

# Political Participation in Texas: A passive citizenry? Part I



The worst illiterate is the political illiterate.  
He hears nothing, sees nothing, takes no part in political life.  
He doesn't seem to know that the cost of living, the price of beans, of flour,  
of rent, of medicines all depends on political decisions.  
He even prides himself on his political ignorance, sticks out his chest and  
says he hates politics.  
He doesn't know, the imbecile, that from his political non-participation  
comes the prostitute, the abandoned child, the robber and, worst of all,  
corrupt officials, the lackeys of exploitative multinational corporations.

Bertolt Brecht

# Political Participation

- ...actions undertaken by ordinary citizens that are intended, directly or indirectly, to influence the selection of government officials and/or the policy decisions they make
- Democracies need citizen participation In order to succeed.
- Political participation is important because it is the mechanism that links citizens to government.
- Political participation in a democracy can take many forms. The individuals engaged in such participation hope that these actions will have some impact on the content of government policies.



# Political Participation



- Even political participation at its most passive - the act of voting for elected representatives - has a clear expected link to policy outcomes. We expect that the different candidates and parties for which we vote will advocate, pass and implement different policies.
- grassroots participation
  - Participation is more personal and more issue-oriented at lower levels.
  - The local news media and elite families have a great deal of influence.
  - increase in ad hoc / issue specific organizations
  - non-partisan election: contest (usually local) in which candidates run without formal identification or association with a political party

# Political Participation in Texas



- Texas has done a very good job of denying people the right to participate in the past but today it is a more open system much of the time.
  - Any Texan can join a political party or not, join an interest group or not, or vote for a candidate or not.
- **Wealthy Texans** have significant influence but all Texans are free to make up their own minds and can ignore the influence of others.
- civic engagement in San Antonio



# Voting



- The right to vote, or suffrage , is a legal right.
- Throughout US history, suffrage was generally restricted for reasons that included race, gender and property ownership.
- However, the dominant trend has been to expand the vote.
- Initially, suffrage changes resulted in increased participation.
- Recently, voter turnout has steadily declined ... the vanishing electorate. High of around 60% in Presidential elections, 50% in midterm elections and even lower in local elections.

# Voting Rights in Texas

- When Texas joined the Union in 1845, only white males enjoyed the right to vote.
- Much of the subsequent voting history of the state is the story of the efforts of women and the members of racial and ethnic groups to gain the right to vote and participate meaningfully in Texas politics.



# Voting Rights in Texas: Women's Suffrage Movement



- The women's suffrage movement began in the 1840s as an offshoot of the abolition movement.
  - abolition movement: a political reform effort in the early 19th century, goal was the elimination of slavery
  - suffrage: the right to vote
- The drive for women's suffrage did not pick up steam in the state until 1903 with the founding of the Texas Suffrage Association.
- In 1919, the US Congress proposed a constitutional amendment granting women the right to vote nationwide. The 19th amendment became law in 1920.
  - Texas was the first state in the South to ratify the 19th amendment.

# Voting Rights in Texas: African American Enfranchisement



- The Civil War ended slavery, but the state's white political establishment refused to enfranchise former slaves.
- In 1867, Congress passed legislation that placed the South under military rule and forced southern states to grant African Americans the right to vote.
- African Americans registered to vote for the first time in 1867 and begin to participate in Texas politics.
- After the early 1870s, Texas politics began to return to the pattern in place before the Civil War of denying political participation to African Americans.



