

Unit 2: Participation

2a: Analyze the concept of political culture.

2a.1. Political culture is tied closely to the people belonging to a nation or the subgroups within a nation. It reflects their political ideologies, beliefs, attitudes, values, and norms.

A. Each country has its own political culture and subcultures, shaped and refined by the heroes, folklore, customs, traditions, and unique characteristics and experiences of the people.

B. Political culture connects citizens with each other and helps define their attitudes toward and relationships with their government and their political leaders. A common political culture can facilitate political consensus and decision-making among a people.

C. Different geographical areas and population sectors may have their own political subcultures. Characteristics such as ethnicity, economic status, and gender coupled with historical experiences all influence the development of a political culture and the formation of subcultures.

2a.2. American political culture includes high regard for individual achievement, free enterprise, egalitarianism, liberty, justice, and the rule of law.

A. Americans also highly value democratic principles and practices and the positive aspects of capitalism. They take pride in their nation and value patriotism itself.

B. How has the large geographical size of America and its variety of resources shaped the American value of individualism? Refer to USHistory.org's article, "[American Political Culture](#)," to review the elements that make up American political culture and how a uniquely American combination of political attitudes, beliefs, and values developed over time.

2a.3. Political culture varies across the different groups of people who live in a country.

A. In the United States many subcultures exist. Which subcultures can be defined by ethnicity or class? Do Native Americans, African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, and immigrants represent individual subcultures? What evidence can you present as you consider these questions?

B. The values and beliefs of people in diverse subcultures influence their political preferences and voting patterns. Review "[American Political Culture](#)," to learn more about the subcultures that exist in America and where they developed from.

C. Not all Americans share the same political views or feelings about the importance of the federal government compared to their own state government. How did these differences of allegiance to the federal government develop? To what extent did the American Civil War play a role in shaping the American attitudes toward the proper role of the federal government?

The general consensus of Americans is that America is a democracy composed of a plurality of cultures, all of whose members have the right to express their voice through representative government. How and why was this view challenged in the 2016 presidential election campaign? What caused a breakdown in consensus over the value of diversity in America?

2a.4. A political culture develops gradually and can remain stable and influential for a long time, but political cultures do change.

A. Events such as wars, natural catastrophes, periods of prosperity, and growing interactions with other countries and cultures can shift political cultures in new and sometimes unexpected directions. For example, during America's Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s, countless Americans suddenly lost their jobs and their life savings. As a result, many people's attitudes changed about the necessary and appropriate role of government in their lives.

B. Under the leadership of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the federal government enacted legislation to get America back on its feet through measures collectively known as "The New Deal." Rather than expecting individuals to pull themselves up by themselves, government leaders developed socialistic policies to help the people solve basic economic and welfare issues.

C. Why was The New Deal so well received by Americans, whose political culture typically valued individual achievement over government intervention? Was this shift in attitude only temporary or did it lead to lasting changes in the role of government in people's lives? Provide evidence for your answers to these questions by citing examples of welfare programs to help impoverished Americans during and after the Great Depression. You can review a number of resources on The New Deal, including many period photographs, at [the New Deal Network](#).

D. In the late-20th and early-21st centuries what changes in American political culture resulted from large-scale moves by manufacturing companies to countries where wages were lower and workers lacked the rights and protections American workers enjoyed? Which grassroots political movements developed during this time period to address widespread American dissatisfaction over job loss? The Preamble to Chapter 6 and section 6.1 of [American Government and Politics in the Information Age](#) will help you respond to these questions.

How has the American attitude toward the protection of individual rights changed with the increase in terrorist attacks in the United States and in other parts of the world since 2001? Does this represent a change in political culture, or is the change likely to be only temporary? Explain why you believe as you do, in terms of the temporary or permanent nature of increasing government control over society in the US and other places over the past 15 years.

2a.4. Each country has its own unique political culture and subcultures.

A. The political culture of many Asian countries, for example, differs quite significantly from American political culture. Could the more community-oriented perspective of Asian cultures help explain China's long history of Communist governments in the 20th and 21st centuries?

