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[RE]ENGAGING THE OTHER HALF OF AMERICA IN ELECTORAL POLITICS:

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS, CAUSES, AND

SOLUTIONS FOR NONVOTING

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[RE]ENGAGING THE OTHER HALF OF AMERICA IN ELECTORAL POLITICS:
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A DISSERTATION
APPROVED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

By

DEDICATION

To my parents

and to the memory of Andrew Solos

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The motivation for this dissertation was my belief that all people should have a voice; that everyone should be represented in a democracy. I will continue to work to this end.

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Abstract

Perhaps no single issue is more important to the sustenance of democracy than political participation. Given that over half of American citizens do not vote in presidential elections and the many questions surrounding political involvement, this study examines the phenomenon of nonvoting. It aims to provide a deeper and more descriptive understanding of why the majority of American citizens are abstaining from political participation and what solutions would serve to [re]engage the public and reinvigorate American democracy. In particular, this dissertation pursued broad knowledge of the characteristics, causes, and solutions for nonvoting in the 2000 presidential election. To conduct such an examination, the rationale for this study is outlined in Chapter 1. A literature review of the reasons for nonvoting is provided in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, the qualitative and quantitative methods for this dissertation are presented. The results from the research are provided in Chapter 4. The discussion of the findings from the focus groups, in-depth interviews, and multiple regression analysis are listed in Chapter 5. Finally, a critical analysis on the importance of voting is given in Chapter 6.

Based on past research, sociological, economic, psychological, governmental, media, campaign, and cultural influences are highlighted in the literature review as correlating with political behavior. Within each influence, several popular reasons for nonvoting are also included, such as issues regarding political knowledge, efficacy, civic duty, Downsian theory, discourse, corruption, and apathy.

The dissertation outlines both qualitative and quantitative methods to address the underlying phenomenon. Specifically, 22 focus groups and 54 in-depth personal interviews were conducted to address the reasons and solutions for political abstention. The responses from the focus groups are categorized into several areas: economic, psychological, government, mass media, campaign, and cultural. Remedies for nonvoting are also included.

Survey data using multiple linear regression analysis were applied to address the demographic and political perception attributes of nonvoters. Data from 291 participants were utilized to differentiate nonvoters based on various characteristics. The focus groups and surveys were part of a larger study on the 2000 elections conducted by the National Election Research Study project in conjunction with the Political Communication Center at the University of Oklahoma. Personal interviews were conducted solely for this project.

The recurring reasons for political abstention and strategies for increased voter turnout from group and individual interviews are illuminated in the results and discussion sections. Survey data reveals to what extent certain demographic (sex, age, education, party affiliation, race, and income) and political perception variables (political cynicism, and whether one voted in the 1996 election) predicted voting participation.

[Re]engaging the Other Half[1] of America in Electoral Politics:

An Analysis of the Characteristics, Causes, and Solutions for Nonvoting

> Every regime lives on a body of dogma, self-justification,
> glorification and propaganda about itself. In the United States, this
> body of dogma and tradition centers about democracy. The hero of
> the system is the voter who is commonly described as the ultimate
> source of all authority. The fact that something like forty million
> adult Americans are so unresponsive to the regime that they do not
> trouble to vote is the single most truly remarkable fact about it. In the
> past seven presidential elections the average difference in the vote
> cast for the winning candidates was about one-fifth as large as the
> total number of nonvoters. The unused political potential is sufficient
> to blow the United States off the face of the earth.
> —E. E. Schattschneider, The Semi-Sovereign People, 1960

Half of American citizens (100 million people) do not participate in presidential elections (Miroff, Seidelman, & Swanstrom, 1999; Watters, 1997). Only 48.8 percent of the voting age population actually voted in 1996 with "barely one quarter of eligible voters paying close attention to the campaign the final weeks of the campaign" (Danitz, 1997, p. 8). Nationwide, voter turnout[2] was 51.2 percent[3] in the 2000 election—up 2.2 percent—but still ranking the United States at 140th among the world's 163 democratically elected governments, between Chad and Botswana where democracies have a shorter history (see Table 1). Furthermore, if one includes mid-term and presidential elections, the United States has the lowest voting participation level of any democracy in the world (Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, 1989, as cited by Blackburn, 1992).

Turnout has not been this low since 1920s[4], when women were first given the right to vote (Associated Press, 2000; Cooper, 2000; Lyons & Arrington, 1988). The country specifically reached its nadir at 44 percent in 1920. Voter turnout was at it

highest level, in the 80 percent range, in the 1880s and 1890s (Bonar, 1980). In fact, from 1828 to 1900, voting never fell below 56 percent of the eligible voting population. Moreover, from 1840 to 1900 participation levels bettered 74 percent on average (Nichols & Beck, 1992).

In addition, voting percentages have fallen in every single state, from Alaska where it has dropped around 18 points, to Hawaii, where it dipped 1 point (Minzesheimer, 1996). Turnout rates in off-year elections are even lower--slipping to 35 percent, the lowest since 1942 (Taylor, 1990). Furthermore, fewer than 18 percent of Americans participate in selecting local officials (Blackburn, 1992).

The statistics for young voters are even more disheartening. Only 38 percent of the eligible youth participated in the electoral process in 2000 (Hochman, 2001). With few exceptions, the percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds who vote has declined in each succeeding election since 1972 when 18-year-olds were first eligible to participate (McGregor, 2000; People for the American Way, 1988). Moreover, experts say that younger individuals are not likely to acquire the habit of voting as they get older (Lessner, 2000).

Furthermore, Pinkelton and Austin (1998) argue that this negative trend among the youth and adults can lead to an inconsolable situation called "spiral of disaffection." Under this scenerio, people isolate themselves from political information, which heightens cynical perceptions of government, resulting in hardened personal views in opposition to political participation. When individuals shun political knowledge long enough, they become oblivious to public policy and outright hostile to political candidates. As a result, antagonistic emotions are often

aimed at encouraging others to question government and political participation. Thus,
citizens' anger can "snowball" affecting other individuals and groups of people
resulting in a genuine "spiral of disaffection."

While there is considerable evidence that the majority of America is
disengaged from electoral politics, there are signs--albeit not many--that the citizenry
is reconnecting themselves to civic affairs (e.g., community service, nonprofit
contributions). In addition, the rise in public interest groups and the rededication of
public support to some community organizations raises hope for a fully-engaged
public in the future (Johnson, Hays, & Hays, 1998). Yet, despite these few bright
spots, voting participation continues to decline each election year and many reasons--
from the mundane to the sublime[5]--are cited for this declining trend. One of the most
frequently mentioned reasons why people do not vote is that Americans feel
unempowered. "With politics a distant mediated reality, many citizens feel like
spectators curtained behind a class wall. They see themselves as witnesses but not
active participants in the give and take of direct democracy" (Woodward, 1997, p. 16).
Other nonvoters state apathy as their explanation, the feeling that Americans do not
care much about politics. It could be that nonvoters do not understand the political
process. Some citizens might have a difficult time figuring out how to register.
Maybe nonvoters are just too old, or maybe too young to understand the importance
of voting. Other reasons offered for political abstention: media reliance, negative
political advertisements, past political experiences, the decline of political parties, the
absence of a working class party, the complicated voting system, the increased

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mobility of citizens, fraying social bonds, and the current state of economic affairs (People for the American Way, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Schier, 2000; Spiker, 1998).

Actually, it is these explanations and many others that apply to abstainers. And it is these reasons and their effects that could prove detrimental to America's sovereignty. The current and impending crisis is eloquently prophesied by Curtis Gans (1998), considered one of the premiere experts on nonvoting behavior and Chairman of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate:

> The only thing that is certain is that the political conditions which have
> undermined citizens will to vote and participate have gotten worse. Unless we
> begin to address some of these problems--the decay and misalignment of the
> political parties, the conduct of our campaigns, the lack of civility in political
> dialogue, the inadequacies of our educational system when it comes to training
> citizens, the fragmenting effects of the coaxial cable and computers, and our
> increasingly anti-engagement, anti-government, self-seeking and libertarian
> values, among other things--the nation which prides itself on being the best
> example of government of, for and by the people, will continue to drift
> towards a government of, for and by the interested few. (p. 7)

Henceforth, this dissertation serves to provide a deeper and more descriptive understanding of why the majority of American citizens are not engaged in political elections, and what changes are required to address declining voter participation and reinvigorate American democracy. Chapter 1 outlines the rationale for conducting this research. A literature review of the reasons for nonvoting is provided in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, the qualitative and quantitative methods for this dissertation are

outlined. The results from the research are provided in Chapter 4. The discussion of the findings from the focus groups, in-depth interviews, and a regression analysis are listed in Chapter 5. Finally, a critical analysis on the importance of voting is presented in Chapter 6. In this dissertation, the terms "voter turnout" and "political participation" are used interchangeably.

Rationale for Study

Information not available on nonvoters. There is consistent agreement that voting is decreasing, but there are significant disagreements over the causes or reasons for nonvoting. There are only a few solid studies on nonvoters and why they choose to abstain. Most of the research on voting behavior and electorate participation has focused exclusively on voters, rather than nonvoters. In addition, most of the empirical scholarship concerns voter choice instead of voter turnout. A significant reason for this discrepancy is that researchers have been much more successful at finding the factors influencing candidate choice in comparison to understanding why people choose to participate or abstain politically. Consequently, it is normal to find statistical techniques explaining above 70 percent of the variance in vote choice. On the other hand, very little voter turnout research exists and, from what is available, it can only predict 10 to 20 percent of the variance for electoral participation (McClure, 1983).

Moreover, if the issue of nonvoters is covered in voting behavior literature, the discussion is usually short and quite superficial (Berke, 1996; Maddox, 1978). This consensus was echoed by Doppelt and Shearer (1999): "We found little in-depth information available about the millions of Americans not counted on Election Day;

most of the data involved gross characterizations of the groups as a whole with little

differentiation among its many members" (p. xii). In addition, not one study on voter

turnout "has produced an explanation of electoral involvement that includes the full

range of potential influences and runs the entire gamut of political contests (Caldeira

& Patterson, 1982, as cited by Avey, 1989). Finally, when studies are conducted on

why nonvoters fail to participate, almost none of this scholarship includes analysis of

what steps are needed to increase political participation (Avey, 1989).

There is no clear understanding of nonvoters. Further, when reasons are given

for disengagement, academic scholars attribute nonvoting to various factors that

sometimes contradict each other (see Bennett, 1997; Bowen, Stamm, & Clark, 2000;

Pinkelton, Austin, & Fortman, 1998; Spiker, 1998). Despite these reasons, there is no

clear indication of which factors are dominant or their causal relationship. Studies

reveal a complex array of reasons, ranging from "disconnected indifference to well-

informed disgust" (Maddox, 1978; Nesbitt, 1996, p. A8). This lack of understanding

about nonvoting was coined the "puzzle of political participation" by Richard A.

Brody in 1978.

Blackburn (1992) addresses this issue when he says: "decline in turnout has

taken place in all major demographic and political groups—young and old, rich and

poor, college and non-college educated, business people and laborers, blacks and

whites, liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats" (p. 2).

Schattschneider (1960, p. 109, as cited by Maddox, 1978) defines nonvoting as being

"automatic, unconscious, and thoughtless." In addition, the most popular

explanations provided by scholars for nonparticipation are often flawed and

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incomplete. Further, the reasons listed are often ahistorical, focusing on specific

campaign occurrences rather than the psychological, economical, or systematic

reasons (Seidelman, 1999). Thus, the reasons and motivations for nonvoting are

extremely diverse, complex, and unclear. What is certain, however, is that the

stereotypical portrayal of nonvoters as "angry white males," "soccer moms,"

"apathetic Gen-Xers," or an "incipient jihad ready to overthrow government" are far

from a fair and precise description of these individual citizens (Johnson, Hays, &

Hays, 1998; Shearer, Morris, & Doppelt, 1998).

In addition, nonvoters have a very weak grasp themselves of why they do not

vote, often clinging to rationalizations that they do not fully believe or that are

internally contradictory. The answers given by nonvoters "reveal multiple truths and

observations, conflicting and almost always susceptible of deeper answers beneath the

surface" (Doppelt & Shearer, 2000, p. xiv). Such complexity and interrelatedness

among factors are the foci of this dissertation.

Of course, both of the above rationales assume that increasing voter turnout is

inherently positive[6]. The justification outlined in this research wholly accepts the

view that a decline in voter turnout is harmful to democracy. Further, these rationales

emanate from the idea that nonvoters—if they participated in some form of a voter

block—would revolutionize politics (Teixeira, 1984). Especially when considering

that many elections—at all levels—are decided by margins of less than one percent

(Graber, 1997; Uhlaner, 1989, as cited by Niemi & Weisberg, 1993). Walzer (1997)

summarizes the point: "Our non-voting fellow citizens . . . represent a potential swing

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vote of vast proportions, [but] we have too little sense of how they might swing" (p. 24).

In addition, voting turnout must be improved for ethical/moral and practical reasons. Piven and Cloward (1988) argue that "low turnout is the result of explicit political efforts to keep poorer, less educated, and minority voters from the polls" (as cited by Blackburn, 1992, p. 12). Campaigns have a long history of directing their campaign messages to certain segments of the population, while ignoring others during the election season (Avey, 1989). Others argue that along practical lines, voting participation deserves attention to ensure political stability and civil peace (Affigne, 1992). In addition, it is nonvoters that have the most to gain from voting. Nonvoters—who often have lower incomes and less education—can weld their voting block to ensure policy that reflects their needs and concerns (Miroff, Seidelman, & Swanstrom, 1999).

Finally, survey studies are usually conducted to determine the characteristics of nonvoters. In this quantitative vein, voter turnout is correlated with various isolated characteristics, such as political interest and efficacy, to determine a general understanding of the characteristics of nonvoters. Yet, by utilizing a qualitative and quantitative approach in this dissertation, it is posited that the reasons and solutions for nonvoting can be better described and more fully understood. More specifically, through the use of focus groups and in-depth interviews, the interaction of different attributes that may most affect voter turnout can be explained (Maddox, 1978). In addition, the incorporation of a sophisticated statistical analytical technique will make it possible to sort out the many causal influences on voting (Milbrath & Goel, 1977).

Thus, focus-groups, in-depth interviews, and a multiple regression analysis will be utilized to clarify the phenomenon of nonvoting in the 2000 election.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nonvoter Influences

There are generally four modern areas of voting behavior: sociological, social-psychological, economic, and legal-institutional. For this dissertation, the reasons given for why citizens do not vote have been divided into the following five areas, which are sociological, economic, psychological, system, and cultural. One of the first works to give attention, albeit scant focus--to nonvoters was a 1924 work by Merriam and Gosnell. Much of the early work comes from sources whose primary purpose is to explore other phenomena. However, some early research did provide brief descriptions of characteristics common to nonvoters (see Flanigan & Zingale, 1994). The seminal work on voting behavior and nonvoters is the 1960 book by Angus Campbell and his colleagues, entitled The American Voter. This book was the first to present a comprehensive and organized theoretical schema to describe voting behavior, called the "funnel of causality." Other important works (as cited by Maddox, 1978; Hunt, 1994) on voting behavior include V.O. Key's (1949) Southern Politics in State and Nation, Lane's (1959) Political Life, Key's (1966) The Responsible Electorate, Verba and Nie's (1972) Participation in America, Milbrath and Goel's (1977) Political Participation, Piven and Cloward's (1988) Why American's Don't Vote.

The first book to turn the focus of voting research from sociological characteristics to psychological influences was Campbell, Guerin, and Miller's 1954 book, The Voter Decides. In addition, one of the more refreshing earlier studies was

written by Arthur Hadley in his 1978 book, The Empty Polling Booth. This book was
the first source to divide nonvoters into differing attitudinal subgroups (cg., Doppelt &
Shearer, 1999; Maddox 1978).

<center>Sociological Influences</center>

In terms of sociology, studies reveal that nonvoters--on the whole--tend to be
younger, more mobile, have less of an education and income, are less partisan, and
less politically involved (Checkoway & Van Tsi, 1978; Kagay, 2000; Luntz &
Maslansky, 1992; Toner, 1990; Wellstone, 2001). Other research labels nonvoters as
being poorer, younger, less educated, more unorganized working class, more
unemployed, more minority, more Southern, more rural, more urban underclass, more
likely to participate in nothing else, and more likely to come from a family of
nonvoters (Gans, 1985). Among these factors, the academic research indicates that
the education, age, and income level of the potential voter are key demographic
variables affecting political participation (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980).

Consequently, education, age, income, race, gender, marital status, resident
status, church attendance, and "cross pressure" influences will be discussed as
possible sociological factors affecting electoral participation. Not only are these
demographic characteristics often related to voting behavior, these variables are also
correlated with each other as well (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). For example,
white-collar employees are likely to have more education and money than blue-collar
workers.

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Education

It is wholly accepted that education has a stronger effect on voting than any other influence (Burke, 1998; Flanigan & Zingale, 1994; Lerman, 1982; Nie & Stehlik, 1996; Shienbau, 1984; Watters, 1997; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Looking back, The American Voter reported that no other social attribute bears such a strong relationship to participation in presidential elections (Bonar, 1980; Campbell et al., 1960). Citizens with a college degree are more inclined to vote than those with just a high school degree and the probability of participation increases with advanced degrees. During the 1960's, Kim, Petrocik, and Enockson (1975) wrote that those with a college degree voted around 13 points above the national average (as cited by Bonar, 1980). Finally, Ashenfleter and Kelley (1975) provided a definitive answer by the 1970s by citing that for every year of schooling, one's probability of voting increased by .03 percent (as cited by Bonar, 1980).

The reasons for increased likelihood of voting are based on several theories. First, education has proven to increase one's knowledge of civic affairs and current events as well as influence positively one's civic duty, internal efficacy, external efficacy, critical thinking, and registration status (Jackson, 1995, as cited by Burke, 1998). These abilities serve to heighten citizens' interest in political issues. This concept can be understood by realizing that the educated are allotted more occupational opportunities; thereby having more leisure time to pursue political information. Education also makes it easier to understand politics. Wofinger and Rosenstone (1980) wrote that "the personal qualities that raise the probability of

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voting are the skills that make learning about politics easier and more gratifying and reduce the difficulties of voting."

Other studies highlight the effect of education on income, political efficacy, and election interest which all serve to heighten voter participation (Fugate, 1996). Therefore, it is not surprising that fifty-five percent of nonvoters in 1996 had a high school degree or less ("Americans who don't vote," 2000). Moreover, it is education that has helped to stabilize voter turnout over the last four decades. Miller and Shanks in their 1996 book, New American Voter, wrote that:

> Everything else being equal, the upgrading of educational attainment across
> the four decades separating 1988 from 1952 forestalled what could have been
> a cataclysmic drop in national voting turnout by the 1980s. . . . Exposure to
> college education clearly inhibited the overall drop in aggregate turnout
> between the middle generation and the younger cohorts of the post-New Deal
> group [those who began voting in 1980]. (pp. 56-57)

However, it should be noted that this correlation does not always prove true as of recent. During the last four decades, there has been a growing number of highly educated nonvoters. Teixiera (1992) specifically discovered a ten-point drop in voting participation by college-educated citizens since 1964.

Age

Age is an important concept strongly associated with voting behavior (see Table 2). Almost 40 percent of nonvoters are under the age of 30 (Campaigns & Elections, 2000; Lewis, 1989). Among the youngest voters, only 30 percent are 18-19 year olds and 33 percent are citizens between the ages of 20 to 24 (Cox News Service,

1998). Moreover, Watters (1997) wrote that since 1972, almost[7] every successive 18-to 21- year-old age group has participated less in voting than it's preceding group. For example, 48 percent of Boomers ages 18-20 voted in 1972 compared to only 31 percent in 1996. Regardless of the statistics, the older the individual, the greater the probability that they will participate in the election (Verba & Nie, 1972, as cited by Hunt, 1994; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Rennison, 1997; Wolfingter & Rosenstone, 1980). One theory purports that older individuals vote in higher rates because it is a habit for them. Others argue that older citizens participate due to their extended residence in one locality, their full employment, their secure family and marriage (Nie, Verba, & Kim, 1974, as cited by Bonar, 1980). Celinda Lake, a Democratic pollster, explained the apathy among younger voters this way: "This is a generation that can't even remember politics being dominated by anything but scandal, an inability to get anything done, and gridlock. And it's no wonder they're resigned and rejected the model" (Schlach, 1996, as cited by Watters, 1997). This cynical model has been labeled the cohort theory and is popular in sociology, but certainly has its detractors[8] in other fields.

Income

Furthermore, 50 percent of nonvoters have a yearly income of less than $30,000 (Campaigns & Elections, 2000). The relationship between political participation and income is pretty clear: the higher the income, the more likely to participate in politics. Yet, turnout has declined the most among low income individuals and continues to grow; olitical participation has decreased among all income levels, including the highest income groups (Gans, 1996, as cited by Spiker &

McKinney, 1999; Shienbaum, 1984; Teixeira, 1999). For example, if one were to divide the electorate by income, one would find the most substantial decline among the lowest income group, but there would be a marked drop among individuals in the highest income bracket as well (Teixeira, 1999). Past scholarship (see Burke, 1998; Hadley, 1978; Kim et al., 1975) has revealed a linear relationship between these two variables (i.e., voting and income). The one exception to this research was a study conducted by Filer, Kenny, and Morton (1993, as cited by Burke, 2000) who found that turnout sometimes falls as income rises due to an increase in the time cost of political participation.

The simultaneous increase of income and voting is often attributed to the bivariate relationship of income and education. However, this is not always the case as some individuals achieve certain job skills that foster political participation regardless of education (Fugate, 1996). Thus, both income and occupation can be a positive predictor of voting likelihood (Verba & Nie, 1972, cited by Hunt, 1994; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Rennison, 1997). Yet, being a bonafide member of the working class does not also guarantee participation, especially among today's workforce. Since 1970, the greatest share of nonvoters is in the fastest growing segment of the economy: "new working class." This group of the population works in the modern service economy as receptionists, word processors, restaurant workers, and hospital employees who vote in numbers significantly less than steelworkers and auto workers, for example (Seidelman, 1999).

Race

Finally, much research has focused on the political participation of minorities (see Table 4). Nonwhite individuals only make up 30 percent of nonvoters (Campaigns & Elections, 2000). This might be expected, given that many minorities in America are likley to have less education and lower incomes. It is true that minorities participate at lower levels, however Verba and Nie (1972) found that blacks, in particular, over-participate. In other words, "on a summary participation scale that compared blacks and whites on six socioeconomic levels, the blacks participated more than whites on all but the very lowest socioeconomic level" (as cited by Bonar, 1980, p. 15; see Fugate, 1996). This is especially the case when African-Americans have an equal opportunity to register and the necessary motivation to vote (Gray, 1971).

Gender

Sex as a determinant of voting behavior has undergone radical transformations (see Table 3). At one time, scholars like Milbrath and Goel (1977) wrote that " . . . [t]he finding that men are more likely to participate in politics than women is one of the most thoroughly substantiated in social science" (p. 116). Just over a decade later, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) reported that, on the whole, women participate at rates comparable to men. Since 1980, women have voted in larger numbers than men in presidential elections. This change in the influence of gender over time is often credited to cohort or generalization explanations. In other words, women who had never voted, were therefore, in the habit of abstaining from electoral politics. Interestingly, research does not support the argument purported by Amundsen (1977)

that sexism or gender discrimination affect voting participation (Wolfinger &

Rosenstone, 1980).

Marital status

Married individuals tend to vote in higher numbers than single, divorced, or

widowed persons (Conway, 1985, 2000). In a 1993 General Social Survey reported

on by Watters (1997), 74.5 percent of married persons claimed to have voted in 1992

versus 61 percent of those who were never married. Some studies cite a higher level

of "social connectedness"[9] for married couples which increases voting participation.

Other research reveals that an interpersonal influence between married couples as the

reasoning for this motivation to get involved (Fugate, 1996). Wolfinger and

Rosenstone (1980) explain this phenomenon:

> People with very little autonomous political motivation are most likely to
>
> respond to political stimuli from those with whom they have continuing
>
> relationships. Moreover, marriage provides a setting for the reinforcement of
>
> one's own beliefs. Spouses are likely to have similar preferences, no matter
>
> how feeble. The encouragement of a wife or husband might be the push
>
> necessary to get both partners to the polls. If someone has a weak inclination
>
> to vote, the presence of another family member who has some tendency in the
>
> same direction will raise the probability that both will vote. (p. 45)

Resident Status

Length and region of residence have a relationship to voting turnout as well.

Studies show that the longer a person resides at one place, the greater the chance that

they will participate in elections. Conway (1985) and Teixeira (1987) argue that

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participation significantly increases for people living in a community for three to five years. Miller and Shanks (1996) highlight the difference in voting between renters and homeowners at about 20 percentage points. One reason for this finding is that every time one moves, they must register their change of address in order to vote again (Shearer, Morris, & Doppelt, 1998). Further, this might also explain why young people--who tend to be more mobile--have lower voting rates (Cuerdon, 1986; Hadley, 1978). Another reason might be the connection long-time residents feel toward their community and local affairs; they have a stake in the vitality of the community. In addition, buying a home also directly connects voters with issues of mortgage loans and real estate property taxes that are relevant to governmental policy (Gray, 1971). However, contradictory research emphases that the impact on registration might be minimal. One study found that 66 percent of nonvoters had lived at their present location for more than two years (Shearer, Morris, & Doppelt, 1998).

Voter turnout also varies across regions in the United States. A state-by-state analysis shows stark differences: Hawaii's 49 percent to Maine's 72 percent. In addition, research reveals that people living in the South vote in lower numbers than those living in other parts of the country. The lower turnout rates might be due to lower overall education levels and remnants of barriers to electoral participation (Fugate, 1996; Nichols & Beck, 1992).

Church Attendance/Religious Affiliation

Church attendance and religious affiliation have shown to correlate with voting behavior as well. Watters (1997) lists findings from the 1993 General Social

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Survey that revealed that 71.4 percent of voters attended church regularly in comparison to 52.4 percent who never attended. This discrepancy is credited to three ideas according to Watters (1997). First, activities in church foster social skills necessary for community engagement. Second, churches serve as an important social group, serving to increase the salience of certain political issues or candidates. Third, organized religious participation "breaks down the individualist tendency in contemporary society and leads people to regard themselves as part of a larger group with legitimate claims upon public policy" (Wald, 1987, p. 31, as cited by Watters, 1997). Furthermore, political scientists Macaluso and Wanat (1979) explicate that religion teaches citizens that they have a "sense of stewardship" that "translates into higher participation" (p. 158-159, as cited by Watters, 1997).

Turnout among religious affiliations has also been consistent over time although the differences seem to be small. According to Nichols and Beck (1992), Catholics vote in higher numbers than Protestants. Voting levels for Jews tends to be very high and those who are not affiliated have a lower turnout than the national average. Some of the differences between religions is partly credited to educational levels.

<u>"Cross pressure" Influences</u>

Contradictory research exists about the influence of typical demographic factors affecting voting behavior. Lewis (1989) argues that similar demographic characteristics (or similar group membership) may influence voter choice. Communication among members of the same group serves to emphasis similar political attitudes and beliefs. A great example is labor unions. Nichols and Beck

(1992) report that all things being equal, union members are more likely to vote than non-members. Indeed, scholarship has shown that, in some cases, organizations who work to mobilize their members—even low SES individuals less prone to participate politically—can boost their turnout.