# Voting Rights in Texas: Minority Disfranchisement

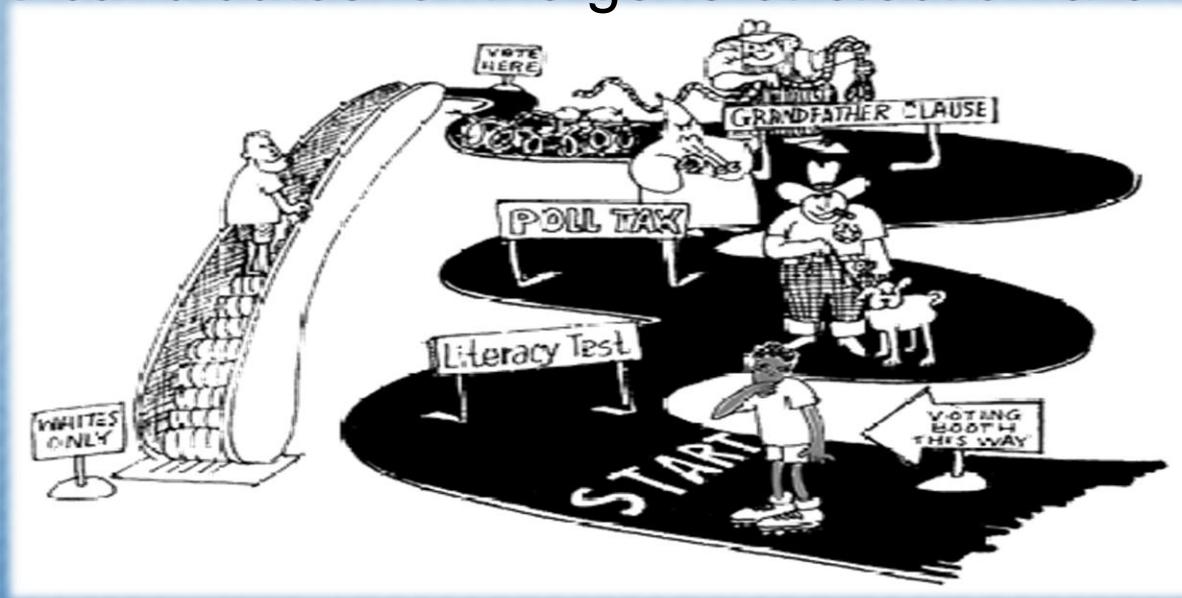


- After Reconstruction, Texas was a one-party state dominated by the Democratic Party.
- In the early 20th century, Texas restricted the voting rights of minorities in order to maintain the political power of whites.
- **disfranchisement**: the denial of voting rights
- **main instruments of disfranchisement**:
  - **poll tax**: a tax that prospective voters had to pay in order to register to vote
  - **white primary**: an election system that prohibited African Americans from voting in Democratic primary elections

# Voting Rights in Texas: Minority Disfranchisement



- The exclusion of African Americans from participation in the Democratic primary not only barred them from influence in Democratic Party politics but also from meaningful participation in Texas politics in general.
- primary election: an intra-party election during which a party's candidates for the general election are chosen



# Voting Rights in Texas: Minority Disfranchisement



## Freedom Party To Fight Parr In South Texas

SAN DIEGO, Tex. (AP) — The Freedom Party is making another bid for control of Duval County.

Its members aim to smash what they term the life and death power of South Texas political leader George B. Parr.

"Hogwash" is what Parr calls charges that pistol-packing toughs have tried to intimidate persons attending Freedom Party election rallies.

What is the Freedom Party?  
Who are its leaders?

The Freedom Party was or

- Boss Control in South Texas
  - In heavily Hispanic South Texas, political bosses (in particular ranch-owners) controlled both local economies and local politics.
  - The white primary did not keep Latinos from voting, but political bosses often controlled *how* they voted.

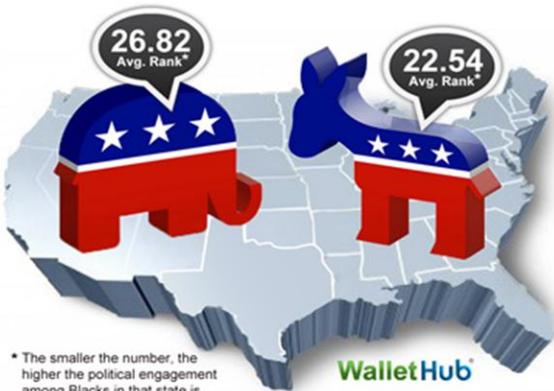
# Voting Rights in Texas: Struggle for Minority Voting Rights



- Minorities turned to the federal courts and Congress for help in gaining the right to vote.
- In 1944, the Supreme Court struck down white primaries as an unconstitutional violation of the 15th amendment.
- In 1962, Congress proposed a constitutional amendment to prohibit the poll tax, and it was ratified as the 24th amendment in 1964.

