

14. Participation & Voting

Breakout Sessions

POLS 1101

**12:40pm-1:30pm Park Hall 145
& 1:50pm-2:40pm Leconte Hall 135**

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Political Participation

- Elections don't guarantee democracy -> We need **regular, competitive** ones
- Beyond elections, people need channels to influence politics.
 - **Conventional participation**
 - **Unconventional participation** (political “resistance” / contentious politics)
- Is there clear distinction between “conventional” and “unconventional” participation? **What matters more in judging, intent** (to change policy vs. to overthrow authority) matter or **method** (legal vs. illegal)?
 - Teachers' strike for higher salaries
 - Online petition against a new surveillance law
 - Civil rights march with government permit
 - Farmers block highways to protest low crop prices
 - A student organization hosts a campus debate on voting reform
 - Environmental NGO sues the government for failing to meet emission targets
 - Voters boycott an election to protest corruption

Unconventional Participation

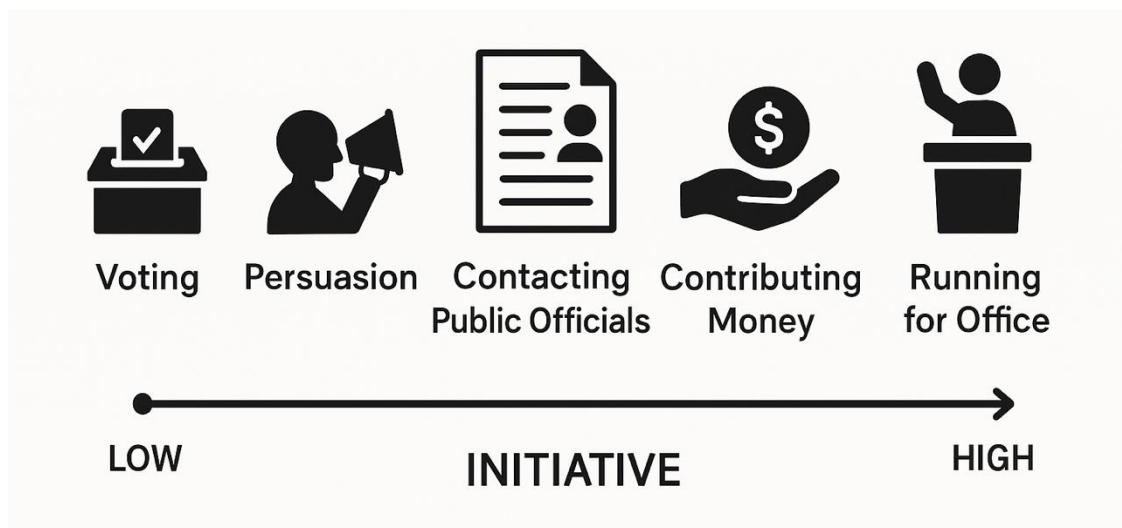
- **Key feature: (the intent) against the established order/norms/institutions**
- **Some other characteristics**
 - Collective action involving “new” agents (e.g. the Selma Marches)
 - > **Direct action**: unconventional participation that involves **assembling crowds** to confront businesses and local governments to demand a hearing
 - Unconventional / “illegal” methods (varied, contextualized definitions)
 - Depending on some political opportunity structures
 - Always having emotional and symbolic slogans / claims
 - > People using unconventional behavior often have a strong **group consciousness**
 - Can lead to social change, or damage (depending on **state capacity** and **government responsiveness**)
- **Should governments tolerate disruptive but nonviolent actions (e.g. sit-ins)?**
- **When, if ever, is violent political participation justified?**
 - Freedom, Order, and Equality

Conventional Participation

Share some of your experiences of “conventional participation”!

- The objective of democratic institutions is **to make political participation conventional**.
 - **For particular benefits** (supported by rationalism and pluralism): ask for services from the local government; contributing money to a candidate’s campaign
 - **For broad policy objectives** (not directly related to individuals)
 - Often related to elections, but not restricted in elections!