However, Mehlinger and Patrick (1980, as cited by Lewis, 1989) report that "the influence on voting behavior of social groups tends to be limited or undercut by "cross pressures" (p. 10). As most people belong to several social groups, they are susceptible to various influences that pull them in conflicting directions. "This system of 'cross currents' encourages split ticket voting, independent voting (decline in partisan loyalty) and non-voting (the costs of voting are too high)" (Mehlinger & Patrick, 1980, p. 283, as cited by Lewis, 1989, p. 10).

Other Reasons for Nonvoting

Aside from demographic characteristics of nonvoters, several other factors contribute to a lack of political participation. However, it should be noted that some researchers argue that sociological attributes have nothing—if very little—to do with nonvoting in the first place. Huntington and Nelson (1976, p. 170, as cited by Avey, 1989) highlight the grave error of failing to include mobilization variables:

> Research based on socioeconomic variables has ignored the actions of political mobilizers, an extraordinary omission for political scientists to make. Low participation may be the result of the decisions of political elites to minimize the political influence of low-SES people, but recent research has ascribed it to a lack of character in lower-status persons.

Furthermore, Achen (1992) defends psychological traits over sociological:

> When researchers are being theoretically serious, demographics should be discarded. They belong neither in party ID nor in vote equations. The voter's political history is the only causal variable. Age, social class, and other background factors will be correlated with history, of course; they may provide a serviceable summery for purely descriptive purposes. But they do not belong in explanatory equations. (p. 198, as cited by Timpone, 1994)

These other voting influences—including economic and psychological—vary from citizen apathy, to voter confusion, to governmental anger (Miroff, Seidelman, & Swanstrom, 1999).

<div align="center">

Economic Influences

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Rational Choice Influences

A popular approach explains voting behavior according to a cost-benefit analysis. Under this theory, often associated with Anthony Downs, "utility" or benefits must be accrued from the act, or therefore no rational individual would participate in elections (Filer, 1977; Timpone, 1994, 1998; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). In other words, the cost of voting is weighed against the citizen's ability to influence politics (Lewis, 1989). The potential voters weigh the benefits (B) by the probability that they will affect the outcome of the election (p), and the cost of voting (C). R is the reward voters get from public engagement and if it is greater than zero, then citizens engage in political participation. Down's idea is often represented by the following equation:

$$R=pB-C$$

Riker and Ordeshook (1968, as cited by Rennison, 1997) expanded on this equation to include a "D" term. They surmised that it was important to add the psychological need of civic duty to the overall framework on the equation, represented by (D). Thus, the abstract benefits of voting are captured in the Downsian Theory. They also modified (p) to mean voters' perception of affecting the election, instead of the actual chance of impacting the race. Riker and Ordeshook's formulation is:

$$R = pB - C + D$$

As a result of this philosophy, candidates must motivate the citizens to support them as well as go out to vote for them. Along these lines, a citizen's position in the "social structure"[10] determines their stakes (i.e., costs and benefits) in the election. Such stakes may include benefits to the community as a whole, for example: public elementary and secondary schools, public safety, transportation, and recreation facilities. Specific issues at stake which might motivate involvement include insured mortgage loans, grants and low-interest loans for college expenses, income tax deductions, property deductions, and retirement pension plans (Conway, 1985; Watters, 1997).

One's stake in the election might also be determined by other, more abstract benefits and costs. Benefits could include a feeling that one has performed their civic duty for themselves or others; or the belief that one reaffirmed their efficacy for the political system. Whereas, costs associated with voting could be the effort required to register, gain knowledge about the candidates, decide how and where to vote, as well as actually voting on Election Day (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980).

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Socio-economic Influences

Another factor that may relate to this philosophy pertains to socio-economic influences. Economic conditions are important factors in electoral behavior for it is the opinion of Sweezy, Magdoff, and Huberman (1985, as cited by Lewis, 1989) that people do not vote in ordinary times, but do participate in times of crisis. In other words, when times are economically difficult, citizens are motivated to vote, usually to punish the incumbent party (Burke, 1998). However, some researchers disagree and claim that economic hardship dissuades electoral participation. They argue that during these troubling times, citizens utilize their resources for survival, not voting (Burke, 1998). Arcelus and Meltzer (1975, as cited by Burke, 1998) concluded in their study that economic factors have no affect on participation. Finally, Southwell (1998, as cited by Burke, 1998) wrote that "personal unemployment depresses turnout but that high unemployment rates do stimulate employed working class and African-American individuals to turnout" (p. 20).

Psychological Influences

It is widely believed that contextual variables also affect one's propensity to participate politically. Specifically, parental, school, and party influences, as well as political knowledge, political efficacy, and civic duty are all commonly cited as related to voting behavior.

Parental Influence

Early "studies most often identified parents and the family's socio-economic status as the most influential factors in the political indoctrination of people" (Gresens, 1998, p. 15). Further, recent research conducted by the National

Association of Secretaries of State also found that one of the major predictors of voting is parental modeling. They posit that children are more likely to vote if their parents do. Jennings and Niemi (1974) eloquently espouse this argument:

> Political participation is a learned behavior, and children who are not taught to participate effectively in civil society or who are not socialized at home, in school, or by the media to believe that their participation in the political system matters are not likely to become full and active participants as adults. Children whose parents regularly vote, show an interest in politics, pay attention to political news on television or regularly read a newspaper, and socialize them to believe that political participation through voting or other means is a right, privilege, or obligation are more likely to emulate these attitudes and behaviors as adults. (as cited by Shearer, Morris, & Doppelt, 1998, p. 14)

In addition, Carlin (2000a) wrote that the 1996 and 2000 DebateWatch focus groups revealed that one of the things that separates student voters and nonvoters is positive parental role models. This finding is especially cogent when realizing that over half of American children live in households where neither parent votes, according to Curtis Gans of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate (Clymer, 2000). Yet, McDevitt and Chaffee (2000), McLeod (2000), and Teixeira (1992) argue that political socialization continues even after adolescence. They claim, for example, that children's involvement in the "Kids Voting" program increased parents' participation and their voting levels. This phenomena is called "trickle-up socialization" (as cited by Johnson, Hays, & Hays, 1998).

School influence

Naturally, schools can also play a role in connecting students with politics. It is known that experiences while young strongly influence adult perceptions (McLeod, Eveland, & Horowitz, 1995). Yet, most schools do very little or nothing to assist students in registering to vote (People for the American Way, 1988). Therefore, it is no wonder that youth are participating politically at very low rates. One approach to ensuring a positive political impression among the younger generations is civic education classes. Yet, relatively little is known about what makes these classes effective (Teixeira, 1992). At present, there is no clear evidence that civic education can increase political participation, but these types of courses have been shown to increase awareness of and support for the democratic process (Gresens, 1998, p. 20).

Party Influence

A key factor in determining an individual's voter choice is partisan affiliation or what is termed Perception of Party Differences (PPD) (see Cassell & Hill, 1981, as cited by Burke, 2000; Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954, as cited by Cuerdon, 1986; Campbell et al., 1960; Lerman, 1982). This is important because the traditional view is that party identification develops during one's childhood, and remains stable throughout the course of one's life. Additional studies have found the same significant link between partisan affiliation and political participation. In addition, the more an individual identifies with a political party, the greater the probability that they will participate in elections. The longer they are associated with a political party, the greater psychological commitment they possess as well (Affigne, 1992; Burke, 2000; Campbell et al., 1960; Rennison, 1997; Weisberg, 1992). In other words, people with

a connection to a political party have a better understanding of the differences between the candidates as well as the ramifications of the electoral decision. They have more motivation to vote in order to bring about their preferred partisan outcome. In fact, Shaffer (1981, as cited by Cuerdon, 1986) credits as much as 25 percent of the overall decline in voting to decreasing levels of partisanship. In addition, over the last 50 years, the number of people identifying themselves as Democrats or Republicans has declined while the amount of self-identified Independents has significantly increased.

On the converse, nonparticipation is more likely by weak party identifiers and independents (Campbell, Miller, & Gurin, 1954, as cited by Cuerdon, 1986; Nie et al., 1980). Parties were once very influential due to their role in providing voter information as well as conducting voter registration and get-out-to-vote drives (Blackburn, 1992). In addition, party affiliation served as a strong cue for voting. Without strong cues, voters have to sort through complex political information which has decreased voting turnout according to some studies (see Burke, 1998; Nie et al., 1980). It should be noted that political parties have decreased in influence for several reasons, such as the growth of media campaigns and the rise in party independents (Lewis, 1989). In addition, contrary research exists citing the growing strength of issue and candidate cues in voting behavior instead of party identification (see Brody & Rothenberg, 1972; Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Franklin & Jackson, 1983; all cited by Rennison, 1997). Similar to the decline of political parties, De Snoo (1991, as cited by Blackburn, 1992) also illuminates the decline of organized labor and its impacts on the Democratic Party's get-out-the-vote efforts.

Political Knowledge

In 1996 survey, the League of Women Voters conducted a study on nonvoters that is highly acclaimed and widely distributed. They found that nonvoters are no more alienated than voters. They claim that people fail to participate "because they do not grasp the importance of elections on issues that matter to them. Many citizens are ill informed about their choices and thus perceive the actual process of voting as difficult and cumbersome" (Burke, 1996, p. A21). A recent study discovered that 64 percent of citizens who do not always vote claim that they do not know enough and thus possess a feeling that they have no stake in the election (Lerman, 1982; Pew Research, 2000). Further, the lack of political knowledge or stimulation can lead to campaign disinterest among the populace. Thus, research reveals that the more information stimulation a person receives, the greater the chance of political participation (see Petrocik, 1981; Kim, Petrocik, Enockson, 1975; Milbrath, 1965; all cited by Avey, 1989; Luntz & Malansky, 1992).

Yet, other scholarship claims that many nonvoters are not information deprived. Actually, the opposite is true. Shearer, Morris, and Doppelt (1998) wrote that more than one-quarter of surveyed nonvoters read a newspaper six or seven days a week. According to the same study, almost half of the nonvoters tuned into a television newscast six or seven nights a week. Older nonvoters were even greater users of the news media.

Political Efficacy

Political efficacy is defined as the "extent to which citizens feel their votes matter" (Blackburn, 1992, p. 25). In addition, there are two kinds of political efficacy:

internal and external. Internal efficacy is the personal belief that one can successfully influence politics. External efficacy is the idea that government and political officials are concerned and responsive to the public (Hays, 1998).

As a whole, political efficacy, both internal and external, has been decreasing according to several recent studies. Furthermore, several studies purport that low levels of efficacy does serve as a reason for why citizens do not vote (Burke, 1998; Conway, 1991; Johnson, Hays, & Hays, 1998; Lyons & Arrington, 1988; Teixeira, 1992). Campbell et al. (1960) highlight this relationship between efficacy and voting --a finding that still remains valid today: Of those with high political efficacy, 91 percent voted while only 9 percent did not participate. Only 52 percent of those with low efficacy voted. Shaffer (1981, as cited by Cuerdon, 1986) estimates that as much as 67 percent of the decline in turnout is based on the public's declining sense of political efficacy.

To explain this phenomenon, research compiled in 1994 by Mark DiCamillo, director of the Field Poll and published by the League of Women Voters, highlighted that "approximately two-thirds of all nonvoters believe that they are powerless to exert influence over public policy or feel completely detached from politics" (Garcia, 1994, p. A1). Thus, it is not surprising that a poll conducted by The New York Times/CBS News in 1990 revealed that "nonvoters seemed dismayed by campaigns and turned off by politics. They often voiced feelings of powerlessness, a sense that their ballot would make little difference on the issues they cared about" (Toner, 1990, p. B1). Further, a 1993 Freedom Forum survey and other research purports that most Americans (i.e., 70 percent or more) believe that America is really governed by

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powerful politicians, journalists, giant businesses, unions, and other power blocs, and

that the public has just a tiny influence in comparison to other institutions (Burke,

2000; Kees & Phillips, 1994, as cited by Johnson et al., 1998). It is no wonder that

James Fallows noted in his 1996 book Breaking the News that the public feels it is no

longer involved in discussions about politics and public life. They seem removed

from the political system. "The bridge has washed out, and public perceives itself as

located on one side of the gorge looking helplessly on while journalists, business

people, and politicians run the country on the other side" (as cited by Johnson et al.,

1998, p. 3).

Civic Duty[11]

Studies reveal that a citizen's level of civic duty has a great influence on voter

participation as well. Certainly, the idea of fulfilling one's civic duty is a strong

motivator to go to the polls (Lyons & Arrington, 1988; Tullock, 1968, as cited by

Shienbaum, 1984). Yet, levels of civic duty have appeared to decline sharply overall

during the last two decades (Teixeira, 1992). For those individuals with high rates of

civic duty, voting is viewed as the premiere act of political participation regardless of

its affect on the outcome of the election. Milbrath and Goal confirmed this concept in

a well received study in 1977:

> Voting clustered with other patriotic acts: 'love my country;' 'show my
>
> patriotism by flying the flag;' 'pay all taxes;' 'respect the police;' 'support my
>
> country in wars I don't agree with.' This clustering indicates that voting is
>
> more an act by which a citizen affirms his loyalty to the system rather than an
>
> act by which he makes demands on the system. (p. 12)

Moreover, people who possess the lowest sense of civic duty, vote at a rate of only 13 percent, whereas those claiming the highest degree of civic duty, voted at a rate of 85 percent (McCorkell, 1995; Nichols & Beck, 1992).

Institutional Influences

Governmental Influences

Registration requirements. In addition, many individuals fail to vote as they are not registered. Erikson (1981, as cited by Lewis, 1989, p. 28) argues that "people who are registered may vote in a specific election precisely because they are registered" [emphasis added]. On the contrast, the decision not to vote is almost always the result of a decision not to register (Teixeira, 1992). Thus, higher levels of voter registration have shown to increase voter turnout (Johnson et al., 1998).

As a result, the most researched structural/institutional factor affecting nonvoting has been registration requirements (Blackburn, 1992). Some of the registration restrictions affecting voting rates are highlighted by Rusk (1974, p. 1044, as cited by Timpone, 1998):

> Basically, the theory postulates that legal-institutional properties of the electoral system--ballot and registration systems, voting systems (e.g., plurality, proportional representation), suffrage requirements, and the like-- have important effects in influencing and shaping voter behavior.

Accordingly, academic scholarship--on the whole--argues that a major explanation for low registration is stringent requirements. A collection of researchers released this statement on registration and its effects on voting:

Local differences in turnout for elections are to a large extent related to local

differences in rates of registration; and these in turn reflect to a considerable

degree local differences in the rules governing, and arrangements for handling,

the registration of voters. (Kelly, Ayres, & Bowen, 1967, pp. 373-374, as cited

by Lyons & Arrington, 1988)

Despite some reform, registration stipulations still heavily affect registration levels

throughout the country (Calvert, 1998; Piven & Cloward, 2000). However, a 1990

Washington Post survey documented other reasons for low registration, specifically

that 75 percent of the unregistered maintained that they had not registered because

they "simply hadn't gotten around to it." Further, according to the poll, 56 percent of

the respondents claimed to be "too busy [to vote]." Others said they do not know how

to register, could not get to the polls, and did not know who to support (Uehling,

1991). Many scholars (see Blackburn, 1992; Piven & Cloward, 1988; Wolfinger &

Rosenstone, 1980) believe that voting would increase if obstacles associated with

registration were simply eliminated.

Electoral process. The election process may also contribute to disengagement

by the populace. One problem might be the never-ending campaign cycles present in

the system. In other words, considering general presidential, primary presidential,

off-year congressional elections, gubernatorial elections, local elections, special

elections, referendums and initiatives, Americans are likely to have eight elections

every four years. In comparison, British voters are only exposed to two or three

elections in the same time period, for example (Nichols & Beck, 1992).

Campaign finance system. The current campaign funding process might alienate potential voters as well. People indicate that they are frustrated with a politics that is inundated with too much money, too much time spent raising money, the money's influence over lawmakers, and the reality that resource-poor candidates may not have a fair chance of being successful.

Presidential campaigns spend many hundreds of millions of dollars each election. Campaign costs for congressional races have increased 73 percent in just the last few years, the average cost of winning a seat in the Senate is $4.5 million, and the cost of a House seat $660,000. Further, between 1972 and 1988, expenditures for the House and Senate have astronomically increased, 456 and 600 percent respectively ("All aboard," 1997; Teixeira, 1992). Moreover, in the 1996 election cycle for the federal House candidates, the individual who raised the most money won 92 percent of the time; in Senate races, 88 percent of the time. Thus, the average statewide politician must collect at least $14,000 every week to pay for their election based on present fundraising practices (Jezer, 1996; Raskin, 1997).

Another concern is the amount of time political officials spend on fundraising. "The time you spend raising money, and the number of fundraising events I was obliged to attend or at least stop by--gosh, you'd have five or six a night. It just wares you out doing that, exclaimed Representative Robert Michael in 1997" (Public Citizen, 1997, p. 1). Moreover, it is estimated that a successful candidate spends three quarters of their term just raising campaign funds for their next election (Kuttner, 1997).

Large campaign contributions may also be troubling as they are perceived as giving donors unfair access and influence (Citizen Union Foundation, 1998). There is no way to calculate the full threat done to the political process by the "legalized bribery that now masquerades as representative democracy" (Ivins, 1998, p. 15). However, one example might be the $75 billion per year offered to successful businesses in federal cash and tax subsidies. Therefore, it is not surprising that most Americans think of large campaign donations as bribes. Further, polls indicated that six out of 10 Americans believe that former President Clinton altered his policies in exchange for contributions, and nine out of ten think members of Congress sometimes exchange votes for contributions (Mollison, 1997).

Finally, the present fundraising system can not only corrupt democracy, it can work to scare away citizens that might restore idealism and credibility to public service (Kuttner, 1997). In other words, today's practices might "work as an entry barrier to politics" and confer a disadvantage to candidates who do not focus their campaign on fundraising efforts (Wells, 1997, p. 4). As a result, the populace seems worried about the implications for those without access to wealth—especially important for candidates that are historically resource-poor, such as "minorities, women, people who have less formal education, and the poor" (Manning-Miller, 1990, p. 4).

Bureaucratic nature of government. Decreased political participation can also be due to a feeling of governmental ineffectiveness. Walter Wriston (1997) writes that:

'government is big and growing--just how big and how fast it is growing is in the eye of the beholder' (Section A, p. 14). In his review of Robert Higgs' new book, <u>Crisis and Leviathan</u>, Wriston notes there are more than 80,000 governments in the country today and more than 60,000 that have the power to tax. Higgs' attempts to explain the growth of government by what he calls the 'racket'--'that process by which some 'emergency' causes government to increase power over our lives, and when the crisis passes, never quite give us back our old freedoms.' (Wriston, 1987, Sec. A., p. 14, as cited by Lewis, 1989, p. 21)

Under this theory, some voters are overwhelmed by the bureaucratic nature of government and feel politically ineffective, thus choosing not to vote.

<u>Mass Media Influences</u>

The study of the influence of mass media began with the celebrated Erie County research (see Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948) that found that opinion leaders usually formed their views from the media (as cited by Gresens, 1998). Since that early study, a healthy collection of academic literature has been produced on mass media's impact on political attitudes, however minimal research has been specifically conducted on the presses' effect on voting turnout (Simon, 1993). Some research on this question has focused on indirect media effects, such as television's ability to blur distinctions between candidates (see Wagner, 1983 as cited by Simon, 1993) and the affect of voter volatility (see Bybee, McLeod, Luetscher, & Garramone, 1981, as cited by Simon, 1993) among other issues, but the scholarship is scant.

In terms of the impact of mass media on general political behavior, Joseph

Klapper (1960) found evidence to support his theory favoring a selective model of

effects. . . . Klapper's work was followed by more recent studies citing some cases

where the press were very powerful (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Blumler & McQuail,

1969; O'Keefe, Mendelsohn, & Liu, 1975; Saldich, 1981) and some where they were

not powerful at all (Bennett, 1990) (as cited by Gresens, 1998, p. 22). However,

Bartels (1993) undercuts "minimal effects" studies by criticizing their research design

and process. He argues that with most of this research, the effects of measurement

error and short panel studies were overlooked, thus decreasing their overall validity.

On the whole, scholarly literature does indicate that the press has some role in

political attitude formation. However, research has been better at limiting and

qualifying the impact of media rather than fully supporting it (Bartels, 1993; Simon,

1993). What is unclear is the affect of potential intervening variables (e.g., political

interest, political knowledge, education) which have also found to play a significant

role in voting behavior (Price & Zeller, 1993, as cited by Simon, 1993).

These questions are of increasing importance given that television and

newspaper coverage are the most important media presence in modern campaigns.

However, television is the primary source of general news and political information

for citizens (Adatto, 1990, as cited by Teixeira, 1992; Barthlow, 1993; Chaffee &

Frank, 1996; Burke, 1998; Kaid, Corgan, & Clampitt, 1976). In addition, as of 1980,

99 percent of all households owned one television or more (Sabato, 1981, as cited by

Burke, 1998). According to West (1996), state- and national-level political campaigns

are practically mass media elections. Political consultant Raymond D. Strother put it

simply: "that a campaign is nothing but dealing with the media" (p. 32). Kaid (1977) stated that the modern political campaign has become a "mass media extravaganza" (p. 245). Important conduits for political information include television news, newspapers, radio, internet, political advertisements, and candidates debates.

Television news. Television news during campaigns can function for the good--informing the citizenry and mobilizing the electorate. Literature confirms that political participation is directly related to the barrrage of politicking the potential voter is subjected to (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1997). However, despite the informing nature, television news--in its negative, sound bite, and "horse race" form--can also deflate voter turnout.

As of recent, television news has adopted a style that has proven to increase cynicism by covering politics in a satirical and distrustful manner (Jacobson, 1987, as cited by Burke, 1998; Rust, Bajaj, & Haley, 1984, as cited by Jeffres, 1986). Therefore, it is not uncommon to see news stories on corrupt politicians, incompetent bureaucracies, negative campaigning, pressure lobbying, and unruly protesters (Mathews, 1994). Consequently, Lichter and Noyes' (1995) assessment of the possible impact of media's critical coverage is that: "Such unrelenting negativism does not simply reflect public alienation, it intensifies it" (as cited by Lichter, Noyes, & Kaid, 1999, p. xvii). Consequently, television news with its reporting protocol can lead to "a growing political instability among voters; a withering of the two major political parties; [and] the flowering of a broad-based, anti-democratic third party" (Robinson, 1976b, p. 431). This notion of negativity among television viewers was

coined videomalaise by Michael J. Robinson in a 1976 study entitled, "Selling of the Pentagon."

Television news has also instituted sound bite coverage of political affairs. According to Adatto (1990, as cited by Teixeira, 1992), the average length of sound bites has decreased from 42 to 9 seconds between 1968 and 1988. This type of coverage results in less campaign news and issue discussion.

An increase in "horse race" coverage can also be detrimental to voter turnout. With this type of news, political polls and campaign strategy become the focus of media campaign coverage. When conducting campaign coverage, reporters emphasis how candidates are running their campaign rather than what issues are being discussed by the political officials. This type of "horse race" and "campaign strategy" coverage has increased dramatically from 6 percent in 1968 to 52 percent in 1988 (Addato, 1990, as cited by Teixeira, 1992).

Contradictory studies claim that citizens who give the most attention to the media are the most likely to participate in elections (McCorkell, 1995). Becker and Dunwoody (1982, as cited by Jeffres, 1986) write that media use serves to increase one's cognitive skills, thus boosting political participation. Other research claims that late campaign exposure and longer paid-TV commercials can also lead to higher voter turnout, especially among sporadic voters (Hoffstetter & Buff, 1980, as cited by Jeffres, 1986). In addition, Rust, Bajaj, and Haley (1984, as cited by Jeffres, 1986) document that reading newspapers and magazines increases an individual's likelihood of political participation. Conway (1985) summarizes these studies by implying that

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the more exposure to political information, the greater the likelihood of political involvement and interest, thus electoral participation.

Newspapers. The readership of newspapers for political and other information has been declining over the past decades (Cuerdon, 1986). However, about three-fifths of the adult population still read a newspaper daily, Sunday readership is even higher, and nine in ten adults read a newspaper at least once a week (Times-Mirror, 1990, as cited by Teixeria, 1992). Regardless, lower readership raises alarm because Reagan and Ducey (1993, as cited by Simon, 1993) found that citizens who read the newspaper for at least 30 minutes were more likely to vote than those who did not. Kennamer's (1987, as cited by Simon, 1993) research explained this phenomenon by suggesting that newspaper readership has an effect on one's cognition about voting, therefore an indirect impact on election turnout. This idea is further explained and supported by Teixiera (1992):

> [S]omeone who follows the campaign in the papers is more likely, all else equal, to vote than someone who only follows the campaign on television. This reflects, in my view, two notable strengths of newspaper, compared to television, campaign coverage. First, newspapers tend to provide more substantive and detailed campaign information than television, so citizens who are more involved in the campaign are particularly likely to turn to newspapers for coverage. Second, precisely because newspapers provide more substantive and detailed information and because citizens must make more effort, relative to television, to consume that information, the very process of following the campaign in the papers tends to engender increased campaign involvement.

This suggests that newspaper campaign coverage, despite being less popular than television campaign coverage, plays a very important role indeed in how citizens interact with campaigns. (pp. 166-167)

However, Teixeira's analysis requires everything to be "all else equal," and given the cross pressures of intervening variables, this condition is hard to meet. Chaffee, Zhao, and Leshner (1994) discovered newspaper advertising to also be "related to a voter's knowledge of issues and to knowledge about the candidate's personal characteristics" (as cited by Rhee & Capella, 1997, p. 197). However, in terms of newspaper readership, a contradictory study was published in 1985 by Latimer and Cotter (as cited by Simon, 1993) that claimed that newspaper use revealed no significant differences between voters and nonvoters as a result of spurious influences. Regardless of the effect of newspaper reading, people have turned almost exclusively to television news for their political news which has raised new concerns and considerations (Cuerdon, 1986).

Radio. Talk radio's advent has also become a major force in shaping public opinion and thus making a significant splash on the political environment (Graber, 1997, as cited by Johnson, Hays, & Hays, 1998). Talk radio proponents argue that it has allowed for greater freedom of expression unfiltered by traditional media (see Buckley, 1994; Rehm, 1995; all cited by Bennett, 1998). One of the strengths of talk radio is its interactive nature. In other words, radio can allow listeners to talk back, chat, ponder, discuss, deliberate, and become engaged in political topics. Bennett's research (1998) highlights that talk radio correlates with citizen's current event/political knowledge. Moreover, the academic literature reaffirms that the more

a person listens to talk radio, the more likely they are to be motivated to participate in the electoral process (Hollander, 1994; Owen, 1996; all cited by Bennett, 1998). Although direct causality was not proven, Bennett was able to eliminate extraneous factors within his study. Pinkleton and Austin (1998) also wrote that talk radio encourages increased comprehensive political coverage and extensive discussion, thus making governmental issues more relevant to people's everyday lives. Yet, a somewhat different finding was published by Gilsdorf as cited by Wolf (1975) who found that radio exerted a stronger influence than the newspaper on voting, though not on the amount of information possessed by an individual. Opponents of talk radio claim that it "pollutes the airwaves with right wing extremism, corrodes trust in political leaders, and reinforces bigotry" (see Lewis, 1995; Stern, 1992; Zibart, 1995; all cited by Bennett, 1998, p. 111).

