

# SUFFRAGE

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THE earliest well-known Anglo-American law regulating the suffrage, or right to vote, cut back rather than expanded the electorate. Recent elections, the preamble to an English act of 1430 declared, had been disturbed by the riotous behavior of "very great, outrageous and excessive number[s] of people, of which [the] most part was [sic] people of small substance and of no value, whereof every [one] of them pretended a voice equivalent as to such election with the most worthy knights and esquires." Accordingly, in future elections for Parliament in the English counties, only those who owned, free of debt, land or houses that produced an income of forty shillings or more a year would be allowed to vote. This "40s. freeholder" criterion remained the basic standard in England for over four centuries and in parts of America until—and in some states, long after—the Revolution.

The law has three implications worth noting here. Its passage underlines the fact that the franchise may be contracted as well as liberalized. There is no natural Whiggish law or inherent logic guaranteeing that barriers to the vote will progressively erode. The stated reason for the 1430 restriction, moreover, was not that the men "of no value" were illegitimately influenced or that their votes were controlled by those on whom they were dependent but that, on the contrary, they were insufficiently deferential to their social superiors. Far from having "no will of their own," to use the eighteenth-century catchphrase, the fault of these voters was that they had entirely too much will. Such a charge in an act passed by a legislative body dominated by "knights and esquires," not to speak of more highly titled persons, indicates, finally, that this particular elite was using its political and social power self-consciously to cut off a potential

threat to its hegemony. Self-interest, in other words, shaped late medieval as well as more modern election regulations. The suffrage provisions in English boroughs varied much more widely than those in the counties. Probably most common was the requirement that voters be resident householders; but in some cities and towns payers of local taxes (or "scot") who accepted the obligation to fill local offices (or "lot") were allowed the franchise. In other places, anyone who had a hearth on which to cook something in a pot, who was referred to, picturesquely, as a "potwalloper," became a parliamentary elector. "Scot and lot" and "pot" suffrage standards were later exported to some American cities.

Not only did such requirements vary between places, they changed over time and not always in a more inclusive direction. In 1653 Oliver Cromwell, whose antiroyalist supporters were stronger in the countryside than in the towns, cut borough representation in Parliament by half while quadrupling county representation and, fearful of "anarchy" in the wake of egalitarian "Leveller" agitation, imposed a 200-pound property qualification on all voters. The English Revolution "went backward" with regard to the breadth of the electorate, at least. The act proved, furthermore, that what has come to be called vote dilution is no modern invention.

While all women, and males who were Roman Catholics, Jews, aliens, and servants were generally excluded, inflation caused by the influx of precious metals from the Americas devalued the British suffrage qualifications for other men in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Still, by the early eighteenth century only about 15 percent of English adult males could vote.

Imported into an America in which the supply of uncleared land was vast, the English qualifica-

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tions or their approximations had quite different effects than in the mother country. Here, nearly every white male who lived long enough could acquire fifty acres of land, or real or personal property worth forty or fifty pounds, or that produced an income or rent of forty shillings per year. In consequence, these most usual suffrage requirements in colonial America enfranchised from 50 to 75 percent of the white adult males, according to Chilton Williamson's estimates, and from 54 to 97 percent, in the view of Robert and Katherine Brown. In 1977, Robert Dinkin concluded that each reckoning, based as it inevitably is on fragmentary data, is correct for certain colonies. Since men typically accumulate wealth as they grow older, the property restrictions in an area of cheap land and dear labor such as early America amounted, in effect, to fairly mild, gradual age qualifications for voting. In any case the franchise was from three to six times as wide in the colonies as in England and was without doubt the broadest of that in any large country in the world at the time.

Even these curbs on voting were loosely enforced and easily evaded, especially in close elections. As a parliamentary address to Queen Anne noted in 1706, in recent North Carolina elections "servants, Negroes, Aliens, Jews and Common sailors were admitted to vote. . . ." In America as in England, candidates and their friends sometimes temporarily leased to their supporters land sufficient to qualify them to cast ballots, reclaiming it from these "fagot voters" after the election. Such practices were especially prevalent during the bitter battles between the Ward and Hopkins factions in Rhode Island during the 1760's. After a 1762 Virginia act reducing the voting qualification from ownership of 100 to 50 acres of land was disapproved by the crown, the colony seems to have enforced the lower standard anyway. By 1770 the ever sour Massachusetts Tory Thomas Hutchinson reported that at Boston town meetings, which were supposed to be open only to holders of forty pounds' worth of property, "anything with the appearance of a man is admitted without scrutiny. . . ." Less biased observers made similar observations in Pennsylvania during the same period. In Connecticut, Governor Oliver Wolcott noted in 1821, the property qualifications had been "essentially nugatory" from the early eighteenth century on.

In other colonies, men who could not meet the property requirement were sometimes allowed to vote on grounds of "good character" or "freemanship." Fluctuations in the value of the currency, especially during the Revolution, offered election officials considerable room to manipulate voter lists. The line between full citizen and ineligible wavered with the rate and exactness of assessments of property values, which was even less precise and more subject to political machinations in an age of nonprofessional tax collectors than it is today. Since the vast majority of white men could expect to qualify legally at least when they reached middle age, and since many others would be allowed to vote even if they did not attain the stated requisites, it is no wonder that there was little recorded protest against colonial property qualifications.

What were later attacked and defended in inflated rhetoric in both England and America as matters of high principle were in practice reduced to life-cycle effects and often biased or quirky administrative procedures. As the Salem, Massachusetts, *Essex Register* noted in 1820, in politically exciting elections, a property qualification was an invitation to fraud, "and these are the only times when any qualifications are necessary, for it is only at such times that they are attended to. If there was any way by which no one but those who would exercise their judgment freely, and without influence or corruption should be admitted to the vote, we would most gladly subscribe to it. But we are satisfied no such way exists—we therefore must, most certainly open the door of universal suffrage."

The American Revolution, in suffrage as in many other matters, pushed theory toward a reconciliation with practice. The excited, widespread discussions of political principles and the heightened involvement of young men in meetings, mobs, and militia brought into question not only circumscriptions of voting rights but also current schemes of representation and arguments about consent. Pennsylvania in 1776 and New Hampshire in 1782 went furthest, substituting a taxpaying for a property qualification. Adult males could satisfy the requirement by paying a fixed-amount poll or capitation (head) tax. Notorious in the twentieth century as a southern suffrage restriction, the poll tax was initially a liberalizing provision. North Carolina, in 1776, kept its fifty-acre requirement for voting

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for state senators but followed the Pennsylvania plan in its lower house. Georgia in 1777 reduced its fifty-acre to a ten-pound exclusion, weakened that further by allowing all men who followed a "mechanic trade" to vote, and, in 1789, moved to a simple poll-tax standard for all white men. Other states reduced requirements by restating the previous pound sterling standards in inflated American currency or by cutting, but still keeping, property requirements. Only Delaware, Rhode Island, and Connecticut left their qualifications untouched before 1800.

The disfranchisement of Roman Catholics was terminated in New York, Virginia, Maryland, Rhode Island, and South Carolina, and of free persons of color, in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and North Carolina. New Jersey in 1777 even allowed women to vote if they possessed, in their own right, fifty pounds of property. (Because of sexually discriminatory laws concerning property-holding, this provision primarily enfranchised widows.) Countering this pluralistic trend, however, adherents of the British cause were generally excluded by test oaths or by less formal means during, and to some degree even after, the Revolution.

Between 1800 and 1860 the remaining formal impediments to universal *white male* suffrage were almost everywhere removed, but barriers to voting by free persons of color and women were raised. Although the largely symbolic contests over the abolition of property tests often became intertwined with factional or partisan concerns, there was no consistent split on the issue. Jeffersonians, Federalists, Democrats, Whigs, and Republicans all appeared on both sides of the universal white male suffrage question. In Maryland, for instance, a five-year struggle over a universal male suffrage bill originally introduced by a Federalist ended in the adoption in 1802 of a Jeffersonian's universal white male suffrage act. In Connecticut the demand for a broader franchise was part of the Republican program against the Federalists. After a struggle that lasted for almost two decades, and that saw Federalist officials jail a Republican for sedition because of his statements in favor of universal male suffrage, Connecticut in 1818 abolished its property qualification and enfranchised all white males who paid any taxes or served in the militia. At the same time, the state disfranchised future black voters. In perhaps the first version of a

grandfather clause—one, ironically, that worked to protect black rather than white voting rights—Connecticut allowed those blacks who currently voted to retain the privilege.

By adopting a uniform taxpaying or militia-service standard for white males in 1821, New York enlarged its electorate from the 30 percent who had been allowed to vote for state senators and governor, and the 78 percent who had been able to vote for lower-house members, to 90 percent of the white adult males. While not completely excluded, blacks were required to own \$250 worth of property—probably the highest property qualification in the history of America—before they could vote. A decade and a half later, North Carolina and Tennessee followed Connecticut and New York down the road toward legal "Herrenvolk democracy," or equality within the tribe, by ending most restrictions on white males in statewide elections. They simultaneously disfranchised free blacks. New Jersey in 1807 abandoned its complex, largely unenforced property restrictions for a taxpaying standard but also eliminated what might be called its "widow suffrage."

While Frederick Jackson Turner believed that the "wind of Democracy" from the trans-Appalachian west blew away eastern property restrictions on the suffrage, Williamson has shown more recently that it was the practical matter of the insecurity of, and extensive litigation about, western land titles in the period of settlement, not egalitarian theory, that accounted for the adoption of universal white manhood suffrage in the western states. Until land titles were settled, in other words, comparatively few could prove that they owned enough to meet a property qualification. In fact, the western states largely constructed their constitutions, including their suffrage provisions, by cutting apart and pasting together the fundamental documents of their eastern neighbors. Of the eight states that joined the Union from 1796 to 1821, three limited the electorate to male taxpayers, while five, including four north of the Ohio River, authorized every white adult male, but no blacks, to vote.

