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MOBILIZATION,
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THE POLITICAL LOGIC OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

While spontaneous popular action warms the heart of any good democrat, a moment's reflection shows that the people initiate little of what we normally call participation.... Acts of participation are stimulated by elites—if not by the government, then by parties, interest groups, agitators, and organizers.

Jack Nagel¹

Why do people get involved in politics? Why do some people participate in politics while others do not? Why are citizens deeply committed to participation in politics at some times and wholly passive at other times?

We offer two answers, one personal, one political. Working from one side, the personal, we trace participation to the individual characteristics of citizens. People participate in politics when they get valuable benefits that are worth the costs of taking part. Working from the other side, the political, we trace participation to the strategic choices of political leaders. People participate in politics when political leaders coax them into taking part in the game. Both sides are necessary: Strategic mobilization without individual motivation is impossible, and individual motivation without strategic mobilization is illogical.

The complex interaction of the personal and the political stems from the nature of democratic politics. We view democratic politics as a struggle for political power among competing political

¹Jack Nagel, *Participation* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1987), pp. 3–4.

leaders.² In such a system, citizen activism has *two* beneficiaries: It is a source of policy benefits for citizens and a source of political advantage for leaders. Accordingly, to understand political participation, we must appreciate how it is used, both by individual citizens and by their leaders.

In this chapter, we lay out the political logic of citizen activism in politics. First, working from the individual perspective, we lay out the benefits and costs of political participation and show how individual resources, interests, preferences, identifications, and beliefs determine the relative attractions of the benefits and the relative burdens of the costs. Next, we consider individuals in political society. We show how the social nature of political life affects the individual rewards of involvement. We show how the social nature of political life makes people accessible and amenable to the appeals of political leaders. And we show how the strategic choices of political leaders determine who participates and when.

Political participation, we conclude, cannot be explained entirely by the orientations and endowments of individual citizens. The competitive pressures of the democratic system encourage political leaders to mobilize their fellow citizens, and if we are to understand participation, we must also comprehend their choices.

Individual Influences on Political Participation

People participate in politics for a variety of personal reasons. Some people participate because it does not cost them much; some participate because they receive lots of benefits. As stated, this personal explanation of political activism is both obvious and tautological: It explains everything because it rules out nothing.

Even so, as political theorist Brian Barry noted, “it is still a quite potent tautology, because it can be combined with empirical assertions to produce significant implications.”³ Our task in this

²Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950); Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957); Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

³Brian Barry, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970), p. 33; for a similar approach, see John Mark Hansen, “The Political Economy of Group Membership,” *American Political Science Review* 79 (March 1985), pp. 79–96.

section is to supply empirical linkages, to develop the implications of different resources for the relative costs of participation, and to develop the implications of different interests and attitudes for the relative benefits of participation.

Costs and Resources

Participation in politics puts demands on people's scarce resources. Working on a political campaign requires time; writing a letter requires verbal acuity; making a donation to a candidate requires money; signing a petition requires a sense of personal competence. Participation in politics, that is, has a price, a price that is some combination of money, time, skill, knowledge, and self-confidence.

Some people are better able to pay the price than others. In economic life people with greater resources can consume more of (almost) everything, from fancy meals to fast cars to flashy clothes. In social life people with greater resources can do more of (almost) everything, from entertaining friends to joining organizations to volunteering at schools, churches, and charities.⁴ So, too, in political life. People with abundant money, time, skill, knowledge, and self-confidence devote more resources to politics, not because politics gives them more in return (although it might) but because they can more easily afford it. Many of the most familiar empirical regularities in American politics follow from this simple observation.

First, the wealthy vote, write, campaign, and petition more than the poor.⁵ This should come as no surprise. Citizens with lots of income can simply afford to do more—of everything—than citizens with little money. The wealthy have discretionary income that they can contribute directly to political parties, candidates, political action committees, and other causes. Moreover, money is fungible—it

⁴Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948); Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), chap. 11; Howard V. Hayghe, "Volunteers in the U.S.: Who Donates the Time?" *Monthly Labor Review* (February 1991), pp. 17–23.

⁵Among many, Verba and Nie, *Participation in America*, chap. 8; Raymond E. Wolfinger and Steven J. Rosenstone, *Who Votes?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 20–26.

can be freely converted into other political resources that make it easier for people to take part in politics. A car is not a necessary condition for political action, for example, but having one makes it much easier to get to a school board meeting, a political rally, or a candidate's campaign headquarters. Money can be used to hire someone to do the daily chores—to clean the house, buy the groceries, cook dinner, baby-sit the kids—and free up time for politics. Thus, if people want to participate in politics, money makes it easier for them to do so.

The costs of political activity can also be measured in opportunities forgone. Taking part in politics requires that people forfeit or postpone other activities, and these opportunity costs of participation are higher for some people than for others.⁶ Because the resources of the wealthy are more ample, they do not face the same hard tradeoffs that the poor face every day of their lives. As important and interesting as politics may be, its significance pales in comparison with paying the rent, maintaining the car, keeping the children in school, and putting food on the table. In short, for people whose resources are limited, politics is a luxury they often cannot afford, particularly when political outcomes may have only a modest impact on their own economic situations.⁷

Second, the more educated are more likely to take part in politics than the less educated.⁸ Again, no surprise. In the United States,

⁶In general, politics does not compete very well with the other things that demand people's attention. See John P. Robinson and Philip E. Converse, "Social Change Reflected in the Use of Time," pp. 17–86 in Angus Campbell and Philip E. Converse, eds., *The Human Meaning of Social Change* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1972); John P. Robinson, Philip E. Converse, and Alexander Szalai, "Everyday Life in Twelve Countries," pp. 113–44 in Alexander Szalai, ed., *The Use of Time: Daily Activities of Urban and Suburban Populations in Twelve Countries* (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1972).

⁷Wolfinger and Rosenstone, *Who Votes?*, p. 20; Steven J. Rosenstone, "Economic Adversity and Voter Turnout," *American Journal of Political Science* 26 (February 1982), pp. 25–46; Benjamin Radcliff, "The Welfare State, Turnout, and the Economy: A Comparative Analysis," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, 1991.

⁸Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960), chap. 17; Verba and Nie, *Participation in America*, chap. 8; Wolfinger and Rosenstone, *Who Votes?*, pp. 18–26.

the educational experience fosters democratic values and nurtures a sense of citizen competence, both of which encourage participation.⁹ More important, however, education provides skills that facilitate participation in politics. As Wolfinger and Rosenstone argue, "education imparts information about politics and cognate fields and about a variety of skills, some of which facilitate political learning. . . . Schooling increases one's capacity for understanding and working with complex, abstract and intangible subjects, that is, subjects like politics."¹⁰ Skills in research, writing, and speaking, developed through education, help citizens to negotiate the maze of demands that participation places on them. To cast a ballot, citizens must figure out how to register to vote; they must make sense of the candidates and issues; they must locate polling places. To write a letter to a senator, citizens must compose a persuasive message once they have identified the senator and looked up her address. For the grade-school educated, these are daunting tasks; for the college educated, they are easy. The better educated have been better trained to participate in politics.

Finally, those with many years of formal schooling are substantially more likely to read newspapers, follow the news, and be politically informed, all of which makes them more aware of the opportunities to participate and more likely to possess information with which to do so.

This is not to say that politically useful knowledge and skills derive only from the classroom. Lessons picked up from the "school of hard knocks" can compensate for formal education, imparting equivalent knowledge, experience, and skills.¹¹ With experience comes familiarity with the political process, familiarity with and increased attachment to the political parties and their candidates, and familiarity with the ins and outs of political action: what people need

⁹One of the unusual features of American schools is their historic emphasis on citizenship education, an emphasis born in response to the massive waves of immigration in the nineteenth century. Wolfinger and Rosenstone elaborate more fully the connection between education and citizenship values in *Who Votes?*, chap. 2. Here, this effect is considered to work through the attitudes it fosters: a sense of duty and a sense of efficacy.

¹⁰Wolfinger and Rosenstone, *Who Votes?*, p. 18.

¹¹Wolfinger and Rosenstone, *Who Votes?*, chaps. 2-3.

to do to take part and where people need to go to do it.¹² Hence, older citizens vote, write, campaign, and petition more than young citizens who have had less experience in politics.

Finally, people with a sense of political efficacy are more likely to take a more active part in politics than those without this belief. By efficacy we mean both a sense of personal competence in one's ability to understand politics and to participate in politics (what political scientists call internal efficacy), as well as a sense that one's political activities can influence what the government actually does (external efficacy).¹³ Some people come to believe in their personal competence because they have been told again and again, by parents, teachers, and friends, that their efforts make a difference. Other people come to believe in their personal competence because they have acted and in fact found their actions consequential. As defined, it is already evident that efficacy is an important political resource.¹⁴ Working in a campaign or signing a petition involves some sense that the cause is not hopeless (even if the particular effort is). Participation is a waste of time if one does not believe that one's

¹²Philip E. Converse, *The Dynamics of Party Support: Cohort-Analysing Party Identification* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976); John M. Strate, Charles J. Parrish, Charles D. Elder, and Coit Ford III, "Life Span Civic Development and Voting Participation," *American Political Science Review* 83 (June 1989), pp. 444-64; John M. Strate, Charles J. Parrish, Charles D. Elder, and Thomas Jankowski, "Life Span Civic Development and Campaign Participation," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1990.

¹³For a discussion of the distinction between internal and external efficacy see Robert E. Lane, *Political Life: Why and How People Get Involved in Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1959); George I. Balch, "Multiple Indicators in Survey Research: The Concept of 'Sense of Political Efficacy,'" *Political Methodology* 1 (1974), pp. 1-43; Stephen C. Craig, "Efficacy, Trust, and Political Behavior: An Attempt to Resolve a Lingering Conceptual Dilemma," *American Politics Quarterly* 7 (April 1979), pp. 225-39; and Stephen C. Craig and Michael A. Maggionto, "Measuring Political Efficacy," *Political Methodology* 8 (1982), pp. 85-109.

¹⁴Among others, Campbell et al., *The American Voter*, chap. 5. It is so evident, in fact, that one fears circularity: People participate because they feel efficacious, but they feel efficacious because they participate. Analysts have long seen citizen participation as productive of efficacy; see Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) and Steven E. Finkel, "Reciprocal Effects of Participation and Political Efficacy: A Panel Analysis," *American Journal of Political Science* 29 (November 1985), pp. 891-913. More troubling is the argument

(continued)

efforts make a material difference to political outcomes. Those who have confidence that their participation will make a difference are more likely to act than those who lack that basic confidence.¹⁵

In summary, the costs of political activism affect different people in different ways, depending on their resources. For people with abundant money, time, knowledge, skills, and efficacy, involvement costs very little. Consequently, they participate more.

Rewards, Interests, and Beliefs

People participate in politics because they get something out of it. The rewards take many forms.¹⁶ Participants sometimes enjoy *material benefits*, tangible rewards that are easily converted into money, like a government job or a tax break. Those active in politics can also receive *solidary benefits*, intangible rewards that stem from social interaction, like status, deference, and friendship. And participation can also yield *purposive benefits*, intrinsic rewards that derive from the act of participation itself, such as a sense of satisfaction from having contributed to a worthy cause.

