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<b>Lecture: What Is Political Participation?</b>	عنوان المحاضرة باللغة الانجليزية
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## محتوى المحاضرة

### Introduction

Good morning, students.

In today's lecture, we're going to discuss a central pillar of democracy: **Political Participation**.

Political participation is what allows ordinary people—not just politicians—to have a voice in how their country or community is governed. Whether you're voting, signing a petition, joining a protest, or discussing politics with friends, you are taking part in shaping the decisions that affect your life and the lives of others.

Understanding what political participation means—and why it matters—is essential for anyone who wants to be an **active, responsible citizen** in a democratic society.

### 1. What Is Political Participation?

At its core, **political participation** refers to:

**Any activity by an individual or group aimed at influencing decisions made by the government.**

It includes both **formal** and **informal** actions citizens take to express their opinions and shape political outcomes.

In the **social sciences**, political participation is often defined as:

**"An action taken by a citizen to influence the outcome of a political issue or process."**

## 2. Why Is Political Participation Important?

In a **democracy**, the legitimacy of the government comes from the **people**. Without public involvement, democratic systems can become weak or unresponsive.

Political participation is important because:

- It **connects citizens to government**.
- It allows individuals to **express their needs and preferences**.
- It ensures **accountability** of elected officials.
- It fosters a sense of **ownership and responsibility** within society.
- It strengthens **democratic culture** by encouraging civic engagement and dialogue.

In short, democracy cannot function properly without citizen participation.

## 3. Forms of Political Participation

There are many ways to participate politically. These can be grouped into **conventional** and **unconventional** forms.

### Conventional Participation

These are actions considered legal, accepted, and encouraged within the political system.

Examples include:

- **Voting** in elections
- **Contacting elected officials**
- **Joining a political party**
- **Running for office**
- **Campaigning** for a candidate or cause
- **Participating in public meetings or town halls**
- **Serving on a jury**

### Unconventional Participation

These are legal but often more confrontational or disruptive methods.

Examples include:

- **Protesting** or marching
- **Demonstrations or sit-ins**
- **Civil disobedience** (non-violent refusal to obey certain laws)
- **Strikes** (especially in labor or political movements)

## □ **Illegal Political Activities**

While not encouraged, it's important to note that some people resort to **illegal** political actions when they feel excluded or unheard.

Examples:

- **Political violence**
- **Vandalism**
- **Riots**
- **Terrorism** (extreme and rare)

These actions are **not** considered legitimate forms of political participation in democratic societies and are subject to legal consequences.

## **4. Who Participates and Why?**

Political participation is not equally distributed. Some people are more active than others. Factors influencing participation include:

- **Education** – Higher education often leads to higher participation.
- **Income** – Wealthier individuals are more likely to vote and get involved.
- **Age** – Older citizens tend to vote more often.
- **Race/Ethnicity** – Minority groups may face barriers but are increasingly active.
- **Interest in politics** – People who follow news and political debates are more likely to participate.
- **Trust in government** – People who believe their actions matter are more likely to get involved.

## **5. Barriers to Participation**

Even in democracies, there can be **obstacles** that prevent people from participating, such as:

- **Voter suppression** (e.g., strict ID laws, limited polling places)
- **Lack of political education**
- **Language or cultural barriers**
- **Disillusionment or distrust in government**
- **Socioeconomic inequality**

Part of maintaining a healthy democracy involves **removing these barriers** to ensure equal participation.

## **6. Political Participation in the United States**

The U.S. is often celebrated for its rich tradition of **civic engagement**. Examples of political participation in American history include:

- **The Civil Rights Movement** (1950s–60s): Marches, protests, and sit-ins to demand equal rights.
- **Voting Rights Act of 1965**: Result of sustained political participation by Black Americans and allies.

- **Women’s Suffrage Movement:** A decades-long campaign leading to the 19th Amendment in 1920.
- **Recent protests** (e.g., Black Lives Matter, March for Our Lives): Show how political participation continues to evolve.

Today, Americans participate in many ways—from voting in presidential elections to organizing around local issues like education or police reform.

## 7. The Role of Technology in Political Participation

In the modern world, **digital technology** has transformed how people participate.

Examples include:

- **Online petitions** (e.g., Change.org)
- **Social media activism** (hashtags, campaigns)
- **Virtual town halls**
- **Emailing or tweeting politicians**
- **Online fundraising for political causes**

Technology has made participation more **accessible**, especially for young people—but it also raises concerns about **misinformation, polarization, and cybersecurity**.

### Conclusion

To summarize:

- **Political participation** is any action that allows citizens to **influence government decisions**.
- It is **essential to democracy**—without it, the system fails to reflect the will of the people.
- Participation takes many forms, both **conventional** (like voting) and **unconventional** (like protests).
- Access and motivation to participate are shaped by **social, economic, and political** factors.
- As citizens, understanding and engaging in political participation is part of our **civic responsibility**.

### Discussion Questions

1. Which forms of political participation do you think are most effective today? Why?
2. What barriers to participation exist in your country or community?
3. Do you think social media has improved or harmed political participation?