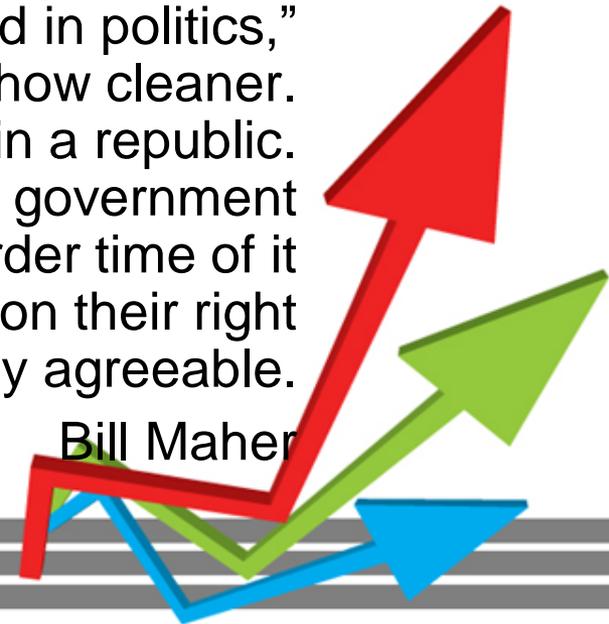




Political Participation

Freedom isn't free. It shouldn't be a bragging point that "Oh, I don't get involved in politics," as if that makes you somehow cleaner. No, that makes you derelict of duty in a republic. Liars and panderers in government would have a much harder time of it if so many people didn't insist on their right to remain ignorant and blindly agreeable.

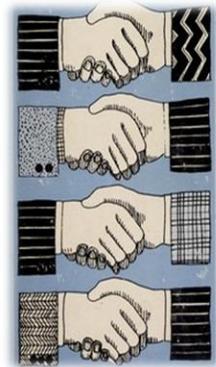
Bill Maher





Political Participation

- Political participation refers to political activity by individual citizens. It encompasses the many and diverse activities used by citizens to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue.
- Political participation derives from
 - the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate
 - the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs
 - the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government
- It can be direct or indirect, individual or group-oriented.



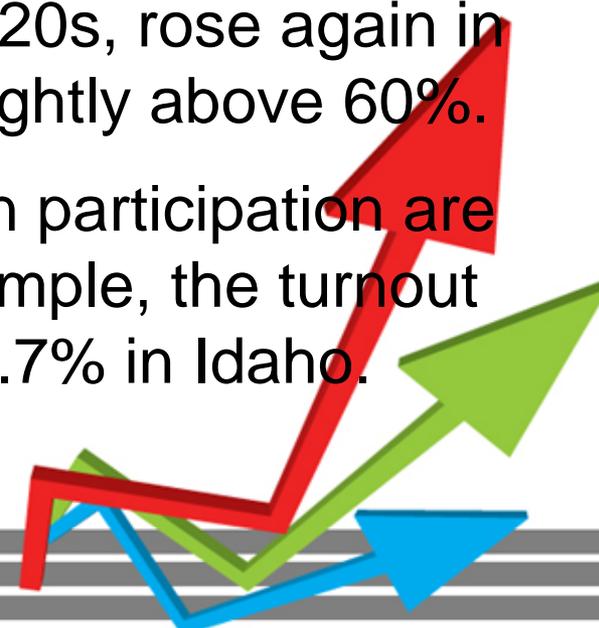


Extent of Political Participation

In the US, participation appears to have declined sharply at the end of the 19th century.

For example, although **turnout for presidential elections** in the decades following the Civil War averaged more than 75%, the rate fell steadily during the early years of the 20th century to an average of 51.7% in the 1920s, rose again in the 1930s and in the 1960s averaged slightly above 60%.

Even within the US, **regional variations** in participation are great in any given year: in 1960, for example, the turnout ranged from 30.4% in Georgia to 80.7% in Idaho.





Benefits of Political Participation

- the principal means by which **consent** is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and leaders are held **accountable**
- promotes **stability** and order
- secures the **greatest good** for the greatest number by giving everyone the opportunity to express his/her own interests
- **community gains** by drawing on the talents and skills of the largest possible number of people
- gives individuals a sense of their own **value**
- alerts both leaders and citizens to their **duties and responsibilities**
- broadens **political understanding**



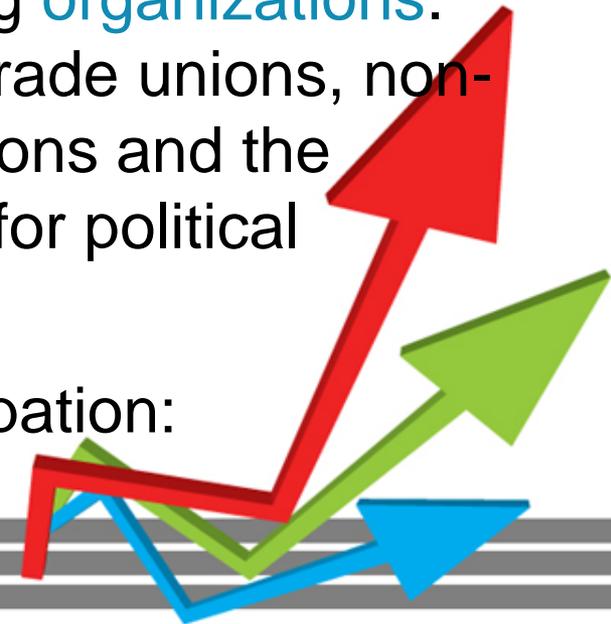


Political Participation

- Participation in electoral processes involves much more than just voting and it extends beyond political parties.

