political participation

PSCI 5901.003/7901.003
Fall 2007
T 12:30-3:00 P.M.
116 Ketchum
webct.colorado.edu

Why do people choose to participate or not participate in politics? Normatively, good citizenship suggests a requirement for people to be attentive and participatory in politics. However, patterns of political participation often fall short of normative ideals – with unequal participation by socioeconomic status, low voter turnout, and declining social capital. In this course, we will consider who participates in politics and why, considering both individual level and institutional explanations for political action. We will begin by considering patterns of public involvement in politics and the consequences of political participation. Next, we will investigate a range of explanations for why some are more likely to participate in politics than others. We will then explore the causes and consequences of social capital. Finally, we will consider citizen participation in social movements, including how collective action problems can be overcome, the psychology of social identity in participation, and why people protest and challenge their government.

reading assignments

Most of the course readings include book chapters and journal articles, available on e-reserves or online journals. Three books have also been assigned and are available at the University Bookstore.


requirements

participation (worth 20% of your final grade)

It is essential that you not only attend class, but also actively engage in class discussions. For two of the weeks, you will also be responsible for leading class discussion.

ten short papers (each worth 4% of your final grade)

Throughout the course, you will be responsible for ten short papers in response to a week’s readings. These response papers should be single-spaced and one to two pages in length, and turned in before we discuss that week’s set of readings. Papers should not summarize the readings, but instead add some novel insights to the points raised in the readings. For instance, you might critique the theory or methods of the
research, discussing the implications of these limitations for the authors' findings. You might extend points raised in the readings, suggesting questions we might ask if we pushed these arguments further. You might also synthesize readings on a topic with other theories covered in this class or other courses. Or you could discuss points of conflict between the readings, and discuss how to resolve these disagreements.

**research paper (worth 40% of your final grade)**

The final project for this class will be to develop a research paper that tests an interesting question about political participation. This paper will resemble the format of the kinds of academic papers read in class – including development of a research question, a review of relevant literature, theory, tests of these explanations, and interpretation of what you find. The paper should be 15-25 pages in length. Additional guidelines will be detailed in a separate handout.

**special accommodations**

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. You can contact the Disability Services office for more information at www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices.

**some important comments on academic integrity**

- Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are not familiar with the rules of citing sources in written work or what constitutes plagiarism, you should contact me or refer to the University Honor Code at www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode. Academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course and referral to the Honor Court for additional non-academic sanctions.
- All papers are expected to be original work, not previously or simultaneously handed in for credit in another course (unless prior approval of all instructors involved is obtained).
class schedule – political participation - Fall 2007

1. Introduction to political participation

About the class.

Tuesday, August 28

2. Describing how and when people participate

Levels of participation, trends in turnout and participation over time.

Tuesday, September 4


3. Consequences of participation

Why participation matters: outcomes, representation, inequalities in participation.

Tuesday, September 11


4. Why people vote

The rationality of voting and participating

Tuesday, September 18


5. Socioeconomic status and political participation

Socioeconomic biases in participation, the resource model of participation.

Tuesday, September 25


6. Age and participation

Age effects and turnout, Political socialization and participation.

Tuesday, October 2


7. The consequences of institutional design

Cross-national differences in participation, Individual differences versus institutions in explaining turnout.

Tuesday, October 9

8. State rules and neighborhood contexts

Registration laws, electoral reform, social networks.

Tuesday, October 16


9. Recruitment & race

Who is recruited to participate? How representative are activists? What explains minority participation?

Tuesday, October 23


10. Political mobilization

Mobilization by campaigns, parties, and groups

Tuesday, October 30


11. Social capital
The consequences of community participation and interpersonal trust.
Tuesday, November 6

12. Even more social capital
Tuesday, November 13

Class does not meet – Fall Break
Tuesday, November 20

13. Collective action
How collective action problems can be overcome in social activism.
Tuesday, November 27

14. Social movements
Tuesday, December 4

15. Protest participation


Tuesday, December 11