

# 3

## TURNOUT AND PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS

IN EVERY election cycle, stories in the media question who and how many will vote. Are Trump voters more fired up than Clinton voters? Are they fired up enough to vote? Will Hispanic turnout be higher than normal in reaction to Trump's calls to "build a wall"? Will women vote in higher numbers than expected because there is a woman on the ticket or because of Trump's comments about women? What about youth? What about the Republican or Democratic base? Voter turnout is a major strategic concern for candidates running for office. Elections can be won or lost by getting one's supporters to the polls and keeping the opponent's supporters at home on Election Day. It is no surprise, then, that campaigns expend a great deal of time and energy in get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts to encourage their supporters to vote while trying to dampen enthusiasm for the opponent.

The activity surrounding GOTV efforts in any given election occurs against the backdrop of historically anemic turnout rates in the United States over the past fifty years. Turnout rates declined dramatically after 1960, leading many commentators to worry about the future of American democracy and many scholars to examine what was going on. Two major explanations were the focus of this research: institutional impediments to voting and individual-level attitudes that might increase or decrease turnout. We look at historical trends in voter turnout and at the institutional and attitudinal factors that affect whether people vote or not. We also address mobilization efforts by political parties and candidates and their impact on turnout.

While turnout is obviously important in a democracy, the American electorate can participate in many other ways that can have an impact on elections. Americans

can donate money to a campaign, put a sign in their yard or a bumper sticker on their car, make telephone calls on behalf of a candidate, go door-to-door canvassing for a candidate, write letters to the editor supporting a candidate, and so on. Donald Trump's unconventional strategy of holding rallies across the country, rather than using traditional GOTV efforts, points to attendance at rallies as another activity important in the 2016 election season. We therefore examine in this chapter not only who votes but who gets involved more actively in campaigns as well.

## TURNOUT IN AMERICAN ELECTIONS

One of the most persistent complaints about the current American electoral system is its failure to achieve the high rates of voter turnout found in other countries and common in the United States in the nineteenth century. U.S. voter turnout was close to 80 percent before 1900; modern democracies around the world frequently record similarly high levels. Turnout in the United States over the past one hundred years, in contrast, has exceeded 60 percent only in presidential elections, and it has exceeded that low threshold only twice since 1960.

These unfavorable comparisons are somewhat misleading. The *voting turnout rate* is the percentage of the eligible population that votes in a particular election (the number of voters divided by the number of eligible voters). This seems straightforward, but it isn't. As Michael McDonald and Samuel Popkin point out, most reports on voter turnout use the voting age population (VAP) as the denominator rather than the voting eligible population (VEP).<sup>1</sup> Not all people who are of voting age are eligible to vote because of state laws restricting voting to, for example, U.S. citizens and people who fulfill residency requirements. The voting turnout rate is ideally calculated taking into account all state-level restrictions. When the denominator includes the VAP rather than the VEP, the turnout rate appears lower than it actually is because the denominator is inflated. On the flip side, in some states, blacks, women, and eighteen-year-olds were given the right to vote before suffrage was extended to them nationwide by the Fifteenth, Nineteenth, and Twenty-Sixth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Since the Constitution originally left it up to the states to determine voter eligibility, states varied in who they let vote. Not including these groups in the denominator when they were actually eligible to vote within their states makes the turnout rate in earlier years appear higher than it actually was because of a deflated denominator.

Determining the numerator in the turnout rate is also surprisingly difficult. The total number of ballots cast throughout the country is unknown; some states report the total vote only for particular races. For example, not included are those who went to the polls but skipped the presidential race or who inadvertently invalidated their ballots. This "undercount" of votes cast also reduces the estimate of turnout. Most often, the number of votes cast for the highest office on the ballot is used as the numerator, but this method could miss some votes.

Michael McDonald, who runs the United States Election Project at George Mason University, has attempted to calculate turnout more accurately by correcting both the numerator and the denominator of the official figures on a state-by-state basis from 1980 through 2016. The turnout rate is slightly higher when total ballots cast, rather than total votes for the highest office, is used, but the difference is usually less than 1 percentage point. The most pronounced difference comes from using the VEP instead of the VAP, especially when looking at recent elections. The VEP-based turnout rate in the 1980s was about 2 percentage points higher than the VAP-based turnout rate. This difference increased to just under 5 percentage points beginning in 2004, largely due to both an increase in the number of noncitizens and an increase in the number of ineligible felons. In 1980, 3.5 percent of the U.S. population was made up of noncitizens, and just over 800,000 were ineligible felons. By 2016, 8.4 percent of the population was noncitizens, and 3.24 million were ineligible felons.<sup>2</sup> Rather than the official VAP highest office turnout rate of 54.7 percent in 2016, the VEP highest office turnout rate was 59.3. Thus, turnout tends to be low in the United States compared to other established democracies, but it is not as low as official statistics suggest.

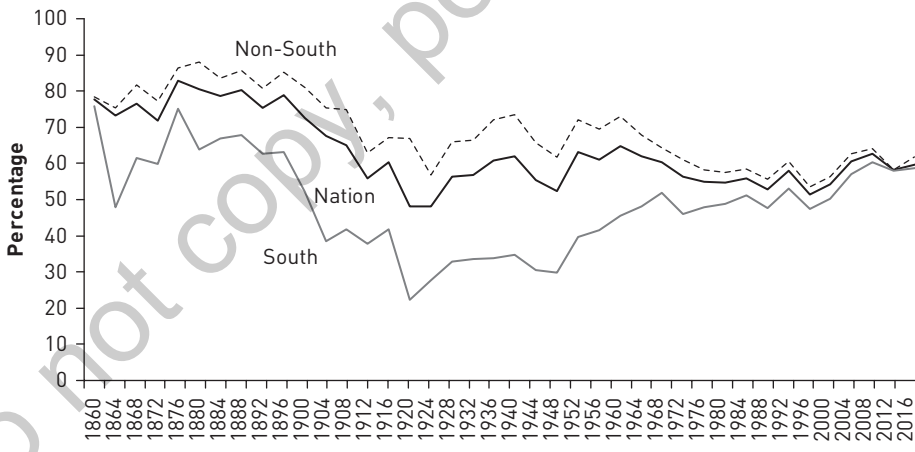
Despite the difficulties in estimating turnout, the data in Figure 3-1 show that dramatic shifts in the rate of voter turnout have occurred over time. During the nineteenth century, national turnout appears to have been extremely high—always more than 70 percent. The biggest drop in turnout occurred after 1896, especially in the South but also in the non-South. The steep drop in the South from 1900 to 1916 is in part attributable to the restrictions placed on African American voting and to the increasing one-party domination of the region. In many Southern states, whoever won the Democratic primary won the general election, making turnout in the primary much more important than turnout in the general election.

Political maneuverings in the South, however, cannot explain the decline in turnout in the non-South that occurred at about the same time. While the Republican Party became dominant in the non-South, leading to less competition and therefore less interest in general elections, the Progressive Era reforms of the late 1800s and early 1900s likely affected turnout rates across the United States.<sup>3</sup> Party organizations in the latter part of the 1800s, referred to as party machines, “delivered” or “voted” substantial numbers of voters, by party loyalists casting multiple votes, “voting tombstones” (dead people), or buying votes. The decline of stable party voting in the early twentieth century coincides with attacks on political corruption and party machines. These electoral reforms included the introduction of the secret, or Australian, ballot and the imposition of a system of voter registration.<sup>4</sup> Prior to the electoral reforms, voters were given distinctively colored ballots from their political party and openly placed them in the ballot box. The Australian ballot provided for secret voting and an official ballot with all candidates’ names appearing on it, thereby decreasing party control of voting. Without the color-coded ballots, the parties couldn’t know for whom people voted, which meant they couldn’t reward or punish people according to their vote.