The most spectacular antebellum conflict over the suffrage was the "Dorr war" in Rhode Island. Although the state's \$134 freehold qualification had enfranchised a half to three-fourths of the adult males during the colonial period, the rise in the number of urban industrial workers,

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many of them Roman Catholic immigrants, increased both the proportion disfranchised and the reluctance of the rural white Anglo-Saxon Protestant voting majority to abolish the restriction or to reallocate legislative seats in accordance with population shifts. A Whig who organized the moderate Constitutionalist party in 1834, Thomas W. Dorr, growingly frustrated with the refusal of either Whigs or Democrats to move toward suffrage liberalization, embraced revolution in 1841. Encouraging a boycott of a regularly called election for delegates to a state constitutional convention that he was sure would merely forestall reform, Dorr invited all white adult males, not just the qualified electors (a group that included propertied blacks), to vote in an extralegal election of delegates to a counterconvention. While the legal or "landholders" convention substituted a personal-property for the freehold qualification, Dorr's convention gave population greater weight in the legislature and introduced universal white adult male suffrage. The Dorrites could ignore protests by the blacks and antislavery whites at the black disfranchisement, but they could not convince their supporters that the "Old Charter" group's new constitution, which through a compromise on the suffrage expanded the state's electorate by about 60 percent and added comparatively mild nativist provisions, was so conservative that it merited armed resistance.

While the collapse of his rebellion left Dorr in jail and about 30 percent of the Rhode Island adult males voteless, and while reformers failed to abolish taxpaying and similarly fairly minor requirements for the franchise in Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, all other states by 1860 had adopted virtually universal white native male suffrage; and five New England states had black male suffrage as well. At certain points during the nineteenth century, a total of twenty-two states even allowed alien adult males who indicated the desire to become American citizens to vote. Although America had moved formally "from property to democracy"—for white adult males—by the Civil War, a wide distribution of property and the frequent relaxation of statutory requirements had always limited the impact of those restrictions. How widespread was actual voting and what effect did repeal of the requirements have?

Colonial election returns and estimates of the

adult male population are fragmentary. Elections were sometimes uncontested, or, in open polls, candidates who watched their chances dwindle might drop out during the voting, cutting turnout and often resulting in unrecorded votes. Almost no returns before 1730 and few enough thereafter have been found. Of those that survive for the last forty years of the colonial era, the highest percentage of white adult males, often close to half, voted in Virginia assembly elections. New York and Pennsylvania turnout ranged between 20 and 40 percent; Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, between 10 and 25 percent; and data from other colonies are too fragmentary to support generalizations. Townsmen voted in larger percentages than farmers, and participation rose when races heated up. In seven Rhode Island gubernatorial contests between Richard Ward and Stephen Hopkins from 1758 to 1767 (four wins for Hopkins to three for Ward), turnout jumped from about 25 percent in the colony's previous votes to over 45 percent. The candidates' margins ranged from 10 to 450 actual votes.

After declining as the patriots united among themselves and swept away or intimidated their Tory opponents, and as fighting disrupted colonial society during the 1770's, turnout rose again during the 1780's. The still fragmentary returns indicate that about 10–15 percent of the white adult males throughout America voted at the beginning of the Revolution and between 20 and 40 percent during the 1780's. Less than 20 percent cast ballots for delegates to the state conventions that ratified the Constitution and in the first congressional races in 1788. These figures represented only a fraction of those eligible to vote, who, according to the leading student of conditions nationwide, amounted to 50–80 percent of the white adult males before and 60–90 percent after the Revolution. As the noted eighteenth-century Connecticut minister Ezra Stiles remarked, in words that now seem anachronistic only because of their occupational reference, "The multitude will not leave the plow to have a governor of their taste."

Turnout rose in the 1790's and early 1800's in areas where both Federalists and Jeffersonians were strong; it generally dropped off after the War of 1812; and it revived considerably in the 1820's. In the South during the period from 1822 to 1860, gubernatorial turnout never fell

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below 60 percent of the white adult males and was often above 70 percent. Southern presidential turnout, however, topped 40 percent for the first time in 1836 and never surpassed the voting percentages in simultaneous antebellum statewide races. Why did a loosening of qualifications not lead to an immediate and automatic rise in turnout; why did state contests in the first half of the nineteenth century usually attract more voters than national races; and why has participation always seemed to vary, not so much with the importance of the issues involved, such as the Revolution and the Constitution, but with the closeness of the contest?

Answers to these questions require a brief consideration of the fundamental topic of why people vote at all. Adherents of the so-called rational-choice school in political science theorize that potential voters roughly calculate the time and effort it would cost them to collect sufficient information to make a decision on whom to vote for, the benefits they might gain if their preferred candidate were to win, and/or how much they might lose if another candidate were victorious, the costs in opportunities for monetary gain or for engaging in leisure activities that they would have to forgo by casting a ballot, the chance that their vote might make a difference in the outcome, and the pleasure they would feel by performing (or guilt if they did not perform) their civic duty of voting. Yet since the benefits are usually public goods (that is, commodities, broadly defined) that everyone enjoys merely by membership in the relevant community, since the probability of being the decisive voter is tiny in any large group, and since most people are probably less affected by feelings of civic duty than professional students of politics are, it is difficult to see why anyone would rationally decide to vote. He could gain all the benefits and incur none of the costs by being a "free rider." That otherwise highly rational people, sometimes including even political theorists, do vote is referred to as "the paradox of voting."

The rational explanation for the paradox is generally that some people have incentives to reduce the costs of participation and increase the costs of not participating, either for particular voters or groups of voters, or for all voters in general, or to offer them particularized benefits to vote. Because the regime usually gains legitimacy from higher voting participation, the state

generally seeks to foster a belief in the duty to vote and the importance of voting through formal and informal education. Modern registration laws in the United States often require that a voter's name be purged if he fails to vote in one or more elections. Since it is generally more time-consuming to register than to vote, voters uninterested in one campaign but who think they may be more concerned in future campaigns may vote just to remain registered. This provision, rational for officeholders who want to maintain the state's legitimacy, is equivalent to a tax on non-voting, which has been adopted more straightforwardly in some countries. Because candidates for office, patronage employees or potential employees, and certain interest groups stand to make sizable private gains or to suffer considerable losses depending on election outcomes, they canvass, distribute information about campaigns, facilitate trips to the polls, or make donations for those purposes. Until the Civil War, state and local governments, not the national government, were the founts of patronage, and they continued to be the chief centers of policy-making on issues that affected large economic interests until the New Deal. Organizational and propaganda activities cut down the price of information for the voter and often induce feelings of guilt if the recognized duty is unperformed or especially if a personal promise, made for instance to a campaign worker, is not fulfilled. The same groups may also offer nonpublic goods, such as programs benefiting only certain groups or members of the public, participation in political clubs that offer companionship, recreation, or a chance for psychic or material gains, or, even more simply, bribes to voters or to people believed to be able to influence numbers of voters. Of course, people may vote for irrational or nonrational reasons as well, such as incomplete or false information about the virtues or vices of candidates or parties, misconceptions about the importance of their single votes, or altruism. In a good many cases, however, these "mistakes" on the voter's part are largely the result of self-interested action by someone else.

Such considerations largely explain the general patterns of participation of eligible voters in American elections. During the eighteenth century and much of the nineteenth century it was more difficult for people in sparsely settled areas than for town or city dwellers to obtain informa-

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tion or get to the polls, or for politically interested persons to reduce these costs for them. An increase in the uncertainty of an election outcome greatly stimulates activity by those with a personal or organizational stake. Differences in the range of activities that a government performs and in the number and value of particularized benefits—most importantly, jobs that can be promised to campaign workers—induce differences that are linked to voter participation in both state and private activity. Variations in stated voter qualifications and in their administration, in nonsuffrage laws that facilitate or discourage voting (such as the availability of polling places), and in the value of a vote (the result, for instance, of diverse schemes for apportioning legislative seats) set the general, public constraints on turnout. Private, self-interested actions determine how closely turnout will approach those limits.

Yet the constraints remain crucial. Had blacks or women or children or, in all colonies before 1776 and in some states up to 1860, all white adult males been eligible to vote, the number of recorded ballots would no doubt have risen markedly. Had people other than white adult males been included in the denominators of turnout percentages, those proportions would have been much lower. The reasons for the restrictions—it will hardly do to call these seldom fully explicated, often self-contradictory, and nearly always self-serving sets of statements “theories”—therefore deserve fuller attention.

Justifications for granting or withholding the suffrage refer to values at three levels: that of the state or society, of the group, and of the individual. According to John Locke, who was immensely influential in America, men form social compacts to avoid instability and to protect such fundamental interests as private property. Since dictatorship or unchecked kingship maximizes the influence of personal quirks and differences on state policy from ruler to ruler, it often leads to instability. The electorate should therefore consist of more than one person. But it should not, the argument continues, include all. Those with no “stake in society,” classically indexed by property ownership—especially landownership—or at least residency, might favor governmental actions that violated some individuals’ rights or otherwise threatened the social order. Having “no will of their own”—the phrase is

Montesquieu’s; its currency in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and America is due to Blackstone’s adoption of it; and the thought behind it may derive from Aristotle’s view that the slave is a mere will-less tool of his master—the propertyless are easy prey for demagogues or for the rich, who may either buy their votes or control those who are dependent on them. That contradictions between the “too much will” and the “no will” views were never acknowledged by proponents of property qualifications indicates that one or the other of them—doubtless the second—was largely a rationalization for a position taken for the other reason. To enfranchise persons who are socially dependent is therefore to violate the norm of equality among the voters. Those who are politically ignorant, who lack information about a particular community, or who have some special interest in state policy, moreover, possess no informed, unbiased, objective will; hence, by this line of reasoning, their participation pollutes the quality of decisions made by the state.