- Individuals can become involved in aspects of the electoral process through **independent action**, particularly at the local level, and by joining **organizations**. Professional networks, trade unions, non-governmental organizations and the media provide avenues for political participation.

- There are two types of political participation: **unconventional** and **conventional**.





Unconventional Political Participation

- ...relatively uncommon behavior that challenges or defies government or the dominant culture
- usually personally **stressful** for both participants and their opponents
- **long history** (the Boston Tea Party) of unconventional participation yet Americans generally **disapprove**, particularly of those acts that interfere with their daily lives (such as occupying buildings or disrupting traffic)
- has been **successful** in influencing government decisions (civil rights movement, the Vietnam War)





Unconventional Political Participation

- characteristics of people participating in unconventional ways:



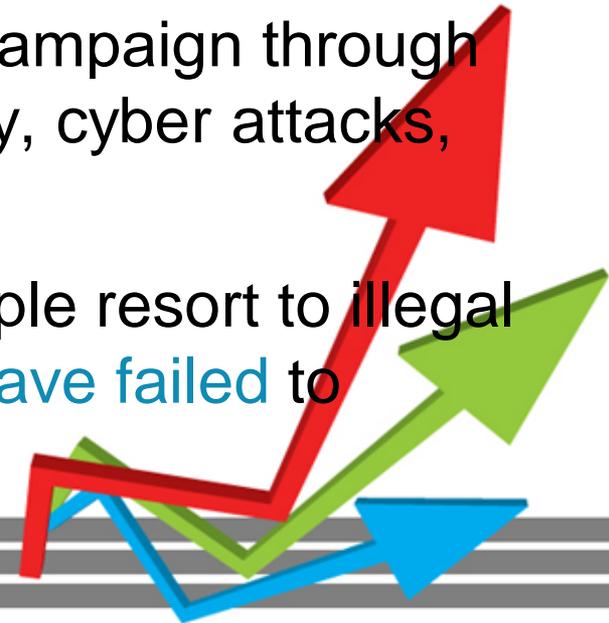
- distrust of the political system
 - strong sense of political efficacy
 - highly developed sense of group consciousness
- includes activities such as marches, sit ins, direct political action, signing petitions, supporting boycotts, staging demonstrations and protests, acts of civil disobedience, etc





Unconventional Political Participation

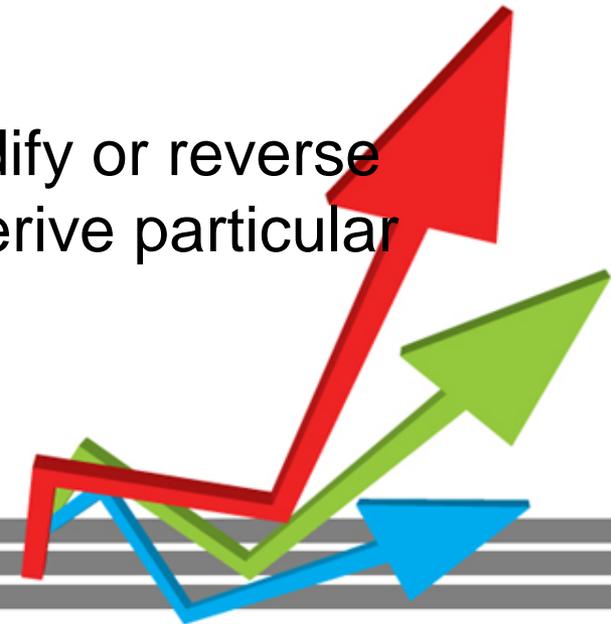
- Some theorists add a third type of political participation, usually as a distinct form of unconventional political participation.
- **illegal participation**: activities that break the law
- includes activities such as political assassination, terrorism, sabotaging an opponent's campaign through theft or vandalism, damage to property, cyber attacks, etc
- Most of the time (but not always), people resort to illegal participation only when **legal means have failed** to create significant political change.





Conventional Political Participation

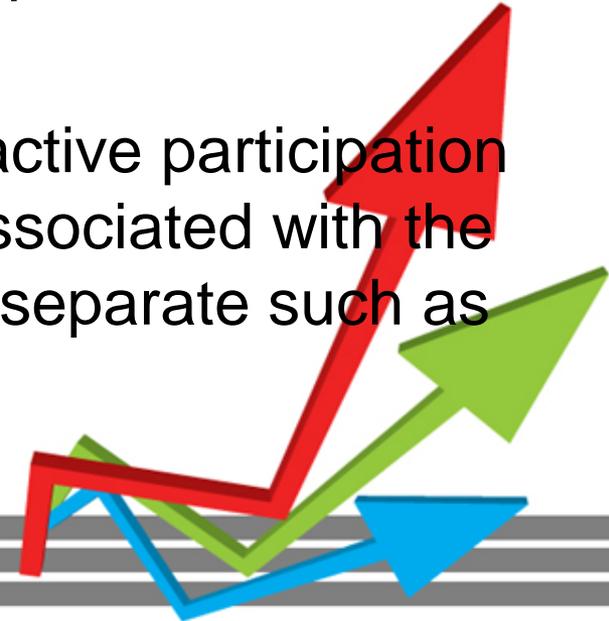
- ...relatively routine, added behavior that uses the channels of representative government
- types
 - **supportive/symbolic behavior**: mainly ceremonial acts expressing allegiance to government and country
 - **influencing behavior**: seeks to modify or reverse government policy, may seek to derive particular benefits from government