Voter registration requirements were another useful tool for combating corruption, by limiting the opportunity for fraudulent voting, but they also created an additional barrier to the act of voting that had the effect of decreasing the turnout of less motivated potential voters. The resultant weakening of party machines and increased honesty in electoral activities likely reduced turnout.

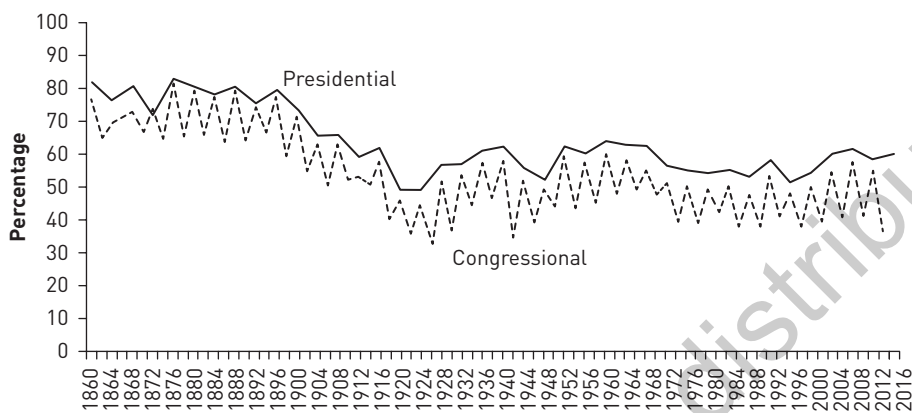
After reaching a low in the early 1920s, turnout in national elections increased steadily until 1940. A substantial—though temporary—drop in turnout occurred during World War II and its aftermath, and another decline took place from 1960 through the 1980s, before the recent slight uptick in the early years of the twenty-first century. Great differences in turnout among the states are concealed within these national data. Rates of voting in the South, as shown in Figure 3-1, were consistently low until recently, when they nearly converged with northern turnout, but state variation is still considerable. For example, states with the lowest turnout in 2016 were Hawaii at 42 percent and West Virginia at 50 percent. States with the highest turnout were Minnesota at 75 percent and Maine at 73 percent.<sup>5</sup> Variation in turnout is considerable not only from state to state but also from one type of election to another. Elections vary in the amount of interest and attention they generate in the electorate. As Figure 3-2 demonstrates, high-salience presidential

**FIGURE 3-1** ■ Estimated Turnout in Presidential Elections in the Nation, the South, and the Non-South, 1860–2016



Sources: Curtis Gans, *Voter Turnout in the United States, 1788–2009* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010) for the data from 1860 to 2010; Michael McDonald, United States Elections Project, [http://elections.gmu.edu/voter\\_turnout.htm](http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm) (2012), <http://electproject.org/2014g> (2014), and <http://electproject.org/2016g> (2016).

Note: The states included in the South were Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. All other states were counted as non-South. The data on Southern states from 1864 were limited to only four states.

**FIGURE 3-2 ■ Estimated Turnout in Presidential and Congressional Elections, 1860–2016**

Sources: Curtis Gans, *Voter Turnout in the United States, 1788–2009* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010) for the data from 1860 to 2010; Michael McDonald, United States Elections Project, [http://elections.gmu.edu/voter\\_turnout.htm](http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm) (2012), <http://electproject.org/2014g> (2014), and <http://electproject.org/2016g> (2016).

elections draw higher turnout, whereas low-salience elections, such as off-year congressional elections, are characterized by turnout levels that are 10 to 20 percent lower. Even in a presidential election year, fewer people vote in congressional elections than vote for president. Primaries and local elections elicit still lower turnout. Most of these differences in turnout can be accounted for by the lower visibility of nonpresidential elections; when less information about an election is available to the voter, a lower level of interest is produced.

## VOTERS AND NONVOTERS

While turnout rates vary across time and across states, political scientists are pretty clear on the demographic characteristics of those who vote and of those who stay away from the polling booth on Election Day. Campaign staffs care a great deal about who the voters and nonvoters are as well because what matters is not only whether people vote or not but also whether the party's base is getting to the polls. We look at the voter turnout rates of various demographic groups in 2016 and compare these results to previous elections.

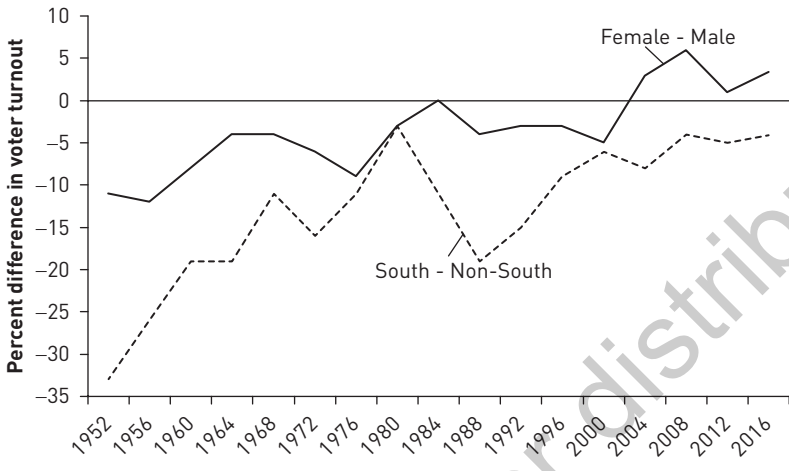
Socioeconomic status is a key predictor of turnout. People who are better educated, wealthier, and in more professional occupations consistently turn out to vote at a higher rate than those from a lower socioeconomic status. When respondents were asked in the American National Election Studies (ANES)

surveys from 1972 to 2012 if they voted in the presidential election, slightly over 85 percent of those with a college education or postgraduate degree said they voted compared to only about 56 percent of those with a high school education or less. In 2016, a similar pattern emerges, with 92 percent of the college educated saying they had voted compared to only 66 percent of the high school educated. Granted, self-reported turnout in face-to-face and telephone surveys is always higher than actual turnout numbers, largely due to the social desirability problem of people not wanting to admit they did not vote when they know they should have.<sup>6</sup> And research suggests that the better educated seem to be more affected by the social desirability bias than the less educated and therefore are more likely to claim to have voted when they did not. Even taking into account exaggerated turnout numbers, education is highly related to voting for a variety of reasons, including having a better understanding of the voter registration process, having greater interest in and knowledge about politics, and being part of a more politically active social network (see chapter 5).<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, family income plays out in much the same way. In the past forty years, ANES data show that just under 90 percent of those in the top third of family income say they voted in the previous presidential election compared to just over 65 percent of those in the bottom third. The most recent presidential election was no different. Clearly, socioeconomic status matters in American elections.

