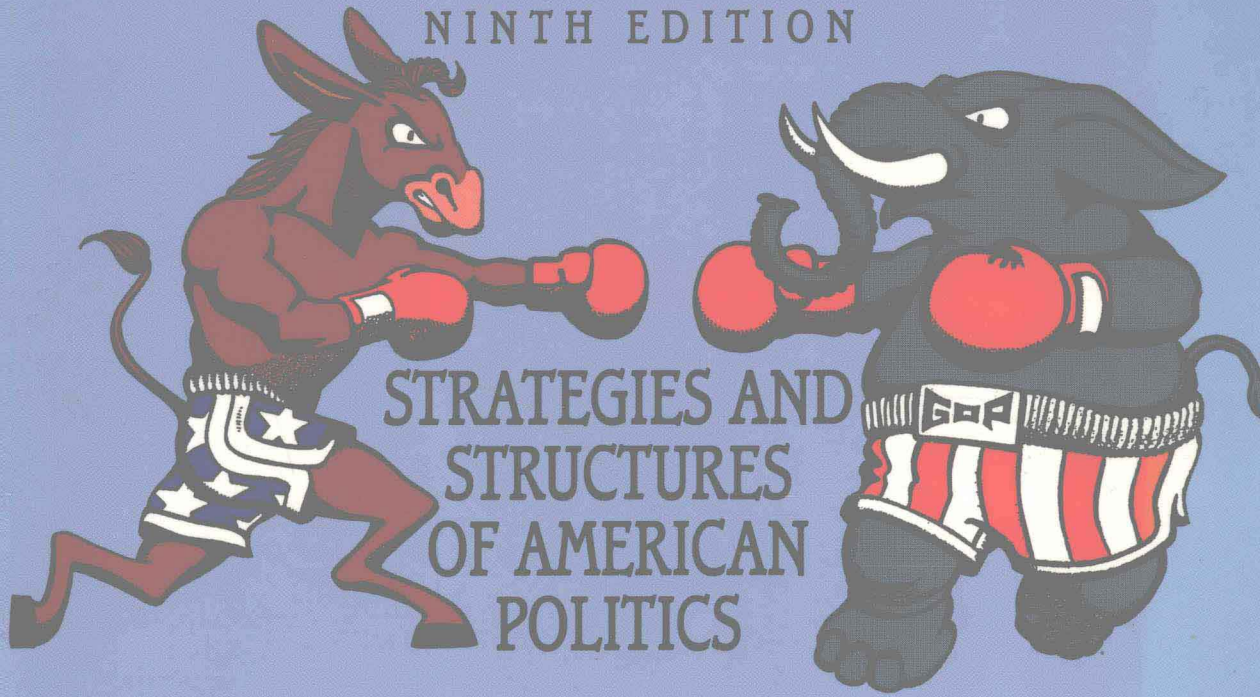


NINTH EDITION



STRATEGIES AND
STRUCTURES
OF AMERICAN
POLITICS

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

NELSON W. POLSBY
AARON WILDAVSKY

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

**Strategies and Structures
of American Politics**

Ninth Edition

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University of California, Berkeley

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Chatham, New Jersey

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To our grandchildren:

Benjamin Polsby Stern

Eva Miriam Wildavsky

Aaron Alexander Wildavsky

Preface

Before Aaron Wildavsky died, on 4 September 1993, he and I had many opportunities to talk about what we wanted to do in this ninth edition of *Presidential Elections*. We agreed that the underlying theoretical argument that had sustained the book since its first appearance in 1964 was sound. This argument could be summarized as follows: A lot of what goes on in a presidential election can be understood if we think of these activities as strategic choices by actors who operate in a world that is partially manipulable—that is where strategies come in—and partially structured by elements that are more or less given. The main structural influences on actors' strategic choices are (1) the rules and regulations governing nominations and elections and (2) principles of behavior governing how voters involve themselves in the process. Thus we continued to think that the great strength of this book was the way it drew attention to politicians' choices in the light of evolving structures of politics—political parties, primary elections, national conventions, campaigns and their organizations—and the emerging study of the behavior of masses of voters.