Conventional Political Participation



- types
 - influencing behavior
 - two kinds of activities that influence the selection of government personnel and policies
 - **low-initiative acts**: do not require much effort, such as voting
 - **high-initiative acts**: require active participation to obtain benefits, can be associated with the electoral process or can be separate such as class-action suits





Conventional Political Participation

- includes activities such as voting, writing letters, contacting officials, giving money, volunteering for a political campaign, belonging to activist groups, serving in public office, etc
- Compared with citizens of other countries, Americans are **less likely to vote** in elections but are **more likely to engage** in other forms of conventional participation.
- tendency for various forms of political participation and indifference to **cluster**:

- People who engage in one of the more active forms of participation are inclined to be active in other ways as well.

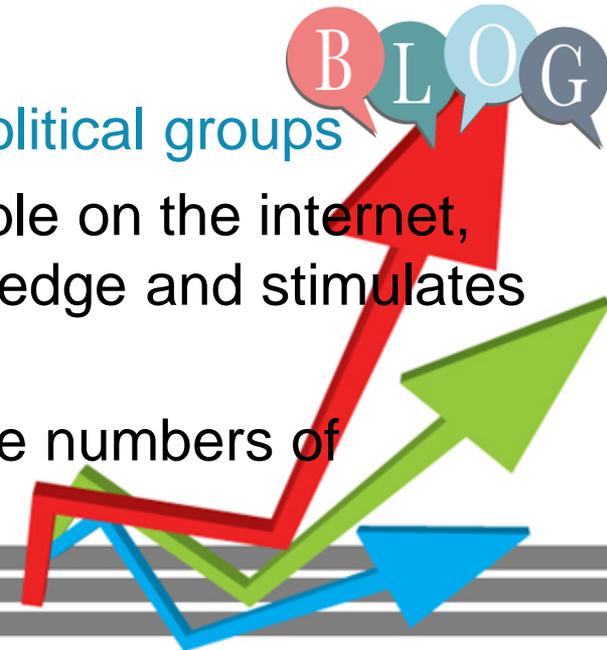
○ People who habitually fail to vote will usually avoid such other minimal activities as reading the political news.





The Internet and Political Participation

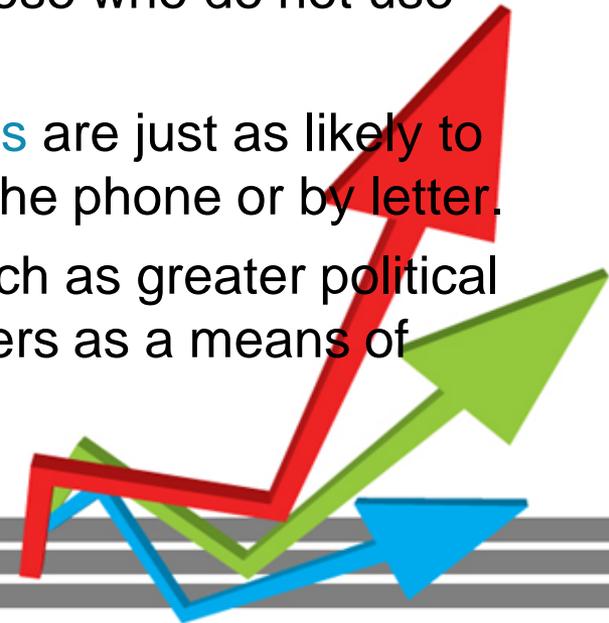
- capacity of the internet to permit ordinary citizens to **short-circuit political elites** and deal directly with one another and public officials
- fosters **deliberation**, enhances **trust** and creates **community**
- **facilitates political participation**
- allows certain forms of political activity to be **conducted more easily**
- facilitates the process of the **formation of political groups**
- vast amounts of **political information** available on the internet, lowers the costs of acquiring political knowledge and stimulates political interest
- facilitates **political conversation** among large numbers of participants spread over vast distances





