

## UNIT 5: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

*Students should understand the many ways that they can influence policy-makers and impact the decisions that will affect their daily lives. The principle of rule by the people is the bedrock of the American political system and requires that citizens engage and participate in the development of policy. Under our Constitution, governing is achieved directly through citizen participation, although there are institutions (e.g., political parties, interest groups, and mass media) that inform, organize, and mobilize support to influence government and politics, resulting in many venues for citizen influence on policy making.*

**Big Idea:**

- Why do some people choose to participate in government while others do not?
- How does your social network affect your political beliefs?
- Why might you join a political party? Why might you choose not to?

***Factors associated with political ideology, efficacy, structural barriers, and demographics influence the nature and degree of political participation.***

### TOPIC 5.1 Voting Rights and Models of Voting Behavior

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Legal protections found in federal legislation and the Fifteenth, Seventeenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-Fourth, and Twenty-Sixth Amendments relate to the expansion of opportunities for political participation.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

- Describe different models of voting behavior.

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Examples of political models explaining voting behavior include:
  - Rational choice—Voting based on what is perceived to be in the citizen’s individual interest
  - Retrospective voting—Voting to decide whether the party or candidate in power should be reelected based on the recent past
  - Prospective voting—Voting based on predictions of how a party or candidate will perform in the future
  - Party-line voting—Supporting a party by voting for candidates from one political party for all public offices at the same level of government

### TOPIC 5.2 Voter Turnout

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Structural barriers, political efficacy, and demographics can predict differences in voter turnout in the U.S., and the following can influence voter turnout among democracies worldwide:
  - National versus state-controlled elections
  - Voter registration laws and procedures
  - Election type (midterm or presidential)
- Demographic characteristics and political efficacy or engagement are used to predict the likelihood of whether an individual will vote.
- Factors influencing voter choice include:
  - Party identification and ideological orientation
  - Candidate characteristics
  - Contemporary political issues
  - Religious beliefs or affiliation, gender, race and ethnicity, and other demographic characteristics

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

**TOPIC 5.3 Political Parties**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

- Describe linkage institutions.

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Linkage institutions are channels that allow individuals to communicate their preferences to policy-makers:
  - Parties
  - Interest groups
  - Elections
  - Media

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- The functions and impact of political parties on the electorate and government are represented by:
  - Mobilization and education of voters
  - Party platforms
  - Candidate recruitment
  - Campaign management, including fundraising and media strategy
  - The committee and party leadership systems in legislatures

**TOPIC 5.4 How and Why Political Parties Change and Adapt**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

- Explain why and how political parties change and adapt.

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Parties have adapted to candidate-centered campaigns, and their role in nominating candidates has been weakened.
- Parties modify their policies and messaging to appeal to various demographic coalitions.
- The structure of parties has been influenced by:
  - Critical elections and regional realignments
  - Campaign finance law
  - Changes in communication and data-management technology
- Parties use communication technology and voter data management to disseminate, control, and clarify political messages and enhance outreach and mobilization efforts.

**TOPIC 5.5 Third-Party Politics**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- In comparison to proportional systems, winner-take-all voting districts serve as a structural barrier to third-party and independent candidate success.
- The incorporation of third-party agendas into platforms of major political parties serves as a barrier to third-party and independent candidate success.

## **TOPIC 5.6 Interest Groups and Influencing Policy Making**

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

### **ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Interest groups may represent very specific or more general interests, and can educate voters and office holders, conduct lobbying, draft legislation, and mobilize membership to apply pressure on and work with legislators and government agencies.
- In addition to working within party coalitions, interest groups exert influence through long-standing relationships with bureaucratic agencies, congressional committees, and other interest groups; such relationships are described as “iron triangles” and “issue networks,” and they help interest groups exert influence across political party coalitions.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

### **ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Interest group influence may be impacted by:
  - Inequality of political and economic resources
  - Unequal access to decision makers
  - “Free rider” problem

## **TOPIC 5.7 Groups Influencing Policy Outcomes**

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

- Explain how various political actors influence public policy outcomes.

### **ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Single-issue groups, ideological/social movements, and protest movements form with the goal of impacting society and policy making.
- Competing actors such as interest groups, professional organizations, social movements, the military, and bureaucratic agencies influence policy making, such as the federal budget process, at key stages and to varying degrees.
- Elections and political parties are related to major policy shifts or initiatives, occasionally leading to political realignments of voting constituencies.

***The impact of federal policies on campaigning and electoral rules continues to be contested by both sides of the political spectrum.***

**TOPIC 5.8 Electing a President**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- The process and outcomes in U.S. presidential elections are impacted by:
  - Incumbency advantage phenomenon
  - Open and closed primaries
  - Caucuses
  - Party conventions
  - General (presidential) elections
  - The Electoral College

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

- Explain how the Electoral College facilitates and/or impedes democracy.

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- The winner-take-all allocation of votes per state (except Maine and Nebraska) under the setup of the Electoral College compared with the national popular vote for president raises questions about whether the Electoral College facilitates or impedes democracy.

**TOPIC 5.9 Congressional Elections**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

- Explain how the different processes work in U.S. congressional elections.

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- The process and outcomes in U.S. congressional elections are impacted by:
  - Incumbency advantage phenomenon
  - Open and closed primaries
  - Caucuses
  - General (presidential and midterm) elections

**TOPIC 5.10 Modern Campaigns**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- The benefits and drawbacks of modern campaigns are represented by:
  - Dependence on professional consultants
  - Rising campaign costs and intensive fundraising efforts
  - Duration of election cycles
  - Impact of and reliance on social media for campaign communication and fundraising

**TOPIC 5.11 Campaign Finance**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Federal legislation and case law pertaining to campaign finance demonstrate the ongoing debate over the role of money in political and free speech, as set forth in:
  - Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002, which was an effort to ban soft money and reduce attack ads with "Stand by Your Ad" provision: "I'm [candidate's name] and I approve this message"
  - *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010), which ruled that political spending by corporations, associations, and labor unions is a form of protected speech under the First Amendment
- Debates have increased over free speech and competitive and fair elections related to money and campaign funding (including contributions from individuals, political action committees [PACs], and political parties).
- Different types of PACs influence elections and policy making through fundraising and spending.

***The various forms of media provide citizens with political information and influence the ways in which they participate politically.***

**TOPIC 5.12 The Media**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

• **ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Traditional news media, new communication technologies, and advances in social media have profoundly influenced how citizens routinely acquire political information, including news events, investigative journalism, election coverage, and political commentary.
- The media's use of polling results to convey popular levels of trust and confidence in government can impact elections by turning such events into "horse races" based more on popularity and factors other than qualifications and platforms of candidates.

**TOPIC 5.13 Changing Media**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Political participation is influenced by a variety of media coverage, analysis, and commentary on political events.
- The rapidly increasing demand for media and political communications outlets from an ideologically diverse audience have led to debates over media bias and the impact of media ownership and partisan news sites.
- The nature of democratic debate and the level of political knowledge among citizens is impacted by:
  - Increased media choices
  - Ideologically oriented programming
  - Consumer-driven media outlets and emerging technologies that reinforce existing beliefs
  - Uncertainty over the credibility of news sources and information