Yet at times, even according to this deeply conservative view, suffrage should be extended beyond the bounds of the propertied and well-informed. Inclusion co-opts the discontented (in the phrase of the 1960’s, encourages people to “work within the system”) and is therefore a prophylactic for revolution as well as a source of legitimacy. Thus, the Virginia Assembly extended the suffrage in 1676 at the time of Bacon’s Rebellion—but effectively rescinded its action after the rebellion was crushed. Although Levellers at the Putney Debates in England in 1647 failed to convince the leaders of the Puritan Commonwealth that those who fought deserved to vote, the impulse of leaders to rally support during wartime, particularly from soldiers or potential soldiers, led to militia suffrage during the American Revolution, to calls by Abraham Lincoln and others to enfranchise blacks who had fought in the Civil War, and to the ratification of the eighteen-year-old-vote amendment during the Vietnam War in 1971. It is also no coincidence that struggles for woman suffrage in Britain, Canada, and America succeeded—in the American case after a half-century of struggle—at the time of World War I. Other societal values that some proponents claimed were advanced through incorporating more people in the electorate included encouraging whites to

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perform militia or slave patrol duties, solidifying white support for slavery, and increasing tax revenues by requiring poll tax payments by voters.

Arguments about the suffrage that refer to groups or individuals have, in America, focused principally on Afro-Americans and women, since they were the only distinct sets of adults unenfranchised through much of the country's history. Although in only three of fifteen state or territorial referenda in the North from 1846 through 1869 did black suffrage win, Republicans imposed Negro voting on the District of Columbia and on the seceding states in a series of post-Civil War laws. Having been race-baited by Democrats throughout the 1850's and 1860's, northern Republicans—some but not all of whom favored black voting—feared to identify the party squarely with national racially impartial suffrage until they had secured the presidency in the 1868 election. A party necessity in the South, black suffrage was perhaps the party's major liability in the North. With Grant elected, however, the Republicans moved quickly to secure a supposedly permanent constitutional buttress for southern black suffrage and to nullify the issue in the North by driving the Fifteenth Amendment through Congress and the state legislatures in fifteen months. They assumed correctly that Democratic politicians would mitigate the severity of their attacks on a group enfranchised at home, and the 1870–1872 campaigns witnessed “New Departure” northern Democrats curbing some of their more strident “Sambo” rhetoric and even making cautious appeals to the new black voters.

Although the impetus for suffrage for females, like that for blacks, had its origin in the antislavery movement, its accomplishment was more difficult—but also, once granted, more permanent. Proclaiming the postwar period “the Negro's hour,” Republican leaders quashed the attempt of women's leaders, as Elizabeth Cady Stanton put it, to avail themselves of “the strong arm and blue uniform of the black soldier to walk in [to the voting booth] by his side. . . .” Only the most radical Republicans, such as Thaddeus Stevens and George Washington Julian, backed an effort to add sexually to racially impartial suffrage in a District of Columbia government bill in 1867, and the same politically pragmatic view prevailed on the Fifteenth Amendment. To join both deeply controversial provisions, politicians felt,

doubtless correctly, would doom any change whatever. Frustrated and furious at the defeat, suffrage leader and former abolitionist activist Susan B. Anthony denounced “the ignorant foreign vote” and exploded into an ethnocentric diatribe: “It is an open, deliberate insult to American womanhood to be cast down under the iron-heeled peasantry of the Old World and the slaves of the New, as we shall be in the practical working of the Fifteenth Amendment. . . .” The 1869 split in the small woman suffrage movement—part, until the 1890 reunification, concentrated on stimulating actions at the state level and continued the alliance with the Republicans, and part focused on a national amendment and forsook its old party ties—along with a general waning of radical and Republican political power after the 1860's doomed national female suffrage until the second decade of the twentieth century.

While the fundamental reason for supporting black or woman suffrage was the simple belief in the equal natural rights of every human individual, arguments for and against their exercise of the franchise focused on their alleged group traits and the effects of enfranchising them on other groups and interests. Hereditarian racists asserted that blacks were either naturally inferior in mental capacity or naturally servile and therefore lacking in the “independence” that was a necessary characteristic of voters. Environmentalist racists arrived at the same conclusions by blaming slavery or lack of education for the blacks' alleged traits. The former thought that no blacks should ever vote; the latter usually admitted that the flaws might in principle be curable with time but had difficulty determining when members of the “child race” could be expected to “mature.” Parallel contentions about women pictured them as emotional rather than coldly rational, as concerned with personal and familial rather than with general and societal matters, and as too weak and delicate to take part in the political hurly-burly. The “masculine” qualities were, it was assumed by men at least, desirable in citizens. Woman suffragists sometimes turned these stereotypes to their advantage by claiming, for instance, that an electorate that included women would be less corruptible, more compassionate, and less bellicose than an all-male polity. Indeed, it was doubtless because of their supposed special competence in the rais-

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ing of children that nineteenth-century women were often awarded the right to vote in school elections. Kentucky gave widows with children "school suffrage" as early as 1838. Kansas extended the privilege to all women in 1861. By 1890, eighteen other states allowed women to cast ballots in school elections.

Although individuals could hardly defend themselves against discrimination based on their membership in identifiable groups, because no single individual in a democracy would have enough political power to overturn general discriminatory laws or practices, the argument that blacks and/or women needed the vote for self-protection did make sense as a group-based justification. When the immediate post-Civil War southern state governments passed "black codes" subjecting the freedmen to second-class citizenship in the economic, social, and legal, as well as electoral, spheres, and when the leaders and the police of the same governments stood by—when they did not actively join in—while blacks in Memphis, New Orleans, and other places were wantonly slaughtered in "race riots," all but the most racist northerners agreed that some federal guarantees against a return to slavery or quasi-slavery were needed. Generally opposed to a continuing federal police role, expecting that southern elections would be conducted with at least a degree of openness and recognition of rights, and hoping that the votes would be counted relatively fairly, Yankee Republicans considered the vote for blacks something close to a panacea.

In contrast to such life-and-death matters, legal discriminations against women seemed comparatively mild. Most adult women could rely on their husbands to help guard their physical safety, and male voters had an interest in protecting the extrafamilial economic and social rights of their wives and daughters. Moreover, opponents of suffrage for any group could always contend that its interest was better protected by the current electors than it would be by the assertedly less competent group itself, or at least that their cause was already adequately guarded. In Aileen S. Kraditor's fine summary phrase for this antisuffragist contention, "woman was not a class apart but a part of every class." The self-protection justification for black voting therefore seemed, in the 1860's at least, stronger than that for women. As the most prom-

inent nineteenth-century black leader, Frederick Douglass, who had also staunchly supported woman suffrage since the famous 1848 Seneca Falls convention, remarked in 1869:

When women, because they are women, are dragged from their homes and hung upon lamp-posts; when their children are torn from their arms and their brains dashed to the pavement; when they are objects of insult and outrage at every turn; when they are in danger of having their homes burnt down over their heads; when their children are not allowed to enter schools; then they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot.

Investing black or female Americans with the franchise would also, proponents contended, balance or reduce the influence of other groups. Republicans often asserted in the post-Civil War period that suffrage for southern Negroes was necessary to ensure the loyalty of the formerly rebellious areas. Especially after the midwestern women's antiliquor campaign of 1874 and the contemporaneous founding of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, both "wet" and "dry" politicians, as well as brewers and distillers, generally assumed that the enfranchisement of women would greatly increase the prohibitionists' strength. As the already quoted statement by Anthony demonstrates, moreover, suffragist spokespersons, seeming conveniently to forget that not all women were white native Anglo-Saxon Protestants, also repeatedly asserted that women's votes would reduce the political influence of "undesirable" groups, especially northern immigrant slum dwellers, who were assumed to support urban political machines, and southern blacks. Such contentions, paradoxically, were most often asserted around the turn of the century, when literacy tests, poll taxes, registration laws, and secret ballot acts were already seriously cutting down these groups' political power. Weakened, they made easier targets. By 1894 Elizabeth Cady Stanton publicly endorsed a literacy test in English to disfranchise many of the foreign born as well as the "ignorant native vote." Having failed to walk into the voting booth with the black man, Stanton now hoped to gain entrance by helping to expel him and his foreign-born brother.

Undoubtedly the most important groups that



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potentially could be affected by the inclusion or exclusion of any class in the electorate were political parties or factions or, in disorganized political systems, cliques of calculating politicians. Scholars sometimes treat the rules that structure the polity as if they were composed behind a "veil of ignorance." It is possible, this view implies, to forget one's current socioeconomic and political positions, as well as the ways in which those positions have shaped one's views of how the world works and ought to work, and simply to decide disinterestedly what is best for the state. Human beings, even the least worldly theorists, appear to be incapable of adopting this artificial, fictive posture. It seems hardly coincidental, for instance, that to the monarch of Western philosophers, Plato, the best rule was that of the philosopher king; that to Blackstone, codifier of the principles of laws protecting property, only property-holders should vote; that such modern conservatives as James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock should design a constitutional structure that would make the redistributive measures of the welfare state nearly impossible.

Politicians, whose success depends on how well they know and can manipulate the rules of politics, are no purer than philosophers. The crucial facts about Afro-American and woman suffrage—why blacks won the vote so soon after seven-eighths of them were emancipated, why they were disfranchised around the turn of the century, and why it took so long to pass national woman suffrage—cannot be understood without considering the partisan consequences of each fact.

Why the Federalist and Whig parties contained more antislavery politicians than did the Democratic; and why the Democrats, northern as well as southern, disproportionately backed moves to disfranchise and, more generally, to discriminate against Afro-Americans have never been satisfactorily explained. The truth of these statements, as well as the fact that, during the antebellum period, blacks able to vote generally favored the party more committed to ending slavery, has long been recognized.

