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Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma

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Low voter turnout is a serious democratic problem for five reasons: (1) It means unequal turnout that is systematically biased against less well-to-do citizens. (2) Unequal turnout spells unequal political influence. (3) U.S. voter turnout is especially low, but, measured as percent of voting-age population, it is also relatively low in most other countries. (4) Turnout in midterm, regional, local, and supranational elections—less salient but by no means unimportant elections—tends to be especially poor. (5) Turnout appears to be declining everywhere. The problem of inequality can be solved by institutional mechanisms that maximize turnout. One option is the combination of voter-friendly registration rules, proportional representation, infrequent elections, weekend voting, and holding less salient elections concurrently with the most important national elections. The other option, which can maximize turnout by itself, is compulsory voting. Its advantages far outweigh the normative and practical objections to it.

EQUALITY VERSUS PARTICIPATION

Political equality and political participation are both basic democratic ideals. In principle, they are perfectly compatible. In practice, however, as political scientists have known for a long time, participation is highly unequal. And unequal participation spells unequal influence—a major dilemma for representative democracy in which the "democratic responsiveness [of elected officials] depends on citizen participation" (Verba 1996, 2), and a serious problem even if participation is not regarded mainly as a representational instrument but as an intrinsic democratic good (Arendt 1958, Barber 1984, Pateman 1970). Moreover, as political scientists have also known for a long time, the inequality of representation and influence are not randomly distributed but systematically biased in favor of more privileged citizens—those with higher incomes, greater wealth, and better education—and against less advantaged citizens.

This systematic class bias applies with special force to the more intensive and time-consuming forms of participation. Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen (1993, 238) found that, in the United States, the smaller the number of participants in political activity, the greater the inequality in participation. In other countries, too, it is especially the more advantaged citizens who engage in these intensive modes of participation—both conventional activities such as working in election campaigns, contacting government officials, contributing money to parties or candidates, and working informally in the community (Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978, 286–95) and unconventional activities like participation in demonstrations, boycotts, rent and tax strikes, occupying buildings, and blocking traffic (Marsh and Kaase 1979, 100, 112–26).

Voting is less unequal than other forms of participation, but it is far from unbiased. The bias is especially strong in the United States where "no matter which form citizen participation takes, the pattern of class equality is unbroken," and where, over time, the level of voting participation and class inequality are strongly and negatively linked: "When [relatively] many citizens turn out to vote, they are more representative of the electorate than when fewer people vote. . . . Class inequality in participation was greatest in the high-turnout elections of the 1960s and least in the low-turnout elections of the 1980s. As turnout declined between 1960 and 1988, class inequalities multiplied" (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 238, 241; see also Burnham 1980, 1987). Although generally not as strong, the same pattern of inequality can be seen in other democracies.

It is interesting to note that, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, when universal suffrage was being adopted in many countries, political analysts tended to assume that it would be the better educated and more prosperous who would make the rational choice not to bother to vote. As a French observer put it in 1896, "The intellectual elite of the people asks itself whether it is worthwhile to cast a vote which is doomed to drown among the votes of the great crowd" (cited in Tingsten 1937, 184). But empirical studies soon showed that socioeconomic status and voting were positively, not negatively, linked. In his study of voting in the 1924 presidential election in the city of Chicago, Harold F.

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Gosnell (1927, 98) found that turnout increased with economic status and that "the more schooling the individual has the more likely he [or she] is to register and vote in presidential elections." In an article in the *American Political Science Review* two years earlier, the same clear pattern was reported on the basis of a voting study in the small Ohio town of Delaware (Arneson 1925). Herbert Tingsten (1937, 155) reviewed a large number of voting studies in Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Austria, the United States, and Sweden, conducted between 1907 and 1933, and formulated "the general rule that the voting frequency rises with rising social standard."

Can the democratic dilemma of unequal participation be resolved? With the possible exception of financial contributions,[1] little can be done to equalize participation in the more intensive activities; mobilizing more people to participate appears to be of little help because, as Verba (1996, 7) laments, "for most activity, the forces of mobilization bring in the same people who would be active spontaneously." But a partial solution to the dilemma is to make the most basic form of participation, namely voting, as equal as possible—especially important as a "democratic counterweight" (Teixeira 1992, 4) to other forms of participation which are bound to remain unequal. And the obvious way to make voting more equal is to maximize voting turnout. The democratic goal should be not just universal *suffrage* but universal or near-universal *turnout*—in line with Tingsten's (1937, 230) "law of dispersion," which states that the probability of differences in voting turnout "is smaller the higher the general participation is. . . . The chances of dispersion . . . are inversely proportional to the electoral participation."[2]

On the basis of studies from the 1930s (Gosnell 1930, Tingsten 1937) to the 1980s and 1990s (Franklin 1996; Franklin, van der Eijk, and Oppenhuis 1996; Jackman 1987; Jackman and Miller 1995; Powell 1980, 1986), we know a great deal about the institutional mechanisms that can increase turnout, such as user-friendly registration rules, proportional election formulas, relatively infrequent elections, weekend voting, and compulsory voting. And all of these studies, from the 1930s on, have found that compulsory voting is a particularly effective method to achieve high turnout—in spite of generally low penalties (comparable to a fine for parking violations), lax enforcement (more lenient than the enforcement of parking rules), and the secrecy of the ballot which means that an actual vote cannot be compelled in the first place.

Compulsory "voting" is therefore a misnomer: All that can be required in practice is attendance at the polls; hence the least intrusive, but sufficient, form of compulsory voting is the requirement to appear at the polling station on election day without any further duty to mark a ballot or even to accept a ballot. This was the rule in the Netherlands from 1917 until the abolition of compulsory voting in 1970 (Adviescommissie Opkomstplicht 1967; Irwin 1974, 313).[3] More democracies have used the compulsory vote than is commonly recognized: Australia, Italy, Greece, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Austria (several *Länder*), Switzerland (a few cantons), and most Latin American countries (Fernández Baeza forthcoming; Fornos 1996; Hirczy 1994; Ochoa 1987, 866–7).[4]

In addition to being an effective enhancer of turnout in practice, the basic logic of compulsory voting as an egalitarian instrument is also strong. As Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, and Jae-On Kim (1978, 6) argue, to make political participation perfectly equal, one needs both a "ceiling"—a prescribed maximum—and a "floor"—a prescribed minimum—for activities of various kinds. For voting participation this means that "each citizen is allowed one and only one vote. . . . Such a *ceiling* goes a long way toward equalizing political participation, but it does not eliminate the possibility that citizens will differ in their use of the franchise. Turnout is usually related to socioeconomic status. Thus it may be necessary to place a *floor* under political activity as well, *to make it compulsory*" (emphasis added).

UNEQUAL TURNOUT AND UNEQUAL INFLUENCE

Before turning to the various institutional methods for raising turnout, including compulsory voting, let me first review the empirical evidence and theoretical arguments concerning the problems of low voter turnout and class bias. There are several serious reasons why democrats should worry about these problems.