C. Both Chinese culture and Japanese culture place a higher value on the community than on the individual. Why doesn't Japan's political culture mirror China's in terms of a high regard for Communism, considering that both countries are East Asian? What historical factors may have shaped Japan's political culture to make it similar to or different from China's?

D. The culture of Scandinavian and other northern European countries generally values secularism, but religious political parties do exist. Freedom of expression among individuals also is valued. For what reasons would such countries tend to avoid stigmatizing persons belonging to particular religious identity groups, such as Muslims, even if some members of those communities are viewed as endangering the secular nature of northern Europe?

2b: Illustrate the political socialization process.

2b.1. Learning about the politics and political culture of one's society is called political socialization. Political culture is composed of many attitudes, values, and beliefs, and each child in a society develops his or her attitudes and values about politics from a variety of sources.

A. A child first learns about politics from experiences within the family. What parents think and do regarding local police, government offices, and elections influence their children's political ideas, values, and behavior – in other words, their children's political culture.

B. Children also learn their political culture and political behavior gradually by interacting with others at school and in their peer group and from the media.

C. The process of political socialization involves responding to, rejecting, and/or adopting others' attitudes, values, and beliefs and practices concerning political life and government.

D. How might an African child raised in a small rural village develop views and attitudes different from those of an urban child? Consider Section 6.2, "[Political Socialization](#)," from *American Government and Politics and the Information Age, v.1.0* in answering this question.

2b.2. Political socialization is an ongoing process that occurs throughout a person's lifetime.

A. Children in the US traditionally had positive views of government authorities, responding to their parents' training about police officers as helpful members of society. This may be changing.

B. When people receive new information that conflicts with their previously held attitudes about political offices and figures (as when President Clinton was investigated for his involvement with legislative intern Monika Lewinsky), their views may change regarding key offices or figures in politics. This is true for children as well as adults.

C. People are often said to get their political party attitudes and affiliations from their parents. Can you think of times in recent US history when the younger generation deliberately rejected their parents' attitudes and feelings about politics and government? Why did this occur?

How do you suppose recent media coverage of violence by some police against members of ethnic minority communities affected the views of children and adults towards police officers? Do the views of children and their parents depend more on their own particular family background or from broader community attitudes? Explain your thinking about these questions.

As the authors of *American Government and Politics in the Information Age, v.1.0* note in their discussion of “Scandal Coverage” from section [6.3: Political Culture and Socialization in the Information Age](#), media coverage of President Clinton’s impeachment hearings negatively affected children, leading fewer children to want to be president. Should children be exposed to adult news coverage, especially when scandals are reported and investigated? Is it healthy for children to develop a mixture of positive and negative attitudes toward government figures, or should children be encouraged to look at the brighter side of political life?

2c: Discuss the role and importance of public opinion in influencing government decisions.

2c.1. Public opinion is important in a representational democracy where the people’s preferences, interests, and choices are seen as sources of governmental decision-making and programs.

A. During election campaigns, political opinion polls are taken frequently and can be highly influential in shaping voter behavior.

B. Not all voters or persons living in a community are equally well informed.

C. Read the section called “Public Opinion and Democracy,” in Jonathan Mott’s article, [“Public Opinion,”](#) to consider the positive as well as negative effects that people’s opinions can have on governmental outcomes in a democracy. Why did the original framers of the US Constitution decide to have people vote for representatives who could make decisions for them rather than to have people vote directly on every issue, such as happens in a referendum?

D. Is representational democracy really very democratic, if representatives are not obliged to follow public opinion in making their decisions in state or national government?

Even in the earliest days of the American republic, the framers of the Constitution were wary of giving too much control to the general population in determining courses of action by government. Many worried that an uneducated public would make poor decisions. Protections against rule by an angry mob or a group of influential but uninformed citizens were thus written into the US plan of government. What are some of the protections the framers of the Constitution incorporated to prevent factions from unduly shaping the course of political decisions? Were these protective measures sufficient, or should the Constitution be updated to include additional measures to protect the general population and the country itself from undesirable influences of those holding extreme views or of those who are misinformed or poorly educated?

