

Occasional Paper Series

Citizenship Norms and Political Participation in America: The Good News Is ... the Bad News Is Wrong

Russell J. Dalton

Center for the Study of Democracy
University of California, Irvine
rdalton@uci.edu

CDACS Occasional Paper 2006-01
October 2006

The Center for Democracy
and Civil Society
Georgetown University
3240 Prospect St. NW
Washington, DC 20007



phone: (202) 687 – 0593
fax: (202) 687 - 0597

email: cdacs@georgetown.edu
<http://www8.georgetown.edu/centers/cdacs/>

Citizenship Norms and Political Participation in America: The Good News Is ... the Bad News Is Wrong

By *Russell J. Dalton*

There is no doubt that democracy has lost a clear conception of the type of citizen it wants to create.

*Karl Mannheim*¹

What does it mean to be a citizen in America today? The special nature of the American political experience is central to our ideas about nation and citizenship. From John Winthrop's description of colonial America as the shining city on the hill to Ronald Reagan's reiteration of this imagery during his presidency, Americans have viewed the United States as the first new nation. Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and other studies have enriched this image of American citizenship and democracy, highlighting what is special about the American public. Indeed, this tradition of citizenship, participation, and democracy is central to the political history and academic scholarship on the United States (e.g., Lipset 1963, 1997; Almond and Verba 1963).

Despite this heritage, there is a growing sentiment among contemporary political scientists and political analysts that the foundations of citizenship and democracy in America are crumbling. For example, a new study cosponsored by the American Political Science Association and the Brookings Institution begins:

American democracy is at risk. The risk comes not from some external threat but from disturbing internal trends: an erosion of the activities and capacities of citizenship. Americans have turned away from politics and the public sphere in large numbers, leaving our civic life impoverished. Citizens participate in public affairs less frequently, with less knowledge and enthusiasm, in fewer venues, and less equally than is healthy for a vibrant democratic polity. (Macedo et al. 2005: 1)

There is no shortage of pundits and political analysts who will proclaim what is wrong with America and its citizens.² Too few of us are voting, we are disconnected from our fellow citizens and lacking in social capital, we are losing our national identity, we are losing faith in our government, the nation is in social chaos, and the list goes on seemingly ad infinitum. The lack of 'good' citizenship is often used to describe or explain these phenomena.

The subtitle for this article is "The good news is, the bad news is wrong." We believe that many of the current critiques of American citizenship are overstated. American politics and the citizenry are changing, but some analysts presume that if politics is not working as it did in the past, then the political process is at risk. We present evidence that the generalized indictment of the American public is exaggerated, and that a full understanding of how citizens are changing provides a more complex picture of the challenges and opportunities facing American democracy today.

This article first maintains that the *norms of citizenship* are vital to understanding the political behavior of the American public. There has been a general call for the revival of citizenship to address the problems facing contemporary democracies (e.g., Putnam 2000; Milner 2002; Macedo et al. 2005). However, it is more accurate to say that there are multiple norms of citizenship; and while some have weakened, others have strengthened. The social and political transformation of the United States over the past several decades has systematically altered the distribution of citizenship norms in significant ways.

Second, we show that previous research has typically focused on the change in what we call *duty-based citizenship* and its consequences, looking backward to the politics of the past. Alternative norms of *engaged citizenship* have much different implications for the political attitudes and behavior of the public, and many of these may represent positive developments for American democracy. The "Citizenship, Involvement and Democracy" survey of the Center for Democracy and Civil Society (CDACS) allows us to describe citizenship norms and their effects. This article shows how the changing norms of citizenship are affecting one aspect of contemporary politics: the patterns of participation.

The evidence of changing citizenship norms and their consequences does not mean that American democracy does not face challenges. Indeed, the vitality of democracy is that it normally responds to such challenges, and the response ideally expands and strengthens the democratic process. By accurately recognizing the current challenges, and responding to them rather than dire claims about political decay, American democracy can continue to

evolve and develop. We cannot return to the politics of the 1950s, and we probably should not want to, but we can improve the democratic process if we understand how citizens and their world are really changing.

Assessing Citizenship Norms

At his inauguration in 2001, with prompting from prominent political scientists, George W. Bush stated: “We are bound by ideals that move us beyond our backgrounds, lift us above our interests and teach us what it means to be citizens. Every child must be taught these ideals. Every citizen must uphold them. . . . I ask you to be citizens. Citizens, not spectators. Citizens, not subjects. Responsible citizens, building communities of service and a nation of character.”

However, the exact meaning of citizenship is open to multiple interpretations. The concept of citizenship has a history dating from the first democratic polity, and theorists—republicans, liberals, neo-liberals, communitarians, social-democrats, and others—differ substantially in their definitions of citizenship (Heater 2004). In other work (Dalton forthcoming), we discuss the philosophical history of the concept and its application in empirical social science. The application of these various models of citizenship to the United States, or any other single nation, is a matter of ongoing debate.

Public opinion surveys have only recently begun to study the public’s adherence to different potential citizenship norms. The 1984 General Social Survey and the 1987 Swedish Citizenship Survey included some initial questions on the duties of citizenship (Bennett and Bennett 1990; Petersson et al. 1989: ch. 8). The 1998 Swedish Democracy Audit systematically studied these norms (Petersson et al. 1998). The European “Citizenship, Involvement and Democracy” (CID) project replicated several of these items across a set of European nations in the late 1990s (Rossteutscher 2005); and the European Social Survey (ESS) asked a subset of these items for 22 European nations in 2002 (Denters, Gabriel, and Torcal forthcoming). The International Social Survey Program built upon this research tradition with a module on citizenship in 2004, and this battery is included in the General Social Survey in the U.S.

The “Citizenship, Involvement and Democracy” survey of the Center for the Democracy and Civil Society (CDACS) at Georgetown University replicated the battery of citizenship questions from the European Social Survey. In-person interviews were conducted with 1001 respondents between May

16 and July 19, 2005. Interviewing was conducted by International Communications Research (ICR) using a clustered, area-probability sample of households and random selection of respondents. The CID survey asked:³

To be a good citizen, how important is it for a person to be . . . [list items]. 0 is extremely unimportant and 10 is extremely important.

