



Elections: Notes

In this lesson,

- Types of Elections
- Presidential Nominations: Party Differences
- Congressional Elections & Incumbency
- Redistricting
- The Media

Types of Elections:

- **General Election:** contests between opposing candidates of different parties and independents (local, state, national)
- **Recall Election:** special election to remove incumbent from office (rare)
- **Primary Elections:** choice of who will be party's candidate in general election (Ex. R - Trump, Cruz, Rubio in 2016)
 - **Open Primary:** any voter (regardless of party) can participate in the party's primary election
 - **Closed Primary:** only registered/pledged party members can vote in their party's primary
 - **Problems:**
 - **Crossover Voting:** voting in primary when you aren't a member (common)
 - **Party Raiding:** organized effort to crossover by opposing party to pick weakest candidate (rare)
- **Ballot measures:** public gets to directly vote on laws, amendments, etc. (direct democracy)
 - **Initiatives:** proposed by citizens, voted on by citizens
 - **Referendums:** proposed by legislature, voted on by citizens

Presidential Nominations: Party Differences

- **Objective of the nomination game: get a majority of delegates**
- **Democratic Party System:**
 - **Proportional delegate allocation:** award delegated based on proportion of votes received in each state (pledged)
 - **Super delegates:** party leaders; establishment elites, elected Democrats
unpledged (free) delegates can vote for whoever they want at Democratic National Convention
- **Republican Party System**
 - **Winner Take All:** person who gets most votes gets ALL of state's delegates at convention



- **Hybrid Delegate Allocation:** combination of winner take all and proportional allocation
- **Who Votes First?**
 - **Iowa Caucus & New Hampshire Primary**
 - 1st states who vote in presidential nomination
 - Draw media attention and candidate travel
 - Winning one = serious contender
 - Special interests of early states (farming, ethanol) get big promises
 - **Caucus**
 - Like primary but requires more time
 - In depth, tailored to party activities
 - **You stand around and vote by raising your hand for a candidate**
 - **Front loading**
 - All other states changing their primaries to earlier dates because they see attention that IA and NH get
 - **Super Tuesday:** many primaries on one day; in 2016, it was on March 1st

Congressional Elections & Incumbency:

- **Approval Rate of Congress: about 10-15%**
- **Reelection Rate of Congress members: more than 90%**
 - **People hate Congress, but love their Congressperson**
- **Advantages of Incumbency:**
 - Open Seat: general election where both candidates don't currently hold the seat
 - Incumbent: current office holder (faces a "challenger" for their seat)
 - **Incumbency Advantage: incumbent almost always wins re-election!!**
 - **This is the most important factor in determining the outcome of an election**
 - **Advantage #1: Money**
 - Incumbents are able to raise more money than challengers (because they're already in office and more likely to win)
 - Political Action Committees (PACs) give more money to incumbents
 - Incumbents outspend challengers 2 to 1
 - **Advantage #2: Visibility**
 - Name recognition: incumbents are well known
 - Media covers positive activities of office (grand openings)
 - Incumbents get to use public tax dollars for transportation costs
 - **Advantage #3: Constituent Services**
 - Elected officials help constituents with their needs
 - Military benefits, social security checks
 - Incumbents can bring money/jobs home



- Pork: legislation allowing elected officials to “bring home the bacon”
 - Officials sit on committees that deal with constituent wants/district needs
 - Earmarks: provisions in laws that designate specific projects for funding for their districts
- **Advantage #4: The Franking Privilege**
 - Members of Congress get to mail newsletters to constituent’s at government’s expense
- **Advantage #5: Scare Off Effect**
 - All challengers know the incumbent will win, so why bother?
 - Established incumbents scare off qualified challengers
 - Many seats in Congress/state legislatures go unchallenged
- **Consequences of Incumbency Advantage:**
 - Congress is made up of experienced members/leaders
 - Maintains continuity of leadership/policy
 - Continuity discourages radical change or reform
 - Continuity encourages close relationships between members and interest groups
 - Incumbents benefit from existing rules and advantages so they have no reason to change them

Redistricting:

