“Understanding Declining Voter Turnout in Canada and Other Late-modern Capitalist Democracies: A Contemporary Analysis of T.H. Marshall’s Social Citizenship”

Wednesday, December 17, 2014
10:00AM
David Turpin Building, room A144

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Helga Hallgrímsdóttir, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Min Zhou, Department of Sociology, UVic (Member)
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External Examiner:
Dr. J. Scott Matthews, Department of Political Science, Memorial University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Marlea Clarke, Department of Political Science, UVic
Abstract

In this research, I undertake an analysis of the relationship between aggregate voter turnout and income inequality within late-modern capitalist democracies to better understand the problem of declining voter turnout in these societies. I analyse this relationship at the sub-national level using provincial-level Canadian data and at the national level through a sample of twenty-one nations. At both levels, cross-sectional time-series regression analyses of pooled data are applied. Findings are interpreted through a citizenship lens; specifically the work of T.H. Marshall (1950) and Esping-Andersen (1990), as both social and political inclusion are fundamental and constitutive elements of citizenship. Initial findings include a statistically significant negative relationship between income inequality and voter turnout, for both provincial and federal general elections in Canada (1976-2011); this relationship is also found at the national level in a sample of older democracies (1980-2013). The relationship holds using various measures of income inequality including the Gini coefficient and a range of income ratios. However, once time is controlled for in the model this relationship seems to disappear. This suggests a lack of support for the theory that income inequality has a direct impact on participation in the exercise of political power. Rather, a more fundamental factor or factors seem to be causing these societal shifts. I discuss alternate ways of understanding this relationship, including how declining voter turnout and income inequality might be related to the broader socio-political and economic changes associated with economic globalisation and the global spread of neo-liberal fiscal policies. I conclude that to better understand the relationship between voter turnout and income inequality further research is required.

Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships

2006/07 & 2007/08 – University of Victoria Fellowship
2007/08 – Pacific Century Graduate Scholarship
2008/09 & 2009/10 – Pacific Leaders Graduate Student Fellowship