Reflecting the logic of Almond and Verba’s (1963) description of a political culture as a shared set of social norms, this question defines citizenship in terms of attitudes toward the role of the individual in the political system. Respondents are asked how they think a ‘good’ citizen should behave—the perceived norms of citizenship—rather than personal adherence to each behavior.

The CID survey asked about norms in four areas that are derived from the theoretical literature on citizenship (Table 1). For reference, we also include the questions from the 2004 General Social Survey in this table.

Participation is a prime criterion for defining the democratic citizen and his or her role within the political process, and it is central to the theoretical literature on democracy. The battery thus asks about the importance of always voting in elections. In addition, the survey asks about the importance of participation beyond voting: being active in voluntary groups (participating in civil society) and generally being active in politics. This does not include all the diverse forms of political action (see below), although it spans a range of participation opportunities. Moreover, it is important to note that the survey does not ask if the respondent actually participates in these activities—the question is whether they recognize such norms as existing in American society.

Related to the concept of participation, a second category taps what Petersson and his colleagues (1998) labeled as *Autonomy*. Autonomy involves the citizen’s role in being sufficiently informed about government to exercise a participatory role. The citizen should participate in democratic deliberation and discuss politics with other citizens, and ideally understand the views of others. Denters, Gabriel, and Torcal (forthcoming) describe such items as representing critical and deliberative aspects of citizenship. The CID survey taps these orientations with a question on the importance of forming one’s own opinions. The GSS asks about understanding the views of others and monitoring the actions of government.

Table 1: Categories of Citizenship Norms

Categories	CID/ESS	GSS/ISSP
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Vote in elections ➤ Be active in voluntary organizations ➤ Be active in politics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Always vote in elections ➤ Be active in social or political associations ➤ Choose products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Form his or her opinion, independently of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Try to understand reasoning of people with other opinions ➤ Keep watch on actions of the government
Social order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Serve on a jury if called ➤ Always obey laws and regulations ➤ Men serve in the military when the country is at war ➤ Report a crime that he or she may have witnessed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Never try to evade taxes ➤ Always obey the laws and regulations ➤ Being willing to serve in the military in a time of need
Solidarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Support people who are worse off than themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Support people in America who are worse off than yourself ➤ Help people in the rest of the world who are worse off than yourself.

Source: 2005 CID Survey; 2004 General Social Survey.

Social Order represents the acceptance of state authority as part of citizenship. The CID asks four items on adherence to social order: always obeying laws and regulations, willingness to serve on a jury, reporting a crime, and willingness to serve in the military. The GSS includes a similar set of three items.

Finally, *Solidarity* represents a fourth category of citizenship norms that approximates the concept of social citizenship. This represents a long tradition in European social democracy or Christian socialism that includes a concern for others within the definition of citizenship (Marshall 1992). The CID asks about the importance of helping others who are worse off in society; the GSS separately asks about helping those at home and abroad.

The Two Faces of Citizenship

Although there is a distinct theoretical logic to these four categories of norms, the American public perceives citizenship in terms of a simpler framework. We factor analyzed the interrelationship

between items, and this methodology identified two broad dimensions of citizenship in both the CID survey and the General Social Survey (Table 2).⁴

The first dimension, *Citizen Duty*, primarily involves norms of social order. The willingness to report a crime is most strongly related to this factor (.84), closely followed by the other three items on social order. In addition, the responsibility to vote is strongly linked to this dimension. Allegiance to the state and voting are linked together in discussions of citizenship, beginning with Tocqueville. For instance, the brochure produced by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for new citizens begins its description of the duties and responsibilities of citizens as follows: “the right to vote is a duty as well as a privilege” (1987: 11). Similarly, research on voting turnout stresses the importance of citizen duty as a predictor of voting (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980: 7-8; Blaise 2000: 92). Thus, the clustering of participation and order norms into a single pattern of duty-based citizenship has a strong foundation in prior empirical research and democratic theory, such as Almond and Verba’s description of the citizen-subject. The same basic dimension also emerges from the GSS.⁵

In contrast, *Engaged Citizenship* spans several elements that are typically described as liberal or communitarian norms of citizenship. It includes both measures of solidarity, as well as two participation examples: being active in civil society groups and general political activity. This dimension also incorporates the norm of political autonomy, that one should form opinions independently of others. Engaged citizenship is linked to participation in the non-electoral domain: working with voluntary groups or general political interest. The engaged citizen is willing to act on his/her principles, be politically independent, and address social needs. This evokes the values implicit in Barber’s (1984) concept of “strong democracy.” Even more directly, engaged citizenship overlaps with the patterns of post-material or self-expressive values that Inglehart has described in advanced industrial societies (Inglehart 1990; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Engaged citizens are also likely to hold different policy priorities, and have different orientations toward the role of the government (Dalton forthcoming).

Table 2: Dimensions of Democratic Citizenship

Variable	CID			GSS	
	Citizen Duty	Engaged Citizen		Citizen Duty	Engaged Citizen
Report a crime	.84	.12	Vote in elections	.65	.17
Always obey the law	.77	.09	Never evade taxes	.65	-.01
Serve in the military	.64	.15	Serve in the military	.54	.07
Serve on a jury	.63	.32	Obey the law	.51	.10
Vote in elections	.56	.43	Keep watch on government	.51	.40
Form own opinions	.29	.47	Active in association	.39	.54
Support worse off	.16	.65	Choose products	.22	.59
Be active in politics	.15	.80	Understand others	.28	.59
Active in voluntary groups	.10	.84	Help worse off in world	-.12	.77
			Help worse off in America	.02	.77
Eigenvalue	2.56	2.37		1.95	2.37
Percent variance	28.5	25.8		19.5	23.7

Source: 2005 CID Survey and 2004 GSS; the order of dimensions in the GSS has been transposed to simplify comparison of both surveys.

