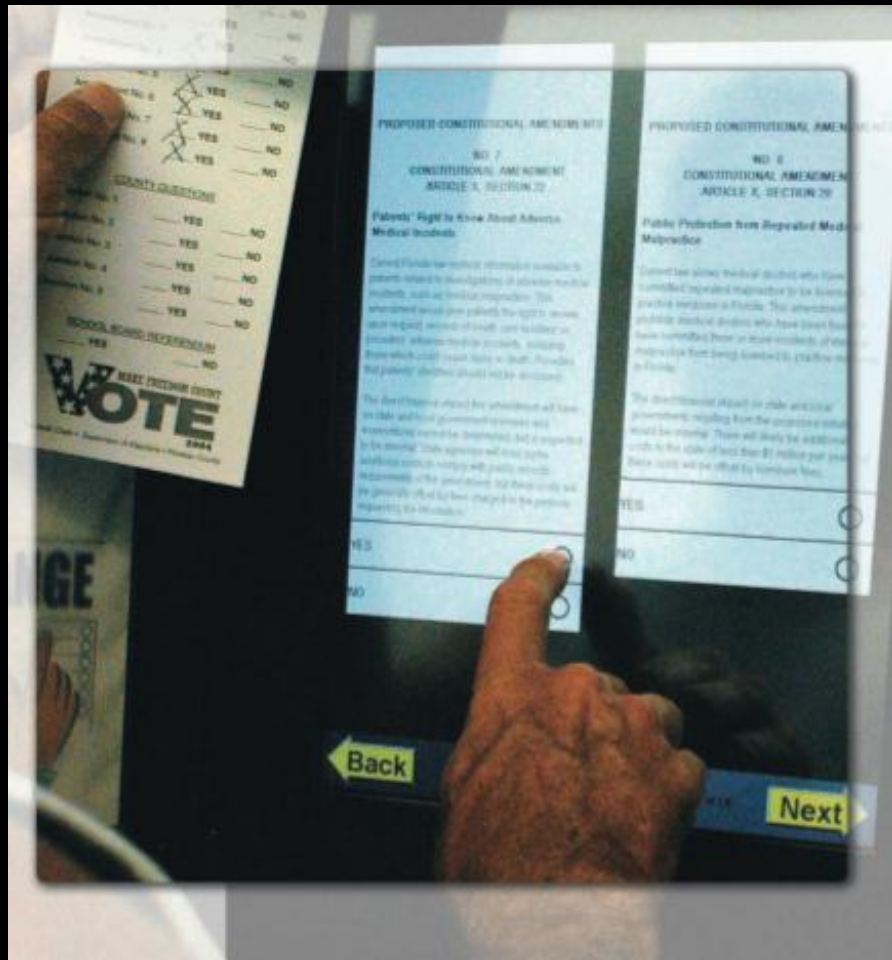




Public Opinion,
Participation, and
Voting

Chapter 8: Public Opinion, Participation, and Voting



- Forming Political Opinions and Values
- Public Opinion: Taking the Pulse of the People
- Participation: Translating Opinions into Action
- Voting Choices
- Counting Votes

Forming Political Opinions and Values

Political Socialization

- Family
- Schools
- Peers and Friends
- Mass Media
- Religious, Ethnic and Racial Background

Forming Political Opinions and Values

Other Influences

- Religious, ethnic, and racial backgrounds, as well as the workplace, can also shape opinions, both within and outside the family.

Forming Political Opinions and Values

Stability and Change

- People who remain in the same place, in the same occupation, and in the same income group throughout their lives tend to have stable opinions.