(continued)

that the relationship between involvement and efficacy might be an artifact of human psychology. Some work in psychology has cast doubt on the idea that people can identify their internal attitudinal states (e.g., Richard E. Nisbett and Timothy D. Wilson, "Telling More than We Can Know: Verbal Reports of Mental Processes," *Psychological Review* 84 (May 1977), pp. 231-59). When asked to identify their internal attitudinal states, they instead infer their attitudes from their own behavior (see Daryl J. Bem, "Self-Perception: An Alternative Interpretation of Cognitive Dissonance Phenomena," *Psychological Review* 74 (May 1967), pp. 183-200; and Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980). The concern, then, is that survey respondents infer beliefs from their behaviors: "I must feel like my actions make a difference because otherwise all of the time I spend participating in politics would be wasted."

¹⁵Among more recent arguments, Terry M. Moe, *The Organization of Interests* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Paul R. Abramson and John H. Aldrich, "The Decline of Electoral Participation in America," *American Political Science Review* 76 (September 1982), pp. 502-21.

¹⁶James Q. Wilson, *Political Organizations* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), chap. 3; Peter B. Clark and James Q. Wilson, "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 6 (September 1961), pp. 129-66; Robert H. Salisbury, "An Exchange Theory of Interest Groups," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 13 (February 1969), pp. 1-32.

This typology, suggested by James Q. Wilson, gives an idea of the great variety of possible benefits from participation, but for our purposes, the distinction between collective and selective rewards is more important.¹⁷ Collective rewards, on the one hand, benefit every resident of a particular place or every member of a particular group, whether she took part in politics or not. Most, but not all, are material. A clean air bill, for example, benefits every resident of Los Angeles, New York, or Denver. A residential parking ordinance benefits every resident of the neighborhoods surrounding a hospital. A mortgage interest deduction for homeowners benefits every homeowner, homebuilder, and realtor. An end to the ban on interstate sales of firearms benefits every gun owner and gun dealer. People receive collective rewards regardless of whether they participate. Selective rewards, on the other hand, benefit only those people who take part in politics. Some selective rewards are material: Government jobs in Brooklyn, for instance, may go exclusively to campaign workers. Others are solidary: Recognition as a leader falls only to neighborhood activists. Many are purposive: A sense of having done one's duty accrues only to those who have done their duty. Unlike collective rewards, people receive selective rewards because they participate; by the same token, people forgo selective rewards because they do not.¹⁸

Each form of citizen participation in politics offers a unique mix of collective and selective benefits. Citizens find each combination of benefits more or less worthwhile depending on their interests, preferences, identifications, and beliefs. A man who works for the park district of the city of Chicago might view campaign work as a requirement of his job. A woman who lives on a farm in west Texas might see attendance at county commission meetings as a rare opportunity for visiting with friends and neighbors. A man who has been socialized with a deep sense of obligation to participate

¹⁷This distinction has a long history in economics, where the equivalent terms are "public" and "private" goods, but it was most influentially applied to the problem of political action by Mancur Olson, Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

¹⁸The definitional distinction between collective and selective rewards—namely, whether people have to take part in order to get them—will become very important to our argument later on.

in the community might see voting as a way to live up to his duty. Depending on their needs, certain kinds of participation make more sense for certain people than other kinds of participation.¹⁹

These observations help to structure our ideas about the role that interests, preferences, identifications, and beliefs play in promoting participation in politics.

First, people who have a direct stake in political outcomes are obviously more likely to participate in politics than people who do not have such an immediate stake.²⁰ Parents who have children in public schools, for instance, are much more likely to attend school board meetings than other people, simply because the school board makes decisions that affect the welfare of their children directly, broadly, and consequentially. Although everybody in the community has an interest in the financial decisions that school boards make, only parents typically care very much about such matters as curricular requirements, athletics and activities, bus routes, crossing guards, and dress codes. People with direct interests anticipate greater material rewards, both collective and selective, from their actions.

Second, people who strongly prefer one political outcome to another are more likely to enter politics than people who have weaker preferences.²¹ Voters consistently complain that American elections offer no choices, only echoes. Their complaint, however, is not always on the mark. Some people see differences where others see none. For many Americans in 1948, Harry Truman and Thomas Dewey were Tweedledum and Tweedledee: Both supported the New Deal welfare state and both were anticommunist cold warriors. But for members of industrial labor unions the differences between them were clear: Truman was the defender of the National Labor Relations Act against the anti-union Republicans in Congress. Likewise, the system sometimes offers a real choice. Although voters might be

forgiven for confusing Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter in 1976, few could fail to discern the differences between Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater in 1964 or Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale in 1984.

The variations in preferences are important. Those who strongly prefer one candidate or one party or one policy to another anticipate greater policy benefits from the outcome than those whose preferences are weaker. Accordingly, they are more likely to get involved in politics.

Third, people who identify closely with political contenders are more likely to participate in politics than people whose psychological identifications are weaker.²² This may sound, on its face, like a restatement of the preceding point, but it is not. Before, we argued that strong preferences heighten the value of extrinsic rewards of participation, of material and solidary benefits that arise as a consequence of political action. Here, we argue that strong psychological attachments heighten the value of intrinsic rewards from participation, of the internal satisfactions that derive from taking part. Just as sports fans take pleasure in cheering on their favorite teams, so partisans take pleasure in acting on behalf of their favorite politicians, parties, or groups. The more committed the fans, the more lusty their cheers; the more committed the partisans, the more likely their participation.

Because of their psychological attachments, then, issue activists are more likely to write letters to their representatives in Congress. Because of their psychological attachments, likewise, strong Democrats and strong Republicans are more likely to be active in elections than independents or weak partisans. Political participation appeals more to the strongly than the weakly committed because the strongly committed derive greater personal satisfaction from it.

Finally, some people hold beliefs and preferences that motivate their participation internally. The most common is a sense of citizen duty. Because of their socialization by family, teachers, or friends, some people believe it is their responsibility to participate in politics—and in particular to vote—regardless of whether their participation has any effect on the outcome. Obviously, people who

¹⁹Wilson, *Political Organizations*, chap. 3.

²⁰Wolfinger and Rosenstone, *Who Votes?*, chap. 5; Raymond E. Bauer, Itiel de Sola Pool, and Lewis Anthony Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy: The Politics of Trade*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972), chaps. 9–13.

²¹Campbell et al., *The American Voter*, chap. 5; John F. Zipp, "Perceived Representativeness and Voting: An Assessment of the Impact of 'Choices' vs. 'Echoes,'" *American Political Science Review* 79 (March 1985), pp. 50–61.

²²Campbell et al., *The American Voter*, chap. 6; Verba and Nie, *Participation in America*, chap. 12; Abramson and Aldrich, "The Decline of Electoral Participation."

hold these beliefs are more likely to participate: Taking part makes them feel that they have discharged their obligations.²³ The purposive rewards of participation are selective.

Thus, the benefits of political participation appeal to different people in different ways, depending on their interests, preferences, identifications, and beliefs. People who perceive more at stake in politics—because policies affect them more, identities beckon them more, options appeal to them more, or duty calls them more—participate more in politics.

People get involved in politics, then, in predictable ways: Because of their resources, some people can better afford politics than others; because of their interests, preferences, identifications, and beliefs, some people get more benefit from politics than others. Clearly, the two work together. No matter how valuable the benefits of participation, people cannot take part unless they have sufficient resources to do so. No matter how ample the resources, people will not take part unless they get more out of politics than other pursuits. Taken together, these considerations help to explain why some people take part in politics and others do not.

Political Influences on Participation: Strategic Mobilization

When applied to the question of *which* people participate in politics, the individual explanations of political activism that we have just discussed seem to satisfy. But when applied to the question of *when* people participate in politics, their inadequacies begin to show.

Suppose, for instance, that people participate in politics because of the solidary or the purposive benefits they receive—the approba-

²³Campbell et al., *The American Voter*, chap. 5; William H. Riker and Peter C. Ordeshook, "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting," *American Political Science Review* 62 (March 1968), pp. 25–42. Again, the connection between belief in a duty to participate and participation itself is distressingly close. Undoubtedly, many people vote because they believe it is the right thing to do. Still, many people might identify their duty as a reason for their participation because they cannot identify any other reason for it. As with a sense of personal efficacy, people may infer a sense of duty from their participation: "I have voted in every election in the last ten years; thus, I must believe that it is important to vote." See the references in note 14.

tions of their friends or the satisfactions from a duty performed. It stands to reason, then, that participation should not fluctuate very much from month to month or from year to year because fundamental social identifications and political beliefs change only slowly, if at all. The same people should turn out for politics time and time again.

Yet this prediction is wrong, as we will show in Chapter 3. Both the level of political participation and the people who participate change significantly from month to month, year to year, and election to election. That being the case, we need to turn to the *political* circumstances that change over time and induce people to take part at one moment and not another: the personal qualities and policy stands of the candidates for office; the issues that appear and disappear on the political agenda; the actions of the politicians, parties, and interest groups that compete for political advantage. These considerations, in turn, lead to an explanation of political participation that emphasizes the collective benefits that people receive from political outcomes, such as military spending, abortion rights, tax breaks, and other public policies. But this line of thinking immediately runs up against two deadly logical conundrums.

Two Paradoxes: Participation and Rational Ignorance

The first difficulty is the famous "paradox of voting," or, more broadly, the "paradox of participation in politics."²⁴ If people are rational, the paradox holds, and if they receive only collective benefits, they will not turn out to vote, and for very good reason: The result of the election will be the same whether they participate or not. In any election, hundreds or thousands or millions of voters will cast ballots; the chance that a single ballot will determine the result is exceedingly small. In 1960, for example, the closest presidential election in the twentieth century, John F. Kennedy's victory over Richard M. Nixon hinged on 115,000 votes, only 0.2 percent of the total, but still a very large number. At the same time, casting a vote is costly. At a minimum, voters must spend time, energy,

²⁴Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, chap. 14; Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, chap. 1; Barry, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy*, chap. 2.

and money rousting themselves to polling places and marking their ballots. Thus, even if the outcome of the election really matters to people, trying to affect it does not make any sense. Rational people choose the most efficient means to achieve their goals; they do not knowingly waste their scarce resources. Voting, it follows, is irrational: It consumes resources but achieves no results that would not be achieved otherwise.

The same paradox holds with equal force for other forms of political activity. Objectively, the probability that any one person's one lonely act will determine a political outcome is vanishingly small. One more letter mailed to Congress, one more person attending a meeting, one more dollar sent to a campaign, one more person persuaded to vote will not make a bit of difference to the result, but it will cost the participant. If people receive only collective benefits from political outcomes, therefore, they will not participate in politics. Political action, if it occurs, is irrational.²⁵

The second difficulty is "rational ignorance."²⁶ If political involvement is irrational, so, for much the same reason, is political learning. First, information about politics and government must be gathered, and its cost is far above zero. Washington is a distant place, government is a complicated business, and the press can be relied on to cover only a fraction of what the government is up to. Likewise, candidates for office are unfamiliar people, their records are voluminous, and the media are quite selective in their coverage of the campaigns. Second, the value of information, once obtained, is very small, precisely because of the paradox of participation in politics. Even if voters had lots of information about the issues debated in Washington and the issues contested in campaigns, what good would it do them? It makes no sense for them to act on it anyway: The outcome will be the same regardless. Thus, citizens have few incentives to inform themselves about politics. They stay "rationally ignorant."

