PSCI4120 Public Opinion and Participation
Participation I

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How does public opinion influence the policy-making process?
Active citizen participation is required for democracy because it is through discussion, popular interest, and involvement in politics that societal goals should be defined and carried out.

Thomas Jefferson: “a well-informed electorate is the most important constraint on government.”

What is political participation?

Who is likely to participate in politics?
Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, 38):

1. “Activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies.”
2. Voluntary activity, not paid work
3. Doing politics, rather than with being attentive to politics
4. Political and non-political activity
Participation is not limited to voting, nor is voting necessarily the most effective means of affecting the political process.

Four general modes of political action: voting, campaign activity, communal activity, and directly contacting officials (Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978)

These participation modes differ in the requirements they place on participants and in the nature of the actions involved:

1. Whether the act conveys information about the individual’s political preferences and/or applies pressure for compliance
2. Whether the act is directed toward a broad social outcome or a particular interest
3. The potential degree of conflict involved in the activity
4. The amount of effort required
5. The amount of cooperation with others required by the act
## The Modes of Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modes of Activity</th>
<th>Type of Influence</th>
<th>Scope of Outcome</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voting</td>
<td>High pressure/</td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Conflictual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Activity</td>
<td>High pressure/</td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Conflictual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low to high information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Activity</td>
<td>Low to high pressure/</td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>yes/no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacting Officials</td>
<td>Low pressure/</td>
<td>Particular</td>
<td>Nonconflictual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest</td>
<td>High pressure/</td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Very conflictual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Modes of Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modes of Activity</th>
<th>Initiative Required</th>
<th>Cooperate with Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voting</td>
<td>Little</td>
<td>Little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Activity</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some or much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Activity</td>
<td>Some or much</td>
<td>Some or much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacting Officials</td>
<td>Much</td>
<td>Little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest</td>
<td>Some or much</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Brief History of Voting

- The first democratic election (in a limited sense) was conducted in 1848 in France.

- The U.S. was one of the first nations to begin liberalizing suffrage laws; by 1850, virtually the entire white adult male population in the U.S. was enfranchised.

- True democratic elections with universal mass suffrage began with the creation of the Weimar Republic in 1919.

- Women’s right to vote was approved in 1920 in the U.S.

- The Voting Rights Act of 1965 removed most of the remaining formal restrictions on the voting participation of African Americans.
Voter Turnout in the 1990s across Democracies

![Bar chart showing voter turnout percentages for Canada, France, Germany, UK, Italy, Japan, and US in the 1990s. Italy has the highest turnout, followed by Germany, UK, Japan, France, Canada, and the US with the lowest turnout.]
Why is Electoral Turnout in the U.S. Lower than in Most Other Nations?

- Some analysts cite these statistics as evidence of the American electorate’s limited political involvement, but a more complex set of factors strongly influence cross-national differences in voter turnout.
- A more restrictive voter registration system than other countries.
- Electoral systems (proportional representation vs. plurality-based single member districts).
- Less competitive elections.
- A wide range of elections and voter fatigue?
The Changing Rate of Voter Turnout in the U.S.

Presidential Turnout Rates, 1948–2004

- Turnout Rate (%): 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, 65

VAP

- Graph shows a declining trend in turnout rates over the years.
The Changing Rate of Voter Turnout in the U.S.

Presidential Turnout Rates, 1948–2004

Year

Turnout Rate (%)


40 45 50 55 60 65

VEP

VAP
How to measure voter turnout rates?

- # of votes casted / Voting Age Population (VAP)
- # of votes casted / Voting Eligible Population (VEP)

When VAP is used, voter turnout has declined over time. When VEP is used, there has been no decline in turnout.
Some Additional Issues

- Turnout rates in national elections provide a poor indicator of the overall political involvement of the public.
- High pressure but limited information
- An influence on policies may increase when elections extend to a wide range of political offices and include referendums, as in the United States.
Campaign activity includes working for a party or candidate, attending campaign meetings, persuading others how to vote, membership in a party or organization, and other forms of party activity during and between elections.

Campaign activity requires more initiatives, but offer more political influence to the individual citizen and convey more information than voting.

Campaign work is important to parties and candidates, and candidates generally are more sensitive to, and aware of, the policy interests of their activists.

The most frequent campaign activities involve individualistic forms of participation.
Campaign Activity in Presidential Elections

- Work for a party or candidate
- Go to a meeting
- Give money
- Wear a button or have a bumper sticker
- Persuade others to vote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Participation (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph showing participation in presidential elections from 1952 to 2000 for various campaign activities.
The essence of grassroots democracy is represented in communal activity.

It involves group efforts to deal with social or community problems, ranging from issues of schools or roads to protecting the local environment.

Communal activity is distinct from voting and campaign involvement because communal participation takes place largely outside the regularized, institutional settings and lacks a partisan focus.

Putnam’s “Bowling Alone”: participation in groups ranging from the PTA to bowling leagues has dropped off markedly over the past four decades. He argues that this drop has a negative impact on the function of democracy in the U.S.
The question of who participates in politics is important because

1. The characteristics of participants help us to interpret the meaning of political activism.

2. The pattern of action suggests which citizens are making their voices heard by policymakers and which interests are not being represented.
Who Participates?

Three main explanations in Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s (1995) *Civic Voluntarism model*

- People participate in politics because “they can, they want to, and they are requested.”
- Personal resources (socioeconomic status and civic skills)
- Group effects (mobilization)
- Political attitudes (knowledge, interest, partisanship, efficacy)
Who Participates?

Other major explanations:

- Life cycle and age
- Policy preferences
- Local and electoral environment
- Civic duty
Socioeconomic Status and Political Participation

- Socioeconomic status affects not only citizens’ political attitudes but their decisions to participate in politics.
- “Participatory resources” are the underlying factor that connects socioeconomic class with the level of political participation.
- Resources denote time and money.
Income and Political Participation, 2004

The chart illustrates the proportion of individuals participating in political activities across different income brackets. The x-axis represents various income ranges: Under $15K, $15K~$35K, $35K~$80K, $80K~$105K, and Over $105K. The y-axis shows the proportion participating in different activities:
- **Voted**
- **Contributed Money**
- **Worked for Campaign**

The data points indicate a general trend where the proportion of participation increases with higher income levels. For instance, the proportion of individuals who voted or contributed money to campaigns is higher in the Over $105K income bracket compared to the Under $15K bracket.
## Education and Political Participation, 2004

### Proportion Participating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Voted</th>
<th>Contributed Money</th>
<th>Worked for Campaign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and More</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison with Other Nations

- Education has a strong impact on voter turnout in the United States, yet it plays a minor role in other nations. Why?
What is an implication of class bias in political participation to democratic representation?