These two sets of norms are not contradictory (since all items are positively correlated), and all are cited as important by most Americans (see mean scores in appendix). However, these different norms reflect contrasting emphases in the role of a democratic citizen. Both clusters involve a norm of participation, albeit in different styles of political action. Both define citizenship as a mixture of responsibilities and rights, but different responsibilities and different rights. And both are linked to democratic theory, although neither completely matches the mix of norms posited in previous theoretical models.

Much of the current discourse on citizenship and civic education focuses on the presumed erosion of the norms of citizen duty: Americans today are less respectful of authority, more distrustful of government, and less likely to vote—and these developments may be linked to the erosion of duty-based citizenship. But this is only half the story. The erosion of duty-based citizenship may be counterbalanced by an increase in the norms of engaged citizenship, which has its own consequences for citizen actions. Both sets of norms have positive and negative implications for the functioning of the political system. To understand contemporary American democracy, we need to examine both.

The Social Distribution of Citizenship Norms

Understanding the social distribution of citizenship norms can illuminate the sources of these norms as well as their political implications. In other work (Dalton forthcoming) we examine the social correlates of citizenship, but here we focus on two factors: age and education. For instance, to the extent that citizenship norms become relatively fixed during early political socialization, then generational patterns suggest how norms have changed over time—just as a field anthropologist tracks changes in societies over time by comparing social artifacts across layers of accumulated deposits. Similarly, if there are strong educational in citizenship norms, we can interpolate these patterns across the demographic changes of the American public over recent decades.

Generational Patterns

Central to our theorizing on citizenship norms is the presumption that the tremendous changes in the content and context of American politics since the mid-twentieth century have reshaped these norms. The legacy of these historical experiences should be apparent in generational differences in opinions. Older Americans—those of the pre-1945 generations—were raised in a different epoch, when the expectations of citizenship and the practices of citizenship were different. This is ‘the greatest generation’ that Tom Brokaw (1998) wrote about, and who reflect the civic values that Putnam (2000) praised. Brokaw articulately summarized the experiences of this generation and the impact of these events on their political norms (1998: xix-xx):

These men and women came of age in the Great Depression, when economic despair hovered over the land like a plague. They had watched their parents lose their businesses, their farms, their jobs and their hopes. They had learned to accept a future that played out one day at a time. Then, just as there was a glimmer of economic recovery, war exploded across Europe and AsiaWhen the war was over, the men and women who had been involved, in uniform and in civilian capacities, joined in joyous and short-lived celebrations, then immediately began the task of re-building their lives and the work they wanted. They were mature beyond their years, tempered by what they had been through, disciplined by their military training and sacrifices They stayed true to their values of personal responsibility, duty, honor and faith.

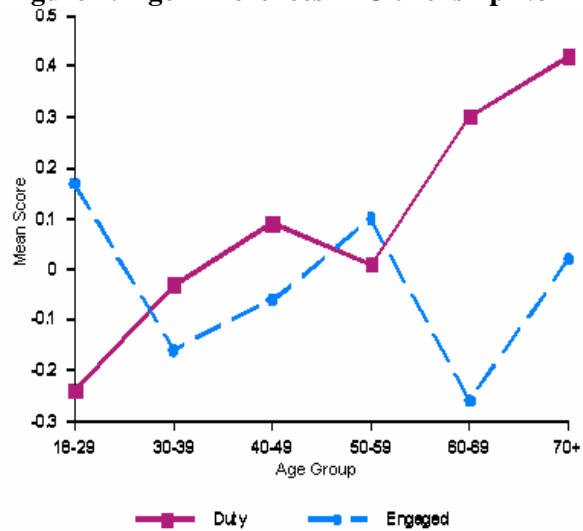
Indeed, previous research suggests that feelings of citizen duty are more common among older Americans (Bennett and Bennett 1990: 126-130).

In contrast, contemporary writings on the citizenship of young Americans are much less flattering (Putnam 2000; Wattenberg 2006). The postwar baby boom generation was on the cusp of the old order, and some were the driving force for the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s. Since then, however, there is a nearly universal claim that younger generations are what is wrong with contemporary American politics. While criticizing the politics of the young has a long tradition, it has taken on a new intensity in the current discourse on citizenship.

Implicit in our ideas of changing citizenship norms is the possibility that these critical views of contemporary youth miss a larger reality. Older people typically castigate the young for not being like them—this has been true since the time of Aristotle—and attribute negative political developments to the eroding values and poor behavior of the young. This is what old people do best—they complain. The fact that the young may not think of citizenship in the same duty-based terms as their elders is taken as evidence that the young lack desirable citizenship norms. However, if feelings of citizen duty are eroding among the young, this may be balanced by new norms of engaged citizenship. Such a shift in orientations is consistent with evidence that the young are more likely to support self-expressive and self-actualizing values (Inglehart 1999; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Baker 2004).⁶ And norms of engaged citizenship may have benefits for democracy that are missed by narrowly focusing on the decline in duty-based norms.

The distribution of duty-based citizenship and engaged citizenship across age groups is presented in Figure 1. The shifting balance of these norms across generations is quite clear. Older Americans who came of age (reached age 18) by the end of World War II and the postwar boomer generation score highest on citizenship duty. These sentiments then steadily weaken among the 1960s generation and GenX and GenY. Expressed in other terms, there is a strong positive relationship ($r = .20$ in CID, $.21$ in GSS) between age and duty-based citizenship. This is the pattern that analysts typically discuss, leading to negative commentaries on the declining sense of duty among the young.

Figure 1: Age Differences in Citizenship Norms



Source: 2005 CID Survey

At the same time, Figure 1 shows that the erosion of duty-based norms is counterbalanced by somewhat greater support for norms of engaged citizenship among younger cohorts. There is a modest negative correlation between these norms and age ($r = -.05$ in CID, $-.08$ in GSS). These are hardly undemocratic or un-American values—although few analysts write about the lack of such values among older Americans.