Thus, the question of when people involve themselves in politics cannot be addressed solely within the context of individual motives and behaviors. One approach fails to provide an answer,

²⁵On this more general point, Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, chap. 1. See also Barry, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy*, chap. 2.

²⁶Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, chaps. 12–13.

and the other gets tangled in its own logic. Instead, the explanation of participation, to make any sense, must move beyond the worlds of individuals to include family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers, plus politicians, parties, activists, and interest groups.

The Social Nature of Political Life

With few exceptions, people are deeply embedded in a web of social relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Within these circles, people convey expectations to others about the kinds of behaviors, some political, that are appropriate and desirable. Sometimes they relate their expectations overtly: They ask acquaintances directly to do something. More often they relate their expectations subtly: They simply raise their concerns. What's more, people in these networks reward those who comply with expectations, and they sanction those who do not. They praise, esteem, and owe favors to those who do act, and reprove, shun, and take note of those who do not. Social networks, in short, create solidary rewards and bestow them, selectively, on those who act in the common interest.²⁷

For most people, the obligations and rewards of friendship, camaraderie, neighborliness, and family ties are very powerful. People want to be accepted, valued, and liked. As a consequence, social networks play a key role in overcoming the paradoxes of participation and rational ignorance.²⁸

²⁷Wilson, *Political Organizations*, chap. 3; Robert Huckfeldt, "Political Participation and the Neighborhood Context," *American Journal of Political Science* 23 (June 1979), pp. 579–92; Robert Huckfeldt and John Sprague, "Political Parties and Electoral Mobilization: Political Structure, Social Structure, and the Party Canvass," *American Political Science Review* 86 (March 1992), pp. 70–86; Carole Jean Uhlaner, "Relational Goods' and Participation: Incorporating Sociability into a Theory of Rational Action," *Public Choice* 62 (September 1989), pp. 253–85; Stephen Knack, "Civic Norms, Social Sanctions, and Voter Turnout," *Rationality and Society* 4 (April 1992), pp. 133–56.

²⁸Gerald M. Pomper and Loretta Sernekos, "The 'Bake Sale' Theory of Voting Participation," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1989; Huckfeldt, "Political Participation and the Neighborhood Social Context"; Huckfeldt and Sprague, "Political Parties and Electoral Mobilization"; Christopher B. Kenney, "Political Participation and Effects from the Social Environment," *American Journal of Political Science* 36 (February 1992), pp. 259–67.

Social networks address rational ignorance. They provide information.²⁹ Participants in family, work, and friendship groups communicate, and in doing so they learn about politics from others in the group. They likewise reward contributions of information. Family, work, and friendship groups favor those who offer their knowledge to the collegium. Thus, because of social networks, each person bears the cost of collecting only a fraction of the political information she receives.

Too, social networks address the paradox of participation. People take part in family, work, and friendship groups on a regular and sustained basis. Consequently, members of social networks can identify readily those who comply with social expectations and those who do not, that is, those who vote and write and attend and otherwise participate in politics and those who do not. In turn, because members of social networks can distinguish participants from pikers, they can also selectively reward the one and sanction the other. Finally, because they can reward and sanction discerningly, they can also create and enforce expectations that many will act in concert.³⁰ Although one letter to Congress is not likely to have any impact, one thousand letters is, and although one vote for governor is not likely to make a difference, one hundred thousand votes is. Social networks, the everyday groupings of friends, family, and associates, make effective, coordinated, political action possible.

They do not, however, make effective, coordinated, political action probable. Most citizens are not in positions to know what is occurring in politics, nor do they know anybody who is. Neither they nor their families, friends, and co-workers really know whether their interests are enough at stake at the moment to warrant political action—of whatever kind—being undertaken to advance or defend them.

²⁹Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965); Bonnie H. Erickson and T. A. Nosanchuk, "How an Apolitical Association Politicizes," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 27 (May 1990), pp. 206–19; Robert Huckfeldt and John Sprague, "Networks in Context: The Social Flow of Political Information," *American Political Science Review* 81 (December 1987), pp. 1198–1216.

³⁰Russell Hardin, *Collective Action* (Baltimore: Resources for the Future, 1982), chaps. 10–11; Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

Others in the system have such knowledge close at hand. Because they are in the thick of political battles, political leaders, be they candidates, party officials, interest groups, or activists, know exactly what is on the political agenda and exactly how it affects people. And because they are in the thick of political battles, they have a tangible incentive to convey such information to the people who can help them to win.

For politicians, political parties, interest groups, and activists, citizen involvement is an important political resource. In a democracy, the people's wants are supposed to matter. In elections, for example, candidates for office and their organized supporters need citizens' votes, money, and time. In national government, likewise, elected officials, interest groups, and activists want votes in Congress, favors from the White House, and rulings from the bureaucracy, and they can use citizens' letters, petitions, and protests to help get them. In local government, finally, neighborhoods want stop signs from city councils and parents want computer labs from school boards, and they can use citizens' contacts, presence, and pressures to try to get them. Citizen participation is a resource that political leaders use in their struggles for political advantage.³¹ We call their efforts to deploy it "mobilization."

Political Mobilization

Mobilization is the process by which candidates, parties, activists, and groups induce other people to participate. We say that one of

³¹Gerald H. Kramer, "The Effects of Precinct Level Canvassing on Voter Behavior," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 34 (Winter 1970), pp. 560–72; James N. Rosenau, *Citizenship between Elections: An Inquiry into the Mobilizable American* (New York: Free Press, 1974); Carole J. Uhlaner, "Rational Turnout: The Neglected Role of Groups," *American Journal of Political Science* 33 (May 1987), pp. 390–422. Unsurprisingly, mobilization arguments show up most often in comparative works on political participation, e.g., Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, and Jae-on Kim, *Participation and Political Equality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), chap. 6; G. Bingham Powell, Jr., "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 80 (March 1986), pp. 17–43; Robert W. Jackman, "Political Institutions and Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies," *American Political Science Review* 81 (June 1987), pp. 405–23.

these actors has *mobilized* somebody when it has done something to increase the likelihood of her participation.³²

We distinguish two types of mobilization. Leaders mobilize people *directly* when they contact citizens personally and encourage them to take action. Door-to-door canvasses by campaign organizations, direct mail solicitations by political agitators, televised appeals for aid by presidents, and grass-roots letter drives by interest groups are examples of direct mobilization. Leaders mobilize people *indirectly* when they contact citizens through mutual associates, whether family, friends, neighbors, or colleagues. When candidates solicit employers for campaign money and bosses in turn encourage their employees to give, when local activists push their friends to attend meetings and friends ask family to accompany them, when parties contact workers in a plant and the workers ask their co-workers to vote, that is indirect mobilization.³³

Direct Mobilization

Through direct mobilization, political leaders provide opportunities for political action that citizens would not have otherwise. They build the organizations that give people the chance to contribute their time and money to political causes. They sponsor the meetings and rallies that give people the opportunity to attend. They circulate petitions that give people the chance to sign. They request contributions to causes that people may never have heard of until the moment of contact. The mobilization efforts of political leaders create the very opportunities for citizens to participate.

³²Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978), p. 69.

³³Huckfeldt and Sprague, "Political Parties and Electoral Mobilization"; Rosenau, *Citizenship between Elections*, chap. 3. This conjecture about indirect mobilization is analogous to the notion of the "two-step flow" of communication in which information flows first to opinion leaders who in turn pass on the information to the less active members of the population. See Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, *The People's Choice*; Elihu Katz, "The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-to-Date Report on an Hypothesis," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 21 (Spring 1957), pp. 61-78; John P. Robinson, "Interpersonal Influence in Election Campaigns: Two Step-Flow Hypotheses," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 40 (Fall 1976), pp. 304-19. With respect to mobilization, we think that people who are the most attentive to and active in politics are most likely to be directly mobilized, but once they are mobilized, they are likely to influence others in their family, in their neighborhood, and in the place of work.

Through direct mobilization, likewise, political leaders subsidize political information. Because information is costly and because politics is far from the most pressing concern in most people's lives, few citizens know much about politics unless somebody tells them. People remain rationally ignorant. Through the mobilization efforts of political leaders, however, they are informed about the issues on the congressional agenda, alerted to the meetings of the school board, and reminded about the upcoming city council elections. In short, they are given information about the issues at stake and the opportunities to affect them. The mobilization efforts of political leaders help citizens to overcome their rational ignorance.

Through direct mobilization, finally, political leaders subsidize the costs of citizen activism. They distribute voter registration forms and absentee ballots. They drive people to the polls on election day. They provide child care to free parents to attend meetings and demonstrations. They supply people with the texts for letters to representatives and senators. By underwriting the costs of political participation, the mobilization efforts of political leaders help to overcome the paradox of participation.

Indirect Mobilization

The impact of political mobilization, though, extends far beyond the effect it has on the limited number of people who are contacted directly. Membership in social networks makes people available to politicians, organizations, and activists. Membership in social networks makes people responsive to mobilization. Social networks, that is, convert direct mobilization into indirect mobilization. Political leaders mobilize citizens for political action through social networks.³⁴

For politicians, parties, interest groups, and activists, access to social networks reduces the costs of making contact. Leaders need not communicate with every person directly. Instead, leaders contact their associates, associates contact their colleagues, and colleagues contact their friends, families, and co-workers.³⁵ Through social

³⁴Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1955).

³⁵Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 44; Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), p. 79; and Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 125.

How does bureaucratic mobilization fit in?

networks, leaders get the word out, and citizens get the word. Social networks multiply the effect of mobilization: Direct mobilization reverberates through indirect mobilization.³⁶

Even more important, for politicians, parties, interest groups, and activists, access to social networks makes it possible to mobilize people to participate. Absent the involvement of social networks, leaders usually have only collective rewards to offer to potential participants: They hold out the prospect that favored candidates will win or that the government will formulate beneficial policies.³⁷ Because rewards are collective, however, citizens receive them whether they act or not. Mobilization runs aground on the paradox of participation.³⁸

With the involvement of social networks, however, mobilization occasions the creation of selective rewards. When friends, neighbors, and co-workers present the opportunities to partici-

³⁶Bauer, Pool, and Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy*, chaps. 11–13. Social networks ensure that information spreads rapidly even to people the initiator does not know at all. One amazing bit of evidence comes from the experimental investigations of the “small world problem” in the 1960s. The experimenters asked their subjects in Nebraska to get a letter to a person in Massachusetts without finding the address and sending it directly. Instead, they were to send it to a “first-name acquaintance” who might know somebody who knew the intended recipient. Each intervening recipient of the letter received the same instructions. Over a quarter of the letters reached their destination. The average number of people—all mutual acquaintances—through whose hands the letters passed on their way from Nebraska to Massachusetts was 5.5. (Presented with the same task, people in Massachusetts got about a third of the letters through to the target, using an average of 4.4 intermediaries.) See Jeffrey Travers and Stanley Milgram, “An Experimental Study of the Small World Problem,” *Sociometry* 32 (December 1969), pp. 425–43; Stanley Milgram, “Interdisciplinary Thinking and the Small World Problem,” pp. 103–20 in Muzafer Sherif and Carolyn W. Sherif, eds., *Interdisciplinary Relationships in the Social Sciences* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969); Charles Korte and Stanley Milgram, “Acquaintanceship Networks between Racial Groups: Application of the Small World Method,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 15 (June 1970), pp. 101–08.