The elections of 2016 fit the pattern of demographic shifts that have been taking place over the past sixty years. It used to be the case that men turned out to vote at a higher rate than women, sometimes by as much as 12 percentage points. As Figure 3-3 shows, this tendency reversed itself in 2004 when women began to vote at a higher rate than men, especially in 2008 when there was a six percentage point difference in reported turnout between women and men. While 2012 saw little difference in their voting rates (76 percent of women and 75 percent of men), women had a higher turnout rate than men in 2016. Over the same time period, people living in the non-South were much more likely to vote than people living in the South. The comparatively low turnout in the South in the 1950s can be attributed to the efforts to keep African Americans from voting, such as the use of poll taxes and literacy tests. After passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the difference in turnout between the South and the non-South diminished (see Figures 3-1 and 3-3). In the past three presidential elections, turnout in the South has reached almost the same level as turnout in the non-South.

Race has long been a key factor when discussing turnout. Whites discriminated against African Americans primarily but not exclusively in the South when it came to registering and voting. National turnout figures for African Americans consistently showed them voting at a much lower rate than whites because of these discriminatory practices that decreased African Americans' voting eligibility. When registration and voting laws that discriminated against blacks were removed, the turnout rate among African Americans increased.

**FIGURE 3-3 ■ Voter Turnout, by Gender and Region, 1952–2016**

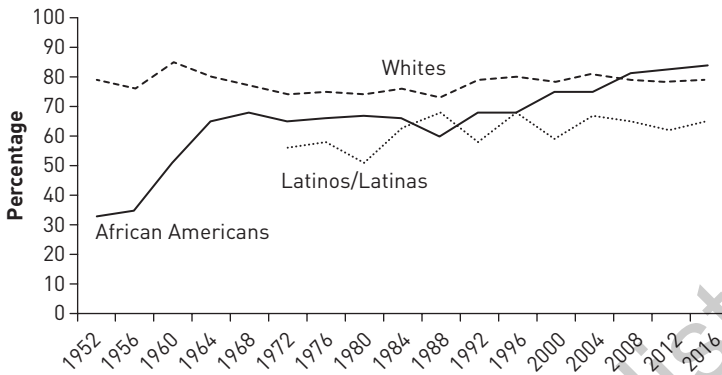


Source: American National Election Studies, available at [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org).

Note: The gender effect was calculated by subtracting the percentage of male voters from the percentage of female voters. Negative numbers therefore mean there were more male voters than female voters. Positive numbers mean there were more female voters than male voters. The region effect was calculated by subtracting the percentage of non-Southern voters from the percentage of Southern voters. Negative numbers mean there were more non-Southern voters. Because non-Southerners have outvoted Southerners in this time period, there are no positive numbers.

Figure 3-4 shows that while African Americans closed the distance with whites after the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965, they did not surpass whites in turnout until 2008, when Barack Obama first ran as the Democratic nominee for president. African Americans voted at an even higher rate than whites in both 2012 and 2016.

The ethnic group that has consistently voted at a level lower than whites and blacks is Latino/as. Part of the reason behind these lower turnout rates is voter eligibility. In the past, some states gave noncitizens the right to vote, but today only citizens are allowed to vote in federal and state elections. Latino/a immigrants who are not U.S. citizens might be asked in a survey if they voted, but they are not eligible to vote. Even taking eligibility into account, however, Latino/as vote at a lower rate than whites and African Americans, as can be seen in Figure 3-4. One potential explanation is the possible language barrier some Latino/a voters might experience. A more likely explanation is that campaigns have been slow to target Latino/a voters. As the Latino/a population has grown in the United States and as the Latino/a vote has become more critical to election outcomes, the targeting of Latino/a voters will increase dramatically.

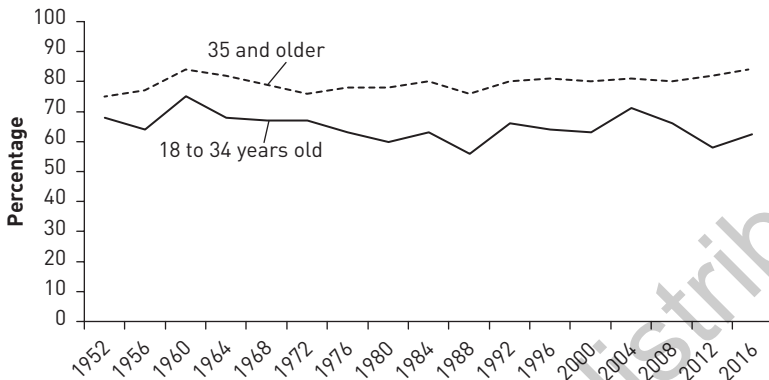
**FIGURE 3-4** ■ Voter Turnout, by Race/Ethnicity, 1952–2016

Source: American National Election Studies, available at [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org).

One demographic group that consistently gets a lot of attention for not voting is young people. People in the 18 to 34 age cohort consistently vote at a lower rate than older people, sometimes by 20 percentage points (see Figure 3-5). Even in a good year, such as 2004, youth turned out to vote significantly less than older people. Reported turnout was higher in all age groups in 2004 and 2008, in comparison to the late 1970s and the 1980s. The increase was most impressive among the youngest group of eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds, whose turnout increased from 48 percent in 2000 to 64 percent in 2008 (data not shown). Turnout among younger people dropped in 2012. Many analysts wondered what would happen to youth turnout in 2016. Bernie Sanders garnered enthusiastic support from young people during the primaries, and his failure to get the Democratic Party's nomination was frustrating to many of his supporters. Some Bernie supporters insisted they could not vote for Hillary Clinton, which raised the specter of a decline in voter turnout especially among young people. Figure 3-5 shows this was not the case. The turnout of young people increased slightly between 2012 and 2016, suggesting there was not a pronounced Sanders effect on young adult turnout. Almost all people who report voting in the primaries also report voting in the general election. Nonetheless, 1.5 percent of Clinton primary voters and 1 percent of Trump primary supporters reported that they did not vote in the general election, compared to 3.8 percent of Sanders supporters.

There are many reasons why young people are less likely to vote than older people, including motivational and institutional factors. Young people often incorrectly think that politics doesn't have much of anything to do with their lives when in reality it does. Aside from the direct connection with certain issues such as student



**FIGURE 3-5 ■ Voter Turnout, by Age, 1952–2016**

Source: American National Election Studies, available at [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org).

loan rates, many laws debated by Congress have a big impact on young people such as health care reform, the spending of money on defense versus social programs, and so on. A contextual factor that likely affects youth turnout is the attention, or lack of attention, they receive from the candidates running for office. Candidates know that young people vote at a much lower rate than older people and therefore often tailor their messages to older people to capture their votes. When candidates take the time to talk specifically to younger people, as Barack Obama did in 2008 and 2012, they are able to both increase youth turnout and gain much of their vote. Finally, much of the nonvoting among young people may be attributed to the unsettled circumstances of this age group rather than to simple disinterest in politics, although young people are slightly less interested than older people of similar educational levels. Military service, being away at college, geographic mobility with the possible failure to meet residence requirements, and the additional hurdle of initial registration, along with receiving less attention from candidates, all create barriers to voting for young citizens that are less likely to affect older ones. Efforts to promote voter registration have affected the young; as of 2016, about four-fifths of the youngest members of the electorate had registered to vote (although this registration rate is lower than older people's over 90 percent rate).