This figure displays a simple truth. Claims about the decline in citizenship values among younger Americans are incorrect. Rather, there is a generational shift in the types of citizenship norms that Americans stress. Americans socialized before and immediately after World War II reflect their socialization experiences and are more likely to define citizenship in terms of duties and obligations. Indeed, one might argue that these are the norms of a good subject (though not necessarily a good democratic participant) in the terms of Almond and Verba's (1963) concept of the civic culture. These norms would lead one to vote out of a sense of duty, to feel a duty to be civically active, and to be somewhat deferential to elites. In contrast, the young reflect a new political reality, and stress alternative norms that should encourage a more rights conscious public, a socially engaged public, and a more deliberative image of citizenship. Both norms have positive (and negative) implications for the practice of citizenship and the workings of the democratic process.

Educational Patterns

Many studies point to the power of education and other social status variables in shaping images of citizenship (Milner 2002; Almond and Verba 1963). Nie, Jun and Stehlik-Barry (1996: ch. 2), for example, show that education is strongly and consistently related to political knowledge, participation in electoral and non-electoral activities, and democratic norms such as tolerance. These authors claim that education is a key variable in explaining democratic participation and democratic enlightenment, although in different ways. Empirical research consistently shows that better educated Americans vote more, are more active in their community, are more knowledgeable about politics, and more politically tolerant.

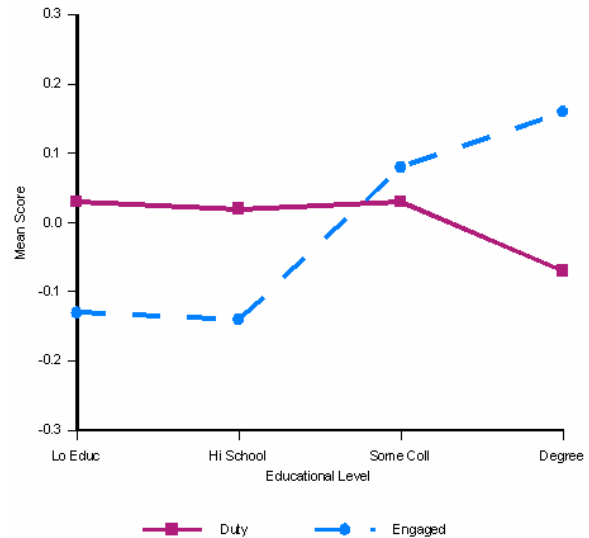
Better educated, higher income, and higher status Americans should be more likely to subscribe to duty-based norms of citizenship that encourage voting and allegiance to the political system (obeying laws, serving on a jury). The formal and informal civics training of the American education system presumably stresses these norms, and upper status individuals typically are more supportive of the norms and principles of the existing political order.

Yet, once we realize that there is an alternative norm set of engaged citizenship, the implications for social status relationships become more ambiguous. If the skills and values produced by education are important in creating norms that one should vote, they should be even more important in stimulating participation in direct and more assertive forms of engaged citizenship. Similarly, the work of Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry (1996: ch. 4) suggests that the cognitive skills identified with education should be even more directly related to norms of engaged citizenship. At least since the 1960s, furthermore, it is commonly asserted that the political ethos in higher education has generally shifted toward the norms of engaged citizenship with increased stress on direct action, the critical role of the citizen, and social responsibility—partly as an alternative to traditional duty-based conceptions of citizenship (Bennett and Bennett 1990: 119-120). In summary, if education and higher social status are valuable in developing the norms of a good subject, they may be even more relevant to developing the norms of an engaged citizen.

Figure 2 presents the relationship between education and the two sets of citizenship norms. The CID survey actually displays a slight negative relationship between education and adherence to duty-based citizenship norms ($r=-.05$), which implies

that increasing educational levels may have contributed to the erosion of these norms.⁷ At the same time, education displays a stronger positive relationship with engaged citizenship ($r=.13$ in CID, $.11$ in the GSS).

Figure 2: Education Differences in Citizenship Norms



Source: 2005 CID Survey

Taken together, the evidence in this section suggests that social modernization—reflected in generational change and rising educational levels—during the later half of the twentieth century probably contributed to the development of new norms of citizenship. The cognitive skills and political resources represented by education provide a basis for a more engaged form of citizenship that goes beyond the deferential, almost subject role of duty-based citizenship. Similarly, the changing context of politics and changing life experiences shifted citizenship norms, as apparent in generational difference. Thus, it is not that citizenship is lacking in the contemporary American public—but that the priorities of citizenship are changing.

Citizenship Norms and Political Action

The norms of citizenship should shape the political behavior of Americans—norms say what the individual feels is expected of the good citizen. For instance, duty-based citizenship is more likely to encourage allegiant behaviors, and a deference to political authorities; engaged citizenship may encourage elite-challenging orientations (Dalton 2006b). A duty-based image of citizenship, stressing citizen obligations to the state and participation through elections, may be less accepting of dissenting

political views. Engaged citizenship, which stresses participation and social responsibilities, may evoke more sensitivity toward challenging political groups and thereby encourage feelings of tolerance. Citizenship norms may also shape expectations of the overall role of government, and specific policy priorities. Indeed, since citizenship provides an identity about what is expected of the individual and what the individual expects of government, it should influence a range of political attitudes and behaviors.

This article focuses on one specific consequence of these norms: patterns of political participation. Scholars are debating participation trends in contemporary America, and citizenship norms should influence these patterns. One stream of research argues that political participation is decreasing among Americans. Although education levels, socioeconomic resources, access to political information and the other resources of democratic citizenship have increased substantially over the past several decades, researchers claim there has been a decline in participation. Most prominent is Robert Putnam's (2000) warning that civic engagement is decreasing to dangerous levels in America. Fewer Americans are engaged in elections, and other evidence points to a drop in campaign activities as another example of electoral participation (Putnam 2000: ch. 2; Wattenberg 2002; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Putnam thus reaches a pessimistic conclusion: "declining electoral participation is merely the most visible symptom of a broader disengagement from community life. Like a fever, electoral abstention is even more important as a sign of deeper trouble in the body politic than as a malady itself. It is not just from the voting booth that Americans are increasingly AWOL" (2000: 35). These sentiments are repeated in the recent APSA study of Americans' civic engagement (Macedo et al. 2005).

