

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

PSC 436, Spring 2006
Department of Political Science
University at Buffalo, SUNY
6 Clemens Hall
12:30-1:50 pm, Tuesdays & Thursdays

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This course investigates the ways in which citizens can participate in politics and government and the reasons why citizens choose to participate or abstain from participation. In exploring political participation, the course emphasizes citizen participation in the electoral process and primarily in the United States, though non-electoral forms of participation as well as participation in nations other than the U.S. will also be examined.

Voter turnout levels in American elections have historically been quite low. Fewer eligible voters vote in American presidential elections than in the elections of virtually every other advanced democracy. As recently as the closely fought presidential election of 2000, only about 54.2 percent of the eligible adult population in the U.S. bothered to vote. This was only slight higher than in the 1996 presidential election in which only 51.7 percent of eligible voters bothered to vote, perhaps the lowest turnout rate in a presidential election since 1924. In the 2004 election, however, turnout increased significantly. 60.3 percent of the eligible electorate turned out to vote in 2004. While there are serious questions regarding whether turnout rates are now on the rise, there is no question that they have been low. Aside from being an interesting phenomenon in its own right, questions regarding the extent and nature of citizen engagement in the political process are of substantial political importance.

The course addresses many questions about political participation. Among these are the following:

- What is the role of the citizen in a democratic republic and how has that role evolved?
- In what ways can citizens participate in politics and elections?
- What demands do various forms of participation place on citizens?
- How and why has the right to vote (the suffrage) expanded throughout American political history?
- Is it rational for citizens to participate in politics?
- How many Americans avail themselves of the opportunities to participate?
- Who participates and who does not? Why do some citizens participate, while others do not?
- How many Americans participate in the easiest form of participation, voting?
- Why do so few citizens bother to vote?
- What aspects of education makes it such a strong factor in causing citizens to participate?
- Why are young potential voters so much less likely to vote than middle-aged and older people?
- What attitudes and individual skills increase the likelihood that someone will vote?
- What are the trends in voter turnout over time?
- What are some of the difficulties in assessing trends in voter turnout?
- Why might we have expected turnout to increase since 1960?
- Who was responsible for turnout being so low -- the political system (voter registration, districting, campaign finance, etc.), the candidates, the parties, the media, or citizens themselves?
- Have political campaigns in general and negative campaigning in particular affected turnout?
- Do low turnout rates reflect a weakening of social-connectedness in society?
- Do low turnout rates reflect a lack of tolerance for political conflict or the lack of decisive consequences from elections?
- Why has turnout increased since the 1996 presidential election? What does the apparent turnaround in turnout rates since 1996 reveal about what influences turnout? Is turnout likely to continue to increase in the future?
- Does either political party benefit from low or high turnout rates?
- Does the level of political participation make any difference to elections or to the way in which government is run? If so, what is the difference? If not, why not?
- What efforts have been made to encourage participation and why have they apparently failed?
- Is there anything else that might be done to increase political participation? If so, what?

REQUIRED READING

There are four required texts for this course. They are listed in the order in which they will be used in the class.

- (1.) Mark Franklin. 2004. *The Dynamics of Voter Turnout in Established Democracies Since 1945*.
- (2.) David Lee Hill. 2006. *American Voter Turnout*.
- (3.) Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber. 2004. *Get Out the Vote*.
- (4.) Jack C. Doppelt and Ellen Shearer, *Nonvoters: America's No-Shows*.

These books are available at the bookstore. The books are referred to by the author's last name in the listing of reading assignments. You should obtain these books as soon as possible. If you wait too long, they may not be available in the bookstore. In any case, it is *your* responsibility to obtain these books. In addition to these four books, six additional

readings will be distributed as “pdf” files. These are:

(A.1) Benjamin Highton. 2004. “Voter Registration and Turnout in the United States” *Perspectives on Politics* (September) 507-15.

(A.2) Thomas E. Patterson. 2005. “Young Voter Turnout & the 2004 Election.” Report of the Vanishing Voter Project, pp.1-8.

(A.3) International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), *Voter Turnout since 1945: A Global Report*, pp. 1-128.

(A.4) Curtis Gans, 2004. “Making It Easier Doesn’t Work.” Center for the Study of the American Electorate Report on Early Voting, pp.1-9.

(A.5) Summary of the “Help America Vote Act” of 2002.

(A.6) National Research Commission on Elections and Voting, 2005. *Building Confidence in U.S. Elections: Report of the Commission on Federal Election Reform*. Report of the Carter-Baker Commission, pp.1-91.