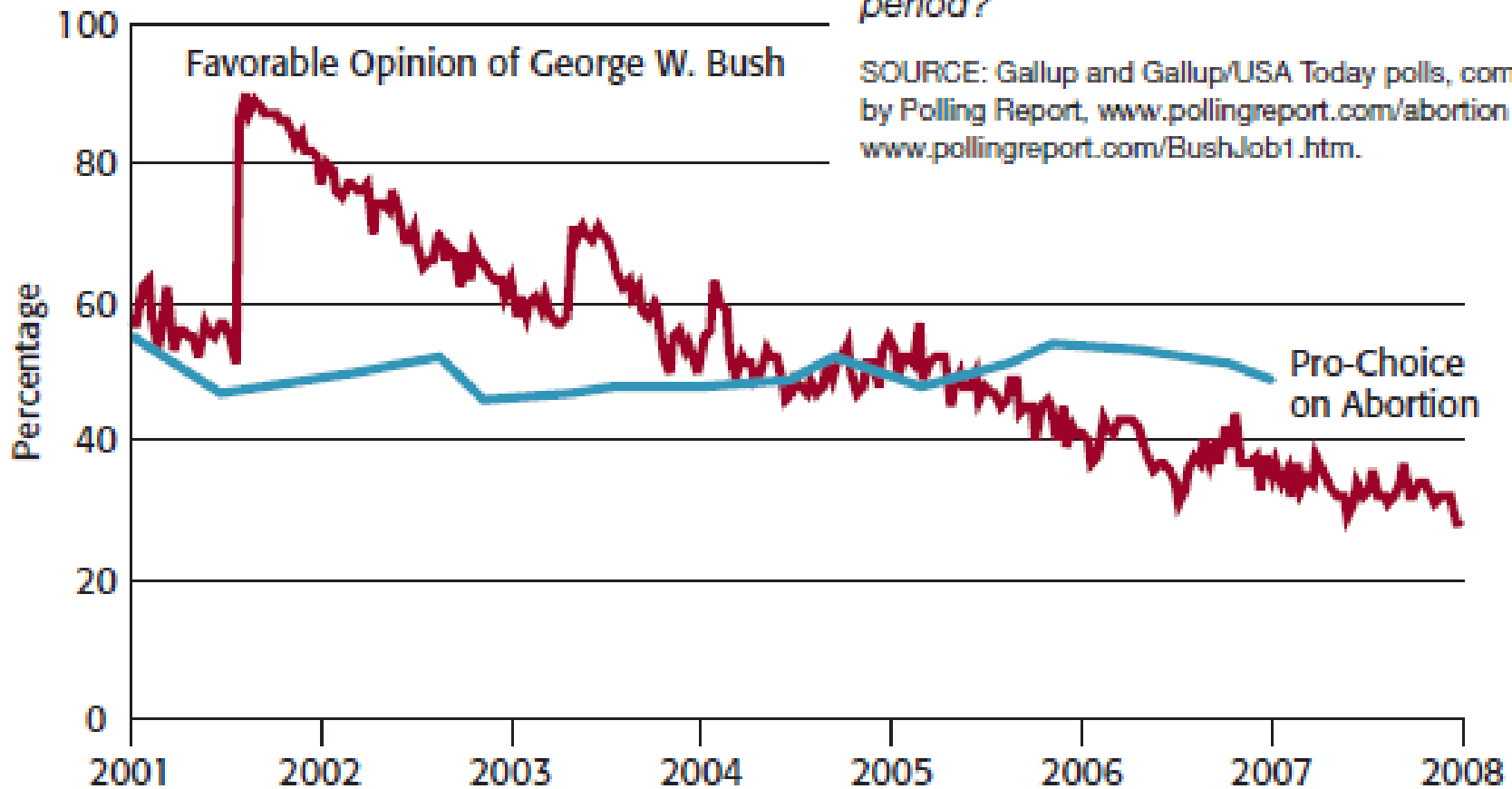
Forming Political Opinions and Values

Awareness and Interest

- Many people find politics complicated and difficult to understand.
- Younger adults who remember learning the details in school typically know most about how the government works.
- The public knows even less about important public policy issues.

FIGURE 8-1 Comparison of Opinion of President George W. Bush and Attitude on Abortion over Time.

