

# Give Americans the Right to Vote!

“Shoring Up the Right to Vote for President: A Modest Proposal” by Alexander Keyssar, in *Political Science Quarterly* (Summer 2003), 475 Riverside Dr., Ste. 1274, New York, N.Y. 10115-1274.

Though attention soon shifted elsewhere in all the excitement at the close of the 2000 election, when Republicans in the Florida legislature threatened to select the state’s presidential electors, it came as a shock even to many knowledgeable observers that Americans do not possess a constitutionally guaranteed right to vote for president. Article II, Section 1, of the Constitution leaves it up to each state’s legislature to decide how the state’s delegates to the Electoral College (which actually elects the president) shall be chosen. Keyssar, a historian at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, urges enactment of a constitutional amendment to remedy the defect.

Several constitutional amendments prevent states from denying people the right to vote on grounds such as race and sex, but none directly affirm the right itself. This omission is at odds with America’s “core political values” today, argues Keyssar, author of *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (2000).

In practice, of course, thanks to the 50 state legislatures, the vast majority of citizens now are able to vote in statewide elections for their state’s presidential electors. While it’s unlikely that a legislature would “legally hijack a presidential election” and thus touch off a “crisis of legitimacy,” Keyssar contends, the events of 2000 showed the need to make it impossible.

## FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

### *A Formula for Iraq*

“Nation-Building: The Inescapable Responsibility of the World’s Only Superpower” by James Dobbins, in *RAND Review* (Summer 2003), 1700 Main St., P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, Calif. 90407-2138.

Longer version available at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org).

The examples of Germany and Japan after World War II are often cited to show what could be accomplished in reconstructing Iraq. But the United States has had much more recent and varied experience in democratic “nation-building”—in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. The fuller record, says Dobbins, who served as a U.S. special envoy in all five places and is now director of RAND’s International Security and Defense Policy Center, believes that democratic nation-building can work—but it takes huge investments of troops, money, and time.

The enduring “major transformations” in Germany and Japan have yet to be matched, but the nation-building effort that began in Kosovo in 1999 has been a “modest success,” and the one that began in Bosnia in 1995 has produced at least mixed results (democratic elections, but a weak constitutional government).

“From Somalia in 1992 to Kosovo in 1999, each nation-building effort was somewhat bet-

ter managed than the previous one,” Dobbins says. The disastrous effort in Somalia was plagued by “an unnecessarily complicated U.S. and United Nations command structure,” while in Kosovo there was “unity of command” on both the military side (under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the civil side (under a UN representative). “Leadership was shared effectively between Europe and the United States.”

What mainly separates the successes from the failures in Somalia, Haiti, and, to date, in Afghanistan, “is not the country’s levels of Western culture, democratic history, economic development, or ethnic homogeneity,” Dobbins says. It’s “the level of effort that the United States and the international community have put into the democratic transformations.”

The number of troops deployed has ranged widely—from 1.6 million U.S. personnel in West Germany to 14,000 (U.S. and international) in Afghanistan. In Kosovo, there were 45,000 NATO troops, including 15,000 Americans. Providing the same level of troop