

# Chapter Six

## *Individual Participation*



# Democracy and Political Participation

- How much and what kind of citizen participation is necessary for democratic government?



# Democracy and Political Participation

- **Political participation** consists of the actions of private citizens seeking to influence or support government and politics. Most practical observers contend that people can govern indirectly, through their elected representatives.



# Democracy and Political Participation

- **Conventional participation** consists of relatively routine behavior that uses the established institutions of representative government, especially campaigning for candidates and voting in elections.



# Conventional Participation

- The two categories of conventional participation are:
  - Actions that show support for government policies.
  - Those actions that try to change or influence policies.



# Democracy and Political Participation

- **Unconventional participation** includes relatively uncommon behavior that challenges or defies established institutions or the dominant culture (and thus is personally stressful to participants and their opponents).

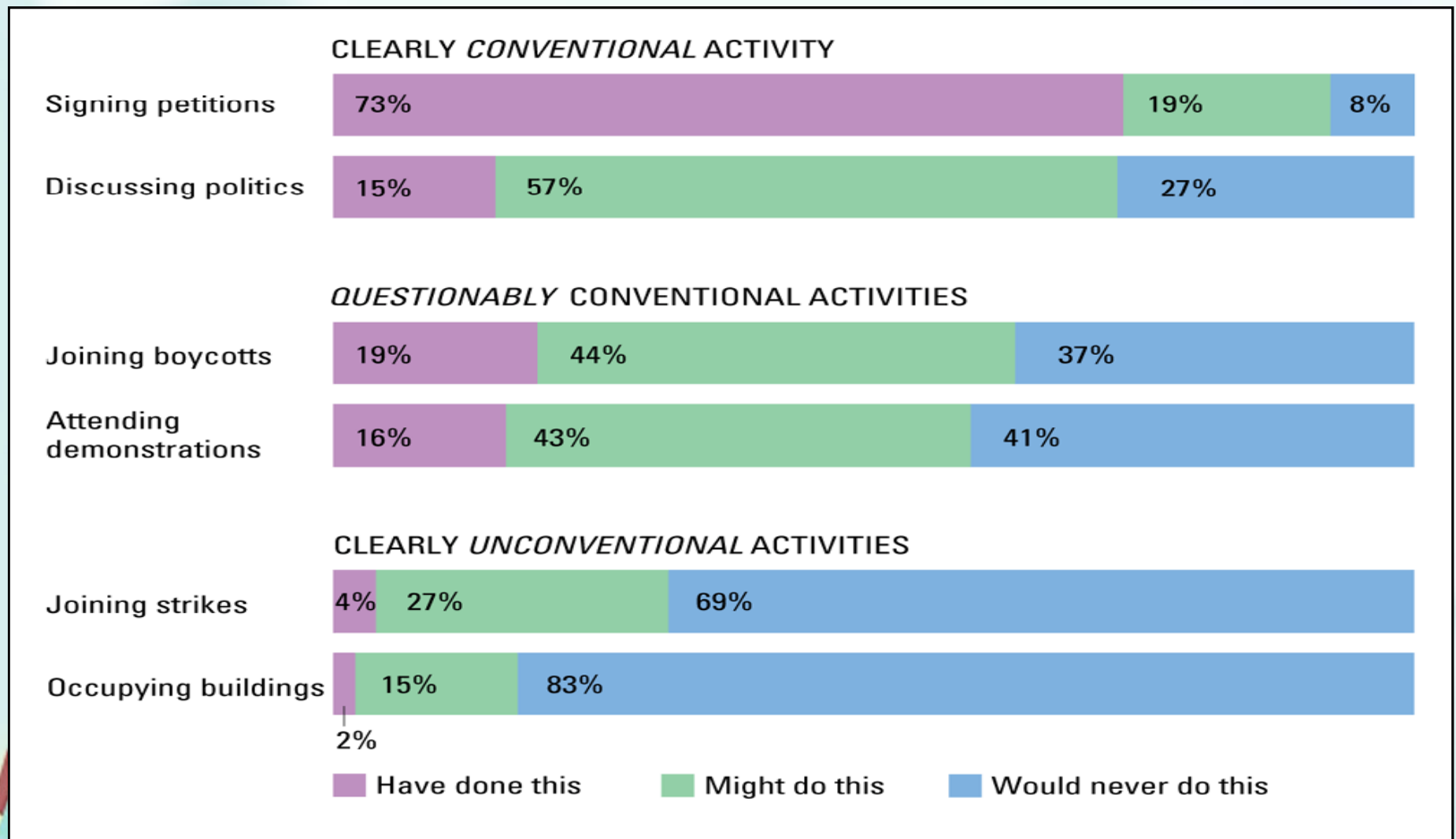


# Unconventional Participation

- **Direct action** involves assembling crowds to confront businesses and local governments to demand a hearing.
  - Most commonly appeals to people who distrust the political system and have a strong sense of political efficacy.

