Objectives

1. Examine the problem of nonvoting in this country.
2. Identify those people who typically do not vote.
3. Examine the behavior of those who vote and those who do not.
4. Understand the sociological and psychological factors that affect voting and voter behavior.
Key Terms

• **off-year election**: a congressional election held in the even years between presidential elections

• **ballot fatigue**: a phenomenon that results in fewer votes being cast for offices at the end of an election ballot

• **political efficacy**: having an influence on politics

• **political socialization**: the process by which people gain their political attitudes and opinions
• **gender gap**: the difference between the political choices of men and women
• **party identification**: the loyalty of people to a specific party
• **straight-ticket voting**: the practice of voting for candidates from only one party
• **split-ticket voting**: the practice of voting for candidates of more than one party
• **independent**: a person with no party affiliation
Introduction

• What factors influence voter behavior?

  – Voters are influenced by sociological factors such as income, occupation, education, gender, age, religion, ethnic background, geography, and family.

  – Voters are also influenced by psychological factors such as political party identification, specific candidates, and key issues.
Nonvoting

• Millions of Americans do not vote.

• Many people who do vote do not cast votes for every candidate on the ballot.
  – These people are called “nonvoting voters.”
  – Statewide offices and the presidency receive the most votes.

• Voter turnout is highest in presidential election years.
  – More people vote in general state elections than in primaries or special elections.
Voter Turnout

- Voter turnout varies from election to election, but presidential elections always draw more voters than off-year elections.

  - What factor does the blue at the top of each bar represent, and what is that factor called?
People Who Cannot Vote

• Many people cannot *legally* vote.
  – This includes resident aliens, people with disabling mental conditions, and adults in prison.

• Many others simply cannot vote.
  – Some 5-6 million people are too ill or disabled to vote.
  – Other people do not vote due to their religious beliefs or because they are traveling.

• Others may not be able to vote due to discrimination aimed at them.
Actual Nonvoters

• Checkpoint: Why do people choose not to vote?
  – They may feel that their votes will not influence local or national government or they may not trust political institutions.
  – They may believe that conditions will remain fine even if they do not vote.
  – Western voters in presidential elections may feel that the election has been decided by eastern and central states before they can vote.
Voters vs. Nonvoters

• The people most likely to vote:
  – Have higher levels of income, education, and status
  – Are older, married, long-time residents with strong party affiliation
  – What does this cartoon suggest about voter apathy?
• Checkpoint: What three sources are used to gather data about voter behavior?

– The results of specific elections

– Scientific polls and surveys of public opinion

– Studies of political socialization—how people gain political attitudes and opinions
Studying Voter Behavior, cont.

• Voters are influenced by a combination of sociological and psychological factors.
  
  – **Sociology** includes a voter’s personal qualities and their group affiliations.
  – **Psychology** includes how a voter sees politics.
Sociological Influences

• Every voter has several qualities that combine to influence their votes.

• A majority of the following groups tend to vote Republican:
  – Voters with higher incomes (such as professional and business people)
  – Voters with higher levels of education
  – Older voters (though this has varied in the past 30 years)
  – Protestants
A majority of the following groups *tend* to vote for Democrats.

- Women (by a 5-10 percent margin)
- African Americans (by large margins since the 1930s)
- Latinos (this varies among Latino groups)
- Catholics and Jews
• Geography affects voting:
  – Southerners once voted heavily Democratic, but now Republicans win many southern elections.
  – A majority of voters in big cities tend to vote for Democrats.
  – A majority of voters in the suburbs, small cities, and rural areas tend to vote Republican.

• In general, family members tend to vote in similar ways.
Party Affiliation

- Party identification is the strongest predictor of how a person will vote.

- Party loyalists are likely to vote for all of their party’s candidates in any election.
  - This tendency has decreased recently as more people identify themselves as independents with no party affiliation.
  - More people are also willing to vote for some candidates from the opposing party, “splitting” their ticket.
Independents

- It is estimated that from one fourth to one third of all voters today are independents.

- Independent voters once tended to be less concerned, less informed, and less active in politics than Democrats or Republicans.

- In recent years, a rising number of independents are young people with above average levels of education, income, and job status.
Candidates and Issues

• Short-term factors such as particular candidates or key issues can swing voters in any specific election.

  – The image projected by a candidate—personality, style, character, appearance, and ability—influences voters.

  – Emotional, publicized issues such as civil rights, war, scandals, or the economy can also sway voters.
Why Vote?

• Is it really true that only those persons who vote have a right to complain? Why or why not?
• Now that you have learned about the factors that influence voter behavior, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.

  – Why do voters act as they do?