- **House of Representatives:**
 - **Size, Apportionment, and Constitution**
 - Constitution doesn’t set exact size for House of Representatives
 - Constitution states House’s size shall be apportioned (distributed) among states based on respective population
 - The Constitution guarantees each state gets 1 rep.
 - **Reapportionment**
 - **Reallocation of House seats after a census is taken every 10 years; requires House reps. be reorganized based on population changes**
 - Reapportionment Act of 1929: set House size (435 members)
 - Each House member represents 700,000 people
 - **Why Reapportionment?**
 - increases/decreases number of seats each state has in the House of Representatives
 - Increases/decreases number of electors a state has in electoral college
 - As state’s representation increases, its potential influence increases
- **Redistricting & Gerrymandering:**
 - **House Districts & Redistricting**



- Each seat is filled from single member districts: 1 person represents entire district (top vote getter)
- State legislatures draw congressional district lines
- Redistricting: states take census data and redraw district (every 10 years)
- **Gerrymandering: legislative process where majority party in state legislature redraw lines for their own benefit**
- **Consequences:**
 - Protects incumbents/discourage challengers
 - Strengthens majority party/weakens minority
 - decreases/increases minority representation
- **Types of Gerrymandering:**
 - **Fair:** rep is close to actual population preferences
 - **Sweetheart:** districts designed to protect incumbents with easy elections
 - **Cracking:** hide minority in majority districts increases majority party power
 - **Packing:** put majority in easy districts, dilutes their power overall
- **Supreme Court: Limitations on Redistricting**
 - Wesberry v. Sanders (1964): set force the principle of “1 person, 1 vote” in drawing congressional districts (gave cities/suburbs more reps)
 - **Other SC limitations**
 - Districts = equally populated
 - Must be compact: normal shape
 - Lines must be common bordered and connected
 - Cannot dilute minority voting strength
 - District lines can’t be drawn based on race
 - Can be one of several factors considered
 - **SCOTUS has not eliminated gerrymandering for political purposes**

The Media

- **Mass Media = newspapers, radio, TV, internet, etc.**
- **What are the media’s functions?**
 - **Entertainment (big emphasis):** popular shows are continued while low rating shows are cancelled
 - **News Reporting:**
 - **Yellow journalism (late 1800s):** focusing on useless news (original “fake news”)
 - **Muckraking (early 1900s):** focus on exposing gov corruption & industry
 - Today: media provides varying amounts of “news”
 - **Creating Political Forums:**



- Politicians use media to promote themselves and draw public attention to their favorite issues
- President has special media power: set policy agenda (what the country/Congress should focus on)
- **How is the Mass Media a Linkage Institution?**
 - Mass media connects people to their government officials by
 - Interviewing citizens
 - Presenting poll results
 - Covering protests
 - Mass media connect government officials to the public by
 - Interviewing political leaders
 - Reporting on government actions
- **How does Mass Media affect politics:**
 - **Agenda setting**
 - Policy agenda: consists of issues that attract serious attention of public officials
 - Huge role in drawing public attention to certain topics/issues
 - Gatekeeper: if media doesn't address certain topic, then it is not part of the policy agenda
 - **Candidate Centered Campaigns > Issues**
 - Campaigns now centered more on candidates than issues (more entertaining)
 - Sound bites (7-8 seconds): short, easily understood phrases that politicians repeat and that media will air
 - Media focuses on day-to-day campaign activities: rallies, scandals, negative ads, etc.
 - Gaffes: linguistic errors, bizarre behavior of candidate that gets a lot of attention
 - Horse race journalism: focus on how candidates are doing in the polls
- **How do voters decide their vote?**
 - **Prospective voting:** evaluating candidates' positions on issues in relation to what they'll do
 - **Retrospective voting:** declaring whether to vote for incumbent based on 1st term performance
 - **Rational choice voting:** vote for who you want
 - **Party-line voting:** voting based on party
- **Using media to win a campaign:**
 - **Paid media:** ads purchased for campaign
 - **Spot ads:** TV ad on behalf of candidate (short)
 - **Free media:** coverage of candidate's campaign in news