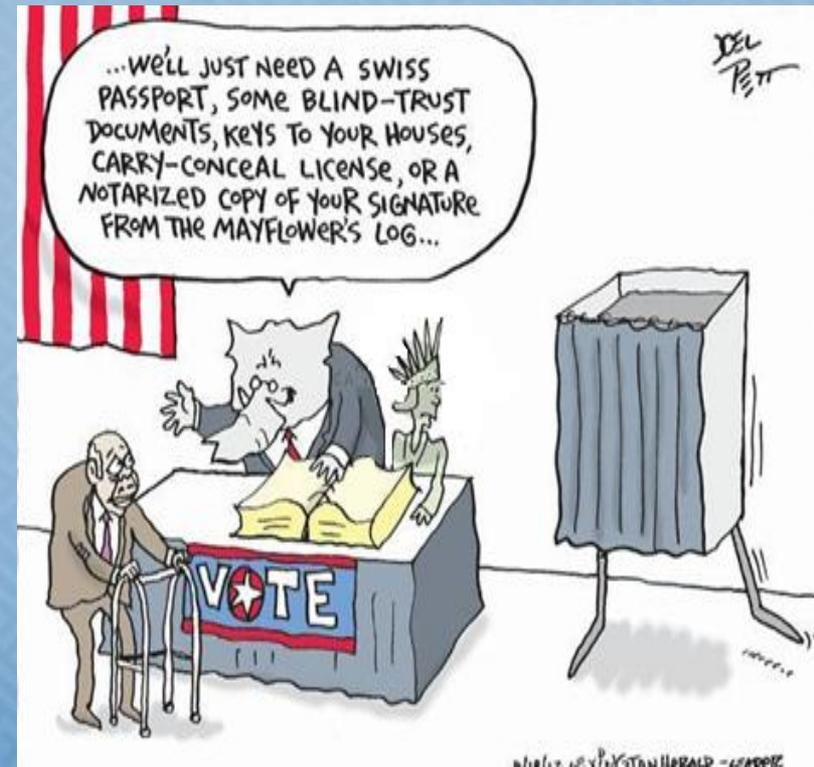
- In 1964, the Supreme Court struck down the poll tax as a violation of the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment.

Blue States Have Higher Political Engagement  
Among Blacks than Red States



# Voting in Texas

- To vote in Texas, individuals must be 18 years of age, American citizens, residents of the state and registered to vote.
- Voters cast their ballots in election precincts near their homes.
- Under recent changes by the state legislature, when a voter arrives at a polling location, the voter will be asked to present one of 7 acceptable forms of photo ID that is current or expired no more than four years.
- Texans can vote early if they wish.



# Other Forms of Political Participation: Traditional



- voting: fundamental but only a start
- traditional political participation: various activities designed to influence government, involves the use of routine and legitimate institutions provided by government
  - engaging in political discussions
  - using media or internet to find out about political issues
  - signing petitions
  - contacting media about political issues
  - attending political meetings

# Other Forms of Political Participation: Traditional



- traditional political participation
  - campaigning for a political party
  - giving campaign contributions
  - fundraising
  - volunteering to work in campaigns: Campaign volunteers help with mass mailings, staff telephone banks, assemble yard signs and distribute them to the candidate's supporters, etc.
  - contacting elected officials: writing letters, phone calls



# Other Forms of Political Participation: Traditional



- traditional political participation
  - make presentations to local school boards or city councils
  - joining groups (social capital): political party, interest groups, unions
  - running for office
  - holding an elected office

# Other Forms of Political Participation: Non-Traditional



- non-traditional political participation: activities outside the usual and acceptable routes for affecting government, challenge and oppose policy, can be illegal forms
  - cronyism: connections, gifts to bureaucrats in exchange for help
  - bribery
  - taking part in protests, boycotts, sit-ins, marches, demonstrations
  - political violence or terrorism



# Other Forms of Political Participation: Initiative



- An initiative process is a procedure whereby citizens can propose the adoption of policy measures by gathering signatures on a petition.
- In 2016, voters in 35 states approved 71% of 162 statewide ballot initiatives covering such diverse policy issues as marijuana, gun control, universal healthcare, the death penalty, solar power, taxes and minimum wage.
- Advocates of the initiative process believe that it enhances participation by more closely linking citizens to their government. Initiative allows voters to overcome the opposition of their elected representatives to adopt policy proposals they favor.

