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**Intro:** Welcome to the Let’s Talk Government Podcast that is provided for you by the Department of Government at Minnesota State University, Mankato located in Minnesota in the United States. I am your host Dr. Pat Nelson the chairperson of the Government Department. I want to thank you for joining us as we explore different topics about government. Some may be surprising to you and some may not, so please enjoy.

**Dr. Nelson:** Welcome to episode six of the Let's Talk Government podcast. Today, we are going to discuss why does voting matter? I am joined by Dr. Kevin Parsneau and Dr. Fred Slocum, who are professors in the political science program at Minnesota state university Mankato. They were guests on episode three, where we discussed Democrats and Republicans. So thank you for joining me today. So Kevin, do you want to start? Why does voting matter?

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** Okay. I know I threw a curve ball here, but I wanted to start with talking about an argument that exists in political science. That's essentially, um, let's talk about why voting may not be a good idea, but we may not be rational. Um, and then that should get us around to thinking about it in a different way. In other words, a lot of times political scientists. When we talk about, um, voting, we talk about something that's known as Down's as paradox. Uh, Anthony Donald was a famous political scientist who made this idea famous. And he essentially said that, uh, it's not rational to vote because, um, if you look at it from an economic personal self-interest level, um, the idea of advancing your own self-interest through voting is not practical. It's not rational in an economic sense. What Down's did was he pointed out that indeed, any individual voter has such a small chance of casting the deciding vote in any election, that it doesn't really make sense for them to spend that time casting that vote. Um, so even if a candidate, uh, would winning would mean that you would get like $10,000, let's just throw that number out there. Um, and it only took like 10 minutes to vote. You still would be unlikely to cast that one vote that caused your candidate to get over the top. And so it would make more sense to just sit home, cross your fingers and hope that your candidate wins and you get the $10,000. Anyway, you spend the five, 10 minutes doing something else. Um, reason I talk about this as, because I always bring this up in my us government class. I didn't want to leave it out of this particular discussion, but the point is not to talk people out of voting or to say that you should invoke. The point is that voting is inherently a social act rather than a selfish act. It's the act of being a citizen. Um, it's kind of like being part of a club or being part of a supporting a team or something along those lines. That it's a group thing that, that there's group rewards. And you should think of it as membership in a group. Um, you with voting you, aren't just thinking about yourself, you're thinking about your fellow citizens. You're thinking about your community. You're thinking about your country. You're thinking about what's best for your country. And so the way that political scientists ultimately got around this idea that it might be irrational is to say, Hey, you know, you don't just get from the vote by voting. You don't just get some sort of personal reward or even just the policies you want. But just the act of voting is an expression of the idea that it feels good to be a citizen in a democracy. You are doing your part, you're being patriotic. Um, you're showing your commitment to your political beliefs or your party. If that's important to you, it's a chance to express your opinions. Um, it's kind of a small act of being part of something bigger than yourself. So that's actually the reason to think about voting rather than think you're going to be the one casting, the deciding vote that causes a candidate. That's going to get something for you, um, personally. Um, and there's even the idea, right? People say, if you don't vote, you can't complain. Okay. Um, well, if you think about it, if you just go vote, then nobody can say that to you for two years or four years, you get to complain. That's a pretty low price for being able to complain, right. And being able to shut those people. I'm like, yep. I voted, I can complain, um, myself. And this is what I tell my students. And it's, it's true. I can bet on it sometime in the next, sometime in November, my mom is going to call after every election. At some point, my mom calls, she asked me if I voted and I said, well, I mean, now like mom, I'm, I'm 53 years old. You don't need to call me anymore. I'm a political science professor. Yes, I voted. But I assume a lot of you will have other people ask you if you vote and think about that future point in time. You want to be embarrassed. You want to have to tell your mom or your dad, your grandma and grandpa, you didn't vote. Or do you want to say, yeah, got it. And now I'm going to go complain

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Dont want to lie to your relatives inherently,

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** Inherently. It is not rational in an economic sense, but that means it's not selfish. It's a social political. And thanks for letting me get that out of my system.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well, actually that leads me into my next question that I'm going to direct at Fred. So it's it's you got it. Doesn't make sense to do that. But one of the other complaints about voting is why should I vote? Because the president is elected by electoral college. Can you talk about maybe the difference between the electoral college and popular vote and why we should still vote?