While some hoped or feared that postbellum southern freedmen—poor, almost universally illiterate, and, as wage-earning field hands, renters, or sharecroppers, economically dependent on white landowners—would vote as their former masters dictated, Republican politicians cal-

culated otherwise. In any event, the Republicans had little choice except to rely on the dependent but, they hoped, willful blacks for support in the South. For, as Radical Republican leader Thaddeus Stevens, appealing in 1867 to those party colleagues less convinced than he of the justice of black suffrage but who shared his belief that Republican party control was necessary for the nation's safety (or perhaps just their own), remarked: "If impartial suffrage is excluded in the rebel States, then every one of them is sure to send a solid rebel representative delegation to Congress, and cast a solid rebel electoral vote. They, with their kindred copperheads of the North, would always elect the President and control Congress."

There was no time to wait for blacks to gain sufficient education and property to satisfy the environmentalist racists' stringent criteria for enfranchisement, and little possibility of blacks' passing the tests unless they could first eliminate the discriminatory laws and practices that hobbled them. In the South, Republicans needed black votes immediately. Likewise, in the North the Republicans had to act rapidly to grant black suffrage in order to stop the Democrats from using its threatened passage as an effective issue. Since all reckonings concurred, the astonishing thing is not the overwhelming Republican support for the Fifteenth Amendment in 1869–1870, but, rather, that ordering that solid phalanx took four years.

The enduring southern Democratic opposition to Negro voting is no more surprising, in the light of the importance that both common sense and the rational-choice perspective attribute to partisan motives than is Republican support for it or the continuation until well into the twentieth century of northern Democratic apologies for southern election practices. Black voting did not cease when President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1877 symbolically sent federal troops in the South back to their barracks, thereby ending the national government's attempt to protect the rights of black and white Republicans by force of arms. In the 1880 presidential election a majority of the black adult males were estimated to have voted in nine of the eleven ex-Confederate states, and in all but one of the eleven the blacks even succeeded in having a majority of their votes counted for the party of Lincoln.

The physical intimidation of Republicans dis-

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rupted too many delicate social and economic arrangements for the leaders of society to feel very comfortable about repeatedly invoking it. More to the point, it did not always work. Fraud was more effective. An Alabama Democratic leader boasted that "any time it was necessary the black belt could put in ten, fifteen, twenty or thirty thousand negro votes," while a Virginia Democrat admitted that elections in his state were "crimes against popular government and treason against liberty." But obvious ballot-box chicanery handed northern Republicans and southern oppositionists ready-made campaign themes and invited the GOP, when it controlled Congress and the presidency, to unseat fraudulently elected Democratic congressmen and to try to pass laws aimed at preventing corrupt elections.

More effective and permanent were Democratic moves to change state and local election laws in ways that diluted southern Republican political power and discouraged blacks and poor whites from voting. As soon as they regained majorities in the state legislatures during the 1870's, and continuing throughout the 1880's, Democrats drew blatantly gerrymandered legislative and congressional districts, imposed at-large elections in areas in which blacks were in the minority, called informal and later legalized white Democratic primaries, passed lengthy residency and complicated registration requirements, adopted provisions that barred from the ballot box men guilty of minor crimes, and designed multiple ballot box and secret ballot laws that served as very effective literacy tests. It was generally later, often after the turn of the century, that southern Democrats amended their state constitutions by adopting the better-known devices: poll taxes, and straightforward literacy and property qualifications, with "grandfather" and "understanding" clause exemptions inserted in order to win the support of poor whites who feared, correctly, that the disfranchisement measures were partially aimed at them. Administered, as they were designed to be, with extreme partisan and racial bias, these legal changes decimated the black electorate, greatly reduced the number of poor whites who voted, and severely diminished the chances of anti-Democratic parties, except in isolated pockets of the South, for generations.

Whereas Republicans and Populists of both

racess overwhelmingly opposed these changes, Democrats sometimes openly avowed their partisan purposes. "Upon the adoption of this Constitution whether right or wrong," a delegate to his state's "disfranchisement" constitutional convention stated, "the very salvation and existence of the Democratic party in Alabama depends." The framers of potent de facto literacy tests in Tennessee and Arkansas, in almost identical words, urged their legislative colleagues to vote for their bills "in the interests of the Democratic party." While the racial reasons for the southern suffrage restrictions were doubtless primary, partisan motives were important, probably even necessary, for their final passage.

The facts that woman suffrage split the parties much less cleanly and that, while controversial and difficult to achieve, it was a much less deeply divisive issue in American society than was that of black voting rights, largely account for the length of the struggle over the adoption of the Nineteenth, or "Anthony," Amendment, the absence of any serious attempt to repeal or legally to undermine it, and the relatively small impact of women's votes on the political system. Since compatibility of attitudes and of many social traits is an important factor in marital choice and stability, since discussions of politics, like those of other topics, may be lengthier and generally occur more often in the home than do dialogues with particular individuals outside the family, since living together puts a premium on consensus, and since income in families is usually pooled, which implies that all family members share a common interest in each other's economic welfare, adult members of the same families are quite likely to vote similarly. Because both Democratic and Republican men usually have wives and because the vast majority of American women, at least until very recently, have been married during the age period when they are likely to participate most regularly in politics, the division in women's votes is likely to parallel quite closely that in the male electorate. Since, as a consequence of these obvious facts, neither party had a great deal either to gain or to lose from woman suffrage, neither had much incentive to risk taking a leading role on an issue that was not strikingly popular with current male voters. Like the abolitionists before the emergence of a credible antislavery political party during the 1850's, the

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woman suffrage movement had to conduct a general campaign of education outside the parties.

Ironically, the more this campaign succeeded and the more women discussed politics and, by confounding the stereotype of female political passivity, made clear that the stated excuses for excluding them from the electorate were nonsensical, the more likely they were to formulate precise programs and to gain favorable attention from governments. The more politically active they became, in other words, the easier it was to obtain specific profemale legislation or to eliminate sexually discriminatory laws and, therefore, the less they needed the vote themselves. By 1887, for instance, thirty-six states and the District of Columbia had enacted statutes giving women control over their own wages, and others had followed Mississippi's 1839 lead in passing married women's property acts. On the other hand, one of the chief reasons why women lobbied for special protective laws, such as statutes setting minimum wages and maximum hours for female employees, was the growth in the proportion of women working outside the home, a significant percentage of whom lived apart from family units for at least a time. By 1890, women made up about a sixth of the labor force and nearly a third of the professionals (mostly schoolteachers). By 1900, there were over 100,000 female typists and secretaries, over 200,000 female sales clerks, and, in the textile and clothing industries alone, nearly a million female factory workers. If independence was a prerequisite, and the need for public protection a rationale for suffrage, an increasing number of women fulfilled both conditions by the turn of the century.

The response to changed conditions and to growingly effective pressure by suffragists was neither automatic nor uniform. Republicans, perhaps because of their greater identification with the prohibitionist cause, supported woman suffrage more strongly than Democrats did. In the ten Senate and House roll calls shown in Table 1, Republicans were more prosuffrage than Democrats in all except the two votes taken in 1867; in six of the eight later votes, the differences were statistically significant at the conventional 5 percent level. The five climactic roll calls taken during 1918 and 1919, however, showed majorities of both parties, although much more

TABLE 1  
Votes on Woman Suffrage

Party	For	Against	Chi-Square	Significance of Chi-Square
<i>1867—39th Congress, 2d Session, Senate</i>				
R	4 (13.3%)	26	5.78	0.016
D	5 (50.0%)	5		
<i>1867—39th Congress, 2d Session, House</i>				
R	28 (28.0%)	72	28.52	<0.001
D	19 (90.5%)	2		
<i>1887—49th Congress, 2d Session, Senate</i>				
R	16 (59.3%)	11	20.04	<0.01
D	0 (0.0%)	23		
<i>1914—63rd Congress, 2d Session, Senate</i>				
R	21 (63.6%)	12	4.22	.04
D	14 (38.9%)	22		
<i>1915—63rd Congress, 2d Session, House</i>				
R	87 (71.9%)	34	48.56	<0.01
D	86 (33.6%)	170		
<i>1918—65th Congress, 2nd Session, House</i>				
R	163 (82.7%)	34	47.21	<0.01
D	102 (50.2%)	101		
<i>1918—65th Congress, 2d Session, Senate</i>				
R	27 (73.0%)	10	2.77	.096
D	26 (55.3%)	21		
<i>1919—65th Congress, 3d Session, Senate</i>				
R	30 (71.4%)	12	1.87	.0172
D	24 (57.1%)	18		
<i>1919—66th Congress, 1st Session, Senate</i>				
R	36 (81.8%)	8	7.26	.01
D	20 (54.1%)	17		
<i>1919—66th Congress, 1st Session, House</i>				
R	199 (90.9%)	20	53.63	<0.01
D	103 (59.5%)	70		

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NOTE TO TABLE 1. Including abstainers does not substantially affect the significance levels of any of the statistical measures. The Chi-Square test is one that compares an actual table with one that is "expected" according to certain assumptions. In Table 1, for instance, we test whether the members of each party had the same or differing views on woman suffrage. A 5 percent level of significance means that one could expect to observe a particular result one out of twenty times in the "sample" even if there were no relationship in the "population." Here, the "sample" is members of Congress and the "population" is party elites or perhaps party identifiers.

disproportionate percentages of Republicans than of Democrats, in the suffragist ranks. Once it became clear that the amendment stood a good chance of passage, pressure on all politicians to be on the winning side mounted; and, despite the efforts of Alice Paul and the radical Woman's party to hold the Democrats responsible for delaying the drive for the vote, by 1919 neither party could credibly claim sole responsibility for enfranchising women.