Internet. The internet has also become a powerful medium that has great potential for reconnecting the populace and politics. For those with internet access, it can connect people through Usenet news groups, electronic bulletin boards, issue forums, chatrooms, webpages, and email (Johnson, Hays, & Hays, 1998). According to Johhson and Kaye (1998) as well as Slaton and Becker (1998), one of the internet's strengths is its ability to link political candidates and the public, whereby various methods (e.g., pseudo electronic town hall meetings) could be incorporated to better address constituent concerns. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, the lieutenant governor of Maryland, explains in The New York Times that the internet will increase participation because "it's immediate. It's not just television talking at you, but you participate" (Clymer, 2000). Furthermore, grassroot organizations have also taken

advantage of the internet to reach out to current and new members in an effort to organize and urge citizen action (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). For a list of organizations using the internet to specifically reach out to potential nonvoters and encourage their participation, see Appendix A.

Political advertising. Political advertising[13] in the U.S. also plays a major part in elections as it has become the most used method of campaign communication. Yet, very little information is added to the campaign dialogue, in terms of issue discussion, by spot ads. The Markle Commission on the Media and the Electorate reports that overall less than 10 percent of ad content was issue related (Buchanan, 1991, as cited by Teixeria, 1992). Moreover, along with this trend, is a form of campaigning that has almost become synonymous with so-called mudslinging. A recent survey conducted by the National Journal concludes that attack advertisements had become the norm rather than the exception, and that these ads have varied effects on the electorate (Ansolabehere et al., 1997). Gresens (1998, p. 25-26) wrote that:

It began as early as post colonial America when politicians began

exercising their democratic freedom to criticize each other.

Thomas Jefferson was attacked by Federalists who accused him of

being an atheist and a coward. This took place during America's

first contested presidential election in 1802 between Jefferson and

Aaron Burr. Print ads since that time (especially in the 1930s) are

some of the most negative in American history. Some research

shows that prints ads that pre-date television were the most

libelous in U.S. political history (Scammell, 1990). When

television emerged in the 1950s, it was immediately seen by

political strategists as a vehicle with awesome power and reach.

The debate on the issue of negative advertising produces contradictory

findings. Some research indicates a "demobilization hypothesis," arguing that

negative ads undermine political efficacy and decrease voting levels. A study

initiated by Ansolabehere et al. (1997) found that voting turnout dropped by 5 percent

after participants watched an attack advertisement. In fact, some television

advertisements are specifically created to depress voter turnout (Clymer, 2000).

Another line of research supports a "stimulation hypothesis," claiming that

negative ads have a negligible effect or actually boost electoral participation. Similar

studies also report the positive effect that negative ads have on political cynicism (see

Freeman & Lawton, 2000; Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990; Kaid,

McKinney, & Tedesco, 2000). However, on the whole, research tends to lean to the

fact that negative stories and political advertisements increase cynicism, discourage

participation, confuse and frustrate the electorate (Harwood, 1996; Kaid, 1996).

Further, the trend of negative advertising seems to force citizens to vote against, rather

than for political candidates. Curtis Gans, head of the Committee for the Study of the

American Electorate, clarifies the present campaign practice:

> [T]he conduct of campaigns, especially at the end, in 30-second attack ads that
>
> vilify all the candidates and create a miasma over the political system and
>
> invite people not to vote for particular candidates and not to vote at all.
>
> (Clymer, 2000, p. 24)

This practice is, once again, especially troubling when realizing that voters gain most of their political knowledge about candidates from television advertising (Graber, 1988, as cited by Blackburn, 1992).

Candidate debates. Political debates also play a role during the campaign season. In fact, McKinney and Lamoureux (1999) wrote that political debates attract more viewers than any other single campaign event. On the average, viewership ranges between 60 to 80 million people for each presidential debate. However, the 1980 debate between President Jimmy Carter and challenger Ronald Reagan topped 100 million viewers, ranking it among the most watched television programs in history (Schroeder, 2000).

Besides the high viewership rates, candidate debates hold several advantages for our political system as well. First, debates can serve to educate and inform the public. After viewing a debate, research shows that citizens leave having learned something, being more informed, and can pick out contradictions in the candidates' messages. Debates also help the public make significant issue differentiations between the candidates (Drew & Weaver, 1991; McKinney & Lamoureux, 1999). And for people who have not been following the campaigns closely, debates serve as a "last minute cram session for preparing the voting public" (Graber, 1997, p. 257). As important, the reach of these campaign events is all-encompassing; touching citizens from every class, race, income, and education level (Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988, as cited by Schroeder, 2000). Furthermore, Drew and Weaver (1991) found that debates provide more substantial information about campaign issues than political news sources. They wrote that voters were more likely to gain greater political

knowledge from debates than from traditional news media (e.g., television talk shows, morning network news).

In addition, academic literature has shown that debates have proven to increase voter turnout. Sears and Chaffee (1979), Cuerdon (1986), and Kaid et al. (2000) elaborate that debates stir interest in the electoral contest and minimize political cynicism. Political scientist Thomas Patterson explained this influence when he stated:

> I think you could even argue that the '92 debates saved the campaign. In September, Americans were very soured on the campaign, and Perot's reentry into the race perked the campaign up a bit--and then the four debates in October. By the end of October, people were into the campaign and we had a 5 percent increase in voter turnout. I think in terms of connecting the American public to the campaign, the debates are probably the central event. (PBS News Hour, 1996, as cited by Schroeder, 2000)

The idea of linking the audience to the campaign was echoed by Schroeder (2000, pp. 206-207): "Debates provide a sense of connectedness, granting individual viewers a voice in the collective discourse." In other words, through creating a para-social relationship with the citizenry, the public is made to feel like real participants in the unfolding campaign season. Therefore, it is no wonder that Hellweg, Pfau, and Brydon (1992) conclude--in a comprehensive study of presidential debates--that debates seem to strengthen and reinforce voting decisions. Further, this hardening of candidate preferences often serves to motivate voters to turn out at the polls.

However, as with any form of mass media, debates are only one of many factors considered when making voting decisions (Schroeder, 2000).

Campaign Influences

Campaign style. Campaigns of today are quite different from the politicking that took place before the 1960s (Ansolabehere et al., 1997). Hunt (1994) labels this transition as a changeover from "old politics" to "new politics" from "geographical" politicking to "aspatial" campaigning. In other words, old politics represented campaigns with get-out-the-vote drives, rallies, political speeches, and efforts by parties and political machines. Further, this campaign system relied on neighborhood party workers to organize even larger amounts of citizens to rally for their candidate and vote. These efforts were geographical in nature.

New politics is strikingly different. Contemporary campaigns are built around media advertising, packaged candidate communications (commonly via television), direct mail, telemarketing efforts, and especially target marketing. This type of campaigning is aspatial as it does not require the voter to go to, or even live in, any particular place (Hunt, 1994).

Clymer (2000) writes that the old ways of politicking have died and been replaced with slick television advertisements and professional direct mail. Old politics, such as door knocking, does continue in Iowa and New Hampshire, but almost as "museum pieces." Furthermore, it is generally believed that the current campaign methods (e.g., television advertisements, direct mail) have undermined the traditional style of campaigning for political office (see Bartels, 1988; Polsby, 1983; Wattenberg, 1984, 1991; all cited by Ansolabehere et al., 1997). In addition, under

the current system, evidence reveals that political consultants—who are a mainstay in modern politics—actually prefer low turnout. The tactics of consultants specifically work to impede mass participation through specific targeting and negative campaigning, for example (Blackburn, 1992). As a result of selective campaigning, Schier (2000) has labeled contemporary elections a "politics by invitation only."

In addition, with this wholistic change have come—many would argue—damning effects to the political system, specifically on voter turnout. The reason for the link between new politics and voter decline is outlined by Rosenstone and Hansen (1993, pp. 231-232):

> Nineteenth-century parties mounted elaborate spectacles of campaign pageantry, parades, mass demonstrations, and rallies. . . They 'built cadres of party workers to encourage men to go to the polls.' The intense partisan mobilization . . . heightened people's interest in politics. . . It reinforced ethnic, religious, class, and regional identities and provided solidarity and purposive benefits to those who stood with their neighbors. It got people to vote.

This mindset is further purported by E. J. Dionne (1991, p. 10):

> Over the last three decades, the faith of the American public in their democratic institutions has declined, and Americans have begun to doubt their ability to improve the world through politics. . . . Election campaigns generate less excitement than ever and are dominated by television commercials, direct mail, polling, and other approaches that treat individual voters not as citizens deciding their nation's fate, but as mere collections of impulses to be stroked and soothed. (as cited by Woodward, 1997)

Under the new system of politics, partisan and social cues are no longer readily present. Thus, the cost of voting (i.e., time required in finding out where and when to register, informing oneself about the race, and getting to the polls) is no longer wholly subsidized by the party organization. Couple this with the hands-off approach common under the current method of campaigning, today's politics does not call for door-to-door campaign activities or other social contact familiar to campaigns before 1960. Even get-out-to-vote (GOTV) efforts have been neglected by campaigns, making mobilization of voters for the election ever more difficult. Accordingly, Katz (1957, p. 61, as cited by Robinson, 1976a) wrote that "personal influence figures both more frequently and more effectively than any of the mass media." In addition, academic research conclusively finds that interpersonal interactions, as compared to media communication, are associated with a seven percent higher involvement rate (Robinson, 1976a). Thus, the social benefits of face-to-face, political engagements have succumbed--along with voter turnout--to the impersonal, mass communicated campaign's of today (Blackburn, 1992; Hunt, 1994; Lyons & Arrington, 1988).

Competitiveness of election. In an historical study of presidential elections since 1828 conducted by Fenton (1979), it was found that there was a positive correlation between voter turnout and the competitiveness of the campaign. Researchers have also used cross-sectional data from single elections to show that turnout was higher in states with close races (Campbell, 1960, 1964; Dye, 1966, Milbrath, 1971, & Flanigan, 1972, all cited by Cuerdon, 1986; Lyons & Arrington, 1988). However, Gray (1976) using time-series analyses and studies conducted by the

Survey Research Center reveals contrasting conclusions regarding election

competitiveness and voter turnout. Specifically, the data highlights that the

competitive nature of an election has had little to do with voting levels since 1964 (as

cited by Cuerdon, 1986). Furthermore, races that are perceived as close or

controversial result in higher turnouts (Lewis, 1989). In addition, research illuminates

that voting is strongly correlated to the interest one has for a campaign (Pew

Research, 2000).

Cultural Influences

Nonparticipation has also been linked to cultural phenomena. Current

American cultural values of individualism and altruism often make political

participation unappealing (Rosenberg, 1951, as cited by Burke, 2000). One such

change is the decline in group membership over the last twenty five years (e.g., civic

organizations) that used to connect the populace, resulting in greater attention to

community affairs and political matters. Today's patterns of work, housing,

recreation, and entertainment often hinder the public from actively engaging in

communal activities. Specifically, due to a lack of time, resources, and space,

participation in electoral politics has become more difficult and "costly." However,

the decline has been slowest among the most educated and wealthy. For example, the

educational, business, political, and cultural elite still have the resources (e.g.,

monetary, leisure) to continue to organize around group membership (Seidelman,

1999).

Obviously, the studies above highlight numerous significant reasons for why

so many Americans have become politically disengaged. Various other peripheral

reasons could be explored as well, such as the deep partisanship of Congress, an emphasis on image over substance, and the media's willingness to report messages in strategic objectives rather than on policy implications. Considering these reasons, the bottom line from past research is quite straightforward: Nonvoters are not connected and do not see the relevance of politics to their lives (Bauder, 2000).

Prior Research Methods

Surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and content analyses have all been utilized in prior research to address the characteristics, causes, and solutions for nonvoting. In most cases, survey studies are conducted to determine the characteristics of nonvoters. In addition, much of the early survey research is the product of work done at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University and the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan now known as the Center for Political Studies (Lyons & Arrington, 1988). Current research on voting behavior is based on this pioneering survey data. In a quantitative vein, scholarship on voter turnout is usually correlated with various isolated influences, such as political interest and efficacy, to determine a general understanding of the attributes of nonvoters. Yet, these studies have found differing factors contributing to nonvoting, thus proving to be far from conclusive. In addition, much of the early research simply used bivariate analysis or "control tables" making a full prediction of influences on nonvoting impossible. Further, some qualitative research indicates that many forms of quantitative data could be invalid. In addition, follow up questions must be used in nonvoter research due to the fact that participants' often provide rote answers in order to shield their disaffection with voting (Shearer et al., 1998).

Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding of who makes up nonvoters and their true reasons for disengagement are needed.

Thus, by utilizing a qualitative and quantitative approach in this dissertation, the characteristics, causes, and solutions for nonparticipation can be better described and more fully understood. Specifically, through the use of focus groups and in-depth interviews, the interaction of different attributes that may most effect voter turnout can be highlighted (Maddox, 1978). A multiple regression analysis was also conducted to explain in greater detail the multiple causal influences on nonvoting (see Milbrath & Goel, 1977). Thus, focus-groups, in-depth interviews, and a mulitiple linear regression analysis were utilized to determine the phenomenon of nonvoting in the 2000 election.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study on the phenomenon of nonvoting:

RQ 1: What are the reasons for nonvoting?

RQ 2: What are the solutions for nonvoting?

RQ 3: What demographic and political perception variables predict voting?

Chapter III

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used focus groups and in-depth personal interviews to address

questions regarding the reasons and solutions for political abstention. In addition, a

multiple regression analysis of survey data was utilized to determine the

characteristics of nonvoters. The research design and methods used in this study were

approved by the University of Oklahoma's Institutional Review Board (IRB). (See

Appendix G for a copy of the IRB forms).

Focus Groups

The focus groups for this study--part of a larger study on the 2000 election--

were conducted after the presidential and vice-presidential debates (i.e., October 3,

October 5, October 11, and October 17, 2000). Participants represented a cross-

section of eligible mixed, adult voters in the United States during the 2000 election.

In specific, the focus groups were representative of the four major regions of the

United States as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (see Fugate, 1996). Data were

gathered from the following locations: (a) Dickerson College (PA); (b) Ohio

University; (c) University of Akron (OH); (d) University of Missouri; (e) University

of North Texas; (f) University of Oklahoma; (g) University of Florida; (h) Cosumnes

River College (CA); and (i) University of Idaho. Each focus group consisted of five

to thirty participants. In all, 22 focus groups were conducted with over 228

participants (details of focus group sites are listed in Table 5). Each focus group

lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and the discussion questions are listed in Appendix

B. Volunteers were solicited using a variety of methods, and some participants were

given small honorariums. Focus groups were conducted to gain a greater understanding of attitudinal factors (e.g., efficacy) as well as external factors, such as the media and legal barriers, on voting. In addition, options for increasing political participation were also solicited. Probing questions were often included to gain more information about why individuals hold certain feelings and viewpoints about voting.

Focus group interviews were unstructured or planned group conversations about a specific topic(s) that were taped and subsequently transcribed into text for analysis. Adler and Clark (1999) as well as Babbie (1999) state that focus groups usually consist of anywhere from 4 to 15 people brought together to discuss a certain topic(s). While the discussions are prompted by thoughtful questions, they are not closely controlled (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1992). "[R]espondents are (a) free to use their own language and terminology, rather than merely respond to a researcher's questions and (b) able to interact with each other in a social setting that more closely reflects the way people actually experience citizenship" (McCorkell, 1995, p. 12, as cited by Krueger, 1988; Conover, Crewe, & Searing, 1991).

Focus groups were one of the chosen qualitative methods for this study due to their effectiveness at harnessing detailed information about a person's thoughts and reasoning process. Further, "when questions are asked in a group environment and nourished by skillful probing, the results are candid portraits of customer perceptions. The permissive group environment gives individuals license to divulge emotions that often do not emerge in other forms of questioning" (Krueger, 1994, p. 11). The more natural environment found in focus groups is prone to create increased candor by the participants, and can often raise issues of discussion not anticipated by the researcher.

In addition, the situation allows the moderator to probe and ask follow-up questions when appropriate. This flexibility is not often available with the use of other qualitative or quantitative methods (Adler & Clark, 1999; Babbie, 1999; Stewart, 1990).

Focus groups alone, of course, do have some weaknesses. For example, due to their group-based nature they are prone to social desirability effects. Furthermore, because they are not random or truly representative, they often make generalizing difficult. Nonetheless, they are an important tool for harvesting a comprehensive or initial understanding of how people think about a certain phenomena (McCorkell, 1995).

In-depth Interviews

In-depth or personal semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain detailed accounts, extended exploration, and specific thoughts about political participation, thus a deeper understanding of nonvoting behavior. The terms "in-depth" and "personal" interview are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. Discussions of possible remedies for political abstention were also included. During interviews—one of the most widely used methods of data collection-- respondents were asked to answer a set of questions presented by the interviewer (Adler & Clark, 1999). In this case, a convenience sample of over fifty interviewees participated during the months of January and February 2001. The sample consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in introductory communication classes (e.g., Principles of Communication, Public Speaking) at a large Midwestern university. Fifty-four percent of the focus group members were female, and of the total sample,

17 percent were 25 years or older. Volunteers were solicited, but some students were awarded minimal research or extra-credit points for their participation. During the interviews--lasting no longer than 45 minutes--open-ended questions were asked (see Appendix C for the interview guide). In order to gain a deeper understanding on nonvoting behavior, follow-up questions were also utilized.

The personal nature of interviews presents many benefits and disadvantages. For this dissertation, interviews proved especially helpful at getting "beneath the surface" to better comprehend why citizens choose not to participate in political elections (Frey et al., 1992). One reason for their success is due to the comforting nature of the in-person interview. Respondents and interviewers often build a quick connection or rapport allowing for deeper conversations (Adler & Clark, 1999). In addition, face-to-face interviews allow the interviewer to be aware of nonverbal communication, thus better understanding when clarification, follow-up, or probing should take place. In many cases, the interviewer will also take note of nonverbal observations as part of the data gathering process (Babbie, 1997; Frey et al., 1991).

Yet, with the intimate nature of interviews, the participants can easily be led to give a desired answer. The practice of video- and/or audio-taping the interviews can also make the participants feel uncomfortable and can cause them to be selective in their answers. Therefore, the success of the interview depends on a "successful" interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Frey et al., 1991).

Regression Analysis

In addition, the quantitative method of multiple linear regression analysis was utilized on survey data to explain voting behavior using several predictor variables. A

regression analysis was conducted in this case to predict if certain demographic and political perception factors led to political participation (Frey et al., 1991; Hirschman, 1981). The survey data were collected as part of the 2000 presidential campaign. The survey questions are listed in Appendix D and measure political cynicism as well as demographic characteristics. Other questions listed on the survey were not used for this study.

The telephone surveys for this study—part of the National Election Research Study project coordinated by the Political Communication Center at the University of Oklahoma—were conducted after the presidential election in December 2000. Participants represented a cross-section of eligible mixed, adult voters over 18 years old in the United States. Data were gathered from the following ten states: (a) Missouri; (b) South Carolina; (c) Texas; (d) Virginia; (e) Utah; (f) Oklahoma; (g) California; (h) Indiana; (i) Georgia; and (j) Alabama. In all, 291 surveys were collected. The average survey lasted 15 minutes and participants were selected for phone contact using a variety of methods (e.g., random digit dialing, previous participation in focus groups).

Of the total sample, 152 (53 percent) of the respondents were female and 134 (47 percent) were male. Six percent of the participants were African American, 3.5 percent Spanish/Hispanic Origin, 2 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 2 percent Native American, 2 percent multi-racial, and the remaining 83 percent were Caucasian. The average age of those surveyed was 39 years old, and 70 percent of the participants were older than 25 years. Forty-four percent of the respondents considered

themselves Republicans, whereas 34 percent and 14 percent identified with the Democrats and Independents respectively.

Procedure

The research procedure involved many steps to systematically produce the results listed in the next section. In terms of the qualitative data collection, focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted first to gather information on voting behavior. All 22 focus groups were conducted in October 2000. After individuals agreed to participate, they were asked to watch a presidential debate as well as fill out a pre-test questionnaire, a post-test questionnaire, and join a 60-90 minute focus group discussion. The entire research process lasted around two and a half to three hours. For this study, only focus group questions related to nonvoting were needed. Each focus group was audio- and video-taped for accurate documentation. Verbatim transcriptions were made of focus groups by trained graduate students and the author, and were verified for accuracy.

Personal interviews were also conducted to gain a clearer view of the problem and solutions to nonvoting. All 54 interviews were conducted between March and early April 2001. After individuals agreed to participate, they were asked to answer a number of questions related to the 2000 presidential campaign. Each interview included structured and probing questions, and lasted about an hour. In addition, each in-depth interview was audio- and video-taped. Although each interview typically included around 30 questions, verbatim transcriptions were only made of discussion specifically related to nonvoting. Transcriptions were made by trained graduate students and the author. All transcriptions were verified for accuracy. In all, there

were over 218 pages of transcriptions from the focus groups and in-depth interviews. After transcribing, the data from both sets of discussions were read several times to determine primary and secondary themes (see Table 6 for a thematic coding scheme). These themes were also based on an exhaustive literature review of the reasons and remedies for nonvoting. After finalizing the content themes or categories, the focus groups and in-depth interviews were content analyzed again to provide an accurate count under each theme. The data from the content analysis were used to address research questions one and two.

In terms of the quantitative method, this study used a multiple linear regression procedure to show how the criterion variable of voting could be explained by the various predictor variables. Several predictor variables (sex, age, education, party affiliation, race, income, political cynicism, and whether one voted in the 1996 election) were investigated.

First, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on survey items measuring political cynicism. A factor analysis is used to reduce scores on multiple items to a common underlying factor (Frey et al., 1991; Williams, 1992). The five items testing political cynicism were based on survey questions from the General Social Survey by the Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan. The cynicism statements were:

    a. Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do.

    b. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

    c. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

d. One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing.

e. Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over.

Responses for the questions were either "strongly agree," "agree somewhat," "have no opinion," "disagree somewhat," or "disagree strongly." On a scale of 1 to 4, "strongly agree" represented the highest level of political cynicism. Respondents who answered "have no opinion" for an item were excluded from analysis on that question. Item "d" had to be reverse coded before running the factor analysis. The mean average for each item fell between "somewhat agree" and "somewhat disagree" (Item a, M=2.21; Item b, M=2.08; Item c, M=2.27; Item d, M=3.23; Item e, M=2.98). Of the five items, two were eliminated (i.e., item 1 and 4) during the process to create a more reliable cynicism scale to minimize error between observed and predicted factors.

A multiple regression analysis was then conducted to assess the extent to which demographic (sex, age, education, party affiliation, race, and income) and political perception variables (political cynicism, and whether one voted in the 1996 election) predict voting. As the regression model tested significant, both bivariate and partial correlations are listed in the following results section. Descriptive statistics were also employed to offer insights into participants' traits.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

In order to answer the first two research questions posed, transcripts were made of the focus groups and in-depth interviews. During the transcription process, special notice was made of the discussions related to the reasons and solutions for nonvoting. The results from both the focus groups and the in-depth interviews are combined due to their similarity in findings (see Appendices E and F). In addition, similar theories and ideas voiced by the focus group and personal interview participants are listed together for clarity purposes. Furthermore, the terms "participants," "discussants," "respondents," and "interviewees" are used interchangeably throughout the remainder of the dissertation.

Reasons for political abstention have been cataloged according to the following themes: psychological, governmental, campaign, media, economic, and cultural. The focus group and in-depth interview excerpts chosen to support the nonvoting themes were typical and representative of the overall discussions. In addition, they were selected due to their clarity and explanatory power. The geographical location and gender are listed for the focus groups and in-depth interviews by the use of abbreviations: "F" for female, "M" for male, and "Mod" for moderator.

Reasons for Nonvoting

<center>Reasons for Nonvoting</center>

<center>Psychological Influences</center>

Political Knowledge

The main reason for nonvoting cited by both the focus group and in-depth interview participants was a lack of knowledge about the candidates, the political process, and the importance of voting. Nonvoters do not seem to understand how politics affects their everyday life. This sentiment was plainly spoken by a male respondent in a personal interview on March 29, 2001, "Basically, for me to vote more, I would have to have to be educated as to why it is important that I do so, that it does make a difference what I believe." A similar comment was shared by a female discussant during an in-depth discussion on April 2:

> For me, this was the first presidential election I could vote in and I didn't feel like I knew. I mean, I knew how I felt on certain issues, but I didn't know how each candidate felt about those certain issues. I didn't know who I would be voting for. I didn't know if that would help or hinder me, my vote, so I didn't.

One potential voter was so worried, he commented in an interview, "It would take a 20 to 30 hour week of research or more to even get any idea [about the candidates' stances], and then you don't even know if you are getting started in the right direction."

As professed in the discussions, nonvoters are less aware of political issues and are thus more likely to perceive the act of voting as extremely complex and difficult. Many political abstainers are often not privy to campaign dialogue due to their own actions or other external factors.

Political Efficacy

Of the psychological influences, the second highest ranked reason for nonvoting relates to political efficacy. During the discussions, respondents often questioned if their vote really mattered. They wondered if politicians truly cared about them and if they could successfully influence the political system. Their sentiment was similar to that enunciated by a Florida focus group member on October 11, "There is just a feeling of helplessness or that, you know, that they're [voters] not going to make a difference. That they [nonvoters] think the political wheel moves regardless." This mindset was also common among those participating in in-depth interviews as well. A female participant explained on April 3 that "nonvoters don't really care because they don't think their vote matters. Everybody thinks that, it really doesn't matter if I vote--things are going to go the way they go, no matter if I vote." Along these lines, a California respondent stated after the third presidential debate:

> M4: . . . we don't feel like our vote's going to count. We don't feel also like we're going to make a difference. We feel like the government is going to do what the government wants to do regardless of, not only what we ask them to do, but what they promise in their campaign. And after they're elected it seems to vary by degree as to whether or not they keep their promises.

An in-depth interviewee on March 29 also provided a good insight into the psyche of the nonvoter turned off by politics:

M: A couple of my really good friends, they don't come out and say . . .

they [politicians] don't care what people think, do what is in

their best interest. Don't have any faith in the system.

Whatever way they were raised. Whatever their thinking

process, everyone, and politicians and stuff are out for their

own good. Not for the good of whoever. Those people think

that they "can't affect the process," another thing they think.

People are not going to listen to me. One vote is not going to

do anything, why am I going to do this start thinking about

more. Think more, everything is messed up, I don't like

anyone. Politicians don't know what they are doing, they don't

care for me. Whoever has the most money, whoever is going to

donate.

Furthermore, a male participant highlighted the need for inclusion and efficacy

among voters when he stated, "I think young people really need to feel that the

politicians care about what they want especially, some people don't think that they

care and stuff."

A feeling of powerlessness is frequently customary for nonvoters. For those

who have given up on the political system, they sense that a working relationship with

political officials is worthless and counterproductive. Further, their inefficacious

perceptions hinder them from being motivated by political campaigns, thus often

resulting in their disengagement from governmental affairs altogether.

Party and Parental Influence

Other psychological influences include partisan identification and parental socialization. Several respondents mentioned the limited role of political parties in contemporary campaigns and consequently, their effect on voter decision. Specifically, a female participant spoke of this conundrum during a focus group in Columbia, MO following the first presidential debate:

> F2:   I think voting was a lot easier for generations before, like our older generations for one because there was like definitive lines between the Democratic party and the Republican party. You didn't have to be really educated about a specific candidate because if they were Republican you pretty much knew this is what they are going to be supporting because there were so many definites between, you know, definite differences between the Republicans and Democrats and even for, but like now days it's really becoming so much blurrier. You can't really tell a definite difference so it forces you to go out there and get educated about the candidates and it's hard to do . . .

