

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
AND  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**Posc 105**

**VOTING AND ELECTIONS  
(Continued)**

I. THIS MORNING:

- A. Voting, elections, campaigns
  - 1. These notes basically repeat the ones distributed yesterday.

II. ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY - SOME BASICS:

- A. Elections are a key component of “democracy by accountability.”
  - 1. Instruments for holding representatives accountable
  - 2. Educational and motivational functions.
    - a. Presumably an exciting campaign would interest people and encourage them to learn more about the candidates and issues.
- B. Elections American style:
  - 1. Number of separate choices
    - a. Sheer number of offices to be filled can be overwhelming
  - 2. Selection of candidates: the nomination process adds to the number of opportunities to cast a ballot.
    - a. Conventions and caucuses versus primaries
  - 3. General elections
    - a. Presidential and "off year" elections
  - 4. Referenda
- C. Recall a major effect of the constitution: the creation of independent power centers.
  - 1. Members of the White House, House, and Senate are elected separately.
  - 2. Geographical representation

III. DISSATISFACTION WITH THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM:

- A. Three general concerns
  - 1. The turnout conundrum: participation in **presidential** and **off-year** elections has declined during the last 100 years despite improvements in communications and transportation and rising level of education.
    - a. In 1996 less than half of the eligible electorate bothered to show up at the polls.
    - b. In 1998 it was less than 40 percent.
    - c. See the graph at: <http://www.state.wv.us/sec/Info/stats/turnout.htm>
      - (1) Note that turnout in congressional (off year) elections is lower than in presidential years.

- d. The class web site has a graph that is complete through 1994. It clearly illustrates the down turn in turnout.
  - (1) Go to <http://www.udel.edu/htr/American/Texts/elect.html>.
- B. Compared to other countries turnout in elections is quite low.
  - 1. Go to:  
[http://www.igc.apc.org/cvd/on\\_line\\_library/Voter\\_Turnout/turnout.htm](http://www.igc.apc.org/cvd/on_line_library/Voter_Turnout/turnout.htm).
- C. Lack of voter interest and knowledge **seems** to be high.
- D. The bottom line: elections in the United States leave nearly everyone unhappy.
- E. For an interesting discussion of participation in politics, including voting, see Carl Everett Ladd's article at  
<http://www.intellectualcapitol.com/issues/98/0820/icnational.asp>.

#### IV. EXPLAINING THE DECLINE IN TURNOUT:

- A. First what are the reasons for the decline?
  - 1. Individual characteristics (the "Hamilton school"): interest, knowledge, concern, civic-mindedness, ability to "pay the costs of participation" (i.e., social-economic standing).
    - a. \*The "voters are contented" argument
  - 2. \*Structural factors (the "Jefferson school"): general proposition: political institutions and practices keep the "cost of participation" too high for many citizens.
    - a. What are these institutions and practices that discourage voting?
      - (1) Mass media and "quality" information.
      - (2) Registration laws
      - (3) Campaign practices
      - (4) Structure of elections
      - (5) Decline of political party grass roots organizations.
      - (6) Growing size and complexity of government.

#### V. REGISTRATION AND TURNOUT:

- A. In order to vote citizens in most states must **register**. But specific registration requirements vary from state to state. Some make it easier to register than others.
- B. Proposition: turnout is related to registration requirements: the "easier," the higher the turnout; the harder, the lower, other things being equal.
- C. The politics of **motor voter** legislation.

#### VI. MODERN CAMPAIGN TACTICS AND STRATEGIES:

- A. Self-selected candidates:
  - 1. Decline of party influence in candidate selection
  - 2. Examples: Steve Forbes, Patrick Kennedy, S. B. Woo, Joe Biden, Pat Buchanan, Jimmy Carter...
- B. Candidate centered campaigns

- C. Adopt policy positions in order to get elected; not run for office in order to get elected, not to advance public policies.
- D. The impact of advanced technology
  - 1. Television, polling, computers, direct mail
  - 2. Example: Focus groups
    - a. “Boston Harbor” and “Pledge of Allegiance” and Reagan Democrats
    - b. The uses of technology
- E. The new breed of political consultants
  - 1. James Carville, Lee Atwater, Dick Morris
- F. The strategy of ambiguity
- G. The consequences:
  - 1. Soaring costs of running for office
  - 2. Trivialization of issues
  - 3. Personal agendas
  - 4. Personality over substance
  - 5. Generalization over specifics
  - 6. Negative advertisements
  - 7. The debasing of political discourse.

VII. NEXT TIME:

- A. Film, “Taking on the Kennedy’s”
  - 1. It illustrates in an amusing and interesting way many of the concepts we have been discussing
  - 2. It’s also important; I take it seriously as an important part of the course.
- B. Reading:
  - 1. Look at the material on the class web site mentioned above.