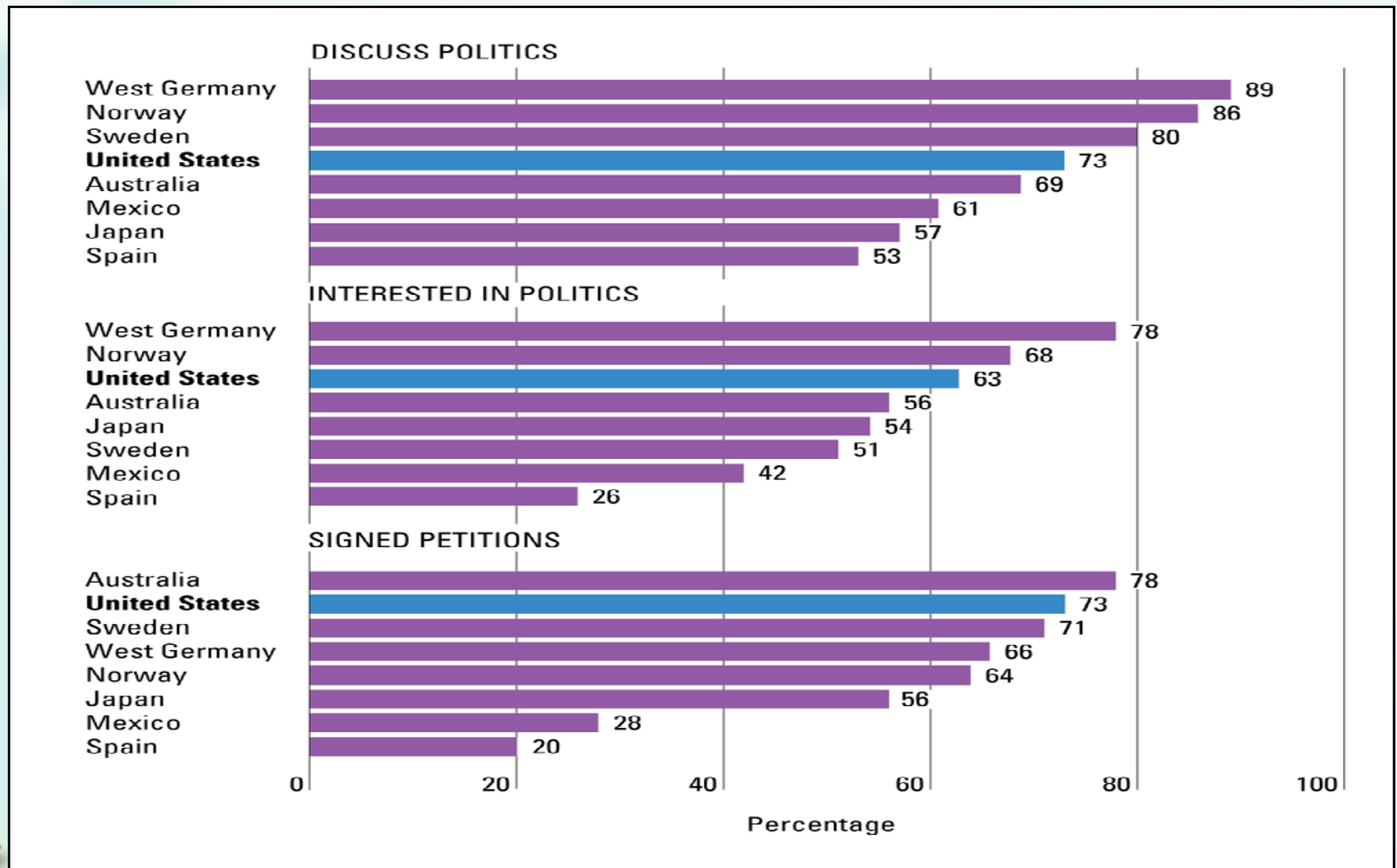


# What Americans Think Is Unconventional Political Behavior





# Popular Participation in Politics



# Conventional Participation

- A test of the democratic nature of any government is whether citizens can affect its policies by acting through its institutions.
- If people must operate outside governmental institutions to influence policymaking, the system is not democratic.



# Conventional Participation

- The objective of democratic institutions is:
  - To make political participation conventional
  - To allow ordinary citizens to engage in relatively routine, nonthreatening behavior to get the government to head their opinions, interests and needs.



# Conventional Participation

- **Supportive behaviors** include actions that express allegiance to government and country.
- **Influencing behaviors** are behaviors that seek to modify or reverse government policy to serve political interests.



# Conventional Participation

- Conclusions about “Particularized” Forms of Political Participation:
  - Approaching government to serve one’s particular interests is consistent with democratic theory which encourages participation from an active citizenry
  - Particularized contact may not necessarily be related to other forms of participation such as voting,



# Conventional Participation

- Particularized participation is more common among citizens advantaged in knowledge and resources, and
- Particularized participation may serve private interests to the detriment of the majority.



# Conventional Participation

- People use the courts for both personal benefit and broad policy objectives. Particularly, the class action suit, a legal action brought by a person or group on behalf of a number of people in similar circumstances, is a mechanism used to influence policy via the courts.
- Attending or testifying at congressional hearings is a high-initiative behavior that few people are willing to do.



