

Read the following selection, taking note of the **boldface** words and their contexts. These words are among those you will be studying in Unit 2. As you complete the exercises in this unit, it may help to refer to the way the words are used below.

Why Vote?

< Persuasive Essay >

It is dispiriting to acknowledge the lack of interest that citizens of the United States display when it comes to exercising their right to vote. Many eligible voters, nearly 40 percent, in fact, stayed home in the last presidential election, while at the turn of the twentieth century there was an 80 percent turnout rate for presidential elections. Why has such **lassitude** permeated a society that once was vigorous and energetic about voting?

Nonvoters contend that their vote makes little difference and that they cannot vote because candidates are all loud-mouthed, **bombastic**, and dishonest. Such nonvoters **surmise** that politicians, once elected, act in their own best interests and not in the interests of the people who put them in office. Perhaps they find examples of such behavior among elected officials, but the right to vote is one that should be exercised and appreciated regardless of personal opinion about the characters of the politicians. What nonvoters do not recognize is the plight of people who cannot vote at all.

Over many **millennia** and in societies all across the globe, voting was not regarded as an **intrinsic** and inherent right of citizens—except in rare instances. First, absolute monarchs ruled and made decisions by claiming the divine right of kings they believed they alone enjoyed. Aristocrats concurred, and,

like the czars, queens, kings, and emperors they served, they believed that common people were too **callow** and uneducated to govern themselves. Unless these rulers and their scions were compassionate and astute, life for their powerless subjects was a struggle. The same was true for citizens ruled by unrestrained, powerful tyrants, like Nazi Germany's Adolf Hitler and Russia's Joseph Stalin. Even in the emerging democracy in America, the country's founders vigorously debated who could and could not become enfranchised. In 1789, only white men who owned property could rightfully take part in the voting process—hardly the **epitome** of democracy, but a start.

Some nonvoters **inveigh** against the Electoral College, claiming that this body of electors, not the majority of individual voters, actually chooses the President. Under the current system, voters in presidential elections vote not for a candidate but for a slate of electors who are

affiliated with a certain party and who promise to cast their ballots for that party's standard-bearer. In a very closely contested election, a candidate with a slight majority of popular votes might lose the election because of the way the Electoral College has voted. This has happened more than once in the country's history.

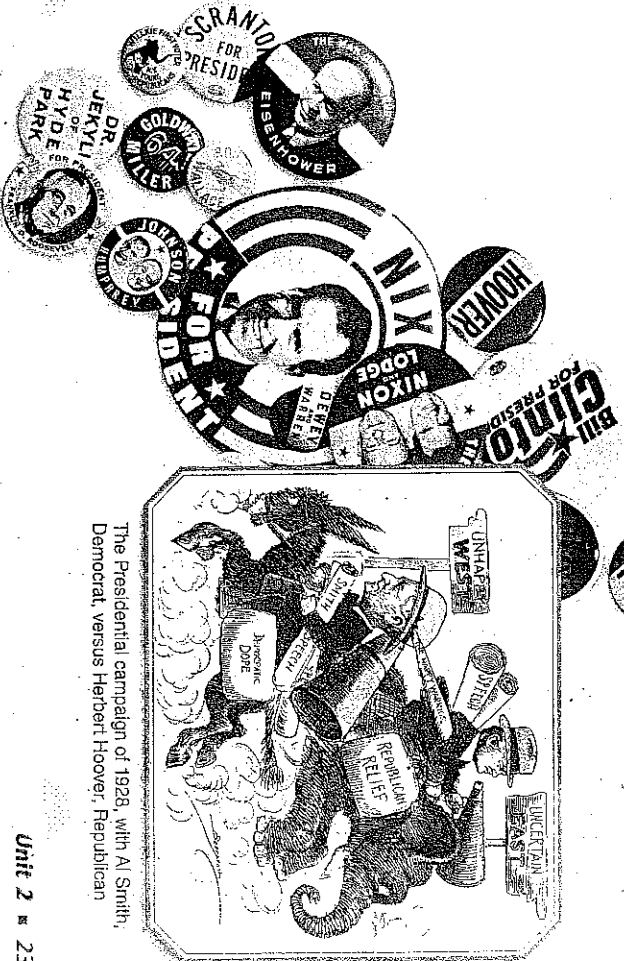
Today, in many countries, totalitarian dictators still make all decisions for the citizenry **ex officio**, whether or not the people support those decisions. In such societies, citizens are helpless against the **stringent** laws and rigid strictures that **infringe** upon most aspects of their lives. Those residing in one-party "democracies," in which autocrats pay lip service to democratic ideals but treat opposing candidates as **interlopers**, have it no better. Nonvoters should be urgently

exorted to consider the alternatives to democracy before they refuse to go to the polls to cast a ballot.

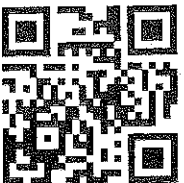
Voting is a process, not a panacea. A single vote will neither herald positive change nor instantly **ameliorate** poor conditions, but voting is the best chance to achieve either outcome. In America, responsible citizens are granted the right to vote at age eighteen; and this right is a privilege and a duty that should be exercised and protected.



Left: A college student encourages people to vote, October 2008. Above: A man registers to vote in Florida.



The Presidential campaign of 1928, with Al Smith, Democrat, versus Herbert Hoover, Republican



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Words