# Other Forms of Political Participation: Initiative



- Opponents of the initiative process contend that it diminishes the quality of democracy. They point out that interest groups often drive the initiative process when they fail to achieve their policy goals through the legislative process.
- Nearly half of the states have the initiative process, but Texas does not.



# Levels of Political Participation



- **inactive:** They have virtually no participation and are typically low income, not very educated, and young.
- **voting specialists:** They vote, but that's it. Typically older and not very educated.
- **campaigners:** They vote and campaign, focusing on the emotions and passionate struggles of politics. Generally well-educated.
- **communalists:** They have a largely non-partisan focus, engaging in community activities and projects. Generally well-educated.

# Levels of Political Participation



- **parochial participants:** They avoid elections, but are willing to contact politicians about specific, even personal, issues.
- **activists:** They participate in all aspects of politics. Often high income, well-educated and middle-aged.
- Political participation is not natural but must be learned. For learning to occur, one must have **capacity, motivation and opportunity**. In some strata of US society, all three preconditions are missing.

A popular Government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy, or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.

James Madison

# Levels of Political Participation



Milbrath (1965a, pp. 16–22), employing a similar classification, stratified the electorate into gladiators (the small number of party actives and officeholders), spectators (who seek information and vote) and apathetics (who participate only passively, if at all).

Although all such classifications are arbitrary, they point up the tendency for various forms of political involvement and indifference to cluster: people who engage in one of the more active forms of participation (say, canvassing) are inclined to be active in other ways as well (say, the collection of money). People who habitually fail to vote will usually avoid such other minimal activities as reading the political news.

# Levels of Political Participation



Milbrath suggests that the various forms of political involvement fall into a hierarchy or continuum according to the cost in time and effort that each demands. But other variables, such as political articulateness, saliency and interest, also affect the frequency of the various forms of participation.



# Levels of Political Participation



- two classes of apathetic individuals can be distinguished:
  - those who fail to participate out of political indifference, exclusion or incapacity
  - those who consciously choose not to participate

# Patterns of Political Participation



- Experts have found several demographics (social and economic characteristics) to be strongly associated with levels of political participation: education, religious involvement, race and ethnicity, age, gender, income.
- **education:** Single most important characteristic of a politically active citizen is a high level of education. Generally, the more education an individual has, the more likely he/she is to vote.
- **religious involvement:** As religious involvement increases, so does political participation. Some theorize that church involvement leads to social connectedness, teaches organizational skills and/or increases one's awareness of larger societal issues.



# Patterns of Political Participation



- race and ethnicity: If only race and ethnicity are considered, whites have higher voting rates than do African Americans and Latinos. Studies that control for income and education differences have found that voting rates are about the same.
- Participation rates for African Americans somewhat exceed expectations because of the effectiveness of organizations in the African American community, such as churches and political groups.
- Whites are significantly overrepresented at the ballot box, whereas Latinos are dramatically underrepresented.
- Participation rates for Latino Texans reflect the relative weakness of Latino organizations at turning out the vote.
- [Latino political participation in the Texas Panhandle, 1980–2010](#)

# Patterns of Political Participation



- **age:** Voting levels for 18-24 year olds are the lowest of any age category but they are more likely to join interest groups and demonstrations. Older people are more likely to vote than are younger people, until advanced age and ill health force the elderly to slow down. The highest percentages of eligible voters who actually vote are in those groups 45 and above.
- **gender:** At one time, men and women were equally likely to vote but since 1992, turnout among women voters has exceeded that of men. (This trend is relatively new.) Men are more likely than women to engage in other forms of political participation and fewer women are elected to office.
- **income:** Middle- and upper-income groups participate at a higher rate than lower-income groups.