However, other analysts maintain that the forms of political participation are changing, and that political activity persists, albeit in new forms (Dalton 2006a; forthcoming; Zukin et al. 2006). As people have become more educated, politically skilled, policy oriented, and accept engaged citizenship, they seek different means of influencing policy. Elections provide infrequent and fairly blunt tools of political influence. If one is dissatisfied with the policies of the Bush (or Clinton) administration, waiting several years to vote in the next election as a means of political participation seems like political inaction. Instead, these citizens seek more direct means of influencing policy makers, such as working with

public interest groups, contentious political action, direct contact, and similar methods (Wuthnow 2002: 75; Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005; Meyer and Tarrow 1998). These direct participation forms also fit the self-expressive norms of engaged citizens, more so than participation in elections (although they may also continue voting because of the importance of electoral politics). From this perspective, America is witnessing a change in the nature of citizenship and political participation leading to a renaissance of democratic participation—rather than a general decline in participation.

The Impact of Citizenship Norms

Citizenship norms provide a framework to understand how and why the patterns and level of political participation may be changing. Duty-based norms of citizenship encourage individuals to participate as a civic duty, which may stimulate election turnout and participation in other institutionalized forms of action. For instance, Wolfinger and Rosenstone's describe turnout in these terms: "the most important benefit of voting [is] . . . a feeling that one has done one's duty to society . . . and to oneself (1980: 7-8). Andre Blaise (2000: 92) sees duty-based voting in even stronger terms: "To use a religious analogy, not voting can be construed as a venial sin: it is a wrong, one that weak human beings should be urged not to commit but may be forgiven for if they indulge in it." These citizenship norms also parallel Almond and Verba's description of the civic culture as limited and allegiant participation in the polity (Almond and Verba 1963).

Engaged citizenship should also stimulate political action. However, the expressive, participatory emphasis of these norms suggests a shift in the modes of political participation—away from elections and party activity that are seen as institutionalized expressions of citizen duty, and toward individualized and direct forms of action. Engaged citizenship overlaps with the patterns of post-material or self-expressive values that Inglehart has described in advanced industrial societies (Inglehart 1990; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Inglehart maintains that posmaterialists emphasize participatory norms, elite challenging behavior, and more direct forms of political action. The solidarity element of engaged citizenship may also encourage volunteerism and greater civil society activity. In short, engaged citizens may still vote, but this is less central to their definition of citizenship and participation in other forms of action should be more common.

In summary, political participation represents an area where contemporary scholarship is divided in describing contemporary American politics, and where norms of citizenship may provide the key to resolving this controversy. Duty-based norms of citizenship apparently once were the basis of stimulating political engagement, especially turnout in elections. The decline of these norms thus may contribute to the erosion of electoral participation. In contrast, engaged citizenship may be shifting the style of political action; engaged citizens are not drawn to elections but prefer more direct forms of political action, such as working with collective groups, boycotts, or contentious actions. As a result, a shifting balance of these two patterns of citizenship should reshape the patterns of participation in America.

One of the riches of the 2005 CID survey is the wide range of old and new participation forms that are examined in the survey. Respondents were asked about their participation in thirteen different political activities over the past twelve months, and whether they voted in the 2004 election.⁸ In addition, we use a shorter political participation battery available from the 2004 General Social Survey to replicate findings and determine the consistent effects of citizenship norms.

Table 3 presents the correlation between the two dimensions of citizenship and this extensive list of participation options.⁹ Voting and party membership illustrate the causal forces driving participation in electoral politics. The norm of citizen-duty—which is a combination of participation norms and obeying the laws—is significantly related to electoral participation in both surveys. These are the only significant positive correlations for citizen duty in the CID survey, and the relationships are stronger in the GSS. In contrast, the norms of engaged citizenship are unrelated to electoral participation in the GSS survey, and have weak correlations for these activities in the CID survey. In other words, more people participate in elections because they are supposed to do this as the duty of a citizen, rather than seeing elections as an example of political influence.

Participation in forms of contentious action presents a different pattern. For the three examples of contentious action—signed a petition, attending a legal protest, or an illegal protest—engaged citizenship stimulates participation in these areas, while traditional norms of citizen-duty have no impact or a negative impact. Consumer actions—boycotts and buying products for political reasons—and internet actions follow the same pattern.

Table 3: The Correlations Between Citizenship Norms and Participation

Activities	CID Survey		GSS Survey	
	Citizen Duty	Engaged Citizen	Citizen Duty	Engaged Citizen
<i>Voting/Elections</i>				
Voted in election	.11	.06	.25	-.04
Worked for party	-.03	.17	.13	.07
Worked for campaign	.01	.14	--	--
Donated money (GSS: any pol group)	.03	.18	.10	.20
<i>Contacting</i>				
Contacted politician	.02	.20	.18	.12
Contacted media	--	--	.02	.08
<i>Contentious Actions</i>				
Signed petition	-.01	.23	.09	.09
Lawful demonstration	-.15	.09	-.07	.23
Illegal demonstration	-.17	.09	--	--
<i>Consumer Action</i>				
Boycotted product	-.05	.319	.02	.18
Bought product	-.04	.18	--	--
<i>Internet Action</i>				
Visited Website	-.02	.21	--	--
Forward political Email	-.02	.14	--	--
Web Activity	-.06	.17	-.03	.16

Source: 2005 CID Survey; 2004 General Social Survey

Note: Table entries are Pearson correlation coefficients

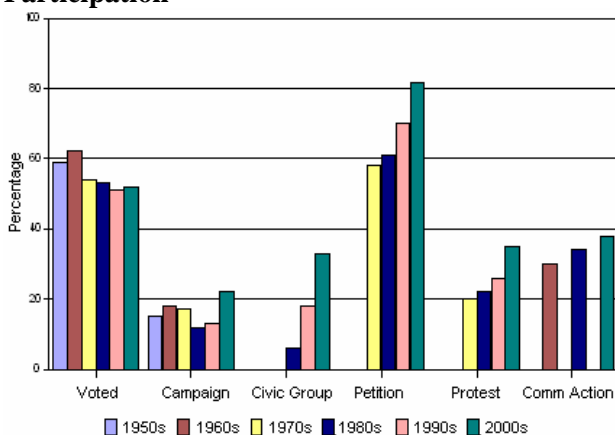
This contrast in the normative basis of participation in electoral politics versus contentious and new forms of political action highlights how different images of democratic citizenship are transforming the patterns of political action in America. Focusing on either dimension in isolation provides only a partial answer of how political participation is changing. While the decline in duty-based citizenship may contribute to decreasing electoral participation, it is also lessening the normative impediment to alternative forms of political action that are negatively associated with citizen-duty. Concomitantly, the spread of engaged citizenship may stimulate participation, albeit in new forms of activity outside of the electoral arena. And given the causal forces behind these participation patterns, this shift may be a continuing feature of democratic politics.