A few statements were also made about the effect of parents and school on one's political socialization. It was ordinary to hear such exclamations as "My family has always been very strong. My family when growing up, it was a very big deal to be able to vote" (female, in-depth interview, March 14, 2001). Others reminisced about (or lack thereof) their high school's civic education class. They talked about the value of learning about the political process and the importance of voting as well as

instilling a sense of civic duty in students. Yet, according to those interviewed, these topics of discussion are sorely missing from many educational curriculums.

Parents and schools still act as effective socializing agents. They can serve to increase awareness of political policy and support the democratic process. Yet, this is possible only if children are taught in school and in the home that political participation matters, and see their parents actively involved.

Governmental Influences

Electoral Process

The category of governmental influences, specifically the electoral process, covers a broad range of issues pertaining to the act of voting and its effect. Focus group and in-depth discussions revealed a number of factors that were credited with decreasing political engagement.

One vote in a million. A cause of nonvoting—closely related to the above reasons (i.e., political knowledge and efficacy)—is the often repeated complaint that "one's vote does not really count" in the electoral process. A male respondent stated in a personal interview on April 2:

> M: I think a lot of people feel that their one little vote isn't going to change
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> anything. I think that is why most people, you know . . . Just a
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> feeling that they [nonvoters] are not going to change anything
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> so it doesn't matter. So I think all that combined rolls into one
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> snowball effect.

This mindset was further explained by a female focus group member from Texas on October 11, "it is hard to think that your vote makes a difference when there's so many people in America that vote because, you know, out of a hundred thousand, one vote doesn't make a difference."

In these cases, the potential voter is expressing unhappiness with the rewards of their participation. They believe that they will have little impact on the outcome of the election, and thus believe there are few reasons for them to get out to vote.

Single-party states. A similar opinion to the one mentioned above was found in the "single-party states" argument. A recurrent viewpoint shared by many of the discussion participants was the lack of vote significance due to one-party dominance. In other words, supporters of the candidate deeply trailing in the polls often felt defeated and were less likely to consider their political participation essential to the election outcome. A female focus group member from Texas on October 17 expounded:

> F3: It's because they don't have an impact. They, I mean like the last election, said 'oh, this is a Bush backing state,' it doesn't make a difference whether or not I vote for Gore because it, you know, won't have an impact on . . . people are voting for Bush. One vote doesn't make a difference.

A personal interview on April 29 further substantiated this traditional concern:

F: Like I said earlier, in a state like this, it usually is a given state, it goes

         Republican, has Republican views. So, a friend of mine, a

         Democrat, chooses to vote and doesn't see results time and time

         again. Why should he put out the extra effort?

This theme highlighted the need for voters to feel as if their participation has

meaning. Obviously, a lack of state competition among parties or candidates can be

literally and psychologically defeating. On the other hand, close or competitive races

can act to increase interest, and therefore voting turnout in the long run.

   Electoral College. According to the participants, some voters were also

"turned off" because of the Electoral College in presidential elections. To bolster this

argument, an exemplary exchange happened in a focus group in Norman, OK after the

second presidential debate:

F1   I really don't think that my vote matters and a matter of fact in the

         presidential election, if you live in Oklahoma, your vote does

         not matter. It is because of the Electoral College that we have--

         winner take all. Your individual vote doesn't matter and, in

         national elections. I think it is really sad the way our system is,

         but that is the way it is.

F2   The candidates don't come here. They are not advertising here--

         nothing. It just doesn't matter.

In line with others, many stated that the Electoral College should be abolished to send a strong message about the importance of voting. Respondents in Norman, OK following the first presidential debate had this discussion:

M2   Electoral College. This one, I would think at some point in time we would rethink this idea that in the Electoral College—you know those numbers make the decision and, ah, as opposed to the popular vote. . . . I would hope that, just as we elect a mayor or elect a city council, ah—with a popular vote. A popular vote as opposed to a electoral vote.

F4   I think it would probably encourage people to go to the polls. You know, if it is a foregone conclusion that Oklahoma is going to go Republican, than why vote? But if my vote was going to be tallied with every other Democratic vote in the whole country than my vote would certainly count, you know.

F5   It would count as much as?

F4   It would count as much as somebody's in California.

Some of the talk offered by participants endorsed reform to the electoral process. They spoke in favor of a direct vote, rather than the Electoral College, to provide the populace with more influence and control over the elections. Overall, this topic seemed to be more potent among both focus groups and in-depth interviews than previous literature would suggest.

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Voting process. A few respondents also complained about the often inconvenient process of voting. One in-depth interview provided this personal narrative on March 29:

M: ... it is probably not convenient for a lot of people to go vote. You know when you go in there, my dad, for instance, works long hours. Works his ass off. Goes to McDonald's for lunch and goes to vote. An hour wait because there is enough old people handing out the sheets and it takes you 3 hours. I went twice to mine this year. Took 10 minutes to find my name. Took 30 minutes to get me a sheet and then I had to wait for a booth. I tried to just sit in a chair and they made me wait for a booth. It is inconvenient for a lot of people, you know.

Interviewees were not afraid to delve into the real mechanics of voting either. Accordingly, they advocated simple modifications in the electoral process in order to increase political satisfaction. They believe that matters of convenience do play a major role in voting behavior.

Minor Party Candidates

During the focus groups, participants also registered their frustration with the exclusion of third-party candidates in the political spectacle. People were upset that minor party candidates are not included on the ballots or in the presidential debates according to a focus group on October 11 in Norman, OK.

F1   Keeping candidates off the ballot that should be on. It is not fair to

have the domination of the major parties in one state and not in

another. How can you have a fair election when people are on

the ballot in one state and not in another?

Ensuring the inclusion of a variety of candidates on the ballot could serve to

spark interest among politically disenfranchised citizens. Third-party candidates often

give voice to criticisms of the current state of affairs as well. Thus, this act of shared

expression can serve to increase political efficacy and citizen engagement.

Campaign Influences

Certainly, psychological and governmental influences have a significant affect

on voting rates among the citizenry, however campaign influences are also a decisive

factor in this equation. Campaign influences is a broad category covering the many

topics related to candidate image and campaign protocol.

Candidates Are the Same

Due to perceived similarities between the candidates, several participants

openly questioned the stakes in the election. In addition, without clear differences

between the presidential campaigns, participants were asking, "Why bother? Why

vote?" This line of thought was highlighted in a Florida focus group on October 11:

M2   [The] fact that tonight once again, I mean if you compare the American

political system to like other political systems in other countries

our candidates are almost exactly identical compared to what

some of these other countries go through. And tonight you saw

these guys having really to struggle to find the differences between each other and so sometimes people think well, you know, Gore, Bush it's not going to change my life that significantly either way and I feel that way, honestly.

A focus group member in California on October 17 also agreed:

F5   I think it just catches the essence of what people feel in America about these two candidates and these two political parties. The only thing, the only thing that is better about Gore is that he is getting money from slightly less, uh slightly less, um offensive uh .. special interest groups than Bush is and that's it. I mean they're both wrong, and I think that what he said was also a very, very good, this is just the left wing and the right wing of the business party, of the corporate party. I mean they're the same, their ideals, their everything else, it all boils down to the same thing. Its sort of like the difference between Freud and Skinner, I mean they're two different theories but when you boil it all down it comes to the same end. It's the same thing and so people have just got to the point where they feel like, you know, it doesn't matter. Because no matter how they arrive at the, uh outcome, the outcome is gonna be the same. So, you know, does it really matter if I vote for Gore or does it really matter if I vote for Bush? Probably not.

<u>Candidates Are Fake</u>

In addition, questions about nonvoting, recurrently raised talk of the quality of candidates running for office. Discussants felt uneasy about the type of candidate and campaign discourse common to politicking today. Specifically, focus group and in-depth interviewees expressed a sense of overall frustration with political affairs as stated in in-depth interview testimony on October 11 in Norman, OK:

> M1:   I know a lot of people that feel like the federal government is so out of touch with the issues that really relate to us. . . . they poll that agenda and find that certain parts are appealing to certain people, so thus the next week Gore has a plan. . . . They only listen so that they can turn around and tell us what we want to hear, so that we will elect them, so they can go back to Washington--go back to their cushy jobs. . . . I just feel that they are out of touch.

In other words, citizens are searching for a politician to whom they can relate. A participant from Texas explained:

> F3:   . . . For me it's I just, I'm craving something real, and these men to me aren't real. You know like when Gore came out and was all like 'well, I just want to thank...', it was just crap. It was so fake, you know. It's so easy to say, you know, we need a real candidate in there but they can't be real anymore. . . . it's just it's come to a point, for me at least, as a youth, it's just it's just so fake. It's just not even right any more. I don't know, it may

have been like that the whole time but I'm just beginning to see it.

The populace is also concerned with the tendency for some politicians to embellish the truth and to not be completely frank with their views and opinions. A female focus group member at the University of North Texas after the first presidential debate stated:

> F2: Because I don't believe everything that either one of them says. I don't think that either one of them is telling it exactly the way that it is. It is a big act, it is a big show, everything that they say is designed specifically to make you vote for them and I have not found a candidate yet since, I'm a big Reagan advocate, since Reagan that I've really respected enough to, to want to get behind and vote, not for President. . . .I have not found a presidential candidate that I was really for, as opposed to being really against, in a long time.

Corruption

Focus group and interview members also voiced concern with corruption in politics. They specifically identified special interests and big money as devaluing the image of politicians and governmental affairs. In addition, they highlighted the growing power of corrupt influences in comparison to citizen activism. On October 17 in Norman, OK, a participant explained the ingrained distrust and disengagement citizens possess toward elected officials and political candidates:

M6   I have been in politics a long time and I have a feeling that most of the

kids think that anybody in politics is a crook, and sometimes

they are not that far off. That makes it very difficult to

convince them they should participate. . . . Invite them

[students] into all political operations.

This attitude was elaborated by a male discussant in a personal interview on April 3:

M: Truly, the reason people are not voting, there are several reasons,

several don't care. The main reason, people are really kind of

fed up with the system is because they feel what good is it.

They think a lot of organizations, Political Action Committees

(PACs), businesses, lobbyists, what not, they have the power,

they have the money. So, when it comes to the question of

elected officials listening to me or these big groups, they are

going to go with these big groups perhaps.

Finally, discussants highlighted their negative opinion of big money in

political campaigns. These statements were made during a focus group following the

first presidential debate in Norman, OK:

F3   Another slant on the whole disengagement [issue] is the feeling that it

is all bought and sold before we ever get involved. I have lost

out—I have no voice. When General Mills or whoever the big

corporation is, decides to funnel millions of dollars to a

candidate—who is suppose to be representing people in

Oklahoma—we have lost it, we have lost it. It is totally

irrelevant what those candidates will do when they get there. It is totally irrelevant what is good for me, good for Oklahoma, or good for anyone else.

Discourse Focus

Discussants also mentioned the narrow range of campaign topics debated during the election season. According to a focus group in Norman, OK after the third presidential debate, participants believe the issue discussions need to be changed or broadened:

> F1: Well, we put out the issue of protecting Social Security and the ah, prescription drug benefits for seniors and it seems like that more of the issues are talking to the people in my age group and beyond, instead of the twenty something year olds I work with. They don't care [about them]--they are not going to vote.

A focus group member from California on October 17 also concurred:

> F2: Nobody focuses on the 20-year-old generation, how they would like to see the president's talk. We don't see that. They see how we would like the middle class 35-year-old white man. That's what he would like. Sorry, but it's true. That's what I think. I think that if we want to make our young 18 year olds to 25 year olds be interested in this we need to address them in a way that would influence them positively.

Finally, a focus group member in Columbia, MO on October 3 explored the endless circle created by a lack of focus given to certain age groups and political issues:

M2:   Well I think it's kind of like a slippery slope. One of the main reasons

that young voters don't vote is that we think campaigns aren't

geared toward us, they don't have issues that affect us, so why

do we vote, so if candidates direct their campaigns towards

people who are registered to vote and who are undecided

registered voters, that's not going to apply to us because we're

not undecided registered voters, and that further leads to our

disengagement because we're like well they're not directing

their attention towards us, so we're just not going to vote. And

it just kind of leads to a slippery slope where it just goes

downhill from there.

When focusing on certain groups of people and issues, however, it is also
important that the political candidates speak in terms understood by average citizens.
Some discussants complained about the amount of political jargon and legalese used
while campaigning. According to a participant from a Pennsylvania focus group
following the first presidential debate:

M1:   I think since we're all in the collegiate atmosphere we kind of take,

people kind of take for granted the level of understanding or

logic that our peers have. I think one of the most, one of the

biggest reasons for disinterest in politics is what Dick Cheney

pointed out--whether or not I agree with it is a different story--

but he said that you needed to be a CPA to understand what

Lieberman was saying. And I think that's true with a lot of

people. They know the last thing about politics or any policy. And with these candidates just spewing out 1.6 trillion, one hundred thousand, 75% . . . I was still kind of lost in most of the statistical debate that was going on. So I think that's one of the, one of the most important reasons. One of the more significant reasons why people are having a lack of interest and lack of feeling of inclusion.

Mass Media Influences

The mass media influence is another primary theme that emerged from the focus groups and in-depth interviews. Included in this section is criticism of the quality of media coverage, negativity in news reporting, and the heavy reliance on political polls.

First, members of the discussions described the "dumbing-down" of mass media. Several respondents discussed on October 3 in Norman, OK this phenomenon in detail and its powerful effects on the political process:

M1:   I think, frankly, the media coverage is such that it is so canned—that they don't know they are voting for real people. It is so disconnected from them in a sense because they are getting canned kind of things. I think it is the candidates and campaigns—they are so scripted. The campaign, government does not seem relevant. They say this is a societal trend. People are not involved in their family and community. The

candidates and campaign come across so scripted. I think it is something. You are dealing with politically interested people or we wouldn't be here—I think we have a lot of people turned off before we even get started. It just doesn't seem relevant to their lives.

Participants seemed shocked with the quality of today's mass media. A member of the first focus group in Norman, OK spoke further on this viewpoint:

F4   I have a little bit different take on this. I think if we went around this room, not many people would admit getting information from television. Yet, I bet if we went down the street, we would find a much higher percentage of people who get their information from television. I watch morning television because I am retired—I can do that. It is so watered down. It is like a magazine. Yeah, you get recipes, you get household advice and health advice. It is like [static noise], television news needs to be more in-depth and longer. Local news does a poor job of covering issues important to society. Television now presents things in the ultra-simple terms. It has been so de-emphasized. I think the average person just doesn't get any information.

When discussing the influence of mass media, several discussants highlighted their specific disdain for negative campaign reporting. Respondents following the third presidential debate had this exchange in Texas regarding their impression of political news:

F2:   I think mostly it's like, I think people don't want to mess with it

because it's just a big negative thing and there's so much

scandal and that's all the media talks about, they don't talk

about good things, they talk about bad things and so people

don't want to have any part of it, cause they don't think it

works.

M2:   And even when they [media] talks about good things it seems false,

you know, it's cynical.

As most people receive their campaign information from watching television,

participants from a focus group in Pennsylvania on October 3 also spoke strongly on

this issue. A typical response was the following:

F4: . . . I think that people are tired, as you know he said, people are tired of

network news, they're tired of hearing the same old thing. And

they know that when they turn on the television that's all

they're going to see, when they pick up a newspaper that's all

they're going to read, is about negativity. So they separate

themselves from the election and when Election Day rolls

around they really don't know much about the issues because

they've been exposed to all negativity so they don't want to be

bothered with it. I, like I don't think that there's ever really

been, I don't recall ever in my life them having had a positive

view of the presidency per se. And I think that this is a new

development, especially for people our age because I think pre-

1972 there was a great deal of respect for the office and I don't

think that exists today. . . . but I think that, I think that a lot of

people have lost a lot of respect for the government in the last

30 years and I think that me having been reared in the last 20

years can only take from it like the bitterness of our parents and

our grandparents. And certainly, we're children of the baby

boom generation, we have a lot of disenfranchisement like

running with us. Because that's what all our parents knew.

A participant in the first focus group in Norman, OK was also upset over the

negative influence of political polls during the election cycle. Respondents were

concerned with "horse race" coverage and its effect on citizens' motivation to vote.

She made her statement following the first presidential debate:

F2   I think all the polling information that we get is also damaging. I think,

we are not even going to see these candidates in Oklahoma—it

is a foregone conclusion that our state is not going to go for

Gore, there is no way. It is not even a contested deal. I think

this constant reporting of who is ahead and stuff, affects who is

going to go vote. It is basically just small samples, and I think

everyone should just refuse to answer polls.

A discussant in a personal interview on April 4 alluded to other damaging effects of

reporting political polls:

M: But even if I am informed enough to vote, the media tells me one thing

that they are not going to win, I am probably not going to go

out and vote for them. Why should I go vote if the media tells

me they aren't going to win? If the media has me thinking that

my candidate is going to win, and I am serious about wanting

him to be elected, maybe I might be lazy and won't go vote if

he already has it in the bag.

As with the major role mass media plays in society, it can function for the
good—informing the citizenry and encouraging political participation. However,
recent press practices have risen ire with many of the focus group and interview
participants. It seems that media in its negative form can serve to deflate voter
interest and electoral involvement.

Economic Influences

Within the primary theme of economic influences, several participants
reasoned that the relative good times, economic and otherwise, were a cause for their
lack of involvement in political affairs. This form of analysis is often referred to as
the Downsian Theory, and explains behavior according to a cost-benefit schema. The
comfort felt by today's traditional voter is enunciated in a statement by a male
respondent in a Texas focus group on October 17:

M1:   I think times are so good that government's reach on the average

person doesn't really hold, for instance in, in European

countries where their history and tradition is much deeper and

it's a tumultuous one where perhaps now, you know, things are

solid but you have this legacy of a lack of security, people turn

out more because you have the perception that government has

more of an effect. Well here, you know, we haven't had any

sort of a threat since, what the Civil War, to security, to inner

security. So I think slowly, you know, people feel that, oh well,

the autopilot's on, it's all right, you know.

This philosophy is furthered by a California participant following the third

presidential debate:

M4:   . . . if you look at the years when we had high voter participation,

there's been one or two things going on. There's either been a

national crisis or the economy's been in trouble, okay. So what

we have to look at is right now, sure we have a flare-up in the

Middle East, but United States militarily or foreign defense

policy-wise, we're pretty sound. Things are good. Things are

good on the homeland. The other thing is the economy, okay.

Granted the economy's running real well right now, so people

are in a state of complacency because they don't have anything

to really draw them to their patriotic duty of voting.

The consonance experienced by the electorate has provided many with a sense

of security. At this time, they feel little need to worry about political concerns when

societal conditions seem healthy and holding. Yet, this positive outlook seems to

contradict the responses provided on cultural influences.

Cultural Influences

Another primary theme contributing to nonvoting is an overall change in our societal attitudes and priorities. In general, individualistic goals have taken precedent over collectivistic concerns. Consequently, the lackadaisical approach to civic matters by the electorate has contributed to declining rates of political participation. This interpretation was offered during a focus group in Norman, OK following the first presidential debate:

F4:   I think we are too soft in the United States, frankly. I think we have so

much that we are becoming too watered down—we are

becoming 72 degrees temperature everywhere. I mean we

never want to be too hot or too cold. We have food for the

most part. People no longer have issues, concerns, and

problems—we live too comfortably. We don't see. We are so

comfortable, it is hard to think about change, I feel that way.

And I live on a public school salary. But a friend of mine says,

"how can anybody in this country spend over $200,000 a year,

intelligently?" And there are many people that have huge

incomes, but want more of it. To me, it doesn't make any

sense. To me, that is the issue. Well, growing up in the 60's—

most of the people here are of age—we had, there were reasons,

there were issues—there were things people felt so strongly

about. But now—yeah, we have some homeless people here,

and some education problems here—it is like everything is ho-hum. That is what I think.

In addition, this troublesome cultural change was defined by a male participant in the same focus group. He highlighted the increasing mood of all types of apathy and malaise prevalent within the American psyche. He was especially concerned with an overall trend toward "citizen disengagement" which serves to make politics seem less central to one's everyday existence:

> M2: It doesn't seem relevant. The election doesn't seem relevant. The government doesn't seem relevant. He and I work with youth in Scouts. If you go to these football and other school activities only about 48 percent of the parents are there. Too many times I go to grade school, high school events. Not every kid has a parent there. I think what we are seeing is a deeper problem than just not caring about elections—they are not involved with their families, community, and. I see it on and on.

A pervasive selfish mindset has also resulted in many citizens devoting less energy to civic matters. Under this reasoning, the complexities of surviving and keeping abreast of everyday rituals keeps the citizenry from having the time for political affairs. This shift in individual priorities was highlighted by numerous discussants, including statements made on April 2:

> M: . . . time reasons, maybe an inconvenience. A lot of people these days—I have noticed—are more centered on themselves, than others. They think it won't affect me—I just do my own thing. I

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have got to go to the store today. I don't have time to run by the court house and fill out a ballot. I think maybe it is a time issue, maybe a convenience issue.

Among the younger generation, an overall rebellious posture might be to blame for a declining trend of voting as well. A male participant in Texas on October 3 provided an explanation:

> M2: I think that one reason, you know, people don't vote because it goes against, when you're young you like to rebel it's, you get a kick from it, it's part of the adolescent process, you're just not going along with your parents. . . . Once you get older you get more conservative, you know, you take more interest. You have things to do.

It is commonly believed that these trends have had damning effects on the political system, specifically on voter turnout. Now in a society concerned with instant gratification—being concerned with how one looks and what one owns—priorities of community and neighborhood have been forgotten. As a result, participation in political affairs and other social activities have been replaced with a disengaged populace and a lackluster democratic order.

With the cataloging of primary themes—psychological, governmental, campaign, media, economic, and cultural—the major reasons for nonvoting have been identified. Furthermore, a more comprehensive understanding of the factors leading to political abstention provide a rational and sound foundation from which to advocate remedies for civic disengagement.

Solutions for Nonvoting

More Communication

Several answers for nonvoting were offered by the focus groups and in-depth interviews. Most of the discussion took place around the notion of providing more communication about the political candidates, campaign issues, party platforms, and the importance of voting. A male focus group member from California on October 17 provided a summation of this common sentiment:

> M7:   I think more of the candidates need to reach out to people. I think that's the big thing, you have to, they have to make the effort to reach out. I think the thing is, the reason they don't want to make that effort is because they, they see issues like the HMOs and bigger things like that they're running with that. They don't want to make that extra effort to reach out to 18-24 year olds. They don't want to make the extra effort to reach out to minorities. They don't want to make that extra effort to reach out to those people. And right or wrong if those people don't feel they're being heard then they don't feel, they don't feel the need to do anything about it. Whether, I mean, I'm not saying they're right for doing that but if they don't see people in power willing to work for them then why should they make the extra effort to go out and vote?

An interviewed participant on April 5 concurred with the need to have greater educational campaigns regarding the importance of voting and political issues of the day:

M: Make them really aware of the issues. I doubt most people even know the platforms of these candidates. Vote for whoever they see the most. Well, he is a Democrat I am going to vote for him. Really take a look at the issues, see what is being presented out there. The more that we really educate people, the more we try to have Rock The Vote, and voter registration drives, and really make people aware of what is going on in politics, I think we will see people vote a little more.

Panelists on October 3 in Norman, OK also explained the need for civic education, especially for the young, on the link between governmental policy and voting.

F2:   I think a lot of us, especially younger people. . . Don't know how to make government work for them. Um, a great example, I had an employee that was on Medicaid. She has a large family. She was part-time, they were low income. She is Hispanic, but is a registered voter. Having a problem getting her son in for a doctor's appointment--had some Medicaid problems. So we called her state representative, and they called her back. The next day, she got in and all her troubles went away. She said, 'I never knew I could do that.' Never, ever occurred to her she

had a voice--and that they would listen. I think that is a lot of the trouble, that especially with the younger kids--they are cynical and they don't think it makes a one difference.

In other words, reform of the education curriculum should be supported that includes a heavier emphasis on civic education and the importance of community involvement, including political participation. A personal interview on March 15 explained how teaching about the governmental process can successfully increase citizen engagement:

F: In my civics class, most kids were turning eighteen during that class or just after that class was over and they [the teachers] talked a lot in voting years about voting and how important it was. The instructor said this is the importance of voting, this is how people get into office, this is who represents you and your thoughts and ideas, and this is how we as a public determine what happens in this country. If you do not vote, you have no say in your own life. And that's basically how he explained it to us. And I think half of our class made sure they vote now. He did a survey after everyone came back, and about 50% of the kids had actually went out and voted and sat down with their parents--and typically voted like their parents did--but they went out and voted and they made sure that they were heard. I think educating the younger population has a big effect.

More Contact

In addition to greater communication needs, respondents overwhelmingly called for more contact with politicians. They want to get to know the political candidates and interact with them in dialogue over issues of importance. This was the message presented in an in-depth interview by a 21 year old male:

> M: I mean letting people, introducing people to the candidates. Sort of making people aware of some of the issues that each candidate is trying to present. I think that is the big thing, you start to show them how it affects them, I am going to show you how. Then they will start taking the mindset that it does matter, maybe my vote does count. Or maybe not all politicians are the same. Maybe this candidate is trying to do something for me (April 5, 2001).

This concept was further crystallized in comments made on April 4 in a personal interview:

> F: I think part of it is during the campaigns, get the public involved more somehow. I am not sure how to do that. I know when in a lot, when I go to vote, and you look at the ballot and a lot of the candidates you don't know, what they stand for, or what is their platform. And I think if they are not involved with you on a personal level, you, I have problems backing them. I think if there was more one-on-one contact between the candidates and

the voters, more people might consider supporting them so that they could get their ideas across.

Communicating with the electorate is key to raising favorability rankings for governmental officials. A rough count of the responses, revealed that over 82 percent of the in-depth interviews included this type of solution. Without more interaction with candidates and more campaign information, citizens can hardly be expected to have the tools and encouragement necessary to participate politically.

Electoral Process

In addition to the remedies regarding political information and contact, many participants emphasized the simple solution of eliminating voting obstacles. A participant in the third round of focus groups in Norman, OK said that changes must be made to "do things to make it easier [for voters]. . . . Moving polls to more convenient places and making it more accessible, make the polls stay open longer" were some of his suggestions. Another participant in the first focus groups in Norman, OK argued:

> M3   I think we need to lower some of the barriers we have. Make it easier to register and make it easier to actually vote, considering when we are putting in so many hours each day and each week—or make it a national holiday, a voting day. That would be my preference, voting on the Internet. If we could make it that easy to vote on WebTV, I think we would see a much higher percentage of people voting.

Furthermore, the call for technological innovations (e.g., internet voting) was a common refrain, especially among the younger participants. Discussants seemed perplexed with the idea that in this modern electronic world, the obsolescent ballot box still flourished. One respondent on March 28 demanded:

> M: Technology has to step forward, step up. You go to the voting place, you still have 97 year old ladies with that pen, and they take 3 hours to find your name. You have another who only hands out stickers. You go into this line and into this plastic booth. Mark with your pen and punch as in Florida, and put it in an old machine. It is still kind of archaic. Technology brings things out of the woodworks, and that is probably the first major step.

Specifically, the internet was often mentioned as a prescription for dismal voting trends. One discussant explained during a March 30 interview how technology could increase voting turnout:

> M: I'd say, try to put something on the internet because a lot of us have access. Most, you know, college students have access to the internet. Put a system on the internet where you can just go vote. Of course, things would have to be worked out for that, but I'm thinking that could increase voter turnout because a lot of kids are on the internet everyday.

