

Jason Palmeri

James Morrow

LA400-410-420

Assignment 1

The Tension between Engaged Citizenship & Individualism

The tension between engaged citizenship and individualism highlights the ongoing struggle to balance the rights and responsibilities of the individual with the needs and well-being of the community, as both are essential for a healthy and functioning society.

Civic engagement is the active participation of citizens in the political process and the betterment of their community. It encompasses various activities, from voting and volunteering to advocacy and community organizing. Civic engagement is crucial for a free society because it allows citizens to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives and the community's well-being. Citizens engaged and involved lead to a more responsive and accountable government and a more just and equitable society. One of the most basic ways to be civically active is by voting in elections, whether local elections for your state politicians or the presidential election. Your vote matters, and it's up to you to vote for whichever party will negatively affect your life the least. According to The United States Election Project, the 2020 presidential election voter turnout was up 66% of the eligible voting population from 60% in 2016 (McDonald, 2020). This statistic is an excellent example of how we are improving as a country, with many youths being more engaged in politics. At the same time, it is something we can improve on, and everyone should go out and vote, Right? That's what most people think, but as someone not educated on current political topics and, frankly, does not care one bit about it, should I go out and vote? Does my vote matter if I don't care who wins? If I went out to vote in 2020 for Kanye, would that have made a difference? That would have been a nothing vote, along with the other five

people who put Kanye down on the ballot as a joke. I consider myself well off. I have great supportive parents and an excellent job right now, so I've never in my 22 years of life had something like a president or state senator change how I've lived, so I never have, and probably never will care who the guy sitting in the oval office is.

There is more to civic engagement than just voting, though. In the second section of Robert Putnam's "Bowling Alone," he discusses trends in Civic Engagement and Social Capital. Chapter 7 explicitly highlights additional ways to engage in our communities with "Altruism, Volunteering, and Philanthropy." Putnam says, "Giving time and money to help others is a long and distinguished tradition in American society. Both Philanthropy and volunteering are roughly twice as common among Americans as among other citizens of other countries" (Putnam, 2000). This quote shows that we, as Americans care for our neighbors, and as citizens, we can help address our neighbors' needs and create positive change. It's easy to see all of the things that we as a society are doing wrong. Still, it's essential to highlight the things we do well on and are actively improving on. For example, voter turnout has been increasing, and there has been a growing awareness and focus on race and social justice issues.

Putnam talks about social capital throughout "Bowling Alone" and how it is essential for the functioning of democracy. Similarly, Keeley talks about human capital in "Human Capital: How what you know shapes your life." Keeley describes human capital as "the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attributes that allow people to contribute to their personal and social well-being, as well as that of other countries" (Keeley, 2007). These are new terms, but I understood what Keeley talks about in the assigned reading. They talk about how education is a critical factor in helping us grow and how it is essential to learn these things early so that we can be functioning members of society and engage in our politics when we grow older. Keeley's book made me think about my schooling and how politics wasn't brought up ever, either at school or at home, and I wonder how things could have changed for me if it was, though honestly, I don't think I would have made politics my whole life had it been brought up earlier.

In conclusion, civic engagement is an essential aspect of a free society. It allows us citizens to have a say in significant decisions that affect our everyday lives, well-being, and the community around us. By voting, volunteering, and advocating for change, citizens can make a meaningful impact on their communities and society. As Michael Sandel writes in "Justice: What is the Right Thing To Do," "Life in democratic societies is rife with disagreement about right and wrong, justice and injustice" (Sandel, 2015). There is a lot of truth to what Sandel says here, and I believe that this quote highlights the fact that in democratic societies where individuals have the freedom to express their own opinions and beliefs, there will always be a diversity of perspectives and disagreements about what is considered right or wrong, just or unjust.



The image of empty voting booths is a powerful reminder of the importance of civic engagement and the role that every individual plays in shaping our democracy. The empty booths signify a missed opportunity for citizens to have their voices heard and to participate in the political process. Voting is a fundamental right and a cornerstone of democracy, and it is through the act of voting that citizens can hold their elected officials accountable and shape the policies and decisions that affect their lives. The picture is a great representation of the fact written in the above essay about voter turnout. Though voter turnout has gone up 6% since the last election, 66% is still very low. This is a reminder that there is still a lot of work to be done to increase voter turnout and ensure that all voices are heard in the democratic process. If you want to take the image a step further, you could say that this image also symbolizes the lack of trust and belief in democracy and the political process by citizens, which could be a result of the lack of representation, lack of transparency, and lack of accountability from those who are in power.

Corum, S. (2020). *Empty Voting Booths*. Slate. Retrieved January 16, 2023, from <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/03/trump-cancel-election-day-constitution-state-electors-coronavirus.html>.

McDonald, M. P. (2020, December 7). *US Elections Project -2020 General*. US Elections Project. Retrieved January 16, 2023, from <https://www.electproject.org/2020g>

Putnam, R. (2000). Chapter 7: Altruism, Volunteering, and Philanthropy. In *Bowling alone* (pp. 124–124). essay, Simon & Schuster.

Keeley, B. (2007). *Human capital: How what you know shapes your life*. OECD.

Sandel, M. J. (2015). Chapter 1: Doing the Right Thing. In *Justice: What's the right thing to do?* (pp. 11–12). essay, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.