■ *Why is attitude on abortion so consistent in comparison to the fluctuation in opinion of President Bush over the same time period?*



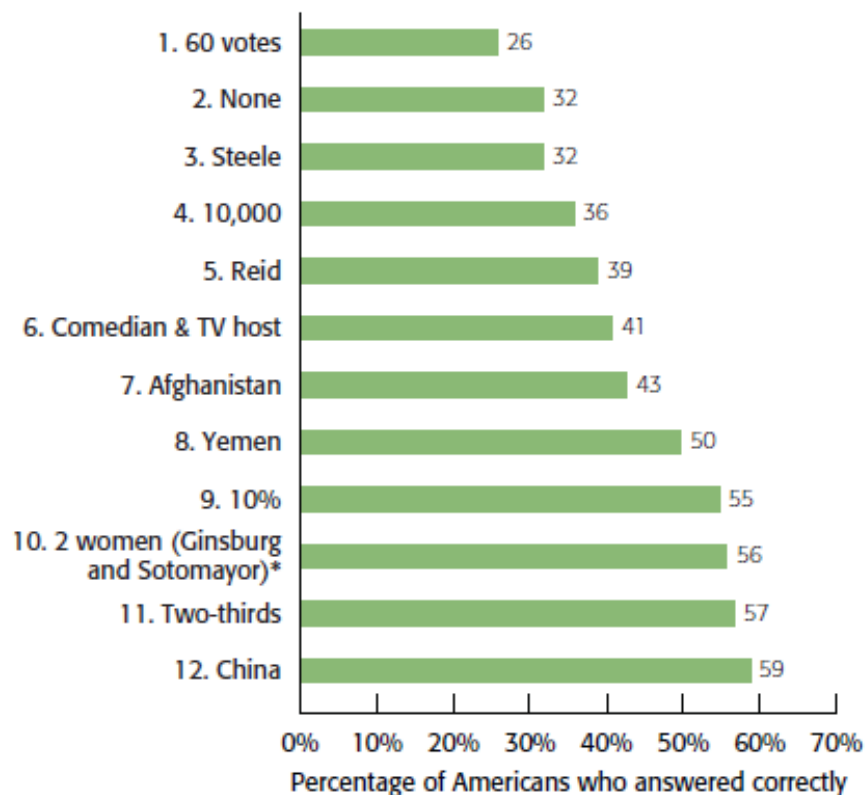
SOURCE: Gallup and Gallup/USA Today polls, compiled by Polling Report, www.pollingreport.com/abortion and www.pollingreport.com/BushJob1.htm.

FIGURE 8-2 Political Interest and Knowledge

Do you know more than the average citizen? Test yourself!
(Answers at right)

1. How many votes are needed in the Senate to break a filibuster?
51, 60, 67, or 75
2. How many GOP senators voted for the health bill?
0, 5, 10, or 20
3. Who is the chair of the GOP National Committee?
Sarah Palin, Howard Dean, Michael Steele, or Newt Gingrich
4. What is the Dow Jones Industrial Average currently closest to?
3,000; 5,000; 10,000; or 20,000
5. Who is the majority leader of the U.S. Senate?
Harry Reid, Al Franken, Mitch McConnell, or Hillary Clinton
6. Stephen Colbert is which of the following:
congressman, athlete, comedian and TV host, or hip-hop artist
7. In 2009, were there more U.S. deaths in Iraq or Afghanistan?
8. Where was the attempted "Christmas day" bomber trained?
Israel, Syria, Afghanistan, or Yemen
9. Which of the following is the unemployment rate closest to?
5%, 10%, 15%, or 20%
10. How many women are on the U.S. Supreme Court?:
0, 1, 2, or 3
11. The U.S. imports what percentage of the oil it consumes?
one-quarter, one-third, half, or two-thirds
12. Who holds the most U.S. debt?
Japan, China, Saudi Arabia, or Canada

What the Public Knows



*With the addition of Elena Kagan there are now three women on the Court

SOURCE: Pew Research Center, January 28, 2010, news release, <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/586.pdf>.

Public Opinion: Taking the Pulse of the People

Public Opinion: Taking the Pulse of the People

- In a public opinion poll, a relatively small number of people can accurately represent the opinions of a larger population if the researchers use *random sampling*.
- The *art of asking questions* is also important to scientific polling
- Scientific polls also require thorough *analysis and reporting of the results*.