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Yes, I'll do my best with that. It's kind of a complex system, but, um, the electoral college, um, uh, is, uh, is a, uh, group consists of a group of electors who are decided on each state. Um, and there are 538 electors all told, um, and it takes, ed requires 270 or more electors to be elected president. So the, so the majority of electoral college is necessary to become president. Um, the number of electors per state ranges from three and the smallest States, um, like, you know, I think Montana is one of them, Kevin, right? So, um, up to 55 in California, um, and it's, and it's proportional to population to the state's population. Um, and also the district of Columbia has three electoral votes. And the total number of electoral votes is as 538. Um, with 270 required to when, um, within, almost within, within most States 48 out of 50 States, the candidate who wins the popular vote within the state wins all the electoral votes for that state winner take all. So what's called the unit role. Um, the acceptance to that are Nebraska and Maine, um, which, um, and Nebraska has, um, Nebraska and Maine a portion, some of their electoral votes by congressional district. Um, and Maine has two congressional districts, another, not a Southern district and the winner of, and Maine has four electoral, but it's all told for statewide. And, uh, two of them are a portion. Two of them go to the winner of the statewide vote. And then the Northern district gets one Northern district winner gets one electoral vote on the Southern district. It gets another electoral vote. And so there's a possibility of a split in Maine. The same applies in Nebraska, um, where there are three congressional districts and the winner of the statewide winner gets two electoral votes for winning a state. And then the winner of the, each of the three congressional districts gets one electoral vote per district one. So, um, and in both Maine and Nebraska, at this point, it is looking possible significantly possible that there will be a split and the electoral votes, um, um, especially in Nebraska, um, where, uh, Joe Biden is shown to be ahead in the polling and the second congressional district, which comprises the Omaha, the greater metropolitan Omaha area. And, um, and Donald Trump will win and the other two districts, um, and also when the state, so as possible that Nebraska will end up with a four, a portioning four electoral votes to Donald Trump and one to a Joe Biden based on Biden twinning, the second district, if that materializes. So, um, and main as, as a possibility also the last polling I saw, however, showed that Joe Biden was a well ahead in Southern Maine and slightly ahead in Northern Maine. So, um, it's um, so all of Maine's votes may go to Biden, but, um, but those two States allocate their, uh, electoral votes, partly by congressional district. The other 48 States are a winner take all, um, the, whoever wins the popular vote within the state went to all the state's electoral votes. Um, and so based on those rules, okay, winner take all within 48 out of 50 States, five, uh, 538 total electoral votes, 270 electoral votes required to win. Um, the, those, the.is the deciding factor in deciding who becomes president.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well, thanks, Fred. I think, and I think what was important there is that the electoral votes for the state are based on the popular vote within the state, so that you still have power in voting, um, because of the popular vote within the state. And this is only for president

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Only for president. Yeah. But this, all this, yeah. This does not cover congressional Lockton's, which are also important to, to vote in. Yeah. What were you going to say, Kevin?

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** I was just going to say, yes, you don't get to directly vote for the president, but you decide who's going to win your state. And whose people are going to go cast the votes from president. So that's

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Which part is electors. Yeah.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well, so that's, that's the president, you know, that's the one that's probably the most popular in this election. The one that we have the most visibility on, but what is the impact at the federal level? If we're not worried about, if we take the president of the pitcher, why should we vote? What does it impact the federal?

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Well, we can't take the president off the picture. I'm sorry.

**Dr. Nelson:** Well, no, we, when we think more of more than just the president. Okay.

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** In addition, in addition, you know, voting is important for, um, us house of representatives and for us Senate and the States that have Senate races like Minnesota does right now between, uh, Tina Smith and Jason Lewis. Um, and, um, so voting is important and those rights is as well. And we do not have a governor's race this year. We will have in 2022, um, you know, Minnesota is among many States that have their governors and statewide races, an odd number. And, and I'm sorry, not odd number, but, um, and, um, even numbered years opposite to the presidential election that has midterm, what are called midterm years, 2014, 2018, 2022. Right.

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** I would say at the federal level, particularly here in this, this part of Minnesota is house district one, um, at the, for the house of representatives seat, Minnesota district one, which is where we're at. Um, it's been extremely close elections for that house seat, um, between fi Han and Hagadorn last time. And then those two same guys are running again this time. Hagadorn one last time. But just prior to that, Hagadorn lost a very close election to, uh, Tim Walz who went on to be governor it's, it's been very tight here. Um, so if you want to vote in a, in a close house race in the US, um, you can't get closer than this one in Southern Minnesota. And we also have, you know, Senate seats are hugely important. And, um, there's a seat up for the Senate and Minnesota has a tradition, even though it generally has gone along with, uh, Democrats for the presidency. Um, we've had some awfully close Senate races, including a recount. I think it was 2008. Fred can correct me if I'm wrong.

