

# Participation and Voting

Chapter 7

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# Participation and Voting

- People think of political participation as voting but there are many more ways to participate than voting
- All forms of participation have varying degrees of difficulty

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# Participation and Voting

- People of higher income and education levels are more likely to become politically active and to vote
- Some may argue this make governments more responsive to the needs of wealthy, educated citizens

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## Democracy and Political Participation

Political participation- those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence of to support government and politics.

- a. Conventional participation- relatively routine behavior that uses established institutions of representative gov; especially voting in elections
  - This behavior is acceptable to the dominant culture

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## Democracy and Political Participation

- b. Unconventional behavior- relatively uncommon challenges or defies established institutions or dominant culture
  1. Terrorism is the most extreme form of unconventional behavior
  2. Not all unconventional behavior is violent (Civil Rights)
  3. These tactics are often used by "powerless" groups to bring about changes that would benefit them
    - Marches
    - Sit-ins
    - Violence

**All of these methods pose great danger/stress on participants**

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## Support for unconventional participation

- A. We have a history of it, we were founded on it but we don't like it
  1. Boston 1770's
  2. South 1950's
  - We look at these as positive things
- B. We don't agree with unconventional participation when it upsets our daily lives/ routines
  - Occupying buildings

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## Effectiveness of Unconventional Participation

- a. Direct action-assembling crowds to confront business and local governments
- Used by MLK very successfully
- 1. Brought much media attention = influence of public opinion
  - 2. They were denied the conventional ways of participation (voting)

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## Effectiveness of Unconventional Participation

- b. Decision to use unconventional behavior depends on the extent to which individuals develop a group consciousness and awareness
- c. Terrorism doesn't require a mass groups consciousness or effort
- d. Americans are more likely to engage in political protests of various sorts than are citizens in other democratic nations (why?)

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## Conventional Participation

This is participation using established institutions (the true measure of democracy)

Fall into 2 categories: Actions that show support for government policies and those that try to change or influence policies:

- 1. Supportive behavior- actions that express allegiance to a country and government
  - These things require little effort, knowledge, or personal courage; demand little of citizen

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## Conventional Participation

2. Influencing behavior- intended to modify or even reverse government policy to serve political interests
  - This can be individual or group interest
  - No one person can bring about change alone so it depends on like-minded individuals who have the same self interests
  - May make demands on government
  - May contribute to a candidates campaign.

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## Influencing Behavior

Broad policy objectives- activities that influence government personnel and policies

1. Some of this behavior requires little effort (voting, watching a convention, using a bumper sticker)
2. Some require great initiative (persuading others how to vote, attending legislative hearings, using the court system)

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## Influencing Behavior

### Courts

1. Self interests
  - Bush v Gore
2. Class action
  - Brown v Board
  - US v Tobacco companies
  - Fat kids v McDonalds?

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## Conventional Participation in America

1. Americans are more likely to participate in all forms of participation conventional or unconventional than other democracies
2. BUT they are less likely to vote

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## Part II

Voting

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## Voting on Policy

Progressive movement (1900-1920s)- shaped the way we vote on policy in America

1. Direct Primary: primary election, run by states where voters (not party leadership) choose candidates for a party
2. Recall: a special election that removes elected officials from office (Gray Davis)

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## Voting on Policy

3. **Referendum**- an election on a policy issue. Voters vote on an issue to become a law instead of legislature (gay marriage)
  - This allows politicians to avoid messy issues that may be unpopular to their constituents
4. **Initiative**- procedure that allows voters to choose a topic that must be decided on by a legislature
  - Many times politicians oppose initiatives (that is why they aren't bringing them up themselves)

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## Voting for Candidates

- A. Citizens choose the candidates they think will best serve their interests
  - B. Citizens will reelect the officials who did a good job for them
    1. This makes the politicians accountable to the public
    2. Assumes voter know what politicians are doing
    3. Assumes citizens will participate in voting process
    4. America there is more opportunity to vote for leaders than in any other country
- STILL few Americans vote compared to other nations**

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## Explaining political participation

- People who take part in some form of participation don't take part in other i.e. Citizens who contact their public official may not vote
- Over past decades American voter participation is on the decline
- Socioeconomic model- people with more education, higher incomes, and white-collar jobs tend to vote in higher numbers. They have money and time

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## Explaining political participation

Education

- Is the number one indicator of voter participation?

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## Explaining political participation

Race and Gender

- •Have been areas that defined low voter but in recent years this has not been true
- •African Americans are now as likely to vote as a white
- Women are now as likely to vote as a man (although they are less likely to try and persuade others as a man is)

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## Low Turnout in America

26th amendment – increase the lowest voting group there was therefore there are more non-voters who are registered. (Added about 1-2 percent)

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## Low Turnout in America

- Motor Voter- a bill that linked voter registration to drivers license renewal
- Now more lazy people are registered with out putting forth any effort so again we have registered more non voters

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## Low Turnout in America

A change in political attitudes

1. More Americans think that the government is unresponsive therefore voting does no good
2. For many years there was a decrease in party identification ( changes @ 1994)

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## Other Countries

1. Election days are public holidays
2. Two day voting period
3. Compulsory voting
4. Government takes on burden of registration

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