The Internet and Political Participation

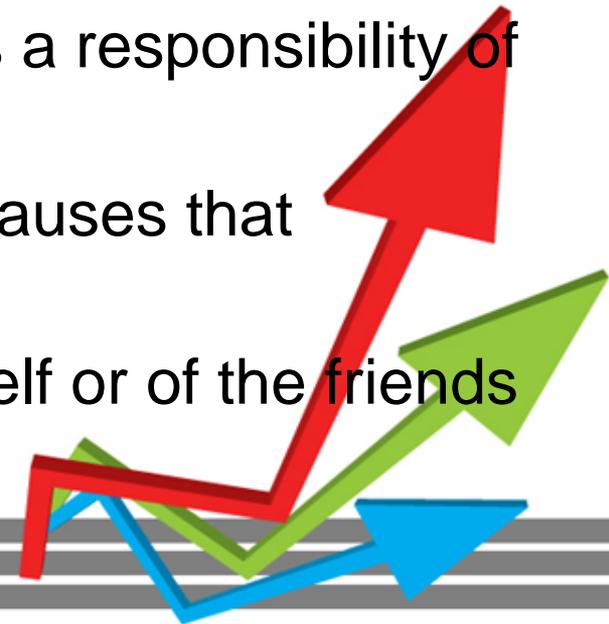
- facilitates mobilization to take political action
- There are hints that forms of civic engagement anchored in blogs and social networking sites alter long-standing patterns that are based on socioeconomic status.
- Those who use blogs and social networking sites as an outlet for civic engagement are far more active in traditional realms of political and nonpolitical participation than are other internet users. In addition, they are even more active than those who do not use the internet at all.
- Online communications to government officials are just as likely to draw a response as contacts in person, over the phone or by letter.
- negative: fosters undemocratic tendencies such as greater political fragmentation, hacktivism (the use of computers as a means of protest to promote political ends) and incivility
- Hacktivism is Not a Crime





Reasons for Political Participation

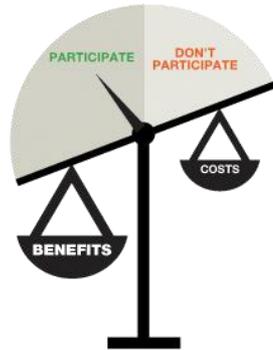
- Most feel that some level of political participation, particularly conventional participation, is admirable and acceptable. But political participation can be hard ... it requires time and money. So why do people do it?
 - **idealism**: believe strongly in a particular idea
 - **responsibility**: view participation as a responsibility of democratic citizenship
 - **self-interest**: promote issues and causes that personally profit the person
 - **enjoyment**: either of the activity itself or of the friends made while politically engaged





Reasons for Political Participation

- **Rational Actor Model:** Citizens weigh the costs against the benefits.
 - If benefits are small, it isn't rational to participate.
 - Local participation, group activities and political protest may seem more effective and thus more rational.





Who Participates?

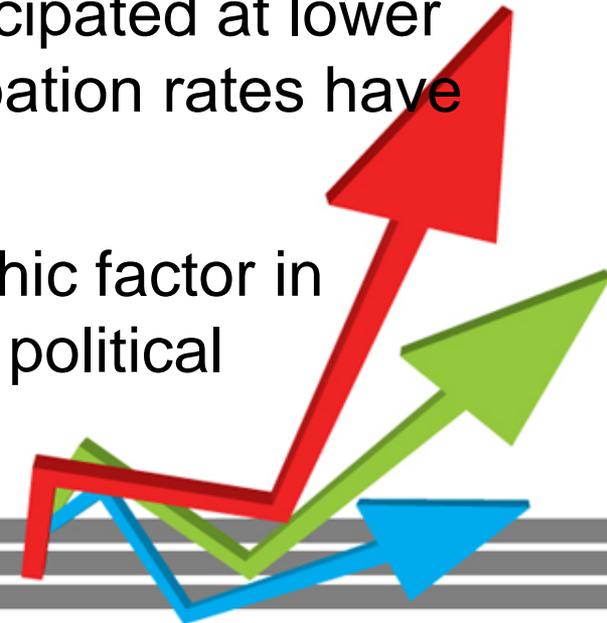
- Participation rates are a **function of resources and civic skills**.
- **socioeconomic status**: an indicator of most types of conventional political participation ... People with more education, higher incomes and white-collar jobs are more likely than others to participate in politics.
 - **standard socioeconomic model of participation**: shows relationship between socioeconomic status and conventional political involvement
 - Unconventional behavior is related to higher socioeconomic status in much the same way.
- **age**: Young people are less likely than older people to participate in conventional politics.





Who Participates?

- **racial and ethnic groups**: If only race and ethnicity are considered, whites have higher rates than do blacks and Latinos. Studies that control for income and education levels have found that the participation rates are about the same for whites, blacks and Latinos.
- **gender**: For many years, women participated at lower rates. More recently, women's participation rates have equaled and exceeded that of men.
- **education**: strongest single demographic factor in explaining most types of conventional political participation





Who Participates?

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

	Did any activities	1-2 activities	3-4 activities	5+ activities
Total	63%	34%	16%	13%
Gender				
Male	66	36	16	14
Female	61	32	16	12
Age				
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
Race/Ethnicity				
White, non-Hispanic	65	35	17	13
Black, non-Hispanic	60	34	14	12
Hispanic (English-speaking)	53	26	12	15



Who Participates?

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

	Did any activities	1-2 activities	3-4 activities	5+ activities
Total	63%	34%	16%	13%
Education				
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
Annual Household Income				
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
Geography				
Urban	61	33	15	12
Suburban	67	34	18	14
Rural	58	33	13	13



Who Participates?

- **ideological consistency**: Across all types of political participation, people on the ideological left or right are more than twice as likely to be active participants compared with those who hold a roughly equal mix of liberal and conservative values ... Even after controlling for demographic factors known to be associated with higher levels of participation, the relationship between ideological consistency and participation persists.
- **antipathy for opposition**: Those who hold strongly negative views of the other political party are far more likely to participate in the political process than the rest of the nation.