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Yeah. It ended up being resolved in 2009, you know, without fracking with just a few hundred votes. Yeah. Just 312, 312 votes, Senate race between Franklin and, uh,

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** It came down to a recount and it was close. There was a lot of, a lot of,

**Dr. Nelson:** So literally every vote counted in that one, then.

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** they count all boats anyway. And recounted obviously too. Oh, I'll tell you one thing. If, if you were a Minnesota and I, I voted in Minnesota that year, if you were in Minnesota and you hadn't voted for your favorite candidate and you really care between Franklin and Coleman, a great deal. You'd have been sweating if you hadn't gone because you thought, Oh my Lord, what if it came down to just a couple of molds? Right.

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** And then in 2010, okay. There was a Minnesota governor's race, um, where, um, Mark Dayton prevailed over Tom Emmer. Um, what was that by 3000 something votes? I think like, um, it was, it was a very small margin statewide. Yeah. It was very, very close.

**Dr. Nelson:** Especially when you look at the population in Minnesota is what five and a half million. So just 3000 votes, a small, well, Fred, you kind of led us into the next level. So we talked about the impact of voting at the federal level. What's the impact of voting at the state level besides governor? What else do we vote for? Why would the votes matter about that?

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Well, state house and state Senate, um, and years when they happen this current year, 2020, uh, state senators are on the ballot, state, Senate seats are on the ballot. So I say, and also state house seats are also on the ballot. Um, every state representative is elected to a two-year term, and that is an even number of years there, their elections or an even number of years. Um, and so, um, that, that is mem members of the Minnesota state house. Um, and there are 134 of them. Um, and the current, uh, the house district that, um, includes Mankato is district 19 B and the district that includes North Mankato and St. Peter is 19 a and then also our area is within state Senate, district 19. Um, and our, um, and this year, the state Senate, all state senators are up for re-election this year, election or reelection this year and all state house members. Also, the governor is not however, the governor will be up for election or reelection in 2022.

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** And, and if you want to add a little bit more of a twist to it, I don't know how exciting this is, but in all the other States, Minnesota is the only state, I believe since the last election in 2018, where one chamber is controlled by one party and the other chamber is controlled by the other, at the state level. So the, the, the Mo the Minnesota house is controlled by Democrats. And it's a really close margin for the Minnesota Senate, which is controlled by Republicans. Minnesota is the only state like this. So if you want, if you want to be like teetering on the balance of control of state government besides the governor's office, um, that's up for grabs. And I think, I, I mean, I don't know how much other people in other States are gonna be paying that close attention to it, but it's the kind of thing that political scientists like to look at. And if you're in Minnesota, you get to be part of that too.

**Dr. Nelson:** So that's our, that's our, but only if you vote, right. So that's our legislative, um, elections at the state level. What else do we vote on at the state level then besides governor, we've got legislation? What about Judaism?

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Are there are other statewide offices, but there are elected in, um, not this year. Um, there are a lot in, um, midterm years, even numbered years that are not this year that do not include this year, but that would include attorney general for the state, for the state of Minnesota, uh, secretary of state and, um, a state auditor. Um, but those are, those will be up in 2022.

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** This, this year you have local elections with depends on where you live. You're going to have school boards, we're gonna have me oral races, city councils. Um, and, and I think, I think Pat, you may have mentioned this earlier, um, but it is right. Okay. I would, it would, it would be super exciting to cast the deciding ballot in a Senate race, or, you know, really close, but a local election is really one where you and a couple of dozen of your friends could go out and actually change who wins. Right, right, right. School, board election, or something like that. Um, and that doesn't mean that you can only do that by voting. It's still very unlikely, but by helping your favorite candidate or at least voting, um, those local races have so few voters, it just increases the, it increases any one person's influence on.

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Yeah. Correct. Local, local races have generally have low voter turnout. Um, and, um, so your impact is magnified, you know, to the extent that you vote in those local races. That's true.

**Dr. Nelson:** So let me ask about the impact of voting for judges, you know, the judicial branch at the state level and local level they're on the ballot. I mean, why is it important that people vote in those races as well?