First of all, as already indicated, low voter turnout means unequal and socioeconomically biased turnout. This pattern is so clear, strong, and well known in the United States that it does not need to be belabored further. Compared with the United States, the class bias in other democracies tends to be weaker—leading some analysts to regard it as an almost unique American phenomenon (Abramson 1995, 918; Piven and Cloward 1988a, 117–9). There is, however, abundant evidence of the same class bias, albeit usually not as

[1] Making financial contributions to campaigns, parties, and candidates is an exceptional activity in two respects. One is that it is characterized by an income bias that is greater than in all other modes of participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 516–7). The other is that, in principle, it can be equalized by complete and exclusive public financing of political parties and campaigns—a policy that, however, is more difficult to apply in countries like the United States with its "candidate-centered politics" (Wattenberg 1991) than in countries with strong and disciplined parties.

[2] Of course, another crucially important reason to aim for maximum turnout is democratic legitimacy (Hasen 1996, 2165–6; Teixeira 1992, 3, 101–2).

[3] Even in Australia, where the voter is actually obligated to deposit a ballot in the ballot box, compulsory "voting" is still a misnomer. In the words of a former Australian senator and proponent of compulsory voting: "What the law requires is that [electors] turn up at a polling booth and take a ballot paper. They are not compelled to fill in that ballot paper and have an absolute right not to vote by placing a blank or spoiled ballot paper in the ballot box. That is their unqualified right which only a small number choose to exercise" (Puplick 1995, 3–4).

[4] Some Latin American democracies exempt large groups such as illiterates and people over age 70 from the obligation to vote (Nohlen 1993). The exclusion of illiterate citizens, in particular, reintroduces a significant class bias in voting.

strong, in other democracies. In Switzerland, the other major example of a Western democracy with low levels of turnout, the participation gap between the least and most highly educated citizens in the March 1991 referendum was 37 percentage points; Wolf Linder (1994, 95–6) calls this a "typical profile of a popular vote," and concludes that "especially when participation is low, the choir of Swiss direct democracy sings in upper- or middle-class tones." In survey data covering referenda between 1981 and 1991, the gap was almost 25 percentage points (Mottier 1993, 134). The class bias in turnout also affects Swiss parliamentary elections (Farago 1996, 11–2; Sidjanski 1983, 107).

In countries with higher turnout, as expected, the link between socioeconomic status and turnout tends to be less strong, often not strong enough to be statistically significant and sometimes even negative. However, G. Bingham Powell, Jr. (1986, 27–8) combined data for seven European nations and Canada and found a consistent effect of the level of education on turnout: a difference of 10 percentage points between the lowest and highest of five education levels and a consistent increase of 2 to 3 percentage points at each higher level in the averages of eight nations. A similar study of six Central American countries also reports mixed results, but these averages show similar turnout increases at higher educational levels and a difference of 12 percentage points between the highest and lowest levels, with the "more dramatic differences . . . found in countries with lower turnout rates" (Seligson et al. 1995, 166–71).

Richard Topf (1995, 48–9), who surveys data from 16 European countries in six periods since 1960, finds several instances in which the least educated cohorts actually have slightly higher turnouts than the most highly educated—contrary to the expected pattern—and concludes that there is "no generalized education effect for voting." His own figures, however, show that the instances of the expected positive link between educational level and turnout are four times more numerous than the deviant instances; without the countries with compulsory voting the ratio is almost five to one. Similarly, a study of the 1989 European Parliament elections in the 12 member countries finds several negative correlations between levels of education, income, and social class on the one hand and voting turnout on the other, but positive correlations prevail by a better than two-to-one ratio; without the four countries with compulsory voting, the ratio is higher than three to one (Oppenhuis 1995, 186–90). The same expected, but not huge, class bias is also the usual finding in Russell B. Dalton's (1996, 57–8) comparative analysis of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, as well as in single-country studies of these countries plus Spain and the Netherlands (Denters 1995; Denver 1995; Font and Virós 1995; Justel 1995; Särlvik and Crewe 1983, 79; Schultze 1995).

A slight class bias sometimes still turns up even in countries with compulsory voting, and hence high turnout. For instance, even in Australia where about 95% of the registered voters usually vote, Ian McAllister (1986) finds that slightly higher turnouts give a perceptible boost to the Labor Party and that slightly lower turnouts benefit the parties of the right; he also estimates that the hypothetical abolition of compulsory voting would strengthen this pattern and would give the political right "an inbuilt advantage." In the well-known graph in the first chapter of their *Participation and Political Equality*, Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978, 7) strikingly illustrate the increase in class bias that resulted from the abolition of compulsory voting in the Netherlands in 1970. For five educational groups, the reported turnout rates varied between 66 and 87%. Compared with these unequal turnouts, the last parliamentary election that was still conducted under compulsory voting, in 1967, showed turnouts for all groups above 90%—but there was still a slight class bias: turnouts increased gradually from 93% in the lowest educational group to 98 and 97% in the two groups with the most education.

In Belgium, surveys have found little or no relationship between educational level and voting participation. However, they have also discovered that, if compulsory voting were abolished, turnout would drop from well over 90% to about 60%, resulting in a strong class bias from which the more conservative parties would benefit (Ackaert and De Winter 1993, 77–9; 1996; De Winter and Ackaert 1994, 87–9). Similarly, Venezuela had high turnouts in its elections under compulsory voting until the mid-1980s and, like Belgium, relatively little class bias in turnout. Here, too, however, a survey found that, under voluntary voting, turnout would decline dramatically, to 48%, and that "electoral demobilization would introduce socioeconomic distinctions in voting turnout" (Baloyra and Martz 1979, 71; see also Molina Vega 1991).

In the early 1960s, two authoritative volumes summarized the most important findings of political scientists and sociologists. On the subject of voter turnout, Seymour Martin Lipset (1960, 182) stated that "patterns of voting participation are strikingly the same in various countries: Germany, Sweden, America, Norway, Finland, and many others for which we have data. . . . The better educated [vote] more than the less educated; . . . higher-status persons, more than lower." Similarly, one of the findings in Bernard Berelson and Gary A. Steiner's (1964, 423) *Inventory of Scientific Findings* was that "the higher a person's socioeconomic and educational level—especially the latter—the higher his [or her] political interest, participation, and voting turnout." More than three decades later, these conclusions are clearly still valid.[5]

The second reason why low and unequal voting

[5] The one serious doubt about the practical significance of these findings is that measures to increase turnout in the United States, such as easier registration and absentee voting rules, do not necessarily increase the proportion of the less privileged among the voters. For instance, being allowed to register as late as election day "rather than goading the disadvantaged to the polls, appears to simply provide a further convenience for those already inclined to vote by virtue of their social class position" (Calvert and Gilchrist 1993, 699; see also Oliver 1996; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 82–8). One has to keep in mind, however, that such measures result in relatively small turnout increments; more substantial increases in voting participation, in line with Tingsten's law of dispersion, are much more

turnout should be a serious concern is that who votes, and who doesn't, has important consequences for who gets elected and for the content of public policies. What is the significance, V. O. Key (1949, 527) asked, of group differences in voting and nonvoting? And he answered: "The blunt truth is that politicians and officials are under no compulsion to pay much heed to classes and groups of citizens that do not vote." More recently, Walter Dean Burnham (1987, 99) emphasized again that "the old saw remains profoundly true: if you don't vote, you don't count." Voice and exit are often alternative ways of exerting influence (Hirschman 1970), but with regard to voting the exit option spells no influence; only voice can have an effect.