TABLE

8-1 The Way You Ask the Question Matters

The way you ask a polling question can make a lot of difference in the way people answer it. Consider the following questions about the Holocaust, each of which was asked during early 1994. Read each question and consider how you would have responded if asked by an interviewer.

1. The term Holocaust usually refers to the killing of millions of Jews in Nazi death camps during World War II. Does it seem possible or does it seem impossible to you that the Nazi extermination of the Jews never happened?

| | | |
|----------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| Possible—36.8% | Impossible—58.2% | Unsure, do not know, etc.—5.0%* |
|----------------|------------------|---------------------------------|

2. The term Holocaust usually refers to the killing of millions of Jews in Nazi death camps during World War II. Do you doubt that the Holocaust actually happened or not?

| | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Yes, doubt it happened—8.8% | No, do not doubt it happened—87.0% | Unsure, etc.—4.2%** |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|

3. Just to clarify, in your opinion, did the Holocaust definitely happen, probably happen, probably not happen, or definitely not happen?

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Definitely happened—77.8% | Probably happened—17.2% | Probably did not happen—2.2% | Definitely did not happen—0.1% | Do not know, etc.—2.7%† |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|

4. Does it seem possible to you that the Nazi extermination of the Jews never happened, or do you feel certain that it happened?

| | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Possible it never happened—1.1% | Feel certain it happened—91.2% | Do not know—7.7%‡ |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|

* Gallup (January 1994)

** Gallup (January 1994)

† Gallup (January 1994)

‡ Roper (April 1994)

■ *What about the question wording might explain the very different results in these polls? Which of the questions do you think led to the most accurate measure of opinion? Why?*

Public Opinion: Taking the Pulse of the People

Public Opinion: Taking the Pulse of the People (cont.)

- Intensity
- Latency
- Salience

Public Opinion: Taking the Pulse of

Public Opinion and Public Policy

- For much of human history, public opinion has been difficult to measure.
- Many examples from history show how public opinion can shape policy and, in turn, of how policies shape opinion.
- Typically, elected officials focus on issues of importance to the public.
- Polls are no substitute for elections.

Participation: Translating Opinions into Action

Participation: Translating Opinions into Action

- U.S. citizens influence their government's actions in several ways, many of which the Constitution protects.
- For most people, politics is a private activity.
- Levels of political participation rose during the 2008 presidential election, in part because of increased use of the Internet.

Participation: Translating Opinions into Action

Participation: Translating Opinions into Action (cont.)

- Voting
- Turnout

TABLE

8-3

Changes in Voting Eligibility Standards Since 1870

| Timeline | Change |
|----------|---|
| 1870 | Fifteenth Amendment forbade states from denying the right to vote because of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” |
| 1920 | Nineteenth Amendment gave women the right to vote. |
| 1924 | Congress granted Native Americans citizenship and voting rights. |
| 1961 | Twenty-Third Amendment permitted District of Columbia residents to vote in federal elections. |
| 1964 | Twenty-Fourth Amendment prohibited the use of poll taxes in federal elections. |
| 1965 | Voting Rights Act removed restrictions that kept African Americans from voting. |
| 1971 | Twenty-Sixth Amendment extended the vote to citizens age 18 and older. |

■ *How have “the people” included in our government by the people changed since the founding of the country?*

