

# Turning Out the Vote

David E. Campbell, *Why We Vote: How Schools and Communities Shape Our Civic Life* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006). 288 pp., \$39.50 hardcover, ISBN-10: 0691125252.

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**D**avid E. Campbell enriches our understanding of voting, civic life, and diversity in asking and answering the age-old question about why we vote. Scholars and civic leaders interested in how communities can influence our behavior should examine this work. On the surface the book's theory and major finding – that people vote out of a sense of duty as well as out of political motivations – seems hardly informative. This argument has been accepted for years. Campbell's theory, however, provides a tidy argument as to why and when we should expect to see individuals acting out of one or the other motivation. In addition, the theoretical argument makes important connections to social capital theory and provides insight into what forms of community diversity matter most in the case of voting. Campbell provides empirical evidence for his theory, making this a rich and informative contribution to the discipline.

The book begins with the story of a young woman who cast the sole vote in her precinct in a 1989 Boston city council election. She was new to town and knew little about the candidates. Still, she voted. When asked about her decision to vote the woman expressed a sentiment many would expect; she felt obligated to do so. Campbell uses this interesting anecdote to anchor the book and to raise questions about what motivates individuals to turn out during elections. He goes on to develop what he calls the *dual motivations theory* to explain patterns in voting behavior. On the one hand, individuals turn out to vote to protect their political interests (a Madisonian response). On the other hand, individuals turn out to vote out of a sense of duty to community (a Tocquevillian response). The latter explanation – Campbell's true interest – introduces questions about the importance of social norms in decision making and about the stability of norms across time and space.

Campbell examines multiple dimensions of community diversity, including the more common forms of race, ethnicity, and income, but goes on to argue that political diversity is the more important dimension. Political diversity in this case is conceptualized as party affiliation, which Campbell views as a proxy for cultural outlook. The dual motivations theory turns on the ideas that individuals in culturally homogeneous communities will turn out in higher numbers because of social pressures to do so, i.e. because of social norms, and that individuals in culturally heterogeneous communities will turn out in higher numbers to protect their political interests. The data support this claim and show a curvilinear relationship between voter turnout and political diversity. Turnout is highest at the extremes and lowest in the middle, where a community is neither distinctly homogenous nor heterogeneous.

The importance of social norms in communities is an integral part of social capital theory, and Campbell spends considerable energy connecting his work to that of James Coleman and Robert Putnam. Norms pressure individuals to act in a certain manner, and they are more likely to emerge in communities where there are like-minded individuals (homogeneous communities). Coleman's study of social capital in the late 1980s incorporated norms and related them to levels of school performance. In part, Coleman argued, it was the norms that emerged among Catholic high school parents that led their schools to outperform public high schools and private but non-Catholic high schools. Putnam, drawing on Coleman's work, incorporates norms into his social capital theory and used them to explain the success of democracy in Italy and the decline of civic engagement in America. Norms can be powerful motivators for individuals, as Putnam explains, leading one to even give up watching his favorite football team on a Saturday afternoon to rake leaves, just to avoid the stares and disapproval of neighbors who expect raking to be done each autumn before leaves migrate to another's yard.

The richness of Campbell's work is enhanced by the chapters that follow his explications of the dual motivations theory. Having shown that norms favoring voting emerge more often in homogenous communities, he goes on to examine the role and effects of social networks and the portability of norms across time and space. Campbell finds that norms are reinforced through personal interaction in social networks, and that the homogeneity of social networks is itself a function of the partisan composition of one's wider community. In short, socializing with like-minded individuals is easier in homogeneous communities, and this facilitates establishing and enforcing social norms. Individuals in more diverse communities come in contact with like-minded individuals less often, making it more difficult to establish and enforce norms. He also finds that when individuals leave a homogeneous community with norms impressed upon them, as in the case of the woman voting in the Boston city council election, they are more likely to do what they learned back home, back when.

The contributions of *Why We Vote* are varied. First, it contributes to arguments about voter turnout. Previous models predicted higher levels of turnout as a result of increased levels of education, increased enfranchisement of blacks in the South, and relaxation of registration laws. Current data indicate that turnout levels continue to languish and are even worsening among younger voters. Campbell offers another argument to help inform debates about why people turn out to vote. Second, it contributes to our understanding of civic engagement and social capital. The empirical evidence supports theories about the influence of norms on civic behavior and the stability of norms across time and space. These findings bolster arguments that social context is an important predictor of community outcomes. Third, the book demonstrates that the more obvious differences among us – race, ethnicity, and income – are less influential in determining who participates in elections, and this may well be true for other civic issues. This is an important finding, for it points toward homogeneity of a different sort. As America grows more diverse racially, ethnically, and in terms of income, it is comforting to know that these differences do not predict our civic behavior.

Campbell is quick to point out that the findings of the book should not be perceived as encouraging greater political homogeneity as a prescription for the ills of low voter turnout in America. Instead, his findings are an invitation to researchers to consider more carefully the effects of political homogeneity and heterogeneity in future

research. This difference may be as important, if not more important, to explaining social phenomena in America as race, ethnicity, and income have proven to be in the past.

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