

# Chapter Eight

## Political Participation

# From State to Federal Control

- Initially, states decided who could vote and for which offices
- This led to wide variation in federal elections
- Congress has since reduced state prerogatives through law and constitutional amendments

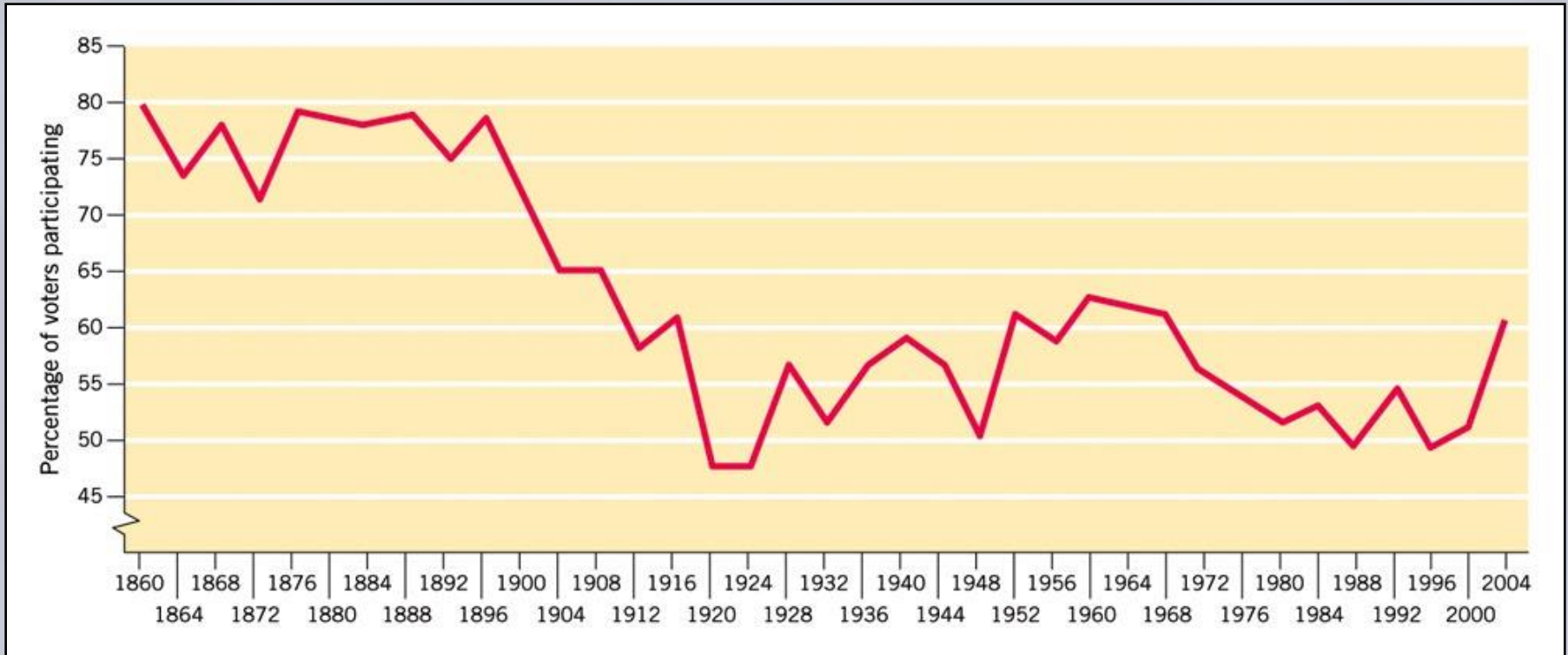
# Expanding the Franchise

- 1842 law: House members elected by district
- 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment (1870): seemed to give suffrage to African Americans
- 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment (1920): Women given suffrage
- 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment (1971): 18-year-olds given suffrage

# Nonvoting

- Alleged problem: low turnout of voters in the U.S. compared to Europe
- Data is misleading: it tends to compare turnout of the voting-age population; turnout of registered voters reveals the problem is not so severe
- The real problem is low voter registration rates

# Figure 8.2: Voter Participation in Presidential Elections, 1860-2004



For 1860-1928: Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, part 2, 1071; 1932-1944: Statistical Abstract of the United State, 1992, 517; 1948-2000: Michael P. McDonald and Samuel L. Popkin, "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter," American Political Science Review 95 (December 2001): table 1, 966.

