Political Participation: Activating the Popular Will
Chapter 7
Voter Participation

- Factors in voter turnout: the United States in comparative perspective
  - Significantly lower turnout than European democracies
  - Registration requirements
    - Historically a means to limit suffrage
    - Motor voter law
Voter Participation

• Factors in voter turnout: the United States in comparative perspective
  • Registration requirements
    • Voter ID cards serve to depress voter turnout
    • Georgia photo ID/voter identification card law
      • Federal judge struck down monetary requirement
    • Supreme Court upheld Indiana voter ID card requirement
Voter Participation

- Factors in voter turnout: the United States in comparative perspective
  - Frequency of elections
    - Elections at many levels of government, frequent and staggered
    - Primary elections
    - Americans asked to vote two or three times as often as Europeans

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Voter Participation

- Why some Americans vote and others do not
  - Education and income
  - Age
  - Civic attitudes
    - Apathy
    - Alienation
    - Civic duty

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Percentage completely agreeing on voting as a duty

30 years of age and older

18–29 years of age

Year

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Conventional Forms of Participation Other Than Voting

- Campaign and lobbying activities
- Virtual participation
  - Political campaigns and citizen mobilization
  - Democratizing effects, but also lend themselves to political polarization
- Community activities
  - Decline in social capital?
Unconventional Activism: Social Movements and Protest Politics

- The Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street protest movements
  - Each social (political) movement started with anger at established interests and seek change
- Tea Party:
  - Initial target: Republican lawmakers for the 2008 bank bailout
  - Played a key role in Republican takeover of House in 2010
  - Resulting House turmoil has weakened popular support
Unconventional Activism: Social Movements and Protest Politics

- The Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street protest movements

- **Occupy Wall Street:**
  - Began as protest against bailout of the financial industry and government’s failure to hold bankers accountable
  - Has seen popular support decline because of public’s unease with protesters confronting police
  - OWS’s target was private wealth and aimed to curb the political influence of large political donors
Of those with an opinion, percentage expressing support

Tea Party
- Earlier level: 37%
- Later level: 48%

Occupy Wall Street
- Earlier level: 42%
- Later level: 49%
Unconventional Activism: Social Movements and Protest Politics

- The public’s response to protest activity
  - Political protests have a long history in America
  - Americans less likely to protest than citizens in other democracies
  - Public support for protest activity relatively low
Percentage taking part in a protest

Spain: 28%
France: 26%
Germany: 12%
Sweden: 11%
Mexico: 8%
United States: 6%
Poland: 2%
Participation and Potential for Influence

- Individualism diminishes political participation
- Lower-income Americans least likely to vote or participate politically; lack resources and education levels
- Participation reflects socioeconomic level