In this edition we intend to stick to this theme and to try to explain the strategic choices of actors differently situated—Democrats, Republicans, incumbents, challengers, journalists, delegates, and voters—by seeking to understand the way in which their world is organized by incentives and prohibitions, habits, customs, regulations, and opportunities.

So much change has occurred over the past thirty years, when we first began to write about the world of presidential elections, that Aaron and I had more or less decided that in this new edition we would attempt a fresh synthesis rather than merely add the experience of the 1992 election on to what on the whole had been a highly successful text. It has fallen to me to follow through on our intention single-handedly, but readers can rest as-

sured that there is still a lot of Aaron Wildavsky in this book. Hence the continued coauthorship on the title page. I have followed our custom of waiting until the midterm elections were over before beginning work on a new edition, thus setting the stage for the presidential election of 1996 by taking account of trends reflected in the elections of 1994, and in all the presidential elections that have taken place since we began writing this book more than three decades ago.

Our aim, as always, is to help readers understand what presidential elections are all about, not to make predictions or advise people how to vote. Aaron and I agreed about many aspects of politics, as political scientists with a decent respect for evidence naturally would. The fact that in the last decade or so of his life we usually voted differently stimulated our conversation and never diminished the affection we built up over thirty-seven years of friendship and intermittent collaboration. In this spirit the current edition of *Presidential Elections* seeks to be useful to readers no matter what their political preferences.

Nelson W. Polsby
Berkeley, California

Acknowledgments

Aaron and I have enjoyed the companionship of some impressive graduate students over the years who have helped us put together new editions of *Presidential Elections*. This ninth edition was immeasurably aided by the intelligence and devotion of Allison Wegner, Emil Levendoğlu, and Jonathan Bernstein. Ben Highton was our guide to the survey material. Among our colleagues, Herbert Alexander kindly supplied advance information from his vast store of knowledge on money in politics. We have drawn freely between editions on the insights of Jack Citrin, Bruce Cain, Ray Wolfinger, Austin Ranney, John Zaller, and Herb McClosky, and we are sure their influence will be visible to readers of this edition.

Our friend and colleague, the gifted artist Henry Fong, designed the cover. And a wonderfully supportive staff at the Institute of Governmental Studies, especially Caren Oto, Eunice Baek, and our great librarians, made working on this new edition a pleasure.

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Part I

The Strategic Environment

The strategies of all the participants in presidential elections are to a certain extent constrained, and to a certain extent driven, by the ways in which actors are situated with respect to conditions that are for them given and hard to manipulate. Here are some examples: the rules governing how votes are counted, the sequence in which primary elections occur, the accepted practices of campaign journalism, whether candidates are incumbents or challengers, and the habits of voters. All these conditions need to be taken account of by participants and need to be understood by observers.

Voters

In 1992 more than 104 million Americans voted in the presidential election. Millions more who were old enough to vote—over 85 million in 1992—did not. Parties and candidates depend on voter turnout. And so it is important for them to know why some people show up at the polls and why others do not. In two respects, Americans are different from citizens of other democracies. A smaller proportion of Americans will vote in any given election than citizens of other democracies, but Americans collectively vote much more often, and on more matters, than anyone else. Voting behavior is one of the most carefully studied of any political action. Who votes? Who doesn't vote? What motivates voters? All these questions are the subjects of extensive study.

Turnout: Why People Don't Vote

A lot of elections, not just presidential elections but also state and local and congressional elections, take place in the United States. Americans are noted for their lukewarm levels of participation as compared with voters in most Western European democracies. Table 1.1 compares the turnout of Americans in presidential elections, when U.S. turnout is highest, to typical turnout figures in parliamentary elections in other democratic countries.