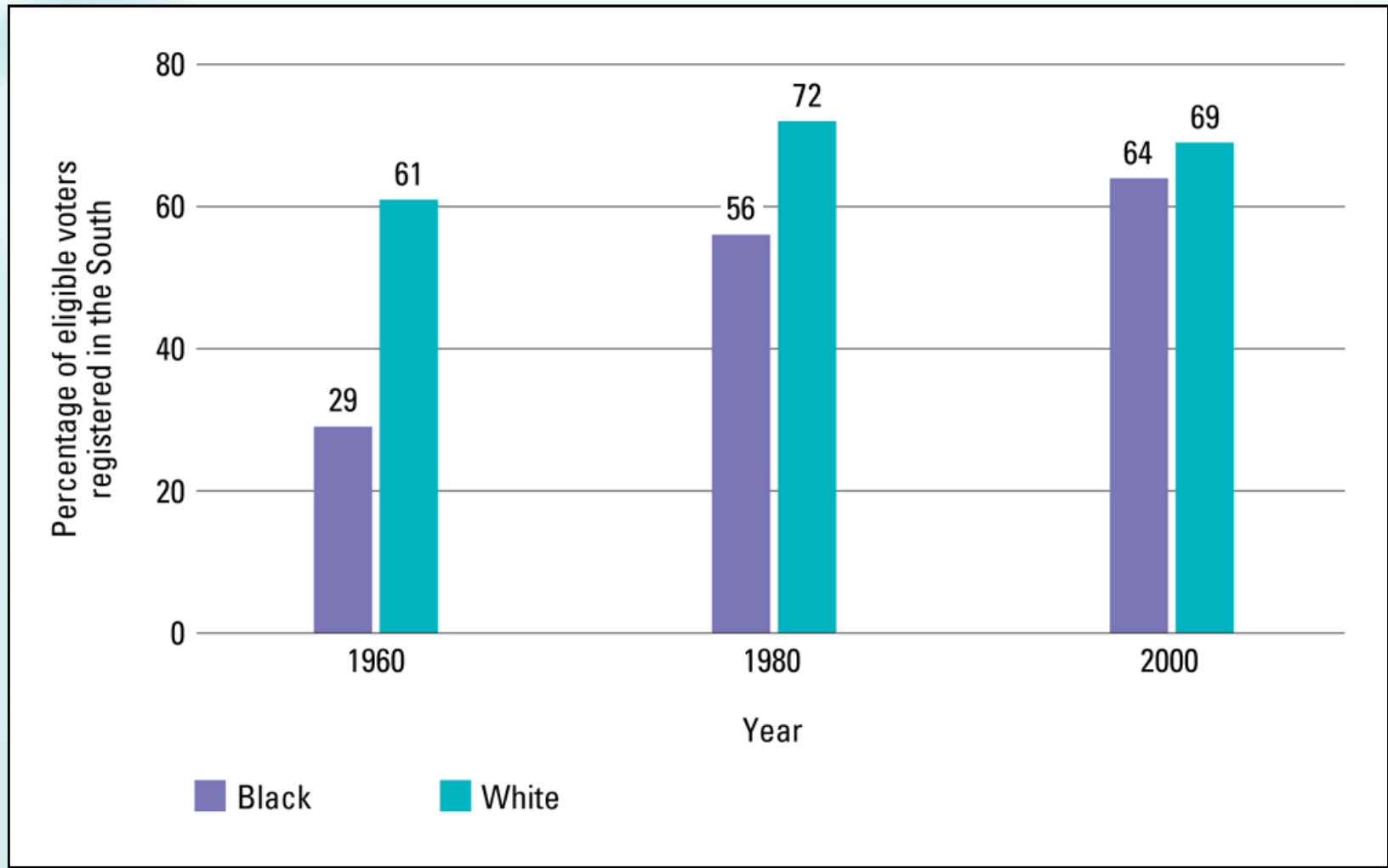
# Participating Through Voting

- The most common form of political behavior in most industrial democracies is voting for candidates, also termed suffrage or “the franchise.”
- The **expansion of suffrage** in the United States has included enfranchisement of Blacks, voter registration drives in the South, the enfranchisement of women, and the enfranchisement of younger voters.





# Voter Registration in the South, 1960, 1980, and 2000



# Participating Through Voting

- Voting on policies becomes important as disenfranchised groups struggle to gain voting rights.
- **Progressivism** was a philosophy of political reform based upon the goodness and wisdom of the individual citizen as opposed to “distrusted” special interests and political institutions.



# Participating Through Voting

- The **direct primary** was championed by Progressives. This is defined as the ability to vote in a preliminary election, run by the state governments, in which the voters choose the party's candidates for the general election.



# Participating Through Voting

- **Recalling** elected officials from office was another public initiative favored by Progressives.
- The **referendum** was hailed because it allowed a direct vote by the people on either a proposed law or an amendment to a state constitution.
  - These measures subject to popular votes are known as **propositions**.



# Participating Through Voting

- Finally, an **initiative** is a procedure by which voters can propose an issue to be decided by the legislature or by the people in a referendum.
- It requires gathering a specified number of signatures and submitting a petition to a designated agency.