In addition to the clear connection between socioeconomic status and turnout, there are two further important links. One is the clear nexus between socioeconomic status on the one hand and party choice and the outcome of elections on the other; in Lipset's (1960, 220) famous formulation, elections are "the expression of the democratic class struggle." The second crucial link is that between types of parties, especially progressive versus conservative parties, and the policies that these parties pursue when they are in power. There is an extensive comparative literature about welfare, redistribution, full employment, social security, and overall government spending policies that is unanimous in its conclusion that political parties do matter (Blais, Blake, and Dion 1996; Castles 1982; Castles and McKinlay 1979; King 1981; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994; Tufte 1978). Douglas A. Hibbs's (1977, 1467) conclusion represents the broad consensus very well: "Governments pursue . . . policies broadly in accordance with the objective economic interests and subjective preferences of their class-defined core political constituencies."

Skeptics have raised two critical questions about the strength of the above links. One has to do with the supposed decline in class voting. Even Lipset (1960, 220) who originally proclaimed that "on a world scale, the principal generalization which can be made is that parties are primarily based on either the lower classes or the middle and upper classes," retreated from this conclusion in the updated version of *Political Man* (Lipset 1981, 503): on the basis of American, British, German, and Swedish data, he concluded that his original generalization "has become less valid" (see also Dogan 1995, Franklin 1992). Other analysts have argued, however, that class voting is changing—especially from a dichotomous working versus middle-class contrast to more complex and multifaceted class differences—instead of declining (Andersen 1984; Hout, Brooks, and Manza 1995; Manza, Hout, and Brooks 1995). These authors also emphasize, and the supporters of the thesis of the decline in class voting admit, that this decline does not mean that class voting has vanished. This is also the conclusion of a study of class voting in 20 democracies from 1945 to 1990 by Paul Nieuwbeerta (1995, esp. 46–51). He finds a "substantial decline" in class voting in many countries, but the decline is strong enough to be statistically significant in only about half of his countries. In about a third of the countries he finds an opposite trend or no trend. Most important, in none of the countries has class voting disappeared altogether.

The second doubt about the nexus between social class, voting turnout, party choice, and public policy is raised by studies that show nonvoters not to be different from voters, especially in the United States, regarding policy preferences and candidate and party preferences. Ruy A. Teixeira (1992, 100) sums up the conclusions of a large number of studies in the following words: They "all tell a similar story: nonvoters are somewhat more liberal than voters on policy issues concerning the economic role of government . . . and all agree that the magnitude of these differences is not large and that therefore the absence of nonvoters from the voting pool probably has little immediate effect on the policy output of government" (see also Gant and Lyons 1993, Shaffer 1982, and, for a similar British study, Studlar and Welch 1986).[6] For election outcomes, the story is basically the same. For instance, if all nonvoters had voted in the 1980 presidential election, Reagan would have received only 2% fewer votes and would still have won the election; in 1984 and 1988, winners Reagan and Bush would actually have received a *higher* vote percentage (Bennett and Resnick 1990, 795; see also Petrocik 1987).

There are, however, several problems with Teixeira's (1992, 96–7) conclusion, based on the above studies, that "most electoral outcomes are not determined in any meaningful sense by turnout." Nonvoters who are asked their opinions on policy and partisan preferences in surveys are typically citizens who have not given these questions much thought, who have not been politically mobilized, and who, in terms of social class, have not developed class consciousness. It is highly likely that, if they were mobilized to vote, their votes would be quite different from their responses in opinion polls. The usual surveys, while "more representative than any of the modes of citizen activity" and hence "rigorously egalitarian" (Verba 1996, 3–4), fall short of discovering people's true opinions and preferences; only James S. Fishkin's (1991, 1995) "deliberative opinion polls" and Robert A. Dahl's (1989, 340; 1970, 149–50) randomly selected "minipopulus" of about one thousand citizens, who would meet and deliberate for an extended period of time, combine representativeness with well-formed policy and political preferences.[7]

Furthermore, the few studies that attempt the diffi-

likely to reduce class bias. Moreover, Teixeira (1992, 112–5) presents data that directly contradict Calvert and Gilchrist's conclusion.

[6] It is worth noting, however, that the usual finding is that there are only *small* differences instead of *no* differences, and that these small differences usually indicate, as expected, that less privileged citizens have more leftist opinions.

[7] Teixeira (1992, 102) appears to agree at least in part with this interpretation when he argues that, in the long run, low voter turnout "may contribute to the problem of an unrepresentative policy agenda, because nonvoters and voters do tend to differ systematically from one another in attributes that reflect individual *needs and interests*, even if their specific policy preferences within a given agenda generally do not" (emphasis added).

cult task of directly testing the link between voter turnout, on the one hand, and tax and welfare policies, on the other, all find compelling evidence that unequal voting participation is associated with policies that favor privileged voters over underprivileged nonvoters (Hicks and Swank 1992; Hill and Leighley 1992; Leighley 1995, 195–6; Mebane 1994). Finally, perhaps the most persuasive evidence is the strong and direct link between turnout and support for left-of-center parties found by Alexander Pacek and Benjamin Radcliff (1995). They analyzed all national elections in 19 industrial democracies from 1950 to 1990 and found that, as hypothesized, the vote for left parties varied directly with turnout: The left share of the total vote increases by almost one-third of a percentage point for every percentage point increase in turnout.[8] In short, the overall weight of the evidence strongly supports the view that who votes and how people vote matter a great deal. Indeed, any other conclusion would be extremely damaging for the very concept of representative democracy.

LOW AND DECLINING VOTER TURNOUT

Additional reasons for serious worry are the low levels of electoral participation in almost all democracies—even in national elections but especially in lower-level elections—and the downward trend in turnout in most countries. That the United States ranks near the bottom of voting participation in comparative perspective is well-known, and this high degree of nonvoting is often contrasted with "nonvoting levels as low as 5 percent in other democracies" (Teixeira 1992, 21). Voter turnout, however, tends to be lower in other countries than is commonly recognized. Powell's (1980, 6–8) turnout figures for 30 democracies in the 1960s and 1970s—all of the democratic countries with populations over one million during this period—show that not a single country had a turnout rate as high as 95%. The highest percentage is that of Italy, a country with compulsory voting—94%; the lowest percentage is that of Switzerland—53%. And the median turnout rate is only 76%.