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Well, the, um, you know, judge, not all judges are on the ballot, every election cycle, but it's generally a, um, you know, some judges are up for retention and, uh, one of them is, uh, you know, there's, what's called retention elections, um, as a system where a judge gets appointed to the court and this case, the Minnesota Supreme court, um, by the governor and, um, and then has to stand for a retention generally, I think every 10 years as it is in Minnesota. Um, and currently the judge up for retention election is Paul Tiesen, T H I S S E N. Um, um, and, um, and, and he is up for retention this, this election cycle. So, um, and then he was appointed by governor. Um, I think I'm not sure if it was walls or Dayton actually, but, um, but he was appointed to the court initially to the state Supreme court and, and now he is standing for retention. Um, and if he is retained, um, he will serve another 10 years on the court and then be up for retention, um, as well. Um, and I have not seen any other state court, Supreme court justices who are up for retention at this point. Um, I've only gotten literature about the TSN rates, so, um,

**Dr. Nelson:** But he does have a challenger. So it, so voting, if they, if people elected the challenger, um, then she could take his position

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** That would, that would, uh, they, they stand very different on their views of the rule of the court. Um, I think, uh, that, that if she were to win, that would be a major change. Everybody gets excited about the federal judges in the Supreme court while the Minnesota Supreme court is probably more important to any individual Minnesota, because your case is not going to wind up in the Supreme court of the United States, if you have issue in Minnesota. So it's really important. I mean, it's, it's an important post we focus because it gets all the attention. I'm like, uh, you know, uh, Coney Barrett, replacing Bader Ginsburg and so forth. Um, but the election, you actually get to vote on judges. Um, you can just think of yourself as a us Senator voting at the state level on this one, on this one election. Um, I highly recommend going and looking at the differences between uh Tiesen and, um, I can't remember McDonald.

**Dr. Nelson:** McDonald's yeah. Michelle McDonald. Yep. Yep. Yep. Well, and that is important because state Supreme courts can make rulings that are more narrow than the U S Supreme court. In fact, they've done it in the past. Um, especially, well, I know before because of law enforcement related items. All right. So obviously it is important to vote. So how does, how does we do here in the upper Midwest, in Minnesota for voter turnout? Do people go vote or don't they vote and why

**Dr. Fred Slocum:**They do go vote and, and here in Minnesota, um, the, the historical pattern has been that Minnesota has the highest voter turnout of any state in the U S

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** Yeah. I mean, I'm

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** The highest voter turnout of any state. Um, and I, you know, back when I, you know, I don't teach U S government anymore, but I've highlighted this fact. And, you know, in the past, when I taught U S government, you know, from 2015 and before, um, Minnesota has the highest voter turnout of any state in the country, um, due to what's called a moralistic, uh, political subculture, um, which is identified by historian Daniel LSR, who was born in Minnesota by the way, and, and grew up in Minneapolis. Um, and, um, but he noted that, um, that the moralistic sob culture encourages voter turnout by emphasizing that voter turnout is our civic as a citizen or civic duty. Um, and, um, Minnesota, more than any other state, um, in part because of the Scandinavian, uh, culture, um, you know, uh, you know, due to the digital Minnesota's history as being, um, you know, products of German and Scandinavian immigrants has emphasized voter turnout as a civic duty and kind of a community communitarian, uh, principle, if you will. And, um, and Minnesota has emphasized voter turnout more than any other state and has demonstrated it over time. And related to that, Minnesota has also among the highest percentage and, um, census turnout, um, in, uh, returning the census in 2010, Wisconsin was the highest, uh, turnout, state, and census and census participation, but Minnesota was close right behind just like a couple of tenths of a percentage point. And so I think that's part of that civic duty, um, notion.

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** Yeah, I I'm, uh, that's all that's, I, that Daniel L is our stuff is really fascinating. Um, think about it because it's not just, it's not just about immigration, but it's, then the people that follow after the initial immigrants. Um, the thing that's interesting to me, I've I moved here from Montana now it's been 20 years, but Montanans, we usually wound up being about fifth or sixth on the list. And I think Minnesota has been number one every single year I was here. And I, I knew enough people in Montana that I think we imagined that we might turn out in high enough levels to, to catch up to a state like Minnesota. Now that I live here, I don't think that's going to happen because there will be, you'll hear news stories on election day, uh, you know, and a normal election. It would be like, uh, some old lady in a Dyna couldn't vote today were all very upset.

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** Someone called a secretary of state, you know, this is a big thing in Minnesota. And I used to think that it was just that I agree Fred about the civic mindedness, but sometimes I think Minnesotans vote in such high numbers so that they can, they can beat Wisconsin and Iowa. Um, and if that's the case, we're, you know, we're having a different election here because of the pandemic and, you know, Minnesota wins under normal conditions, but as Minnesota gonna win with the pandemic, I, I suspect they will. I wouldn't be surprised if it is even bigger.

