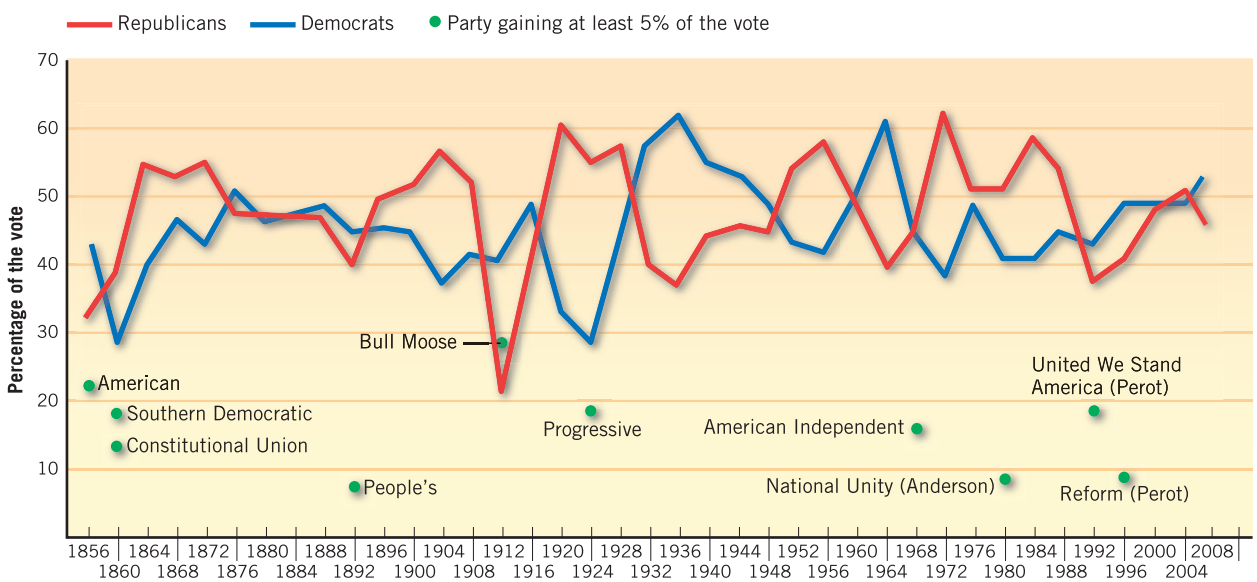
Figure 10.4 shows the trend in the popular vote for president since before the Civil War. From 1876 to 1896, the Democrats and Republicans were hotly competitive. The Republicans won three times, the Democrats twice in close contests. Beginning in 1896, the Republicans became the dominant party, and except for 1912 and 1916, when Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat, was able to win owing to a split in the Republican party, the Republicans carried every presidential election until 1932. Then Franklin Roosevelt put together what has since become known as the "New Deal coalition," and the Democrats became the dominant party. They won every election until 1952, when Eisenhower, a Republican and a popular military hero, was elected for the first of his two terms. In the presidential elections since 1952, power has switched hands between the parties frequently.

Still, cynics complain that elections are meaningless: no matter who wins, crooks, incompetents, or self-serving politicians still hold office. The more charitable argue that elected officials usually are decent enough, but that public policy remains more or less the same no matter which official or party is in office.

There is no brief and simple response to this latter view. Much depends on which office or policy you examine. One reason it is so hard to generalize about the policy effects of elections is that the

Figure 10.4

Partisan Division of the Presidential Vote in the Nation, 1856–2008



Sources: Information for 1856–1988, updated from Historical Data Archive, Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, as reported in William H. Flanigan and Nancy H. Zingale, *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*, 3rd ed., 32. For 1992: *World Almanac and Book of Facts 1994,* 73.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

MEMORANDUM

To: *Arjun Bruno, National party chairperson*

From: *Arlene Marcus, State party chairperson*

Subject: *Supporting a national primary*

In the past few election cycles, our state's role in the party nomination for president virtually has disappeared with a May primary date. Several states have leapfrogged ahead of us, and party leaders have indicated that they do not want any more states to move up their primary date. The national party needs to find a way to ensure that all states, large and small, have a real voice in nominating a presidential candidate.