The main reason for the exaggeration of voter turnout in other democracies is that their turnout rates are usually calculated as percentages of registered voters rather than percentage of voting-age population. For the United States, the latter figure is almost always used since the former would be extremely misleading, given the large numbers of eligible voters who are not registered. For most other democracies, which have automatic registration or where it is the government's responsibility to register voters, turnout percentages based on registered voters are more nearly correct—but far from completely accurate: Voter registers everywhere may fail to include all eligible voters or may include names of voters who have moved or died. Therefore, the only proper turnout percentages both in absolute terms and for comparative purposes are those based on voting-age populations.[9] Powell's percentages, cited above, are the optimally accurate figures based on voting-age population. The median of only 76% that he reports means that in half of the countries—including most of the most populous countries such as India, Japan, Britain, France, and, of course, the United States—fewer than about three out of every four citizens turn out to vote.[10]

All of the unimpressive turnout figures that I have mentioned so far are still deceptively favorable because they are the turnout percentages in the most salient national elections and hence the elections with the highest turnout: national parliamentary elections in parliamentary systems and presidential elections in presidential and semipresidential systems. The vast majority of elections, however, are elections with lower salience—local, state, provincial, and off-year congressional elections, as well as the elections to the European Parliament—which are characterized by considerably lower turnout. The U.S. off-year election turnout has only been around 35%, and turnout in local elections only about 25% in recent years (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995, 145–6; Teixeira 1992, 7). When lower-level elections are on the same ballot as presidential elections, voting participation improves, but there also tends to be considerable roll-off, that is, voters casting their votes for president but not for less prestigious offices. Moreover, as turnout decreases, roll-off tends to increase (Burnham 1965, 13–4), and roll-off, like nonvoting, is inversely correlated with socioeconomic status (Darcy and Schneider 1989, 360–2).[11]

In other democracies, too, lower-level elections at-

[8] In a more controversial analysis, challenged by Erikson (1995), Radcliff (1994, 1995) found a strikingly similar pattern in the United States on the basis of state-level data from 1928 to 1980. Another similar finding is that, in New Zealand between 1928 and 1988, Labour's share of the vote increased by about a third of a percentage point for every percentage point increase in turnout (Nagel 1988, 25–9). In the United Kingdom, high turnout has meant a consistent disadvantage for the Conservatives, a modest gain for the Liberals, and no appreciable advantage for Labour—but, of course, a relative advantage for Labour as a result of the Conservatives' disadvantage (McAllister and Mughan 1986).

[9] Nevertheless, in the remainder of this paper, I shall often have to cite turnout figures based on registered voters because these may be the only figures that are available. It should also be noted that percentages based on voting-age population may still contain two types of inaccuracy. One is that the voting-age population includes noncitizens, which means that turnout rates in countries with relatively large numbers of resident aliens such as the United States, Switzerland, France, Germany, and Belgium are understated (Powell 1986, 40; Teixeira 1992, 9–10). The other is that, in most countries but not in the United States, the "voters" that are counted include those who cast blank and invalid ballots (Crewe 1981, 238; Wolfinger, Glass, and Squire 1990, 570). However, these inaccuracies are not likely to affect turnout figures by more than a couple of percentage points.

[10] Mark N. Franklin (1996, 218) reports turnout figures for 37 countries in the 1960–95 period with a much higher median—83%—but these use registered voters as the denominator.

[11] One recent example is the 1990 election in Oklahoma in which 39.5% of the voting-age population voted for governor, but only 38.3% and 37.1% in the U.S. senatorial and congressional races, and an average of 31.6% in the judicial retention choices—roll-offs of 2.9%, and 20%, respectively (calculated from data in Darcy and Vanderleeuw 1993, 3–4). Gosnell (1930, 209–10) reports that in the 1920 election in Kansas "35% of those who voted for president did not vote for state printer."

tract fewer voters than national elections. In his classic *Why Europe Votes*, Gosnell (1930, 142–76) devoted an entire chapter to local elections in European countries and found that, in the 1920s, Europeans were more faithful voters than Americans but considerably less so in lower-level than in national elections. Average turnout rates in local elections in France and Spain, in German state elections, and in elections to the parliament of autonomous Catalonia in the 1980s and 1990s have been between 60 and 70%, but these averages conceal much lower turnouts in particular states and cities such as the 54.8% turnout in the German state of Sachsen-Anhalt in 1994 and the 45.6% turnout in the French city of Saint-Martin-d'Hères in 1983 (Botella 1994, Font and Virós 1995, Hoffmann-Martinot 1994, López Nieto 1994, Schultze 1995). Average turnout rates in the English-speaking democracies tend to be much lower still: 53% in New Zealand; 40% in Great Britain, but well below 40% in the major urban areas; 33% in Canada; and about 35% in Australia, where at the local level there is no compulsory voting (Denver 1995; Goldsmith and Newton 1986, 145–7; Miller 1994; Rallings and Thrasher 1990). In the 1994 European Parliament elections, the average turnout in the 12 member countries was 58.3% but in three countries only slightly more than a third of the registered voters participated: 36.4% in the United Kingdom and 35.6% in the Netherlands and Portugal (Smith 1995, 210). Turnout in the first European Parliament election in newly admitted Sweden in 1995 was a mere 41.6% (Widfeldt 1996).

All of these elections have been called "second-order elections" in which less is at stake than who will control national executive power (Reif and Schmitt 1980). But while second-order elections may be less important elections, they are not entirely unimportant, even in unitary and centralized systems of government. In decentralized and federal systems such as the United States and Germany, state elections are obviously of great importance and, similarly, congressional elections should rank close to presidential ones in democracies in which the executive and legislature are coequal branches of the government. From the perspective of rational choice, it is to be expected that carefully reasoning voters will vote less in most second-order than in first-order elections, but the magnitude of the difference between the two is more difficult to explain (Feeley 1974, 241). In any case, when considering the general problem of low voter turnout, second-order elections with their often striking lower voter participation cannot be ignored.

Finally, voter turnout is not only low but also declining in most countries. In the United States, participation in presidential elections has declined from 60–65% in the 1950s and 1960s to 50–55% in the 1980s and 1990s; in Teixeira's (1992, 6) words, "a *low* turnout society . . . has been turned into an *even lower* turnout society." In other industrialized democracies, the decline is also unmistakable although not as dramatic. Average turnout in 20 of these countries declined from 83% in the 1950s to 78% in the 1990s, with 17 countries showing a lower and only 3 a higher turnout in the latter period (Dalton 1996, 44–5). For 18 industrialized democracies in the shorter time span from the 1960s to the 1980s—but based on more accurate turnout rates as percentages of voting-age population—average turnout went down from 80 to 78%, with ten countries showing lower, four higher, and four about the same turnout in the most recent period (Jackman 1987, 420; Jackman and Miller 1995, 485). For the European democracies, the *Beliefs in Government* study reports "a decline in average participation levels over the postwar period as a whole" (Borg 1995, 441) and a drop from 85% in 1960–64 to 80% in 1985–89 (Topf 1995, 40–1; see also Flickinger and Studlar 1992).[12] In Switzerland, the European country with a long record of poor voter participation, the 42.3% turnout in 1995 was a new all-time low in legislative elections (Farago 1996, 11).

