

Unit Three: Lesson # 2

- ❑ Elections: Rules of the game
- ❑ Regularly Scheduled Elections
- ❑ Fixed, Staggered, and Limited Terms
- ❑ Term Limits
- ❑ Winner Take All

Elections: The Rules of the Game



★ **Regularly Scheduled Elections**

★ **Fixed, Staggered, and Sometimes Limited Terms**

★ **Term Limits**

★ **Winner Take All – an election system in which the candidate with the most votes wins.**

★ **Single-member districts**

★ **Proportional representation**

★ **The Electoral College**

REGULARLY SCHEDULED ELECTIONS

Elections are held at fixed intervals that cannot be changed by the party in power. The predetermined timing of elections is one of the defining characteristics of democracy in the United States.

- National government establishes WHEN they will be held
- States determine HOW the voting will occur

It does not make any difference if the nation is at war, as we were during the Civil War, or in the midst of a crisis, as in the Great Depression; when the calendar calls for an election, the election is held.

Elections for members of Congress occur on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of even-numbered years.

- Although there are some exceptions (for special elections or peculiar state provisions), participants know *in advance* just when the next election will be.

FIXED, STAGGERED, AND SOMETIMES LIMITED TERMS

Electoral system is based on fixed terms, meaning that the length of a term in office is set, not indefinite

- The term of office for the U.S. House of Representatives is **two years** (can be elected as many times as they want)
- The term of office for the Senate is **six years** (can be elected as many times as they want)
- The term of presidency is **four years** (can only serve two full terms – 22nd amendment)



FIXED, STAGGERED, AND SOMETIMES LIMITED TERMS

Our electoral system has staggered terms for some offices, meaning that not all offices are up for election at the same time

- All House members are up for election every two years
- **Only one-third of the senators are up for election at the same time**
- President is elected every four years



FIXED, STAGGERED, AND SOMETIMES LIMITED TERMS

Our electoral system has limits on the number of terms a person can hold a particular office

- **The Twenty-second Amendment limits presidents to two terms**
- **Despite their popularity, proposals for term limits have repeatedly lost when they have come to a vote in Congress**
- **If term limits are to be imposed on Congress, it will have to be done either by an amendment to the U.S. Constitution since the Supreme Court has ruled term limits for congressional offices (as set by the states) unconstitutional**

U.S. Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton (1995)

Pence Video

Term Limits Activity



Introduction to the topic:

In 1994, **Rep. Newt Gingrich** and the new Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives signed a "**Contract With America**" in which they promised to make Congressional term limits a priority.

There is already a term limit on the presidency. The Twenty-Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits anyone from being elected to the presidency more than twice. Many states have similarly limited the terms of their governors.

Members of the U.S. House of Representatives currently serve two-year terms; members of the U.S. Senate serve six-year terms. There is no limit on the number of terms they may serve. Proposed term limits would prohibit a member of the House from running for election more than six times, and would prohibit a member of the Senate from running more than twice.

(Do the math: how many years would members of each House be allowed to serve? How does this compare with the presidential term limit?)

WINNER-TAKES-ALL

- The candidate with the most votes wins = **plurality, not majority!**
- Most American election districts are single-member districts, meaning that in any district for any given election, the voters choose one representative or official
- When a single-member district is combined with the winner-takes-all rule, there is a powerful push to sustain a two-party system
- In contrast to the winner-takes-all rule, proportional representation (In national election if party X gets 12% of vote, party Y gets 43% of vote, party Z gets remaining 45% of vote party X gets 12% of seats...) rewards minor parties and permits them to participate in government

HOW DO U.S. ELECTIONS WORK?