Arguments for:

1. A single national primary permits equal participation by all states and presents a fair compromise with the increased number of delegates that larger states send to the national conventions, much like the compromises during the original constitutional debates.
2. The nominating process needs to be less costly, particularly when presidential candidates realistically need to raise $100 million a year before the general election to be competitive for the nomination. Holding all primaries and caucuses on a single day will reduce overall election expenses significantly.
3. If the American electorate knows presidential nominations will be decided by each party on one day, then they will be more likely to vote, a significant factor for elections in which, historically, fewer than 20 percent of eligible voters typically participate.

Your decision:

Support national primary _____

News »

Would a National Primary Date Give All States an Equal Voice?

With the increasing cost and length of presidential nominating contests, several political strategists favor creating a single national primary date. But party leaders are divided over the consequences for candidates and voters.

Arguments against:

1. Each state decides in conjunction with the national party when its primary or caucus will take place, and the federal system of government designed by the Framers did not guarantee that all states would be treated equally at all times.
2. A national primary would favor candidates with high name recognition and funding to further that recognition and would severely disadvantage lesser-known candidates within the party.
3. Even though the general election takes place on one day, voter turnout in the United States still is lower than in other advanced industrialized democracies, which suggests that other factors influence who participates.

Oppose national primary _____

offices to be filled by the voters are so numerous and the ability of the political parties to unite these officeholders behind a common policy is so weak that any policy proposal must run a gauntlet of potential opponents. Though we have but two major parties, and though only one party can win the presidency, each party is a weak coalition of diverse elements that reflect the many divisions in public opinion. The proponents of a new law must put together a majority coalition almost from scratch, and a winning coalition on one issue tends to be somewhat different—quite often dramatically different—from a winning coalition on another issue.

In a parliamentary system with strong parties, such as that in Great Britain, an election often can have a major effect on public policy. When the Labour party won office in 1945, it put several major industries under public ownership and launched a comprehensive set of social services, including a nationalized health care plan. Its ambitious and controversial campaign platform was converted, almost item by item, into law. When the Conservative party returned to power in 1951, it accepted some of these changes but rejected others (for example, it denationalized the steel industry).

American elections, unless accompanied by a national crisis such as a war or a depression, rarely produce changes of the magnitude of those that occurred in Britain in 1945. The constitutional system within which our elections take place was designed to moderate the pace of change—to make it neither easy nor impossible to adopt radical proposals. But the fact that the system is intended to moderate the rate of change does not mean it will always work that way.

The election of 1860 brought to national power a party committed to opposing the extension of slavery and southern secession; it took a bloody war to vindicate that policy. The election of 1896 led to the dominance of a party committed to high tariffs, a strong currency, urban growth, and business prosperity—a commitment that was not significantly altered until 1932. The election of that year led to the New Deal, which produced the greatest single enlargement of federal authority since 1860. The election of 1964 gave the Democrats such a large majority in Congress (as well as control of the presidency) that there began to issue forth an extraordinary number of new policies of sweeping significance—Medicare and Medicaid, federal aid to education and to local law enforcement, two dozen environmental and consumer protection laws, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a revision of the immigration laws, and a new cabinet-level Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The election of 1980 brought into office an administration determined to reverse the direction of policy over the preceding half century. Reagan's administration succeeded in obtaining large tax cuts, significant reductions in spending (or in the rate of increase of spending) on some domestic programs, and changes in the policies of some regulatory agencies. The election of 1982, in which the Democrats made gains in the House of Representatives, stiffened congressional resistance to further spending cuts and stimulated renewed interest in tax increases as a way of reducing the deficit. Following the election of 1984, a major tax reform plan was passed. After the 1996 election, Clinton and Republican congressional leaders agreed on a plan to balance the budget.