○ **government responsiveness**: A positive experience with government responsiveness will increase the probability of future participation.

Individual chooses whether to act based on currently perceived benefits, costs and probability of success



Individual observes outcome of action



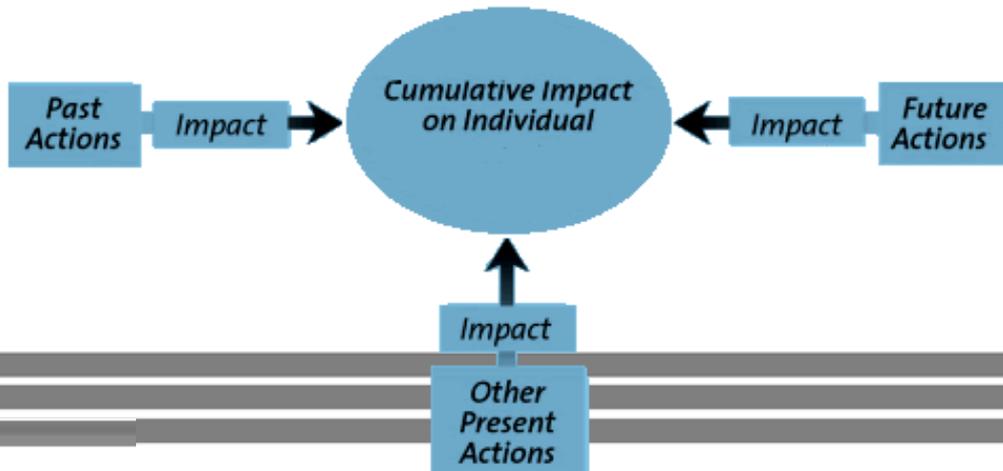
Individual updates perceptions of the probability of success based on outcome





Range of Political Participation

- political participation is...
 - **hierarchical**: a cost vs. benefit situation ... The greater the investment of political resources required the fewer people are involved.
 - **cumulative**: Those who participate accumulate social capital and gain political efficacy, making future participation easier and more likely.

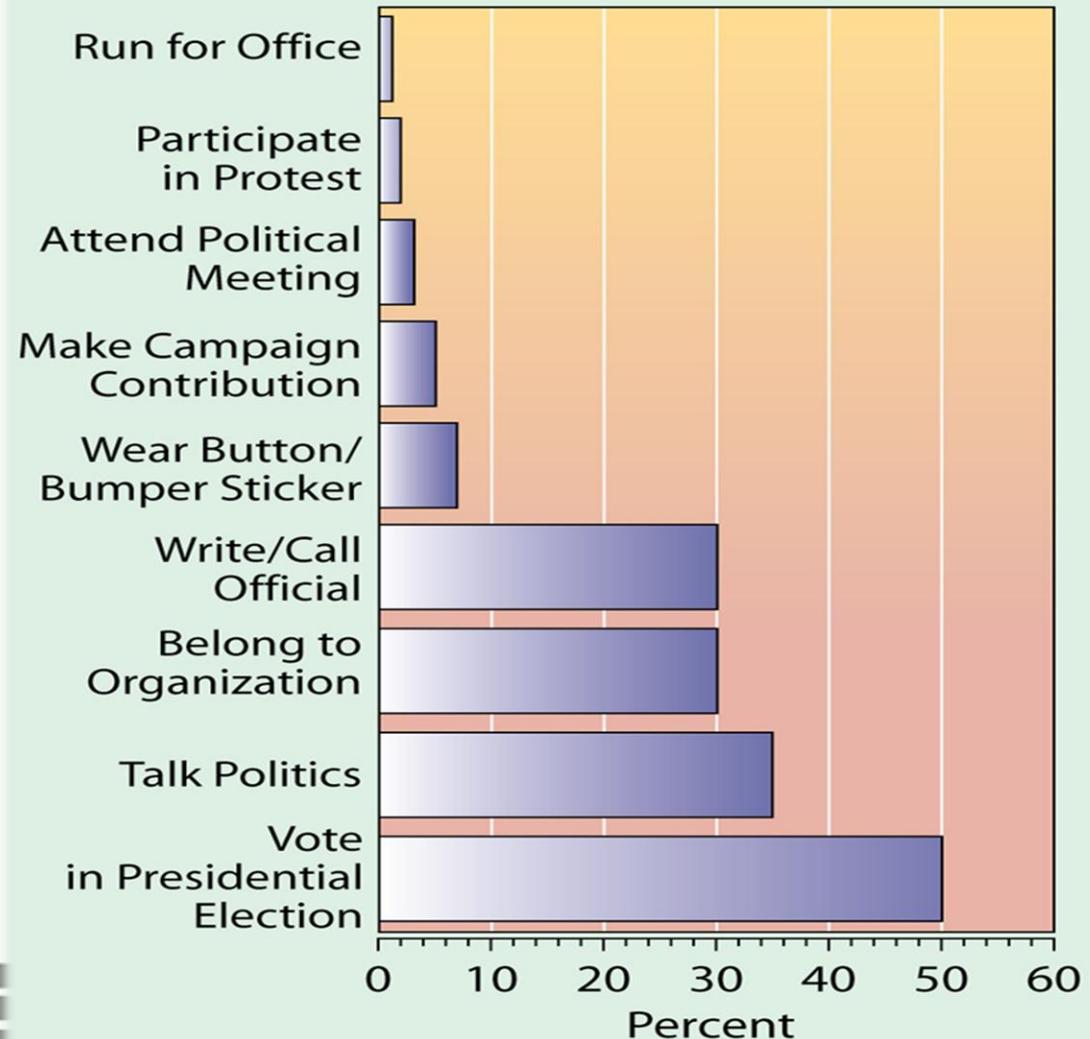




Range of Political Participation

Only a small percentage of the American people are actively engaged in the political process.