Gratitude to a party that was largely responsible for enfranchisement and, the other side of the coin, retribution against the opposition ceremonialized a marriage of blacks to the Republican party that was to last for over sixty years. A similar set of facts might conceivably have moved women disproportionately into one party after 1920. But Republicans lacked a two-thirds majority, such as they had had when they passed the Reconstruction measures during the 1860's, which might have allowed the GOP to pass the Anthony Amendment without Democratic votes; and the Democrats were less adamantly opposed to female suffrage than they were to Negro voting. Another contingency that might have produced a "gender gap" in politics would have been a clear-cut difference in attitudes between the sexes on a major issue of national concern. Yet the two great issues on which observers purported to find systematic differences between the sexes, prohibition and war, were settled, at least in a sense, by the Eighteenth Amendment and the Versailles peace treaty—just before women nationally got the vote. Since a majority of men for a variety of reasons took the side of the "dry" (Republican) party during the 1920's, women's votes—presuming that they were largely antiliquor—

could only add to the Republican majorities. And it was two decades before American involvement in a major military conflict became a serious possibility. Furthermore, since before the Great Depression both parties assumed that social and economic regulations were the business of the state governments and not the national government, neither the Democratic nor the Republican party during the 1920's took distinctive national stands on welfare issues that might have been of special interest to women. Calculations by political elites, the nearly simultaneous passage of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Amendments and the end of World War I, and widely held assumptions about the responsibilities of different levels of governments combined to ensure that woman suffrage did not, as Kradtitor has noted, "significantly alter American voting patterns."

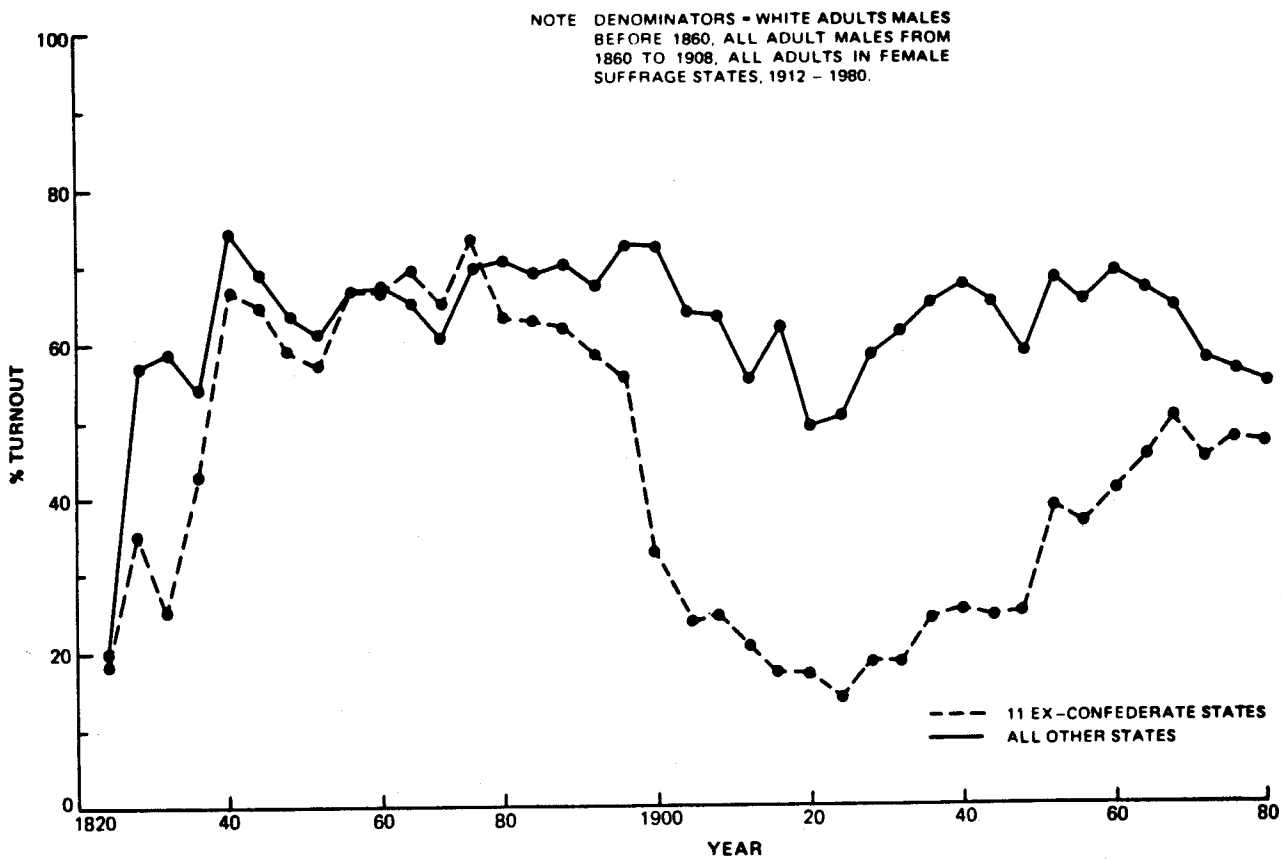
Those patterns were much more variable in the twentieth than in the nineteenth century. Figure 1, which graphs the participation of the potential electorate in presidential contests from 1824 to 1980, reveals three major shifts over the last century, each of which has given rise to an important scholarly controversy. The first is the drastic drop in turnout after 1888 in the South and the smaller but still significant decrease after 1900 outside the South. The second is the post-1948 rise in southern voting. The third is the nonsouthern decline since 1960.

Political scientist V. O. Key, Jr., believed that disfranchisement laws did not account for the turn-of-the-century "decimation of the southern electorate." Rather, these laws merely "recorded a *fait accompli* brought about, or destined to be brought about, by more fundamental political processes," such as the decline in party competition. When the southern Populists and Republicans ceased to contest elections seriously, many of their partisans dropped out, which, in turn, reduced the incentives for Democratic activists to cajole their followers into going to the polls.

More recent research has stood Key on his head. A study of all the southern states and of all of the restrictions on the suffrage, registration, and secret ballot laws, as well as the more often noted literacy tests and poll taxes, shows that the passage of laws restricting the franchise in the South nearly always preceded and produced, rather than followed and resulted from, deteriorations in party competition. Opposition

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FIGURE 1: VOTING TURNOUT FOR PRESIDENT, BY REGION



party percentages dropped by only an average of 1 percent in the elections immediately preceding the passage of disfranchisement laws in the eleven ex-Confederate states, but by 12 percent in the elections succeeding their passage. Comparisons of estimated black and white turnout in the same sets of elections show black participation falling by 8 percent in the elections preceding, but by 32 percent in the elections succeeding, the enactments; while white turnout actually rose by 2 percent before, but declined by 19 percent after the laws went into effect.

These were merely the short-term and primarily the direct effects of the restrictive laws. In several states the responsibility to pay poll taxes cumulated from year to year, so that instead of having to pay a one-to-three-dollar annual fee to vote, an adult who had abstained from voting in one quadrennial election, and who might well never have been assessed for payment in the interim, could confront at the next election an eight-to-twenty-four-dollar charge—a very substantial monetary payment in a poor region

whose economy ran on credit, not cash. As late as 1960, a one-dollar noncumulative poll tax was estimated to decrease turnout by 7 percent, and a literacy test was associated with a 13–16 percent negative difference in participation. Furthermore, the imposition of relatively small penalties for not voting, which has never been tried in this country but which is not uncommon elsewhere, increases turnout rather dramatically. Turnout in eight countries that penalize nonvoting averaged about 10 percent higher during the 1960's and 1970's than in twenty-two democracies that imposed no such penalties.

Moreover, the “grandfather” and “understanding” tests, which allowed whites to escape having to pass literacy or property qualifications, were usually temporary. After a few years, new voters would, in law at least, have to meet a standard besides that of skin color; and these more stringent qualifications, combined with generational replacement, gradually pruned the electorate further. The restrictions also interacted with depressed party competition to induce even

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more decay in turnout. The erosion of potential votes for the opposition unremittingly diminished the incentives of all parties' activists and the remaining voters to participate. As it became clearer and clearer with each election that because of suffrage restrictions one party was guaranteed victory, both sides lost stomach for the fight.

Nonsouthern turnout among adult males declined by only 10 percent (from 72 percent in 1900 to 62 percent in 1916), compared to more than 45 percent in the South (from 63 percent in 1888 to 17 percent in 1916). Although the competing hypotheses derive from and closely resemble those about the South, no one has yet published a comprehensive study that takes account of all the legal changes that potentially affected voting participation in even one—much less in every—northern state. Key's major scholarly legatee, Walter Dean Burnham, in effect moved the *fait accompli* thesis north and to the political left. After 1896, Burnham contended, Republicans securely controlled the North, and capitalists securely controlled the GOP. To compete outside the South, the Democrats ceased trying to co-opt the Populists, as they had in the 1890's, running, for instance, the extremely conservative Alton B. Parker for president in 1904; both parties acquiesced in an ideological capitalist hegemony that allowed large business interests to develop without significant governmental challenge and even with considerable state assistance. Offered no alternative except a Socialist party that had no chance to win a national election; lower-class voters dropped out. The hole in northern voting participation thus represented the grave of political socialism in America. Conjoining his class interpretation to other scholars' seemingly not very compatible contentions about the ethnic and religious correlates of nineteenth-century voting, Burnham added that ethnocultural conflicts over liquor, parochial schools, and the political recognition of non-British groups, which had enlivened nineteenth-century contests, ceased to divide the parties cleanly. Lacking class, ethnic, or religious issues, politics became uninteresting to many potential voters.

To Burnham's "behavioralist" thesis, Philip E. Converse and Jerrold H. Rusk offered an "institutionalist" alternative. Adopted, at least according to Converse and Rusk, not to disfran-

chise voters but merely to diminish corruption, northern residency and registration statutes had the unintended consequence of increasing everyone's cost of voting, and the laws therefore cut turnout. So did secret ballot laws. By making it impossible to tell whether a bribed voter had carried out his part of the bargain, these laws curtailed turnout-inflating vote buying. Even in areas not covered by such laws, local politicians, Converse guessed, may have dampened corruption to check potential moves by urban legislators to apply the restrictions to them.