³⁷William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1975); David A. Snow, “Social Networks and Social Movements,” *American Sociological Review* 45 (October 1980), pp. 787–801. In some cases, which are rare and becoming rarer, political leaders are able to provide material incentives (such as jobs, contracts, and access to leaders) to those who take part. See Wilson, *Political Organizations*, pp. 97–101; and Raymond E. Wolfinger, *The Politics of Progress* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), chap. 4.

³⁸Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, chap. 1.

pate, they also convey social expectations about desirable courses of action. Citizens who comply and participate reap the rewards of social life. They enjoy the attentions and esteem of their friends and associates; they enjoy the intrinsic satisfactions of having helped their colleagues' cause. Citizens who fail to comply and refuse to participate receive no rewards; in fact, they may suffer social sanctions.³⁹

Indirect mobilization promotes participation, then, by allowing political leaders to exploit citizens' ongoing obligations to friends, neighbors, and social groups. Citizens feel an obligation to help people they like, people they identify with, people who are like them, and people who have helped them in the past—an obligation, that is, to help their friends, family, and daily associates.⁴⁰ Likewise, citizens are more likely to contribute when they know that the people who expect them to help can tell whether or not they have done so.⁴¹ Political organizers have long thought personal, face-to-face contacts to be much more effective than impersonal mobilization through the mail or the media, and this is why.⁴²

Contact through social networks adds the power of social expectations to the message of mobilization.

Thus, by working through social networks, political leaders need not provide selective incentives themselves, need not coax, cajole, and persuade people to take part. Social networks do it for them. Family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers echo leaders' calls to action, and participants respond to please their neighbors and co-workers and to

³⁹Uhlman, “Rational Turnout”; Uhlman, “Relational Goods.”

⁴⁰E. E. Sampson and C. A. Insko, “Cognitive Consistency and Conformity in the Autokinetic Situation,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 68 (February 1964), pp. 184–92; C. D. Batson and J. S. Coke, “Empathy: A Source of Altruistic Motivation for Helping?” pp. 167–87 in J. P. Rushton and R. M. Sorrentino, eds., *Altruism and Helping Behavior* (Hillsdale, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1981); C. D. Batson and J. S. Coke, “Empathic Motivations for Helping Behavior,” pp. 417–33 in J. T. Cacioppo and R. E. Petty, eds., *Social Psychophysiology: A Sourcebook* (New York: Guilford Press, 1983); H. W. Simmons, N. N. Berkowitz, and R. J. Moyer, “Similarity, Credibility and Attitude Change: A Review and a Theory,” *Psychological Bulletin* 73 (January 1970), pp. 1–16; D. Byrne, *The Attraction Paradigm* (New York: Academic Press, 1971).

⁴¹B. Latane and J. M. Darley, *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn't He Help?* (New York: Appleton-Crofts, 1970); Hardin, *Collective Action*, chap. 11.

⁴²Saul D. Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), pp. 94–99, 108–10; Si Kahn, *Organizing* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), p. 109; (continued)

honor their obligations to friends. Working through social networks, politicians, parties, interest groups, and activists piggyback political action onto the everyday hum of social relationships.

The Strategy of Political Mobilization

Of course, mobilization is not a universal or a constant occurrence. Political leaders do not try to mobilize everybody, and they do not try to mobilize all of the time. Mobilization, after all, is not their real goal; they have little interest in citizen activism per se. Rather, they seek to use public involvement to achieve other ends: to win elections, to pass bills, to modify rulings, to influence policies. Mobilization is one strategy they may use, but it is neither the only one nor, always, the best one. Alternatively, politicians, parties, interest groups, and activists might (among other things) incite other politicians, ally with other interest groups, compile facts and figures, muster experts, or even (we hope rarely) pay bribes. Because each strategy is costly, and because resources are scarce, political leaders simply cannot use every tool in their toolkit on every job.

Consequently, citizen participation is a resource that political leaders use selectively in their fights for political advantage. For maximum effect, they *target* their efforts on particular people, and they *time* them for particular occasions.

Targeting Mobilization

Once political leaders decide to pursue a mobilization strategy, they want to get the most effective number of people involved with the least amount of effort. This simple—indeed obvious—criterion suggests four kinds of citizens whom leaders are most eager to contact.

(continued)

Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, *The People's Choice*; Katz, "The Two-Step Flow"; Paul Carton, *Mobilizing the Black Community: The Effects of Personal Contact Campaigning on Black Voters* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Center for Political Studies, 1984). It is also possible that the framing of the messages conveyed by political leaders promotes participation by changing people's attitudes toward politics. Leaders often try to play on people's sense of civic responsibility. They try to bolster feelings of political efficacy and to increase the intensity of political beliefs. They try to portray a situation of life-or-death issues hanging in the balance. As appealing as these ideas might be, we find little evidence in Chapter 6 that mobilization reshapes people's political values and perceptions about political conflict.

First, politicians, parties, and other activists are most likely to mobilize the people they already know. For one thing, they are close at hand, easy to contact, and responsive to requests—because they are friends or associates.⁴³ For another thing, they are familiar. Political leaders, naturally, want their allies to participate, not their enemies. Democrats want Democrats to vote, not Republicans, and abortion rights advocates want pro-choice voters to write letters, not pro-life voters. When leaders mobilize people they know, they have a good idea of how they are going to act.⁴⁴

Second, politicians, groups, and other activists are more likely to mobilize people who are centrally positioned in social networks. They are easier to identify, simply because they are more visible and because they know more people. More important, because they are in the middle of things they are in a good position to mobilize others. They turn direct mobilization into indirect mobilization.

Third, politicians, parties, groups, and agitators are more likely to mobilize the people whose actions are most effective at producing political outcomes. Like it or not, some citizens are more influential in politics than others, and legislators, executives, or bureaucrats like, fear, respect, or depend on them more. Because political leaders are interested in outcomes, they concentrate their mobilization efforts on the powerful.

Finally, politicians and activists are more likely to mobilize people who are likely to respond by participating.⁴⁵ As we already argued earlier in this chapter, some people, because of their resources, interests, preferences, or beliefs, are more likely to participate in politics than other people. Because political leaders cannot afford to mobilize everyone, they concentrate their efforts on people they have the greatest chance of mobilizing.

A number of simple predictions follow from these observations.

First, people who are employed, especially in large workplaces, are more likely to be mobilized than people who are not; they are

⁴³See Fenno's idea of a "personal constituency." Richard F. Fenno, Jr., *Home Style: House Members and Their Districts* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1978).

⁴⁴Rosenau, *Citizenship between Elections*; Kramer, "The Effects of Precinct Level Canvassing"; Huckfeldt and Sprague, "Political Parties and Electoral Mobilization."

⁴⁵Huckfeldt and Sprague, "Political Parties and Electoral Mobilization."

more likely, consequently, to participate. Their jobs make them visible. Political leaders know where to find them—at work—and know what they care about—their jobs. Their jobs make them powerful. Workplaces represent concentrations of numbers, wealth, and power, the currencies to which politicians respond. Finally, their jobs incline them toward participation. They have powerful incentives to act in defense of their livelihoods, and they have powerful incentives to live up to the expectations of their employers and co-workers.

Second, people who belong to associations are more likely to be mobilized and more likely to participate than people who do not belong.⁴⁶ Group members are more visible. Labor unions, service clubs, and churches meet daily, weekly, or monthly, and their purposes often reveal their politics. Group members are more influential. In politics, organizations have the power of numbers, attentiveness, and singular purpose. Finally, through their organizations, group members get greater encouragement to participate. They voluntarily associate with people who share their identities and their interests; accordingly, they find it difficult to resist the entreaties of other members. Indeed, their very involvement in organizations signals their susceptibility to social expectations.

Third, leaders of organizations, businesses, and local governments are more likely to be mobilized: They are better known to political leaders,⁴⁷ more likely to be effective, and more likely to participate, for the reasons we have already discussed. In addition, their positions atop organizations and institutions give them the ability to reach other people. Business owners have access to employees, union stewards to rank-and-file, club presidents to members, and church deacons to the faithful. They occupy the center of social networks. They turn direct mobilization into indirect mobilization.

Finally, the wealthy, the educated, and the partisan are more likely to be targeted for mobilization than the poor, the uneducated, and the uncommitted, which is part of the reason for their greater potential for political action. The advantaged are better

known to political leaders because they travel in the same social circles. Politicians and activists are usually wealthier, better educated, and more partisan than ordinary citizens, and so are their friends and associates. Likewise, their actions are more likely to produce favorable political outcomes. Because of their social positions, they often know legislators, executives, and bureaucrats personally. Moreover, because of their status and wealth, they stand as benefactors of many politicians and government officials: campaign contributors, information sources, former and future employers. Consequently, political elites know them, like them, respect them, and depend on them. They, in short, have power. Finally, they are more likely to respond to political leaders' requests. They have more resources. They have the money, the leisure, and the skills to meet the demands that participation places on them.⁴⁸ Likewise, they receive more rewards. Because of their social status they have a greater stake in political decisions, and because of their socialization they have a bigger psychological investment in political affairs. Perhaps most important, they are part of social networks that esteem, expect, and reward activism in politics; hence, they receive greater selective and solidary rewards from their activism. The greater propensity of the advantaged toward participation, that is, stems not only from their individual characteristics but also from their placement in the political system.⁴⁹

Thus, the strategic calculations of political leaders determine a lot about who participates. Intent on creating the greatest effect with the least effort, politicians, parties, interest groups, and activists mobilize people who are known to them, who are well placed in social networks, whose actions are effective, and who are likely to act. Their efforts to move the organized, the employed, the elite, and the advantaged into politics exacerbate rather than reduce the class biases in political participation in America.

⁴⁸This is most obviously important in the case of campaign fundraising: The wealthy get hit up for money and the poor do not. Recalling the famed remark of the bank robber Willie Sutton, political fundraisers target the wealthy because that is where the money is.

⁴⁹See Michael W. Giles and Marilyn K. Dantico, "Political Participation and Neighborhood Social Context Revisited," *American Journal of Political Science* 26 (February 1982), p. 149.

⁴⁶Among many, Verba and Nie, *Participation in America*, chap. 11; Erickson and Nosanchuk, "How an Apolitical Association Politicizes."

⁴⁷Sidney Verba and Gary Orren, *Equality in America: The View from the Top* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 67.

Timing Mobilization

Political leaders likewise identify favorable times to move citizens into politics. Sometimes mobilization of public participation is a worthwhile enterprise—it is likely to accomplish its purpose—and sometimes it is not.

Clearly, for mobilization of citizen activism to be an effective strategy, two conditions must obtain. First, people must be ready to follow their leaders into politics. If people are not interested in the issues or are distracted by other concerns, mobilization is wasted effort. Second, citizen participation must have a consequential effect on political outcomes. If important decisions are not on the docket, if political outcomes are foregone conclusions, or if public officials are unmoved by citizens' pleas, mobilization is wasted effort. Unless citizens are likely to act and action is likely to yield outcomes, leaders' resources are better spent on strategies other than mobilization.

These observations provide some perspective on when people are likely to be mobilized, and when in turn people are likely to participate in politics.

First, people participate in politics more when salient issues top the agenda. Leaders can only lead, after all, when the public is willing to follow. Big pocketbook issues, such as pensions and jobs, and big moral issues, such as prohibition and abortion, draw greater public attention than more arcane issues, such as deregulation of natural gas pipelines and accounting rules for capital depreciation. Salient issues affect more people more directly. Knowing that, political leaders adopt mobilization strategies when the issues excite people and adopt other strategies when they bore people. Because of their strategic calculations, citizens receive more pressure to participate when the issues are salient than when they are not.