Why don't Americans vote more, or at least more like Europeans? In some respects, to be sure, the elections being compared really are not comparable. Parliamentary elections in many places—for example, the United Kingdom—require voters to do only one thing: place a single **X** on a ballot to fill an office more or less like that of a U.S. representative in Congress. Who ends up running the government in these countries depends on how many parliamentarians of each political party are elected (in the United

TABLE I.1
RANKING OF COUNTRIES BY TURNOUT

1. Australia*	93.8	13. Norway	84.0
2. Belgium*	93.4	14. Israel	79.7
3. Austria	90.5	15. Finland	77.6
4. Italy*	90.5	16. Canada	75.5
5. Iceland	90.1	17. United Kingdom	75.4
6. Luxembourg	87.3	18. Portugal	72.6
7. New Zealand	87.2	19. Japan	71.4
8. Sweden	86.0	20. Spain	70.6
9. Netherlands	85.8	21. Ireland	68.5
10. Denmark	85.7	22. France	66.2
11. Greece*	84.5	23. United States	52.8
12. Germany	84.3	24. Switzerland	46.1

SOURCES: Thomas T. Mackie and Richard Rose, *The International Almanac of Electoral History*, 3d ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1991). Compulsory voting information from G. Bingham Powell, "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 80 (March 1986): 38, and Raymond Wolfinger, David Glass, and Peverill Squire, "Predictors of Electoral Turnout: International Comparison," *Policy Studies Review* 9 (Spring 1990): 561.

NOTES: These figures refer to voting turnout for the country's most recent national election as of 1989. The format used in this table is the most common representation of comparative voting turnout, but the turnout numbers are in fact deceptive. In this comparison, U.S. turnout is calculated as a percentage of the voting-age population, while turnout elsewhere is calculated as a percentage of registered voters. This difference artificially deflates the U.S. number because it includes non-citizens and other ineligible but age-eligible citizens (e.g., convicted felons in some states), and simultaneously inflates some of the other nations' scores because their denominators do not include all "age-eligible" residents (e.g., guest workers) but only registered voters. See the box on p. 8 for a table that standardizes the denominator for all countries.

* Indicates nations where voting is compulsory.

Kingdom from over 600 constituencies), and so most voters cast party-line votes and do not much care about the identity of individuals on the ballot.¹ Ballots in U.S. presidential elections are longer and more complex: they require voting for president, vice-president, members of the House, senators (two-thirds of the time), frequently various state offices, local offices, ballot propositions, and so on. American ballots therefore demand quite a lot of knowledge from voters. In general, Americans do not invest their time and energy in becoming knowledgeable about all the choices they are required to make.²

TABLE 1.2
VOTER TURNOUT IN PRESIDENTIAL AND MIDTERM ELECTIONS
(IN PERCENTAGES)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Presidential elections</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Midterm elections</i>
1960	65.4	1962	49.2
1964	63.3	1966	49.3
1968	62.3	1970	48.4
1972	57.1	1974	39.5
1976	55.2	1978	39.0
1980	54.3	1982	41.6
1984	55.2	1986	37.2
1988	50.1	1990	33.1
1992	55.2	1994	38.7

SOURCES: 1960–86: Walter Dean Burnham, “The Turnout Problem,” in *Elections American Style*, ed. A. James Reichley (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987), 114; 1986–92: *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1994* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994), 289; 1994: Committee for the Study of the American Electorate.

But voters do turn out for presidential elections more conscientiously than for elections in years when there is no presidential contest, so the complexity of presidential elections is pretty clearly not a deterrent to voting (see table 1.2). To the contrary, the added publicity of a presidential contest obviously helps turnout, as do the greater sums of money spent by political campaigns in presidential elections, and the fact that the level of campaign activity by activists and interest groups is greater in presidential elections.³

A favorite explanation of low American turnout (low by the standards of Western democracies) is that Americans are unusually disaffected from politics and that abstention from voting is their method of showing their disapproval of, or alienation from, politics. Scholars have been deeply interested in the subject of political alienation, but they have shown that this explanation of low turnout is improbable or at best incomplete.