Another possibility is what one discussant calls a Voter Booth, "It works like an ATM. You stick your voter card in there, the candidates pop up, and you vote. You can do it in a supermarket, or wherever" (male, March 28, 2001). Of course, with

these changes, voting still must be convenient, fair, and accurate—a somewhat

traditional reply from participants, especially after the elongated 2000 presidential

election. A personal interview on March 14 provided this insight:

> M: I don't see any reason why an election can't be federally ran, at least to
>
> some point to get some balloting booths that are computerized.
>
> I mean, we can send a guy to the moon, but we can not
>
> seriously put something together to keep an accurate count.
>
> That would be one thing that should be changed."

The focus group and in-depth interviewees seemed to believe that minor

reforms in voting practices should be considered. For it is their belief that by making

the process less costly and prohibitive, it should serve to entice more voters.

Overall, the discussants did not lay blame on nonvoters for their lack of

participation, however they disavowed their reasons for abstaining from political

involvement. Participants, besides believing it is their civic duty to participate, felt

that benefits were available to those who were engaged. They voiced agreement that

average citizens can have an affect on the political system if they devote the time and

energy to the process.

Results of Regression Analysis

Research question three was also posed to address what demographic and

political perception variables predict voting. What demographic and political

perception variables predict voting?. Using a quantitative tool, the characteristics of

nonvoting were explored in greater detail in hopes of differentiating the various types

of political abstainers. Combining qualitative and quantitative data served to more fully explain the phenomenon of nonvoting. What follows are the results of the data collected through surveys during the 2000 election.

Initially, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the cynicism scale as a test for internal consistency. In an effort to minimize error, the scale was reduced from five items to three items (α=.470, $\underline{M}$=2.445, $\underline{SD}$=.469). Item number two, three, and five were kept, representing the following cynicism statements:

Item 2: People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

Item 3: Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

Item 5: Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over.

Insert Table 7 about here

In Table 7, the lower triangle depicts the obtained correlations of the items retained as a result of the confirmatory factor analysis conducted on the data for this scale. The upper triangle depicts error, and the diagonal represents the communalities. Communalities are the amount of variance in the criterion variable accounted for by the factor dimension (Green, Salkind, & Akey, 1997).

A multiple linear regression analysis was then conducted to assess the extent to which demographic (sex, age, education, party affiliation, race, and income) and political perception variables (political cynicism, and whether one voted in the 1996 election) predict voting. However, before the statistical tool was applied, two survey questions—"Who did you vote for in 1996?" and "Who did you vote for in the 2000 Presidential Campaign?"—had to be recoded to directly reflect the research question posed (see Appendix D for initial items). As a result of the change, two separate categories were created: one measuring political affiliation and another inquiring about political participation. The new categories allowed for a more valid measurement of the effects of party affiliation and previous political participation on the criterion variable. Accordingly, the linear combination of these variables was significantly related to voting, $R=.568$, $R^2=.323$, adjusted $R^2=.296$, F (8, 207)= 10.585, $p<.001$, indicating that approximately 30 percent of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the linear combination of the predictor variables.

The bivariate correlations reveal that race, party affiliation, and cynicism are negatively related to the dependent variable. Non-Hispanic/Caucasians are more likely to vote than individuals of other races (e.g., African Americans, Asians) ($r=-$.132, $p<.05$), Democrats are more likely to vote than Republicans ($r=-.153$, $p<.05$), and individuals reporting high on the political cynicism scale are less likely to vote ($r=-.217$, $p<.01$). Household income, voting in the 1996 Presidential election, education level, age, and sex were found to be positively correlated with voting behavior; all correlations were significant except for sex ($r=.005$, $p>.05$),. The higher one's household income ($r=.081$, $p<.05$), education level ($r=.345$, $p<.001$), and age

(r=.144, p<.01), the more likely they are to vote. Individuals that reported voting in the 1996 presidential election were more likely to have voted in the 2000 election (r=.473, p<.001).

Table 8 indicates the relative strength of individual predictors, including partial correlations and beta weights, for each predictor relative to the dependent variable. Partial correlations examine the predictive relationship between each individual predictor and the dependent variable while simultaneously controlling for the effects of the other predictor variables (Green et al., 1997). Based on the data, only cynicism, education level, voting in the 1996 election, race, and income were all found to be significant predictors of voting.

_____

Insert Table 8 about here

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Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted to discover the reasons and solutions for nonvoting (Research Questions One and Two). In addition, a regression analysis was used to extrapolate what demographic and political perception variables predict voting participation (Research Question Three). Moreover, the use of multiple methods, both qualitative and quantitative, produces new dimensions of understanding that cannot be obtained simply through one tool (Polkinghorne, 1983).

While observing the focus groups and interviews, the respondents initially provided typical reasons for why nonvoters fail to participate. However, when listening carefully and watching their nonverbals, the participants actually often seemed unsure or confused about their own feelings of why individuals abstained from political participation. According to one male respondent in a California focus group on October 17, 2001, "there's just so many underlying factors that contribute to apathy that it's hard to pinpoint just one group or one reason." Consequently, discussion participants claimed that they had a very weak grasp themselves of why people did not vote, often clinging to rationalizations that they did not fully believe or that were internally contradictory. Nevertheless, after much probing, participants were able to precisely identify and confidently provide important information on the main reasons and solutions to the phenomenon of nonvoting. The importance of probing regarding the issue of nonvoting is further explained by a male focus group member from Missouri on October 3:

I found that people that I've asked, whenever you ask the question, 'Why don't you go vote?' people are put on the defensive because 'I don't feel like any candidate's good enough' or basically the reasoning behind that. When you ask more questions is [when they say] that they don't know a lot about either candidate and so they don't feel that they could make a correct decision and when you're going to the voting place, it's not like there's a board that says this is what Gore's for, this is what Bush's for, go ahead and make your choice. Like there are other sources that could go to for that information . . . and so when you're asked to vote from your parents, you're put on the defensive and like having a reason, and you don't want to say, 'oh, just cause I don't have time.' Like many people our age, that would be the reason, but they're not going to say 'I don't have time, so that's why I don't go vote.' They're going to say, 'because I don't like either candidate or some other reason.'

Accordingly, after probing the participants, data were transcribed and content analyzed to determine primary and secondary themes. These themes provided a more accurate and thorough understanding of nonvoting behavior.

Reasons

Psychological Influences

Members of the focus group and in-depth interviews talked a great deal about the complexity of the political process and campaign issues. They claimed that it is very hard to keep up with the positions of the candidates. They feel the day-to-day burdens of everyday life hamper their ability to keep abreast of political affairs. Thus, the lack of political knowledge about candidates creates a disconnect between the

public and government officials. Consequently, it is this disconnect that serves to demobilize the electorate.

Another commonly cited reason for political abstention was the idea among nonvoters that their vote would not make a difference. Many focus group and interview participants believed that politicians did not care what they thought. The respondents stated that the candidates did not visit their neighborhoods, did not reach out to them, and did not speak on topics of interest to them. Even if candidates did, the discussants argued, they would do whatever they pleased once in office. Accordingly, the respondents were saying that politicians do not listen to their constituents back home, instead they vote according to their own interests while in Washington. Participants also claimed that, regardless of the candidates' policy decisions, it would have little impact on their lives. This sentiment was especially strong among younger participants who did not think politics was relevant to their lives.

Some participants also commented on the lack of differences between the political parties. They remarked that voting did not matter because both major presidential candidates in the 2000 election were essentially alike. They spoke about minimal contrasting viewpoints between the candidates. One discussant stated, "they both just represent the left and right wing of the corporate party." Accordingly, they did not believe either candidate was speaking to their needs and concerns. It was also often difficult to differentiate the candidates as the political campaigns had purposefully acted to blur the distinctions. Campaigns have learned that by using

such a strategy, they can make mass political participation seem less necessary, thus better identify and control who votes.

Governmental Influences

Electoral Process

The electoral process category covered a number of areas pertaining to the act of voting and its affect. Each of the following areas were credited with decreasing political engagement.

First, respondents believe that citizens do not participate due to the insignificance of one vote. Although this might sound similar to the explanation given for inefficacy, this complaint nevertheless focuses on the electoral process rather than political candidates. Accordingly, the political abstainer is not satisfied with their level of influence on the political system. They believe they weld minimal power over the outcome of the election, and thus feel that there are few reasons to vote.

Second, similar to the explanation provided above, the "single-party states" argument expresses the feeling of worthlessness of minority candidate supporters where one-party dominates the political environment. Under this system, political participation depresses because it robs the electorate of a real choice in the election, thus highlighting the need for political competition. A lack of local, state, or national competition among candidates can be psychologically defeating for potential voters. On the other hand, close or competitive races can act to increase interest, and therefore election turnout.

Third, some participants also voiced concern that the Electoral College would make their vote meaningless. They believed that the winner-take-all approach minimized the importance of dissenting viewpoints. Many respondents suggested that the Electoral College should be abolished and replaced with the popular vote in order to send a strong message about the importance of voting. This topic was more potent with both focus groups and interview members than previous literature has suggested.

Fourth, a few respondents also seemed frustrated with the inconvenience resulting from voting. They claimed that the process was too slow, too antiquated, and too complex. Therefore, they suggested simple voting reforms to increase political satisfaction, such as voting by mail and internet voting along with voter education campaigns.

Minor Party Candidates

Focus group participants were also upset over the exclusion of third-party candidates from the presidential debates and some election ballots. Third-party candidates often offer alternative campaign messages and policy choices, as well as focus their politicking efforts toward the disenfranchised. By adopting more inclusive practices, a higher number of minority-party candidates might be encouraged to run for office resulting in increased political participation among the electorate.

Campaign Influences

Campaign influences can also serve to energize or deflate one's interest in participating politically. Candidate image and campaign protocol were discussed as part of this category.

First, focus group and interview participants talked a lot about the seemingly lack of differences between the two major presidential candidates. This observation seemed confusing and frustrating to many. The respondents wanted to see clear differences between the candidates, but their images of Bush and Gore had become blurred and too complex to decipher. Thus, discussants felt that nonvoters were less likely to participate due to either the meager stakes in the election or their overall frustration with the system.

Second, respondents also believed that politicians had lost touch with the electorate. They believe that government officials no longer understand the concerns of the typical citizen, and even if they did, they often put the needs of special interests above those of average Americans. According to the discussions, the populace is also concerned with a tendency for some politicians to embellish the truth and to not be forthright in their opinions.

Third, focus group and interview members also voiced frustration with the possibilities of a corrupt governmental system. They were concerned with the undue influence of special interests and big money in politics. The respondents specifically mentioned Political Action Committees (PACs), businesses, and lobbyists as having a greater impact on public policy than voting or citizen activism. They also voiced support for campaign finance reform to make elections more competitive and fair to challengers.

Fourth, respondents also harped on the fact that disaffected groups are being ignored by the candidates. For example, the presidential candidates do not seem to court the youth of America. A University of Akron focus group participant on

October 11 elaborated on his feelings about being disregarded by the presidential

candidates, "So being a part of the process is not aimed towards [us], I guess. We're

not encouraged to do, we're not expected to do it and, ah, a fundamental belief that

even participating won't change anything because you're really not wanted."

Scholarship by Gronbeck (2000) confirms this observation: "both parties seem

convinced that they are better off spending message dollars on other segments . . .

Only Nader has aimed any messages at students' consumption habits [during

Campaign 2000]" (p. 4). Survey data also supports this notion as 20 percent of voters

age 18-34 said that the presidential campaigns paid attention to them, compared to 33

percent for 35-64 year olds, and 37 percent for individuals over 65 (Freyman &

McGoldrick, 2001).

Respondents also claimed that they were tired of the degrading and negative

campaigning by some politicians. They wanted the candidates to focus on their own

strengths, capabilities, and platforms, rather than on their opponents'. Accordingly,

they wanted the political candidates to stand on their own record. Moreover, when

speaking about their accomplishments, the focus group and interview members asked

for politicians to talk in clear and understandable terms. Some discussants believe

that the constant use of policy-speak, political jargon, campaign lingo, and legalese

keep potential voters away from the process.

Mass Media Influences

The harmful influence of mass media was also raised during the focus groups

and personal interviews. Discussants voiced concern with the lack of news coverage

regarding campaign policy issues. Instead, media reporting tends to focus on the

horse race, campaign strategy, and candidate characteristics. Disapproval with current media practices was evident, and respondents strongly desired a more substantive, fair, and uplifting form of campaign news coverage for the future.

Economic Influences

Several participants voiced a sense of comfort and pleasure with the current state of affairs. In what seems like peacefully secure and sound economic times, the respondents believed there were few policy issues to ignite the masses. Accordingly, there were few reasons to call for a change in governmental direction via the ballot box. Further, there were minimal injustices to address through participation in the electoral process. As a result of satisfaction with the current governmental institutions, little motivation exists to bring people to the voting booth.

Cultural Influences

Also of interest was the analysis on how culture has influenced electoral participation. Some voters think that America is becoming more individualistic, rather than collectivistic. The participants believed that citizens are becoming more self-centered which is resulting in less political and community participation. As people become more focused on themselves, they have forgotten that their overall well-being is tied to the health of the community and participation in a representative democracy. A focus group member summed up this rationale when he stated, "[It's] indicative of the breakdown of the community . . . it's me, me, me, to hell with everybody else, to hell with this [political participation]. But, I have got a responsibility to the people that came before me and to those coming after me" (University of Akron focus group, October 3, 2000).

Others talked about the lack of time in today's society. The participants

discussed how they exhaust every ounce of energy just to keep up with their jobs and

family, leaving little time for extra-curricular activities like hobbies, entertainment, or

politics. This line of reasoning regarding culture provided one more example of the

highly complex nature of the nonvoting phenomenon.

Solutions

The respondents also provided a number of solutions to remedy the problem of

nonvoting. Yet, most of the solutions were institutional or process-oriented. The

members did not recommend reforms for themselves.

Although free beer, food (i.e., pizza), gifts, and music as well as celebrity

entertainment shows, compensatory voting, and mandatory participation were all

mentioned as solutions to nonvoting, discussants repeatedly voiced a need for more

communication about political campaigns and the candidates' stances. As one

interviewee described the situation on March 28, "You have to make people

understand politics more . . . Make it less peripheral and more attached to their life.

Politics is not making it in [to the nonvoters' thoughts] everyday." Accordingly, a

recent survey conducted by the League of Women Voters revealed the importance of

citizen contact: Seventy-nine percent of voters, as compared with only 42 percent of

nonvoters, were contacted in the last four years by a campaign. And 75 percent of

voters indicated they had communication with political parties, compared with 44

percent of nonvoters (Berke, 1996; Blackburn, 1992). Countless other academic and

traditional sources also recommend communicating the importance of voting for

everyday living (Bucy, 2001; Carlin, 2001; Cuza, 2000; Doppelt & Shearer, 1999;

Wellstone, 2001). By ignoring nonvoters, we fail to provide them with the necessary information and encouragement needed to vote for a candidate or issue. As a result, politicians should exert more effort to talk about issues that affect the public daily. In addition, candidates could discuss political topics using concrete examples for which the average American can relate. In rebuff to traditional governmental officials, citizen candidates that have meaningful experiences and can plainly talk about everyday issues might need greater consideration from the political establishment as well. Accordingly, discussion members believed that traditional candidates were doing a very poor job of stimulating the public's interest. They spoke of encouraging the candidates to visit their communities, their neighborhoods, and their schools. They wanted the politicians to do a better job of reaching out to the constituents for which they represent. They seemed very interested in meeting and talking with the candidates, but indicated that they were seldom provided with that opportunity. Discussion members also realized that by encouraging more one-on-one contact, political candidates would inform the populace, but also take steps at connecting with the citizens on a more personal and intimate level.

More information could be conveyed to potential voters by having political candidates or their surrogates visit community meetings, gatherings, and events. Political discussions, debates, and town hall meetings could be arranged to communicate with the populace about the candidates and the issues raised in the election. Candidates could also take their campaigns door-to-door to ensure that their message is being heard by the entire populace. Other forms of grassroots communication could be initiated as well, such as posters and leafleting. As one

female discussant explained on March 30, "It's the face-to-face interactions, shaking hands, and kissing babies thing that really reaches people and gets people to vote."

The reason that this form of campaigning is effective is due to the connections it builds between the citizens and the politicians. The potential voter knows the candidate as someone besides a "talking head," but as a "real person." They want to look the candidate in the eye, identify with the politician, and feel that they can trust the individual. This concept of connection was clarified by another interview on March 30:

> F: . . . If they talk all about the topics then I think they'll definitely know
> more about the topics, but I think, when people feel like they've
> personally been asked, you know, like 'please go do this,' then
> they feel more of a responsibility maybe. And then when they
> hear how important it is to vote then they're like, well, I did
> meet that person today who's, telling me about so-and-so, so
> I'll go vote for him. I think it's more of a connection . . .

Academic scholarship also confirms the strong influence of personal contact on voting (see Blackburn, 1992; Clymer, 2000; Hunt, 1994; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). It seems that one-on-one contact stimulates interest and provides communication about political affairs that, in turn, increases the probability of voting. In addition, the more contacts with a political campaign, the more likely the citizen will support that candidate (Milbrath & Goel, 1977). Moreover, the more communication modalities are utilized to inform and motivate the populace, the greater the likelihood of political participation (Hadley, 1978).

Focus group and interview participants of college age also repeatedly cited the need for stronger civic education and political science classes while in school. They stated that high school and college teachers should spend more time and do a better job of discussing several topics, such as: how the political process works; the difference between the political parties; the nature of political campaigns; and the importance of political participation in a representative democracy. Furthermore, the addition of civic instructional tools—mock classroom simulations of the political system, government internships, community volunteerism, in-class debates—could educate students on the value of political knowledge and participation. They believe that these types of changes will provide the public with the resources to make politics more meaningful to their everyday lives. Not only does education increase one's knowledge of civic affairs, but it also provides individuals with bureaucratic experiences, two ingredients often cited as needed to mobilize voter participation (Bloom, 1987; Karlitz, 2001; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Moreover, studies by the Ohio Department of Education, concluded that high-school teachers—not mass media, campaign literature, or peers—would be the most effective in encouraging voter registration and participation (People for the American Way, 1988). Thus, the need to reach high school students is extremely important because afterwards many nonvoters fall into a cycle of prolonged abstention. For young people not in school, efforts should be made to target them for voter education, registration, and participation drives as well. In particular, these young citizens might be reached through coordinated efforts with youth employment and training centers. American businesses—both large and small—as well as community-based activists groups could

also take significant steps in rectifying the voter participation problems. Examples of community groups include churches, synagogues, ethnic and neighborhood associations. They could implement voter registration, voter education, and get-out-to-vote campaigns to reach their employees, customers, and community at large, respectively (People for the American Way, 1988). By taking a leadership role, these institutions could play a significant part in the revitalization of American democracy.

Mass media can also play a positive role in [re]engaging the public and reinvigorating American democracy. Media outlets could easily donate free air time or space to simply encourage people to vote and why. Obviously, a great majority of people watch television and read the newspaper daily, and a few reminders--possibly in the form of public service announcements--could be all that is necessary to increase political participation. Consequently, by piquing the public's interest and fulfilling their information needs the media can implement measures to assist in reinvigorating democracy (McLeod, 2000).

In terms of the solutions, most of the proposed remedies centered on the need for more communication--about how the political process works and about how the political policies affects average Americans. In addition, the discussants emphasized this link throughout their discussions. They argued that many, if not all, of the reasons for nonvoting could be alleviated with more communication (see Appendix G). According to many respondents, they asked how one can be concerned about a societal ill if one does not know it exists. Others wondered how one is expected to care and be motivated to fix a problem, if one is not aware of its prevalence. This

concept was also highlighted in a discussion with an interview participant on March 28:

> Mod: If you talk to your friends, your family members and people you know, why do you think some people don't vote or don't participate in the political process?
>
> F: They don't know, or haven't registered, I have a lot of people that haven't even registered yet. And, they don't know where to go, you have to, like, have a card and know where to go and, I mean, they're supposed to let you off work, but, I don't know, some people don't take the effort to do that. Maybe they feel like even if they did vote it wouldn't matter, but I don't think so. I mean, I think people think that way, because you don't see how it affects, like voting and, like choosing a different President or a different senator or whatever. You don't see how it affects your every day. . . . we don't know how it affects us.

Communication was also clearly the foundational reason for nonvoting as illustrated during a different in-depth interview on March 28:

> Mod: What about apathetic people. Why do you think they are apathetic?
>
> F: Because they don't know. They don't have the knowledge to feel like, to feel like they can really make an impact. So maybe if they knew a little bit more they wouldn't be as apathetic because instead of just being like 'oh, I don't care,' they would care because they would have reason to care.

In addition, many of the members focused on the importance of making minor changes to increase voter registration rates. It is their belief--and the theory of some experts--that a registered citizen is much more likely to vote on Election Day. In addition, like other groups of the population, once youth are registered, they vote at rates equal to other segments of society (People for the American Way, 1988). Thus, the participants offered ideas to ease the process of voting and registering: from expanding the use of absentee ballots, flexible voting hours over the weekend, registering on-line, to extending the hours of polling. These changes can easily be adopted as federal legislation ensuring all Americans a fairer and more convenient voting process.

To sum, the most discussed solution requires that political candidates work hard to address the question and release information on why politics really matters. They must strive to provide a new form of politics that "connects" and has relevance to peoples' lives. They must return to their roots whereby interaction and engagement with the populace is required.

Other Observations

Other findings regarding the discussions were that the participants overwhelmingly laid the blame on the system or process, rather than on the nonvoters themselves. Granted some participants claimed nonvoters were lazy, but they often talked about, for example, the lack of effort by the political campaigns and the failure of civic education as reasons for political abstention. They believed that the problem did not lie within individuals themselves or attributes often assigned to nonvoters. They understood that nonvoters were a diverse group of people holding complex and

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differing reasons for their lack of participation. The members of the discussions also realized that they could not force nonvoters to go to the polls on Election Day. Instead, political reforms must be implemented that inform the public about the election and mobilize them to participate. According to respondents, nonvoters want to participate, but they are just waiting for the right reasons, the right knowledge, the right campaign, and the right candidate. This sentiment was echoed during a personal interview with a female participant, "Both of my parents vote. . . . What was funny is that I actually wanted to vote in this election, but didn't know how. You know, no one told us [how to vote]. . ." A female focus group member from Ohio University on October 3 shared the same view:

> F3:   It is important—definitely important to me, but like she was saying, we
>
> don't have those experiences [jobs, paying taxes], experience
>
> with it [voting]. I mean I try to stay involved, or know about
>
> the issues. But half the time I am so confused. I want to vote.
>
> Sometimes I just don't feel I know enough, even though I try.
>
> So looking back at all the people who don't know and don't
>
> care, like if I am confused, they are definitely confused.

Surprisingly, despite the many reasons for nonvoting uncovered in this study, the focus group and personal interview members did not exhibit any grave concern for this negative trend. All the participants were aware of this phenomenon, but had not extensively thought about the problem. Thus, they often seemed to lack the critical reasoning, vocabulary, and confidence to discuss the issue, in-depth. In addition, although the respondents were concerned with the growing number of nonvoters, they

did not seem ready to exert much mental energy or physical effort in trying to immediately rectify the situation.

However, focus group and personal interview respondents--who were voters--often felt it necessary to express why they participated in the political process. Through their statements, it seemed as if they wanted to justify their voting behavior and encourage others verbally to participate in politics as well. A list of some of these reasons for voting is included in chapter six.

Finally, the focus group and interview participants seemed quite optimistic and hopeful about reversing the trend toward nonvoting. A female focus group member from Missouri gave this insight, "I have to say I want to believe that politics really matters, I think because it's one of the American ideals you're always brought up with and taught over and over again. . ." Other participants were willing to share ideas for engaging people in politics and improving voter turnout. Teixeira's (1999) writings reveal the same thought:

> The attitudes that do lie behind declining turnout appear to have more to do with a general sense that the government is not responsive to ordinary citizens and a feeling that politics is not worth paying attention to, in even the most minimal fashion. It is thus indifference to politics that is keeping citizens away from the polling booths, rather than active hostility or lack of trust. (p. 182)

The participants also believed that with some minor changes, we could reverse this trend. Once again, Teixeira (1999) concurs, "The fact of the matter is that most citizens' decisions not to vote are very lightly held and relatively easy to change" (p.

186). Of course, the participants did not imply that we could ever achieve a perfect turnout, or even 90 percent involvement. Yet, they did seem to believe that we could make our country's political participation respectable again by increasing voter turnout to around 75 percent, a 25 percent raise over current numbers.

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was also utilized as a method to further extrapolate which demographic (sex, age, education, party affiliation, race, and income) and political perception variables (political cynicism, whether one voted in the 1996 election) predicted voting. Consequently, the data revealed that the independent variables were significantly related to voting, indicating that approximately 30 percent of the variance in voting was based on the predictor variables.

The bivariate correlations revealed that race, party affiliation, and cynicism are negatively related to the criterion variable. Non-Hispanic/Caucasians are more likely to vote than individuals of other races (e.g., African Americans, Asians), Democrats are more likely to vote than Republicans, and individuals reporting high on the political cynicism scale are less likely to vote. The results regarding race and cynicism are consistent with academic literature on nonvoting, whereas the party affiliation finding is the focus of ongoing debate (see Campbell et al., 1960; Piven & Cloward, 2000). Minorities do typically participate politically at lower rates, however--when correcting for education and income variables--nonwhites outstrip white involvement (Bonar, 1980; Fugate, 1996). Low cynicism has also been linked

to decreasing voter trends. Specifically, individuals with low internal or external political efficacy are more likely to abstain from electoral involvement (Johnson et al., 1998; Teixeira, 1992).

Household income, voting in the 1996 presidential election, education level, age, and sex were found to be positively correlated with voting behavior; all correlations were significant except for gender. The higher one's household income, education level, and age, the more likely they are to vote. Once again, previous research reveals that individuals of higher socio-economic status are more likely to participate politically (Bonar, 1985; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Miller & Shanks, 1996). Accordingly, Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) reported that education, age, and income are key demographic characteristics affecting voting behavior. In addition, individuals' that reported voting in the 1996 Presidential election probably voted in the 2000 election. Once people participate in the political process, it often quickly becomes a routine. Campbell and his collegues wrote in their 1960 book The American Voter--one of the most cited works on voting behavior--that voting in elections is "somewhat habitual."

In terms of partial correlations--which indicate the relative strength of individual predictor variable while controlling for the effects of others--only cynicism, education level, voting in the 1996 election, race, and income were found to be significant predictors of voting. Most studies highlight the overarching influence of education on voting behavior. According to these results, education had the second highest influence, after voting in the 1996 election. This finding is very consistent with academic scholarship on nonvoting which reports that education is a very

significant--if not the strongest--influence on participation intentions. In fact, studies reveal that, on the whole, voting likelihood increases with every year of schooling (Kim et al., 1975; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Of the remaining variables (i.e., cynicism, race, and income), each of these characteristics are traditionally correlated strongly with voting behavior as well.

The survey data reveals important information on the characteristics of nonvoting. In specific, it helps demarcate and rank the attributes associated with political participation. Thus, the quantitative information, in combination with qualitative data, provides a better description, and thus understanding, of the characteristics, causes, and solutions for the nonvoting phenomenon in the 2000 election.