Consult the reading list in syllabus frequently. It is important that you do not fall behind.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your course grade will be based of four considerations. These will combined in the following percentages to compute your overall course grade:

Class Participation	12%
Quizzes	12%
Midterm Examination	37%
Final Examination	39%

PARTICIPATION: Class participation counts for 12 percent of your course grade. Although the evaluation of your course participation is unavoidably subjective, three factors will affect this component of your grade. (1.) Attendance counts. You are expected to attend class regularly. You are expected to know and it is your responsibility to be informed about anything said in the class lectures or discussions. Nothing short of a personal or family emergency is as important as this class during its scheduled meeting time. Attendance will be taken at different times in the course on a random basis. Missing more classes will increasingly detract from your participation grade. Missing one or two classes will only cost a few points on this part of your grade, but each additional absence will cost more and more. Attending class regularly is expected and will be to your credit, but you will not receive an “A” participation grade just by showing up. (2.) Each student will be assigned a case to present in class from Doppelt and Shearer’s *The Non-Voters*. Your presentation will count toward your participation grade. (3.) Finally, the quality of your participation counts. Insightful questions and comments will be rewarded in the participation grade. Inattentive and/or distracting behavior will detract *substantially* from your participation grade. In this regard, I must also make a point of classroom behavior. All students attending class are expected to pay attention and attend the entire class meeting, unless arrangements have been made with the professor before the class. *Students who are obviously not paying attention or who leave class prior to the end of the class meeting (without will receive a failing class participation grade.* The University at Buffalo’s Policy Regarding Expected Student Behavior and Distractions in the Classroom states that *students are expected to:*

Attend classes and pay attention.

Not come to class late or leave early. If you must enter a class late, do so quietly and do not disrupt the class by walking between the class and the instructor. Do not leave class unless it is an absolute necessity.

Not talk with other classmates while the instructor or another student is speaking. If you have a question or a comment, please raise your hand, rather than starting a conversation about it with your neighbor.

Show respect and concern for others by not monopolizing class discussion. Allow others time to give their input and ask questions. Do not stray from the topic of class discussion.

Not eat and drink during class time.

Turn off the electronics: cell phones, pagers, and beeper watches.

Avoid audible and visible signs of restlessness. These are both rude and disruptive to the rest of the class.

Focus on class material during class time. Sleeping, talking to others, doing work for another class, reading the newspaper, checking email, and exploring the internet are unacceptable and can be disruptive.

Not pack book-bags or backpacks to leave until the instructor has dismissed class.

QUIZZES: There will be several (normally unannounced) quizzes in this course. There are absolutely no make-up options for these quizzes. I will drop your lowest quiz score. The quizzes will count for a combined 12 percent of your grade.

The midterm examination is scheduled for Week 8. It will cover the lectures and assigned readings up to and including those assigned for that week. I reserve the right to push back the date of the midterm based on the progress of the course, but will inform you of any change at least two class meetings before the test. The final examination will be comprehensive, covering material throughout the course, but will emphasize material covered after the midterm test. The midterm examination will be composed of "objective" questions (true-false, multiple choice, list). The final examination may also include a take-home essay which will be distributed at the last regular class meeting. If a take-home essay is distributed at this time, it is your responsibility to pick one up in class or check with the professor to obtain a copy. Once examinations are distributed to the class, no one will be permitted to leave the room and return to the test. The midterm and final examinations will count for 37 and 39 percent of the course grade respectively.

You are expected to take the exams at the times scheduled for the whole class. Failure to take a test at the specified time will be counted as a zero for that portion of the course. Exceptions to this rule will only be made when the student confronts extreme circumstances and then, only when arrangements have been made with me *prior* to the examination or due date. If you have difficulty getting in touch with me, you can always leave a message for me on my message machine or send an e-mail message to me at the address at the top of this syllabus. In any case, if you have significant problems you should get in touch with me *as early as possible*.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Academic integrity is vital to the functioning and mission of the university. It is taken very seriously in this class. You are to be evaluated on your own work. There will be no tolerance for any attempt to deceive the instructor by presenting the work of others as your own. Suspected infractions of academic honesty will be referred to the appropriate university disciplinary processes.

There are a number of sources of information on political participation that you should be aware of, there include: *CQ's Guide to U.S. Elections* (two volumes). This is the classic source and is now in its 4th edition.

America Votes. Since the 1950s, an important series on contemporary election statistics, including county level data.

Politics in America and *The Almanac of American Politics*. These are two series that are excellent sources for information at the congressional district level.

American National Election Study: <http://www.umich.edu/~nes/> The "gold standard" of election surveys since 1948.

U.S. Statistical Abstract (mostly from Census reports) (section 7, Elections): <http://www.census.gov/statab/www/>

Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections: <http://uselectionatlas.org/>

U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC): <http://www.eac.gov/>

U.S. Federal Election Commission (FEC): <http://www.fec.gov/>

U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division Voting Section: <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/>

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA): <http://www.idea.int/>

(Michael McDonald's website) United States Elections Project: http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm



COURSE TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1. January 17 & 19

Introduction
Political Information and Opinion Survey
Some Background in Social Science Methodology
Forms of Participation: Governmental Politics Participation and Electoral Participation
What Different Forms of Participation Require of Citizens
The Role of the Citizen in a Democratic Republic
READ: (A.1) Highton, "Voter Registration and Turnout in the United States."
(A.2) Patterson, "Young Voter Turnout & the 2004 Election."