Respondents' Campaign Activities

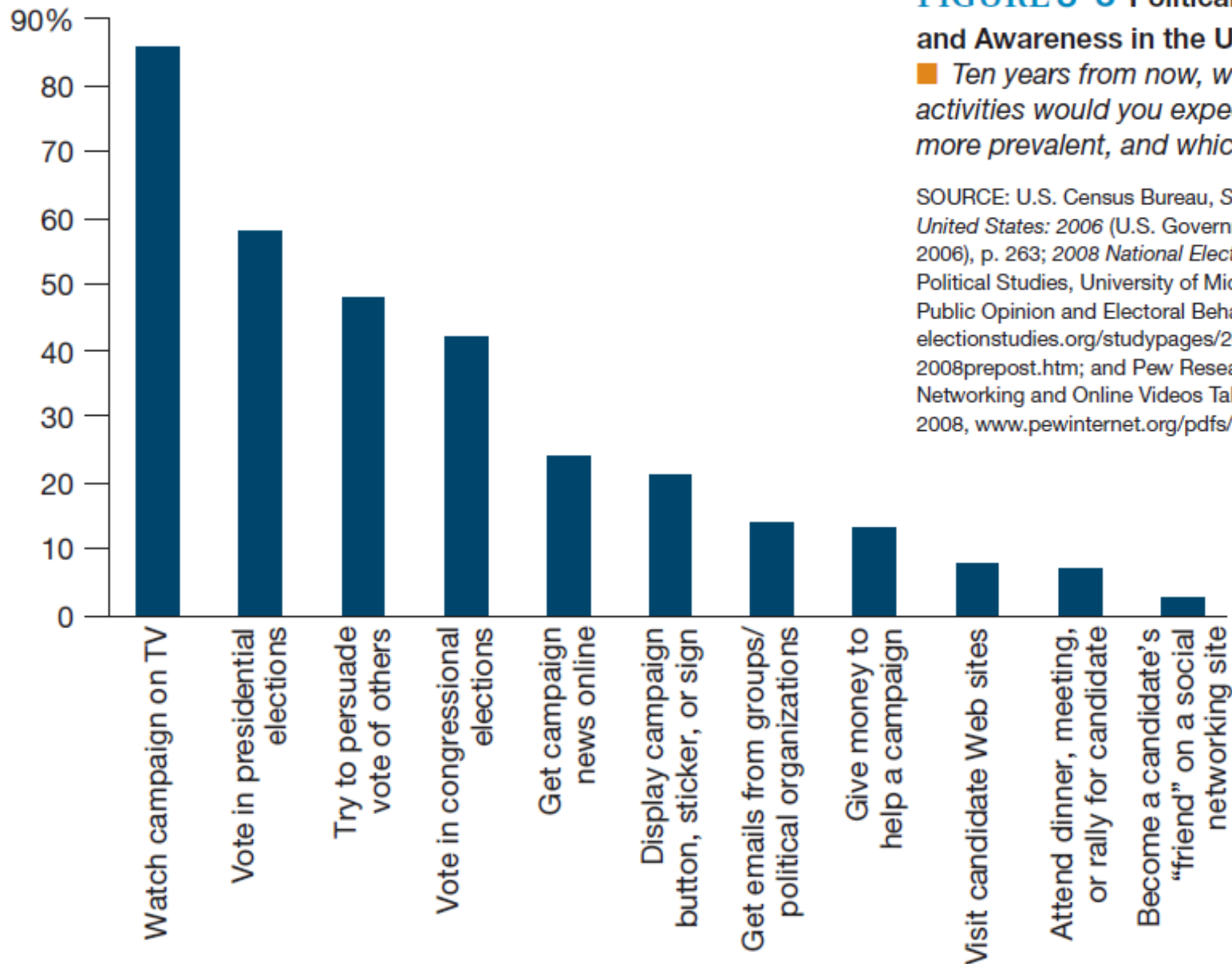


FIGURE 8-3 Political Participation and Awareness in the United States.

■ Ten years from now, which of these activities would you expect to become more prevalent, and which less so?

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2006* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006), p. 263; *2008 National Election Study*, Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan; NES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior, <http://www.electionstudies.org/studypages/2008prepost/2008prepost.htm>; and Pew Research Center, "Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off," January 11, 2008, www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/Pew_Media.

