The Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(Department of Sociology)

Lois Stewart

2003 Queen’s University MA
2001 University of Alberta BA

“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 Kristín Hallgrimsdóttir, Department of Sociology,
University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Min Zhou, Department of Sociology, UVic
(Member)
Dr. Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, School of Public Administration, UVic
(Outside Member)

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