Political Science 17.20
Introduction to American Politics

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Political Participation
Lecture 18 (April 18, 2013)
Outline

1. Voting

2. Other Forms of Participation

3. Consequences of Participatory Patterns
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1 Voting

2 Other Forms of Participation

3 Consequences of Participatory Patterns
Why Do People Vote?

The calculus of voting: \( p \times B + D > C \)

- **B**: benefit if preferred candidate wins
- **p**: probability that vote affects outcome (very low)
- **C**: cost of voting (time, information)
- **D**: satisfaction from act of voting (e.g., civic duty)

The paradox of voting: Since \( p \) is so low, the cost of voting almost always outweighs the benefit (i.e., it is irrational to vote) unless \( D \) is larger than \( C \).
Unpacking the “D Term”

Two potential components of the “D term”:

1. **Intrinsic**: satisfaction from doing the “right” thing, even if no one knows about it

2. **Extrinsic**: satisfaction that is contingent on others’ observing your actions

**Social pressure** is a powerful inducement to vote, which political campaigns have only recently rediscovered.
Trends in Voter Turnout: VAP vs. VEP

Image by MIT OpenCourseWare.
Regional and Racial Differences in Turnout

Image by MIT OpenCourseWare.
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Different resources are needed for different forms of participation:

- **Time**: vote, volunteer
- **Skills**: write letters, organize protest, circulate petition
- **Money**: donate to candidates and parties

*Time* is the most equally distributed resources, but in recent decades its importance has decreased relative to *money*.
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Inequality of Political Voice

- Rich and poor, whites and minorities have different preferences and different priorities.
- Politicians respond to those who can provide valuable resources, and who they hear from affects what they think their constituents want.
- Inequalities of political “voice” \(\Rightarrow\) unequal representation

What then to make of minimal and varying partisan bias due to non-voting, and the ability of liberal, minority politicians like Obama to win elections and raise huge amounts of money?
Inequality and the Political System

- Parties need resources as well as votes:
  - Republicans: Economic interests of the rich
  - Democrats: Social issues
- The puzzling failure of gun regulation
17.20 Introduction to American Politics
Spring 2013

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