In the ensuing exchange with Converse and Rusk and in his subsequent work, Burnham made a place in his story for alterations in the rules of the political game, attributing a third to a half of the decline in participation in certain northern areas to such legal changes as registration. Similarly, a more comprehensive examination of the impact of registration laws by Paul Kleppner and Stephen C. Baker concluded that such laws by themselves accounted for 41–44 percent of the 1900–1916 decline in participation in eleven nonsouthern states. Richard L. McCormick's careful case study of New York state found that registration laws "only assisted a tendency away from voting that lay deeper than the laws themselves." He did not seek to assign a numerical measure to their influence. Although he noted other legal changes, McCormick did not systematically consider the combined effect of registration statutes with a secret ballot law, which, he said, Republicans supported as a literacy test to disfranchise immigrant Democrats, or with the impact of a law scheduling local elections at a different time than state and national elections; this law, he suggested, "may actually have had a greater effect on voter turnout than did registration requirements." In New Jersey, John F. Reynolds has argued that "progressive" reformers' attacks on the late-nineteenth-century partisan political culture, as well as their institution of electoral devices that they self-consciously and effectively designed to make voting more burdensome for those whom they considered "bad citizens," combined (in a mixture that he did not specify precisely) to produce declines in both party-line voting and turnout. Reflecting the ideals of "reformers" rather than of corporate capitalists, as Burnham had earlier seemed to imply, these changes in ethos and law

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discouraged the participation of foreign-born and lower-class New Jerseyans more than they did that of the native-born and wealthier ones.

Three closely related and difficult problems plague these studies. First, since propositions in social science are only possibly true *ceteris paribus* (other things being equal), just what should be "held constant" in this case? In order to measure the impact of one factor, such as a change in an election law, one must somehow determine what turnout would have been if the factor had not been present. Is the best guess based on participation in the previous election, which may somehow have been anomalous, or on that in several preceding contests, which because of cohort replacement and geographic mobility may have involved a rather different set of electors? If such electoral stimuli as candidate personalities and platforms differed before and after a crucial year, should we expect equal participation in each period; and which campaign styles and issue conflicts stimulate more (or less) political interest? Should a switch from campaigns based on ethnic issues to those fought over middle-class political and economic "reform," for example, be expected to stimulate more interest or to dull the voters' appetites? Should we assume that candidate and issue appeals were uniform across the societies in question; or should we allow for different responses to the personal attractiveness of candidates and to different policy positions in, say, urban and rural areas? There are no a priori answers to such questions; but unless scholars openly address them, controversies may continue not because of inherently contradictory results but because of unexamined or poorly justified variations in the manipulation of the data.

Second, the two basic research designs for assessing the institutional and behavioral explanations of the early-twentieth-century changes in turnout have been to compare areas covered and those not covered by a particular law at the same time or to contrast behavior in the same place before and after coverage. In each case it is assumed that the only important institutional change is the one in that particular law and that all other shifts in turnout can be chalked up to behavioral causes. Thus, the glass that holds 30-50 percent of the explanation is viewed as half empty instead of half full. Rarely do students of this period attempt to quantify variations in behavior directly and to match their ex-

planatory power explicitly against that of the modifications of the rules. Furthermore, not all legal changes with potential effects on turnout are taken into account. If literacy tests or secret ballot laws, both of which often depress voting levels, were passed at the same time as registration laws or poll taxes, then the overall effect of institutional changes may be evaluated correctly, but the impacts of particular laws will be confounded with each other. Conversely, if legislatures passed different types of statutes at different times, then the scholar who concentrates on one type of law while ignoring others may underestimate the overall importance of institutional factors.

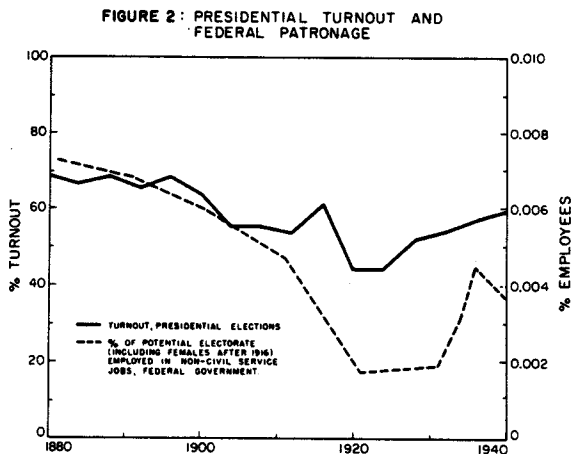
Third, laws may induce behavioral change among activists, which may, in turn, produce alterations in the turnout of the voters. In New York state, for example, the introduction of the secret ballot in 1890 made it much more difficult to tell whether a man who promised to vote a certain way in exchange for money or favors kept his bargain. In an era in which many voters openly declared their partisan preferences, it was still possible to bribe an opponent to stay away from the polls and to determine whether or not he did. Before 1890 the incentive for corruptionists tended to raise vote totals; afterward, to lower them. A systematic analysis of newspaper stories on vote-buying in rural New York indicates a dramatic and immediate response to the change in incentives, which may partially account for the decline in voting participation. Thus the dichotomy between institutional and behavioral factors is in many cases a false one. They often interact.

Another example of their interaction, as well as of an institutional factor not previously considered in the debate, is the depoliticization of the work force of federal, state, and local governments. Before the passage of the Pendleton Act in 1883 most federal employees, especially the large numbers scattered throughout the country who handled the mail and collected tariffs and other taxes, were chosen for their electoral service and not for their administrative talents. Along with state and local government staffs, they provided the core of the campaign workers and often, because they were regularly assessed for monetary contributions, large percentages of the campaign finances as well. Steady and relatively well-paying jobs provided sufficient incen-

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tives for them to rally the partisan troops. Led by businessmen, lawyers, journalists, and doctors, the civil service reformers sought to replace the patronage-dispensing "bosses" with people like themselves and to increase the efficiency of government offices. If they did not intend turnout to decline and businessmen to take over more of the financing of political campaigns, these "best men," as they saw themselves, were clearly not unhappy with those consequences, and they openly cheered any decline in the hold of parties on the electorate.

Intended to be suggestive, rather than conclusive, Figure 2 demonstrates the fairly close parallel between the trends in national presidential election turnout and the proportion of the potential electorate employed by the federal government in nonclassified or patronage jobs. The trends are particularly close between 1880 and 1912, and the gap from 1920 on is less impressive than is the fact that the trends are in the same direction and that the New Deal jump in nonclassified employment roughly parallels the rise in turnout during the 1930's.



Besides leaning on rakes, WPA workers, as Republicans charged at the time, may have hustled Democratic votes. (In a pooled Survey Research Center voter sample drawn from the 1960 and 1972 presidential elections, Ashenfelter and Kelley found that contact with a party worker increased an elector's probability of voting by about 10 percent. Whereas voting hardly seems worthwhile for an elector who perceives an election to be close [how much difference can one vote make?], it is rational for an organization to pressure its members to boost turnout more in a tight contest than in an expected landslide.

This implies that the predicted margin in an election would have had a greater effect in the nineteenth century than in recent times. Even in 1972, government workers in ten states where patronage is still supposed to play a role in employment voted at a 9 percent higher rate than nongovernment workers who had the same amount of education. The turnout difference between the two sets of workers in other states was only 3-4 percent.) The 1939 Hatch Act aimed to stop just such political activity by federal workers. Patronage employment was one solution to the free-rider problem in voting participation. It should not be surprising that while the prevalence of job-seeking campaign canvassers declined and the costs of voting rose—because, for instance, of the institution of registration requirements—both turnout and the intensity of party competition dropped.

**FIGURE 3: White Turnout in Southern Presidential Elections and Gubernatorial Primaries in the South, 1920-48**

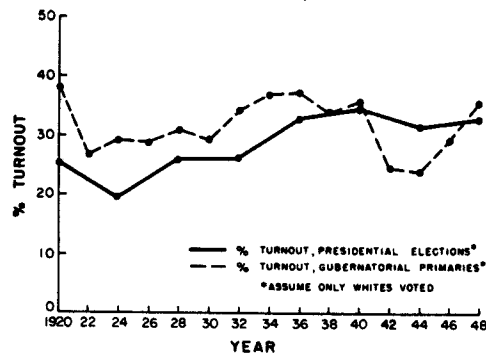


Figure 3 is based on the assumption that no blacks voted in any election, which was certainly untrue, especially after 1944. Returns were taken from Alexander Heard and Donald S. Strong.

If the relation between turnout, changes in laws affecting the electoral system, shifts in parties' policy positions, and variations in party competition is still a matter of controversy in the case of the turn-of-the-century North, it is much less so for the mid-twentieth-century South. As Key noted in *Southern Politics*, the largely unstructured competition within Democratic primaries did not stimulate voter interest sufficiently for most to overcome the legal barriers to the franchise. Figure 3 shows that turnout in gubernatorial primaries in the eleven ex-Confederate states from 1920 to 1948 never exceeded 39 percent of the potential white voters; and, especially after 1936, it barely exceeded the participation in the usually lopsided general election contests

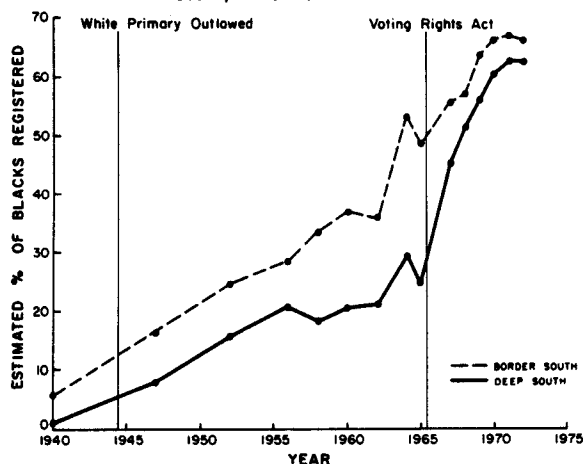


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for the presidency in the region. In fact, the determinants of (white) southern turnout during this period did not seem to include party competition. The percentage of the electorate that swelled Roosevelt's 1936 landslide was more than 25 percent higher than the percentage that turned out in 1928—which had been the most competitive presidential election in the South in half a century.