2c.2. Polls are taken by gathering the views of a relatively small number of people known as a representative sample.

A. Methods of statistical sampling and analysis are used to extrapolate from poll results to draw broader conclusions about the political preferences and likely political behavior of the populace.

B. If a public opinion poll is not conducted by rules for good scientific sampling and analysis, the conclusions drawn by the polling company or individuals may be misleading or inaccurate.

C. Every public opinion poll has a so-called “margin of error,” which means that polling results are not 100% accurate but can be off by a few percentage points. This often makes it very difficult to accurately call an election before all the voting results are in.

D. Consider the US presidential election of 2016. Why were so many voters surprised by the outcome of the election, and what did public opinion polling have to do with this surprise?

Public opinion polls are often considered necessary in general debates on politics and political decision-making in democratic societies. Because the public is considered as the source of initiatives taken by government officials representing the general population, polls are thought of as valuable means to identify public preferences and choices.

However, not all agree that polls are very useful, considering their margins of error.

Additionally, the very idea that public opinion should inform the decisions made in Congress and other legislative bodies is disputed by some, who believe that only those citizens who are politically well informed should be listened to.

2d: Assess the role of mass media in politics.

2d.1. Different forms of media influence the political socialization of both children and adults.

A. News obtained through the Internet and print sources and by radio and television, for example, strongly influences people’s attitudes toward public policies and programs, political parties, candidates for election, and the character and behavior of elected and appointed officials.

B. Beginning with the election of Warren Harding in 1920, the broadcast media have made it increasingly easy for Americans to gain information – albeit not always objectively presented – about political actors. This has shaped elections and the people’s acceptance or rejection of public policies. See Chapter 15, Section 6, [“Media Influence on Law and Government,”](#) in *Understanding Media and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication, v1.0*, for a discussion of how radio grew to be more influential in US political life.

C. When did television become a greater influence than radio in affecting American knowledge about politics and American attitudes about government leaders and programs? Review the above source ([“Media Influence on Law and Government”](#)) in developing your answer.

2d.2. Entertainment media also plays a powerful role in shaping political attitudes and values.

A. Television programs and movies, for example, can directly and indirectly shape public views on government, political action, and even how citizens themselves can and should interact with their political leaders.

B. Can you think of a particular movie about war that shaped your own feelings and attitudes about government and politics? What made this movie so influential for you?

C. Should entertainment media (television series, movies, cartoons, comics, etc.) rightfully be used to shape political views and attitudes, or should entertainment stay out of politics?

2d.3. In recent years, social media and the more widespread use of the Internet have become especially powerful tools in shaping public opinion.

A. Some governments try to regulate or censor people's access to social media and the Internet, believing these are dangerous influences that can destabilize government authority. Read Section 6 of Chapter 15, "[Media Influence on Laws and Government](#)," of *Understanding Media and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication, v.1.0* to learn more about the ways some governments restrict public access to media in order to control political outcomes.

B. Think of how influential Twitter and Facebook were in the 2016 US presidential election campaigns of both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. What made these forms of social media particularly powerful in building communities of followers for the two leading presidential candidates and in influencing voting behavior? Was it correct for the unimpeded use of social media to have had such strong effects on the presidential election?

C. Thinking back to Unit 1's treatment of the theories of constitutionalism and representational politics, is social media's ability to sway public opinion and influence elections good or bad? Does social media threaten individual constitutional rights in America, or is it a good way for the general public to express diverse opinions and gather support for particular courses of action?

Media comes in many forms: as news media, entertainment media, and social media, for example. Many of these types of media directly affect people's attitudes and values, and some argue that certain forms of media should be regulated so that no one infringes on others' rights. Will democratic societies benefit from or be disadvantaged by the continued growth of social media? On what does your answer (and the outcome of media influence) depend?