## INSTITUTIONAL IMPEDIMENTS TO TURNOUT

Political behavior, including whether people vote or not, takes place within a certain context. That context includes the institutional arrangements that make

up the electoral system in the United States. Would turnout be higher if elections were held on a weekend instead of a Tuesday? Would it be higher if the government automatically registered its citizens instead of having citizens take the initiative to get registered? Would it be higher if the United States had more competitive electoral districts? People have jobs, take care of families, and attend school, all of which make it difficult at times to fit politics into their already busy lives. The institutional arrangements surrounding elections can make it easier or more difficult for people to get to the polls. In essence, the easier it is to vote, the more people will turn out to vote.

## Restrictions of Suffrage

Decisions about the institutional arrangements used in elections are inherently political and often partisan because they affect who can vote and how easily they can vote. After the Civil War, Republicans were eager to enfranchise African Americans, figuring that this new group of voters would vote Republican. In the early 1970s, Democrats were eager to enfranchise eighteen- to twenty-year-olds, figuring that they would vote Democratic. Reformers of all sorts encouraged the enfranchisement of women as a means of promoting their own goals. Women voters were seen optimistically as the cure for corruption in government, as unwavering opponents of alcohol, and as champions of virtue in the electorate. Expansions of the suffrage are quite rare, however, compared to attempts to restrict suffrage. The most notorious of these efforts was the effective disenfranchisement of blacks in the Southern states during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Several techniques for disenfranchising blacks were used after Reconstruction in the South, and from time to time some of these techniques were applied in the North on a more limited basis to restrict the electoral participation of immigrants. The most common methods included white primaries, the poll tax, literacy tests, discriminatory administrative procedures, and intimidation. In some Southern states, only whites were allowed to vote in the party primary (the crucial election in one-party states), under the rationale that primaries to nominate candidates were internal functions of a private organization. In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled such white primaries unconstitutional on the ground that the selection of candidates for election is a public function in which discrimination on the basis of race is prohibited. The now-unconstitutional poll tax, whereby each individual was charged a flat fee as a prerequisite for registration to vote, was used for years and no doubt disenfranchised both poor blacks and poor whites. The literacy test gave local officials a device that could be administered in a selective way to permit registration of whites and practically prohibit that of African Americans. Registrars could ask African Americans to read and interpret the state constitution, for example, and insist they had not done a satisfactory job, whereas they might ask whites only to sign their names. To remain effective over long periods of time, these and other similar administrative devices probably

depended on intimidation or the use of violence against African Americans.<sup>8</sup> The outlawing of the poll tax through constitutional amendment and the suspension of literacy tests by the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its extensions eliminated two important restrictions on the right to vote.

Felon disenfranchisement remains a major state restriction on suffrage, although there is great variation from state to state. In all but two states (Maine and Vermont), prison inmates cannot vote. In many states, convicted felons cannot vote until they have served their entire sentence—in other words, served their time in prison and completed probation or parole. In some states, a felony conviction entails a permanent forfeiture of voting rights. With the prison population growing, this amounts to a sizable restriction of the franchise. A study by the Sentencing Project estimates that in 2016, over 6 million citizens were ineligible felons, compared to 3.34 million in 1996 and 1.17 million in 1976. This means that in 2016 approximately 2.5 percent of the voting age population was disenfranchised because of a felony conviction. Over 10 percent of the voting age population was disenfranchised in Florida, which has particularly strict laws.<sup>9</sup> African Americans are hit especially hard by felon disenfranchisement laws because of higher rates of incarceration among African Americans and because they tend to live in states that disenfranchise felons for life, even after they have served all of their sentence. The Sentencing Project study estimated that one of every thirteen black adults (7.4 percent) is disenfranchised because of felony convictions, although certain states have much higher percentages (Tennessee 21 percent, Florida 21 percent, Virginia 22 percent, and Kentucky 26 percent). The disenfranchisement rate of non-African Americans is 1.8 percent.<sup>10</sup>

Felon disenfranchisement clearly decreases the voting eligible population, but does it decrease voter turnout? This question is more difficult to answer. On the one hand, if the people who are disenfranchised because of a felony conviction would not have voted anyway, then voter turnout is not affected by these state laws. Felons often come from certain demographic groups—primarily young people and the poor—that are less likely to vote. Felony disenfranchisement laws can affect voter turnout only if people who want to vote are not allowed to register and to vote because of their felon status. Based on these arguments, Thomas Miles has found that felon disenfranchisement laws do not affect state turnout rates.<sup>11</sup> Other scholars, however, have estimated a much larger impact. By matching felons and nonfelons on such characteristics as gender, race, age, and education, Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza estimate that just over a third (35 percent) of disenfranchised felons would have voted in presidential elections in recent years. They also estimate that a large proportion of these disenfranchised felons would vote for Democratic candidates.<sup>12</sup> In states with higher percentages of disenfranchised felons and in close elections, these disenfranchised nonvoters could affect election outcomes. Putting felon disenfranchisement aside, some research shows that even being arrested (and not convicted) increases distrust in government and less attachment to the political system, leading to significantly lower turnout rates among those who have experienced the criminal justice system.<sup>13</sup> Even if states

do not have severe felon disenfranchisement laws, they likely have citizens who do not vote in part because of their experiences with the criminal justice system.

## Reforms and Institutional Impediments to Voting

Historically, the United States has stood out as being less voter friendly than many Western democracies. In many of these countries, governments maintain registration lists instead of placing the burden of registration on the individual. In the United States, citizens in all states but one—North Dakota—must register to be able to vote. States vary dramatically in how many days prior to the election people must register, ranging from Election Day registration in such states as Minnesota and Wisconsin, where people can register immediately prior to casting their vote, to registering thirty days in advance of the election in such states as Texas and Ohio. Virginia has a twenty-two-day deadline, California a fifteen-day deadline, Alabama an eleven-day deadline, and Vermont a seven-day deadline. Not only must people register when they first vote; they must also reregister each time they move. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 11 to 12 percent of Americans move in any given year.<sup>14</sup> College students are especially mobile. Regulations also typically cancel the registration of people who fail to vote in a few consecutive elections. With the various registration deadlines along with different rules concerning residency requirements set by each state, simply getting registered can appear daunting, and registration requirements raise the costs of political involvement, costs that a significant number of citizens choose not to assume.

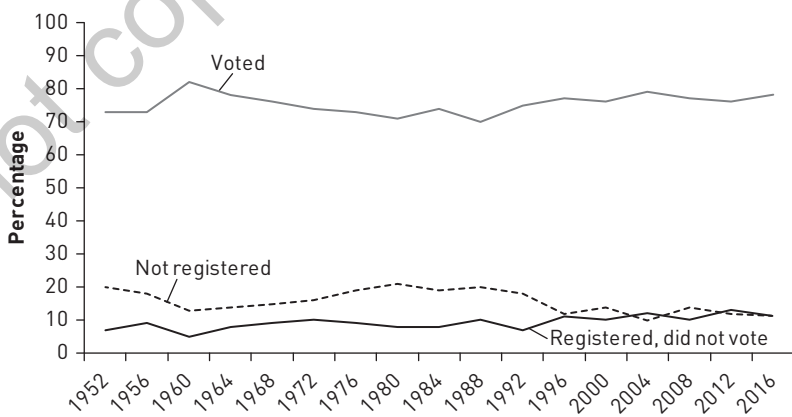
Registering is much easier today than it was in the past, when people had to travel to the county seat to register, but this added step increases the costs of voting. Classic studies estimated that turnout in the United States would increase by 9 to 14 percent if people could register to vote on Election Day.<sup>15</sup> Because of concern over low voter turnout and the role registration requirements likely play in that low turnout, reformers have worked hard to make registering easier. In 1993, Congress passed the “motor voter” bill, which provides that registration forms will be available at various governmental agencies that citizens visit for other purposes. These include agencies where motor vehicles are registered and driver’s licenses are obtained; however, because of a Republican-sponsored amendment, states are not required to provide them at unemployment and welfare offices. Because the unregistered tend to be poorer and less well educated, Democrats, who traditionally represent such groups, hoped (and Republicans feared) that reducing registration obstacles would increase the number of Democratic voters.

