

According to the Literature: Why People Vote

Most Important (Non-Circumstantial) Factor

When an election is perceived as important, it gives people a reason to vote. Different factors that make an election important include:

- **The type of election:** A Presidential election, for example, creates importance
- **Candidate competition and choice:** The election is perceived as close and there are choices among the candidates.
- **The issues:** A voter believes a major issue is at stake. For example, higher than usual worries about a faltering economy or an unpopular war. Or more local issues.
- **Incumbent popularity:** An unpopular incumbent(s) or one that is very popular will give importance to the election.

Circumstantial Factors

What other factors affect whether or not a person is likely to vote in an upcoming election?

- **Parents Voted.** – There is a 50 point gap in turnout between those whose parents voted and those whose parents did not vote.
- **Education and Income Level.** This gap closes with age, but currently makes a 30 point difference in who votes.
- **Mobility.** People who have been living in their community for less than year are far less likely to vote.
- **Habitual voters.** Regular voters stay regular voters.

Mobilization Factors

Under what circumstances are voters likely to be turned out by mobilization efforts?

- If the voter is encouraged or helped to vote by someone they personally know



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and trust

- If the campaign reached out and asked for their vote.
- If the voter met the candidate; or, if the voter doesn't like the incumbent and there is another acceptable or preferred option running a competitive race.

Psychological Factors

- A major reason people vote is a combination of self-interest with altruism; that is, a belief that what might be good for you will bring benefit to others.
- Studies assert that voting becomes "rational" when linked to the idea that one vote could make a difference for a larger population, not just yourself or a smaller population.
- For some, voting is a positive civic action or connection to community

Factors Discouraging Voting

- **Lack of faith in electoral or voting system**
- **Dislike or distrust of government**
- **Lack of access**
- **Fear of failure.** When voters don't know the choices, don't know the voting process and would have trouble voting, they are more reluctant to turn out to vote on Election Day.

For more information, please visit the Voter Turnout section of www.nonprofitvote.org, under "Find Resources"



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Fact Sheet