Second, people participate more in politics when other concerns do not demand their attentions. As important as politics is, for most people other things come first: making a living, spending time with the family, and so forth.⁵⁰ Leaders understand this, and they hesitate to mobilize citizen activism when more pressing needs dominate.

⁵⁰Robinson and Converse, "Social Change Reflected in the Use of Time"; Robinson, Converse, and Szalai, "Everyday Life in Twelve Countries"; Rosenstone, "Economic Adversity and Voter Turnout."

On campus, for instance, college politicians rarely schedule political events during midterms and finals. In real politics, likewise, activists curb their efforts during holidays, when people want only to spend time with family, and during hard spells, when people want only to get back to work or to pay their bills. Because political leaders accommodate the more pressing concerns of the public, people feel less encouragement and pressure to participate when more important events distract them.

Third, people participate more in politics when important decisions are pending. Politics moves to its own distinctive rhythms. Elections, for example, are cyclic: Presidential elections occur every four years, House elections every two years, Senate elections every six years, and state and local elections idiosyncratically, some in presidential years, some in midterm years, and some in off years. Legislation, on the other hand, is seasonal: The U.S. Congress and the larger state legislatures formulate proposals in committees in the spring and summer, debate policies on the floor in the summer and fall, and recess in the winter. Cyclic or seasonal, calendars regulate the activities of political leaders. For maximum effect, these leaders mobilize citizens at the moment when conflicts near resolution. Because leaders are more likely to contact them when decisions are imminent, citizens respond to the rhythms of the calendar as well.

Fourth, people participate more in politics when outcomes hang in the balance. Some elections are so close that a few votes can make a difference, whereas others are so lopsided that hundreds of thousands could not affect them.⁵¹ Similarly, some legislative battles are so evenly matched that a burst of public involvement could clinch them, whereas others are so settled that nothing could perturb them. Given scarce resources, political leaders focus their efforts on the tight contests and forget about the cakewalks. Because leaders are more likely to contact them when decisions come down to the wire, citizens respond to political competition.

⁵¹There is a large literature on closeness and turnout. See Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*; William H. Riker and Peter D. Ordeshook, *An Introduction to Positive Political Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 62–63; John Ferejohn and Morris Fiorina, "Closeness Counts Only in Horseshoes and Dancing," *American Political Science Review* 69 (September 1975), pp. 920–25.

Finally, people are more likely to be mobilized to participate in politics when issues come before legislatures than when they come before bureaucracies and courts. The institutions of American government expose legislators to popular pressures, but they insulate bureaucrats and judges. Representatives, senators, county commissioners, and members of city councils submit regularly to the discipline of the voters, but bureaucrats and judges do not. Accordingly, public participation potentially has more impact when elected officials make decisions than when civil servants and judges do. Accordingly, politicians and activists pursue mobilization strategies when issues are before legislatures, but they favor other strategies when decisions are before agencies and courts. Because leaders are more likely to contact them when the outcomes they seek are laws, people participate more in legislative politics than in bureaucratic and judicial battles.

Thus, the strategic choices of political leaders determine a lot about when people are mobilized, and hence about when they participate. Eager to time their efforts so that they will have the greatest effect, candidates, parties, interest groups, and activists mobilize people when their efforts are most likely to be effective: when issues are salient, when distractions are few, when resolutions are imminent, when decisions are closely contested, and when decision makers depend on the evaluations of the public.

Conclusion

Political participation arises from the interaction of citizens and political mobilizers. Few people participate spontaneously in politics. Participation, instead, results when groups, political parties, and activists persuade citizens to take part. Personal characteristics—resources, perceived rewards, interests, and benefits from taking part in politics—define every person's predisposition toward political activity. The strategic choices of political leaders—their determinations of who and when to mobilize—determine the shape of political participation in America.

In mobilizing citizens for political action, political leaders intend only their own advantage. Seeking only to win elections, pass bills, amend rulings, or influence policies, they target their appeals selec-

tively and time them strategically. Nevertheless, in doing so, they extend public involvement in political decision making. They bring people into politics at crucial times in the process. Their strategic choices impart a distinctive *political* logic to political participation.

Through mobilization of both kinds—direct contact, and indirect contact through social networks—political leaders supply information about politics that many citizens otherwise would not have. Politics is remote from the experience of most people. Absent mobilization, rational ignorance would defeat much citizen involvement in politics. Through mobilization of both kinds, moreover, political leaders create selective, solidary inducements to participate that many citizens otherwise would not have. Politics is not a priority for most people; absent mobilization, the paradox of participation would defeat much citizen involvement in politics.

People participate in politics for a host of reasons, but mobilization makes citizen participation both more common and more consequential. As Rosenau summarized,

Most citizens... are not autonomous actors who calculate what ought to be done in public affairs, devise a strategy for achieving it, establish their own resources, and then pursue the course of action most likely to achieve their goals. Their instrumental behavior is often suggested, if not solicited, by others, either directly in face-to-face interactions or indirectly through the mass media; either explicitly through calls for support by mobilizers or implicitly through the statements of leaders, journalists and acquaintances that situations might be altered (or preserved) if support were available. Thus, to conceive of the practices of citizenship as being largely sustained by independent action toward the political arena initiated by individuals is to minimize the relational context in which people participate in public affairs.⁵²

⁵²Rosenau, *Citizenship between Elections*, p. 96.

CONCLUSION: THE SCOPE AND BIAS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation is the product of strategic interactions of citizens and leaders. Few people spontaneously take an active part in public affairs. Rather, they participate when politicians, political parties, interest groups, and activists persuade them to get involved. Working through social networks of family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and associates, leaders supply information and occasion the creation of social rewards. Their strategic choices, their determinations of who to mobilize and when to mobilize, shape the contours of public participation in American politics. They give political meaning to political participation.

As we have shown throughout this book, the political logic of political participation captures the essence of public involvement in American politics. It explains who participates in politics and who does not, why people engage in some kinds of political activity but not in others, and why more people participate at some moments than at others. It also explains political action in both elections and government, in both local politics and national politics.

Over and over we have shown that resources, interests, and social positions distinguish people who participate in politics from people who do not. People who have better educations, better incomes, more experience, and greater senses of political competence are better able to meet the costs of political involvement. People who have more direct interests, stronger preferences, and more distinct identities are better positioned to see the benefits of political involvement. People who occupy social positions that expose them to information and to social incentives bear less burdensome costs and

receive more substantial benefits from their involvement in public affairs.

But this is only half of the story. Again and again we have shown that the strategic opportunities that political contests present to politicians, parties, interest groups, and activists distinguish times when large numbers of people participate in politics from times when fewer do. Participation in governmental politics rises when salient issues reach the public agenda and falls when they leave it. It rises when governments approach crucial decisions and falls afterward. Participation in electoral politics rises when political parties contact, when competitive election campaigns stimulate, when social movements inspire, and falls when they do not. Political leaders focus their mobilization efforts on the moments when public involvement matters the most to the outcome. Participation in American politics rises and falls with the incentives the system presents to its leaders.

The political logic of political participation, in sum, accounts for heretofore puzzling aspects of public involvement in American politics. It tells why citizens dropped out of electoral politics despite gains in education, and why they moved into governmental politics despite deterioration of political efficacy. It tells why public involvement in elections peaked in the 1960s, and why public involvement in national government surged in the early 1980s. It tells why African-Americans turned out in increasing numbers in the 1960s and in decreasing numbers in the 1970s. It tells why citizens participated in governmental activities in greater numbers in the summer and in lesser numbers in the winter. The political logic of political participation, in short, solves the puzzles with which we began this book. It tells the rest of the story of participation in America.

Our analysis in this book, of course, has (of necessity) concerned itself with only seven kinds of political action, only one period, and only one country. Our argument, however, generalizes to other activities, to other times and other places.

The logic of mobilization helps to account for differences between the United States and Europe in the political involvements of their citizenry. On the one hand, American citizens turn out to vote at rates 20 to 30 percentage points below their counterparts in Eu-

rope.¹ On the other hand, Americans take part in government—in particular by contacting public officials—at rates substantially above Europeans.² The reasons are fairly straightforward. Voter turnout in the United States trails that in Europe because the United States has some of the world's most onerous voter registration requirements and one of the world's weakest party systems. Where institutional arrangements discourage citizens from taking part and political parties fail to mobilize citizens to act, participation in elections is low.³ Yet citizen participation in American government leads that in European governments because the United States has one of the world's most decentralized political systems and some of the world's most numerous, most active, and most powerful interest groups. Where politicians, associations, and activists mobilize citizens to pressure, participation in government is high.⁴

¹Although barely 50 percent of Americans cast a ballot in presidential elections, between 80 and 90 percent of the electorates in Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Portugal regularly vote in national elections. Seventy to 80 percent of the electorates in Ireland, France, the United Kingdom, and Japan take part.

²Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, and Jae-on Kim, *Participation and Political Equality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 58–59; Samuel H. Barnes, Max Kaase et al., *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979), pp. 541–42.

³Verba, Nie, and Kim, *Participation and Political Equality*, chap. 6; G. Bingham Powell, Jr., "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 80 (March 1986), pp. 17–43; Robert W. Jackman, "Political Institutions and Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies," *American Political Science Review* 81 (June 1987), pp. 405–23; David P. Glass, Peverill Squire, and Raymond E. Wolfinger, "Voter Turnout: An International Comparison," *Public Opinion* (December/January 1984), pp. 49–55; Raymond E. Wolfinger, David P. Glass, and Peverill Squire, "Predictors of Electoral Turnout: An International Comparison," *Policy Studies Review* 9 (Spring 1990), pp. 551–74.

⁴Our argument meshes as well with recent theories of involvement in social movements, interest groups, and community action. Mobilization of citizen activism by governments, politicians, entrepreneurs, and patrons plays a prominent role in recent scholarship. On social movements, see Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978); Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970); Anthony Obershall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973). On interest groups, see Mancur Olson, Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), chap. 6; Robert H. Salisbury, "An Exchange Theory

Likewise, the logic of mobilization helps to account for differences between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the political involvements of American citizens. In the United States, voter turnout during the last half of the nineteenth century averaged 78 percent, a full 21 percentage points above voter turnout during the last half of the twentieth century. Part of the reason for the difference, we know from Chapter 6, is the twentieth century's more restrictive election laws, which made it difficult for poor whites and nearly impossible for southern blacks to vote. Part of the reason, too, is the twentieth century's better enumeration methods, which drastically reduced the Census Bureau's population undercounts.⁵ Part of the reason for the difference, though, is surely the contrast between the political parties of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, their styles of campaigning, and their strategies of voter mobilization. As electoral historians report, the social, religious, and economic conflicts of the nineteenth century were intensely politicized and tied inextricably to political parties: Elections not only pitted Republicans against Democrats, they aligned Protestants against Catholics, nativists against immigrants, industrialists against agrarians, and northerners against southerners. Nineteenth-century parties mounted elaborate spectacles of campaign pageantry, parades, mass demonstrations, and rallies. They sustained newspapers noted for no-holds-barred partisanship. They created campaign clubs and marching companies to advertise their tickets. They "built cadres of party workers to encourage men to go to the polls." The intense partisan mobilization of the nineteenth century did more than entertain. It heightened people's interest in politics. It informed people and helped them to understand the logical connection between the issues of the day and the casting of their ballots. It reinforced ethnic, religious, class, and regional

of Interest Groups," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 13 (March 1969), pp. 1–32; Jack L. Walker, Jr., *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America: Patrons, Professions and Social Movements* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991). On community action, see Robert H. Salisbury, *Citizen Participation in the Public Schools* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1980); Steven J. Rosenstone, "Separate and Unequal: Report of the 1989 Detroit Area Study," unpublished manuscript, University of Michigan, 1989; Paul Freedman, "Mobilization and Participation," unpublished manuscript, University of Michigan, 1992.