# Table 8.3: Two Methods of Calculating Turnout in Presidential Elections, 1948-2000

**Table 8.3** Two Methods of Calculating Turnout in Presidential Elections, 1948–2000

Year	Voting Age Population (VAP)	Voting Eligible Population (VEP)
1948	51.1%	52.2%
1952	61.6	62.3
1956	59.3	60.2
1960	62.8	63.8
1964	61.9	62.8
1968	60.9	61.5
1972	55.2	56.2
1976	53.5	54.8
1980	52.8	54.7
1984	53.3	57.2
1988	50.3	54.2
1992	55.0	60.6
1996	48.9	52.6
2000	51.2	55.6

*Source:* Adapted from Michael P. McDonald and Samuel L. Popkin, "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter," *American Political Science Review* 95 (December 2001): table 1, 966. Reprinted with permission of Cambridge University Press.

# Voter Turnout

- Real decline is caused by lessening popular interest and decreasing party mobilization
- Some scholars argue historical voter turnout figures were skewed by fraud
- Most scholars see some real decline due to several causes, including the difficulty of registration

# Six Kinds of US Citizens

- **Inactives:** rarely vote, contribute to political organizations, or discuss politics; have little education, low income, young, many blacks; 22 percent
- **Voting specialists:** vote but do little else; not much education or income, older
- **Campaigners:** vote, get involved in campaign activities, more educated, interested in politics, identify with a party, take strong positions



# Six Kinds of US Citizens

- **Communalists:** nonpartisan community activists with a local focus
- **Parochial participants:** don't vote or participate in campaigns or political organizations, but do contact politicians about specific problems
- **Activists:** Participate in all forms of politics; highly educated, high income, middle age; 11 percent

# Table 8.5: How Citizens Participate

**Table 8.5 How Citizens Participate**

Specific Activity	Percentage Engaging in Fourteen Acts of Participation, 1967 and 1987		
	1967	1987	Absolute Change
<b>Voting</b>			
Regularly vote in presidential elections	66%	58%	-8%
Always vote in local elections	47	35	-12
<b>Campaigning</b>			
Persuade others how to vote	28	32	+4
Actively work for party or candidate	26	27	+1
Attend political meetings or rallies	19	19	0
Contribute money to a party or candidate	13	23	+10
Participate in a political club	8	4	-4
<b>Contacting Government</b>			
Contact local officials: issue-based	14	24	+10
Contact state or national officials: issue-based	11	22	+11
Contact local officials: particularized	7	10	+3
Contact state or national officials: particularized	6	7	+1
<b>Taking Action in the Community</b>			
Work with others on a local problem	30	34	+4
Actively participate in community problem-solving organization	31	34	+3
Form group to help solve local problem	14	17	+3

Source: Reprinted by permission of the publisher from *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* by Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry A. Brady, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1995 by the Presidents and Fellows of Harvard College. Data from p. 72.