2e: Explain the influence of interest groups within the political process.

2e.1. In a democratic society, individuals express their opinions not only as singular members of society but through groups known as "interest groups." By participating in a group whose members share the same values or goals regarding political action or outcomes, an individual can often achieve more than by working alone. Interest groups in democracies are often numerous and very visible, especially as diversity increases by immigration or social change.

A. Interest groups form around particular bases of support, for example, according to economic status and interests, social status or characteristics, and particular ideologies or belief systems, or in support of or opposed to specific policies and actions of political leaders.

B. Read Lumen Learning's discussion of "[The Interest Group System](#)" to learn more about various types of interest groups in democratic societies, or even in non-democratic ones, and how these groups can shape political outcomes.

C. Economic interest groups include businesses, trade unions, and professional organizations.

D. Societal interest groups form around common attributes such as ethnicity, gender, or age.

E. Ideological interest groups reflect specific political orientations and outlooks, such as reactionary, conservative, liberal, libertarian, or radical. Some argue that these interest groups are actually public interest groups, acting on behalf of segments of the population who seek policies laws that benefit them. (See Lumen Learning's ["The Interest Group System"](#).)

F. Public interest groups aim to benefit segments of the population or to serve the broader social good. For example, public interest groups may focus on supporting family issues, defending human rights, or protecting the environment. Their actions may be controversial or widely accepted depending on who supports them and the nature of their goals and behavior.

2e.2. Interest groups have the potential to be both helpful and harmful to democratic processes.

A. Lumen Learning considers the capacity of interest groups to perform useful functions as well as their potential threat to democracy in ["Interest Groups and the Political System."](#) A key disadvantage of interest groups is that politically powerful groups with sizable resources, such as big businesses and corporations, can press government actors to make decisions beneficial to business that do not necessarily serve the best interests of the broader population.

B. Interest group strength depends on assets, goals, allies, visibility in the decision-making arena, adaptability to changing conditions, and reputation as spread by the media (see above article).

C. Because a democratic society is composed of a variety of groups and members, it is a natural arena for interest groups, whose influence can benefit the members of particular interest groups in their interactions with politicians and government decision-making bodies.

D. Lobbyists are persons who represent or work for specific interest groups, interacting with legislative representatives at the local, state, or national levels of government to persuade officials to make decisions favoring the people whose interests the lobbyists represent. Lobbyists get their name from having stood in the lobby, or outer hallway near the legislative chamber, of Congress to talk with political leaders and figures coming in and out of legislative sessions.

2e.3. "Iron triangles" are closely connected interest groups, political officials, and government bureaucrats working together to pass specific legislation or secure particular policy outcomes.

A. The influence of an interest group in getting political and governmental actors to make policies favoring its members can be so strong and the relationships between interest groups, politicians, and bureaucrats so tight that others advocating for alternative policies or courses of action may have virtually no chance of succeeding.

B. According to Lumen Learning, iron triangles may be thought of as "subgovernments," for they work in such a close way as to influence political decision-making without

actually being a recognized, democratically elected or appointed part of the government itself.

C. Iron triangles may be beneficial in their ability to bring laws and public policies smoothly and quickly to fruition or they may be detrimental in their obstructing others (opponents or alternative voices) from having equal access to government and political leaders. For example, large businesses, due to their vast financial resources, often reach top-level decision-makers in government more easily than ordinary people can.

D. US History.org's [discussion of interest groups](#) in "American Political Culture" points out certain benefits of iron triangles, where interest groups can provide information and statistics to government bureaucrats and political decision-makers, who in turn can then enact laws and make policies to better serve the interest group's members. An example of an effective iron triangle, according to this reading, is the connection between the American Association for Retired People (AARP, a membership organization spanning America), the House Subcommittee on Aging (one of many subcommittees of Congressional Representatives), and the Social Security Administration (which distributes retirement benefits to millions of Americans).

