

[Narrator]: Michigan State College, in cooperation with the Departments of History and Political Science presents, Why Vote, an informative program designed for you, the voters. And here to introduce today's panel is your moderator, Ken Richards.

[Ken Richards]: Hello there. We're glad that you were able to stop by for a while because we have what we think is a very interesting panel here to discuss a most important subject today. In just a short time, many of us will be going to the polls to vote for the people that we think should help run our governments, national, state, and local. There's been a great deal of discussion recently of the importance of elections and the importance particularly of this coming election. So today, we have asked to come here and be on our panel, three gentlemen from Michigan State College, one from the Department of History and two from the Department of Political Science. I'd like to introduce them right now to you and then we'll proceed with our panel. First of all, to my far right, we have Professor Madison Kuhn. Professor Kuhn is from the History Department here at the college. And next to Professor Kuhn is Professor Leroy Ferguson. He's a professor of the Department of Political Science. And then next to Professor Ferguson is Professor Edward Weidner. Professor Weidner is head of the Department of Political Science. Well, that's our panel of experts for today. And now we're going to hear from our panel, because I think that they can help us answer some of the questions that are uppermost in our mind about the important factors in this election, and in the problems of voting that we all face as we go to the polls November the 4th. Now, there has been much discussion during the past weeks and months over how important is all of the prophecy that's made about who's going to win this election or the prophecy about any election. For example, all of these polls that are put out about who will win an election and who will lose an election. So I'm going to start out by asking Mr. Madison Kuhn of the History Department his attitude toward these polls and the success of their predictions. We did know that in 1948, the polls seemed to miss the bet. And there's been some question by our panel at least on whether or not the polls did miss on their prognostication. Well, let's find out from Professor Kuhn.

[Madison Kuhn]: Well, it does strike us sometimes that we vote now in a goldfish bowl. A hundred years ago, men in Michigan in the election of that year would do well to know what the results were within three or four days or a week after the election. And certainly, there was no one telling them down to the last 101% as to how Michigan was going to vote on the relative candidates, Pierce and Scott. Today, it's quite different. We know and since we do know who is going to win the presidency, it seems rather pointless to vote, doesn't it?

[Ken Richards]: Well, I would say that you have a very good point, Professor Kuhn, but I'm not going to answer your question. I'm going to turn over here to Professor Weidner because I think Professor Weidner has a comment he'd like to make. Go right ahead.

[Edward Weidner]: Well, it just occurs to me that probably the fact is that we don't know who's going to win the election. Matter of fact, we've had a very interesting development in our election system for president during the last, oh, 12 years or so. Back in '36, we had landslides, and you remember the slogan in 1936 was, "as Maine goes, so goes Vermont", a parody, a play on the old idea, "as Maine goes, so goes the nation". Indeed, we had a landslide in 1936, but since then, our presidential elections have been increasingly close, and it is evident that this election is going to be close also. However, our polls aren't any good. Our public opinion polls aren't any good in

predicting a close election because they have an error, oh, say about 3 or 4% on the average. And since our elections are all closer than 3 or 4% difference between the two major candidates, the polls, as a result, cannot predict the outcome.

[Ken Richards]: Well, now, if that is true, that the polls are not going to be able to predict the outcome, Professor Weidner, I'm going to turn a question over here to Professor Ferguson on this very subject. What can we do about knowing that our candidate is going to win? Now, I assume, Professor Ferguson, that the answer you're going to give us is, well, go out and vote yourself, then you at least are casting a vote for the right man. But I find myself in the difficult position of not knowing a lot of the people I vote for when I vote. In other words, it's a long ballot, and then I sometimes get lost in trying to figure out all of the people that are on there and whether they're the people to vote for. So what recommendations would you care to make about our problems of voting in terms of the number of people we have to vote for these days?

[Leroy Ferguson]: Well, I'm sure certainly by no means alone can, and having some confusion when you go into the ballot box, I'm sure many people not only find the names of many candidates and they've never heard of, but almost certainly most of the voters find that there are offices listed on these ballots that they've never heard of. This is an old problem for political scientists. Most political scientists have been saying for years that we might have more democracy if we placed a smaller burden on the people and actually we elected fewer, filled fewer offices by voting, the democratic process might be improved. But we always run into a great suspicion there on the part of many people who identify democracy with the idea of electing everybody from governor down to dog catcher.

[Ken Richards]: Well, Professor Ferguson, I think Professor Kuhn over there had at least one idea before our program today went on the air. We were talking about this very thing. He brought up something about the straight ticket. Do you want to say anything about that, Professor Kuhn?

[Madison Kuhn]: I don't know that I want to talk about a straight ticket or what, but in the meantime, until we get that shorter ballot for which the reform groups are campaigning, what suggestion would you make as to what we do about the lesser offices?

[Ken Richards]: Right back in your lap, Professor Ferguson.

[Leroy Ferguson]: I think that one of the reasons we've had a long ballot with a great many offices is that the political leaders or political bosses, if you want to call them that, have usually favored this long ballot because it does tend to encourage straight ticket voting. Now, by saying that the bosses or the leaders favor it, I don't mean to imply that strict straight ticket voting is always undesirable. In fact, in many cases, I think a voter may be better able to decide which party is better for him than he is to tell which particular candidate may be better for him.