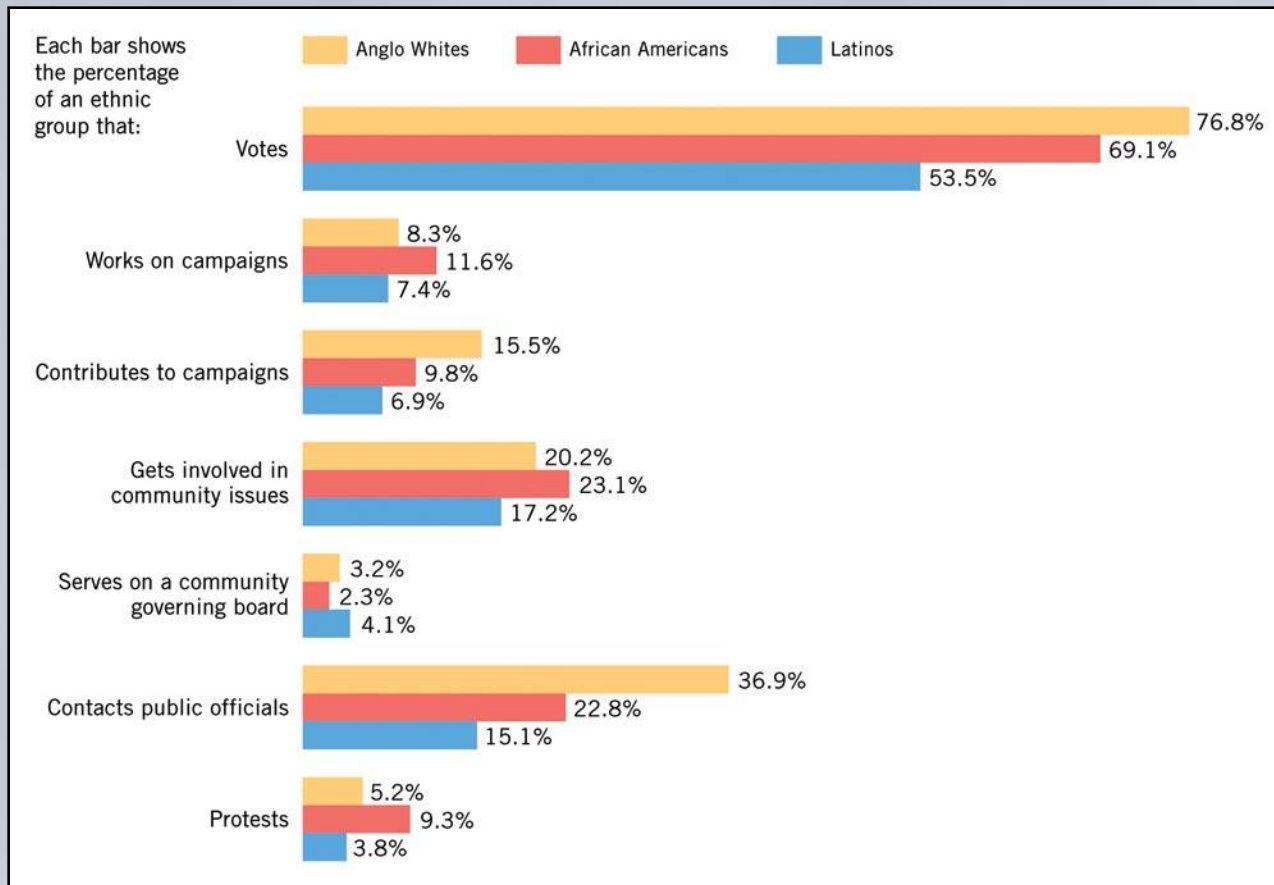
# Predictors of Participation

- Those with schooling or political information are more likely to vote
- Church-goers vote more, because church involvement develops the skills associated with political participation
- Men and women vote at the same rate

# Predictors of Participation

- Black participation is lower than that of whites overall
- Controlling for socioeconomic status, blacks participate at a higher rate than whites
- Studies show no correlation between distrust of political leaders and not voting

# Figure 8.5: Electoral/Nonelectoral Political Participation Among Anglo Whites, African Americans, and Latinos



Adapted from Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Scholzman, Henry Brady, and Norman H. Nie, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

# Factors That Decrease Turnout

- More youths, blacks, and other minorities in population are pushing down the percentage of eligible adults who are registered and vote
- Parties are less effective in mobilizing voters
- Remaining impediments to registration have some discouraging effects