E. When the US Constitution was written and the Founding Fathers debated how to frame the document so Americans would be fairly represented and could have a voice in government decision-making, James Madison wrote of the dangers of factions in Federalist No. 10 (one of the *Federalist Papers*, which Lumen Learning discusses in "[Interest Groups and the Political System](#)"). Madison feared that a pluralist democracy could fall under the influence of dangerous "factions," where certain components of the population would exert undue sway over governmental decision-making by working in concert with each other.

Lumen points out that Madison's factions were not exactly the same as interest groups today, though similarities exist. According to Lumen, interest groups in the currently very diverse US population may pose far less danger than Madison's dreaded hypothetical factions. Was Madison right in warning about the negative influence that groups within the population could have on government decisions? Or do the positives outweigh the negatives concerning interest groups?

2e.4. Political action groups, or PACs, are interest groups that form around specific political candidates, parties, or issues in electoral campaigns.

A. The main goal of PACs is to get that person elected who will best serve the interests of the people or the elements, businesses, or organizations working together in the PAC.

B. Legislation passed in the United States to limit the influence of PACs has been only somewhat successful, as PACs have found ways of getting around election-contribution limits and have continued to make PACs instrumental in pushing the election of specific candidates.

C. Because PACs can gather enormous financial resources and influence political campaigns with their assets, political campaigning has become increasingly expensive in the US. Some argue that US politics, particularly in electoral races for the president, senators, and representatives at the national level, has pushed political office out of reach for regular citizens.

Should people with significant financial resources be allowed to form PACs to shape the outcome of elections if they can raise sufficient funds? Is it preferable for US laws to limit campaign financing by PACs while enabling ordinary Americans to contribute to a general election fund through the voluntary contribution check-off box on federal income tax returns?

2f: Identify the role of political parties.

2f.1. Chapter 10, [“Political Parties,”](#) in *American Politics and Government in the Information Age, v1.0*, defines political parties as “enduring organizations under whose labels candidates seek and hold elective offices.” The history of political parties in America shows that parties have had both positive and negative effects on American political life and government operations.

A. Although political parties were not defined in the US Constitution, they quickly came to play a major role in American political life.

B. The Preamble of Chapter 10, [“Political Parties,”](#) in *American Politics and Government in the Information Age, v1.0*, states that political parties in the United States initially formed around charismatic figures like Thomas Jefferson and John Adams when only male landowners could vote. Later, with voting extended to a larger share of the population (though women and African-Americans were still excluded), parties developed around specific public values and beliefs.

C. When waves of immigrants came to the United States, political parties became authoritarian machines persuading large numbers of immigrants to support particular candidates, parties, and politicians in return for favors such as jobs distributed by the parties and help obtaining citizenship, socializing the immigrants into American political life ([“Political Parties”](#)).

D. As the authors of [“Political Parties”](#) note, the Democratic and Republican parties became the two main political parties more than 150 years ago in the decade before the Civil War. They have remained the two main parties in power because of their ability to adapt to changes in the political and social life of Americans and to changing economic times. However, the influence of the parties themselves in determining the outcome of elections has become less significant as parties have become more “candidate centered” (see “Candidate-Centered Politics” in the above Chapter 10). This change began in the late 1960s with efforts first by the Democratic Party and then the Republican Party to include more ordinary Americans in the candidate-nominating process through the use of primaries that would select the candidates for the general election.

Do you think that new political parties are likely to emerge in the next few years which will differ significantly from the Democratic and Republican parties, or will these two longstanding parties reform? Explain your position, based on your observations of recent American elections.

2f.2. In democratic countries where elections are regularly held, political parties typically bring together persons with common interests, affiliations, or allegiances with the goal of electing candidates to enact legislation and make policies and programs that party members support.