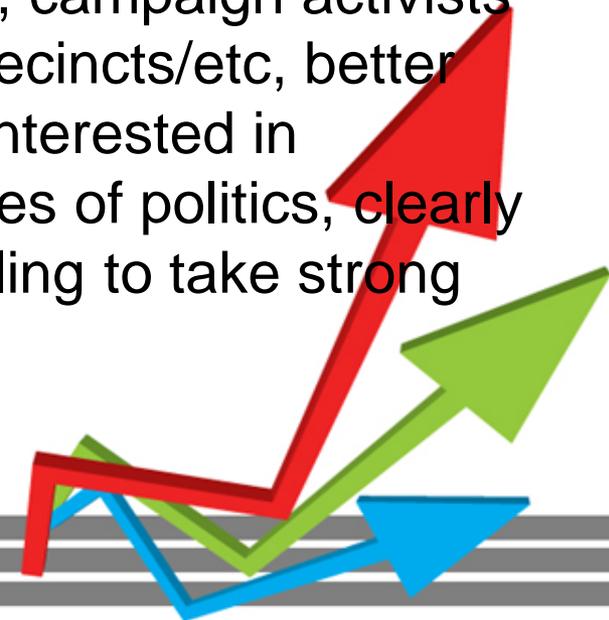
Even these figures are probably inflated since more people tend to report political activity than actually engage in it. The answers may also vary depending on the time asked (whether during or between campaigns) and the type of election.





Range of Political Participation

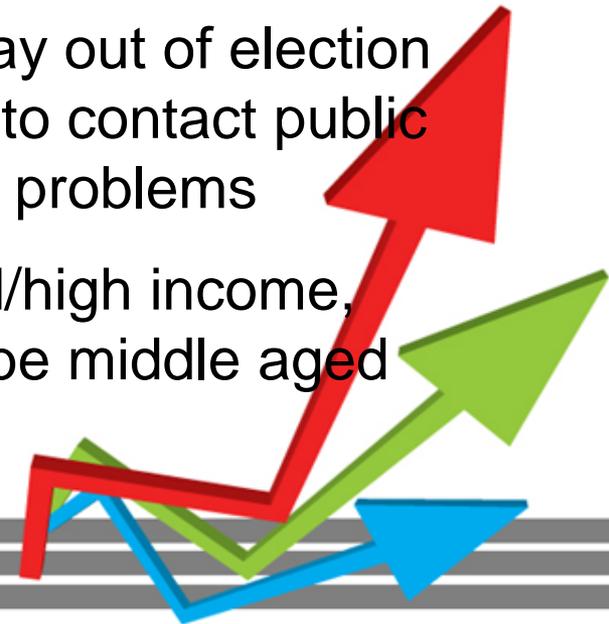
- **completely inactive** (22% of pop): rarely vote, no organizational involvement, rarely / never talk about politics and issues
- **voting specialists** (21%): vote but do little else, tend not to have much schooling or income, substantially older than average
- **campaigners** (15%): vote, campaign activists that work phones/walk precincts/etc, better educated than average, interested in conflicts/passions/struggles of politics, clearly identified with a party, willing to take strong positions on issues





Range of Political Participation

- **communalists** (20%): social background much like campaigners but different temperament, don't like conflict or tension of partisan campaigns, reserve energies for community activities of a nonpartisan nature, form/join non-political local organizations to deal with local problems and local officials
- **parochial participants** (4%): don't vote, stay out of election campaigns and civic associations, willing to contact public officials about specific and often personal problems
- **complete activists** (11%): highly educated/high income, participate in all forms of politics, tend to be middle aged





Range of Political Participation

The proportion of adults who did each of the following in the last 12 months

Sign a petition	32%
Contact a national, state or local government official about an issue	30
Work with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community	28
Attend a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs	24
Contribute money to a political candidate or party or any other political organization or cause	18
Be an active member of a group that tries to influence public policy or government	15
Attend a political rally or speech	12
Send a letter to the editor to a newspaper or magazine	10
Work or volunteer for a political party or candidate	8
Make a speech about a community or local issue	7
Attend an organized protest	4
Any of these	63