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** I think the state's political culture will. Yeah. I mean, we, we have, you know, every state has experienced increases in COVID-19 this fall, but I, I don't think, I suspect that's not going to materially influence Minnesota's possession as the number one voting turnout state in the country. Um, uh, I think the political culture of the state is going to prevail and, um, maybe I'm overly optimistic, but, um, but, um, I'm going to go out on a limb and, um, and, uh, be threatened with song with having that sought off if I'm wrong.

**Dr. Nelson:** All right. My political scientist, I'm going to ask for your opinion here, as we're kind of wrapping this up. So how do you think nationwide? We know Minnesota has a really good history, but how do you think nationwide, um, the voting and elections are going to be impacted by COVID by more early voting, mail-in voting versus people showing up at polling places. Why don't you give me your opinion on it here? Um,

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** I mean, it was, it was hard to guess, but as, as numbers are coming in on, uh, States are setting records for early voting and absentee balloting, which you would expect since that's been a main promoted thing. Um, but the numbers are so large, they're even larger than they're expecting. So I think somewhere about 138 million people voted in 2016. Um, and I, but I think, uh, estimates, I've heard people think 140 to 160 million voters nationwide this year. Um, so like think of 150 as the average, and that's a substantial increase that that's more than you can account for by population.

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Yeah. Based on population increase. Yeah, go ahead.

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** And I wonder if, to some degree absentee ballot and getting so much focus and people having time before the election to do things is not going to overall increase voter turnout just on the idea that, you know, 2018, 2016, a lot of people probably thought, Oh, I'm going to go vote. I'm going to go vote. And then on election day, who knows, you know, what, something at work, uh, you know, it's not with family

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Work and it's may interfere

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** Already banked their votes beforehand. Right.

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** I think absentee and mail-in voting gives, uh, you know, it's, it's, it is absolutely unprecedented level this year, um, compared to previous election cycles, you know, pre COVID. Um, and it is giving people, I think, an additional Avenue to voting, um, that, you know, the, the traditional Avenue was go to the polling place on election day, you know, um, and, you know, vote absentee or, um, you know, only in rare cases, but we're seeing unprecedented levels of bail voting, um, and absentee ballot voting now. Um, and, um, I D I also want to spotlight on what's called the, um, blue shift. Um, the, um, what what's, what's what seems a significant possibility in many States is that, um, absentee and, um, early voting will favor the Democrats. Um, and, uh, election day voting will favor the Republicans, um, in part, because of the culture of hostility towards a mask wiring and, um, you know, and denial of, uh, a corner virus that is prominent, that is prominent among their, on the political right today, um, that, um, and, uh, you know, th the sense that, you know, coronavirus is all a hoax that's liberal, you know, effort to destroy Donald Trump and defeat him and so on. But, um, so I, I, I suspect that, uh, election day voting in person will probably favor Republicans and many States, however, um, pre election day voting absentee and by bail, um, may favor Democrats. And so it will be interesting to see, you know, how that plays out, um, on, you know, um, you know, do those two factors, um, to what extent do they, um, countervail each other

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** On election day, the Coutts on election day might make it look like Donald Trump has a slight lead, but then as absentee ballots come in, I mean, as absences,

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** Okay. Balance are likely to be counted later as one of them.

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:** And that was my wind up making Joe. But I think the main thing is just wait until they're all counted. You may not know on election night, like usual old tradition of watching Tim Russert with his blue markers and things. Yeah. That's even a lot. Yeah.

**Dr. Fred Slocum:** That may be a thing of the past. You know, it may take some days to sort out the outcome of the presidential race and, and Trump knows this, you know, he's been, he's been saying basically, uh, count all is about set. You count only the votes that are available up to a certain point and on election night and declare, so he can declare himself the winner. Um, but, um,

**Dr. Kevin Parsneau:**I'm going to bring both of you back to talk about examining election results after the votes are done, and we should have a fun conversation. I know. I just hope it's not, I hope it's not so soon that we, well, we might have to adjust our schedule to record, but saying, well, thank you both for talking about why voting matters. And like I said, I would definitely we'll have these two back talking about examining election results. So can I add one thing before we go? Yes, go ahead. Um, just one of the things that really has always been on my mind is, especially back when I was in college and at that time, Ronald Reagan was president. Um, but if you ever talked to older people about voting, people are so happy to tell you things like I voted for FDR, or I voted for Eisenhower, or I voted for Reagan and the person doesn't even have to win. I mean, I've heard old people talking about, Oh, I voted for McGovern, right. Or, or Willistone, if you want to get at the state level. Um, and people have fond memories of having done that. Right. So you might want to think of yourself in the future and think, do I want to be the person that was able to say this, right. And, and that, that is what influences me on it. So thanks for the extra time Pat. I just had to put that in.

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