- A. Having a slate (or “ticket”) of party candidates often makes voting easier for those voters unfamiliar with politics or specific candidates’ backgrounds. By preferring one party over another, one can simply choose to vote a “straight ticket” (i.e., all candidates offered by one political party), as USHistory.org’s article, ["Political Parties,"](#) suggests.
- B. Based on USHistory.org’s ["Political Parties,"](#) the major roles of political parties in the US are: 1) to run candidates for office, 2) to balance political views and actions in government by preventing a complete take-over by one set of political actors (i.e., checking party power), 3) to keep the public informed about important issues and policies, and 4) to help organize how to propose and enact laws and policies reflecting party priorities and public interest.
- C. Political systems in democracies often have multiple parties competing for positions in the government. In the US a two-party system developed early on. See the end of USHistory.org’s ["Political Parties"](#) to learn why the US party system developed in this way.
- D. Although the Democratic and Republican parties have been the two major US parties for a century and a half, recent elections, and especially the presidential election of 2016, have shown people’s allegiances to traditional parties to be weakening. Chapter 10, ["Political Parties,"](#) in *American Politics and Government in the Information Age, v1.0*, notes that candidates are now more influential than specific parties in affecting voter support and electoral outcomes.

Because democratic pluralism includes many voices interacting in the political sphere to raise issues, propose laws and enact legislation, make policies, and implement programs reflecting public sentiments and views, rigid party structures or even parties themselves theoretically are unnecessary. Do the advantages of US political parties outweigh their disadvantages? Will political parties in America continue to exist? Could more loosely formed and fluid political interest groups, grassroots movements, and/or independent candidates replace party politics?

2g: Compare and contrast two-party and multi-party systems.

2g.1. Most democratic political party systems include a variety of parties, each fielding candidates or lists of candidates to be elected to political office so that their party’s agenda (“party platform”) can be approved and implemented.

- A. According to Boundless.com’s Political Science Chapter 7, Section 6, ["Political Parties,"](#) three types of political party systems exist: (1) single, or dominant, party systems, (2) two-party systems, and (3) multi-party systems.
- B. In single-party, or dominant party, systems, no real political competition exists, as the party in power dominates the political scene and permits no other party to influence legislation or policy.
- C. Countries with authoritarian rulers tend to have a single-party system, if they have political parties at all. Consider, for example, the dominance of the Ba’ath Party in Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Although Saddam’s regime was called the Ba’athist Regime, indicating that other parties existed, none of the other parties was allowed to operate legally. Members of other parties, such as the Kurdish parties, the Assyrian Democratic Movement, and the Iraqi Communist Party, frequently were imprisoned, tortured,

disappeared, and/or murdered. Both Party leaders tried to completely eliminate any political opposition. Under such circumstances, can it be said that a party system even exists?

2g.2. Two-party systems are less common than multi-party systems and commonly result from “winner-takes-all” voting. With a plurality of votes, even if less than the majority of votes cast, all benefits in terms of winning electors (as in the case of a US presidential election) or winning an entire district goes to the candidate with the most votes.

A. Because the US relies on a simple-plurality voting system in many local elections as well as state and national elections for legislative representatives, two parties tend to dominate the political scene. (See Boundless.com’s discussion of ["The Two-Party System"](#) for the connection between simple-plurality voting and two-party systems.)

B. In a two-party system, two parties dominate politics and take turns serving in the majority, depending on election results. One party is typically more conservative than the other – sometimes extremely so – holding to traditional values and favoring the interests of business more than the interests of individual ordinary persons. The other party generally has a more change-oriented, or “progressive,” ideology and a more liberal-democratic perspective, tending to support the rights and interests of the individual person. (Again, see Boundless.com’s ["The Two-Party System"](#).)

C. Usually, each of the two dominant parties in a two-party system spans a broad range of attitudes, preferences, and views under the party’s basic ideological umbrella, according to Boundless.com’s ["The Two-Party System."](#)

D. Other parties may exist in a two-party system but rarely succeed at getting candidates elected to office. As the above reading notes, two-party systems tend to be more stable than multi-party systems but often are more centrist, ignoring more-divergent views on public policies and laws held by persons not belonging to either of the two main parties.