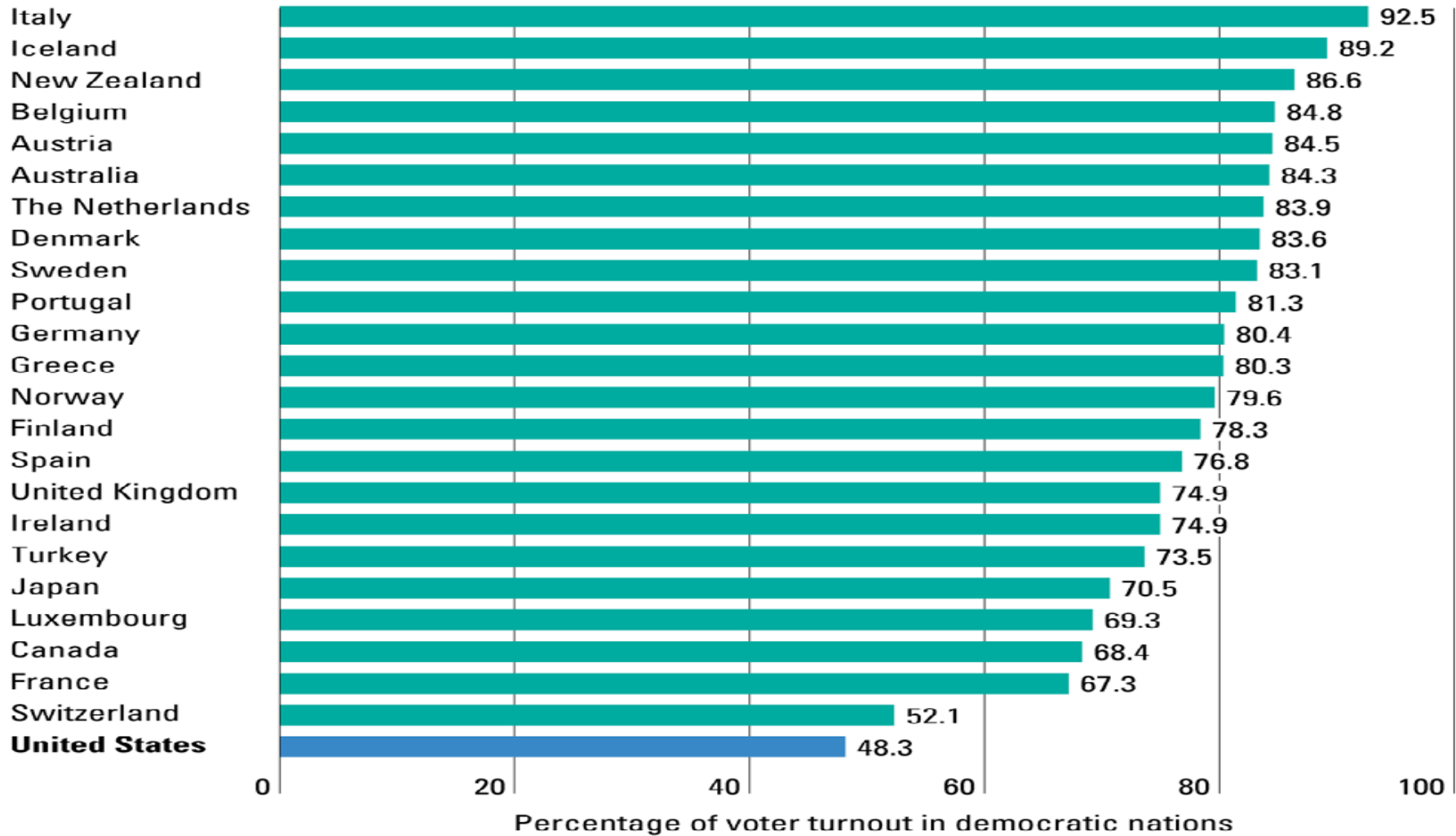


# Participating Through Voting

- The reasons for low U.S. voter turnout versus other countries include:
  - Differences in voting laws and administrative machinery
  - The burden of registration is typically on the government, not the individual, as in the U.S.