# Patterns of US Political Participation



The proportion of adults in each group who have taken part in civic or political activities in the past 12 months

Source: Pew Research Center, 2008

	Did any activities	1-2 activities	3-4 activities	5+ activities
<b>Total</b>	63%	34%	16%	13%
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	66	36	16	14
Female	61	32	16	12
<b>Age</b>				
18-24	59	34	13	13
25-34	62	34	14	14
35-44	66	34	18	14
45-54	65	33	19	14
55-64	68	33	19	16
65+	56	34	13	9
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, non-Hispanic	65	35	17	13
Black, non-Hispanic	60	34	14	12
Hispanic (English-speaking)	53	26	12	15

# Patterns of US Political Participation



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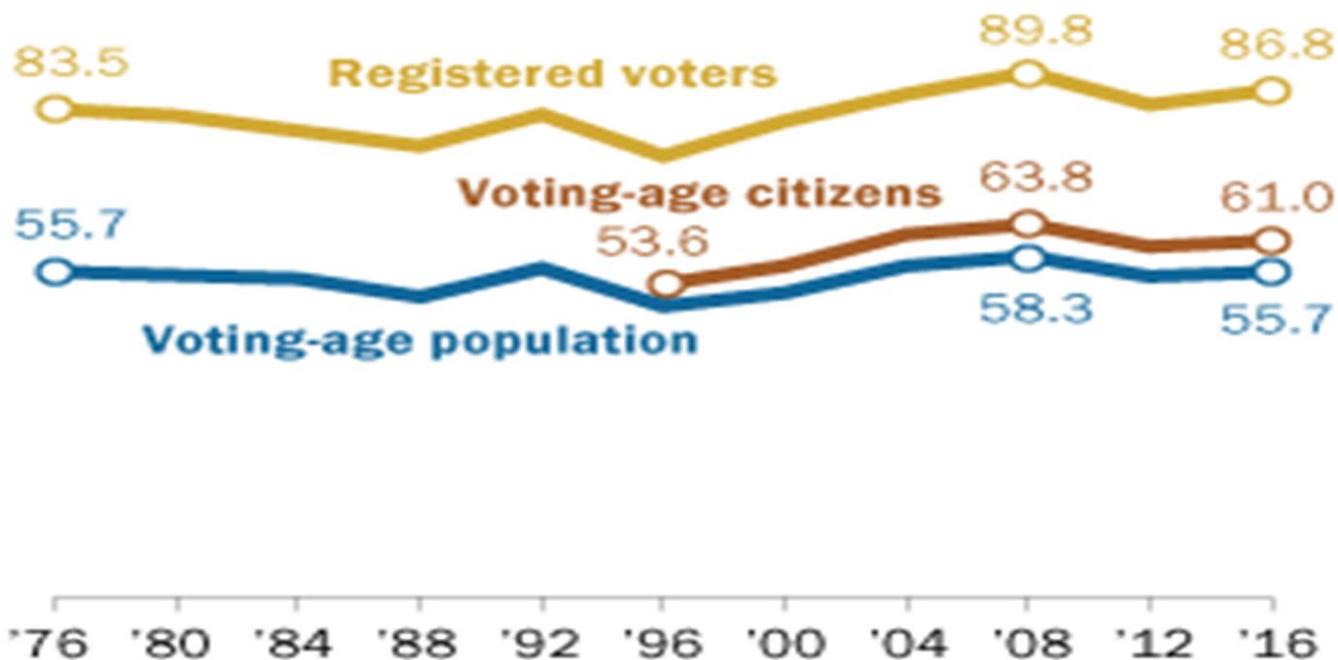
	Did any activities	1-2 activities	3-4 activities	5+ activities
<b>Total</b>	63%	34%	16%	13%
<b>Education</b>				
Less than high school	44	31	8	5
High school grad	52	34	13	6
Some college	72	39	17	16
College grad	79	31	24	24
<b>Annual Household Income</b>				
Less than \$20,000	49	31	13	6
\$20,000-\$39,999	53	31	15	7
\$40,000-\$74,999	69	38	16	15
\$75,000-\$99,999	74	36	18	20
\$100,000 or more	80	30	25	25
<b>Geography</b>				
Urban	61	33	15	12
Suburban	67	34	18	14
Rural	58	33	13	13