⁵See Chapter 6, note 85.

identities and provided solidary and purposive benefits to those who stood with their neighbors. It got people to vote.⁶

In sum, differences between the United States and Europe, between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century reflect differences in the activities of political leaders and institutions. Leaders either supply or deny incentives for people to take part in their politics.

Political leaders clearly do not mobilize public involvement just for its own sake. Instead, they mobilize participation in pursuit of their own advantage: to win elections, pass bills, amend rulings, and influence policies. Accordingly, when these leaders face new political, economic, and social incentives, their willingness to mobilize citizen involvement in elections and in government changes to exploit the new opportunities and accommodate the new constraints.

This is nowhere more aptly demonstrated than in the recent history of the United States. Over the last forty years, American politics, economy, and society have undergone significant and interrelated changes. The population has changed. Citizens have become more affluent, educated, and mobile. Their partisan, ethnic, religious, and community identifications have weakened. Equally, the political system has changed. Party organizations fueled by patronage have almost disappeared. Labor unions have atrophied. Television has nationalized American culture and public discourse. Government has assumed greater and more varied responsibilities. The end result of all these changes, Benjamin Ginsberg and Martin Shefter have argued, is the "declining importance of elections in America" and the rising importance of "politics by other means."⁷

Political, economic, and social changes have dramatically altered the mix of incentives for political mobilization. Electoral campaigns have seen once dependable blocs of committed, partisan voters shrink. They have lost loyal cadres of union and patronage workers. They have witnessed the efficiencies of television and direct mail in reaching a mobile, disconnected citizenry. In response, political campaigns have evolved from labor-intensive to capital-intensive

⁶Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), chap. 2, quoted at p. 12; Paul Kleppner, *Who Voted? The Dynamics of Electoral Turnout, 1870-1980* (New York: Praeger, 1982).

⁷Benjamin Ginsberg and Martin Shefter, *Politics by Other Means: The Declining Importance of Elections in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

organizations. Face-to-face canvassing in neighborhoods has given way to polls and focus groups as means of assessing the public's opinions and reactions to issues. Door-to-door electioneering in wards and precincts has given way to direct mail and television spots. Grass-roots organization has given way to professional staff. Campaigns in the 1990s need to expend more of their energies soliciting the support of an uncommitted electorate.⁸

At the same time, interest groups have discovered better opportunities for mobilization. Affluence and education have created a citizenry newly attentive to causes such as environmentalism and racial justice. Great wealth, federal tax laws, and new government responsibilities have fostered a new class of individual, institutional, and governmental patrons for collective action. New political problems and new governmental obligations have extended the reach of public decision making and endowed government with greater means for responding to public demands. In response, a larger and broader array of interest groups has surfaced to link citizens to city halls, statehouses, and Capitol Hill. More interests and more groups have the motivation and the capacity to mobilize public involvement.⁹

Through the strategic choices of candidates, parties, interest groups, and activists, political, economic, and social change has tipped the balance of political participation in America. Face-to-face contact with political parties and campaign organizations is a thing

⁸Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections: Contemporary Strategies of American Electoral Politics*, 8th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1991); Elizabeth Kolbert, "Campaign Ads Replace Campaigning in California," *New York Times*, May 22, 1992, p. A2; Dan Baltz, "Candidates, Public Depend Less on News Media for the Message," *Washington Post*, May 19, 1992, p. A2; James M. Perry, "Call It New Media, Teledemocracy or Whatever; It's Changing the Way the Political System Works," *Wall Street Journal*, June 24, 1992, p. A20; Sidney Blumenthal, *The Permanent Campaign: Inside the World of Elite Political Operatives* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980); Larry J. Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Ways of Winning Elections* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Benjamin Ginsberg, "A Post Election Era?" *PS: Political Science and Politics*, March 1989, p. 19; W. Lance Bennett, *The Governing Crisis: Media, Money, and Marketing in American Elections* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

⁹Walker, *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America*; R. Kenneth Godwin, "Money, Technology, and Political Interests: The Direct Marketing of Politics," pp. 308-25 in Mark P. Petracca, ed., *The Politics of Interests: Interest Group Politics Transformed* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

of the past. Candidates now speak directly to the electorate through new campaign technologies, bypassing political and social institutions. At the same time, more and more interest groups muster public pressures on local, state, and national governments. As we noted at the very beginning of this book, fewer citizens participate in elections and more participate in government now than did a generation ago. This, we believe, is the reason. The political, economic, and social changes of the last few decades wounded campaign organizations and gave them incentives to persuade rather than to mobilize, while the same changes promoted interest groups and encouraged them to mobilize.

The political uses of citizen participation help to make sense of the puzzles of political participation in modern American politics. The withdrawal of citizens from electoral politics is not wholly of their own choosing, is neither the product of satisfaction nor despair. The influx of citizens into governmental politics is likewise not wholly of their own choosing, is neither the product of enthusiasm nor cynicism. Both, rather, are the product of the strategic choices of political leaders from among the opportunities with which they are presented, and within the constraints under which they must operate.

Once we take political participation out of the realm of the attitudinal and place it in the sphere of the political, once we find its causes not only in individuals but also in the political system, the meaning of citizen participation in a democracy changes dramatically. By itself, citizen involvement implies neither legitimacy nor vigilance, neither contentment nor estrangement, neither virtue nor indifference. Instead, political participation tells us more about a political system than about its citizens. It indicates a society in which people have the resources to bear the costs of participation. It indicates a society in which people have enough interests at stake in political decisions to seek the benefits of participation. Most important, it indicates a society in which the leaders have incentives to involve the people in the ongoing tasks of governance.

Mobilization, Participation, and Political Equality

If political participation has political sources, it must have political effects. After all, political leaders would not go to the trouble to mo-

bilize citizen involvement unless it brought them some meaningful benefit.

Both as scholars and as citizens, however, we must ultimately confront the political effects of political participation beyond the small, the singular, and the episodic. What difference does it make to the functioning of a democracy that public involvement is higher at some times than at others? What difference does it make that many people take part in some kinds of politics while few people take part in others?

The extent of public involvement matters, clearly, because participants are not impartial. As E. E. Schattschneider observed three decades ago:

The outcome of every conflict is determined by the *extent* to which the audience becomes involved in it. That is, the outcome of all conflict is determined by the *scope* of its contagion. The number of people involved in any conflict determines what happens; every change in the number of participants, every increase or reduction in the number of participants affects the result . . . Every change in the scope of conflict has a bias. By definition, the intervening bystanders are not neutral.¹⁰

As Tables 8-1 and 8-2 show, there is a systematic relationship between the scope of political conflict—the extent of citizen participation—and the bias in the composition of participants, just as Schattschneider averred. Each table displays both “representation ratios” and “indexes of equality.” The ratios indicate the degree to which different groups in the population are underrepresented (ratios less than 1.0) or overrepresented (ratios greater than 1.0) among political activists. The indexes show the degree of equality across population groups: The higher the value, the greater the equality.¹¹ Two things are immediately obvious.

First, the pool of political activists is enormously unrepresentative of the population, no matter how many people are involved. In

¹⁰E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), pp. 2, 4–5 (emphasis in original).

¹¹The representation ratios are the ratio of the percentage of participants from that population group to the percentage of citizens from that population group. The equality index is the ratio of two representation ratios: those of the least advantaged and the most advantaged population groups. Appendix F details the derivation, the properties, and the justification for these measures.

Table 8-1 Inequality in Participation in Governmental Politics, 1976–1988

Activity	Total Percentage Participating	Representation Ratio			Index of Equality
		Years of Education			
		0-8	9-15	16+	
Signed petition	34.8	.34	.87	1.44	.24
Attended local meeting	18.0	.31	.78	1.46	.21
Wrote Congress	14.6	.38	.72	1.56	.24
Attended rally	9.1	.29	.57	1.58	.18
Wrote letter to newspaper	5.0	.26	.70	1.68	.15
Made a speech	4.6	.28	.50	1.89	.06
Wrote an article	2.4	.08	.50	1.96	.04

Source: Roper Surveys, 1976, Nos. 76-1, 76-2, 76-6, 76-7; 1980, Nos. 80-1, 80-2, 80-6, 80-7; 1984, Nos. 84-1, 84-2, 84-6, 84-7; 1988, Nos. 88-1, 88-2, 88-6, 88-7.

governmental politics (Table 8-1), the college-educated are vastly overrepresented, while the grammar school-educated are substantially underrepresented. For example, of the people who write to Congress, those who attended college comprise only 35 percent of the population but account for 56 percent of those who write letters: Their share of the participants is 1.56 times larger than their share of the population. Those with the least education comprise 10 percent of the population but only 4 percent of those who write to Congress: Their share of the participants is only .38 times their share of the population. The index of equality is just .24.

In electoral politics, likewise, the fragment of the population that is most abundantly endowed with education and income is dramatically overrepresented, and the segment of the electorate that is most impoverished is strikingly underrepresented (Table 8-2). In the most conspicuous case, the wealthiest 5 percent of the population constitute 17 percent of the financial contributors to campaigns (their

Table 8-2 Inequality in Participation in Electoral Politics, 1952–1988

Activity	Total Percentage Participating	Representation Ratios					Index of Equality
		Years of Education					
		0-8	9-11	12	13-15	16+	
Voted	66.1	.85	.83	1.00	1.12	1.26	.67
Influenced others	26.7	.61	.75	.94	1.33	1.61	.38
Contributed money	8.9	.33	.51	.87	1.37	2.41	.15
Attended meetings	7.8	.48	.50	.85	1.43	2.14	.24
Worked on campaign	4.6	.48	.50	.87	1.33	2.25	.23

Activity	Total Percentage Participating	Representation Ratios					Index of Equality
		Family Income (percentile)					
		0-16	17-33	34-67	68-95	96-100	
Voted	66.1	.76	.90	1.00	1.16	1.27	.60
Influenced others	26.7	.63	.79	.98	1.25	1.54	.41
Contributed money	8.9	.25	.51	.80	1.54	3.25	.08
Attended meetings	7.8	.49	.73	.93	1.31	2.27	.22
Worked on campaign	4.6	.48	.74	.85	1.37	2.42	.20

Note: Analysis is based on data from presidential and midterm years combined.
Source: 1952–1988 American National Election Studies.

representation ratio is 3.25), but the poorest 16 percent constitute only 4 percent (their representation ratio is only .25).¹² The index of equality—at .08—indicates an extraordinary degree of class bias in participation.

