

Political Participation

Elections: "mainsprings" of politics

- Elections hold incumbents accountable
- Candidates articulate their plans & shape political debate
- Educate & persuade voters

Moving Parts

- Candidates
 - Why do they run?
 - What do they do while they run?
- Voters:
 - Will they pay attention?
 - Will they vote?
 - Who will they vote for?
- Nongovernmental Political Organizations: Parties & Interest Groups
 - Donate money
 - Campaign & advertise
 - Mobilize voters?
 - Canvassing: personally contact
- Institutions
 - Election laws: Who and How we
 - o Vote
 - o Campaign
 - o Raise money
 - o Donate
 - o Count votes
 - o Declare winners

 - Governmental Units (wanted to say "political institutions")
 - o Congress, Supreme Court, State administrators
 - o Interpret & enforce election laws: choose winners!

Participation Types: Electoral

- Vote
- Campaign
- Donate money
- Run for office

Participation Types: Nonelectoral

- Join interest group

- Lobby someone
- Sue the government
- Protest
- Revolt!

Voting: Legal eligibility

- Franchise: rights to vote (suffrage)
 - States run elections & set eligibility [within national Constitutional limits]
 - States can allow anyone to vote
 - But most did not

Franchise Grew Incrementally

- Around 1800: White Men with Property Franchise Grew Incrementally Put that In Perspective
- Eased property requirement for White Men
- Except for:
 - convicted felons
 - mentally ill / civil commitment
- African Americans, 1870 (15th Amendment)
- Century of conflict
- 1965 Voting Rights Act
- But Not Women!
- Most states did not guarantee the right to vote to Women
- Women (US Constitution Amended 1920)
- Some states did grant the right to vote before that
- Suffragette March on Washington 1913
- Age (1971: 18=legal voting age.)
- 4 Voter Turnout Puzzles
- Interesting Historical Trend

Important to Note

- peak around 1880
- peak around 1960

Why did turnout go down after 1890?

- Fundamental Institutional Changes in Elections
 - Voter registration requirements
 - Secret ballot: you can't sell your vote anymore!
 - Weakening of political parties:
 - o Less "connection" between vote and political change
 - o Less "mobilization" effort by parties

Why did turnout go down after 1960?

- Best guess explanations:
 - Increasing mobility of voters
 - Continued weakening of party identification and party organizations
 - Rising prison population

Rational Choice Theory of Voting

- Benefits of voting
 - Self-expression (fulfill "duty")
 - Social ties & pressure
 - Chance to affect outcome (make or break a tie)
- Costs: Time and effort to
 - Register
 - Gather info & decide
 - Show up and vote

Low Cost, Low Benefit

- Voting is a low cost, low benefit activity
- Individual traits make voting more likely
 - Education (lowers cost of learning)
 - Partisanship (reduces need to learn)
 - Not moving (no need to re-register, forge new social ties)
 - Feelings of "external political efficacy": government can deal with its problems
 - NOT true: distrust in government or beliefs about corruption cause nonvoting

Federal Government seems concerned

- Motor Voter Bill (1993)

Is Low Voting Causing Mayhem?

- Is there something wrong with "nonvoters?"
- Does the decline make "the system" work badly?
- Is the turnout decline a symptom of some other problem?