Solutions Offered From Literature Review

Get-out-the-vote Efforts in Campaign 2000

In addition to solutions offered by the discussion members, there are many ideas espoused by academics, journalists, politicians, and other experts. There are several organizations that are also equally concerned that have exerted extensive efforts to try to increase voting. During the 2000 presidential campaigns, several entities enacted the most intensive voter-registration efforts in our time--from Harvard University to 7-Eleven; from MTV's Rock the Vote to the World Wrestling Federation; from appeals over the Internet to state motor vehicle offices and other traditional methods (see Doppelt & Shearer, 2000; Feldman, 2000a; Feldman, 2000b; Salant, 2000).

In specific, MTV launched a significant campaign—including an internet campaign—to encourage more participation by young people in the electoral process. In terms of their Internet campaign, they provided surfers with links to other candidates' webpages, information on political issues, and voter-registration forms that could be downloaded.

The League of Women Voters started a "Take a Friend to Vote" campaign. The League also teamed up with other grassroots organizations to boost turnout among voters under 24 years old. According to their data, their efforts resulted in an increase in voting of 3 to 13 percent in targeted areas (Hooper, 2000).

<u>Registration and Voting Reform</u>

Moreover, Piven and Cloward (1988) argue that, on a broad level, simple obstacles to voting, such as registration rules, have kept millions from voting. Scholars (see Affigne, 1992; Blackburn, 1992; Brown, 1988, as cited by Raspberry, 1988; Hadley, 1978) define some of these institutional voting barriers as: residency registration requirements; inconvenient hours; courthouse-only registration offices; the requirement for double registration (at both the county seat and the local municipality) in some parts of the country; no Saturday registration hours; and no absentee registration. In addition, the United States is the only major democracy that does not help register voters as over 40 percent of the population is unregistered. Specifically, Wofinger and Rosenstone (1980) wrote that four registration provisions have had an especially negative influence on voting turnout: early closing dates, irregular office hours, no Saturday or evening registration, and no absentee registration. Furthermore, researchers (see Flanigan & Zingale, 1994; Kim, Petrocik,

& Enokson, 1975; all cited by Rennison, 1997; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980)

suggest that without registration barriers, voting would certainly increase nine percent.

Other academic literature suggests that turnout would increase by over 11percent or

20 million voters if lenient registration requirements were implemented (Piven &

Cloward, 1988, 2000; Winters, 1996). By making simple changes in voter registration

laws, the process can become less costly and prohibitive, thus more enticing to

traditional nonvoters. Other solutions for nonvoting are listed below.

Same-day Registration

The Reverend Jesse Jackson in an article published in The New York Times

espouses the benefits of allowing same-day voter registration (Oreskes, 1988). Six

states[12] have already implemented this practice. Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980)

estimate that if election-day registration had been permitted in all states in the 1972

election, and if other registration hurdles had been removed, national voter turnout

would have increased by about 9 percent. Studies from the Committee for the Study

of the American Electorate and the People for the American Way confirm: Election-

Day registration would increase turnout by 6 to 8 million citizens (Blackburn, 1992;

Gans, 1985; People for the American Way, 1988). In addition, a premiere symposium

in 1983 consisting of prominent journalists and academics, representatives of good

government and civil rights groups, corporate leaders, the heads of the Republican and

Democratic national committees, as well as former Presidents Ford and Carter

recommended same-day registration on Election Day (Piven & Cloward, 2000). The

GAO estimates that same-day registration would significantly increase voting in states

from one to twelve percent (Congressional Digest, 1993, as cited by Burke, 1998).

Ease Registration Requirements

As most people do not get interested in the campaign until the final months of the election, extending the registration time until closer to the election should encourage would-be-voters to register (Gans, 1985; Hadley, 1978; Kassaye, 1980). In addition, a recommendation offered by The Committee for the Study of the American Electorate advocates nationwide adoption of a mail voter registration system. Presently, only 20 states allow registration by mail (Gans, 1985; Hadley, 1978).

Length of Voting Period/24-Hour Voting

Two proposals pertain to the length of time provided to cast a ballot. First, government bodies might want to consider the example of New York who has extended the voting day from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. In addition, a few states have extended the time voters have to cast their ballot to weeks before the Election Day (Cooper, 2000; Doppelt & Shearer, 2000).

Another suggestion for ballot reform is the 24-hour voting booth. An ABC poll in 1983 suggested that 24-hour voting (on a weekday) would improve voting: seven out of ten people support the change. In addition, it could serve to eliminate projection prejudice, as early Eastern returns can influence voting in the West ("Vote, day and night," 1983).

Weekend/Holiday Voting

A 2001 report by the National Commission on Federal Election Reform led by former Presidents Carter and Ford recommends scheduling election days for weekends or holidays. Making Election Day a holiday could work to reinforce the importance of voting and increase turnout. This remedy would be especially helpful

for the five percent of individuals who regularly mention "they were out of town" or "had to work" as reasons for failing to participate ("Ford Carter Election-Overhaul," 2001; Hadley, 1978).

Absentee Ballots

Changing the rules regarding absentee ballots could also prove helpful to voter turnout. Some states[13] are now permitting absentee ballots by email or fax, with no need to explain your absentee status or have a witnesses (McBride, 2000). A similar proposal--called "no-fault" absentee balloting--is now freely available in 10 states. Another idea proposed is to allow people who have just moved to vote in their old neighborhood by absentee ballot, thus cutting down on the amount of people disenfranchised due to residency requirements. Consequently, academic scholarship concludes that easing the absentee ballot procedures should do more to heighten voter rates than any other registration reform available (Hadley, 1978).

Vote-by-mail

A vote-by-mail system could prove cost-effective and increase turnout as well. California was the first to implement its use on local issues, and Oregon had the first vote-by-mail on a U.S. Senate race in 1995. According to estimates by Oregon's Secretary of State Bill Bradbury, vote-by-mail has improved turnout by 6 percent (Cooper, 2000). In addition, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters conducted the initial election by mail among its 1.5 million members nationwide (Mutch, 1992). Therefore, it is no wonder that Adler (1991) claimed: "I personally believe that [vote-by-mail] process would increase the number of participants more dramatically than any other alternative" (as cited by Blackburn, 1992, p. 38).

Internet Voting

Voting can also be done over the internet. Examples of successful implementation of internet voting are the recent Primary example in Arizona and Perot Party's Convention electronic balloting in 1996. By making participation easier, it will improve voter turnout according to Snider and Hall (1994, 1997; both cited by Johnson & Kaye, 1998).

"None of the Above" Ballot

Another option is to add a "None of the Above" line on ballots. This would give the public an opportunity to say no to the present political system or to the chosen major party candidates. Presently, only Nevada residents have this alternative, although it has not proven to increase voter turnout since 1975 (Doppelt & Shearer, 1999).

Proportional Representation

Under the proportional representation system, the winner-take-all election process would be abolished. Instead, elected officials could be determined in different parties in proportion to their vote over an entire area. In terms of the Presidency, one proposal would keep the Electoral College, but allocate electoral votes within the state dependent on the number of electoral votes won, or similar measures. This measure would make minority parties more competitive in areas currently dominated by one party. In other words, it could give voice to both the majority and minority candidates, thus all voters in an election (Teixeira, 1992).

However, changes in registration and voting practices will only fix up to 15 percent of the nonvoting problem according to estimates (Teixeira, 1992). Other steps must also be included to encourage fuller participation among the electorate.

Media Reform

There are several solutions that can be implemented to ensure a positive role for media in a democracy. First, by encouraging greater depth and less sound-bite coverage of public officials, the negativity toward the media and political campaigns can be reduced. In other words, the media should steer away from the sound-bite, visual-image, horse-race, and "theater criticism" type of coverage, and put more effort into insuring more substantive issue coverage. One way to accomplish this task is by simply abolishing paid political advertisements. With this act, the damaging effects and the excessive costs of ads would be immediately eliminated. This step would be common to the actions taken by many European democracies (Teixeira, 1992). Instead of sound-bite political coverage, a process of free or reduced rate television advertising could be supplemented. Sabato (1989) recommends that 8 hours of political advertising be offered free-of-charge by every television and radio station during the campaign season. The time should be given to political parties, instead of individual candidates. This time should also be divided equally between national and state parties. Finally, he advocates that the spots be allocated in short spots and during the last three months of the campaign. Magleby and Nelson (1990, as cited by Teixeira, 1992) offer a similar solution regarding reduced-rate media advertising. They espouse reduced-rate television advertising for quality times during the last sixty days of a campaign. Other researchers support the initiation of the "talking heads"

format for political advertising and free/reduced-rate ads. Under this proposal the candidate (or surrogate, in some cases) is required to face and speak into the camera to supplement the typical modern-day production techniques (Gans, 1991, as cited by Teixeira, 1992). All of the above suggestions should serve to increase the information content and overall quality of political advertising.

Second, the media can do a better job at making news more relevant to the viewer's and reader's life. By providing more opportunities for community interactivity, the media can further facilitate a reconnection and reengagement of the American public in civic affairs. One such example is a project initiated by the Wichita Eagle newspaper in 1990 and 1991. In an effort to increase interest, involvement, and participation in politics (as well as interest and satisfaction with the newspaper), they conducted several surveys and implemented other reforms (i.e., more issue coverage and adwatches) during the campaign periods (Teixeira, 1992). Other media outlets have actively tried to increase "civic journalism" as well through the use of focus groups, for example. Regardless of the specific actions, by exerting more efforts to learn about the public concerns, media can enhance the dialogue between the public, media, and public officials on important issues of the day.

Third, localizing news stories can also make the information more relevant to the audience's life. Further, studies show that localizing news does serve to increase interest and engagement in current events (Pinkleton & Austin, 1998). Along these lines, beat reporters with specific issue expertise should also cover these topics rather than other reporters. By doing so, the beat reporter can provide stronger reports as to how the story impacts the viewing audience. Once again, by increasing media and

political satisfaction, citizens will thus be more likely to participate politically (Goodwin, 1992, as cited by Pinkleton & Austin, 1998).

Political debates. Some experts endorse increasing the number of political debates and other similar options. The Pew Research Center for The People & The Press reported that the public is receptive to the idea of replacing paid TV ads with more frequent candidate debates (Pew Research, 2000). Carlin (2000b) wrote that research over three cycles is conclusive that political debates and DebateWatch programs educate and make people more likely to vote.

Campaign Reform

Campaign Discourse

The way policy is discussed should also be considered. A change in campaign discourse could go along way to improving the overall image of politics ("Voters won't," 1996). In other words, negativity must be limited and the public must be instructed about government's value and successes (Nye, 1998).

Party Reorganization

Many voting scholars advocate party reforms as an important remedy for low political participation rates. Stronger party organizations, with intensive mobilization activities, could be especially effective at increasing voter rates (Teixeira, 1992). To develop more penetrative party operations, Sabato (1988) provides a lengthy list of suggestions, including: (a) promote old style parties by naming party 'ombudsmen' in key constituencies and establish local/mobile offices; (b) provide party members with necessary nonpolitical services; (c) expand party fund-raising capacities, campaign services to nominees, and volunteer recruitment; (d) promote party advertising, both

during and between campaigns; (e) initiate a bipartisan educational campaign to convince the news media of the benefits of strong parties; (f) empower party policy commissions during presidential interregnums so as to increase party capacity for policy formation; (g) have parties sponsor political debates; and (h) increase the number of unpledged delegates to party conventions (as cited by Teixeira, 1992). Other suggestions offered by academic literature are the return of the party ballot, individual tax breaks for party contributions, increased "soft money" contributions to political parties, and party control over free television time (Schier, 2000; Teixeira, 1992). Finally, Walter Dean Burnham (1992), a prominent scholar on elections, endorses a new working class party. He believes that an alternative party centered on the economic issues of the working class could reenergize millions of low-income citizens.

Mobilization Efforts

Election Day efforts to increase voter turnout have proven helpful as well. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) as well as McCorkell (1995) write that get-out-the-vote phone calling programs have shown to inflate political participation. Studies also highlight the importance of personal contact as being one of the most effective methods to motivate individuals to participate in elections (see Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954, Janowitz & Marvick, 1956, Kitt & Gleicher, 1950, McPhee & Glaser, 1962, Milne & Mackenzie, 1954, Wolfinger, 1965, all cited by Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Cambell et al., 1960). Citizens who are contacted are more likely to believe that their vote makes a difference; to vote as if the election affects them (Bedy, 1995). Particularly, studies reveal that individuals, who are contacted less or

totally ignored by most campaigns, are especially prone to being mobilized by political contact (Avey, 1989). Moreover, Burnham (1982) as well as Piven and Cloward (1988) argue that the most important step to improving turnout--especially among lower-income citizens--is the end-game[14] campaign activities, such as get-out-the vote calls, rallies, and other mobilization tools.

Recent events support this conclusion. Jesse Jackson's success in the 1984 Southern presidential primaries was greatly enhanced by turnout drives. In addition, mayoral elections in Chicago and Denver were won on the mobilization of typical non-voting groups (Cuerdon, 1986).

Competitiveness of Election

In addition, races that are perceived as close or controversial result in higher turnouts (Lewis, 1989; Timpone, 1998). Research soundly concludes that voting is strongly correlated to the interest one has for a campaign (Pew Research, 2000). Academic scholarship confirms this hypothesis. In a study of voting in state gubernatorial elections, Patterson and Caldeira (1983, as cited by Niemi & Weisberg, 1993, p. 18) include variables regarding campaign spending, closeness of the gubernatorial election and of presence of a senate contest in the same election. Each of these variables were highly significant in accounting for state turnout levels in 1978 and 1980, even after controlling for socioeconomic variables, the effects of registration laws, region, and year. Cox and Munger (1989, as cited by Niemi & Weisberg, 1993) similarly highlighted the effects of closeness and expenditures on turnout in the 1982 congressional elections.

Campaign Expenditures

Campaign expenditures have also been associated with voter turnout. Understandably, the more money spent on a campaign, the greater the political information available, and the greater probability that citizens will thus be motivated to go to the polls. A strong relationship between campaign expenditures and turnout for gubernatorial and state elections have been verified according to several studies. A positive correlation has been shown through research of specific state elections as well (see Caldeira & Patterson, 1982, Patterson & Caldeira, 1982, Weber & Smith, 1991, all cited by Svoboda, 1995).

However, the amount of campaign expenditures, especially a gross imbalance of funds between candidates, can also have a detrimental impact on voter turnout. One of the concerns among potential voters is that political candidates are so dependent on campaign contributions that financial givers weld undue influence. In other words, because of these contributions, ordinary voters have less say on governmental policy. Another potential harm of the current system of campaign financing is the difficulty facing most challengers running against incumbents. Due to readily accessible, large campaign contribution chests available to incumbents, they can often ward off strong challenges, making elections substantially less competitive and issue oriented (Teixeira, 1992).

Thus, campaign finance reform is advocated as one avenue to level the playing field between incumbents and challengers, as well as average citizens and special interest groups. Some suggestions for reform include the following: (a) partial or full public financing to ensure challengers have a base level of competitive funding; (b)

contribution limits to minimize the influence of wealthy and special interests; (c)

spending limits to equalize the candidates media efforts; (d) tax credits for small

individual contributors to encourage more donations from the electorate (Magleby &

Nelson, 1990, as cited by Teixeira, 1992).

<center>System Reform</center>

<u>Education Reform</u>

<u>Civic education.</u> Research reveals that civic education has an influence on

civic duty, and thus voting. One explanation of this finding is that "the educated"

tend to socialize with others who give attention to political and civic affairs

(McCorkell, 1995; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Even a very low dose of campaign

involvement—such as reading a newspaper article or two—could be enough to

motivate a nonvoter to become a voter. The solution is providing some kind of

meaningful connection between people and politics (Teixeira, 1999). An approach

particularly emphasized asks teachers to encourage voting participation in civic

courses. This practice could be extremely beneficial, especially if it included

discussion of campaign policy issues (Teixeira, 1992).

<u>Neutral political information.</u> The government could also make readily

available neutral political information to citizens. Currently, California, Oregon,

Washington, and Alaska provide state-published and distributed voter pamphlets that

contain biographies and self-described issue positions (Cooper, 2000).

<u>Government Reform</u>

<u>Scheduling of elections.</u> Another factor has shown to influence voter turnout:

the election schedule. Campaigns for higher office (e.g., gubernatorial race, U.S.

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Senate race) often raise more interest and attention, in comparison to low-level campaigns (e.g., state house, ballot initiatives), and are responsible for effecting most of the voter turnout. Consequently, holding U.S. Senate and gubernatorial elections concurrently has proven to increase political participation (Svoboda, 1995; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Having U.S. Senate and congressional elections or gubernatorial and local elections simultaneously can also spur turnout (Caldeira, Patterson, & Markko, 1995, as cited by Svoboda, 1995).

Jury list. Using driver's license lists for jury selection instead of voter-registration files could prove beneficial (Doppelt & Shearer, 2000). The use of voter registration lists for jury selection has been found to reduce registration rates by nine percentage points (Knack, 1991).

Term limits. One idea to increase interest and the competitiveness of races is to implement term limits for political offices. Englander (1991, as cited by Blackburn, 1992, p. 39) agrees, alluding to the fact that voters are upset because they believe "there are a bunch of guys in government making a lot of money with big staffs and nothing seems to change. . . . Why vote?"

Unicameral structure. Another suggestion for increasing voter turnout is by abolishing the bicameral structure of state and/or national governmental bodies. Under this proposal, the senate would be abolished to make the house the sovereign body, for example (Teixeira, 1992). With this change, each individual vote would have greater impact on the overall makeup of the legislative body. It would also allow citizens more of a competitive footing with special interest groups when trying to influence public policy.

Decentralization. Decentralization also has been included as a possible

remedy for improving voter turnout. "Decentralization can be broad or limited in

scope. Transference of decision-making by the central government varies from

shifting responsibility for work within government organizations to turning over all

responsibility to the private sector" (Lewis, 1989, p. 22).

Increase third-party candidates. New political parties or third-party

candidate(s) can give nonvoters a reason to participate and encourage their reentry

into the political process. Gilmour and Lamb (1975) document that alienated voters

are most likely to vote for minor party candidates. They maintain that the politically

disenfranchised are motivated toward third-party candidates because "the alienated

voter was [according to their studies] the least likely to choose the traditionally safe,

middle-of-the-road candidate" (p. 122). In addition, a new political party provides

voice to the unorganized mass of discontent, thereby strengthening the alienated

voters' sense of involvement and belonging. There is some evidence that the increase

in voting in the 1992 presidential election is the consequence of having Ross Perot on

the ballot (Black & Black, 1994; Nichols & Black, 1992). In other words, by giving

voice to a topic (i.e., budget deficit) neglected by the two major party candidates,

Dunn (1989) explained that "third parties may incite the participation of voters,

nonvoters, and involve citizens who were previously uninterested" (p. 28).

Yet, previous research shows little difference in satisfaction about political

candidates between voters and nonvoters. For example, in 1968 when nonvoters were

asked why they failed to vote, only 3 percent mentioned unhappiness with the

candidate choices. Studies in 1976 showed similar levels of cynicism among voters

and nonvoters, and this trend has been consistent over the last two decades (Doppelt & Shearer, 2000; Flanigan & Zingale, 1994). However, Miroff et al. (1999) reveal that up to 60 percent of the electorate express interest in having more third-party candidates involved in political elections.

Of course, there are many other ideas to help remedy this downward trend of voting. Doppelt and Shearer (2000); Gans (1985); Palfrey and Rosenthal (1985) as cited by Lewis (1989); Teixeira (1999) mention just a few of these alternative options: provide transportation to the polls; cash payments for voting; fines for not voting; and compulsory registration. The goal of each of these solutions is to make the campaign process more understandable, accessible, and meaningful for the potential participants.

To conclude the discussion on solutions to nonvoting, the Center for Voting and Democracy (2000) published results of a study conducted on changes needed to increase political participation. A random sample of essays was used to determine what reforms were supported. Here is their summary of solutions offered. Many respondents mentioned more than one reform idea.

- More interaction with candidates (62%)

- More tailoring of the message to the audience (62%)

- Internet voting/internet education (57%)

- More civics curriculum (56%)

- More substantive, positive campaigns (53%)

- More convenient polling locations/times (52%)

- More third-party participation/ballot access/prop. representation (37%)

- Easier registration process (Election Day registration, internet) (34%)

- Required debates for candidates (23%)

- Corrupting influence of money (21%)

- Peer pressure/parental influence (21%)

- Better media coverage/more information about campaigns (21%)

- Lower the voting age (18%)

- Ending the Electoral College (17%)

- More diversity in government (15%)

Limitations and Future Research

There are some obvious limitations within this study, which could provide rich areas for future research. Despite the limitations, efforts were made in the research design to minimize any major flaws.

First, any study of a single presidential year calls for replication during other election cycles. A series of studies regarding presidential elections would provide for greater generalizability. The qualitative section of this study, based on focus groups and interviews, is also clearly limited in scope. In addition, generalizability of the survey data might be limited by a lack of geographical balance because an overwhelming majority of the data were from Oklahoma participants. While more all-encompassing research would be useful to confirm these findings, previous research along these lines is consistent.

Second, studies of presidential elections only reveal a part of the nonvoter puzzle. The public might hold different feelings toward presidential campaigns in

comparison to local elections. In other words, the reasons and solutions for voting on the state and local level could be quite different from the findings presented in this study. The nonvoter puzzle is also incomplete because little is known about the reasons for political abstention in other countries. Furthermore, although citizens fail to vote, they may engage in various alternative forms or "modes" of political participation (Milbrath & Goel, 1977). Thus, additional research on these issues is also warranted to provide a clearer view of the nonvoting phenomenon.

Due to issues of accessibility and time, the focus groups and in-depth personal interviews were limited in geography and number. Although the focus groups were representative of average citizens across the country, the in-depth personal interviews were conducted with a single, undergraduate population. Therefore, future scholarship should include a more representative sample of the voter/nonvoter population. Another limitation could be that the participants were self-selected into the study. Those individuals who were not interested in a research project—especially a study on politics—might have been less likely to participate.

The qualitative content analysis of the focus groups and in-depth interviews is also a weakness of this study. The invention of the theme schema and coding process —as conducted by the author—could be attacked for being subjective and biased in nature. However, systematic steps were undertaken to develop a clear thematic schema and perform a sound content analysis. Regardless, further refinement and verification of the theme categories is warranted.

Another drawback of the study might have been the research design. The procedure for the focus group discussions as well as the question wording and

question schedule for the focus groups, personal interviews, and surveys might have lead the respondents. For example, with the focus groups, members were administered pre-test surveys before participating in group discussions. Henceforth, it was not uncommon to hear comments like this from the focus group participants, "One of the questions on the survey kind of asked, 'Do you think you can make a difference [in the political process].' Well, I think a lot of people think it really doesn't matter." Obviously, it seems that the pre-test survey was influencing the types of topics highlighted by the discussants. In addition, many of the survey questions involved issues regarding mass media and politics. As a result, a higher percentage of the focus group discussion centered on mass media's effect on voting than in the personal interviews. As stated, the wording of questions in the in-depth interview could have also been a problem. Certainly, questions about how much politicians care and listen to average citizens could have skewed the respondents answers regarding voting behavior. In addition, the interview schedule of questions could have influenced the types of answers given by the participants. In fact, one interviewer alluded to this possible affect while addressing a question:

> F: . . . I think people think that way, because you don't see how it affects, like voting and, like choosing a different president or a different senate or whatever. You don't see how it affects your every day. That's kind of going back to question one, we don't know how it affects us.

The intimate nature of focus groups—and personal interviews especially—could also be a limitation. Although the interviewer was careful, the participants could

easily be led to give a desired response. Verbal and nonverbal cues by the moderator can quickly indicate satisfaction or displeasure with an answer. In addition, the practice of video- and/or audio-taping the interviews could have made the participants feel uncomfortable and cause them to be selective in their answers. Furthermore, the survey data were based on a convenience sample of regional subgroups of participants probably resulting in a higher error rate. As with the qualitative discussions, it should also be noted that the practical difficulties of conducting a survey can add error to the findings as well.

Finally, of course, the answer to nonvoting was not found in this study. Instead this scholarship, along with that before it, serves to better understand and explain the "puzzle of nonvoting." The methods of focus groups and in-depth interviews were especially effective at harnessing detailed and candid information about the participants' thoughts and reasoning process. Furthermore, this research—by utilizing a qualitative and quantitative approach—could uniquely highlight the interaction of different attributes that most affect voter turnout.

In addition, reflections from the focus groups and in-depth interviews—along with observations from previous research—indicate that citizen participation in these types of studies might be helpful, in and of itself. Even a short discussion about politics with a moderator may serve to provide greater awareness and efficacy in electoral matters (McKinney, Spiker, & Kaid, 1998). Accordingly, small doses of dialogue on political issues might be enough to trigger further interest.

Of course, future studies should build on the information obtained from this study and improve the methods used to explore the nonvoting phenomenon. At this

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time, it is obvious that several variables contribute to political abstention. Yet, there is minimal research regarding which voting dimensions are most dominant, or what variables affect others. Such correlated relationships among reasons for nonvoting represent an area for future research.

As a result of this scholarship, many other questions are brought to the forefront as well. For example, as much discussion focused on political knowledge, additional research could be conducted to specifically examine this variable. In addition, participants could be given certain scenerios (e.g., "What would you say and ask if introduced to a political candidate?") to enhance the researchers' understanding of nonvoters' feelings toward political participation.

The findings of this research strongly suggest a need for more political communication. It was found that additional campaign-related information and candidate contact could help address reasons for nonvoting, such as political inefficacy and campaign concerns. However, when asking why citizens need more political communication or why individuals call for more campaign information, the answer to these questions might circle back to the identified reasons for nonvoting (i.e., political inefficacy, corruption, failing media). If this is the case, then the origins for political abstention are actually the end-product, rather than the stimulus. Thus, the entire research design and questions would require reevaluation in order to fully understand the nonvoting phenomenon.

Chapter VI

IMPORTANCE OF VOTING

In the last chapter of this dissertation, it is important to reiterate reasons why Americans must be concerned with the growing trend of nonvoters. The rationale for political participation must be constantly drummed in order to [re]engage the public and reinvigorate American democracy. In the words of the participants, excerpts from the focus group and personal interview discussions are included in this section to lend further support to voting as well.

Ensures Representative Democracy

Democracy, from the Greek word *demos*, is commonly referred to as being ruled by the people, rather than a ruling elite. In a representative democracy, it is voting that serves as the link between citizens and government leaders; it is the core of the American political system. Therefore, voting is one of the most important ingredients for democracy as it is central to sovereignty. Downs (1957) as cited by Brians (1997) concisely explains: "[t]he advantage of voting per se is that it makes democracy possible" (p. 1). Not only is voting a basic human right in and of itself, it can be argued that the fuller the participation rates overall, the healthier the democratic system (Fanigan & Zingale, 1994; Hadley, 1978; Putnam, 1993). Voting is the mechanism by which citizens maintain or alter their existing political institutions. Moreover, it serves to accredit or legitimize the governing body and serve as a conduit for communication between government and the governed (Burke, 1998; Kydoniefs, 1998; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). It allows citizens to contribute to and control over the democratic society of which they belong.

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Under a representative form of government, officials must answer to their constituents during every election, at the very least. For it is at the ballot box that citizens have the ultimate say in the direction of public policy. If one chooses to forego this privilege, they lose an important opportunity to voice their opinion. Focus group participants in this study expounded on this concept:

> F2: As far as...I agree with him but what I would say to that is that by, educating yourself politically, by understanding what's going on, by voting for the people that you feel will hear your voice, eventually you may get to a point, where it's not you particularly, anybody in the, you know, in the minority community may get to a point where now they can run for an office because they...if you just don't care because you figure, 'hey what is Gore or Bush gonna do for me, so screw it I'm not gonna do anything.' Then you're right nothing will ever, ever change for you because...I mean so if you get out there and you do vote, and you do educate yourself, and you do understand the issues then eventually you can be that guy in power and you can think back to this time and say, you know, I'm gonna be that voice that wasn't there for me when I wanted it, you know, I'm now gonna be that voice. So I think that, you know, the idea of not voting because your voice isn't heard, well then make your voice heard, you be the voice.