Many of the same political considerations were at play in the passage of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002, which mandated that states provide provisional ballots for those citizens who believe they are registered to vote but whose names are not on the registration rolls. Congress passed HAVA in reaction to the voting debacle in Florida in the 2000 presidential election between Al Gore and George W. Bush. Aside from poorly designed butterfly ballots, hanging

chads, and miscounted overseas absentee ballots,<sup>16</sup> some voters were turned away from polling places because they did not appear on the voter lists even though they insisted they were registered. At a primarily African American precinct in Fort Lauderdale, election workers turned away about one hundred people who came to vote because the voter list indicated they had not registered.<sup>17</sup> Similar scenes were played out across Florida. A provision in HAVA was designed to ensure that registered voters could vote by allowing people to cast a provisional ballot. If people show up to vote on Election Day and their name does not appear on the voter list, election workers must now offer them a provisional ballot. If they are registered, their vote will be counted. Much of the debate in Congress over this provision in the HAVA involved the form of identification that voters seeking to cast provisional ballots would need to produce at the polls. Republican legislators sought more rigid standards to prevent voter fraud; Democratic legislators generally argued for keeping the barriers to a minimum.<sup>18</sup> Despite Republican fears that easing registration requirements would bring more Democrats to the polls, the main impact of making it easier to register seems to have been a decline in the percentage of people not registered to vote and a slight increase in the proportion of the officially registered who do not vote (see Figure 3-6). Overall, the effect has been relatively small. Failure to register prohibits voting, but registering does not ensure turnout. More of those only casually interested in politics and government register—because it is so easy. But when Election Day arrives, it takes the same amount of energy to get to the polling place as it always did.

Registration requirements are not the only institutional impediment to voting. Traditionally, voting in national elections has been done on just one day, the Tuesday after the first Monday in November, at polling sites located in the

**FIGURE 3-6 ■ Registration Status and Voter Turnout, 1952–2016**



Source: American National Election Studies, available at [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org).

precincts near where people live. These polling sites are open at a set time, in many states from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., although the opening and closing times vary state by state. Reformers have argued that having elections on a weekday, when many people work, could decrease turnout. Imagine having to commute an hour to and from work, which might involve leaving one's house at 6:30 a.m. and arriving back home at 6:30 p.m. The time available for voting can be narrow at best, especially since most voters have to vote in their own precinct on Election Day. The more inconvenient voting is for them, the less likely people are to vote.

To lessen the impact of these obstacles, reforms have opened up when and where people can vote by making it easier to vote through mail ballots, early voting, absentee ballots, and the use of voting centers. Some states mail ballots to registered voters and allow them to vote by mail. Oregon has pursued these possibilities most aggressively, with the entire electorate receiving mail-in ballots in statewide elections beginning in 2004. Other states have loosened the conditions under which voters can request absentee ballots. Still other states have set up systems for in-person early voting in the weeks prior to the election. Only 4 percent of votes cast in 1972 were early votes. The percentage of early votes rose to 31 percent in 2008 and by 2016 was at 34 percent.<sup>19</sup> Many people prefer to wait until Election Day to vote, and a fairly recent reform is specifically geared toward these voters. Election Day voting centers, located in convenient, high-traffic places, are designed to encourage people to vote when they are out doing what they would normally be doing, such as heading to work or shopping. People can simply select a voting center within their county and cast their vote there rather than having to make a special trip to a precinct polling site.<sup>20</sup> If making voting more convenient is the answer to higher turnout, then the series of reforms put in place in recent years should lead to a significant increase in votes cast. The act of voting is much more convenient than it used to be, thereby lowering the costs associated with voting. Research on the impact of these reforms, however, has not shown the effects many reformers had hoped would occur. The people taking advantage of these reforms tend to be those who would vote anyway; it is just easier for them now. And these reforms have not increased substantially the turnout of under-represented groups, such as people of color or young people.<sup>21</sup>

Recent reforms that make voting potentially less convenient are the closing of polling places and the requirement instituted by some states that voters provide an official form of identification to be able to vote. Between 2012 and 2016, after the Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* that lifted the restrictions in Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, many counties especially in the South closed voting stations to increase cost savings and efficiency. Texas, for example, closed 403 polling sites and Arizona closed 202 polling sites. The argument for closing these voting stations is that they were underutilized and it was therefore cost efficient to close them. Opponents of the closures argued that having fewer polling sites would make voting less convenient and would increase the time needed to vote.<sup>22</sup>

The use of voter ID laws has also increased. After the 2000 presidential election, states began passing voter ID laws in droves. According to the National Council of State Legislatures, thirty-two states have voter ID laws in place and two more states have passed voter ID laws (although the Supreme Court struck down North Carolina's law).<sup>23</sup> These state laws vary, with some states requiring an official photo ID, others requiring a non-photo ID, and still others requesting but not requiring an ID. What happens if people do not have an appropriate form of identification also varies by state. In some states, people who do not have an appropriate ID can vote using a provisional ballot but must bring their ID to election officials within a few days of the election to have their vote counted. Other states allow those without an acceptable ID to vote if they sign a voucher attesting to their identity or if a poll worker vouches for them.

A recent Gallup survey found a large majority of Americans, 80 percent, favors the requirement that voters show a photo ID to be able to vote. Only one-fifth opposed this requirement. Republicans were more supportive than Democrats, 95 percent to 63 percent, but support for voter ID laws is widespread.<sup>24</sup> Supporters of voter ID laws are more likely to worry about voter fraud, arguing that people who are ineligible to vote are casting ballots and potentially swaying election outcomes, whereas opponents are more likely to worry about voter suppression, arguing that people who are eligible to vote but cannot afford a photo ID are being turned away from the polls. Not surprisingly, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to think votes being cast by people not eligible to vote is a major problem (52 percent of Republicans vs. 26 percent of Democrats), whereas Democrats are more likely than Republicans to think eligible voters not being allowed to cast a vote is a major problem (40 percent of Democrats vs. 22 percent of Republicans). Little evidence exists that there is actual widespread voter fraud, especially of the type that a voter ID law would presumably stop. When Indiana passed its photo ID law among claims of widespread voter fraud, no cases of in-person fraud had been prosecuted, and a special investigation over almost two years of voter fraud in Texas led to only thirteen indictments, and six of these involved people helping friends with a mail-in ballot.<sup>25</sup> Fears of widespread voter fraud appear to be misplaced. One study found that Americans were more likely to claim that they had been abducted by an alien than to have impersonated another voter.<sup>26</sup>