[Ken Richards]: Well, that brings up a point now. If we talk about problems of voting, and I'm sure that this is one of them very definitely that many of us face when we go to the polls to vote, we find the list of candidates so long we're not sure of who to vote for, we say to ourselves, well, why vote if you don't know for whom you should vote? Maybe this is at least one suggestion of an answer if you want to vote the straight ticket, except in the cases where you know people and you know they're good or bad,

and then perhaps maybe we'll get around one of these days to having a shorter ballot, and that might be one of the answers too. Professor Kuhn, did you have a comment?

[Madison Kuhn]: No. I was wondering whether you'd suggest to the gentleman here that one should vote the straight ticket on the constitutional amendments. For instance, I believe two and three each relate to the question of redistricting the legislature. Should one vote a straight ticket there, yes, straight through, or no straight through?

[Ken Richards]: All right, Mr. Ferguson, go right ahead.

[Leroy Ferguson]: Well, in this situation, Madison, if most of the people who are the ardent supporters of number two would probably say that you should vote against number three, and likewise those who support number three would say you should vote against number two. Obviously both these can't become a part of the state constitution. There may be some people, however, who may logically assume that each of these amendments is better than the present constitutional arrangement. But they may vote a yes on both of them and hope that one or the other passes. If they both pass, it's not entirely clear what may happen. Probably we'll have to get a Supreme Court decision as to which one goes into the constitution.

[Ken Richards]: Well, I think perhaps we've covered the subject on this polling and on our straight ballot as much as we can in this panel. Although we have a panel of experts, we don't expect to solve all the problems right here in the few minutes we have. We just want to bring them up and discuss them a little bit for your interest. Now, I have another point I'd like to make, and I know that Professor Weidner here was discussing it before our program today. Professor Weidner, it's probable that one reason why people don't go to the polls on election day is the long ballot, but that's only one. What are some of the other reasons that you in your studies and in your work in political science come across as reasons people give and actual reasons for people not voting?

[Edward Weidner]: Well, there are a lot of them, and some of them are personal, and some of them, I think, go entirely across the entire fabric of our political system, actually. For example, some people say, give a personal reason, they're sick, they just can't get to the polls. We might point out, though, for the benefit of those who are sick, if it's a chronic or long-term illness, that's perfectly possible for them to vote absentee ballot in advance of the election. But it must be admitted, there isn't any solution for the person who gets virus, pneumonia on the morning of election time, and I'm afraid they're out in terms of casting their ballot. But there are relatively few sick on election day, but some are. And there's a second group of people who can't help themselves either in terms of voting, and those are the people who move around from place to place. These people aren't eligible to vote if they move too frequently and too far during the last few months or a few days. And so, therefore, they find themselves not properly registered, and it's not their fault they can't vote. But then you get a lot of other kinds of excuses as to why people don't vote, and it's hard to distinguish between what is just an excuse and what is, shall we say, a valid reason. People say, for example, they can't get to the polls, they're too far away, or there's bad weather, and they don't feel that they can vote, or that they don't think the election is important enough, or they don't understand the issues. And some of them, as a matter of fact, are quite fearful of the election process, fearful of election judges, fearful of

casting the ballots. They fail to realize that, after all, voting is a very simple process, and election officials are there to help you and not to ridicule you or make fun of you.

[Ken Richards]: I think we might make a point of that election place being a place to be feared. I'm sure a great many people, and this would be true maybe of some of our older folks who haven't had too much experience with the voting machine, I'm sure it has frightened people and kept them away from the polls. We hope that it won't keep you away, any of you, this time because everybody should cast his vote who has that right. Mr. Ferguson, you had...

[Leroy Ferguson]: Well, I think in terms of this non-voting, we may as well face the fact that contrary to a lot of the popular ideas about our representative government, that a great many Americans just aren't very much interested in politics. I think most professional politicians will tell you this, that they have a great deal of difficulty getting people to come to meetings and to participate in the political process. And a great many of these people play golf or stay on their jobs or pay attention to their families instead of...

[Edward Weidner] Or watch television or do something of that nature.

[Leroy Ferguson]: ...participating in the voting process.

[Ken Richards]: Well, I would like to say this right now, gentlemen, I hope that in spite of golf on every day in the week and bridge parties and whatever else comes into play and all the activities we have and even television, I hope that more people will get out to vote on this election than perhaps ever in the history of the United States. Now, is there an indication, has there been, so far as any of you gentlemen know from the history department or from political science department here at the college, any indication that there will be a greater majority of votes cast this election?

[Leroy Ferguson]: Well, the registration here in Michigan as well as in other parts of the country is greater than it's ever been in history. And usually, the voting participation does follow this registration so we can logically assume that probably this will be the biggest turnout in our history.

[Ken Richards]: Well, I might say that that at least is very encouraging. And I want to say right now, gentlemen, that this has been a most interesting few minutes that we've had here, at least from my point of view. I hope that our friends out there have enjoyed it as much. You know, it's just my opinion that everyone who has the opportunity to vote this time and doesn't vote is certainly going contrary to all the things that we Americans stand for. And if there's anything you can do at all to make it possible to get out there and vote, do it because we just like to think that every American is for America 100%. Now, I'd like to thank our guests for being here today, Professor Madison Kuhn of the History Department, Professor Leroy Ferguson of Political Science, and Professor Edward Weidner, Head of the Department of Political Science. And now, this is Ken Richards, your moderator, bidding you a very good afternoon.

[Narrator]: From the campus of Michigan State College, the Departments of History and Political Science have brought you a discussion of the topic, Why Vote? This has been a video recording of Michigan State College Television.