# Voter Turnout in Democratic Nations, 1975-1999



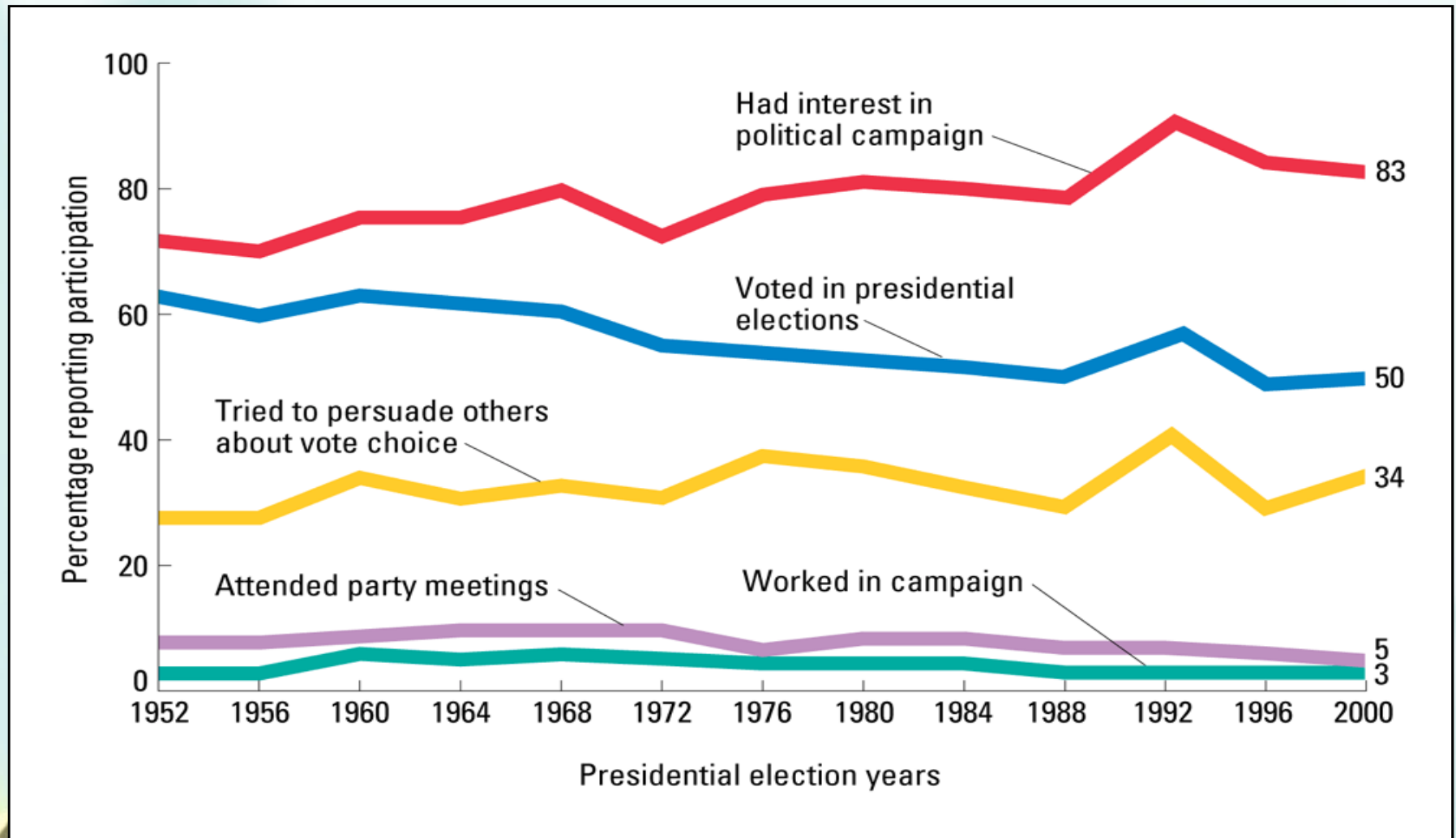
# Explaining Political Participation

- The patterns of participation over time actually shows little variation over time in the percentage of citizens who worked for candidates or attended party meetings.
- Interest in election campaigns and persuading people how to vote have actually tended to increase.