Evidence on the effects of voter ID laws on turnout has been mixed, although any effects are small at best. Some researchers have found a moderate impact on turnout among people who are the least likely to have the type of identification required in the state. Others, however, present evidence for minuscule effects.<sup>27</sup> Stephen Ansolabehere found that less than two-tenths of one percent (seven people out of four thousand) did not vote in 2008 because of voter identification problems. It is certainly possible that the most strict voter identification laws, which have only more recently been passed, could have a detrimental impact on turnout, a potential that will need to be watched. In the meantime, as we discuss



in the next section, what drives voter turnout much more than voter ID laws is having an interest in politics and putting a priority on voting.<sup>28</sup> Research shows, however, that minorities are more likely to be asked to show identification at the polls than is the case for whites. Hispanics and African Americans are much more likely to be asked by poll workers to show some type of identification, especially photo IDs, even when there is no state law in place requiring identification to vote.<sup>29</sup> The unequal treatment of voters at the polls based on race raises serious concerns about voter ID laws.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL MOTIVATION, GENETICS, AND TURNOUT

Election processes and rules clearly play a role in encouraging or dampening voter turnout. Any obstacles increase the cost of voting, and even the smallest cost can cause people to find other things to do on Election Day. But many people vote even when obstacles and costs exist, just as many people do not vote even when voting is relatively easy. Attempts to make voting easier—voting by mail, early voting, absentee ballots—have not resulted in significantly higher turnout rates. Making the effort to register, to become informed about an upcoming election, and to cast a ballot demands a certain level of interest and engagement in politics that cannot be created simply by reducing institutional obstacles.

Some people are highly interested in politics, and they remain so over their lifetime. Political interest increases the likelihood of voting as well as the likelihood of seeking out political news and, not surprisingly, being informed about politics. When people are knowledgeable about politics, they are also more likely to vote. Understanding political issues and the differences between candidates and the political parties makes it more likely that people will more easily decide for whom to vote and therefore to make the effort to vote. Feeling strongly attached to a political party also increases the likelihood of voting, largely because strong identifiers care more about who wins.<sup>30</sup> Table 3-1 illustrates differences among unregistered citizens, registered nonvoters, and registered voters in terms of their level of interest in the election campaign and their partisanship. The registered nonvoters generally fall between the two other groups. In most years, a partisan impact is visible in the failure of potential voters to vote, with Republicans having greater representation among voters than they do in the electorate as a whole. As has been the case since 2008, however, this did not happen in 2016. The nonvoters—both registered and unregistered—were disproportionately independents and the uninterested. If anything, Democrats in 2016 were slightly more likely to turn out to vote than their Republican counterparts.



**TABLE 3-1 ■ Interest and Partisanship of Registered Voters and Nonvoters and Unregistered Citizens, 2016**

	Unregistered	Registered	
		Nonvoters	Voters
Very much interested	6%	7%	29%
Somewhat interested	31	46	50
Not very interested	37	33	15
Not interested at all	27	13	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Strong Democrat	11%	12%	21%
Weak Democrat	10	13	13
Independent Democrat	13	19	15
Independent	30	14	6
Independent Republican	21	17	16
Weak Republican	9	16	13
Strong Republican	5	9	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>101%</b>
<i>(Weighted N)</i>	[226]	[245]	[1,444]

Source: 2016 American National Election Study, available at [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org).

Even though interest in politics is strongly correlated with voting, about half of those who say they have hardly any interest (not very and not at all interested) do vote in presidential elections (57 percent in 2016), suggesting that other factors are also at work. One of these is a sense of civic duty—the attitude that a good citizen has an obligation to vote. Many Americans see voting as an obligation of citizenship, and when they vote, they feel a sense of gratification that overrides any cost of voting they might incur.<sup>31</sup> When voting is viewed as a civic norm, people with a strong sense of civic duty vote because of the intrinsic satisfaction they get from doing what they know is right, or they vote because of extrinsic pressure to conform to a social norm. In a clever experiment, Alan Gerber, Donald Green, and Christopher Larimer found that when people were reminded of the obligation to vote, turnout increased by 1.8 percentage points compared to people who received no message. The biggest impact on turnout, however, came from people who were told that their neighbors would know whether they voted or not. In this case, turnout increased by over 8 percentage points.<sup>32</sup> A similar effect was found in a study of Facebook users that

manipulated whether people saw posts in their Facebook feed that showed their friends voting.<sup>33</sup> Civic duty increases turnout not just because people feel good when they have done what they know they ought to do; it also increases turnout because people experience social pressure to vote. It should come as no surprise that polling places often hand out “I voted” stickers, allowing voters to publicly display the fact that they fulfilled their civic obligation to vote.

Political scientists have begun to wonder more recently if there are even deeper explanations for people’s voting behavior, deeper in the sense that there might be a genetic component that leads people to vote or not to vote. Testing genetic influences is not easy, given that there is obviously not a gene for voting, but scholars have been able to use studies of twins to compare monozygotic twins (popularly known as identical twins, who share 100 percent of their genes) and dizygotic twins (popularly known as fraternal twins, who share only 50 percent of their genes, which is true for all biological siblings). We know that parents who vote are much more likely to have children who grow up to vote, and this is likely affected somewhat more by genetic influences than socialization influences. James Fowler and his colleagues found that over 50 percent of people’s turnout behavior can be explained by genetic heritability, whereas about 35 percent can be explained by shared environment. Environment matters, but genes play a big role. The influence of genetics on voting might well occur through the large role they play in explaining attitudes related to turnout, such as interest, partisanship, civic duty, and political efficacy.<sup>34</sup>

## CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY AND MOBILIZATION IN AMERICAN ELECTIONS

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Our discussion of voter turnout thus far has implied that there are people who vote (sharing certain demographic characteristics, such as higher education level and income; certain attitudes such as interest and civic duty; and certain genetics) and people who do not vote (those who do not share these characteristics). This is clearly not the case. Some people never vote, estimated to make up about 10 percent of eligible voters, and they are unlikely to go to the polls regardless what institutional rules are in place or what is done to get them to vote. Constant voters, about 25 percent of eligible voters, do not need to be prompted to go to the polls, and they will overcome whatever obstacles might get in their way. They always vote. It is the remaining 65 percent who are the intermittent voters. They are more likely to vote in high-salience elections (e.g., presidential elections) and when voting is convenient. Since reforms have, in general, made voting easier, the trick now is to get these intermittent voters to vote regularly. Getting these voters to the polls is a target of mobilization efforts.<sup>35</sup>

Millions of dollars are spent by campaigns, partisan groups, and nonpartisan organizations to get people to the polls on Election Day. These GOTV efforts include door-to-door canvassing, leaflets, door hangers, direct mail, e-mail, and phone calls. In a series of field experiments, political scientists have tested the varying effects of these GOTV strategies to determine which lead to higher turnout.<sup>36</sup> Door-to-door canvassing, where campaign volunteers ring doorbells and ask the targeted individuals to be sure to vote, tends to be more effective than using the phone or mail. Personal, face-to-face requests elicit greater compliance than impersonal requests, but people also tend to follow through when they have made a commitment publicly.<sup>37</sup> People like to think of themselves as consistent, and the only way to be consistent after telling a canvasser that they will vote in the upcoming election is to vote. Given this logic, it makes sense that phone calls can be effective as well if there is a more personal touch involved—for example, when the call is made by volunteers or when professional phone banks use a more interactive and conversational approach rather than robotic calls.<sup>38</sup> Major advances in GOTV efforts came into play in the 2012 presidential election with the use of “big data” and microtargeting. Both the Obama and Romney campaigns bought demographic data from companies that gather personal data on everything from shopping habits to financial problems. They gathered online data themselves on such things as social networks. As *New York Times* reporter Charles Duhigg wrote before the election,

They have access to information about the personal lives of voters at a scale never before imagined. And they are using that data to try to influence voting habits—in effect, to train voters to go to the polls through subtle cues, rewards, and threats in a manner akin to the marketing efforts of credit card companies and big-box retailers.<sup>39</sup>

The campaigns used the information to contact potential voters and apply targeted pressure to get them to vote, although appearing to know too much personal information can backfire by appearing creepy.