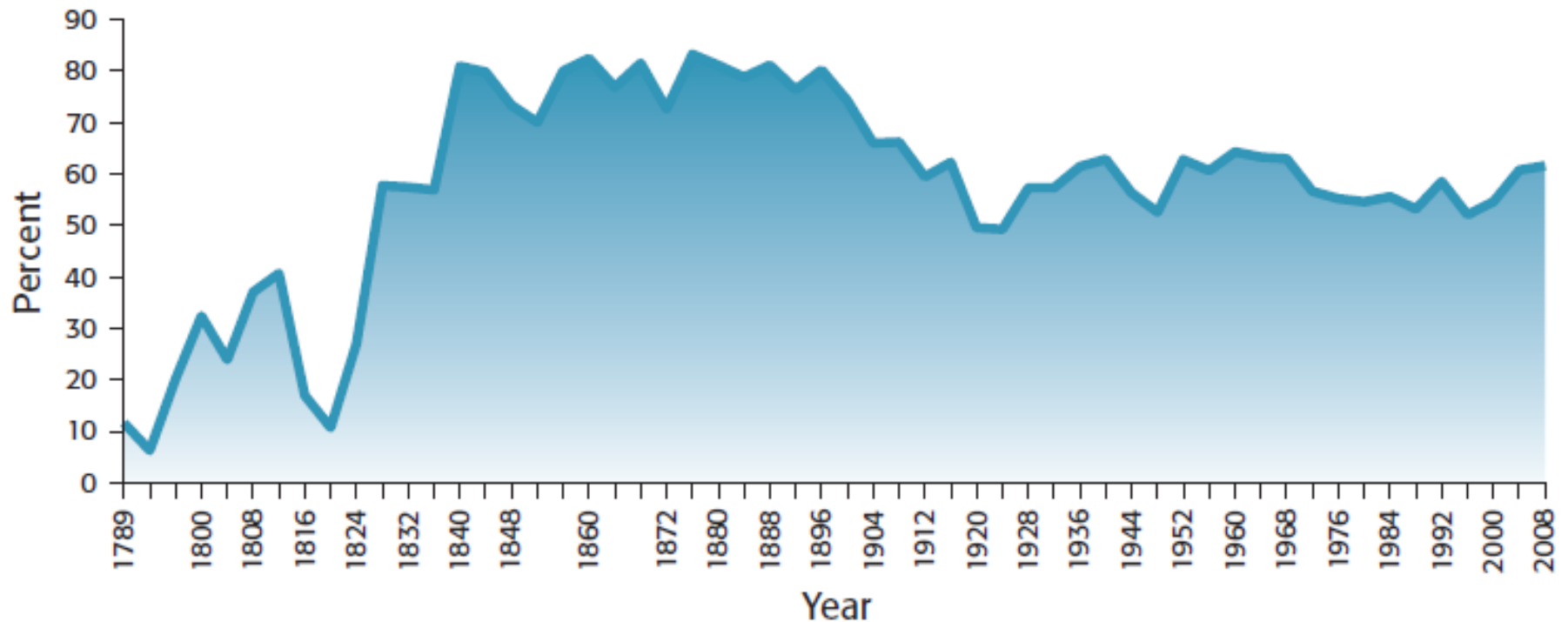


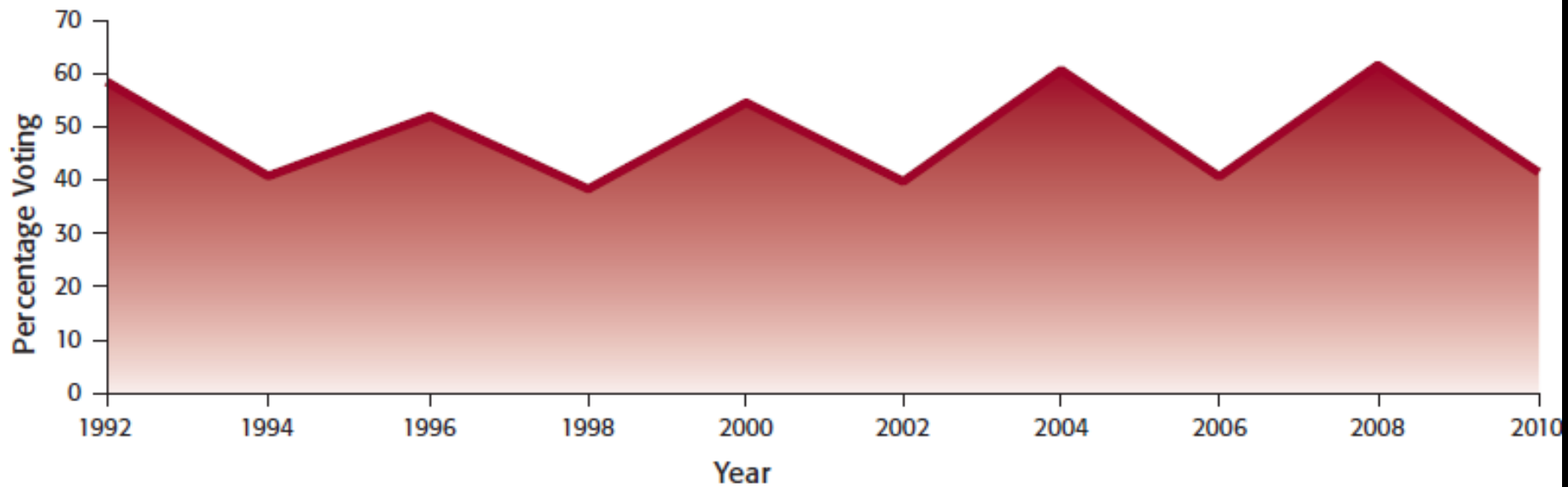
FIGURE 8–4 Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections, 1789–2008.

SOURCE: Curtis Gans, Howard W. Stanley, and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 2009–2010* (CQ Press, 2010), pp. 4–5.

FIGURE 8–5 Voter Turnout in Presidential and Midterm Elections, 1992–2010.

■ How can you explain the consistent pattern of voting demonstrated in the above graph?

SOURCE: Curtis Gans, Howard W. Stanley, and Richard G. Niemi, *Vital Statistics on American Politics, 2009–2010* (CQ Press, 2010), pp. 4–5. U.S. Elections Project, George Mason University, http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2010G.html.



Participation: Translating Opinions into Action

Characteristics of Those Who Vote

- Education
- Race and Ethnicity
- Women
- Age

Participation: Translating Opinions into Action

Mobilization

- In a nation as evenly divided politically as the United States is now, candidates must also mobilize their most loyal supporters, or their “base.”
- Campaigners learn which issues matter to potential voters and which candidates these voters prefer by conducting interviews on the telephone or in person, a process called a *canvass*.

Participation: Translating Opinions into Action

How Serious Is Nonvoting?

- There is considerable disagreement about how to interpret low voter turnout.
- Some political scientists argue that nonvoting does not change the outcome, as nonvoters closely resemble voters in policy views.