# Electoral Participation in the United States Over Time

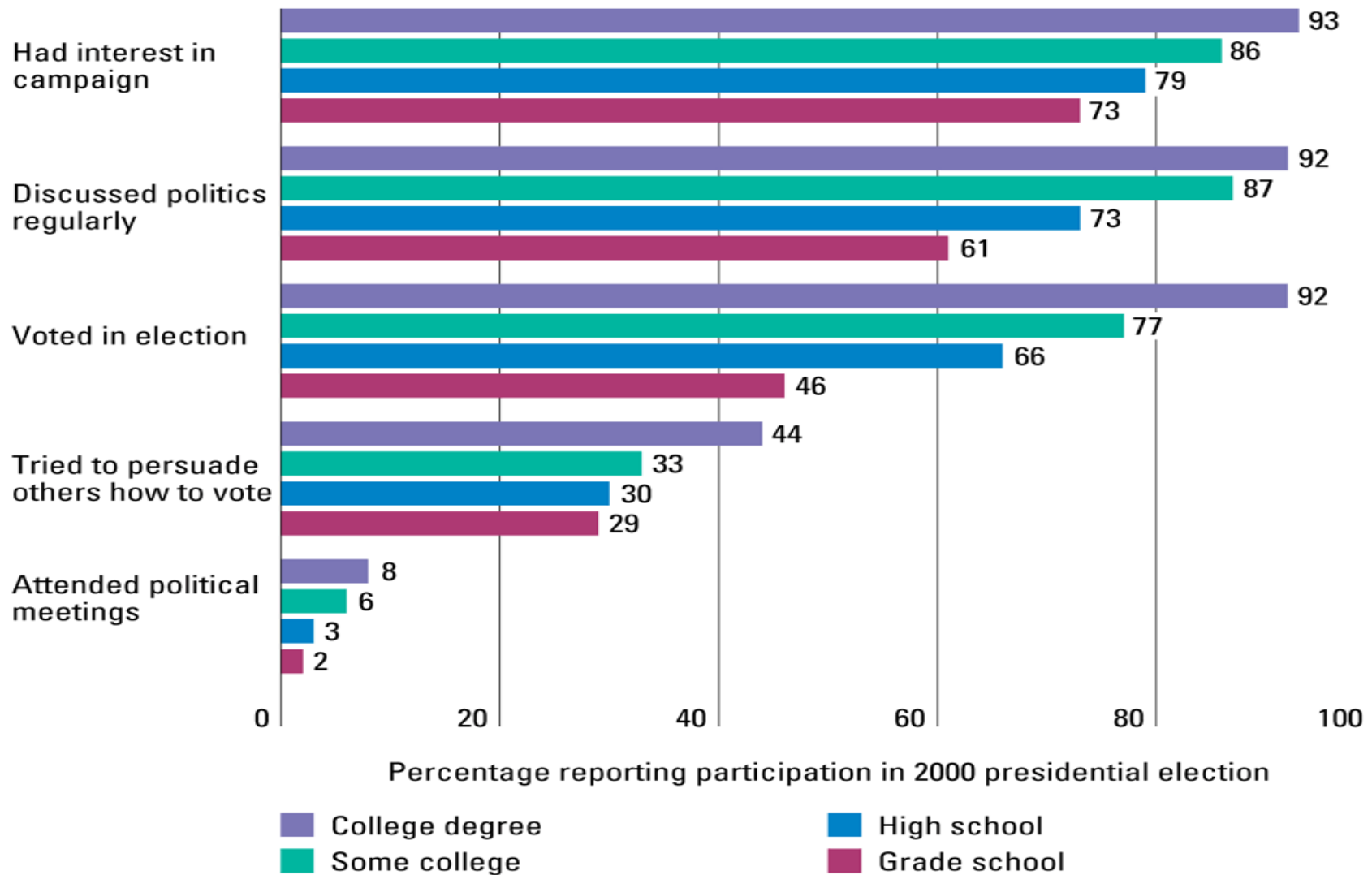


# Explaining Political Participation

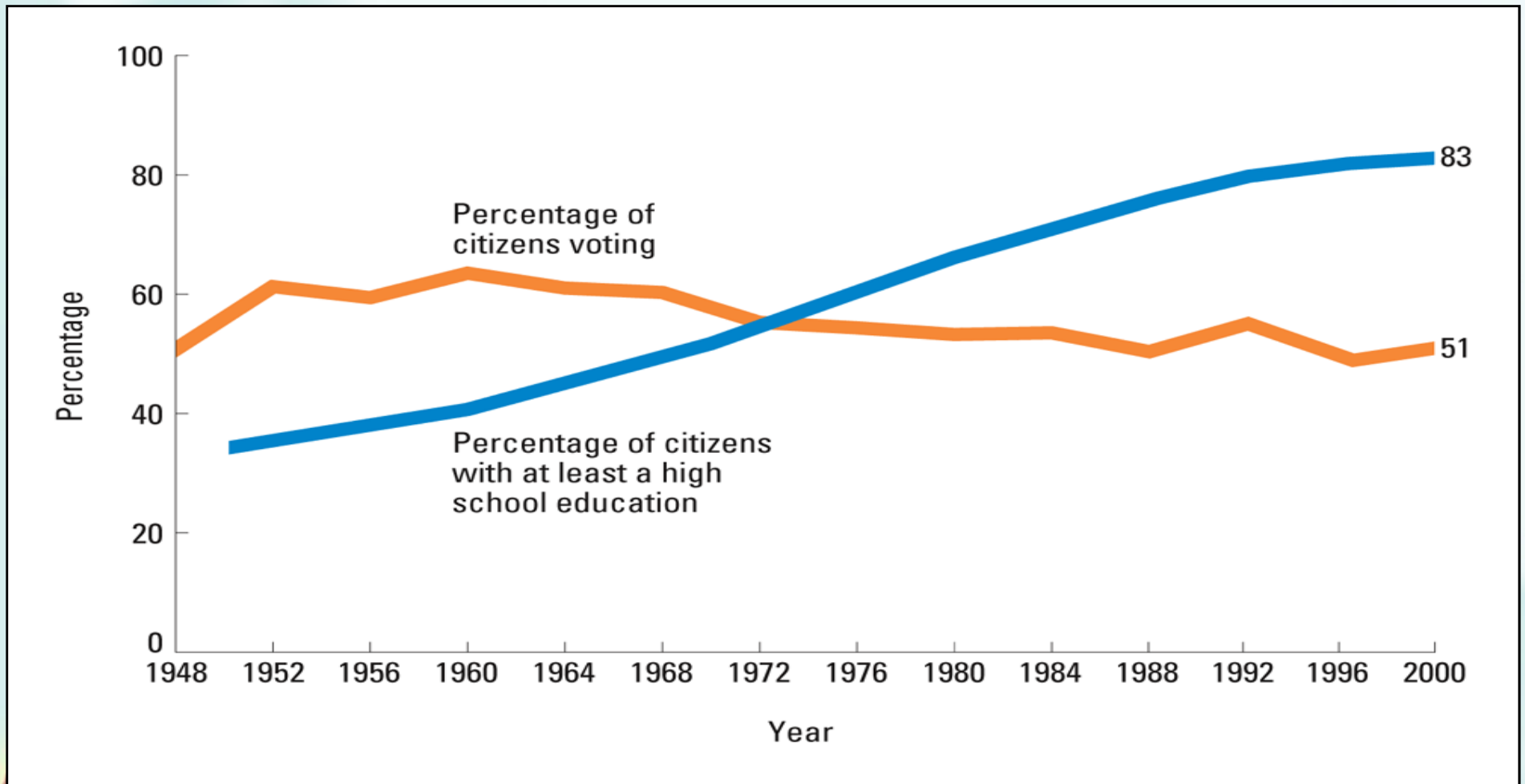
- The **standard socio-economic model** is a relationship between socio-economic status and conventional political involvement that reveals that people with higher status and more education are more likely to participate than those with lower status.



# Effects of Education on Political Participation



# The Decline of Voter Turnout: An Unsolved Puzzle



# Explaining Political Participation

- Attempts to increase voting turnout have included congressional passage of the motor-voter law.
- Turnout may also be low because of the lack of political parties that mobilize the vote of particular social groups such as the lower-income and less-educated people. The process of learning about the scores of candidates on the ballot also requires a great deal of initiative.



## Low Voter Turnout, but...

- Voter turnout in the 2004 election increased sharply from turnout in the 2000 election: 51% to 60%.
