

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE
VOTING AND ELECTIONS

Terms and concepts to know:

The electorate	15 th , 19 th , 26 th Amendments
Proportional Representation	Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)
Political efficacy	Registration laws
Election structure: nomin/elect.	Primary / general elections
Gerrymandering	“New style” campaigning
Open / closed primaries	Party caucuses
Nominating convention	PAC’s
Presidential debates	The Electoral College
“Three-factor” explanation	“Six-factor” explanation
Incumbency	“Errand running” / “pork barrel” spending

Study and discussion questions:

1. Discuss the concepts of proportional representation (in the essay by Amy) and instant run-off voting. Why do we not integrate these into our system of voting if it would make it more democratic?
2. Discuss which type of people vote and why. Do you feel that those who chose not to vote undermine democracy? What could be done to raise voting activity in underrepresented groups?
3. Discuss what Heineman describes as the “new style” of campaigning for election. Does “marketing: of candidates degrade the electoral process? How?
4. Would you call Heineman’s description of “throwing out ones’ vote” for a third-party candidate a fair characterization of third-party voters? Do you think that this perpetuates people’s fears of voting for an alternative candidate?
5. Why does Sifry think it is a mistake to think that discouraged voters are apathetic about politics and therefore unreachable? What sorts of appeals might bring voters back to the polls?
6. In what ways does Lani Guinier see democracy being compromised by current electoral laws and practices in the United States?
7. The investigative journalists at the advocacy group ProPublica suggest that voting in America is too decentralized and confusing, especially for marginalized groups. They propose a series of changes that would make voting in this country more inclusive and fairer. Which changes to our voting system do they propose that you think you could live with? Which seem too radical or difficult to implement?

Readings:

Heineman. *American Government*, Chapter 6.
WEB – Readings from the “Voting and Elections” links.

Video:

Suppressed and Sabotaged: The Right to Vote.