# Patterns of US Political Participation



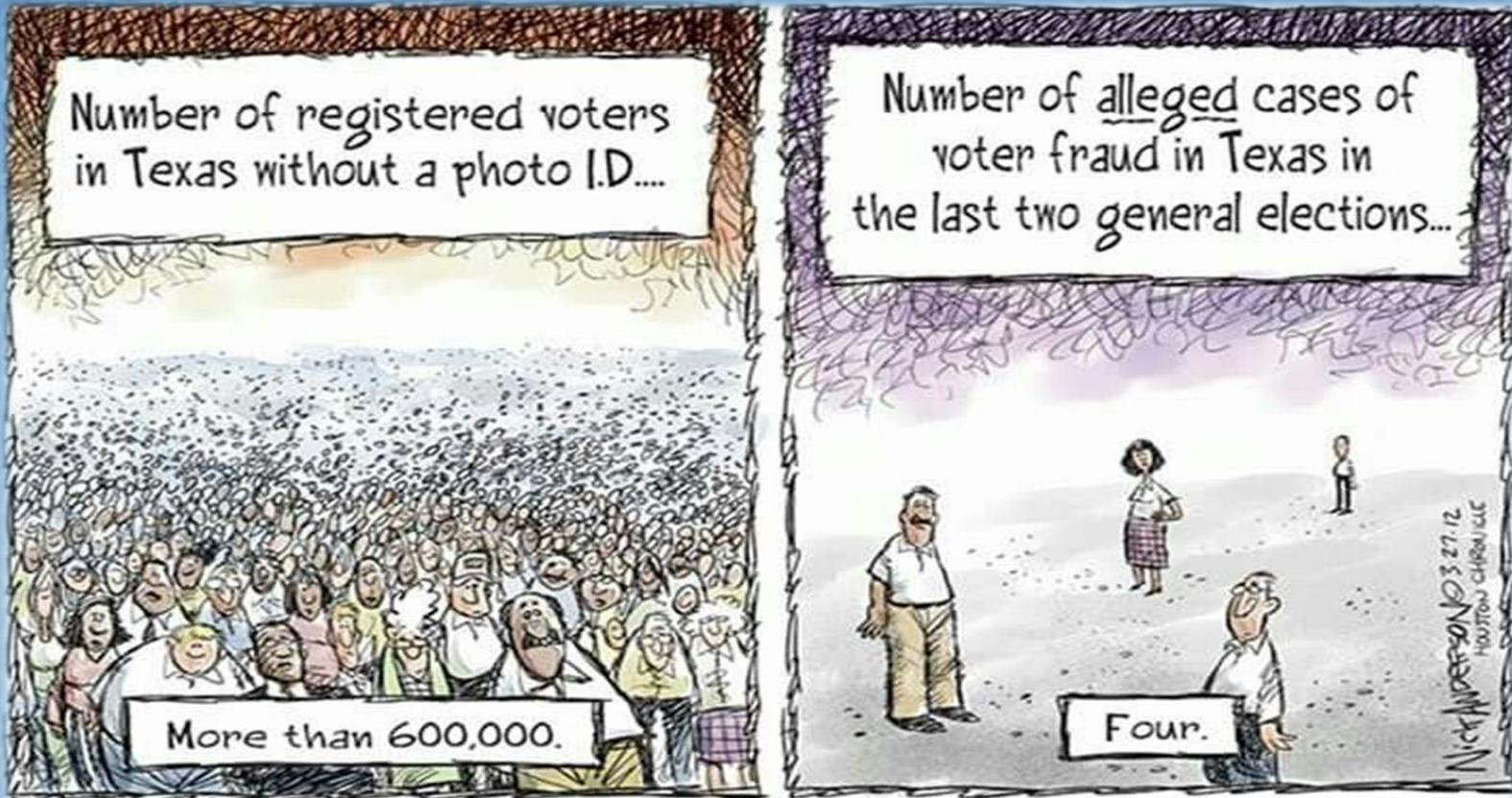
## Turnout in U.S. presidential elections

*Votes cast as a share of ...*



Source: Census Bureau (population estimates), House Clerk's office and Pew Research Center (vote totals).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

continued in  
Political Participation in Texas  
Part II