In sum, no matter which form citizen participation takes, the pattern of class inequality is unbroken. Inequalities are not dispersed, they are cumulative.¹³

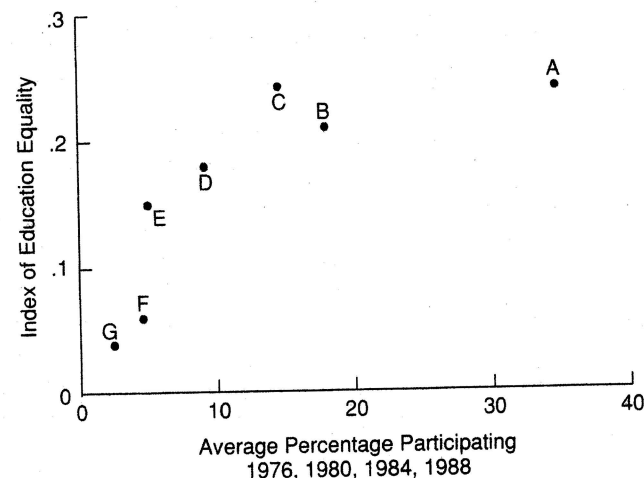
Second, the greater the number of participants in political activity, the greater the equality in political participation. As Figures 8-1 and 8-2 show, the correspondence between the extent of public involvement and the representativeness of the clique of participants is strong and direct. The bias toward the advantaged in such common activities as voting, signing petitions, and attending meetings is serious, but it is substantially less than the bias toward the advantaged in such select activities as making speeches, working for candidates, and contributing money to campaigns.

Given participation's dependence on political resources, demonstrated amply throughout this book, the relationship between the scope of conflict and the degree of bias is not surprising. People participate in politics because they possess resources sufficient to overcome the demands that involvement places upon them. The most popular activities—signing petitions, persuading others, attending meetings—are invariably the least expensive. The least common activities—writing articles for the newspaper, making speeches, contributing money to campaigns—are invariably the most demanding. The resource demands of political participation skew the activist community toward the most advantaged.

Unequal distributions of political resources are not, however, the sole reason for the class inequalities among the politically involved. The class biases in political involvement derive as well from class biases in political mobilization. As our colleague Jack Walker put

¹²Although the income categories available on the Roper surveys are too crude to permit us to make reliable estimates of the degree of income inequality in participation in governmental politics, in every kind of governmental participation the poor are underrepresented relative to the rich.

¹³Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), chap. 19.



Key

- A Signed petition
- B Attended local meeting
- C Wrote Congress
- D Attended rally
- E Wrote letter to newspaper
- F Made a speech
- G Wrote an article

Figure 8-1 Inequality in Participation in Governmental Politics, 1976–1988.

Source: Table 8-1.

it, "Our system of political mobilization does not do a good job of covering those at the bottom of the social order."¹⁴ From the argument we propounded in Chapter 2, the reasons are more than clear. First, political mobilizers target people who are both convenient and predictable, people with whom they share social connections.

¹⁴Jack L. Walker, Jr., "Three Modes of Political Mobilization," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 1984, p. 33.

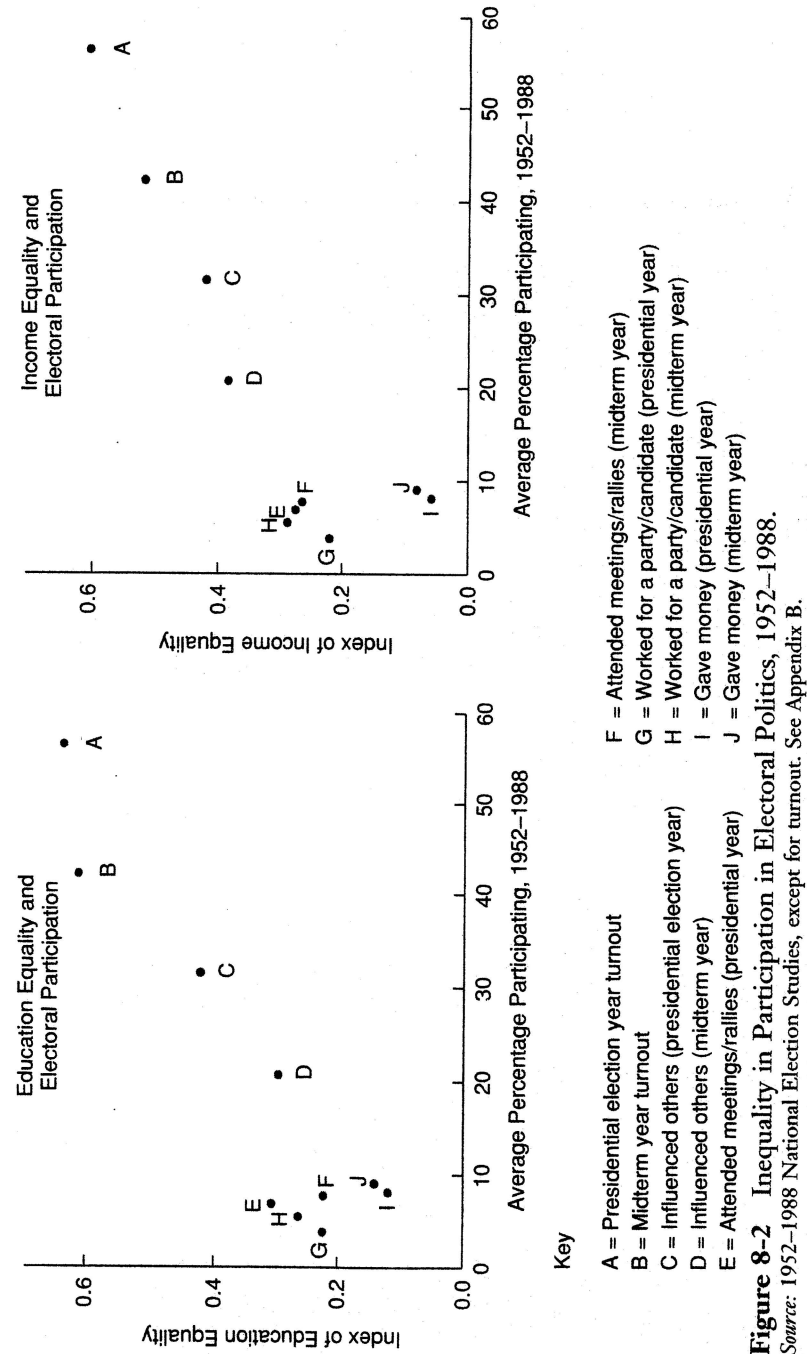
Politicians, activists, and the leaders of interest groups contact people who, like they, come from the upper echelons of American society. Second, political mobilizers target people who are identifiable and accessible, who are members of voluntary associations. The associational universe is heavily weighted in favor of the advantaged.¹⁵ Finally, political mobilizers target people who are likely to respond and to be effective. They target the educated, the wealthy, and the powerful.¹⁶ Thus, the pressures that political leaders face to use their own resources most efficiently build a class bias into their efforts to mobilize. In the American participatory system, class differences in mobilization typically aggravate rather than mitigate the effects of class differences in political resources. Once again, inequalities are cumulative, not dispersed.

History teaches, however, that it does not always have to be that way. Given the right set of incentives, political mobilizers expand their efforts, extend public involvement, and ameliorate inequality. As Figures 8-3 and 8-4 demonstrate, participatory equality rises and falls as public involvement in single activities surges and subsides. When many citizens write letters to Congress, they are more representative of the population than when fewer people write (Figure 8-3). Likewise, when many citizens turn out to vote, they are more representative of the electorate than when fewer people vote (Figure 8-4). Class equality in participation was greatest in the high-turnout elections of the 1960s and least in the low-turnout elections of the 1980s. As turnout declined between 1960 and 1988, class inequalities multiplied.¹⁷ As Schattschneider might put it, increasing the scope of conflict decreases class bias.

¹⁵Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People*, chap. 2; Kay Schlozman, "What Accent the Heavenly Chorus? Political Equality and the American Pressure System," *Journal of Politics* 46 (November 1984), pp. 1006-32.

¹⁶Political parties, we found in Chapter 6, are much more likely to contact the wealthy and the well educated. In addition, parties are more likely to reach the advantaged through their more active involvements in social networks and associations.

¹⁷Walter Dean Burnham, "The Appearance and Disappearance of the American Voter," pp. 112-39 in Richard Rose, ed., *Electoral Participation: A Comparative Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980); Thomas E. Cavanagh, "Changes in American Voter Turnout, 1964-1976," *Political Science Quarterly* 96 (Spring 1981), pp. 33-65; Walter Dean Burnham, "The Turnout Problem," pp. 97-133 in A. James Reichley, ed., *Elections American Style* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987); Walter Dean Burnham, "The Class Gap," *New Republic*, May 9, 1988, p. 30.



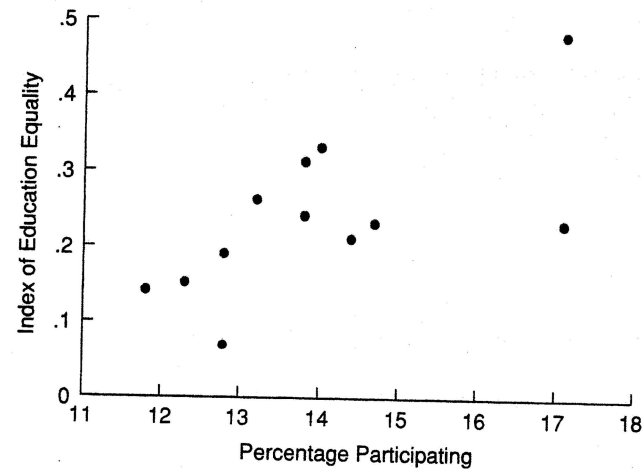


Figure 8-3 Inequality in Writing Members of Congress, 1980-1988.

Source: Roper Surveys, 1980, Nos. 80-1, 80-2, 80-6, 80-7; 1984, Nos. 84-1, 84-2, 84-6, 84-7; 1988, Nos. 88-1, 88-2, 88-6, 88-7.

The correspondence between the scope of public involvement and the degree of class equality *over time* cannot be a consequence of varying demands on resources. Resource endowments and the costs of political participation just do not change that rapidly (particularly in the case of governmental participation, where the fluctuations in citizen involvement are as large from month to month as they are from year to year). Rather, it is the result of mobilization. As we argued in Chapter 2 and have shown throughout, when the stakes are high and the outcomes are uncertain, politicians, political parties, interest groups, and activists devote greater efforts to mobilization. When political leaders offset the costs of political involvement—when they provide information, subsidize participation, occasion the provision of social rewards—they make it possible for people who have few resources of their own to participate. When leaders mobilize extensively, that is, they muster even the disadvantaged into politics.