In view of all these developments, it is hard to argue that the pace of change in our government is always slow or that elections never make a difference. Studies by scholars confirm that elections often are significant, despite the difficulty of getting laws passed. One analysis of about 1,400 promises made between 1944 and 1964 in the platforms of the two major parties revealed that 72 percent were put into effect.[26]

Another study examined the party platforms of the Democrats and Republicans from 1844 to 1968 and all the laws passed by Congress between 1789 and 1968. By a complex statistical method, the author of the study was able to show that during certain periods the differences between the platforms of the two parties were especially large (1856, 1880, 1896, 1932) and that there was at about the same time a high rate of change in the kinds of laws being passed.[27] This study supports the general impression conveyed by history that elections often can be central to important policy changes.

Why then do we so often think elections make little difference? It is because public opinion and the political parties enter a phase of consolidation and continuity between periods of rapid change. During this phase, the changes are digested, and party leaders adjust to the new popular consensus, which may (or may not) evolve around the merits of these changes. During the 1870s and 1880s, Democratic politicians had to come to terms with the failure of the southern secessionist movement and the abolition of slavery; during the 1900s, the Democrats had to adjust again, this time to the fact that national economic policy was going to support industrialization and urbanization, not farming; during the 1940s and 1950s, the Republicans had to learn to accept the popularity of the New Deal.

Elections in ordinary times are not "critical"—they do not produce any major party realignment, they are not fought out over a dominant issue, and they provide the winners with no clear mandate. In most cases, an election is little more than a retrospective judgment on the record of the incumbent president and the existing congressional majority. If times are good, incumbents win easily; if times are bad, incumbents may lose—even though their opponents may have no clear plans for change. But even a "normal" election can produce dramatic results if the winner is a person such as Ronald Reagan, who helped give his party a distinctive political philosophy, or Barack Obama, the nation's first African American president.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

☑ What is the difference between a primary election and a general election?

A primary election selects a political party's nominee for office, while a general election determines who will hold that office.

☑ Does the federal government provide funding for political campaigns?

The federal government does not fund congressional elections, but it does provide public funding for presidential candidates (and their party conventions), though candidates may choose not to accept public funds and raise unlimited funding on their own, as happened in 2008.

☑ How do voters typically decide on a candidate?

Voters typically evaluate an incumbent's performance and vote for reelection if they are pleased; if not, then they cast a vote against the incumbent, but that may not necessarily mean they endorse the opponent's platform. Evaluating an incumbent's term is retrospective voting, while trying to determine how a candidate will act in office is prospective voting.

RECONSIDERING WHO GOVERNS?

1. How do American elections determine the kind of people who govern us?

American democracy rewards candidates who have personal appeal rather than party endorsements. Politics here produces individualists who usually have a strong ideological orientation toward liberal or conservative causes, but only a weak sense of loyalty to the political parties who endorse those ideologies.

2. What matters most in deciding who wins presidential and congressional elections?

The party identification of the voters matters the most. Only 10 to 20 percent of the voters are available to have their votes changed. For them, the state of the economy, and in wartime the success or failures we have while fighting abroad, make the most difference. Closely allied with those issues, at least for presidential candidates, is the voters' assessment of their character.

RECONSIDERING TO WHAT ENDS?

1. Do elections make a real difference in what laws get passed?

Yes. During campaigns parties may try to sound alike, in order to attract centrist voters, but when in office they differ greatly in the policies they put into law.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. **How do presidential nominating contests test candidates?**
2. **Should American elections be restricted in length and cost? Why or why not?**
3. **How do fixed terms of office for Congress and the presidency affect opportunities for policymaking?**
4. **Who spent the most money in the last House and Senate elections?**
5. **How many incumbents won reelection in Congress, and when did challengers prevail?**
6. **How do presidential candidates balance negative and positive campaigning, and which commercials are most effective?**

TO LEARN MORE

Federal Election Commission: **www.fec.gov**

Project Vote Smart: **www.vote-smart.org**

Election history: **clerkweb.house.gov**

Electoral college: **www.fec.gov/pages/ecmenu2**

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