The pattern is similar for second-order elections. Rainer-Olaf Schultze (1995, 91–4) reports declining turnout in Germany, especially since the mid-1980s, at all four levels: local, state, national, and European Parliament elections. For all of the member countries, average turnout in the elections to the European Parliament has gone down steadily from 65.9% in the first elections held in 1979 to 63.8%, 62.8%, and 58.3% in the next three elections (Smith 1995, 210).[13]

These drops in turnout are not as drastic as in the United States, but they are especially disturbing because they have occurred in spite of dramatic increases in levels of education and economic well-being and the rise of postmaterialist values (Inglehart 1990) in all industrialized countries—factors that, at the individual level, are known to increase rather than decrease the probability of voting. Moreover, the decline in turnout has been accompanied by a "participatory revolution" in Western Europe with regard to more intensive forms of political participation in which class bias is very strong; hence, as Max Kaase (1996, 36) points out, serious concerns about political equality arise because of the skewed nature of the "active partial publics."

Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward (1988b, 869) have argued that, in the United States, "restrictive registration procedures are the functional equivalents of earlier property and literacy qualifications." Similarly, it can be argued that the logical and empirical link between low voter turnout and unequal turnout is

[12] Richard Topf (1995, 40), however, belittles this decline by comparing the most recent 80% turnout, not with the high of 85%, but with the overall mean of 83% in the postwar period, and by arguing that "a decline of some 3 percentage points is a very small change indeed." My interpretation of the findings of the *Beliefs in Government* project also obviously differs from that of its three coordinators who conclude that "voting turnout [in Western Europe] has remained remarkably stable in the postwar period" (Kaase, Newton, and Scarbrough 1996, 226).

[13] The number of member countries increased from 9 in 1979 to 10 in 1984 and 12 in 1989 and 1994. It may therefore be more appropriate to examine the averages for the original 9 members only: 65.9% (1979), 62.3% (1984), 63.1% (1989), and 59.3% (1994). The slight boost in 1989 can be explained in terms of the concurrence of that year's election in Ireland with a national parliamentary election (van der Eijk, Franklin, and Marsh 1996, 154) that raised turnout by an estimated 20 percentage points—and which therefore raised the average turnout for the 9 countries by about 2 percentage points.

the functional equivalent of such discriminatory qualifications—as well as the functional equivalent of two earlier proposals and practices that systematically give well-to-do and educated citizens greater voting rights than their less privileged co-citizens. One is Aristotle's suggestion that "equal blocks of property carry equal weights, though the number of persons in each block is different" (Barker 1958, 262); a version of this was Prussia's three-class system from 1849 to 1918 which entailed having each of the three classes elect one-third of the deputies, but the top class consisted of only 4% of the voters, the middle class 16%, and the bottom class 80% (Urwin 1974, 116). The other is Mill's ([1861] 1958, 138) proposal of plural voting: "two or more votes might be allowed" on the basis of occupational status and educational qualifications. Such a system, with a maximum of three votes per voter, operated in Belgium from 1893 to 1919 (Gosnell, 1930, 98–9).

All of these discriminatory rules are now universally rejected as undemocratic. Why then do many democrats tolerate the systematic pattern of low and unequal turnout that is the functional equivalent of such rules?

INSTITUTIONAL REMEDIES

Voting participation depends on many factors, including the salience of the issues—note, for instance, the 93.5% turnout in Quebec's 1995 referendum on independence (Kennedy 1996) and the high turnouts in the final years of the Weimar Republic—the attractiveness of parties and candidates, and political culture and attitudes. When we look for remedies for nonvoting, however, institutional factors are especially important. For one thing, when we compare turnout variations among countries and across social characteristics of individuals, "the most striking message is that turnout varies much more from country to country than it does between different types of individuals" (Franklin 1996, 217–8), which suggests very strongly that in order to expand voting in a country with low turnout it is much more promising to improve the institutional context than to raise levels of education and political interest. For another, rules and institutions are, at least in principle, more amenable to manipulation than individual attitudes. Fortunately, we know a great deal about the effect of institutions on turnout, especially thanks to the impressive early studies by Harold F. Gosnell (1930) and Herbert Tingsten (1937) and the outstanding recent work of G. Bingham Powell (1986), Robert W. Jackman (1987), and Mark N. Franklin (1996).

In the United States, burdensome registration requirements have long been recognized as a major institutional deterrent to voting (Gosnell 1927, 1930, 203–5; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 230). Voting presents a problem of collective action that becomes more serious as the costs increase, and the costs of registration are often higher than the cost of voting itself (Wolfinger 1994, 81–3). Raymond E. Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone (1980, 73, 88) found that turnout would increase by 9.1 percentage points if all states adopted completely liberalized registration rules, but they also argued that turnout could be raised substantially more by a European-style system in which registration is automatic or the government's responsibility. On the basis of his comparative analysis, Powell (1986, 36) concludes that automatic registration could boost turnout by up to 14 percentage points. Comparisons between nationwide turnout and turnout in the few states with either no registration requirement at all or same-day and same-place registration—that is, the possibility of registering at the polls on election day—show differences of about 15 percentage points (Abramson 1995, 916; Wolfinger, Glass, and Squire 1990, 564–5). Other estimates have been somewhat lower; for instance, Burnham's (1987, 108) is about 10%. After an extensive review of all of the evidence, Teixeira (1992, 122) concludes that the increase would be somewhere between 8 and 15 percentage points.

Fifteen percentage points appears to be the maximum benefit that thorough registration reform could achieve, and it would be only a partial remedy that would still leave the United States well below the median turnout of 76% in contemporary democracies. Also, it is unclear how much registration reform would contribute to turnout in off-year, state, local, and primary elections; even if the increase were as much as 15 percentage points in these elections, it would still leave turnout well below 50% in most. Registration reform is irrelevant for most other Western democracies where registration is not a big problem.

Another important institutional mechanism that affects turnout is the electoral system. Proportional representation (PR) tends to stimulate voter participation by giving the voters more choices and by eliminating the problem of wasted votes—votes cast for losing candidates or for candidates that win with big majorities—from which systems using single-member districts suffer; this makes it more attractive for individuals to cast their votes and for parties to mobilize voters even in areas of the country in which they are weak. This phenomenon was already highlighted by both Gosnell (1930, 201–3) and Tingsten (1937, 223–5). Recent comparative studies have estimated that the turnout boost from PR is somewhere between 9 and 12% (Blais and Carty 1990, 174; Burnham 1987, 106–7; Franklin 1996, 226; Lijphart 1994, 5–7; see also Amy 1993, 140–52).[14]

These estimates of PR's beneficial effect are all based on the most salient national elections. In con-

[14] The difference between PR and single-member-district systems is roughly the same as the variable that Powell (1986) and Jackman (1987) call "nationally competitive districts," with two exceptions. One is that the latter takes into consideration three categories of proportionality in PR systems, based on the number of representatives elected per district. The other concerns presidential elections: The direct presidential elections in France, in which each vote counts nationwide, are placed in the same category as the most proportional parliamentary elections, whereas the American electoral-college system of presidential elections is scored on a par with single-member-district systems. Jackman (1987) and Jackman and Miller (1995) also find that multipartism, which is strongly associated with PR, depresses turnout—thus undoing some of PR's beneficial influence—and that bicameralism lowers turnout as well.

trast, in second-order elections using PR, the level of voter participation tends to be much less impressive. The European Parliament elections provide a striking example: Turnouts have been low even though 11 of the 12 member countries choose their representatives by PR. In the 1995 provincial elections, by PR, in the Netherlands, turnout was only 50%. A recent American example is the 1996 New York City school board election, one of the rare cases of PR in the United States: Turnout was a mere 5% (Steinberg 1996).