M6:   The squeaky wheel gets the grease and that's just what she was

        alluding to. If the people don't say, if the people think well if

        I'm not heard it doesn't make a difference so I'm not gonna be

        heard, they're not the squeaky wheel and, and I'm not picking

        on this issue, but why do you think gay/lesbian issues are so big

        right now? Because they're the squeaky wheel. They're the

        ones saying we have no rights, nobody likes us, nobody

        tolerates us, the people that beat up on us hate us. They're

        squeaking. Uh, I'm not saying I hate or love these people,

        okay, I love everybody I think in my religion. But the um, the

        thing is that the squeaky wheel gets the grease and if the wheel

        isn't squeaking they're just gonna lubricate it a little bit and

        keep it quiet, you know what I'm saying, and they're not gonna

        maintain that wheel because it doesn't, it's not giving any

        signs...

Participation gives individuals a voice--a voice that is less likely to be heard if one

does not vote. Participation also provides individuals with an earned right to

complain and protest if things are not as expected. In other words, power is handed to

those citizens who choose to exercise their opportunity to influence government via

the ballot box. This philosophy was also espoused by a focus group participant on

October 11 in Texas:

M1:   . . . I think every vote counts and I think every vote makes a difference,

I think every vote is a voice and I think every vote, I think your

vote is yours, you know, one of this nation's greatest privileges

that we have. And I think to say, 'it doesn't make a difference,

it's just one vote' well think, a lot of people do that and that's a

lot of one people and it adds up to a lot of votes that aren't

getting done. And I think there's a lot of people out there who

don't vote out of protest but I don't think it really is protesting.

I think if you don't vote you get thrown into the same pool of

people who, you know, I hate to say it but there's people who

are too lazy to vote, people who can't vote. And if you're not

voting out of protest because you don't agree with any of the

candidates then your vote is just thrown in there and they don't,

you know, its not a real protest and stuff.

Illuminates Interest of All Citizens

Second, elections are the way in which ordinary citizens try to influence public

policy. When people choose not to participate, it makes it easier for just a few to

control the election and shift the focus to a few narrowly-defined, ideological issues

(Cooper, 2000; Gans, 1985; Kydoniefs, 1998). Voting allows individual citizens an

opportunity to exercise control over the elites and, instead, protect their own self-

interests (Burke, 1998). In the words of a interview participant on April 11, ". . . if I

had the chance to vote, I would vote because I do want to make my life better every

chance I get." Voting is a powerful influence "giving general direction to public

policy and delineating its boundaries (Key, 1966, as cited by McClure, 1983, p. 5).

Moreover, full participation is needed to pit factions against each other to prevent the

majority from tyrannizing the minority. Garrows (1978) eloquently explains that "The

vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice

and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men because they are different from

other men" (p. 132, as cited by Timpone, 1994). In other words, high participation

works to maintain a checks and balance in power between the interests of the

electorate. For it is posited that nonvoting, in the long run, allows politicians to be

more attentive to campaign contributors, private interest groups, political lobbying,

pollsters, and the media instead of the mass populace. Thus, disengaged citizens will

find very little representation for their concerns and issues (e.g., fiscal, tax, labor, civil

rights, health, and social welfare policy) over time (Wilson, 1989; Weir, Orloff, &

Skocpol, 1988; all cited by Affigne, 1992; Burke, 2000; Hadley, 1978; Piven &

Cloward, 1988). Ironically, it is the poor who consistently vote at lower rates than the

rich and who need the most government intervention. As policymakers give attention

to policies benefiting the class that votes at higher rates, government legislation does

not accurately reflect the views of the populace (Kydoniefs, 1998). Greene (1996)

summarized this point: "so many of the poor and working class disfranchise

themselves by not voting" (p. 13WC3). Dahl (1989) concurs: "Experience has shown

that any group of adults excluded from the demos--for example, women, artisans,

laborers, the unpropertied, racial minorities--will be lethally weakened in defending

its own interests" (p. 129, as cited by Timpone, 1994).

The issue of representation is important because Morine and Deane (2000)

argue that voters who are more affluent seek different things from government. For

example, a <u>Washington Post</u>/Harvard poll revealed that nearly half--45 percent of all

nonvoters--say they want the [federal government's] surplus spent on education,

health care and other social programs, in comparison to only 25 percent of voters.

Nichols and Beck (1992) further wrote that nonvoters support programs by the federal

government to provide individuals with jobs and a guaranteed standard of living.

NES data also found nonvoters to lean more to the pro-life side of the abortion debate.

Other studies (see Hill & Leighley, 1992; Radcliff & Saiz, 1994, both as cited by

Burke, 1998) have found that in states where the disadvantaged vote in high numbers,

state spending increases. In addition, the greater the African-American turnout, in

comparison to Caucasians, the more liberal the state policies. In summation, a

personal interview discussant on April 4 contributed this insight on the importance of

voting:

> M: . . . it does affect them [nonvoters], even if they don't know it or not. It
>
>   affects them someway; by the taxes they pay, by the kinds of
>
>   jobs they are getting, by how much things cost. All of that and
>
>   more.

Certainly, there are policy differences between voters and nonvoters that make

higher participation rates important. However, mere voting becomes even more

important to the collective society when realizing that those who participate in energy-

intensive political activities (e.g., contacting officials, community activism, campaign

giving) have a greater impact on the governing elite. Verba, Schlozman, Brady and

Nie (1992, as cited by Teixeira, 1992) indicate that the policy differences between nonvoters and political activists are even more acute. This differentiation between topic agendas can result in extreme underrepresentation for the needs and interests of nonparticipants.

Increases Citizen Participation and Reinforces Community

Third, studies show that people who fail to vote tend not to participate in any other form of social, civic, or political activity (Cooper, 2000; Gans, 1985; Putnam, 2000). Foundationally, participation is a good thing in and of itself. It aids in individual self-development and self-actualization. Specifically, it allows people to "grow up politically;" individuals explore their policy views and party affiliations. Voting also creates a connection between the populace and government; people are made to feel apart of the system (Hadley, 1978). However, the development of these personal attributes are also necessary for one to exert themselves into other forms of social and community participation. Accordingly, political participation often leads one to join in, and have greater confidence within, social networks (Conway, 2000; Teixeira, 1992). Moreover, it is this social networking which has served to strengthen our country's collectivist bonds to foster more caring and concerned communities (Putnam, 1993, 2000).

Another affect of nonvoting is the potential for less volunteerism. Once again, people who fail to participate are less likely to have the confidence or experience necessary to easily engage in volunteer activities. According to the People for the American Way (1988), nonvoters are not likely to:

. . . be participants at school board meetings in their towns and cities, or to engage in public discussion and decision-making about housing for the elderly, or mental health programs, or environmental policies and budget priorities, the myriad of issues that comprises the fabric of community life. (pp. 2-3)

And volunteerism is a fundamental ingredient for the continued life of many social organizations which contribute to the health of a community (Gans, 1985; Putnam, 2000).

Finally, America's liberties are dependent on the sacrifices of those who have come before. The founders of the Constitution and those who fought during the American Revolution contributed mightily, so that others might now enjoy the privileges provided. However, these rights should not be taken for granted as explained during an in-depth interview on April 3:

> M: It is important that they cast their vote because I mean people died for us to have the right to vote—it is a privilege. A lot of countries do not have that right/privilege and Americans need to take advantage of that. Some countries kill to be able to do that. We have to reinforce that, help people [remember]. I mean their relatives died for that right.

Encourages Change From With-in the System

Finally, people who abstain from participation might feel that the government is not legitimate enough to support, and the elected may not believe they possess the legitimacy to lead. Nie, Verba, and Petrocik (1980) explain the tenuous link between

government and the governed: "Government, above all democratic government, depends on the support of the citizenry. It also depends on the ability and capacity of the political process to reconcile conflicting forces in the society" (p. 2). The resulting illegitimacy may result in mild consequences--such as government gridlock and a political culture that discourages new entries into public service--or widespread political upheaval (Teixeira, 1992). In other words, people who do not learn to appreciate and work within the system, might search for alternative (and possibly dangerously, radical) ways to bring about change. The idea behind a pluralistic democracy is that all groups and individuals are heard, thus legitimizing the political system. Elections, by giving voice to the electorate, serve to channel and control politically frustrated citizens. On the other hand, if the majority of disenfranchised grows too large, there is always a possibility of unrest and revolt of some kind (Lewis, 1989). Thus, the ballot box is extremely important in a democracy. For only through voting, do people make their voice heard.

Conclusion

The task of finding solutions to decreased political participation is immense. While the challenges of engaging the politically disengaged are great, following the current path has not proven to energize the forgotten masses. This dissertation provided a thorough examination of the characteristics, causes, and solutions for decreased political participation. Although much of the analysis focused on national elections, the reasons and remedies for nonvoting can be generalized across elections of all sizes (Burke, 1998). It is my hope that a national discussion on the need to

revitalize the democratic process might continue and include some of the findings presented herein.

While social scientists disagree as to whether academic scholarship should include an element of advocacy, I argue, there is no "silver bullet" which can by itself fix our dismal voting trend. Yet, if the campaign process is to ensure the vitality of democracy and serve all its people equally, we must search for remedies.

It is possible to [re]engage the public and reinvigorate the American electorate. Results from this dissertation--along with previous academic research--illuminate the fact that there are quite a few steps that can be taken to increase participation, some of which are certain to work. In addition, the decision not to vote is actually "very lightly held and relatively easy to change" (Teixeira, 1999, p. 186). Moreover, scholarship purports that with simple registration reforms, voter turnout can be increased by as much as 7 percentage points, and up to 20 percentage points with both registration and political reform (Teixeira, 1992; Teixeira, 1999; Winters, 1996). Furthermore, some believe that the mere creation of new registrants could set in motion a "dynamic of mobilization" which potentially could raise voter turnout as much as 80 percent of the voting age population (Avey, 1989; Piven & Cloward, 2000). Other reforms that focus on increasing levels of political knowledge and efficacy--even small gains--could also bring large dividends on Election Day. Now is the time to issue a clarion call for a national educational effort to reaffirm fundamental concepts of democracy, especially among the young. Furthermore, the more voting reforms of a multi-faceted nature are implemented, the greater the chance political participation will increase (Lewis, 1989; People for the American Way, 1988;

Teixeira, 1999). As citizens begin to see success in voicing their views, participation will foster even more participation among new voters (Fugate, 1996). And if registration and political changes can produce an electoral process that is more substantive, less manipulative, more accessible, and less expensive, it seems we have nothing to lose. For only through vast participation can Americans maintain a strong and stable democracy. As Alexis de Tocqueville eloquently wrote in 1848, "The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens."

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Table 1

National Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections: 1960-2000*

Count and Percentage

Year	Voting Age Pop.	Registration	Turnout	Percentage+
1960	109,159,000	64,833,096x	68,838,204	63.06%
1964	114,090,000	73,715,818	70,644,592	61.92%
1968	120,328,186	81,658,180	73,211,875	60.84%
1972	140,776,000	97,328,541	77,718,554	55.21%
1976	152,309,190	105,037,986	81,555,789	53.55%
1980	164,597,000	113,043,734	86,515,221	52.56%
1984	174,466,000	124,150,614	92,652,680	53.11%
1988	182,778,000	126,379,628	91,594,693	50.11%
1992	189,529,000	133,821,178	104,405,155	55.09%
1996	196,511,000	146,211,960	96,456,345	48.80%
2000	#	#	105,380,929	51.20%

*Sources: Congressional Research Service reports, Election Data Services Inc., and State Election Offices

+Percent turnout of voting age population

xRegistrations from AL, AK, DC, IA, KS, KY, MS, MO, NE, NM, NC, ND, OK, SD, WI, and WY not included

#Information not available

Table 2

Voter Registration and Turnout in Federal Elections by Age: 1972-1996*

Year	VAP	%Registered	Voted #	%Voted	%total US Vote
1996 Total	193,651,000	65.9	105,017,000	54.23	100
18-20 years	10,785,000	45.6	3,366,000	31.00	3.21
21-24	13,856,000	51.2	4,603,000	33.39	4.41
25-44	83,393,000	61.9	41,050,000	49.22	39.08
45-64	53,721,000	73.5	34,615,000	64.43	32.96
65+	31,888,000	77.0	21,356,000	67.00	20.34
1992 Total	185,684,000	68.2	113,866,000	61.3	100
18-20 years	9,727,000	48.3	3,749,000	38.5	3.29
21-24	14,644,000	55.3	6,693,000	45.7	5.87
25-44	81,319,000	64.8	47,389,000	58.3	41.61
45-64	49,147,000	75.3	34,399,000	70.0	30.21
65+	30,849,000	78.0	21,637,000	70.1	19.0
1988 Total	178,098,000	66.6	102,244,000	57.4	100
18-20 years	10,742,000	44.9	3,570,000	33.2	3.49
21-24	14,827,000	50.6	5,684,000	38.3	5.56
25-44	77,863,000	63.0	42,018,000	54.0	41.1
45-64	45,862,000	75.5	31,134,000	67.9	30.45
65+	28,804,000	78.4	19,818,000	68.8	19.38
1984 Total	169,963,000	68.3	101,878,000	59.9	100
18-20 years	11,249,000	47.0	4,131,000	36.7	4.05
21-24	16,727,000	54.3	7,276,000	43.5	7.14
25-44	71,023,000	66.6	41,492,000	58.4	40.72
45-64	44,307,000	76.6	30,924,000	69.8	30.35
65+	26,658,000	76.9	18,055,000	67.7	17.72
1980 Total	157,085,000	64.1	80,310,000	48.5	100
18-20 years	12,274,000	44.7	4,387,000	35.7	4.71
21-24	15,864,000	52.7	6,838,000	43.1	7.34
25-44	61,285,000	65.6	35,958,000	58.7	38.63
45-64	43,569,000	75.8	30,205,000	69.3	32.45
65+	24,094,000	74.6	15,677,000	65.1	16.84

Table 2 Continued

Year	VAP	%Registered	Voted #	%Voted	%total US Vote
1976 Total	146,548,000	66.7	86,698,000	59.2	100
18-20 years	12,105,000	47.1	4,598,000	38.0	5.3
21-24	14,848,000	54.8	6,769,000	45.6	7.8
25-44	54,302,000	65.5	31,883,000	58.7	36.77
45-64	43,293,000	75.5	29,763,000	68.7	34.32
65+	22,001,000	71.4	13,685,000	62.2	15.78
1972 Total	136,203,000	72.3	85,766,000	63.0	100
18-20 years	11,022,000	58.1	5,318,000	48.3	6.2
21-24	13,590,000	59.5	6,896,000	50.7	8.04
25-44	49,173,000	71.3	30,819,000	62.7	35.93
45-64	42,344,000	79.7	29,991,000	70.8	34.96
65+	20,074,000	75.6	12,741,000	63.5	14.85

*Source: Federal Election Commission

Table 3

Voter Registration and Turnout in Federal Elections by Gender: 1972-1996*

Gender	VAP	1972 %Registered	# Voted	%Voted
Male	63,833,000	73.1	40,908,000	64.1
Female	72,370,000	71.6	44,858,000	62.0
		1976		
Male	68,957,000	67.1	41,079,000	59.6
Female	77,591,000	66.4	45,620,000	58.8
		1980		
Male	74,082,000	66.6	43,753,000	59.1
Female	83,003,000	67.1	49,312,000	59.4
		1984		
Male	80,327,000	67.3	47,354,000	59.0
Female	89,636,000	69.3	54,524,000	60.8
		1988		
Male	84,531,000	65.2	47,704,000	56.4
Female	93,568,000	67.8	54,519,000	58.3
		1992		
Male	88,557,000	66.9	53,312,000	60.2
Female	97,126,000	69.3	60,554,000	62.3
		1996		
Male	92,632,000	64.4	48,909,000	52.8
Female	101,020,000	67.3	56,108,000	55.5

*Source: Federal Election Commission, "Current Population Reports, Series P20"-
U.S. Bureau of Census

Table 4

Voter Registration and Turnout in Federal Elections by Race/Ethnicity: 1972-1996*

			1972		
Race	VAP^	%Registered		# Voted	%Voted
White	121,243,000	73.4		78,166,000	64.5
Black	13,493,000	65.5		7,032,000	52.1
Hispanic+	5,616,000	44.4		2,103,000	37.5

			1976		
White	129,316,000	68.3		78,808,000	60.9
Black	14,927,000	58.5		7,273,000	48.7
Hispanic	6,594,000	37.8		2,098,000	31.8

			1980		
White	137,676,000	68.4		83,855,000	60.9
Black	16,423,000	60.0		8,287,000	50.5
Hispanic	8,210,000	36.3		2,453,000	29.9

			1984		
White	146,761,000	69.6		90,152,000	61.4
Black	18,432,000	66.3		10,293,000	55.8
Hispanic	9,471,000	40.1		3,092,000	32.6

			1988		
White	149,899,000	65.3		70,473,000	47.0
Black	19,020,000	64.0		8,225,000	43.2
Hispanic	11,832,000	35.9		2,866,000	24.2

			1992		
Race	VAP	%Registered		# Voted	%Voted
White	157,837,000	70.1		100,405,000	63.6
Black	21,039,000	63.9		11,371,000	54.0
Hispanic	14,688,000	35.0		4,238,000	28.9

			1996		
White	162,779,000	67.7		91,028,000	56.0
Black	22,483,000	63.5		11,386,000	50.6
Hispanic	18,426,000	35.7		4,928,000	26.7

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*Source: Federal Election Commission, "Current Population Reports, Series P20"- U.S. Bureau of Census

+Persons of Hispanic Origin may be of any race.

^Voting Age Population

Table 5

Focus Group Traits By Geographic Site

~First Presidential Debate: Oct. 3, 2000~

Location:	Type of Recording: Audio(A)/Video(V)	Type of Group: Students(S)/Adults(A) /Mixed(M)	# of Participants:
Dickenson (PA) College	A	S	11
Ohio University	V	S	7
Ohio University	V	A	6
University of Akron (OH)	V	A	10
University of Missouri	A & V	S	15
University of North Texas	A	S	15
University of Oklahoma	A	A	12
University of Oklahoma	A	A	11

~Vice Presidential Debate: Oct. 5, 2000~

Dickenson (PA) College	A	S	5
University of Akron (OH)	V	S	10
University of Oklahoma	A	S	28

Table 5 Continued

<u>Focus Group Traits By Geographic Site</u>

~~Second Presidential Debate: Oct. 11, 2000~~

<u>Location:</u>	<u>Type of Recording:</u> Audio(A)/Video(V)	<u>Type of Group:</u> Students(S)/Adults(A) /Mixed(M)	<u># of Participants:</u>
University of Akron (OH)	V	S	6
University of Florida	A	(S / all male)	?
University of Florida	A	(S / all female)	?
University of North Texas	A	S	9
University of Oklahoma	A	A	10

~~Third Presidential Debate: Oct. 17, 2000~~

Cosumnes (CA) River College	A & V	M	12
University of Akron (OH)	V	S	15
University of Idaho	A	A	14
University of Missouri	A & V	S	15
University of North Texas	A	S	7
University of Oklahoma	A	A	10

Table 6

Primary Themes For Focus Groups and In-depth Interviews

Economic Influences
  Rational Choice Theory
  Socio-economic Influences
Psychological Influences
  Parental Influence
  School Influence
  Party Influence
    Parties are the same
  Political Knowledge
  Political Efficacy
  Civic Duty

Government Influences
  Registration Requirements
  Electoral Process
    Balloting process
    I am one vote of many
  Bureaucratic Influence

Mass Media Influence

Campaign Influences
  Campaign Style
  Campaign Discourse
    Too complex
    Too negative
    Not focus on our issues
  Candidate
    Candidates are the same
    Lie/Fake/Real
    Corrupt
    They do whatever they want to
    Don't care about people like us

Cultural Influences
  Don't have time
  Lazy
  Politics is last thing on their mind
  Rebellious
  Individualistic

Solutions
>   Greater Contact
>   Greater Information
>   Electoral Process

Table 7

Internal Consistency for the Cynicism Scale*

	Item 2	Item 3	Item 5
Item 2	**.30**	.01	.00
Item 3	.29	**.29**	.00
Item 5	.19	.19	**.14**

* The lower triangle depicts the obtained correlations of the items retained as a result of the confirmatory factor analysis conducted on the data for this scale. The upper triangle depicts error, and the diagonal represents the communalities.

Table 8

Partial Correlations and Standardized Beta Weights of the Predictors of Voting

	Partial Correlations	Beta Weights
Cynicism	-.172	-.029*
Sex	.023	.013
Age	.030	.001
Education Level	.203	.036**
Voting in 1996	.399	.318***
Party Affiliation	-.062	-.023
Race	-.161	-.039*
Income	-.134	-.019*

* $p \leq .05$
** $p \leq .01$
*** $p \leq .001$

Appendix A

For more information about non-partisan organizations concerned with voting turnout, visit any of the following:

League of Women Voters
http://www.lwv.org/voter

MTV's Choose or Lose
http://www.chooseorlose.com

Project Vote Smart
http://www.votesmart.org

Rock the Vote
http://www.rockthevote.org

State of the Vote
http://www.stateofthevote.org

The Democracy Network
http://www.dnet.org

Voter.com
http://www.voter.com

E-Voter Institute
http://www.evoterinstitute.org

Teledemocracy Action News and Network
http://www.auburn.edu/tann

Youth in Action
http://www.youthlink.org

Youth Vote 2000 Coalition
http://www.youthvote2000.org

The Student Voices Project
http://student-voices.org

Appendix B[15]

Focus Group Questions

1. In recent presidential elections roughly half of those who can voter actually do vote. why do you think many people seem to be uninterested or don't participate in the political process?

2. How do you think most people view the government?

3. Do you think federal programs and services are responsive to the needs of all citizens, or are they more responsive to special interests?

Probe, if needed:

4. (Assuming that you do) why do you participate in the political process?

5. What do you think could be done to encourage greater citizen participation?

Appendix C

In-depth Personal Interview Questions

1. How relevant do you believe politics is to your life?
2. How much interest do you have in politics?

3. What feelings do you have toward politics?
4. What feelings do you have toward politicians?
5. Why do you think you have these feelings?

6. How much do you believe that you can affect the political process?
7. How responsive do you think the political system is to meeting your needs?

8. How much do you think that politicians care about you?
9. How much do you think that politicians are willing to listen to you?

10. How much knowledge do you have about political candidates?
11. Would you like to have more information on how politics affects your everyday life?

12. What role do you think the media has in politics and political campaigns?
13. What role do you think political advertising has in politics?

14. What do you think are some of the [other] reasons people do not vote in political elections?

15. Talk with me about what you want in a political candidate. What would be an ideal candidate? What characteristics would they possess?
16. What type of candidate do you believe would motivate more people to vote?

17. What solutions do you think should be implemented to increase voter turnout?
18. What solutions do you think should be implemented to increase turnout among younger voters?
19. Do you think we need to limit the amount of money involved in political campaigns?
20. Do you have any last thoughts about politics that you would like to share?

Appendix D

ID Number: _____

Location: _____   Date: _____

Caller initials: _____ Number dialed: _____

GREETING: Hello, my name is _____, and I am helping conduct a survey for (Name of University) as part of a national election research project. First, let me emphasize that I am not selling anything.

Because this is an election year, we are interested in your opinion on a number of topics abut media, politics, and the election. Your answers are very important to our study. Would you please take about 10-15 minutes to answer some questions about the campaign and the media?

Thank you very much for your participation. Your responses will be completely confidential and you will remain anonymous. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions we are asking.

Let me first ask you the name of your city: _____

Okay, I'll begin by reading a series of statement about politics and politicians. For each one, will you please indicate whether you strongly agree (SA), agree somewhat (A), disagree somewhat (D), strongly disagree (SD), or have no opinion (NO) about this statement?

1. _____ Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do.

2. _____ People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

3. _____ Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

4. _____ One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing.

5. _____ Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over.

6. _____ Government services and programs targeted toward the young are important for every citizen.

7. ____ Government services and programs targeted for older people are important for every citizen.

8. ____ Government programs and services benefit a few special interests.

Now, I'm going to ask you to give us your feelings toward each candidate on a feeling thermometer which ranges from 0 to 100. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the candidate. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 mean that you don't feel favorable toward him and that you don't care too much for him. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold, you would rate him at the 50 degree mark.

Gore _____ degrees Bush: _____ Ralph Nader: _____ Pat Buchanan _____

And, taken as a whole, how much confidence do you place in the news media? Please use again the thermometer scale from 0 to 100 again. 0 represents complete lack of confidence and 100 represents utmost confidence.

[_____] Please fill in number between 0 and 100

In general, how interested are in politics?   On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means VERY LITTLE and 5 means A LOT: 5   4   3   2   1 A LOT   0 Not at all interested

And how interested have you been in THIS presidential election. Again on a 1 (Very Little) to 5 (a lot) scale?   A LOT 5   4   3   2   1 A LOT   0 Not at all interested

The next set of questions ask about this year's debates between Al Gore and George W. Bush and their running mates.

Did you watch the first presidential debate between Al Gore and George Bush, which occurred on Oct. 3?
                    Y _____ N _____

Did you watch the second presidential debate between Al Gore and George Bush, which occurred on Oct. 11?
                    Y _____ N _____

Did you watch the third presidential debate between Al Gore and George Bush, which occurred on Oct. 17?
                    Y _____ N _____

How about the vice-presidential debate between Dick Cheney and Joe Lieberman, did you get a chance to watch it on October 5?
                    Y ____ N _____

What moment during the debates most sticks in your mind as characterizing Bush?

What moment during the debates most sticks in your mind as characterizing Gore?
How often did you read or hear about the debate in the media?   On a scale from 1
(rarely) to 5 (frequently):
             Frequently(5):____:____:____:____:____: (1) Rarely   write 0 if Never

In making your decision about who to vote for, how useful did you find the debates?
Let's use a similar scale with 1 being "not very useful" and 5 being "very useful":
             Very useful (5):____:____:____:____:____: (1) not very useful

And how useful did you find the media commentary after the debates about who won or
lost the debates?   Again, let's use the same scale with 1 being "not very useful" and 5
being "very useful":
             Very useful (5):____:____:____:____:____: (1) not very useful

Different people use different sources to get information about the elections. I'd like to
read a list of several sources from which people may gather political information. On
a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means RARELY USE IT and 5 means USE IT A LOT,
please tell me how much YOU HAVE USED **each** of these sources to obtain
information about the 2000 presidential election: [Instructions to interviewer: Mark 0
if the respondent says NEVER.]

local television news 5 (a lot)   4   3   2   1 (rarely) 0(never)

national television news   5 (a lot)   4   3   2   1 (rarely) 0(never)
(e.g., Nightly News with Tom Brokaw, CNN Headline News)

television late night shows 5 (a lot)   4   3   2   1 (rarely) 0(never)
(e.g.: Jay Leno, David Letterman, Conan O'Brien)

newspapers   5 (a lot)   4   3   2   1 (rarely) 0(never)

internet   5 (a lot)   4   3   2   1 (rarely) 0(never)
(e.g.: candidate Websites, political Websites, news Websites)

talking with others   5 (a lot)   4   3   2   1 (rarely) 0(never)
(e.g.: family, friends, co-workers)

Now, turning to political advertising, there's been a lot of discussion about advertising in recent political campaigns. I'd like to read you some opinions other people have given about their feelings toward political advertising, and I'd like for you to tell me if you strongly agree (SA), agree somewhat (A), disagree somewhat (D), strongly disagree (SD), or have no opinion (NO).