There are several elements to their demonstration. First, scholars note that the constellation of sentiments associated with alienation—disaffection, loss of trust in government and so on—are stronger, on the whole, in many countries where turnout is relatively high. Americans do not express especially negative feelings toward government. On more measures than not, Americans are actually more positive about government than citizens of other democratic nations (see table 1.3).

TABLE I.3
COMPARATIVE ALIENATION: UNITED STATES AND EUROPE
(IN PERCENTAGES)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Political interest index^a</i>	<i>Political activity index^b</i>	<i>Political efficacy^c</i>	<i>Trust govern- ment all or most of the time^d</i>
United States	48 (1)	24 (1)	59 (2)	34 (9)
West Germany	41 (2)	14 (6)	33 (7)	52 (5)
Netherlands	36 (3)	17 (2)	37 (6)	46 (7)
Austria	32 (4)	12 (7)	N.A.	55 (4)
United Kingdom	32 (4)	11 (8)	42 (4)	40 (8)
Finland	29 (6)	17 (2)	N.A.	50 (6)
Switzerland	29 (6)	16 (5)	N.A.	76 (1)
Italy	18 (8)	17 (2)	39 (5)	14 (12)
Greece	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	62 (2)
Denmark	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	56 (3)
France	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	33 (10)
Belgium	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	20 (11)

SOURCES: Samuel H. Barnes and Max Kaase et al., "Political Action: An Eight-Nation Study, 1973-1976," Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research Codebook, cited in Raymond E. Wolfinger, David P. Glass, and Peverill Squire, "Predictors of Electoral Turnout: An International Comparison," *Policy Studies Review* 9 (Spring 1990): 557; Commission of the European Communities, *Euro-Barometre*, no. 17 (June 1982): 25; and 1980 *National Election Study Codebook* 1:614, variable 1030, cited in Wolfinger, Glass, and Squire, "Predictors of Electoral Turnout."

NOTES: The number in parentheses following the percentage is the country's rank on that question.

N.A. = data not available.

a. Scores are the mean of the percentage of respondents who said they were (1) very or somewhat interested in politics; (2) often read about politics in the newspapers; and (3) often discussed politics with others.

b. Scores are the mean of the percentage of respondents who said they (1) often worked with others in their community to solve a local problem; (2) often or sometimes attended a political meeting or rally; (3) often or sometimes contacted public officials; and (4) often or sometimes worked in behalf of a party or candidate.

c. Scores for the Europeans are the percentage of respondents who agreed that "people like yourself can help to bring about a change," and for the Americans, the percentage who disagreed with the statement, "People like me don't have any say about what the government does."

d. Percentage of respondents who agreed that they could trust their government all or most of the time.

TABLE 1.4
ALIENATION AND U.S. VOTER TURNOUT

	<i>Percentage who voted</i>
<i>How much money do the people in government waste?</i>	
None or some	59
A lot	61
<i>How much of the time can you trust the government to do what's right?</i>	
Always or most of the time	59
Some or none of the time	61
<i>Is the government run by a few big interests or for the benefit of all?</i>	
For the benefit of all the people	61
For the benefit of a few big interests	61
<i>Are most of those running the government smart, or do many not know what they are doing?</i>	
Are smart	61
Don't know what they are doing	60
<i>Are the people running the government crooked?</i>	
Hardly any or not many are crooked	64
Quite a few are crooked	57
<i>The federal government in Washington is doing a . . .</i>	
Good job	60
Fair job	64
Poor job	66
<i>How much attention does the government pay to what people think?</i>	
Good deal or some	67
Not much	58
<i>How much does having elections make the government pay attention to what the people think?</i>	
A good deal	65
Some	65
Not much	53

SOURCES: Raymond Wolfinger, David Glass, and Peverill Squire, "Predictors of Electoral Turnout: An International Comparison," *Policy Studies Review* 9 (Spring 1990): 555. Data from the Vote Validation Study of the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies, The American National Election Study, 1980.