- Those who argue that nonvoting is a serious problem cite the “class bias” of those who do vote.

TABLE

8-4 Why People Do Not Vote

| | |
|--|-------|
| Too busy, conflicting schedule | 17.5% |
| Illness or disability | 14.9% |
| Other reason | 11.3% |
| Not interested | 13.4% |
| Did not like candidates or campaign issues | 12.9% |
| Out of town | 8.8% |
| Do not know or refused | 7.0% |
| Registration problems | 6.0% |
| Forgot to vote | 2.6% |
| Inconvenient polling place | 2.7% |
| Transportation problems | 2.6% |
| Bad weather conditions | 0.2% |

■ *What reforms could you suggest to help negate the most often citing reason for not voting?*

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, "Reasons for Not Voting, by Selected Characteristics: November 2008," www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting/cps2008.html.

Voting Choices

Voting Choices

- Political scientists have identified three main elements of the voting choice:
 - Party identification
 - Candidate appeal
 - Issues

Voting Choices

The Impact of Campaigns

- Candidates and campaigns are important to the voting choice.
- Campaigns are a team sport.
- Spending more money does not guarantee that a candidate will win.
- Campaigns are not for the faint of heart.

Counting Votes

Counting Votes

- Votes are counted in the United States according to state law as administered by local officials.
- Voting is imperfect.
- Who is and who is not allowed to vote on election day is also a source of controversy.
- Interest groups, political parties, and candidates have made the integrity of the voting process a high priority.