The Obama campaign was especially advanced in microtargeting. Jim Messina, Obama’s campaign manager in 2012, set up campaign headquarters in Illinois and hired sixty data analysts to analyze all the data needed to microtarget. Being able to microtarget gave the Obama campaign a definite edge over the Romney campaign. In a story told by Messina, Obama volunteers were canvassing a neighborhood at the same time as Romney volunteers. The Romney volunteers knocked on every door on one side of the street, finding that half of the people were not home and the other half were Obama supporters. The Obama volunteers were told to knock on only two doors and to speak with certain people at those houses, people who fit the profile of being potential Obama supporters and who could be nudged to get to the polls on Election Day. Because of the analysis of big data, Messina said, the Obama campaign was able to target the houses

of undecided voters who had a good probability of voting, and they were able to tell their volunteer canvassers what to say. The Obama volunteers knocked on the relevant doors, talked to the relevant people, and were able to move on to the next neighborhood, while the Romney volunteers were still knocking on doors that would not elicit Romney voters.<sup>40</sup> The Obama campaign even ran experiments on volunteer phone calls to potential supporters to test whether it was more effective to control the message in the calls or let the voters talk about issues of their own choosing; the campaign persuaded more people to support Obama when sticking to the campaign script than when letting the voters lead the discussion.

GOTV efforts were decidedly skewed in 2016. While Hillary Clinton's campaign had a less robust ground game than Obama did in 2012, she had more than twice as many field offices than Donald Trump. Field offices are places where people can go to volunteer their services for the campaign. They therefore are the hub from which volunteers go out into neighborhoods to knock on doors and from which phone calls are made to energize voters. Trump's strategy was to piggyback on the efforts of the Republican National Committee, which is a more efficient approach but less under the control of the candidate.<sup>41</sup> The Trump campaign's emphasis was on utilizing untraditional methods to increase enthusiasm and the desire to vote, including his signature rallies that generated significant media coverage.

Even if voter mobilization efforts were highly successful, turnout rates would not be consistently high across all elections. Context still matters. Good candidates, competitive races, and high-salience elections are more likely to bring out voters than are other, less invigorating races. In low-salience races, such as a local race for mayor or even a midterm congressional election, mobilization efforts are aimed at intermittent voters who vote frequently but not always and just need a nudge. Mobilization efforts to get people who only occasionally vote to the polls are more likely to be successful in high-salience elections.<sup>42</sup> GOTV campaigns can also be successful by targeting probable voters who are undecided. The problem is that there have been relatively few undecided voters in most recent elections. Defining undecided voters as those who stated in a survey that they were undecided and did not say they were leaning toward one candidate or the other when pushed, Larry Bartels and Lynn Vavreck found that only 5 percent of survey respondents in 2012 were actually undecided in the months before the election. These undecided voters not surprisingly tended to identify as independents and moderates, were not terribly knowledgeable about politics, and tended not to follow political news much.<sup>43</sup> While people might not be able to make a conscious decision, however, they often have implicit leanings toward one candidate or the other, and this unconscious preference is a good predictor of who they will actually vote for on Election Day.<sup>44</sup> In 2016, the number of undecided voters was higher than normal (10 percent of the ANES respondents), and they turned out to vote not only in high numbers, but they also tended to vote for Donald Trump.<sup>45</sup>

## PARTICIPATION IN CAMPAIGNS

Getting out the vote is what candidates need to do to win, but campaigns would be hard-pressed to get out the vote without a large amount of unpaid help. Candidates and political parties rely heavily on volunteers during the election season to do the canvassing, the stuffing of envelopes, and the calling of potential voters. They hope their supporters get out the word on their candidate by putting up yard signs or placing bumper stickers on their cars or talking to friends, relatives, and coworkers to drum up support for the candidate. And with the tremendous cost of campaigns, especially in recent years, campaign organizations eagerly solicit supporters' donations. Voting is a relatively easy way to participate in politics compared to the initiative and costs (in time and, for donations, money) associated with other types of campaign activity. Campaign activists have to be highly motivated both to figure out what they need to do to be involved and to participate in the activity. Most Americans are not motivated to be activists. A focus group participant summed it up nicely when she said, "When I leave here [the focus group discussion], when I walk out this door, I'm not going to volunteer for anything. I'm not going to get involved in anything. I mean I know this. I'm not going to pretend I'm some political activist. I'm lazy. I'm not going to do it. I'm too busy obsessing on other things going on in my life."<sup>46</sup> It comes as no surprise that fewer people are involved in campaign activities than vote.

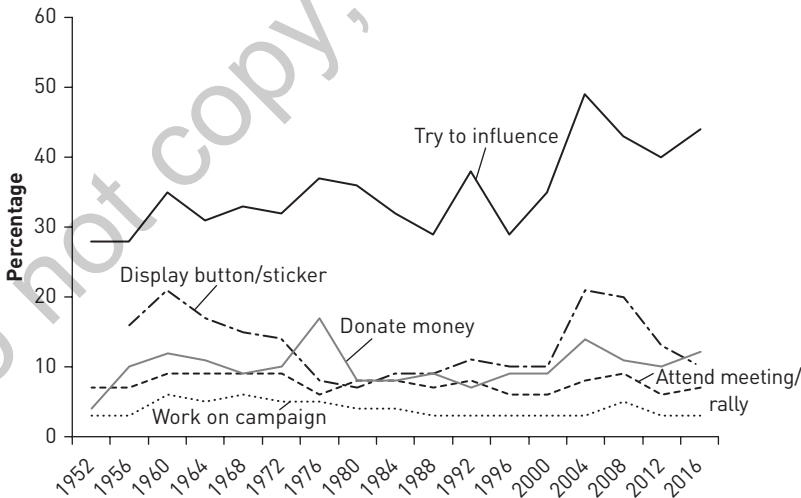
Figure 3-7 shows Americans' involvement in various campaign activities over time. The first thing that stands out is that Americans are much more likely to try to influence other people in how they should vote than to be involved in other campaign activities. ANES respondents were asked, "During the campaign, did you talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates?" On average, about a third of the respondents said yes, they did try to influence people's votes. This percentage skyrocketed to just under 50 percent in the 2004 election and remained high in 2008 (at 43 percent). The percentage of those trying to influence other people's votes was at 44 percent in 2016, but this number was still higher than the average over the time period covered by ANES. Making the effort to try to persuade people how to vote indicates a strong interest in the outcome of the election and enough knowledge about the campaign to be able to make an argument on behalf of a party or candidate. It is interesting to note that while voters are the most likely to try to influence others, people who end up not voting do so as well. Over the past several elections, approximately 50 percent of voters and just over 20 percent of nonvoters tried to influence others' vote choice. These percentages were 50 percent of voters and 24 percent of nonvoters in 2016. We can't know what the nonvoters had to say while trying to persuade other people, but we do know that in the past election, almost half (44 percent) of nonvoters claimed to "care a great deal" or "a lot" about which party won the election. Granted, voters were more likely to care (84 percent), but it is clear that a lot of nonvoters care

enough about the outcome of the election to want to persuade others for whom to vote. The other campaign activities are not as popular, with only 3 to 5 percent of Americans working on campaigns and just under 10 percent attending political meetings.