The Changing Patterns of Action

The changing patterns of citizenship imply that participation repertoires are also changing. However, the strong claims that there is broadly accepted evidence of a long-term decline in electoral and non-electoral participation (Putnam 2000; Macedo et al. 2005). This appears inconsistent with the implications of changing citizenship norms. Consequently, in this section we revisit the evidence of participation trends in America.

The empirical evidence on long-term trends in political participation is ambiguous. Surprisingly, comprehensive longitudinal data on the participation patterns of Americans are relatively rare.¹⁰ For instance, the American National Election Study has a rich battery of items on campaign activity that extends back to the 1950s, but the study does not regularly monitor non-electoral participation. The Political Action/World Values Surveys have periodically asked about protest activities, but not about voting, campaign activity, contacting, or other activities. Furthermore, even when a survey includes a large battery of participation items, the wording of questions changes in ways that make time comparisons problematic.¹¹ Putnam relied on trends from the DDB Needham and Roper surveys, but these are lower quality commercial polls with changing methodology over time. Consequently, there is no definitive source for data on American participation patterns over the last several decades, and thus we must combine a variety of sources to track activity patterns.

Figure 3: Trends in American Political Participation



Sources:

Voting: average of presidential turnout (VAP), IDEA

Campaign activity: participated in 2 or more campaign activities, ANES timeseries

Civic group: member of at least one public interest group, WVS (1980, 1990, 1999)

Petition: signed a petition, Political Action Survey, WVS (1980, 1990, 1999)

Protest: participated in one of four challenging acts, WVS (1980, 1990, 1999)

Community action: worked with group on local problem, Verba/Nie 1967, 1987; Social Community Survey 2000.

In another work, we assemble the evidence from the major academic participation surveys to provide the best accounting possible (Dalton forthcoming). A

brief introduction to these findings is presented in Figure 3. The first set of columns track the declining turnout in presidential elections since the 1960s, based on turnout as a percentage of the voting age population. Despite the increase in turnout in 2004, overall voting rates dropped 10 percent from the 1960s to the 2000s.¹² The next columns describe overall campaign participation, as the percent of the public that has engaged in two or more activities based on the American National Election Studies. Even without the burst of campaign activism in 2004, these statistics show a relatively flat pattern over time—hardly evidence of a mass disengagement from politics. When one turns to other forms of political action, the trends are distinctly more positive. The World Value Survey measures membership in four ‘civic groups’ that represent new forms of political engagement (environmental groups, women’s group, peace groups, and a civic association). In 1981 only 6 percent of Americans reported they were a member of one of these four groups, by 1999 this had increased to 33 percent. Similarly, signing petitions and participating in more challenging protest activities display a marked increase from 1975 to the present. Finally, the Verba et al. (1995: 72) participation studies in 1967 and 1987 asked about participation in groups addressing a community issue—the essence of Tocquevillian democracy—and this question was replicated in the 2000 Social Capital study. Community participation has also increased.

In summary, the dire claims about the political disengagement of the American public are not supported by the evidence from these major academic studies of political participation beyond election turnout. Rather than an absolute decline in political action, the changing norms of citizenship are contributing to a shift in the ways Americans participate in politics.

Changing Publics and Political Participation

Many political observers are concerned about the decreasing political involvement of Americans, and what this implies for American democracy (Macedo et al. 2005; Wattenberg 2002, 2006; Putnam 2000; Bennett and Nunn 1997). Turnout in elections has decreased in the United States, and in most other Western democracies. However, this is only one part of the total transformation of citizenship norms and the patterns of political participation.

Elections are important because they select political elites and are the source of democratic legitimacy, and they are a simple means of engaging

the mass public in the democratic process. However, turning out to vote requires little initiative since the format of participation is institutionalized and regularized (Verba and Nie 1972: 52). Social groups and parties also engage the public in elections, and mobilize electoral participation. At the midpoint of the twentieth century, when the political skills and resources of the average American were limited, voting and campaigns were the prime focus of political action—and duty-based citizenship encouraged individuals to participate. In short, many people voted because of a sense of civic duty, mobilization by the campaigns, or as an expression of partisan support, rather than as a major means to influence policy.

However, as social modernization has reshaped the norms of citizenship and the political skills and resources of the public, this has altered the calculus of participation. The erosion of duty-based norms, as seen in generational patterns of citizenship, has apparently decreased voting turnout. This has captured the attention of political analysts. But it is only part of the total story. Duty-based citizenship dissuades citizens from participating in direct, challenging activities. So the weakening of duty-based norms has had a positive impact on broadening the repertoire of political action beyond elections.

Even more important, the norms of engaged citizenship stimulate individuals to participate in methods that give citizens more direct say and influence. Many engaged citizens will still vote because of the importance of elections to the democratic process. However, their participation repertoire includes more direct and individualized forms of action. The cognitively mobilized, engaged citizen is more active on referendums than elections, and direct action over campaign work, volunteering is preferred to party activity.