Public
Service
Motivation



Resources

- Legislative process: **congressional hearing**
- Judicial process: **class action suit** (a legal action brought by a person or group on behalf of a number of people in similar circumstances)

Participation through Voting

- **Key concepts:** suffrage / franchise (right to vote), voter turnout (actual voting rate)
- **Expansion of suffrage – Equality (Elections serve most the ideal of equality.)**
 - **Blacks:** *Smith v. Allwright* (1944) -> **the Voting Rights Act of 1965** -> *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections* (1966)
 - **Women:** Wyoming (1869) -> Equal Rights Party -> **the 19th Amendment (1919)**
 - **The 26th Amendment (1920):** lowering the voting age to eighteen
- **Voting on policies**
 - Dating back to **progressivism**
 - How? Initiative; referendum
- **Voting for (in the state and local level, even ALL kinds of) candidates**
 - **Ideal assumptions:** 1) Voters know what politicians are doing in office and participate actively;
2) They can choose the “best” candidate, reelect the qualified incumbent and kick out bad ones;
3) Officeholders are motivated to respond to public opinion by the threat of electoral defeat.

Did shark attacks eat into Woodrow Wilson's votes in 1916?

- **Achen and Bartels:** President Woodrow Wilson lost votes in affected counties because citizens irrationally punished him for “natural” events beyond his control — a phenomenon they called the “shark attack effect.”
 - This challenges **the rational assumption of retrospective voting**.
 - Elections may reflect emotional attributions rather than actual performance.
- **Fowler and Hall:** The supposed effect was statistically insignificant and far smaller than claimed. The original study overstated voter irrationality.
 - Even if individual voters behave irrationally, aggregate voting patterns can remain rational.

-> **Do you agree with this idea?**
- **Key question: Are voters rational, and do elections truly function as effective mechanisms of accountability?**
 - We have known that unconventional participation can be depicted as **emotional**, while the most conventional form – voting, can also involve personal feelings.
 - **In cases like this, does voting still represent meaningful participation, or merely symbolic expression?**

Political Participation and Democracy

- **Majoritarianism**

- Favoring conventional, institutionalized behavior, primarily **voting in elections**
 - **How elections contribute to democracy? (p.198)**
 - 1) Allowing citizens to choose among candidates or issues;
 - 2) Socializing political activity, turning citizen claims into routine public function;
 - 3) Institutionalizing access to political power;
 - 4) Bolstering the state's power and authority.
 - Stressing **equality** in political participation, collective decisions formalized through elections; having little place for motivated, resourceful individuals
 - Narrowing the scope of participation by defining which are **orderly** / acceptable

- **Pluralism**

- Decentralization & complexity allows many points of access (**freedom**) and accommodates various forms of conventional participation **in addition to voting**.
- Offering citizens the opportunity to be treated as individuals when dealing with the government, to influence policymaking, and to fulfill their social potential

Explaining Political Participation

- **The standard socio-economic explanation**
 - **More education**, higher income, white-collar occupations are related to more awareness, capability, and resources to **higher (conventional) participation**.
 - For unconventional participation, those who protest against US government policies tend to be more educated.
 - **Is it a universal conclusion across the world?**
 - **What factors can lead to changes of such a pattern?**

Explaining Political Participation (cont`d)

- Low voter turnout in America
 - Which matters more in deciding the “value” of voting, “frequency” or “substance” ?
 - As many elections as possible
 - Elections that cover as many issues as possible

Explanations for the low voter turnout

- Low willingness of young people to vote (accounting for low turnout right after the ratification of the 26th Amendment) – **pay attention to definitions!**
- Attitude changes toward the government (low responsiveness)
- High **learning costs, compliance costs, psychological costs** in **registration** / voting
- Low individual-level “punishment” for not voting (the Australia example!)
 - Why do some of you support compulsory voting (if any)? – **33%** according to the “opinion poll” in our lecture, a proportion that cannot be overlooked
- Lack of political parties that mobilize the vote of particular social groups (its effect also depends on **type of citizens, nature of the election**, and even **random factors** – e.g. weather!)

Next week...

- Read materials on **Campaigns & Elections** before class, and that will be helpful to participate in peer discussions.
- Feel free to email me if you have any questions!
- ENJOY YOUR WEEKEND!