Factors that Influence Voters

**Personal Characteristics.** Many things influence how a person votes: gender, age, income and occupation, education, and religious and ethnic background. Below are examples of how these characteristics translate into voting patterns.

**Gender**
Women tend to favor Democrats at a higher rate than men do.

**Age**
By the end of the 1980s, younger voters began to vote more for Republicans than Democrats, reversing a trend prevalent since the 1960s. However, this pattern reversed itself again in the 1992 presidential election as shown in the graph below.

**Income and occupation**
Voters with higher incomes tend to vote Republican, while lower-income groups tend to vote Democratic. Labor unions tend to support Democrats at a higher rate than Republicans.

**Education**
College graduates tend to vote for Republicans in higher percentages than do high school graduates.

**Religious and ethnic background**
Protestants in the north tend to vote Republican; Catholics and Jews tend to vote Democratic. African-Americans have moved toward the Democratic Party since the 1930s and vote overwhelmingly Democratic today.

Other Factors

**Family and other group affiliations**
Members of a family tend to vote similarly. Nine out of ten married couples share the same partisan tendencies. Co-workers and friends also can influence a person’s voting behavior.

**Party identification**
A person’s political party affiliation—whether Republican, Democratic, or Independent—is a very important factor in determining how he or she votes. Some people support a party with little regard for candidates or issues.

**Candidates and issues**
Voters are concerned with the way candidates present themselves and the way they address certain key issues, especially emotionally charged issues such as abortion.