Administered with a racially uneven hand, the restrictive laws cut the black vote even more than the white vote. Figure 4, which plots estimates of black registration in five Deep South and six Border South states from 1940 to 1971, shows a pattern of rapid growth after the invalidation of the white primary in 1944 and the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, and smaller increases during other parts of the period. Before the changes in federal laws in the mid-1960's, which banned literacy tests and poll taxes and brought federal registrars and observers to especially recalcitrant areas in order to guarantee racially nondiscriminatory registration and voting, Border State registration was approximately double that in the Deep South states. Since 1970, about five-eighths of the blacks have registered in each subregion. By 1972, when one controlled for the effects of age and education, the voting participation of blacks and whites in the country as a whole was approximately equal.

FIGURE 4: Growth of Black Registration in the South, 1940-1971



For the purposes of this graph, the Deep South is defined as Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, while the Border South is Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The registration figures are taken from David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven, Conn., 1978). The population figures are from the relevant U.S. Census volumes. The estimates of registration are only

approximate and are no doubt more accurate from 1965 on. The 1964-1965 drop is probably an artifact of overestimates in 1964.

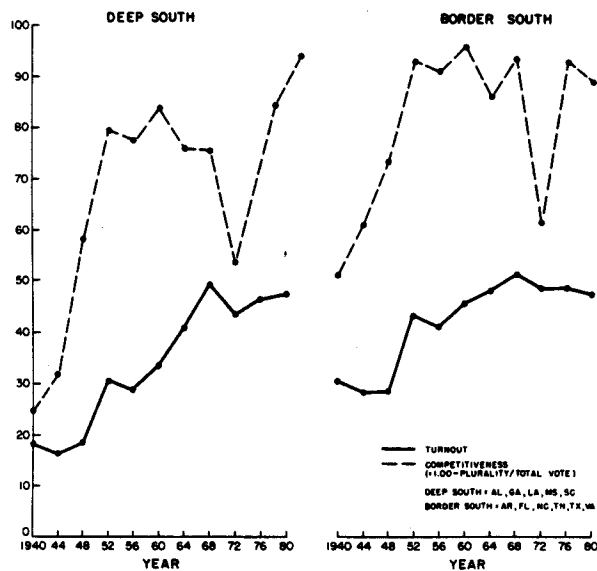
With voting came recognition and grudging respect. Whereas in 1944 South Carolina Senator "Cotton Ed" Smith had walked out of the Democratic National Convention to protest that gathering's decision to let a black minister offer a prayer, in the 1970's Atlanta, Birmingham, and New Orleans elected black mayors, while Houston and Memphis sent blacks to Congress. In 1980 there were 2,042 black local and state officials in the eight states in the South for which data are available. In 1982 George Wallace, who had served as a regional and national lightning rod for white racism in the 1960's and early 1970's, won the governorship of Alabama only by carrying the black vote overwhelmingly against a Republican opponent whose racial politics were less malleable than Wallace's. The televised image of Wallace appealing for black votes was no more striking than that of the entire Mississippi Democratic establishment lining up to have their photos snapped with 1982 Delta black congressional candidate Robert G. Clark, Jr. Although he lost by 1,200 votes in his effort to become the first black Mississippian in the U.S. House in a century, Clark's candidacy stimulated enough blacks to show up at the polls to reelect white Democratic U.S. Senator John Stennis, the former anti-civil rights filibusterer, who, along with every other southern Democratic senator, had voted for the strengthened 1982 version of the Voting Rights Act. Although racial bloc voting persisted in many areas, and at-large multimember districting schemes and other electoral regulations still prevented blacks from exercising local power in proportion to their percentage of the population, the erosion of openly expressed white racism in southern politics would have been perhaps the most shocking change in the nation's political life to some latter-day Rip Van Winkle whose twenty-year nap had begun in the late 1950's or early 1960's.

As was the case in the first Reconstruction after the Civil War, the "Second Reconstruction" politically emancipated southern whites as well as blacks. Intense registration drives from 1960 to 1964 lifted black registration in the eleven ex-Confederate states by 700,000, but racial reflex registration stimulated two million more whites to enroll in those states. In the

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eleven ex-Confederate states in 1966, white registration exceeded that of blacks by 19.1 percent, but by 1971 by only 6 percent. In 1980 in three southern states in which data were available, white registration still exceeded that for blacks by 13.6 percent. Enforced and induced electoral lassitude ended for all; party competition returned to the South; and regional participation rates, as Figure 1 shows, inched toward the national average. Figure 5 details the demise of the "Solid South" in the 1952 election and the continuation of relatively competitive politics, except in the McGovern debacle of 1972, thereafter. The bivariate correlation coefficients between competition and turnout were 0.70 for the Deep South and 0.66 for the Border South, both of which are statistically significant at the conventional 5 percent level of significance. The direction of causation, however, is unclear. The fact that after 1944 blacks began to vote in large numbers and that they increasingly voted for the Democratic party undoubtedly drove many southern whites to vote either Republican or independent (for Thurmond in 1948 or Wallace in 1968), which produced closer outcomes. There are too little data to bear the sophisticated statistical models of the connections between competition and turnout, which theory and popular impressions suggest are appropriate.

FIGURE 5: Increases in Turnout and Party Competition in Presidential Elections in the South, 1940-1980



The loosening of formal restrictions in the 1940's made it possible for voters, whites and, in the Border States and in some cities of the

Deep South, many blacks to respond to the increasing competition for their votes. But it took a further liberalization of those requirements to raise participation in the five Deep South states from a third in 1960 to nearly a half after 1968—an increase of about 50 percent in the electorate normally active in presidential contests. Border State turnout ran about half again as high as that in the Deep South in the 1940's, increased less spectacularly but nonetheless markedly, and reached a plateau after 1968 at about the same level as the Deep South's, nearly 50 percent.

Yet while in the South the active electorate was growing and competition between political parties was taking on meaning for the first time in the twentieth century, in the North the electors were increasingly passive and their commitments to the political parties increasingly weak. It seems deeply ironic that in this period turnout has decreased markedly, attachments to the parties have declined strikingly, and confidence in the political system and in the possibility of the average citizen's having an impact on it has diminished appreciably. For electoral restrictions, not only those in the South but many residency and registration laws in the North as well, have been reduced. The selection of candidates has been democratized through considerable extension of the primary mode of nomination and other rules changes. Educational levels, which, at least in 1972, correlated more highly with voting participation than all other personal traits, have risen. Although women used to vote at rates from 6 percent to 10 percent lower than men, the stimulus to female assertion provided by the women's rights movement, as well as the dying out of those women who came of age before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment—many of whom apparently felt less comfortable taking part in politics than later generations of women did—eliminated the gender gap in turnout by 1972. The scope of government programs, especially those affecting the poor, has grown, giving those least likely to vote a larger stake in political outcomes. Issues on which feelings run deep—the Vietnam War, race, abortion—have enlivened debate in the mainstream of politics and have divided the political parties increasingly cleanly. Voters have been presented with both stark and subtle choices between pairs of candidates—wide gaps in 1964, 1972, and per-

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haps 1980, and much narrower ones between the major competitors in 1968 and 1976; but neither "choice elections" nor "echo elections" have attracted as high a percentage of the electorate to the polls as the 1960 contest did. For those voters who felt their presidential decision sets were too limited, there were serious independent candidacies both on the right (Wallace in 1968) and on the center-left (Anderson in 1980). In sum, the political rules have been opened up, education has enlarged the percentage of potential voters who possess the tools to understand and take part in politics, the outcomes ought to have mattered more, and the menu of political programs and personalities has lengthened; yet the electorate seems increasingly depoliticized, disaffected, and, in relation to the political parties, dealigned.

Political scientists have only recently begun to seek, and are far from agreeing on, explanations for these disconnections. Just as historians have a professional predilection for examining change, political scientists have a guild bias for stating their conclusions as timeless generalizations. Then, too, the prime tool for the postwar examination of electoral behavior, the sample survey, is a particularly blunt instrument for examining turnout. Whether because of unrepresentativeness, the extra stimulus to vote that pre-election interviews gives them, or deliberate exaggeration, the subjects in the Michigan Survey Research Center samples report turnout rates 14-15 percent higher than the national norms; those in the much larger Census Bureau surveys overstate their participation by from 4 to 10 percent. Since, according to Richard Brody, the level of inflation in reports of turnout grew by more than 60 percent between 1960 and 1976, since the mix of reasons for the hyperbole may also have changed, and since, even in any particular survey, the overestimate may systematically infect the relationships between variables, one hesitates to rely too much in this area on conclusions drawn from samples.

Putting problems of methodology aside, we can distinguish three types of explanations for the recent decline in voting participation. While some have pointed to structural changes in society and in the political system, others have emphasized shifts in attitudes, and a third set has focused on what are known in the trade as short-term forces. Of the structural alterations,

the most important is a shift in the age composition of the electorate. Those Americans below thirty-five or over seventy vote less than the middle-aged because the young move about more and are therefore more affected by registration laws and are likely to feel less a part of their communities; and because they have had less time for voting to become a habit. Those over seventy vote less, chiefly because they are more often physically frail than their middle-aged counterparts and because they are, on average, not as well educated as younger cohorts. About a quarter of the decline in turnout over the past two decades can be explained solely by the extension of the vote to eighteen-year-olds, the maturing of the baby boom generation, and increased longevity. The compositional explanation, it should be noted, implies that the decline in turnout is not the result of some malaise and that it, like the crisis in Social Security, is temporary and will recede as the baby boomers gray.