_____Negative advertising provides a lot of information about political candidates.

_____TV and newspapers do a good job of helping people understand negative campaigns ads.

_____Political candidates have a right to point out the weaknesses of their opponents and television ads are one forum for doing that.

_____Negative television ads increase my interest in the political process.

_____In a campaign where there's a lot of negative advertising, I'm less likely to vote at all.

_____Some attacks on an opponent are okay, as long as a candidate also has some ads which talk about his own ideas and programs.

Okay, just a few more questions on ads. This next one is a yes/no question.

Do you recall seeing any television ads for the presidential candidates?
   ___Yes ____No

IF so, for which candidate? Gore ___ Bush ____ Both ____

On a scale from 1 (not very useful) to 5 (very useful), how useful to you consider political television ads to be in helping you learn about the candidates?
                    very useful   5   4   3   2   1   not very useful

Often, newspapers and TV news critique candidate ads in what are termed political "adwatches."

   Do you recall seeing or reading a story about candidate ads?   Yes ____ No ____

[INTERVIEWER: ASK NEXT QUESTIONS ONLY IF RESPONDENT ANSWERS "YES"]
   If so, was it on   TV ____   Newspaper? _____ or Both ____

Again, on a scale of 1 (not very useful) to 5 (very useful) how useful do you find ad watches to be:

(very useful) 5   4   3   2   1 (not very useful)

What do you think are the most important issues in the presidential campaign? List up to 5.

We would also be interested in your views of the news media in more detail. On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), how would you evaluate the American news media

Professional   (strongly agree) 5   4   3   2   1 (strongly disagree)
Negative   (strongly agree) 5   4   3   2   1 (strongly disagree)
Trustworthy   (strongly agree) 5   4   3   2   1 (strongly disagree)
Worthless   (strongly agree) 5   4   3   2   1 (strongly disagree)
Fair   (strongly agree) 5   4   3   2   1 (strongly disagree)
Immoral   (strongly agree) 5   4   3   2   1 (strongly disagree)
Pleasant   (strongly agree) 5   4   3   2   1 (strongly disagree)
Foolish   (strongly agree) 5   4   3   2   1 (strongly disagree)

Sometimes the media run stories about their own coverage. Some people find them interesting; others do not. On a scale from 1 (not at all interested) to 5 (very interested), how interested are you in:

1. Stories in which journalists discuss how well they cover the campaign?
    Very interested   5   4   3   2   1 Not at all interested

2. Stories that discuss how much influence the media have on candidates and voter?
    Very interested   5   4   3   2   1 Not at all interested

3. Stories that discuss how candidates try to construct a favorable public image through the media?
    Very interested   5   4   3   2   1 Not at all interested

4. Stories that discuss how candidates try to influence news coverage?
    Very interested   5   4   3   2   1 Not at all interested

How often did you see or hear such media stories during the election? On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means NOT VERY OFTEN and 5 means VERY OFTEN, please tell me how often you saw these types of stories.

Very often   5   4   3   2   1   Not very often   0 Never

From what you have seen, how useful did you find such stories for understanding the general election? Again, let's use a 1-5 scale with 1 being (NOT VERY USEFUL) and 5 being VERY USEFUL, please tell me how useful you found such stories.

Very useful   5   4   3   2   1   not very useful

Now I'd like to ask you about your participation in the campaign. During the course of the campaign, on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (frequently), how often did you engage in the following activities?

1. Volunteer to work in a political campaign.
    Frequently:___:___:___: ___:___: Never

2. Participate in an electronic or on-line "chat" or discussion about the candidates or issues.
    Frequently:___:___:___: ___:___: Never

3. Talk with friends about the candidates/issues.
    Frequently:___:___:___: ___:___: Never

4. Contact a candidate's campaign for more information.
    Frequently:___:___:___: ___:___: Never

5. Use the internet to find out more information about the election in general.
    Frequently:___:___:___: ___:___: Never

6. Contribute money to a candidate's campaign.
    Frequently:___:___:___: ___:___: Never

7. Use the internet to find out more information about a specific political issue.
    Frequently:___:___:___: ___:___: Never

8. Use the internet to go to a candidate's website.
    Frequently:___:___:___: ___:___: Never

What moment during the entire campaign most sticks in your mind as characterizing Bush?

What moment during the entire campaign most sticks in your mind as characterizing Gore?

A lot of people are using the internet these days for various purposes. I'd like to ask you a bit about your own use of the Internet.

a. In the past month, have you used the Internet?
    (0) No (if not, skip to BOTTOM OF NEXT PAGE)
    (1) Yes
    (9) Don't know/no answer (skip to BOTTOM OF NEXT PAGE)

b. Would you say that in the past month that you used the Internet
    (1) only once or twice   (5) nearly every day
    (2) about once a week   (6) every day
    (3) a couple of times a week   (7) several times a day
    (4) several times a week   (9) (don't know/no answer)

c. How long do you typically stay on the Internet each time you use it? Would you say...
    (1) A few minutes   (5) Between 2 and 4 hours
    (2) Several minutes   (6) Between 4 and 6 hours
    (3) About an hour   (7) More than 6 hours
    (4) Between 1 and two hours   (9) (don't know/no answer)

d. We'd now like to ask a couple of questions about the reasons why you've used the Internet in the past. Please tell me if you very often, often, sometimes, rarely or never use the Internet for the following reasons:

First, to purchase items for your home or office

for entertainment	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never
get information about political issues	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never
to pass time	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never
to read about sports	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never
to contact business associates	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never

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get info. about political candidates	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never
to read about the news	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never
to read conversations in chatrooms	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never
to participate in chatrooms	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never
to post messages on bulletin boards	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never
to read messages on bulletin boards	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never
to send email	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never
to read email	very often	often	sometimes	rarely	never

FINALLY, I HAVE A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT Y O U:

_____ Male (1)   _____ Female (2)   Age _____

Education: (last grade completed):

up to 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16   17+
grade school   high school   college   post-grad

Who did you vote for in the 1996 presidential election?

   Clinton (1)   Dole (2)   Perot (3)   Did not vote (0)

Which of the following best represents your political beliefs? Check one and mark the strength of your affiliation.

☐ Democrat: strong:___:___:___:___:___:weak   (11-15)
  OR
☐ Republican: strong:___:___:___:___:___:weak   (21-25)
  OR
☐ Independent (30)
  OR
☐ Other: _____ (40)

What race do you consider yourself?

1. Non-Hispanic White (Caucasian)
2. African-American
3. Asian- or Pacific Islander
4. Native American
5. Spanish or Hispanic origin
6. Multi-racial or mixed race
7. Other: _____

If you indicated that you are of Spanish or Hispanic origin, do you consider your origin to be:

1. Mexican
2. Puerto Rican
3. Cuban
4. South American
5. Central American
6. Other _____

If of Hispanic origin, were you born in the United States?

1. Yes
2. No

What is your religious preference? _____

Is your household income?

____ Less than $20,000   ____ between $40,000—49,999
____ between $20,000 and 29,999   ____ between 50,000-50,999
____ between 30,000 and $30,999   ____ between 60,000 - 60,999
                                        ____ $70.000 or more

FINALLY, CAN YOU TELL US FOR WHOM YOU VOTED IN THE 2000 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN?

Al Gore   George W. Bush   Pat Buchanan   Ralph Nader   Other   Did not vote

Primary Themes From Focus Groups

Economic Influences
       Rational Choice Theory - 1
       Socio-economic Influences - 7
Psychological Influences
       Parental Influence - 4
       School Influence
       Party Influence - 2
       Political Knowledge - 14
       Political Efficacy - 7
       Civic Duty

Government Influences
       Registration Requirements - 1
       Electoral Process
              Voting process - 2
              One vote in a million - 6
              Single party states - 3
              Electoral College - 3
       Minor Party Candidates - 3
       Bureaucratic Influence

Mass Media Influence - 11

Campaign Influences
       Campaign Style
       Campaign Discourse
               Too complex - 4
              Too negative - 2
              Focus - 8
       Candidate
               Candidates are the same - 11
              Lie/Fake/Real - 7
              Corrupt - 4
              They do whatever they want to - 1
              Don't care about people like us

Cultural Influences
       Don't have time - 3
       Lazy - 4
       Politics is last thing on their mind - 3
       Rebellious - 4
       Individualistic -3

Solutions
       Greater Contact - 3
       Greater Information - 4
       Electoral Process - 3

Reason to Vote - 6

Appendix F

Primary Themes From In-depth Interviews

Economic Influences
        Rational Choice Theory - 1
        Socio-economic Influences - 3
Psychological Influences
        Parental Influence - 1
        School Influence - 1
        Party Influence - 1
        Political Knowledge - 19
        Political Efficacy - 16
        Civic Duty

Government Influences
        Registration Requirements
        Electoral Process
                Voting process - 8
                One vote in a million - 15
                Single party states - 3
                Electoral College - 2
        Minor Party Candidates -2
        Bureaucratic Influence - 1

Mass Media Influence - 1

Campaign Influences
        Campaign Style
        Campaign Discourse
                Too complex
                Too negative
                Not focus on us - 4
        Candidate
                Candidates are the same - 5
                Lie/Fake/Real - 1
                Corrupt - 6
                They do whatever they want to
                Don't care about people like us

Cultural Influences
        Don't have time - 2
        Lazy - 6
        Politics is last thing on their mind - 4
        Rebellious
        Individualistic

Solutions
        Greater Contact - 9
        Greater Information - 27
        Focus of Issues - 7
        Electoral Process - 11
        Mass Media - 3
        Cultural Influence - 1
        Ideal Candidate - 1
        Corruption/Special Interests - 3
        School Influences - 1
        Civic Duty - 1

Reason to Vote - 6

Appendix G

Political Knowledge as Solution to Nonvoting

Political Knowledge	People often claim they don't know enough about the political candidates, the process, or the importance of voting. More communication and political knowledge would help citizens understand the importance of voting and explain how government impacts their everyday lives. Research shows the more information a person receives, the greater the chance of political participation.
Political Efficacy	Citizens often believe their vote doesn't matter. Government doesn't care about their opinion, and will do whatever it deems is best. More communication could allow citizens to realize that their views are valued, and how to effectively influence government. Politicians need to also reconnect with their constituents by engaging in "old politics." Having either the candidates or surrogates meet voters face-to-face is one of the most effective methods for increasing political efficacy.
Parents Influence	Parents are no longer socializing their children to be actively involved in politics. Schools, the media, political parties, and campaigns can now play a role in communicating the importance of political participation.
Parties Influence	Political parties have been declining in influence over the last few decades. Communication can help emphasis the platforms and purpose of political parties.
One Vote in a Million	Citizen's often complain that their vote doesn't count in the electoral process. Citizens must be informed of the importance of voting—both practically and theoretically. Many elections are decided by just a few votes, especially on the state and local levels.
Single-party States	Many voice frustration with the dominance of one political party in their state. They argue that this makes their participation less meaningful. Yet, citizens must be knowledgeable of the many reasons

for voting—both practical and theoretical. In addition, just a few votes, especially on the state and local levels. It is also important to remind voters that even if their candidate isn't successful, their participation sends a message to the winning candidate.

Electoral College

Individuals seemed upset with the Electoral College. They believe that this type of system minimizes the influence of some voters and states. Instead, they endorsed a direct vote approach. More communication could explain the complex reasoning behind supporting the Electoral College. People could also be reminded that they are also voting for state and local offices that are based on popular vote.

Voting Process

People who are ill informed view the process of voting as difficult and cumbersome. The public could be more informed of the relative ease and convenience of voting. In addition, despite news stories in the 2000 election, the voting process—on the whole—is fair and accurate.

Minor Party Candidates

Citizens voiced discontent with the exclusion of third-party candidates from the political process. Citizens could be informed on how to influence and ensure third-party inclusion in the electoral system. More communication could also be conducted to highlight the importance of primaries in determining the kind of candidates that represent each political party. Citizens could be reminded of the opportunities to vote for minor party candidates on the state and local level.

Candidates Are the Same

People claim that the candidates are the same. Communication could help people realize that although candidates might use similar rhetoric and have consistent goals, the policies they support are often extremely diverse.

Candidates Are Fake

Individuals are frustrated with the quality of political candidates running for office today. Candidates could spend more time explaining how their policy proposals relate to average Americans. In many cases, this is just a matter of using language that is consistent with ordinary people, as well as incorporating narratives and personal stories. Politicians could also reconnect

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with their constituents by engaging in an "old politics." Having either the candidates or surrogates meet voters face-to-face is one of the most effective methods for increasing political efficacy. Personal contact is also successful at showing that a candidate is "real."

Corruption	People indicate that they are frustrated with a politics with too much influence from special interests and big money. Communication and knowledge can inform individuals of how government really works, and how to influence the system for the good.
Discourse Focus	Individuals were irked by the narrow range of policy topics discussed during the election. Communication could be used to explain how broader issues impact everyone's well-being. In addition, candidates have positions on a large variety of issues. People could be connected with a broader number of topics important to them.
Mass Media Influence	Current media practices--in their negative, sound bite, and "horse race" form--can deflate voter turnout. Further, news and advertisements often blur the distinctions between the candidates. Reforms in media coverage and programming as well as a greater use of grassroots communication can serve to positively inform and stimulate the public to participate politically. Honing critical thinking skills could also help Americans sift through political information.
Economic Influence	Citizens argue that they have no stake in the election. They have no need to vote because they are happy with the present conditions. Communication could help illustrate how a great number of issues are impacted by each election. The public could also be reminded how government touches their lives on a daily basis.
Cultural Influence	Citizens claim they are too busy, too lazy, and too disconnected to be involved in politics today. Communication can highlight the relevance of politics and serve to connect people to the political process.

The University of Oklahoma

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

February 22, 2001

Mr. Scott Wells
211 McCullough #A
Norman OK 73069

Dear Mr. Wells:

Your research application, "Engaging the Other Half of American in Politics: An Analysis of the Characteristics, Causes, and Solutions to Non-Voting," has been reviewed according to the policies of the Institutional Review Board chaired by Dr. E. Laurette Taylor and found to be exempt from the requirements for full board review. Your project is approved under the regulations of the University of Oklahoma - Norman Campus Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research Activities.

Should you wish to deviate from the described protocol, you must notify me and obtain prior approval from the Board for the changes. If the research is to extend beyond 12 months, you must contact this office, in writing, noting any changes or revisions in the protocol and/or informed consent form, and request an extension of this ruling.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely yours,

Susan Wyatt Sedwick

Susan Wyatt Sedwick, Ph.D.
Administrative Officer
Institutional Review Board

SWS:pw
FY01-222

cc: Dr. E. Laurette Taylor, Chair, Institutional Review Board
        Dr. Larry Wieder, Communication

The University of Oklahoma

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

March 14, 2000

Dr. Lynda Lee Kaid
Communication
University of Oklahoma
CAMPUS MAIL

SUBJECT: "Reactions to Mass Mediated Political Messages"

Dear Dr. Kaid:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved your requested revisions and extension to the subject protocol. The project has been extended through March 15, 2001.

Please note that this approval is for the protocol and informed consent form reviewed and approved by the Board on March 15, 1999 and the revisions noted in your letter of March 6, 2000. If you wish to make additional changes, you will need to submit a request for change to this office for review.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 325-4757.

Sincerely yours,

Susan Wyatt Sedwick, Ph.D.
Administrative Officer
Institutional Review Board-Norman Campus

SWS:pw
FY99-167

cc: Dr. E. Laurette Taylor, Chair, IRB
       Dr. Mitchell McKinney, Communication
       Dr. John Tedesco, Communication

Your application for approval of the use of human subjects should consist of eleven (11) copies* of three parts:

> PART I - A COMPLETED APPLICATION FORM
> PART II - A DESCRIPTION OF YOUR RESEARCH STUDY
> PART III - SUBJECT'S INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN YOUR STUDY

You should attach supplementary information pertinent to this study that will help the board members in their review of your application, i.e., questionnaires, test instruments, letters of approval from cooperating institutions or/and organizations. Failure to submit these items will only delay your review.

Applications are due not later than the 1st day of the month in which you wish the proposed project reviewed

Please return completed proposals to:

Campus Mail:
Office of Research Administration
Buchanan Hall, Room 314

U.S. Mail:
Office of Research Administration
1000 Asp Avenue, Room 314
Norman, Oklahoma 73019-0430

Please call the ORA at 325-4757 and ask for the IRB if you have any questions. Please type your responses.

PART I - APPLICATION FORM

1. **Principal Investigator:**

    Name: _Scott Wells_

    Department: _Communication_

    Campus Phone No.: _325-3003x21139_   E-mail Address: _sdwells1@yahoo.com_

    If you are a student, provide the following information:

    Daytime Phone No. (if different from above): _____

    Mailing Address: 211 McCullough #A
                       Norman, OK 73069

    Faculty Sponsor: _Dr. Lynda Lee Kaid_

    Department _____ Communication

    Sponsor's Phone No. _325-3111_

    Co-Principal Investigator(s) (Please include name, department, and campus phone number)

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

    Signatures:
    Principal Investigator: _Scott Wells_

    Co-Principal Investigator(s): _____

    _____

    Faculty Sponsor (if student research project): _____

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If you believe your use of human subjects would be considered exempt from review or qualifies for expedited review as defined in Sections 4 and 12 of the University of Oklahoma Norman Campus Policy and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research Activities, you may submit two (2) copies of this application for initial review. If full Board review is required, you will be required to submit nine (9) additional copies.

Project Title: Engaging the Other Half of America in Politics: An Analysis of the Characteristics, Causes, and Solutions to Nonvoting

3. Project Time Period: From **Feb 2001** to **April 2001**

4. Previous Institutional Review Board-Norman Campus Approval for this project?
   ☐ Yes ☑ No
   If yes, please give date of the action: _____

5. Are you requesting funding support for this project?
   ☐ Yes ☑ No
   If yes, please give sponsor's name _____

6. Description of Human Subjects:

   Age Range **18-70** Gender (please check one): ☐ Males ☐ Females ☑ Both

   Number of Subjects: **less than 50**

   Special Qualifications:
   none

   Source of Subjects and Selection Criteria:
   Subjects will be graduate and undergraduate students. Subjects will be offered the opportunity to voluntarily sign up on a form calling for a subject pool. Forms will be posted on a bulletin board in
   ~~Dorton Hall~~
   Please check any protected groups included in this study.

   ☐ Pregnant Women   ☐ Fetuses   ☐ Children

   ☐ Mentally Disabled   ☐ Elderly

   ☐ Mentally Retarded   ☐ Prisoners

PART II - DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

To assist Institutional Review Board members in conducting their review of your application, please prepare a brief (1-3 page) description of the study you plan to conduct, including the following information:

A. *Purpose/Objectives*
   Explain the overall purpose of your study and its primary objectives, including the importance of the knowledge expected to result.
B. *Research Protocol*
   Describe the study and procedures you will use, including a step-by-step description of the procedures you plan to use with your subjects.
C. *Confidentiality*
   Briefly describe the procedures you will use to assure confidentiality of the data you collect from your subjects, specifically address whether subjects will be identifiable from raw and/or refined data, how data will be protected from non-project personnel (e.g., stored in locked cabinets), whether the identifiable data will be destroyed when no longer needed, and whether project publications (theses, papers, videotapes, etc.) will allow identification of individual subjects.
D. *Subject Benefit/Risk*
   Describe both the potential benefits and risks to subjects and society that may result from their participation in this project.

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Part II-Description of the Study

A. Purpose/Objectives

Half of American citizens do not participate in presidential elections. Given the many questions surrounding voter involvement, this study aims to provide a deeper and more descriptive understanding of why the majority of citizens are not voting in political elections, specifically on national issues. Further, there is scant literature on why some people fail to participate in political elections. Thus, this study will serve to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the characteristics, causes, and solutions to nonvoting in the 2000 election.

B. Research Protocol

In an attempt to discover more about nonvoting behavior, in-depth personal interviews will be conducted. Interviews were chosen due to their ability to harness detailed information about a person's thoughts and reasoning process. Furthermore, interviews allow the investigator to probe and ask follow-up questions when appropriate. This flexibility is not always available with the use of other qualitative or quantitative methods.

At the beginning of the interview, the investigator will explain the purpose of the study to the participants: to gain a greater understanding of the characteristics, causes, and solutions to nonvoting. The data will consist of transcribed audio and video recordings as well as field notes of personal interviews. Subjects/participants will be solicited for voluntary participation through a bulletin board sign-up form posted in Burton Hall (a convenience sample). Less than 50 subjects will participate. No protected groups will be included as subjects.

C. Confidentiality

Responses to interview questions will remain confidential. Field notes and transcriptions will be prepared in a way that obscures the specific identities of each participant. Among other things, names will not be used and the investigator will not keep any case records, files, or forms on individuals. All data will be stored in a locked cabinet in Burton 211. Furthermore, the tape recordings will be destroyed after the completion of the study. Participants will be informed that they can request the destruction of the tapes of the interviews. If they do so, the investigator will comply with their request.

D. Subject Benefit/Risk

This study possess no risks to the participants' dignity, rights, health, welfare, or well-being. Subject/participants will simply answer questions (see Appendix) pertaining to their thoughts on the characteristics, causes, and solutions to nonvoting. In order to

protect against or minimize any potential problems, the investigator's voice mail and email address

will be offered for questions or concerns. Participants will be notified in the consent form that they may terminate their participation at any time. The benefit of the study is a better understanding of the motivations and reasoning behind political participation.

Individual Informed Consent Form for Research
University of Oklahoma, Norman

Thank you for participating in this research project. I am interested in the characteristics, causes, and solutions to nonvoting in political elections. You will be asked a number of questions about your thoughts on voting participation. The interview will last no longer than 30 minutes. With your permission, audio and video recordings as well as meeting notes will be conducted during this interview. The recording and notes will be transcribed and analyzed. Your name and other identifying information will be kept confidential.

> Title of Study: Engaging the Other Half of America in Politics: An Analysis of the
> Characteristics, Causes, and Solutions to Nonvoting in Campaign 2000
> Principal Investigator: Scott D. Wells, Department of Communication
> Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Larry Wieder, Department of Communication

Personal Consent:

I hereby give my consent to participate in this study. I understand that:

1. *My participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am entitled. I may terminate at any time prior to the completion of this study without penalty.*

2. *I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate.*

3. *Any information I may give during my participation will be used for research purposes only.*

4. *All information I give will be kept confidential and will be used in such a way that identification of me as a participant is impossible.*

5. *I understand that there are no forseeable risks for participating in this study.*

6. *In terms of recording the interview, please check one of the following options:*
   _____ I grant permission to audio/video record the interview, however, I reserve the right to have it destroyed after the fact should I so request.
   _____ I do not grant permission to audio/video record the interview.

7. *I know the investigator is available to answer any questions I may have regarding this research study. If I have any questions, I can reach the investigator using the following information: Scott D. Wells, M.A., Department of Communication, University of Oklahoma, 610 Elm Avenue, Room 101, Norman, OK 73019, (405) 325-3003x21139, sdwells1@yahoo.com*

8. *If you have any questions regarding your participation as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Administration at 405-325-4757 or email irb@ou.edu*

9. *Department of Communication Subject Pool Statement: I understand that I am free to refuse to participate and withdraw from the interview at any time without prejudice to me. I also understand that if I am participating in this experiment to obtain course credit and I decide to withdraw from participating, I might not get the course credit associated with the experiment.*

Name _____ Instructor _____

Signature _____ Course _____

Endnotes

1 Part of this title was originally used in William Stuckey Maddox's 1978 dissertation, entitled "The Other Half: Nonvoters in the American Political System."

2 Voter turnout is the percentage of voting-age population that actually went to the polls. "One way of measuring it is to add up the number of votes cast for a particular office, and divide by the total number of people of voting age. However, some citizens vote but cast invalid ballots; others vote for some offices but not for a presidential candidate. Furthermore, it is generally recognized that the census undercounts the population; and since a census is taken only every ten years, the size of the population in the intervening years must be estimated. Despite these problems, the percentage of voting-age population is probably the best estimate of voter turnout likelihood" (Conway, 1991, p. 5).

3 However, the 51.2 percentage may be inflated due to concerns over voter fraud. Experts believe that around 5 percent of the registered do not actually exist, thus indicating a lower percentage of turnout. Haskins (1991) writes "[There] are documented cases in Orange County of dogs being registered to vote, noncitizens being registered, and people registered to vote in several different locations because there is no check in the system to prevent that from happening" (Blackburn, 1992).

4 Yet, Godstein's (1986) article as cited by Lewis (1989) indicates that only 50% of the electorate chose to vote in 1787.

5 Koenig et al. (1972, as cited by Lerman, 1982) argues that the phase of the moon affects voter turnout and the amount of support for the candidates.

6 Maddox (1978) agrees that increasing voter turnout would not harm democracy. He states that "the nonvoter coalition is diverse enough that even a complete shift of nonvoters into the electorate probably would result in a process whereby the more undesirable types of nonvoters would see their participation cancelled out and even outnumbered by the participation of nonvoters who in many ways are not much different from those who currently vote in our elections" (p. 200).

7 Turnout of 18- to 21- year olds in 1992 was the highest percentage since 1976.

8 One such detractor is Alexander Starr who was quoted in the 1993 edition of the New Republic (as cited by Watters, 1997):

> How can one generalize about a group that is said to be politically disengaged and politically correct, obsessed with surfaces and addicted to irony, scarred by Watergate and Vietnam and unaware of them, technologically savvy and unconditionally ignorant, busy saving the planet and craving electricity and

noise, prematurely careerist and proud to be lazy, unwilling to grow up and too grown up already? . . . The twenty-something craze, like its components, will probably blow over soon. And when it has, this generation is still likely to have found a common voice, for its true cultural legacy is to have been disunited by the very experiences it has had in common. (p.22)

9 "Social connectedness" can be defined as a connection or stake in one's community.

10 Social structure is often determined by one's socioeconomic status.

11 Carlin (2000) provides examples of technical voting obstacles, such as: not knowing   how to vote absentee, not knowing where to register at school; and not knowing where to vote.

12 Fugate (1996) writes that self-reported data consistently overestimate the actual turnout rate by as much as 20 percent. This is especially the case with this variable as those with a high sense of civic duty are more willing to misreport having voted.

13 In political communication textbooks, political advertising is usually referring to television and radio advertising. However, a survey of media advertising is limitless. A partial listing includes brochures, newsletters, questionnaires, letters, billboards, yard signs, bumper stickers, newspaper ads, magazine ads, matchbooks, buttons, pencils, computer bulletin boards, and faxes (Trent & Friedenberg, 1995). Trent and Friedenberg's (1995) favorite media advertising is cans of GOLD WATER, "the delightful drink for all right thinking supporters of the 1964 Republican standard bearer" (p. 266).

14 Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming allow voters to register on election day (Cooper, 2000).

15 "End-game" activities are implemented during the last two to three weeks of the respective campaigns to encourage their supporters to vote (e.g., GOTV calls, rallies, celebrity visits, campaign tours, door knocking).

16 Wisconsin passed a new absentee voter registration law that went into effect in 2000.

17 Focus group questions were part of a larger study on the 2000 election, called the National Election Research Study Project, in conjunction with the Political Communication Center at the University of Oklahoma