The second aspect of Figure 3-7 that stands out is that campaign activities increased significantly in 2004 but by 2012 had dropped to more normal levels (except for trying to influence people). While there was a continued drop in displaying signs or bumper stickers supporting a candidate, people’s engagement in other activities increased a bit in 2016, including trying to influence other people, donating money, and attending meetings or rallies. Even with this slight uptick, it is 2004 that stands out as a particularly engaged election. So what was it about 2004 that led to a pronounced increase in some types of campaign activity? Much of the commentary leading up to the 2004 election focused on an energized youth and upset Democrats who were still smarting after the 2000 election and the debacle in Florida. The closeness of the 2000 election led Democrats to emphasize the need for their followers to vote. The stepped-up efforts of Rock the Vote and Sean P. Diddy’s “Vote or Die,” both aimed at increasing youth turnout, and the large number of Democrats thinking that year’s presidential election “the most important of their lifetimes” led to speculation that youth and Democrats would be much more engaged in 2004 than was usual.<sup>47</sup>

Figures 3-8 and 3-9 help us unravel what happened in 2004 and who participated in 2016. The increase in campaign activity in 2004 was driven primarily by

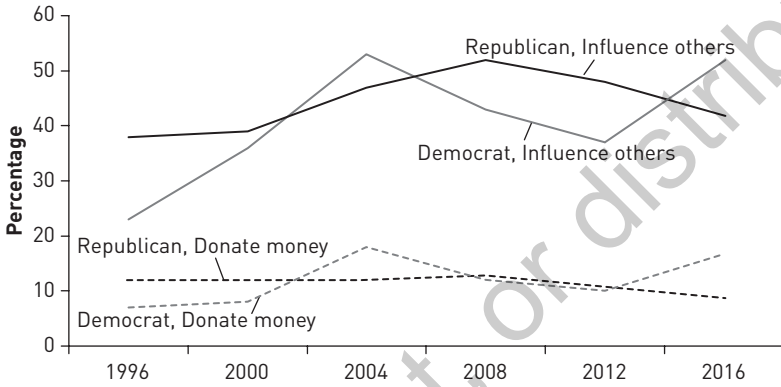
**FIGURE 3-7 ■ Campaign Participation, 1952–2016**



Source: American National Election Studies, available at [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org).

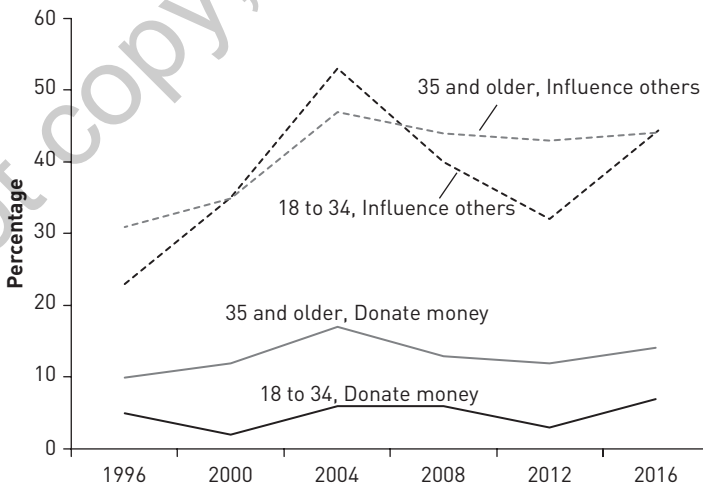
Democrats, who were more likely to influence and to donate than Republicans (Figure 3-8). Age was less of a driver of the increase since both the young and older people increased their participation in 2004 (Figure 3-9). The patterns of

**FIGURE 3-8 ■ Party Identification and Campaign Participation, 1996–2016**



Source: American National Election Studies, available at [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org).

**FIGURE 3-9 ■ Age and Campaign Participation, 1996–2016**



Source: American National Election Studies, available at [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org).

participation in 2016 are interesting. Both Democrats and young people were more likely to try to influence others and to donate compared to their 2012 behavior. In fact, young people experienced a steep increase in their attempts to influence the vote of others, bringing them up to the level of older people in 2016.

Electoral context matters, not just for voting but for other types of campaign activities as well. What happens in the political world—being upset about previous election outcomes, having GOTV efforts target certain groups of people—can influence people's behavior, making them more or less active in any given election. Low participation rates, however, are a common theme among democratic theorists who argue passionately for people to get more involved in politics. People need to vote, be informed about politics, participate in campaigns, and join organizations. The data throughout this chapter show that while many Americans achieve this standard of good citizenship, a great many do not. Political scientists have made significant advances in ascertaining what causes low participation rates and what can be done to increase citizens' engagement in the political system. Having people turned off of politics because of what they see happening in Washington in recent years does not help political scientists' efforts.

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## Suggested Readings

Green, Donald P., and Alan S. Gerber. *Get Out the Vote! How to Increase Voter Turnout*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015. Recommendations on how to mobilize voters and increase turnout based on rigorous research.

Leighley, Jan E., and Jonathan Nagler. *Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality, and Turnout in the United States*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013. In-depth, thorough analysis of the characteristics of voters versus nonvoters.

Manza, Jeff, and Christopher Uggen. *Locked Out: Disenfranchisement and American Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. An indispensable examination of felon disenfranchisement laws and their impact on American elections.

McDonald, Michael P., and Samuel L. Popkin. "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter." *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 4 (December 2001): 963–974.

Patterson, Thomas E. *The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. An analysis of political participation based on a huge, year-long survey in 2000.

Rosenstone, Steven J., and John Mark Hansen. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan, 1993. An analysis of the interaction among the strategic choices of political elites and the choices of citizens to participate in politics.

Rusk, Jerrold D., and John J. Stucker. "The Effect of the Southern System of Election Laws on Voting Participation." In *The History of American Electoral Behavior*, edited by Joel Silbey, Allan Bogue, and William Flanigan. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978. A sophisticated analysis of the disenfranchisement of voters in the South in the nineteenth century.

Teixeira, Ruy A. *The Disappearing American Voter*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1992. A sophisticated and thorough analysis of the factors that have contributed to the decline in turnout in the United States and a discussion of the impact of proposed reforms.

## Internet Resources

An important website for the analysis of aggregate turnout data is the United States Elections Project, <http://www.electproject.org/>. Michael McDonald, the host of this website, uses strategies for reducing the error in turnout estimates and offers commentary on turnout.

The website of the American National Election Studies, [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org), offers data on turnout in both presidential and off-year elections since 1952. In Resources menu, click on the link for tables and graphs under "The ANES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior" and then scroll down to "Political Involvement and Participation in Politics." You also can examine turnout of numerous social groups from 1952 to the present.

Turnout and registration data for the nation and the states are available at the U.S. Census Bureau website, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov). Click on Topics in the menu bar, then click on "Public Sector," and then click on "Voting and Registration."