For at least 160 years, candidates have been elected to US political offices through a two-party system. At least 5 party systems defined by specific time periods and party combinations and policies have existed in US history. The end point of the 5th Party System, which began in 1933 with the New Deal Coalition, is open to debate. Some analysts claim the 5th system ended in the mid-1960s, early-1980s, or mid-1990s – or in fact, continues today.

2g.3. Many countries in Western Europe have a range of parties competing for seats in the legislature and the opportunity to lead the government.

A. In many multi-party systems, two parties dominate and other smaller parties hold a lesser share of legislative seats and power, as Boundless.com’s ["Political Parties"](#) notes.

B. Coalitions of smaller parties sometimes balance one or both of the two main parties in a multi-party system. As the above source notes, this is true for the United Kingdom, Norway, Australia, Ireland, India, Pakistan, Canada, and the People’s Republic of Bangladesh.

C. More typically, according to Boundless.com’s ["Political Parties,"](#) several parties are active in the legislature of a multi-party system and no one or two parties dominate. Smaller parties often join together in coalitions to form a government (set of ministers

and prime minister) in order to carry out government functions and the laws, policies, and programs enacted by the legislature.

D. In his article, ["What If We Really Did Have a Multiparty Democracy?"](#) Aaron Aster asks what would happen if the US had a multi-party system instead of the current two-party system. Read his short article and decide if it would be preferable to shift away from the two-party system in the US. Would such a move help Americans work together more effectively across party lines?

2h: Compare the electoral system of the U.S. to a proportional representation system.

2h.1. The electoral system used in most elections in the United States is based on simple plurality voting, using a first-past-the-post or winner-takes-all rule. This method is also used in Canada, the United Kingdom, and India's lower house of parliament, according to Boundless.com's Political Science Chapter 8, ["Campaigns and Elections."](#)

A. When elections are held in simple plurality systems, the person with the greatest number of votes wins, even if they do not have a majority of votes.

B. With the winner-takes-all rule for voting (also known as the "first-past-the-post" voting rule, with the metaphor being that of a horse race), the person with the highest number of votes – in other words, the plurality – among all the candidates running reaps all the benefits of winning. For example, in an election district with 5 candidates running for Congressional Representative, the candidate with the largest number of votes wins the race even if another comes in close.

C. Majority voting, where the greatest number of votes (more than half) wins, is typically used in US legislative and judicial decision-making and the assignment of administrative rules to public programs and policies. However, candidates themselves are elected through plurality voting. Watch Ian Shapiro's lectures on ["The Moral Foundations of Politics: Majority Rule \(part I\)"](#) and [\(part II\)](#) to gain further insights on the benefits and legitimacy in a democracy of deciding issues through majority decision-making. Do you agree that majority rule is a good way for making decisions? Is it very democratic or only partially so, or does this depend on the circumstances and the composition of the population in a polity?

D. In the US Electoral College system used to determine presidential election results, each state has a certain number of electors based on the state's population. When votes are cast for president, the candidate with the greatest number of popular (public) votes in a state wins all the electors for the entire state. This means that in presidential elections the popular vote may not match how states are won by particular candidates, as the number of electors varies across states.

In a winner-take-all electoral system, small parties and independent candidates often have a very difficult time winning seats, or in the case of a presidential election, winning states and the electors voting for them in the month after the election. Read Boundless.com's Chapter 8 in Political Science, ["Campaigns and Elections,"](#) to see how such voting methods work and the differences between the US electoral system and that of other countries with other voting rules.

2h.2. In a proportional representation system, candidates are elected to positions (e.g. legislative seats) based on the proportion of votes they get in an election.

A. This means that a proportional representation system is more conducive to active involvement by multiple parties, not just two, in winning legislative seats and having a say in the government.

B. In a proportional representation system, several parties typically occupy seats in the legislature, or parliament, and coalitions of parties often form to gain the upper hand when decisions are taken through majority voting. These coalitions may be fixed or fluid, depending on the country, the nature of the parties themselves, and the types of decisions taken.

