**Voter Apathy**



Maxwell Marshall,

When one is posed with a problem one usually strives to solve it; however, first he must define the problem and view the factors contributing to the confused state with which he is confronted.

The statistics are staggering in the case of voter apathy. Although the right to vote is one of the American citizen's most treasured rights, there exists in our country millions of non-voters. In 2004, only 55.27 percent of eligible voters actually made their opinions known in the presidential election. This means approximately 99,000,000 persons of voting age did not vote in that election. [source: [The American Presidency Project](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/turnout.php)] What is more alarming, only 36.8 percent of the voting public cast their vote in the election of representatives to the House. [source: [Ballot Access](http://www.ballot-access.org/2007/010107.html#10)] This illustrates a little known fact that many who vote for a presidential race fail to vote for other offices. In general, the lower the office, the fewer votes are likely to be cast.

Some legislation was passed to encourage voter participation, however, voter turn-out has continued to decline. So that, now, the level of voter turn-out in the U.S. has fallen below those of 54 other democratic countries. [source: [NationMaster.com](http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/dem_pre_ele_reg_vot_tur-presidential-elections-registered-voter-turnout)]

Even at the primary level, low turn-outs are tending to benefit one-issue candidates and extremists both of the left and the right. This tendency could prove very interesting; in that, it provides small activist groups with a vehicle to a victory in an election.

Why do we not vote? How do we counter the factors contributing to the crisis? Some people think that some non-voters can be coaxed to the polls if the government provided more absentee ballots and declared a national holiday for all general elections. This still will not decrease apathy or increase voter participation.

A point that I never realized before is that when we speak of non-voters, we are talking about not only the many that feel that their vote is meaningless, but also those who register and forget to vote.

One possible solution is for the government to register every person eligible to vote. In Belgium and [Australia](http://voices.yahoo.com/theme/1531/australia.html) where voting is compulsory, turn-out is usually above 90 percent. [source: [Idea.int](http://www.idea.int/vt/compulsory_voting.cfm)]

Compulsory means that the federal government would compile a list of all eligible voters and make voting, more or less, mandatory. The argument for this is that voter participation would more than likely increase. Also, the right to vote should be positively promoted by the government. The opposition to this plan have based their arguments around the extra paper work and complications for the government.

Personally, I can't see "typical" America coming around in the future. I think that on the whole we are politically ignorant. If we continue to allow this stupidity to grow, we will continue to find ourselves confronted with dishonest officials; which, in turn, will cause more distrust of elected officials resulting in an increase of apathy among voters. One might think that after a few shifty politicians in office that the voting public would want to "try their hand at the wheel," so to speak, and put into office people they felt were trustworthy. But, instead, scandals have served only to discourage voter participation, rather than compelling voters to right the wrongs of previous voters. Truly, it seems that the country's negative attitude towards politicians and the country's idea of not voting as a sign of protest against corruption have aided the spread of apathy, a morale problem as this indicates.
Yes I would place much of the fault on each of us for losing the vitality of our country's founders; as well as, their appreciation of their right to vote, for which they fought so hard.

I think that the lack of pride in our system of government has played an important role in the problem of apathy. One rarely hears another speak of what a wonderful job our legislators are doing in the capital; let alone in the state or local legislations. I wonder why, in an age when communications have surpassed that of any other time and when the batting averages of various baseball players can be recited by practically any red-blooded American boy of twelve, barely a person knows or cares what his or her Congressman has been doing in Washington. Could it be that over the years the American public and media have not promoted the necessity of political awareness as a base for voter participation? After all, if the general voting public were to read some of the numerous pamphlets, books, and articles which are available at their friendly neighborhood library, they would be aware that the main cause of voter apathy is the lack of political consciousness in our society, as a whole.

If government classes were expanded to more than one year of school, maybe even beginning in grammar school, then when it's time to vote, the voter could display even a small amount of intellect in their decisions. Sure, this plan does not promise immediate results; but then, the efforts we are showing now seem infinitesimal. In fact, the only flaw in this plan is that it does not help those who already graduated from school. However, not long after the plan is put into effect, those who have undergone the education will become adults and start raising families at which point the transition can be made from the classroom to the home, where this education should have originated in the first place.

This plan does hold promise of a renewed faith in government and the VOTE. A faith which could, very well, be revived in generations to come.