Find Your Voice!

Political Participation
How would you define “politics”?

Politics:

a: the art or science of government;
b: the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing governmental policy

So what would political participation include?
Political Participation

Political participation is the way citizens participate in their government.

Click the image above to view Facts of Congress: Citizen Participation!

How do citizens participate in government?
Political Participation

There are many ways to participate in government. Today, we are going to look at ten ways in which citizens can participate in government:

- Becoming and staying informed on political issues
- Boycotting a product/business
- “Buycotting” a product
- Contacting media outlets
- Contacting public officials
- Peaceably protesting and/or petitioning the government
- Running for public office
- Voting
- Volunteering on a political campaign
- Joining an interest group
Becoming and staying informed on political issues

Why is it important to be informed about political issues?

Consider this: What if every voter cast their vote with no knowledge about the candidates or the issues? What if the people didn’t know what was going on in government?

Citizens should know what is going on in government:
- To hold government accountable
- To know what policies exist and are being proposed...
- ...and how these policies will impact the public
Boycotting

What does it mean to “boycott” something?

Boycotting is an expression of protest or disfavor with a person, organization, company, or country usually for political reasons by not dealing with or buying from that entity.

For example:
Following the BP oil spill in 2010, many residents of Florida and other gulf states “boycotted” BP gas; by not buying their gas, the people were sending a message that they were unhappy with BP and that the company and the government should change their drilling procedures/regulations to protect the environment, and, thus, the economies of those states.

How can this be used as political participation?

Buycotting

- Buycotting is the opposite of boycotting. A buycott is an active campaign to buy the products or services of a particular company or country to show support.

For example:
On August 1, 2012, people participated in a “buycott” of Chick-fil-a to show support for the company’s stance on same-sex marriage.

At the same time, many people have decided to boycott Chick-fil-a for their stance on same-sex marriage.

So how does “buycotting” send a political message?
Contacting media outlets

Media outlets are a way to make the voices of individuals heard. This gives people access to public forums to discuss, debate, and even protest issues.

- Websites
- Newspaper articles and opinion pieces
- Radio
- Television news programs
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Blogs
**Contacting public officials**

- Public officials are in office to represent *We the People*
  - This means they are accountable to the people and should listen to the ideas of their constituents.

How can you contact your public officials?
- Letters
- E-mails
- Phone calls
- Media outlets (newspaper, websites, blogs)

**Constituent:** the voters and other individuals being represented in government by an elected official.
Protesting and/or petitioning

- **Protesting** is the act of showing disapproval or disagreement with something.
- **Petitioning** is appealing to the government for change or other specific action.
- Organizations like [www.change.org](http://www.change.org) provide a forum for people to create and sign petitions on various topics at a local, state, national, and even international level.

Protesters gather outside of a Florida courthouse to protest a display of the Ten Commandments.

Have you ever heard of a protest or petition? What was it about?
Run for public office

- As citizens, we are allowed to run for public office as long as we meet the constitutional and legal requirements at the federal and state levels.
- This is a way to solve problems that impact our local community, represent the people in our community, and support causes we find important.
Voting

- Citizens eighteen years of age and older are allowed to vote in elections in the United States.

- Voting is a way to have a political voice in who represents you and who supports and/or opposes policies that will impact you and your community.
Volunteering for a political campaign

- Political parties are groups of people who share similar views on the role of government.
- By volunteering for a political campaign, you are able to show support for candidates and issues you find important.
Joining an interest group

- What is an interest group?
  - An interest group is a group of people who work together to support a cause and/or impact public policy.

  - This could mean encouraging certain public policies created by government...
  - ...or trying to influence individuals in government to vote in certain ways.
  - ...or funding a particular candidate...
  - ...or opposing certain public policies created by government...

Some Examples of Interest Groups:

- American Federation of Teachers
- VFW
- The Humane Society of the United States
- SADD
- Students Against Destructive Decisions