The capacity of political mobilization to promote participatory equality is no mere supposition. The more intense exertions of political parties and labor unions to include citizens in the electoral process are an important reason why voters are more representative

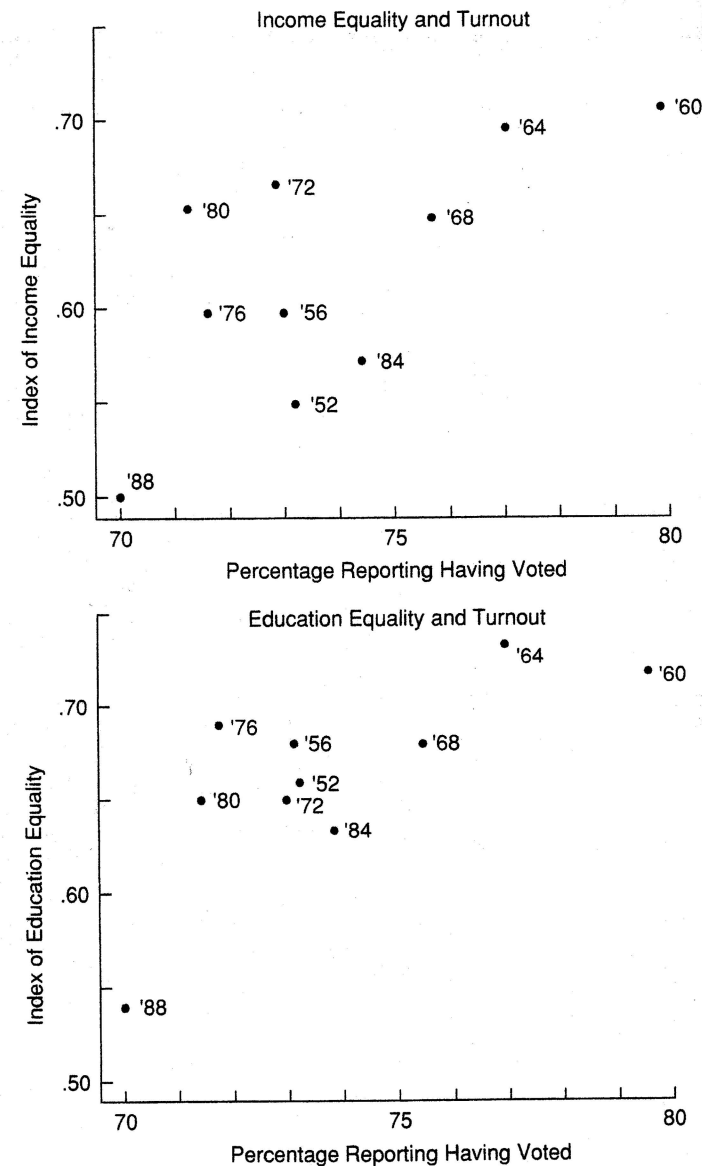


Figure 8-4 Inequality in Voter Turnout, 1952-1988.

Source: 1952-1988 National Election Studies.

of electorates in Europe that they are in the United States.¹⁸ Similarly, the more passionate efforts of political parties to get people to the polls are an important reason why class equality in American voter turnout was greater a century ago than it is today.¹⁹

The most dramatic example of how political mobilization can undo the class biases of political participation, however, comes from the era of the civil rights movement in America. During the 1950s, when the political parties mobilized whites more than blacks and registration laws systematically excluded blacks (particularly in the South), the racial disparities in citizen participation were immense (see Table 8-3). During the 1960s and into the 1970s, in contrast, when the civil rights movement conquered Jim Crow, the federal government enforced voting rights, the political parties reached out to blacks, and the racial inequalities in political participation narrowed. During the 1980s, finally, political mobilization declined, and progress toward equal representation in the political community stalled.

Political mobilization, then, extends political participation, and more extensive public involvement promotes political equality. When political leaders undertake to mobilize, when they activate more than the easiest and the closest at hand, more people take

Table 8-3 Racial Inequality in Political Participation, 1952–1988

Activity	Index of Racial Equality in Participation		
	1952 to 1960	1964 to 1976	1980 to 1988
Voted	.51	.88	.88
Influenced others	.71	.97	.81
Worked on a campaign	.29	.78	.76
Contributed money	.37	.58	.39
Attended meetings or rallies	.74	.73	1.23

Source: 1952–1988 National Election Studies.

¹⁸Verba, Nie, and Kim, *Participation and Political Equality*.

¹⁹Kleppner, *Who Voted?*, chap. 3.

part, and when more people take part, the characteristics of the political class more faithfully mirror the characteristics of the whole polity. When political leaders expand the scope of conflict, in short, they counteract the system’s usual bias toward the prosperous, the privileged, and the fortunate.

It is just possible, however, that political equality is of no consequence. It is just possible that it makes no real difference whether many citizens or only a few actually exercise their rights to participate in their own governance. It is just possible that the political system safeguards people’s interests whether they participate or not.

But it hardly seems likely. In fact, Americans need not look very far back into their history for incontrovertible evidence that who participates matters. “The first step in applying the formula” of white supremacy in the postbellum American South, historian C. Vann Woodward has noted, “was the total disfranchisement of the Negro.”²⁰ By 1905, the institutional bulwark of Jim Crow election laws effectively shut southern blacks out of the political process and within years they were segregated in nearly every aspect of southern social and economic life, in theaters, boarding houses, toilets, water fountains, waiting rooms, ticket windows, sports, factories, unions, churches, voluntary associations, and housing. All-white mayors and councils, all-white governors and legislatures ransacked African-Americans’ education and trampled African-Americans’ constitutional rights.²¹ Inequalities in participation led to inequalities in influence, which led to inequalities in policy outputs, which led to inequalities in resources, which led once more to inequalities in participation and the beginning of another vicious circle. Jim Crow was

²⁰C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 83.

²¹Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*; Gerald M. Pomper, *Elections in America: Control and Influence in Democratic Politics* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1970). Northern politicians were duplicitous and for much the same reason. The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution stipulated that “when the right to vote in any election . . . is denied to any of the male inhabitants of such State . . . the basis of representation therein shall be reduced in proportion which the number of such male citizens shall bear to the whole number of male citizens twenty-one years of age in such State.” Electoral Jim Crow should have cost the South seats in Congress and votes in the Electoral College, but the federal government declined to enforce the Constitution. Because black citizens could not vote, nobody looked out for their interests.

self-perpetuating because the disadvantaged did not—indeed, could not—participate.

After World War II, the first step in the recovery of black Americans' economic and social rights was the restoration of their political rights. Even after the enactment of the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act, the civil rights movement insisted on the necessity of a voting rights act to safeguard its gains, and it forced the hand of the President of the United States to get it. The results were dramatic. In the South and across the nation, violence against blacks declined, the quality of public services delivered to blacks increased, and the number of black public officials grew.²² After the Voting Rights Act, fewer politicians could risk the consequences of ignoring black citizens. As the racial disparities in political participation narrowed, the incentives facing political leaders changed fundamentally. To be sure, massive racial inequalities in political participation persist to this day. African-Americans still possess fewer resources and still face tremendous obstacles to full incorporation in the American political system. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine that the gains blacks have made since the 1950s could have occurred had not racial inequalities in political participation lessened.

Granted, African-American political participation is an extreme case. Southern blacks were barred from political society, if not by legal sanction then by violence, intimidation, and harassment. The

²²Harold W. Stanley, *Voter Mobilization and the Politics of Race* (New York: Praeger, 1987); Richard Bense and Elizabeth Sanders, "The Impact of the Voting Rights Act on Southern Welfare Systems," in Benjamin Ginsberg and Allan Stone, eds., *Do Elections Matter?* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1986), pp. 52–70; William R. Keech, *The Impact of Negro Voting: The Role of the Vote in the Quest for Equality* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968). Black civil disturbances in American cities in the 1960s also had important consequences: These upheavals moved racial issues to the top of the American political agenda; they prompted members of Congress to lobby antipoverty agencies to direct more money to riot-torn communities; they stimulated a flurry of new policies and programs designed to address the grievances of urban blacks. James W. Button, *Black Violence: Political Impact of the 1960s Riots* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); David C. Colby, "A Test of the Relative Efficacy of Political Tactics," *American Journal of Political Science* 26 (November 1982), pp. 741–53; Albert K. Karnig and Susan Welch, *Black Representation and Urban Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Peter Eisinger, "Black Employment in Municipal Jobs: The Impact of Black Political Power," *American Political Science Review* 76 (June 1982), pp. 380–92.

poor, the uneducated, and the unfortunate might not be able to afford to participate, they might not be mobilized to participate, but at least they are not forcibly excluded.

However true that is, though, the simple fact is that democratic government provides few incentives for leaders to attend to the needs of people who neither affect the achievement of their policy goals nor influence the perpetuation of their tenure in office.²³ Politicians can serve either the active or the inactive. The active contribute directly to their goals: They pressure, they contribute, they vote. The inactive offer only potential, the *possibility* that they might someday rise up against rulers who neglect them. Only the rare politician would pass up the blandishments of the active to champion the cause of those who never take part.²⁴

Even the rare politician has limits. Suppose democratic leaders strive conscientiously to represent all citizens, the active and inactive alike. They still need to discover what the citizens want. As for the active, the leaders' task is easy: Participants speak for themselves and thereby shape the information that officials draw upon as they make their choices. The idle go unheard: They do not speak up, define the agenda, frame the issues, or affect the choices leaders make. Even with the best intentions, it is difficult to judge the interests of people who do not disclose them.²⁵

²³See, for example, V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Vintage, 1949), pp. 507–8, 527.

²⁴For some thought-provoking indications that class inequalities in turnout have real welfare consequences, see Kim Quaile Hill and Jan E. Leighley, "The Policy Consequences of Class Bias in State Electorates," *American Journal of Political Science* 36 (May 1992), pp. 351–65.

²⁵Recognizing the overwhelming task of sifting through all the information that comes to leaders' attention, one might even pronounce the task impossible. See, for example, Raymond A. Bauer, Ithiel de Sola Pool, and Lewis Anthony Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy: The Politics of Foreign Trade*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1972); Lewis Anthony Dexter, "What Do Congressmen Hear: The Mail," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 20 (Winter 1956), pp. 16–27; John W. Kingdon, *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Philip E. Converse and Roy Pierce, *Political Representation in France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); Richard F. Fenno, Jr., *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978); John Mark Hansen, *Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby, 1919–1981* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 227–30.

The extent of citizen involvement in American politics matters, then, because people defend and express their interests through participation. "If a group is inactive, whether by free choice, violence, intimidation, or law," Robert A. Dahl observed, "the normal American system does not necessarily provide it with a checkpoint anywhere in the process."²⁶

The thirty-year decline of citizen involvement in elections and the more recent decline of citizen involvement in government has yielded a politically engaged class that is not only growing smaller and smaller but also less and less representative of the American polity. In fact, the economic inequalities in political participation that prevail in the United States today are as large as the racial disparities in political participation that prevailed in the 1950s. America's leaders today face few incentives to attend to the needs of the disadvantaged.

²⁶Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 138.

A P P E N D I X A

PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENTAL POLITICS: DATA SOURCES AND CODING

Aggregate Time-Series Analysis, 1973–1990

Percentage of voting-age population that wrote a letter to Congress. Source: *Roper Reports* Nos. 73–9 to 91–1, September 1973 to December 1990. *Question Wording:* "Now here is a list of things some people do about government and politics. Have you happened to have done any of these things in the past year? Written your congressman or senator." Coding: Percentage of valid responses.

Percentage of voting-age population that attended a local meeting on a town or school affair. Source: *Roper Reports* Nos. 73–9 to 91–1, September 1973 to December 1990. *Question Wording:* "Now here is a list of things some people do about government and politics. Have you happened to have done any of these things in the past year? Attended a public meeting on town or school affairs." Coding: Percentage of valid responses.

Percentage of voting-age population that signed a petition. Source: *Roper Reports* Nos. 73–9 to 91–1, September 1973 to December 1990. *Question Wording:* "Now here is a list of things some people do about government and politics. Have you