# Factors That Decrease Turnout

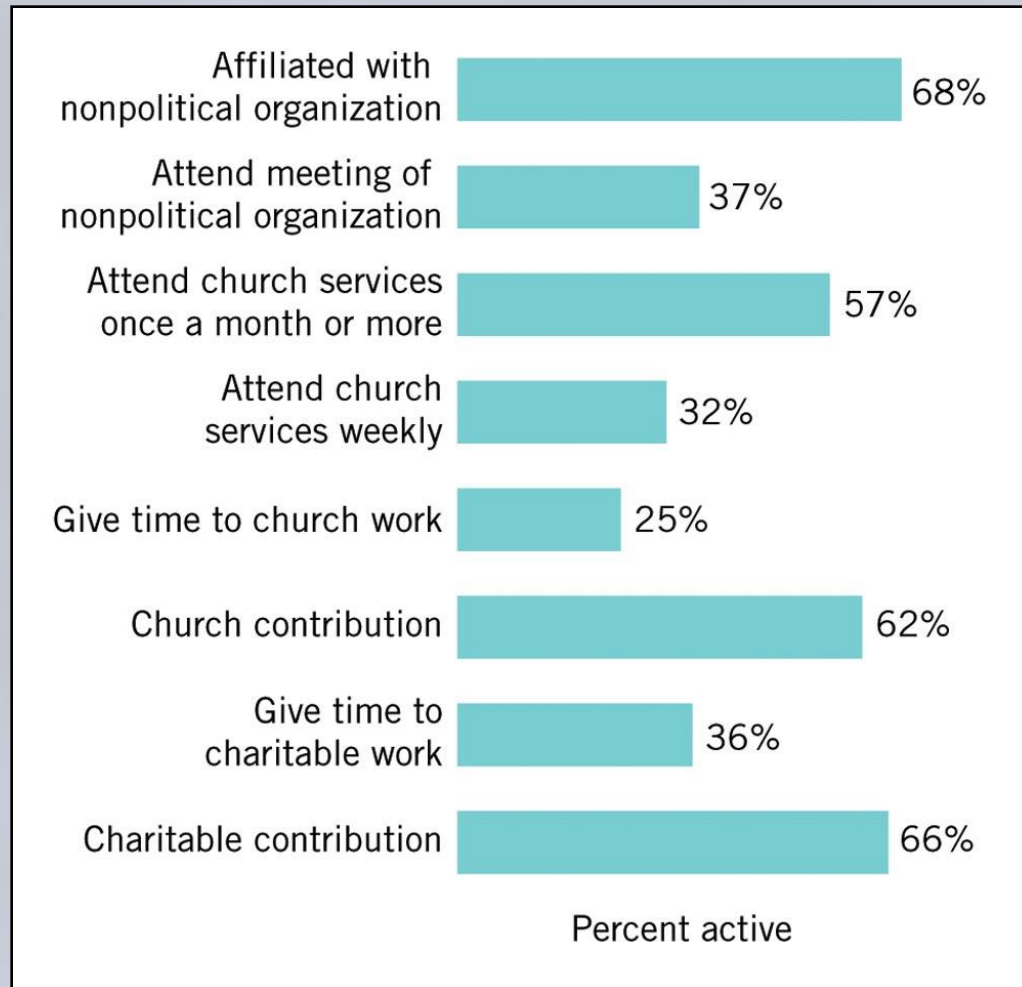
- Voting is not compulsory, as it is in some other nations
- Some potential voters may feel that elections do not matter

# Participation Other Than Voting

- People can give money to a candidate
- They can join political organizations
- Citizens also engage in a wide variety of nonpolitical activities



# Figure 8.3: Nonpolitical Voluntary Activity Among Citizens



Sidney Verba et al., *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 77-79.

# Table 8.6: Participation Beyond Voting in Fourteen Democracies

**Table 8.6** Participation Beyond Voting in Fourteen Democracies

*Percentage of adult population who engaged in some form of political participation beyond voting in 1990.*

Britain	77%	Italy	56%
Sweden	74	Iceland	55
Norway	68	Netherlands	54
UNITED STATES	66	Belgium	51
Denmark	59	Ireland	46
France	57	Finland	38
West Germany	57	Spain	32

*Sources:* U.S. percentage calculated from Sidney Verba et al., *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 83; other percentages calculated from Max Kaase and Kenneth Newton, *Beliefs in Government*, vol. 5 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 51.

# What Participation Rates Mean

- Americans vote less, but participate more
- Americans elect more officials and have more elections
- U.S. turnout rates are heavily skewed to higher status persons