WEEK 2. January 24 & 26

Rights Unused: Universal Suffrage and Low Turnout
The History of Expanding the Suffrage: Four Eras in the History of the Right to Vote
Why did American Politics grow more inclusive?
Is Voting Rational?: The “Free Rider” Problem
Circumstances Inviting Rational Abstention

READ: (A.3) International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), *Voter Turnout since 1945: A Global Report*, pp. 1-128.
Franklin. *The Dynamics of Voter Turnout...*, chapter 1.

WEEK 3. January 31 & February 2

Issues in Measuring Turnout:
Over-Reporting in Surveys
Voting Age Population vs. Voting Eligible Population
How Extensive is Turnout?
The Historical and Comparative Context of Turnout

READ: Franklin. *The Dynamics of Voter Turnout...*, chapters 2, 3, and 4.

WEEK 4. February 7 & 9

A Comprehensive Model of Turnout
The Socio-Demographics of Participation: The Impact of Education
Why is Education associated with Higher Rates of Participation?
The Education Puzzle: Rising Education and Declining Turnout
Income, Occupation, Employment, Unionization effects on Turnout
Age and Turnout
The Effects of Gender, Race, and Ethnicity on Participation

READ: Franklin. *The Dynamics of Voter Turnout...* chapters 5 and 6.

WEEK 5. February 14 & 16

Social Connectedness: Religiosity, Marital Status, Length of Residence, Home Ownership,
Volunteerism, Social Trust, and Memberships
Regional Variation in Turnout
The Political Environment: Electoral Competition, Intensity of the Campaign, Level of Office,
Issue Salience, Mobilization Efforts, Media Attention, Nomination Contests, and
Negative Campaigning

READ: Franklin. *The Dynamics of Voter Turnout...* chapters 7 and 8.

WEEK 6. February 21 & 23

The Psychology of Participation: Internal and External Political Efficacy
Political Interest
Trust in Government or Political Cynicism

READ: Hill, *American Voter Turnout*, chapters 1, 2, and 3.

WEEK 7. February 28 & March 2

Information Levels and Turnout
Citizen Duty
The Impact of Partisanship Strength
Being Opinionated

READ: Hill, *American Voter Turnout*, chapters 4, 5, and 6.

WEEK 8. March 7 & 9

The Optimal Candidate Choice: Strength of Preference
Cross-Pressures about the Vote Choice
Information Levels and Turnout
Tolerance for Conflict and Zones of Acceptability
Habit and Turnout

READ: Hill, *American Voter Turnout*, chapters 7 and 8.

MIDTERM EXAM -- March 9

SPRING BREAK: NO CLASSES MARCH 14 & 16

WEEK 9. March 21 & 23

The Four Eras of Turnout in American National Elections
Why Did Turnout Increase from 1828 to 1896?
Why Did Turnout Decline from 1900 to 1916?
Why Did Turnout Increase from 1928 to 1960?

READ: Green and Gerber, *Get Out the Vote*, chapters 1, 2, and 3.

WEEK 10. March 28 & 30

Why Should we have Expected Turnout to Increase after 1960?
Why Did Turnout Temporarily Increase in 1992?
Why Did Turnout Generally Decline from 1960 to 1996?
Why Did Turnout Increase in 2000 and 2004? Is this a Trend?
Is Turnout Likely to Rise or Decline in the Future?

READ: Green and Gerber, *Get Out the Vote*, chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

WEEK 11. April 4 & 6

Doppelt and Shearer’s Typology of Nonvoters
Presentations of Non-Voters

READ: Doppelt and Shearer, chapters 1, 2, 3, & 4

WEEK 12. April 11 & 13

Presentations of Non-Voters continued
An Alternative Categorization of Nonvoters

READ: Doppelt and Shearer, chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, & 9

WEEK 13. April 18 & 20

Does Participation Matter?
Social and Political Differences between Voters and Nonvoters
The Effects of Differential Turnout across Congressional Districts

READ: (A.4) Curtis Gans, Center for the Study of the American Electorate, “Making It Easier Doesn’t Work.”
(A.5) Summary of the “Help America Vote Act” of 2002

WEEK 14. April 25 & 27

Past Reforms Intended to Raise Turnout: Did Motor Voter Make a Difference?
The Impact of Early Voting
The Help America Vote Act of 2002
The Carter and Baker Commission on Federal Election Reform
The Future of Reform: What Reforms might Stimulate Turnout?

READ: Do we need to decrease the perceived costs or increase the perceived benefits of voting?
(A.6) National Research Commission on Elections and Voting, 2005. *Building Confidence in U.S. Elections: Report of the Commission on Federal Election Reform* .

FINAL EXAMINATION
Time and Place To Be Announced