Reasons for Non-Participation

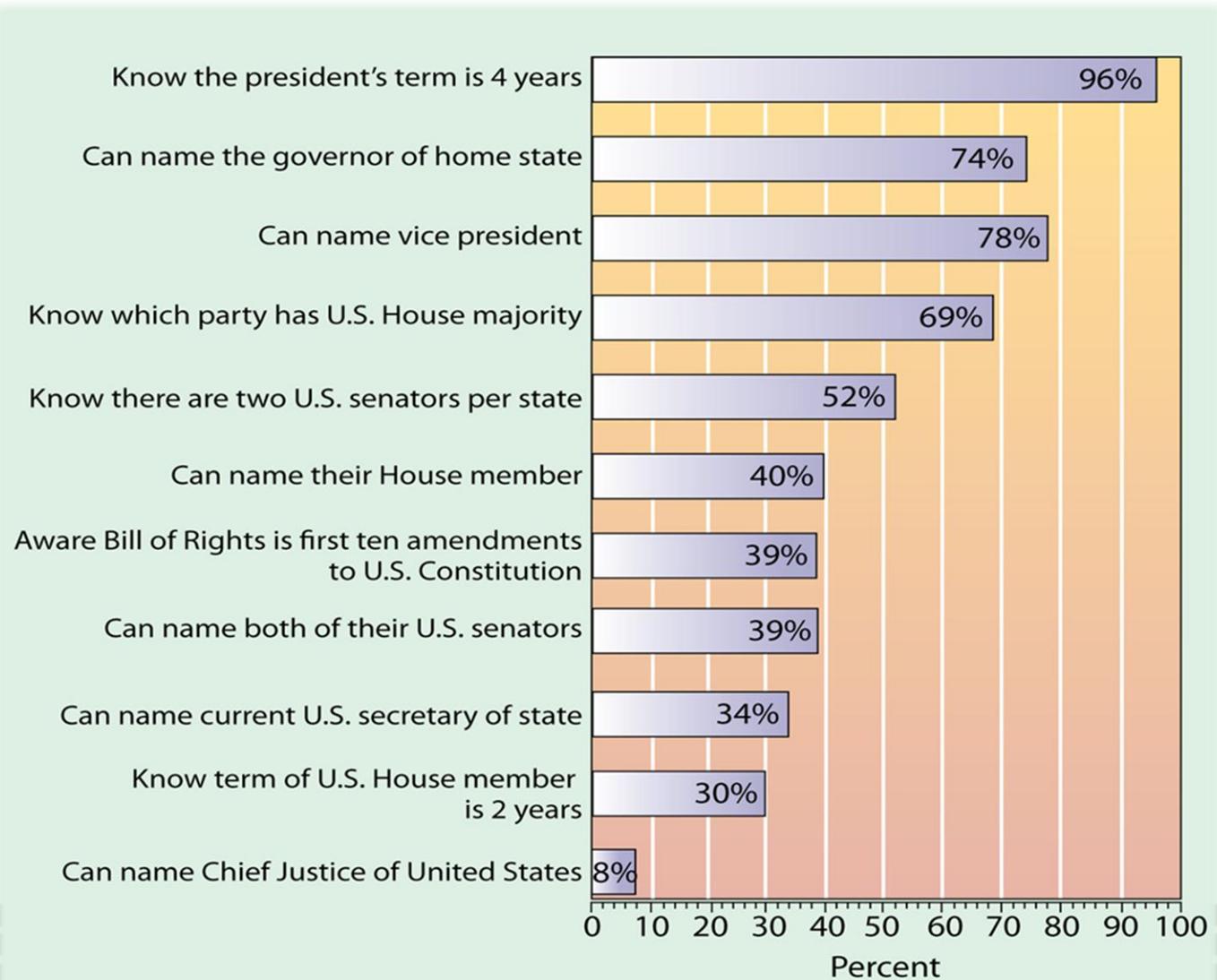
- In the US, only about half of all eligible people vote in presidential elections. Even fewer participate in other ways. Such nonparticipation could signify a number of attitudes.
 - **contentment**: satisfaction with the status quo ... If they were upset, people would participate.
 - **freedom**: the freedom to *not* participate
 - **apathy**: don't know much about politics and don't care
 - **alienation**: feel that no one in power listens to their views and that the government is, at best, indifferent to them





Who Doesn't Participate?

Politics is not a major interest of most Americans and as a result, knowledge about the political system is limited.





Who Doesn't Participate?

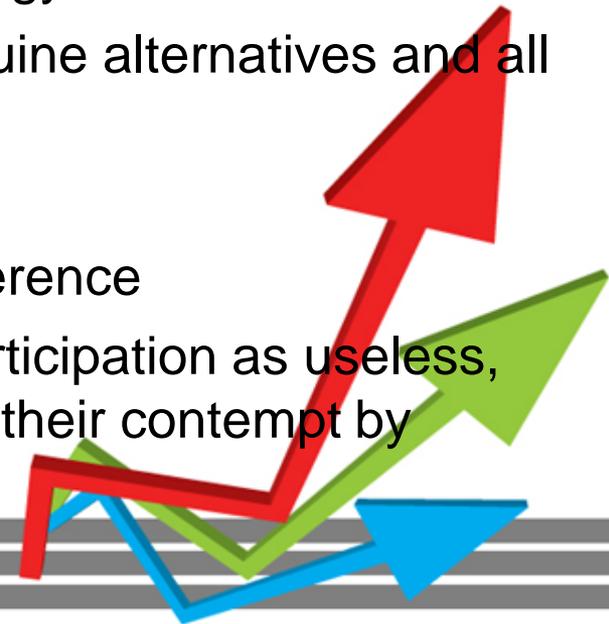
- Political participation is not natural, but **must be learned**. For learning to occur, individuals must have **capacity, motivation** and **opportunity**. In some parts of society, all three are missing.
- two groups of nonparticipants can be distinguished:
- **those who fail to participate out of political indifference, exclusion or incapacity**: the larger of the two groups ... includes:
 - the habitual nonvoters who have little knowledge of issues or candidates and are mystified by political events ... rarely able to connect what happens “out there” with the events of their own lives
 - the uneducated, inarticulate, parochial, isolated
 - those who occupy roles in which political passivity is perceived as the norm





Who Doesn't Participate?

