

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**  
Class Notes | Revised 10/9/2017

**I. Political Efficacy**

- A. Extent to which citizen's feel they understand and can influence government
- B. The belief that political participation matters and can make a difference

**II. Types of Political Participation**

- A. Voting in National, State, or Local elections
  - 1. Voting highest in presidential elections [58% of eligible voters participated in 2016 election]
  - 2. U.S. voter turnout far lower than other countries [example: 2014 midterm election, U.S. turnout was 33%, but Britain's in 2015 was 60%, Australia 80% in 2013]
- B. Working in campaigns > canvassing, phone calls, organizing on behalf of candidates
- C. Contacting public officials > examples: phone calls, letters, emails to officials; attend town hall meetings
- D. Participating in community affairs > volunteer for non-profit organizations, work at the polls on election day
- E. Donating money to candidates > most donations are under \$100
- F. Attending or belonging to a political organization > member of political party, interest group, PAC
- G. Political Protest > attend a protest rally

**III. Voter Participation Factors**

- A. *Race/Ethnicity* > African American turnout surpassed White turnout for the first time in 2012, but declined significantly in 2016 - <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/12/black-voter-turnout-fell-in-2016-even-as-a-record-number-of-americans-cast-ballots/>
- B. *Gender* > men and women tend to vote in about the same numbers, but there is a significant "gender gap" as women, particularly single women, tend to vote Democratic whereas white men tend to vote Republican
- C. *Education level* > the better educated someone is, the more likely they are to vote ex: college graduates vote much more frequently than those with a high school education.
- D. *Socioeconomic status/income/social* > the more wealthy, and in higher social class an eligible voter is, the more likely they are to vote >>> strong political efficacy!
- E. *Party Affiliation* > people who identify strongly with a political party are more likely to vote than those who identify as independents
- F. *Age* > the older a person is the more likely they are to vote

**IV. The Youth Vote > 18-24 year olds are the least likely to vote!**

- A. 2012 Election
  - 1. Turnout of 18-30 year olds declined from 2008
  - 2. Young voters made up of 19% of all voters
  - 3. 2012 Youth Vote = Obama 60%, Romney 37%
- B. 2016 Election > Clinton 54%, Trump 28%, Undecided 18%

**V. Institutional Barriers to Voting**

- A. *Difficulty of Voter Registration* > #1 reason people give for not voting
  - 1. Moving – Americans frequently change residences
  - 2. Few States allow same day registration on Election Day
  - 3. *Motor Voter Law* (1993) – federal requiring states to offer voter registration at DMV's to increase the ease and convenience of voter registration
- B. Number of elections (federalism) > voters become confused by all the candidates, issues on federal, state and local elections
- C. Ease of not voting/not voting is costless > not voting is a choice, and no penalty for not voting
- D. Party Affiliation > people who identify strongly with a political
- E. Tuesday elections > inconvenient for most voters, especially blue collar workers; many countries have Saturday elections or have made Election Day and national holiday
- F. Residency requirements > most states require that voters live in a new residence 30-60 days before they can register to vote
- G. Citizenship requirements > must be a U.S. citizen to vote

- H. Felons > some states [including Virginia until 2016] disenfranchise convicted felons when they get out of prison
- I. Absentee ballots > often a hassle; effects college students and military personnel especially
- J. Precincts inconvenient > the location of voter precincts may be far away for rural voters; precincts overcrowded in inner cities
- K. Voter ID laws
  1. 33 states have passed laws that require a person to provide some form of official identification before they are permitted to register to vote, receive a ballot for an election, or to actually vote
  2. Supporters: purpose is to protect against voter fraud
  3. Critics: voter fraud is very rare [only 4 documented cases of voter fraud in the 2016 election out of 135 million cast]; these laws disproportionately negatively impact the poor, voters of color and the elderly

## VI. Important Voter Constituencies [Swing Voters]

- A. Reagan Democrats (1980 - Present) – blue collar, formerly New Deal Democrats who are voted for Reagan and GWB, but many voted for Obama in 2008, 2012, but went for Trump in 2016
- B. Soccer Moms (1996 - Present) – college educated, upper middle class suburban women with children in some elections vote Democratic particularly if education, abortion rights are front and center (1996, 2008); sometimes vote Republican for security issues (2004)
- C. NASCAR Dads (2004, 2006) – southern/mid-western white men, often blue collar with children who voted for Clinton in 1996 but GWB in 2000, 2004; voted for Trump in large numbers in 2016
- D. Catholics (2000's)
  1. Catholics used to be a dependable voting block for democrats (Irish Catholic, Italian immigrants)
  2. *Religiosity* – in politics the extent to which people feel that religion is important in their personal and civic lives; correlates to church/temple/mosque attendance
  3. Catholics who attend church more than twice per week tend to vote Republican; Catholics who attend church once or less a week tend to vote democratic
- E. Hispanics (2000's)
  1. Many are Catholic and conservative on social issues > though not a majority, GWB did relatively well with Hispanics in the 2004 election because of social issues
  2. Since 2004, Hispanics have voted strongly Democratic because of immigration and economic issues
  3. Exception: Cuban Americans