Consequently, while election turnout has declined, the repertoire of political action has actually expanded, and people are now engaged in other ways (Dalton 2006a, forthcoming; Zukin et al. 2006). More people today make the effort to directly contact their elected representative or other government officials. Participation in election campaigns is still common. People are working with informal groups in their community to address local problems—and this form of action has grown over time. And a variety of contentious and alternative activities are now part of the citizens' repertoire of political action. When one adds political consumerism and internet activism, the forms of action are even more diverse. Ironically, the Putnam 2000 Social Capital Survey replicated four

questions from the Verba/Nie participation series: general interest, attending a rally, working with a community group, and protest. Despite the *Bowling Alone* thesis of decreasing political engagement, none of these four questions displays a statistically significant decrease from the Verba/Nie participation levels of the late 1960s or 1980s. Rather than disengagement, the repertoire of political action has broadened.

Therefore, instead of only lamenting the decline of duty-based citizenship and decreasing voting in election, we should consider the positive implications of this shift in participation patterns. This change in political participation patterns affects the nature and quality of citizen influence. Verba and Nie (1972: ch.3), for example, describe voting as an activity of high pressure because government officials are being chosen, but there is limited specific policy information or influence because elections involve a diverse range of issues. Therefore, the infrequent opportunity to cast a vote for a prepackaged party is a limited tool of political influence. This influence may increase when elections extend to a wide range of political offices and include referendums, as in the United States.¹³ Still, it is difficult to treat elections as mandates on specific policies because they assess relative support for broad programs and not specific policies. Even a sophisticated policy-oriented electorate cannot be assured that important policy options are represented in an election or that the government will follow these policies in the period between elections. Indeed, the importance of citizen-duty as a predictor of voting turnout and party work illustrates how these citizenship norms motivate turnout.

In contrast, citizen access to methods of direct action allows them to define their own issue interests, the methods of influencing policymakers, and the timing of influence. The issue might be as broad as nuclear disarmament or as narrow as the policies of the local school district—citizens, not elites, decide. Control over the framework of participation means that citizens can convey more information and exert more political pressure than through election campaigns. Political institutions are also adopting to accept and encourage these new forms of citizen access (Cain, Dalton and Scarrow 2003). In short, these other modes of action shift control of participation to the public and thereby increase the quantity and quality of political participation.

Certainly we should not dismiss the decrease in voting turnout as unimportant. Elections are important because they select political elites and are

the source of democratic legitimacy, and they are a simple means of engaging the mass public in the democratic process. And if young Americans do not vote, this lessens their representation in the political process (and may change election outcomes). This realization has stimulated efforts to re-engage young people in elections. These are worthwhile pursuits because of the importance of elections. But if one wants to increase electoral participation among the young, one should begin by recognizing their different norms of citizenship norms. Reforms may be more effective if that are embedded in a framework of engaged citizenship, rather than appeals to citizenship as a duty. Ironically, P. Diddy's admonition to "Vote or Die" might be more effective in mobilizing the young than the traditional civic education approach advocated by some experts.

Moreover, it would be equally worthwhile to recognize that young Americans want to connect to their government in new ways, and to explore reforms to facilitate these new participation channels.

For instance, the Macedo et al. (2005) study offered a long list of policy reforms to re-engage young Americans in the electoral process—but they did not discuss internet voting that might actually engage more young people. The goal of participation reforms should not only be to encourage young people to act like their grandparents (and vote), but to also develop new forms of access in tune with these changing norms of citizenship.

In summary, the trends in political activity represent changes in the style of political action, and not just changes in the level of participation. The new style of citizenship seeks to place more control over political activity in the hands of the citizenry. These changes in participation make greater demands on the participants. At the same time, these activities can increase public pressure on political elites. Citizen participation is becoming more closely linked to citizen influence. Rather than democracy being at risk, this represents an opportunity to expand and enrich democratic participation.

Notes

1. Karl Mannheim, *Freedom, Power and Democratic Planning*, quoted in T. Brennan, *Political Education and Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981: 106.

2. Some of the most prominent examples of this genre are Dionne (1991), Craig (1993, 1996), Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995), Bronfenbrenner et al. (1996), Nye et al. (1997), Zakaria (2000), Macedo et al. (2005) and perhaps the best researched and most well-reasoned project, Putnam's (2000) study of social capital in America. Some might add Dalton (2004) to this list, but I disagree.

3. The CID and the ESS both used a ten-point scale to measure support for each norm, and the GSS/ISSP survey used a seven-point scale. Thus, the importance levels of items in the GSS/ISSP is not directly comparable to the CID and ESS. The ESS asked only six of the citizenship items: helping those worse off, voting, obey the laws, form independent opinions, voluntary activity, being active in politics.

4. Factor analysis is an iterative statistical method, balancing theory and empirical patterns rather than yielding a single empirical result. An unrotated analysis has all items loading positively on the first dimension, which normally occurs when a battery of items are rated on a single scale such as importance. The Eigenvalues in CIDS indicated two dimensions to these items. To distinguish between different aspects of citizenship, we used a varimax rotated factor analysis.

The 1987 Swedish citizenship survey (Pettersson et al. 1989: ch. 8) included eight citizenship items and also identified two dimensions. The first was obeying the law that overlaps with our duty dimension, and the second was "creating the rules" which overlaps with our engagement dimension, except that voting loaded on this second dimension in the Swedish survey. The European CID study also included eight items and they produced three dimensions: Law-abidingness, Public-spiritedness and Socio-political Awareness (Denters, Gabriel and Torcal 1996). The latter two dimensions overlap with what we have called engaged citizenship.

5. The GSS actually produces a more 'balanced' measure of both dimensions because it has a more even set of items across the four categories. The CID, for instance, had only one autonomy and one solidarity question, but four social order questions.

6. There is a dichotomy in the research literature. The research stressing the generational decline in duty-based citizenship (e.g., Putnam 2000; Bennett and Bennet 1990: 127-129; Wattenberg 2006) exists in parallel with a separate

literature on the development of post-material or self-expressive values among the young (Inglehart 1990; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Baker 2004). Our research argues that these are examples of separate dimensions of citizenship, and only by comparing both explicitly do we gain a better understanding of the values of the contemporary American public.

7. The GSS finds a weak positive relationship ($r=.07$) between education and duty-based norms. Taken together, this suggests that education is not strongly linked to duty-based norms.

