Political Participation
Political Science 797T
(Course # 39045)
Thompson Hall 512, 10:30AM - 1:00PM
Fall 2009

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Office Hours: Tu 2:00- 4:00, Wednesday 1-2 and by appt

Course Description

This is a broad survey seminar on political participation and its implications for democracy. It will cover mostly mass participation (voting, volunteering, activism, etc.) but venture into elite participation such as running for elective office or giving money to political causes. The primary focus will be on political participation in the United States but all parts of the course have a comparative element, especially with respect to Europe. This course is designed primarily for American and comparative students.

We begin by examining democratic theories about political participation and then discuss incentives and obstacles to participating. Next we explore variations in political participation across groups of citizens and explanations for differences. We will place empirical work against the backdrop of democratic theory: to what extent does citizen participation approach or fall short of an ideal? Does participation matter? In what ways?

Throughout the course we will play close attention to method: how scholars theorize, design research, and present evidence. In the middle part of the course we will have an opportunity to analyze survey data on political participation in the computer labs.

Major goals of course:

- Explore the character and variety of political participation in major democracies
- Assess the relative importance of socio-economic status, civic orientations and political mobilization in explaining variations in political participation
- Analyze institutional reform and its consequences for participation
- Learn to analyze data using statistical software
- Gain fluency in the literature

Major questions:

- What are the dominant theories and concepts regarding democratic participation?
- How much do citizens want to be involved in politics?
- What stimulates or depresses political engagement?
- How much is participation biased by class, race, or gender?
- How much does “civic culture” matter?
- Are some electoral or governmental systems better at increasing participation?
What are the consequences of greater or lesser participation?

Requirements:

1) Seminar participation. This includes participation in weekly discussions of the readings. In addition to the required books, I will post additional readings at SPARK. You should check SPARK each week for updates to the syllabus and readings for that week.

2) Weekly reaction commentary based on readings. These are very short – no more than one-page, single-spaced (12-point font, 1 inch margins). The commentary does not need to address every article or book assigned. Instead, you should write about aspects of the reading(s) that you think are especially worthy of attention. You should NOT summarize the readings but analyze and comment on key concepts and ideas, findings, research methods or other important issues. While everyone will write commentary that they will send to me, I will designate 2 people (on a rotating basis) who will have their commentary distributed to the rest of the class. These commentaries should be completed and emailed to the rest of the class by 8 am on the day of the seminar using SPARK email. The other papers can be emailed to me only (again, via SPARK) at the same time.

One of the required commentaries will be an analysis based on your work in the computer lab using data from the American National Election Studies or Eurobarometer (I will also try to make the Latinobarometer and Afrobarometer available). A separate handout will be provided to explain what you need to do.

3) One 15-page essay, double-spaced, due at the end of semester based on a question you choose.

Required Books (any edition); all other readings are posted at SPARK (pdf format)


Blais, Andre. 2000. To Vote or Not to Vote: The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory (University of Pittsburgh)

Rosenstone Steven J. and John Mark Hansen. 2003. Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America (Longman)

Mutz, Diana. 2006. Hearing the Other Side (Cambridge)


John R. Hibbing, Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2002. Stealth Democracy: Americans’ beliefs about how government should work (Cambridge)
COURSE OUTLINE

Sept 9

Introduction

Questions: What is political participation and civic engagement? Why study it? How do we study it? Is it good?


I. DEMOCRATIC THEORY and PARTICIPATION

Sept 16 Theory

Who should participate in a democracy? In what ways should they participate? How much?


Pateman, Participation and Democratic Theory (entire book)

Further Reading:
Barber, Benjamin. 1984. Strong Democracy (California)
“Federal Farmer,” “Essentials of a Free Government” (Antifederalists letters)

Revised 08/31/2009
Incentives and Disincentives to participate; rational actor models and the paradox of voting

Blais, To Vote or Not to Vote: The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory


Further Reading:
Olson, Mancur. 1965. The Logic of Collective Action (Harvard 1965)

II. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS and OTHER SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Socio-Economic Status and Resources

Revised 08/31/2009
Rosenstone and Hansen, Chapter 3 (skim)


Further Reading:


Revised 08/31/2009
Gender, Ethnicity and Race


Further Reading:


Oct 14

**COMPUTER LAB & DATA ANALYSIS**

Oct 21

**COMPUTER LAB & DATA ANALYSIS**

**III. ATTITUDES AND CIVIC ORIENTATIONS**

Oct 28

**Social Capital, Trust, Culture, Values**


Further Reading:


Revised 08/31/2009 7
IV. MOBILIZATION

Nov 4

Elite Mobilization

Rosenstone and Hansen, Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America

Further Reading:
Nov 11 VETERANS’ DAY

Nov 18

**Social Networks & informal mobilization**

Diana Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*

Further Reading:


**V. INSTITUTIONS**

Nov 25

**Comparative electoral institutions**


Further Reading:

**Joining Groups, Social Movements and Protest**


Revised 08/31/2009
Further Reading:
VI. CONSEQUENCES OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Dec 9

**Political Participation and Policy Outcomes**


Further Reading:


**Participation and Deliberation: Are they both possible?**


**TBA**  **Paper presentations**
Political Participation is the voluntary activities of members of a society in the selection of rulers. Political Participation can be defined as those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics. Participation in electoral processes involves much more than just voting. Political participation derives from the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate; the ability Political participation can be loosely defined as citizens’ activities affecting politics. Political participation is relevant for any political system, but it is an indispensable feature of democracy: “Where few take part in decisions there is little democracy; the more participation there is in decisions, the more democracy there is” (Verba & Nie, 1972, p. 1). Thus, the extent and scope of political participation are important perhaps even decisive criteria for assessing the quality of democracy. Why do social scientists study political participation? To begin with, participation is an ingredient of every polity, large or small. Whether the society is an oligarchy or a democracy, someone must make political decisions and appoint, uphold, and remove leaders. Those who fail to participate, whether out of neglect or exclusion, are likely to enjoy less power than other men.