- Turnout in 2004 was higher than any year since 1968. . . . And higher again in 2008.



# Participation and Freedom, Equality and Order

- The normative theory relationship between participation and freedom is clearly that individuals should be free to participate or not participate in government and politics in the way they choose and as much as they want.



# Participation and Freedom, Equality and Order

- Individuals should also be free to use their personal resources to influence government, provided they do so legally.
- Freedom as a value in political participation favors those with the resources to advance their own political self-interest.





# Participation and Freedom, Equality and Order

- Each citizen's ability to influence government should be equal to that of every other citizen, so that differences in personal resources do not work against the poor or otherwise disadvantaged.
- Groups of people who have few resources can combine their votes to wield political power.



# Participation and Freedom, Equality and Order

- Both conventional and unconventional participation can lead to the ouster of government officials, but the regime is threatened more by unconventional participation.
- To maintain order, the government has a stake in converting unconventional participation to conventional participation whenever possible.



# Participation and the Models of Democracy

- Elections are institutional mechanisms that implement democracy by allowing citizens to choose among candidates or issues.



# Participation and the Models of Democracy

- Other purposes of elections include:
  - Socializing political activity
  - Institutionalizing access to political power
  - Bolstering the state's power and authority



# Participation and the Models of Democracy

- **Majoritarian** views favor conventional, institutionalized behavior.
- **Pluralism** views favor many points of access and accommodations of various forms of conventional participation in addition to voting.