- those who consciously choose not to participate: small but far more diverse group ... includes:
 - those who disdain politics because it seems self-serving and corrupt
 - those disenchanted either because the system serves them badly or because politics doesn't seem sufficiently meaningful
 - the “realists” who believe their chances of influencing the political system are too small to spend time and energy on them
 - those who believe the system offers no genuine alternatives and all efforts to change the outcomes are useless
 - those who find the entire subject boring
 - certain subcultures that value political indifference
 - certain deprived minorities who perceive participation as useless, dangerous or as an affectation and express their contempt by withdrawing

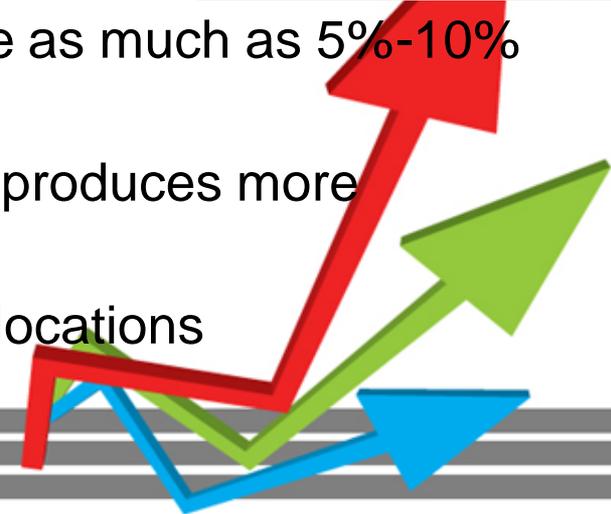




Barriers to Political Participation

Obstacles mainly impede those who are least motivated to participate.

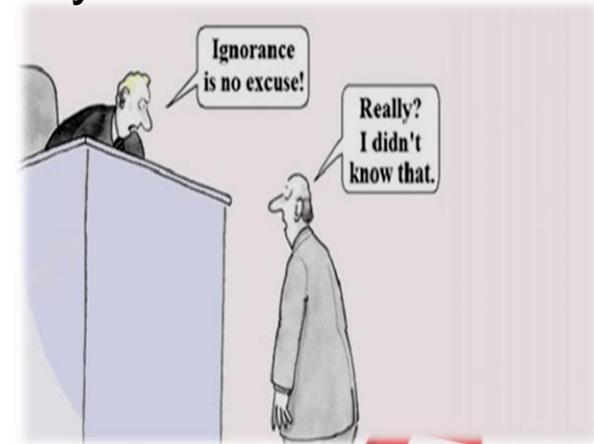
- literacy tests for voting (no longer allowed)
- poll taxes for voting (no longer allowed)
- institutional barriers such as **complicated election codes** and **nonpartisan ballot forms**
- cumbersome **registration** procedures
- inadequate provisions for **absentee voting**
- inaccessibility of **polling places**
- **residency requirements** ... may disenfranchise as much as 5%-10% of the eligible electorate
- **voter/participation fatigue**: US federal system produces more elections than any other modern democracy.
- **non-transparent party** processes, schedules, locations





Barriers to Political Participation

- perceived us vs. them / elitist attitudes of party activists
- lack of time and/or money
- ignorance about the political process and ways of participating
- delayed gratification
- in some areas...
 - lack of opportunities for participation
 - lengthy party incumbency
 - culture in which the political process is the exclusive domain of only certain groups
- In the US, only a small effort is made by government or the parties to register and/or instruct potential participants.



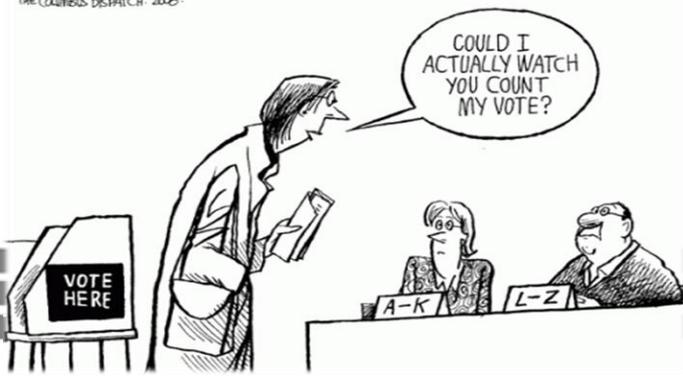


The Paradox of Participation

Rational choice theorists have argued that participation, particularly voting, is **irrational**. In a large country, the probability that one person will change anything is tiny. Because **participation has costs** (time, money, effort to learn about the candidates and issues, etc), **the costs of participation outweigh the benefits**. In other words, political participation does not make sense for people as an activity.

At the same time, however, if everyone who participates ceased to believe in the power of participation to effect change, then **no one would participate and the democratic process would stop functioning**. Political scientists call this phenomenon **the paradox of participation**.

STAHLER.
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Continued in
Voting: Right and Responsibility