C. Varieties of proportional representation systems exist, but the most common is the list system where each party presents a list of candidates for election in a district where multiple members will be elected to political office. The seats are divided up according to the proportion of votes each party list receives from the electorate. Often, several parties are represented in the legislature when proportional representation is used as the basis for electing candidates to office.

D. Many countries in Western Europe use proportional representation to elect legislative representatives. Public policies in Europe thus may more closely match public priorities than in the US, where often only two parties actively determine policy and shape public outcomes.

If you could rewrite the US Constitution to better reflect the diversity of American interests and groups, would you change the voting method used to elect presidents by allowing for a voting method that does not lead to winner-take-all election results in an Electoral College? What type of system would you recommend? Would you keep, reform, or do away completely with the Electoral College? Why did the Founding Fathers believe it important to insulate the election of the president from the popular vote? Is this a fundamental flaw in American democracy?

2i: Analyze global trends in voter turnout and political participation.

2i.1. Voter turnout refers to the percentage of eligible voters or registered voters who actually voted in an election.

A. In many countries, voter turnout is significantly higher than in the US.

B. Some countries require by law that all eligible voters take part in voting when elections are held. Fines and other penalties can be levied on those who do not vote but are eligible to vote.

C. When voter turnout is low, the candidates elected into office cannot be said to have had a mandate – or strong public request – to be elected to power. Ensuring that the candidates chosen for political office accurately reflect voter preferences can be accomplished only when a large proportion of the voting population actually votes.

D. The authors of [“Voter Turnout since 1945,”](#) a 2002 report comparing voting in parliamentary and presidential elections around the world, utilize data on 170 independent countries, 1,256 parliamentary elections, and 412 presidential elections. They focus on parliamentary elections, asking why turnout differs from country to

country and how to increase voter turnout so that elections lead to political officials whose views and preferences better match the electorate's.

Interestingly, "[Voter Turnout since 1945](#)" showed more significant increases in voter turnout over time in some African and other developing countries than in developed Western countries. Why do you suppose this was the case? Is it surprising that strong voting behavior is not purely in the realm of developed Western democracies but sometimes appears in countries where dictatorships and authoritarian governments have given way to more democratic systems?

2i.2. According to Dieter Nohlen in his essay, "Political Participation in Old and New Democracies," included in "[Voter Turnout since 1945](#)" two possible trends for future democratic development globally include: 1) the greater spread of democratic practices, such as voting in elections, to countries that traditionally have been less democratic, and 2) the deepening of democracy in countries where elections already are standard practice but certain population segments have been excluded from or have participated less actively in elections and public decision-making.

A. Methods of registering voters (and determining registration rules) can have a direct impact on rates of voter turnout and consequently on whose voices are represented in government.

B. To include minorities in political processes, elections, and political positions, political scientists examine factors impeding minorities from voting and taking part in the electoral process. See Pinter and Gratschew's article, "Voter Registration and Inclusive Democracy: Analysing Practices Worldwide," in "[Voter Turnout since 1945](#)," to identify these factors.

C. Why is it important for minority voices to be included in elections, legislatures and presidencies? Does rule by majority necessarily exclude people in smaller subgroups in the political community? What are some ways to help all people in a democratic country to take part in elections? See "[Voter Turnout since 1945](#)," especially Pinter and Gratschew's article.

Voting cannot take place in a democracy without candidates, but candidates are not always very representative of the people living in the democracy. How can voters be encouraged to vote for candidates they view as different from themselves? Does it matter that voter turnout is often very low, even in some developed democratic countries like the US? Can we really say that a country is run democratically when only a small proportion of eligible voters actually register to vote and take part in elections by voting for the candidates of their choice? How can elections be improved so that all people living in a country make use of their power to vote?

Unit 2 Vocabulary List

Political culture
Political socialization
Public opinion
Mass media

Interest groups

Political process

Political parties

Two-party political system

Multi-party political system

Electoral system

Electoral College

Winner-takes-all electoral system

Proportional representation electoral system

Voter turnout

Political participation