The frequency of elections has a strongly negative influence on turnout. Boyd (1981, 1986, 1989) has convincingly demonstrated this effect for the United States, in which he estimates that, on average, voters are asked to come to the polls between two and three times each year—much more often than in all except one other democracy. The one country with even more frequent dates on which elections and referenda are conducted—about six or seven times per year—is Switzerland (Farago 1995, 121; Franklin 1996, 225, 234; Sidjanski 1983, 109). The United States and Switzerland are also the two Western democracies with by far the lowest levels of turnout. The most plausible explanation is voter fatigue (Jackman and Miller 1995, 482–3) or, in terms of rational choice, the fact that frequent elections increase the cost of voting. If frequent elections depress turnout in first-order elections, it is logical to expect that they hurt turnout in second-order elections even more. This may be the explanation for the wide gap in the United States between the first-order presidential elections, on the one hand, and the second-order—but in a system of separation and division of powers still very important—midterm congressional as well as state executive and legislative elections on the other.

Rational-choice theory also leads us to expect that concurrent elections will increase turnout since the benefit of voting now increases while the cost remains almost the same (Aldrich 1993, 261; Wolfinger 1994, 76–8). In particular, second-order elections should have better turnout when combined with first-order elections. The available evidence shows this hypothesis to be correct. The European Parliament elections in Portugal and Ireland held at the same time as national parliamentary elections, in 1987 and 1989, respectively, yielded turnouts more than 20% higher than the preceding and/or next separate European Parliament election in these countries (Niedermayer 1990, 47–8). The 1979 local elections in England and Wales were conducted simultaneously with House of Commons elections, and, as a result, "local election turnout soared up to parliamentary levels" (Miller 1994, 69). Combining first-order and second-order elections may even help the former to some extent: In the United States, the inclusion of a gubernatorial race can increase turnout in presidential elections by about 6 percentage points (Boyd 1989, 735–6).

In contrast, the daunting accumulation of very many elections and referendum questions on one long ballot—a phenomenon unique to the United States with its extremely large number of elective offices and primary elections (Crewe 1981, 225–32)—is generally regarded as a deterrent to turnout, although the benefits of voting would appear to keep increasing with increasing ballot length. Gosnell (1930, 186, 209) emphasizes "the old lesson of the need for a shorter ballot," and comments that European voters are "not given an impossible task to perform on election day. [They are] not presented with a huge . . . ballot as are the voters in many of the American states."

Minor measures to facilitate voting, such as the availability of mail ballots and the scheduling of elections on weekends instead of weekdays, can also be a small but distinct stimulus to turnout. On the basis of a multivariate analysis of turnout in 29 countries, Franklin (1996, 226–30) finds that, other factors being equal, weekend voting increases turnout by 5 to 6 percentage points and that mail ballots are worth another 4% in first-order elections. In the second-order European Parliament elections, weekend voting adds more than 9 percentage points to turnout.

COMPULSORY VOTING

The strongest of all the institutional factors is compulsory voting, particularly with regard to second-order elections; but let us first take a look at the most salient national elections. Gosnell (1930, 184) took special pains to examine two of the European cases of compulsory voting, and his conclusion was: "There is no doubt that compulsory voting has had a sustained stimulating effect upon voting in Belgium and in the Swiss cantons where it is used. In Belgium it has maintained the highest voting records found in Europe." Tingsten (1937, 205) gathered evidence from several additional countries—Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, Romania, and Australia—and, like Gosnell, he concluded "that popular participation in elections is very high in countries with compulsory voting, that the introduction of compulsory voting everywhere has been accompanied by a remarkable rise in participation, and that in countries where compulsory voting has been enacted in certain regions, these display more intense participation than the regions without compulsory voting."

In comparative multivariate analyses, compulsory voting has been found to raise turnout by 7 to 16 percentage points. Powell (1980, 9–10) finds a difference of about 10% in his study of 30 democracies. The figures reported by Jackman (1987, 412, 415–6) and Jackman and Miller (1995, 474) for the industrialized democracies in three successive decades from 1960 to 1990 are 15.0, 13.1, and 12.2%. Franklin's (1996, 227) finding of a 7.3 percentage point difference is the lowest that has been reported. In a study of Latin American turnout in the 1980s and early 1990s, replicating Jackman's analysis, Carolina A. Fornos (1996, 34–5) finds that compulsory voting boosted turnout by 11.4 percentage points in presidential elections and 16.5 percentage points in congressional elections.[15]

[15] Enrique C. Ochoa (1987, 867) also notes that the Latin American countries with compulsory-voting laws "tend to have a higher participation rate. The countries with the highest voter turnout during the

The most persuasive results are in Wolfgang Hirczy's (1994) systematic study of within-country differences—both variations over time and variations among different areas in the same country—in Australia, Austria, and the Netherlands. He concludes, in line with previous findings, that compulsory voting effectively and consistently raises turnout. His more striking conclusion, however, is that the increase in turnout depends a great deal on the baseline of participation *without* compulsory voting. Mean turnout in all three countries under mandatory voting was higher than 90%, but the increment due to mandatory voting in Austria was only about 3 percentage points, because turnout even under conditions of voluntary voting was well above 90%. In the Netherlands, the abolition of compulsory voting in 1970 caused a larger drop of about 10 percentage points to the average voluntary-voting baseline of around 84%. And in Australia, the mean turnout difference was even larger—more than 28%—because the average turnout under voluntary voting before 1925 was only about 62%.

Brazil and Venezuela are additional examples of low baselines and hence high turnout boosts due to compulsory voting. Average official turnout in Venezuela from 1958 to 1988 was 90.2% but, after the abolition of mandatory voting in 1993, turnout fell to 60.2% (Molina Vega 1995, 164).[16] A public opinion poll in Brazil in 1990 found that, under hypothetical conditions of voluntary voting, turnout would undergo a similar drop of about 30 percentage points from the 85% turnout in that year's election to 55% (Power and Roberts 1995, 796, 819). These examples lend further support to Hirczy's (1994, 74) observation that "the impact of mandatory voting laws should be particularly pronounced in low-turnout environments."

Hirczy's conclusion also has special significance for second-order elections because these tend to be elections with low turnout. Here, indeed, compulsory voting is strikingly effective. Franklin's (1996, 227, 230) finding of a modest 7.3% boost from compulsory voting in national elections, mentioned above, contrasts with a 26.1% increase in turnout in a similar multivariate analysis of the 1989 European Parliament elections. In all four of the European Parliament elections from 1979 to 1994, the mean turnout was 84.2% in the countries with compulsory voting but only 46.4% in those with voluntary voting—a difference of almost 38 percentage points (based on data in Smith 1995, 210).

