

Study Outline

Chapter 6: Political Participation

- I. A closer look at nonvoting
 - A. Alleged problem: low turnout compared with Europeans, but this compares registered voters with the eligible adult population
 - B. Common explanation: voter apathy on election day, but the real problem is low registration rates
 - C. Proposed solution: get-out-the-vote drives, but this will not help those who are not registered
 - D. Apathy not the only cause of nonregistration
 - 1. Costs here versus no costs in European countries where registration is automatic
 - 2. Motor-voter law of 1993 (which took effect in 1995)
 - a. Did not create a general boom in vote turnout
 - b. Did increase registration among eligible voters
 - c. Did not change the two party balance of registrants
 - d. Did increase the number of independent registrants
 - e. May actually add registrants who are less likely to vote
 - E. Voting is not the only way of participating
- II. The rise of the American electorate
 - A. From state to federal control
 - 1. Initially, states decided nearly everything
 - 2. This led to wide variation in federal elections
 - 3. Congress has since reduced state prerogatives
 - a. 1842 law: House members elected by district
 - b. Suffrage to women
 - c. Suffrage to blacks
 - d. Suffrage to eighteen- to twenty-year-olds
 - e. Direct popular election of U.S. senators
 - 4. Black voting rights
 - a. Fifteenth Amendment gutted by Supreme Court as not conferring a right to vote
 - b. Southern states then use evasive strategies
 - 1. Literacy test
 - 2. Poll tax
 - 3. White primaries
 - 4. Grandfather clauses
 - 5. Intimidation of black voters
 - c. Most of these strategies ruled out by Supreme Court
 - d. Major change with 1965 Voting Rights Act; black vote increases
 - 5. Women's voting rights
 - a. Western states permit women to vote
 - b. Nineteenth Amendment ratified 1920
 - c. No dramatic changes in outcomes
 - 6. Youth vote
 - a. Voting Rights Act of 1970
 - b. Twenty-sixth Amendment ratified 1971
 - c. Lower turnout; no particular party
 - 7. National standards now govern most aspects
 - B. Voting turnout
 - 1. Debate over declining percentages: two theories
 - a. The percentages are real and the result of a decline in popular interest in elections and competitiveness of the two parties
 - 1. Parties originally worked hard to increase turnout among all voters
 - 2. The election of 1896 locked Democrats in the South and Republicans in the North
 - 3. Lopsided Republican victories caused citizens to lose interest
 - 4. Leadership in the major parties became conservative and resisted mass participation

- b. The percentages represent an apparent decline induced, in part, by more honest ballot counts of today.
 - 1. Parties once printed ballots
 - 2. Ballots cast in public
 - 3. Parties controlled counting
- c. Most scholars see several reasons for some real decline.
 - 1. Registration more difficult: longer residency, educational qualifications, and discrimination
 - 2. Continuing drop after 1960 cannot be explained
 - 3. Refinement of VAP data to VEP data also reveals a decline
- d. Universal turnout probably would not alter election outcomes

III. Who participates in politics?

A. Forms of participation

- 1. Voting the most common, but 8 to 10 percent misreport it
- 2. Verba and Nie's six types of participants
 - a. Inactives
 - b. Voting specialists
 - c. Campaigners
 - d. Communalists
 - e. Parochial participants
 - f. Complete activists

B. Causes of participation

- 1. Schooling, or political information, more likely to vote
- 2. Church-goers vote more
- 3. Men and women vote same rate
- 4. Race
 - a. Black participation lower than that of whites overall
 - b. But controlling for SES, higher than whites
- 5. Level of trust in government?
 - a. Studies show no correlation
- 6. Difficulty of registering; as turnout declines, registration gets easier
- 7. Several small factors decrease turnout
 - a. More youths, blacks, and other minorities
 - b. Decreasing effectiveness of parties
 - c. Remaining impediments to registration
 - d. Voting compulsory in other nations
 - e. Ethnic minorities encounter language barriers, whereas blacks are involved in nonpolitical institutions
 - f. May feel that elections do not matter
- 8. Democrats and Republicans fight over solutions
 - a. No one really knows who would be helped
 - b. Nonvoters tend to be poor, black, and so on
 - c. But an increasing percentage of college graduates are also not voting
 - d. Hard to be sure that turnout efforts produce gains for either party: Jesse Jackson in 1984

C. The meaning of participation rates

- 1. Americans vote less but participate more
 - a. Other forms of activity becoming more common
 - b. Some forms more common here than in other countries
- 2. Americans elect more officials than Europeans do and have more elections
- 3. U.S. turnout rates heavily skewed to higher status; meaning of this is unclear