8. The question asked: "During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? First, ..."

9. In Dalton (forthcoming) we develop a multivariate model to explain participation in each activity, including age, education, cognitive sophistication and other controls. The results for the two citizenship dimensions are very consistent with the bivariate patterns described in Table 3.

10. Putnam (2000) presents trends in participation in a wide variety of activities, but many of these trends are from commercial marketing polls of uncertain quality. The evidence from higher quality academic surveys that use national probability samples and have higher response rates yield different findings (see below, also Dalton forthcoming).

11. For example, surveys often change the time reference of the question; asking whether individuals have done an activity over the past year, two years, or longer. The 1967 Verba/Nie survey, for example, did not have a clear time reference; the 1989 survey typically asked about activity over the previous twelve months. Other questionnaires vary the focus of activity or the types of activity combined in a single question. Neither the 1987 or 1989 surveys have been systematically replicated.

12. Even this finding is contentious, however. McDonald and Pomper (2001) argue that if one adjusts for the voting eligible population (VEP) instead of voting age population (VAP), then turnout has not declined significantly since the 1972 election.

13. Indeed, there is evidence that the contemporary public is voting more often on more ballot items than electorates a generation ago (Cain, Dalton and Scarrow 2003, ch. 2). And the increased frequency of voting opportunities appears to decrease participation in any single election.

Editor's Note: In August 2006, the Center for Democracy and the Third Sector (CDATS) changed its name to the Center for Democracy and Civil Society (CDACS).

References

- Almond, Gabriel, and Sidney Verba. 1963. *The Civic Culture*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Barber, Benjamin. 1984. *Strong Democracy. Participatory Politics for a New Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Baker, Wayne. 2004. *America's Crisis of Values: Reality and Perception*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bennett, Linda, and Stephen Bennett. 1990. *Living with Leviathan: Americans Coming to Terms with Big Government*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Bennet, William, and Samuel Nunn. 1998. *A Nation of Spectators*. Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Civic Renewal.
- Blais, Andre. 2000. *To Vote or Not to Vote? The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Brokaw, Tom. 1998. *The Greatest Generation*. New York: Random House.
- Bronfenbrenner, et al. 1996. *The State of Americans: This Generation and the Next*. New York: Free Press.
- Cain, Bruce, Russell Dalton, and Susan Scarrow, eds. 2003. *Democracy Transformed? The Expansion of Citizen Access in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Craig, Stephen. 1993. *The Malevolent Leaders: Popular Discontent in America*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Craig, Stephen. 1996. *Broken Contracts: Changing Relationships between Americans and their Government*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Dalton, Russell. 2004. *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dalton, Russell. 2006. *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Washington: CQ Press.
- Dalton, Russell. Forthcoming. *Citizenship in America: The Norms of Democratic Citizenship and their Consequences*.
- Delli Carpini, Michael. 2000. "Gen.com: Youth, civic engagement, and the new information environment", *Political Communication* 17: 341-349.
- Denters, B., Oscar Gabriel, Mariano Torcal. 2006. *Norms of good citizenship*, in Jan van Deth, J. Ramón Montero and Anders Westholm, eds. *Citizenship and Involvement in Europe*. ed.
- Deth, Jan van. 2006. *Norms of citizenship*, in Russell Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, eds. *Handbook of Political Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dionne, E. J. 1991. *Why Americans Hate Politics*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Heater, Derek. 2004. *Citizenship: The Civic Ideal in World History, Politics and Education, 3 ed.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Hibbing, John R., and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 1995. *Congress as Public Enemy: Public Attitudes toward American Political Institutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Immigration and Naturalization Service. 1987. *Citizenship Education and Naturalization Information*. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 1977. *The Silent Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 1990. *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald, and Christian Welzel. 2005. *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1963. *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1997. *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Macedo, Stephen et al. 2005. *Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation, and What We Can Do About It*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Marshall, T.H. 1992. *Citizenship and Social Class*, ed. T. Bottomore. London: Pluto Press; originally published 1950.
- McDonald, Michael, and Samuel Popkin. 2001. "The myth of the vanishing voter". *American Political Science Review* 95(4): 963-974.
- Milner, Henry. 2002. *Civic Literacy: How Informed Citizens Make Democracy Work*. Hanover, NH: Tufts University Press.
- Nie, Norman, Jane Junn and Kenneth Stehlik-Barry. 1996. *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

- Norris, Pippa. 2002. *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nye, Joseph, Philip Zelikow, and David King, eds. 1997. *Why Americans Mistrust Government*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Petersson, Olof, J. Hermansson, Michelle. Micheletti, J. Teorell, and Anders Westholm. 1998. *Demokrati och Medborgarskap. Demokratiradets Rapport 1998*. Stockholm: SNS Förlag.
- Petersson, Olof, Anders Westholm, and Göran Blomberg. 1989. *Medborgarnas makt (Citizen Power)*. Stockholm: Carlssons.
- Putnam, Robert. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Renewal of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Rosenstone, Steven, and John Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan.
- Rossteutscher, S. 2005. *Die Rückkehr der Tugend?* in Jan van Deth, ed. *Deutschland in Europa*. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag.
- Stolle, Dietlind, Marc Hooghe, and Michele Micheletti. 2005. "Politics in the supermarket: Political consumerism as a form of political participation", *International Political Science Review* 26: 245-270.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. 1966. *Democracy in America*. New York: Knopf.
- Verba, Sidney, and Norman Nie. 1972. *Participation in America*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Verba, Sidney, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wattenberg, Martin. 2002. *Where Have All the Voters Gone?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wattenberg, Martin. 2006. *Is Voting for Young People?* New York: Longman.
- Wolfinger, Raymond and Steven Rosenstone. 1980. *Who Votes?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Wuthnow, Robert. 2002. *United States: Bridging the privileged and marginalized?* in Robert Putnam, ed. *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zakaria, Fareed. 2003. *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*. New York: Norton.
- Zukin, Cliff, Scott Keeter, Moly Andolina, Krista Jenkins and Michael X. Delli Carpini. 2006. *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen*. New York: Oxford University Press.