Gosnell (1930, 155) was greatly impressed with the level of turnout in provincial and local elections in Belgium in the 1920s, which was practically the same, well above 90%, as in the national elections: "The device of compulsory voting in Belgium overcame that indifference toward local elections which is so marked in countries with a free voting system." The same pattern can still be seen today: Belgian local elections from 1976 to 1994 had an average turnout of 93.7%—almost identical with the average 93.8% turnout in parliamentary elections during this period (based on data in Ackaert and De Winter 1996). In Italy from 1968 to 1994, mean turnout in local elections was 84.4% compared with 86.2% in national parliamentary elections—a difference of less than 2 percentage points (Corbetta and Parisi 1995, 171). In Dutch provincial and municipal elections from 1946 until the abandonment of mandatory voting in 1970, turnout was almost always well above 90%, often close to 95%, and usually only a bit lower than that in parliamentary elections. In 1970, turnout dropped to 68.1% in provincial and 67.2% in municipal elections. After a brief improvement in turnout levels later in the 1970s, they declined even further. The 1994 and 1995 figures are 65.3% in municipal, 50% in provincial, and 35.6% in European elections.[17]

Students of compulsory voting have not only been impressed but also often surprised by the strong effect of the obligation to vote, especially in view of the generally low penalties for noncompliance and generally lax enforcement: "Even when the penalties for non-voting are very small, and where law and practice prescribe very wide acceptance of excuses, the growth of the poll has been perceptible" (Tingsten 1937, 205–6). In rational-choice terms, however, this phenomenon can be explained easily. Turnout is a problem of collective action, but an unusual one, because turnout entails both low costs and low benefits (Aldrich 1993); this means that the inducement of compulsory voting, small as it is, can still neutralize a large part of the cost of voting.[18]

Rational-choice theory also provides the basic normative justification for compulsory voting. The general remedy for problems of collective action is to counteract free riding by means of legal sanctions and enforcement. For the collective-action problem of turnout, this means that citizens should not be allowed to be free riders—that is, that they should be obligated to turn out to vote (Feeley 1974, Wertheimer 1975).

Compulsory voting is not the only method for assuring high voter turnout. If all the other institutional variables are favorable—automatic registration, a highly proportional electoral system, infrequent elec-

most recent presidential elections in the 1980s . . . all have mandatory voting laws."

[16] Molina Vega's (1995, 163) own, more realistic, estimates of turnout are a bit lower—a mean of 82.8% before and 54% after the abolition of compulsory voting—but the difference of almost 29 percentage points between the two is roughly similar to that between the before and after official percentages. While the obligation to vote remained formally in force in 1993, compulsory voting was effectively eliminated because all penalties for nonvoting were removed.

[17] I am indebted to Galen A. Irwin for providing me with these data (personal correspondence, May 5, 1996). See also Andeweg and Irwin 1993, 83–5; Denters 1995, 118–21, 137; and Irwin 1974.

[18] Some compulsory-voting laws do prescribe heavy penalties, such as up to a year's imprisonment in Greece, but this kind of sanction is never imposed. The typical penalty is a relatively small fine, similar to a fine for a parking violation, but even these are imposed on only a small fraction of the nonvoters: 4 to 5% in Australia, less than 1% in the Netherlands when it had compulsory voting, and less than one-fourth of a percent in Belgium (Adviescommissie Opkomstplicht 1967, 28; Hasen 1996, 2169–70; Mackerras and McAllister 1996). In Italy, the only penalty is the "innocuous sanction"—but still effective sanction—of noting "did not vote" on the citizen's certificate of good conduct (Corbetta and Parisi 1995, 150; but see also Lombardo 1996).

tions, and weekend voting—and in a highly politicized environment, it may be possible to have near-universal turnout without compulsory voting, as Hirczy (1995) has shown for the case of Malta. Second-order elections can have high turnout if they are conducted concurrently with first-order elections in which all the major institutional mechanisms are conducive to turnout. Compulsory voting is the only institutional mechanism, however, that can assure high turnout virtually by itself.

VOTING AS A DUTY: PROS AND CONS

The most important argument in favor of compulsory voting is its contribution to high and relatively equal voter turnout. Three additional, more speculative, advantages of compulsory voting, however, are worth mentioning. One is that the increase in voting participation may stimulate stronger participation and interest in other political activities: "People who participate in politics in one way are likely to do so in another" (Berelson and Steiner 1964, 422). Considerable evidence exists of a spillover effect from participation in the workplace, churches, and voluntary organizations to political participation (Almond and Verba 1963, 300–74; Greenberg 1986; Lafferty 1989; Peterson 1992; Sobel 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 304–68; but see also Greenberg, Grunberg, and Daniel 1996; Schweizer 1995).

Second, compulsory voting may have the beneficial effect of reducing the role of money in politics. When almost everybody votes, no large campaign funds are needed to goad voters to the polls, and, in Gosnell's (1930, 185) words, "elections are therefore less costly, more honest, and more representative." Third, mandatory voting may discourage attack advertising—and hence may lessen the cynicism and distrust that it engenders. Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar (1995) have found that attack ads work mainly by selectively depressing turnout among those not likely to vote for the attacker. When almost everybody votes, attack tactics lose most of their lure.[19]

Having emphasized the advantages of compulsory voting so far, I must also deal with the most important arguments that have been raised against it. One criticism has been that the compulsory vote forces to the polls people who have little political interest and knowledge and who are unlikely to cast a well-considered vote: "An unwilling or indifferent vote is a thoughtless one" (Abraham 1955, 21). What this objection overlooks is that mandatory voting may serve as an incentive to become better informed. An indirect bit of evidence supporting this possibility is that, in American and European election studies, respondents interviewed prior to elections were found to vote in considerably greater numbers than expected due to the stimulation of these interviews (Popkin 1991, 235; Smeets 1995, 311–2). Warren E. Miller's comment on this phenomenon is that such interviews are "the most expensive form of adult civic education known to mankind"![20] Compulsory voting may be able to serve as an equivalent, but much less expensive, form of civic education and political stimulation. This was an important objective when compulsory voting was introduced in both the Netherlands in 1917 and in Australia in 1924; at that time, one of its Australian proponents argued, in a highly optimistic vein, that "by compelling people to vote we are likely to arouse in them an intelligent interest and to give them a political knowledge that they do not at present possess" (cited in Morris Jones 1954, 32; see also Verplanke 1965, 81–3). Moreover, under compulsory voting, parties and candidates have a strong incentive to pay more attention and work harder to get information to previous nonvoters.

