

Political Science 17.20

Introduction to American Politics

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Political Participation
Lecture 18 (April 18, 2013)

- 1 Voting
- 2 Other Forms of Participation
- 3 Consequences of Participatory Patterns

Outline

1 Voting

2 Other Forms of Participation

3 Consequences of Participatory Patterns

Why Do People Vote?

The **calculus of voting**: $p \times B + D > C$

B: **benefit** if preferred candidate wins

p: **probability** that vote affects outcome (very low)

C: **cost** of voting (time, information)

D: satisfaction from act of voting (e.g., civic **duty**)

The **paradox of voting**: Since p is so low, the cost of voting almost always outweighs the benefit (i.e., it is irrational to vote) unless D is larger than C .

Unpacking the “D Term”

Two potential components of the “D term”:

- 1 **Intrinsic:** satisfaction from doing the “right” thing, even if no one knows about it
- 2 **Extrinsic:** satisfaction that is contingent on others’ observing your actions

Social pressure is a powerful inducement to vote, which political campaigns have only recently rediscovered.

Trends in Voter Turnout: VAP vs. VEP

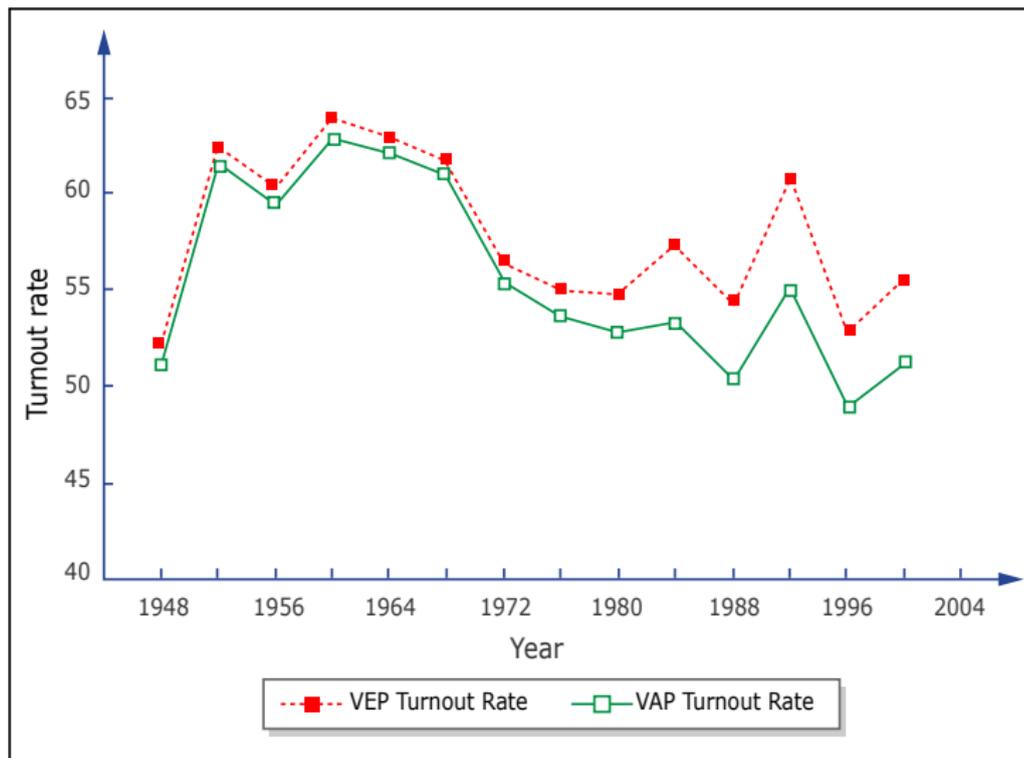
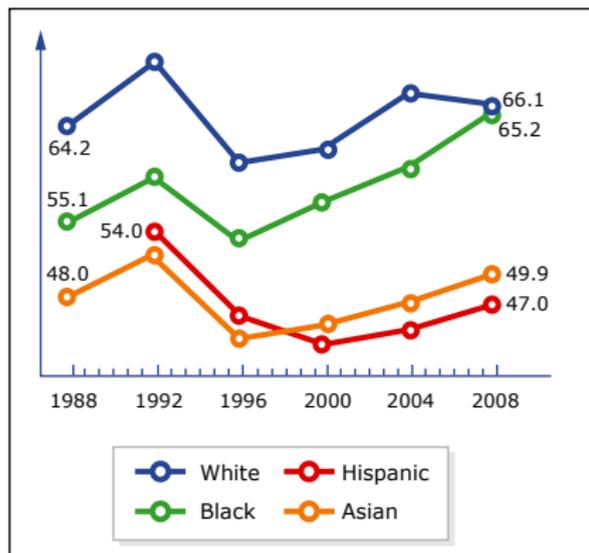
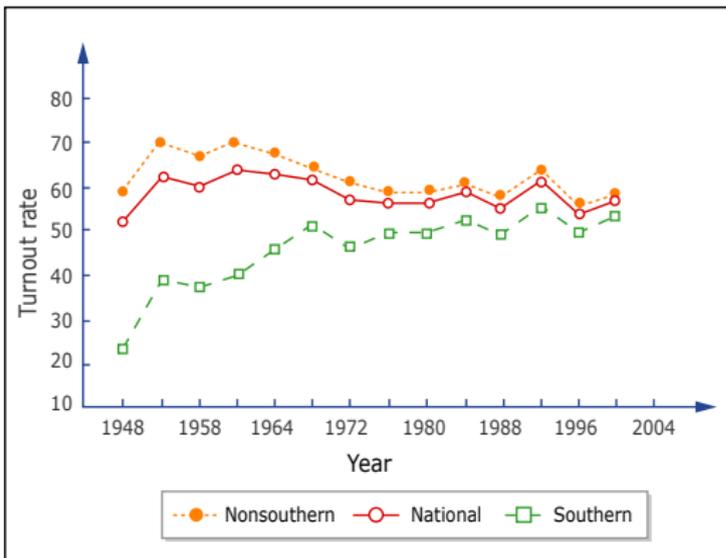


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Regional and Racial Differences in Turnout



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Resources and Participation

Different **resources** are needed for different forms of participation:

- **Time:** vote, volunteer
- **Skills:** write letters, organize protest, circulate petition
- **Money:** donate to candidates and parties

Time is the most equally distributed resources, but in recent decades its importance has decreased relative to **money**.

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Inequality of Political Voice

- Rich and poor, whites and minorities have different **preferences** and different **priorities**.
- Politicians respond to those who can provide valuable **resources**, and who they hear from affects what they think their **constituents want**.
- Inequalities of political “voice” \implies unequal representation

What then to make of minimal and varying partisan bias due to non-voting, and the ability of liberal, minority politicians like Obama to win elections and raise huge amounts of money?

Inequality and the Political System

- Parties need resources as well as votes:
 - **Republicans:** Economic interests of the rich
 - **Democrats:** Social issues
- The puzzling failure of gun regulation

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Spring 2013

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