A second factor may well be the growth in other modes of political participation. While voting sends only a very generalized message to national, state, or local capitals, personalized contact greatly specifies the information, may help in obtaining particularized benefits for individual voters, and, from the point of view of legislators, constitutes a relatively noncontroversial, publicly funded, and effective means of soliciting votes and of weakening potential opponents. The well-known recent increase in the provision of constituency services by U.S. House and Senate members is reflected in the growth of inflation-adjusted congressional expenditures from forty-three cents per U.S. inhabitant in fiscal year 1961 to \$1.15 in fiscal year 1979; in the mushrooming of their personal staffs by 200 percent from 1957 to 1979, while the total population was growing by little more than 25 percent; and in the expansion in the number of pieces of franked mail per U.S. inhabitant sent out by congressmen by 60 percent from 1969 to 1976 alone. Thus, personalized contacting overcomes the free-rider problem and amounts for many to a more effective means than voting to gain political benefits.

Undoubtedly the most ironic explanation for the decline in participation is that it has resulted from "democratizing" reforms. Elections are probably more complex, more decentralized, and more frequent in America than in any other

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country—and they have gotten more so recently. City elections, township elections, county elections, school board and special district elections, state legislative elections, elections for governors and other state officers, senators, congressmen, presidents, primaries for many of these, local and state referenda, recalls—the allegedly increasingly “apolitical” American public seems constantly to be voting on this or that. The country has one elected official for every 442 people, and since there is considerable rotation in local offices, a much higher percentage serves at least once during his or her lifetime. From 1968 to 1980 the number of states holding presidential primaries grew from fifteen to thirty-seven. The proportion of the electorate taking part in caucuses, primaries, and conventions connected with presidential selection more than doubled from 1968 to 1976.

If portraits of the American electorate as politically passive and mostly alienated seem overdrawn, still the large and growing number of diverse contests has two effects that may have reduced turnout in national elections. Since the necessity to win numerous primaries across the country requires candidates to attract a large number of volunteers, and since activists are much more ideologically extreme than either “regular” politicians or the masses of voters, the increased importance of primaries in the presidential nominating process tends to produce more extreme candidates (Goldwater, McGovern, Reagan) or candidates with fewer ties to the established powers (Carter). Two of the immoderates, Goldwater and McGovern, were widely perceived to have little chance of winning in the general election, and the outsiders, McGovern again and Carter, especially in 1980, were generally viewed as incompetent; Reagan’s election was less an endorsement of his positions than a rejection of Carter’s performance. In any case many voters, taking their cues from the media and more conventional politicians and leaders of such quasi-political groups as labor unions, were as displeased with their parties’ nominees in 1964, 1972, and 1980 as liberal activists were in 1968 with Hubert Humphrey, who had been nominated despite his failure to win any major primary.

Another “reform,” the increasing temporal separation of elections, may also have cut turnout. By 1980, two-thirds of the states were hold-

ing elections for state officers in nonpresidential years, and many of them had shifted to off-years since 1952. As a consequence, a voter’s interest in one contest or in one level of government no longer reinforces his or her tendency to vote in other elections. If he or she has already decided to gather information on, for instance, the candidates for governor and has decided probably to appear at the polls, then the marginal cost of collecting knowledge about and pulling the levers or punching the computerized cards for the rest of the ticket is considerably reduced. Voters for whom politics is unfamiliar (the young and immigrants), who have more than average difficulty in learning about politics (the comparatively uneducated, those whose native language is not English), or whose special preoccupations leave them little time or energy to devote to politics (the working poor, those actively seeking employment) will be especially adversely affected by any increases in the marginal costs of voting.

Indeed, as Burnham and others have emphasized, class and age differentials in turnout are much larger in the United States than in certain European countries, and the gaps have recently been widening a good deal. What accounts for this change—to what extent the weakening of parties makes it more difficult to organize the have-nots politically, to what extent the decline in competitiveness for seats in the U.S. House and popular antipathy to the presidential choices offered differentially fails to attract lower-class persons to the polls, and to what extent variations in turnout by class are more properly attributable to other personal traits, such as education—is not so clear. One fact is apparent. The last time there appears to have been a marked increase in the turnout of the disadvantaged outside the South, the attraction appears to have been two controversial Democrats with solidly liberal records, Alfred E. Smith and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Perhaps all the lower class needs is a depression and a good mainstream liberal candidate.

Spurning social-structural and political rationales, some political scientists have turned to social psychology, finding evanescent or perhaps permanent shifts in attitudes toward parties and the political system responsible for the turnout slide. Since 1952, the Survey Research Center has been placing voters on a seven-point partisan scale from “strong” and “weak” Republicans

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through three shades of independents to "strong" and "weak" Democrats. Through 1976 the proportion identifying fervently with one of the major parties dropped by 11 percent, the independent categories picking up the slack. Since those who declare themselves less attracted to the parties are less likely to vote for president, a rise in independence leads to a decline in turnout. In this formulation, party identification is assumed both to be long-lasting and to have been formed prior to vote intention. A voter who, for example, decides which candidate he favors and then picks his party to match would violate the model's premises. Abramson and Aldrich declare that a seventh of the turnout decline from 1964 to 1980 among those whites who actually voted—and more among those who claimed to have voted—can be accounted for by the dislocation of partisan identification alone.

Another attitudinal factor associated with the turnout drop is a decline in the voters' "sense of political efficacy." Interestingly, those surveyed showed no general decline from 1952 to 1976 in their belief that it is the citizen's duty to vote or in interest in the campaigns, or a rise in the belief that politics is too complicated for the average voter to understand. But the proportion who disagree with the statement that "public officials don't care much what people think" has fallen from 75 percent in 1960 to only 46 percent in 1976. An index of "external political efficacy" composed of answers to this and a related question explains a fifth of the decline from 1964 to 1980 of actual (and more, of reported) turnout among white respondents to the Michigan surveys. People who become convinced that officials disregard the public have less incentive to vote. Together the decrease in the proportion of strong partisans and the fall in the sense of external efficacy explains about 35 percent of the decline in actual turnout and about 70 percent of that in reported turnout among white survey respondents since 1964.

Because proponents of this so-called Michigan model believe that the strength of partisan loyalties and the sense of efficacy are closely associated with the degree of enduring attachment to and tendency to participate in the political system, rather than representing a transient orientation toward the current candidates, they assert that a decrease in party identification reduces the "core" of reliable participants and increases the

proportion of those who are only "peripherally" involved. In *Participation in America*, however, Verba and Nie argue that the degree of political involvement varies markedly over the typical individual's lifetime. One may, for instance, be drawn into the campaign of a friend or be stimulated to participate by a particular issue, yet drop out later. And different persons may concentrate on different facets or levels of government. These observations cast doubt on the notion of an unchanging core of voting participants. It is possible, nevertheless, that the proportion who ever become active, who might constitute a "quasi-core," has recently been reduced. If this conjecture is correct, and if the reduction of the core or quasi-core of voters is a product of unspecified fundamental or long-term forces, then instability and the reduction in turnout will be permanent features of the American political system for some time. As Burnham has put it, we are facing a "long-term paralysis of democracy."

But more optimistic conclusions are consistent with much of the same available evidence. After all, there are four possible combinations of causes and effects, not merely the pessimistic one of fundamental transformations whose impact persists. Long-term causes may produce short-term results; special circumstances may give rise to transient conditions; or ephemera could conceivably induce lasting change. Examples of the first of these permutations have already been discussed. Besides the probably impermanent effect of the shift in the electorate's age composition, the connection between the growth of primaries and the nomination of unconventional candidates might fall in this category. The proportion of the electors who say they care about the election outcome (presumably because they prefer one candidate to the other) has dropped off markedly since 1952; this deterioration tracks that in turnout quite closely. If party activists tire of losing and if the rules that have worked to the advantage of candidates who could more easily be nominated than elected are altered, then the electorate may obtain a series of candidates more to its liking. The enthusiasm of voters, although perhaps not that of the activists, may rise once again.

The period since 1960 also contains enough special circumstances to account for nearly any political phenomenon. The assassinations of two Kennedys at times when both were popular and

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very likely to be nominated by the Democratic party; the profound dislocations caused by the most sustained attack on racism in American history; the travail of the country's least popular and least successful war since 1815 and its longest war ever; the deliberate subterfuge of presidents and their advisers about Indochina and Watergate and their later open defiance of large segments of informed and intense public sentiment; and the two huge spurts in energy prices and the extreme economic consequences of the OPEC cartel's actions—no era of American history can match this one for a series of wrenching shocks to the national political consciousness. Unlike other upheavals, such as the Civil War or the Great Depression, the political victims were not all on one side this time. No new stable consensus could easily form. Most obviously, the disgrace of a conservative Republican president, Nixon, closely followed that of a liberal Democrat, Johnson.

It is hardly to be wondered at that party loyalties have been shaken, that politics has seemed less predictable, less controllable by either leaders or followers, that as officials have cynically attempted to manipulate or mislead the public, the voters have begun to view their masters as unresponsive. If this admittedly speculative line of reasoning is valid, the relevant questions are whether our statesmen will renew the Johnson-Nixon level of misbehavior; whether assassins will prove poor shots, sheiks, reasonable men, and economists, better forecasters; and how resilient the voters will be as times become less turbulent—if they do. As to resiliency, the 1982 recovery from the apparent off-year turnout trough of 1978 should serve at least as a caution to the pessimists, if not as a signal of the end of the recent recession in political participation.

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