Another criticism, based especially on the experience of the last years of the Weimar Republic in which increasing turnout coincided with the growth of the Nazi vote, is that high turnout may be undesirable and even dangerous. Tingsten (1937, 225; see also Lipset 1960, 140–52, 218–9) already used the Weimar example to warn that "exceptionally high voting frequency may indicate an intensification" of political conflict that may foreshadow the fall of democracy. The danger is that, in periods of crisis, sudden jumps in turnout mean that many previously uninterested and uninvolved citizens will come to the polls and will support extremist parties. This, however, is an argument for, not against, compulsory voting: Instead of trying to keep turnout at steady *low* levels, it is better to safeguard against the danger of sudden sharp increases by maintaining steady *high* levels, unaffected by crises and charismatic leaders. Additional evidence that the Weimar precedent should not discourage efforts to increase turnout is Powell's (1982, 206) comparative study of 29 democracies in which he found a strong association between higher voter turnout and less citizen turmoil and violence: "The data favor the theorists who believe that citizen involvement enhances legitimacy" instead of producing democratic breakdown.[21]

Compulsory voting has also been disparaged, even by those who support it in principle, on the practical grounds that the possibility of it being adopted in democracies that do not already have it are very small, that one especially big obstacle to its adoption is the

[19] For countries with proportional representation, a fourth argument in favor of compulsory voting is that it is illogical to want votes to be converted proportionally into seats, but to be satisfied with a situation in which only a biased sample of the eligible electorate actually votes—which necessarily introduces considerable disproportionality after all. This was an important part of the reasoning behind the simultaneous adoption of compulsory voting and proportional representation in the Netherlands in 1917 (Andeweg and Irwin 1993, 81, 84; Daalder 1975, 228).

[20] Personal correspondence, July 2, 1995. The expense of this kind of civic education is, of course, not just the cost of conducting the interviews but also the fact that it is unnecessary for those who will vote anyway and far from 100% effective for those less likely to vote.

[21] Because Powell's conclusion is based on a number of presidential as well as parliamentary systems, his finding also assuages, at least partly, Fred W. Riggs's (1988, 263–4) fear that high turnout is a special danger in presidential regimes; Riggs regards presidentialism as inherently weak and unstable—and capable of survival only when conservative forces have predominant power.

opposition of conservative parties, and that, particularly in the United States—where arguably it is needed more than in most democracies given its low voter turnout at all levels—its chances of being accepted are nil. Alan Wertheimer (1975, 293) argues that mandatory voting is "a good idea whose time is either past or has not yet come. It is certainly not a good idea whose time is at hand." And Richard L. Hasen (1996, 2173) favors compulsory voting in American federal elections but concludes that it "has virtually no chance of enactment in the United States."

The very fact, however, that so many democracies do have compulsory voting, and have had it for a long time, shows that, while it may be difficult, it is clearly not an impossible task to introduce it. It is also worth noting that, in compulsory-voting countries, there is no strong trend in favor of abandoning it; the Netherlands and Venezuela are the only major examples of countries that abolished compulsory voting in recent decades. It will indeed not be easy to overcome the opposition of conservative parties in whose self-interest it is to keep turnout as low and class-biased as possible. Universal suffrage was also initially opposed by most of these parties—but eventually accepted. Like universal suffrage, mandatory voting is a moral issue not just a political and partisan one. Indeed, compulsory voting can be regarded as a natural extension of universal suffrage.

A special impediment to mandatory voting in the United States is that it may be unconstitutional. Henry J. Abraham (1955, 31) takes this position and, in support of it, cites an 1896 opinion by the Supreme Court of Missouri that "voting is not such a duty as may be enforced by compulsory legislation, that it is distinctly not within the power of any legislative authority . . . to compel the citizen to exercise it." However, Hasen (1996, 2176) strongly disagrees. He argues that the only plausible constitutional objection to compulsory voting would be on the First Amendment ground of a violation of freedom of speech and that the U.S. Supreme Court has explicitly rejected the argument that the vote may be regarded as a form of speech; moreover, he points out that the Missouri Supreme Court's 1896 decision failed to mention any particular constitutional violations. And, of course, even the courts' possible finding of unconstitutionality would not be a permanent and unsurmountable obstacle; as Gosnell (1930, 207) observes, "if the courts should interfere with the adoption of a system of compulsory voting, then the state and federal constitutions could be amended."[22] It is not entirely without precedent in the United States either: In the eighteenth century, Georgia and Virginia experimented with mandatory voting laws (Hasen 1996, 2173–4), and constitutional provisions adopted in North Dakota in 1898 and in Massachusetts in 1918 authorized their state legislatures to institute compulsory voting—but no legislative action was taken (Gosnell 1930, 206–7).

The danger of too much pessimism about the chances for compulsory voting is that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If even the supporters of compulsory voting believe that its chances are nil—and hence make no effort on behalf of it—it will indeed never be adopted!

Probably the most serious objection to compulsory voting is normative in nature: compulsory voting may be an attractive partial solution to the conflict between the democratic ideals of participation and equality, but it is often said to violate a third democratic ideal, that of individual freedom. For this reason, Abraham (1955, 33) calls compulsory voting "undemocratic," and W. H. Morris Jones (1954, 25) argues that it belongs "to the totalitarian camp and [is] out of place in the vocabulary of liberal democracy."

That compulsion of any kind limits individual freedom cannot be denied, but the duty to vote entails only a very minor restriction. It is important to remember, first of all, that compulsory "voting" does not mean an actual duty to cast a valid ballot; all that needs to be required is for citizens to show up at the polls. At that point, citizens may choose to refuse to vote; the right *not* to vote remains intact.[23] Moreover, compulsory voting entails a very small decrease in freedom compared with many other problems of collective action that democracies solve by imposing obligations: jury duty, the obligation to pay taxes, military conscription, compulsory school attendance, and many others. These obligations are much more burdensome than the duty to appear at the polls on election days. It must also be remembered that nonvoting is a form of free riding—and that free riding of any kind may be rational but is also selfish and immoral. The normative objection to compulsory voting has an immediate intuitive appeal that is not persuasive when considered more carefully.[24]

Compulsory voting cannot solve the entire conflict between the ideals of participation and equality, but by making voting participation as equal as possible, it is a valuable partial solution. In the first sentence of *Why Europe Votes*, Gosnell (1930, vii) states that the "struggle for democracy has just begun with the broadening of the franchise." After universal suffrage, the next aim for democracy must be universal or near-universal *use* of the right to vote.

[22] However, Gosnell (1930, 192–212) was certainly not at all optimistic about the chances for mandatory voting in the United States. He begins the last chapter of *Why Europe Votes* with the question: "What use can be made of European political experience in America?" He discusses the advantages of compulsory voting at great length but quietly drops it from his final list of recommendations, which does include relatively radical proposals like proportional representation in elections to the U.S. House of Representatives, permanent voter registration that is the government's responsibility, and adoption of the short ballot.

[23] Malcolm M. Feeley (1974, 242) states that most of the objections to compulsory voting can be solved by including a "no preference" alternative—or, as others have suggested a "none of the above" choice—on the ballot. The right to refuse to accept a ballot, however, is an even more effective method to assure that the right not to vote is not infringed.

[24] A logical alternative to compulsory voting is to use rewards for voting instead of penalties for nonvoting: Citizens can be paid to vote. The only empirical example of this—obviously more expensive—arrangement appears to be ancient Athens (Hasen 1996, 2135, 2169; Staveley 1972, 78–82).

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