THE INDIVIDUAL IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT

**The Public Initiating and Repealing Laws – Direct Democracy**

Some states allow public to make public policy decisions directly

* Referendum – allows citizens to approve or disapprove proposals passed by state legislatures

In 23 states, mandatory legislative referendums are needed to enact or reject constitutional amendments and certain statutory laws (voters have final say)

All states have optional legislative referendums (legislatures can assign decisions to voters that they could have made)

Some optional referendums ask for advice, not making binding decisions

Initiative – citizens can enact a proposal of a new law or constitutional amendment that is placed on ballot by petition

* Starts with collecting enough signatures within a prescribed time
* Generally, 3-10 percent of number voting for governor
* Qualified initiatives are automatically up for popular vote (requiring legislative approval)

Referendums are rare, especially compared to initiatives

Every 4 years, presidency contest is on the top of the ballot

Ballots in most states also have contests for federal offices, then state, then country

Generally, initiatives and referendums are at the end of the ballot

Roll-Off – declining vote from the top of the ballot to the bottom of the ballot

* Only about half of voters make choices for all offices and referendums
* While turnout is low, the people who do vote aren’t good representation of the public
* When voters fail to vote at the lower end of the ballot, the limited amount that do vote are even less likely to represent the public

California and Washington have seen the growth of the “initiative industry”, specializing in getting signatures on petitions and spending money to influence outcome of referendums

**Voting for Elected Offices – Indirect Democracy**

Generally, only voting for public office holders attracts a majority

These elections can be viewed as indirect democracy, a republican form of government

Voters can affect policy indirectly by supporting candidates they agree with and defeat candidates they disagree with

**Chapter 6A – Voting Participation**

Voting plays a key role in theories of democracy

Is the greatest form of participation at every level of government

Political participation is not common or continuous

* Stimulated by elections and local issues
* Participation is not representative of the population

Voting Age Population – Total number of people above 18

Voting Eligible Population = Voting Age Population – all people ineligible

Texas has generally been on the tail end of electoral turnout

Percent of Voting Age Population < Voting Eligible Population < Registered Voter Population

Popular media and politicians can inflate turnout by using registered voters as denom vs VAP or VEP

* Could also deflate turnout

Can’t always use registered voters because differences in registration laws, and registration rolls are sometimes bloated

Lower turnout is generally related to success in passing amendments

Factors affecting turnout –

Socioeconomic – lower income votes less

Interparty competition declining – some voters don’t vote because their candidates could never win

Political culture makes status quo seems unchangeable

Legal requirements are process gate-keepers - > keep people away

* Registration processes and voter ID laws

Election exhaustion – so many elections can lead to people staying home

Biased outcomes should be expected when turnout is low

* As long as voters are unlike non-voters

No clear evidence of linkage between turnout and quality, responsiveness, or policy(**non**-**result**)

Likely to remain this way until citizen participation in elections increases

* Presence and consequences of biased voters are clearly established

**Recent Efforts to Discourage Voting** **–**

States have enacted new requirements of photo identification

There were cases of Texas discriminating against minority voters in electoral maps in order to inconvenience voters who least supported the current majority party

Some states take action to reduce voting convenience and create barriers

* Perchance republicans fear losing elections due to higher turnout

The states that make voting more challenging are the states with political culture of not valuing higher turnout

Nonpartisan elections –

90% of all local elections, do not list candidates’ political parties

Law prohibits this

Without partisan labels, voters will less vote all Democratic candidates or all Republican candidates

No Participation – state and local

Inverse relationship between level of government and turnout

Without presidential or gubernatorial campaign, elections lose interest in the mass media, leading to very low turnout

As long as voters are unlike non-voters, public policy outcomes are likely to be biased when turnout is low

**Chapter 6B – Voting Rights**

Historical & Current dark sides of voter turnout –