

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Posc 150**

**CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS
(FINISH)**

I. CONTENTS:

A. Voting and campaigns and elections.

II. EXPLANATIONS OF VOTING BEHAVIOR:

A. These notes have been reprinted.

B. 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.

i. ✓Turnout in historical perspective.

1) Turnout has generally decline during the last 50 years.

2) Less than half of the eligible electorate votes in congressional elections.

3) Only little more than half vote in presidential contests.

4) Primaries and local elections attract even fewer voters.

ii. ✓Turnout in comparative perspective:

1) Americans trail citizens in most other democracies.

C. In view of “Taking On The Kennedys” is it any wonder that only half of Americans bother to vote.

D. Explanations revisited:

1. ○Personal factors (Hamilton school).

i. Social class “bias”

1) Lower class individuals participate less regularly than upper status people.

2) Benefits go to those who participate.

ii. Many other personal or individual characteristics have been connected to voting.

1) Demographic factors: age and cohort; race.

a) Hence attention to seniors.

iii. ○Partisanship:

1) More partisan, more likely to vote.

a) *Don't pass over this fact: the ethos in America is to be nonpartisan. Yet data suggest that partisanship encourages voting.*

b) ✓See the attached cross-tabulation.

iv. The bottom line: people don't take advantage of the opportunities.

2. ○Structural factors (the “Jefferson school”): general proposition: political

institutions and practices keep the “cost of participation” too high for many citizens.

- i. What are these institutions and practices that discourage voting?
 - 1) Registration laws (see above)
 - 2) Structure of elections (see above)
 - 3) Campaign practices
 - 4) Mass media and “quality” information.
 - 5) Decline of political party grass roots organizations.
 - 6) Growing size and complexity of government.
- ii. The bottom line: institutions discourage participation and so voters should not be judged harshly.

III. MODERN CAMPAIGN TACTICS AND STRATEGIES:

- A. ✱Proposition: campaign strategies adversely affect participation.
 1. Candidates often or sometimes adopt policy positions in order to get elected; not run for office in order to get elected, not to advance public policies.
 - i. ✓Example: Clinton health care plan in 1992.
 - ii. “Valence” issues often play this role.
 - 1) ○**Valence issue**: an issue that has attracts virtually unanimous support to one side because of its emotional content and impact.
 - 2) These issues include the death penalty, prohibitions against flag burning, school prayers, getting tough against criminals and drug users, and so forth.
- B. ○The impact of advanced technology
 1. Television, polling, computers, direct mail
 - i. In fact, these like most campaigns in America are electronic campaigns.
 - ii. Images and repetitive slogans more than substance.
 2. Most of the money, well over \$1 million in Kennedy-Vigilante race, goes for television and polling.
- C. ○The strategy of ambiguity
 1. Candidates are urged to obscure their positions by saying as little as possible, moving to the “middle of the road,” or wrapping themselves in valence issues.
 2. Did Kennedy or Vigilante make their stands clear? What “issues” did their ads discuss?
- D. Avoidance of issue content.
 1. *Look for “intelligent, substantive” discussion of issues in campaign commercials (i.e., “spot ads).*
- E. ○The new breed of political consultants
 1. A new kind of advisor, a person who is “good at” campaign techniques (polling, public relations, media, computers, voter targeting, etc.) but who

may not (usually does not) have much policy knowledge or experience and frequently no experience governing.

- i. Image over substance
- ii. A major point: some one who is good at getting elected is not necessarily good at governing.
- iii. Political skills are not necessarily transferable.

2. Example: Vigilante's consultant's advise to the candidate: "attack, attack, attack."

F. Self-selected candidates:

1. Decline of party influence in candidate selection
 - i. Weakened party positions has enormous implications for governing, accountability, and democracy.
2. Examples: John McCain, Steve Forbes, Joe Biden, Pat Buchanan, Jimmy Carter...
3. Kennedy decides to run for Congress rather than continuing to work his way up the ladder.

G. Candidate centered campaigns

1. Campaigns are more or less self-sufficient organizations that depend only indirectly on national parties.
 - i. They are contests between two men, not two parties or ideologies.
 - ii. Consequently, once elected a person's "loyalty" is to his/her organization, not the party.
 - iii. This situation thwarts or hinders party leadership and, I will argue, ultimately undermines accountability.

IV. THE IMPACT ON DEMOCRACY:

A. *What are the consequences?

1. The bottom line: campaign practices depress participation and hence hurt accountability.

B. Specific consequences:

1. Soaring costs of running for office
2. Trivialization of issues
3. Personality over substance
4. Negative advertisements
5. The debasing of political discourse.
 - i. Important questions—crime and drug abuse, for example—simply can't be discussed rationally, calmly, intelligently.
 - ii. I think "debates" about the death penalty demonstrate this point.

V. NEXT TIME:

A. Political parties

B. Reading:

1. Keep working at Drew.
2. Start Thurow and Heilbroner as described in the syllabus.