

## Chapter 1. Political Equality as the Foundation of Democracy<sup>1</sup>

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In 1961, M. O. Sims and several other voters from Jefferson County, Alabama, challenged the apportionment of the Alabama state legislature. The state constitution stipulated that each county was to have at least one representative in the Alabama House of Representatives. In addition, the Alabama Senate had 35 members elected from 35 districts; the districts could combine counties, but no county could elect more than one senator. At issue was the wide disparity in the population basis of the electoral districts in the two houses of the legislature. A small rural county had the same number of representatives (one) as the population of Jefferson County, which included the city of Birmingham and a fifth of the state's total population. At its extreme, the number of eligible voters for a representative elected from the most populous district was fourteen times greater than the number of voters in the smallest district.

The petitioners claimed that this system violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that assured equal treatment by the law for all citizens. The U.S. District Court supported their claim. Alabama state officials appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The two sides argued the *Reynolds v. Sims* case before the Supreme Court in November 1963. After hearing oral arguments and then considering the precedents of past court decisions (especially the recent *Baker v. Carr* case), the court handed down its decision in June 1964. The decision articulated the “one-person, one-vote” principle. Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote that “legislators represent people, not trees or acres” and “legislators are elected by voters, not farms or cities or economic interests.” The Court stated that the right to exercise the franchise in a free and unimpaired manner is essential for other basic civil and political rights. Thus, voting rights should not be reduced by differentially weighting the votes of citizens. The Court held that the Fourteenth Amendment ensured that voters should have an equal voice as a democratic principle, and the drawing of district boundaries should reflect this principle.

This decision was contentious at the time, especially among politicians and parties that benefitted from disproportionality.<sup>1</sup> Today, however, most political figures in the U.S. accept the “one-person, one-vote” principle—even if there are persisting challenges to this principle.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, while this was a court case in the United States, democracies around the world generally accept the principle that the equality of voice is essential to democracy. The historic democratic battle to expand the voting franchise aimed to institutionalize a one person-one vote principle by opening the franchise and removing weighted voting systems. Furthermore, most democracies use some form of proportional representation electoral system that reflects the principle of equal representation in the translation of votes to seats.

Citizen involvement in the democratic process has increased and diversified in the past several decades. However, this study argues that a new dilemma for democracies has emerged from this process. On the one hand, fewer people today are voting compared to a generation ago. There are many reasons for this trend, but one consequence is a widening social status gap in who shows up on Election Day. On the other hand, the number and variety of access points that citizens can use to influence government beyond elections have dramatically increased.<sup>3</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> From, Russell Dalton, *Democracy's Dilemma: The Widening Participation Gap and its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2017).

new forms of action greatly expand the potential for citizens to influence public policy and further democratic progress. However, these activities make greater cognitive and resource demands on participants, which further widens the social status gap in those who exercise political voice.

This study asks whether the changing pattern of political participation in contemporary democracies is widening the participation gap between the politically rich and the politically poor. Even if there is a *de jure* equality in political opportunity, does a *de facto* inequality in activity produce increased differences in the voice of different social and ideological groups? If this is the case, this increasing participation gap is eroding one of the fundamental principles of democratic politics. This is the dilemma of democracy examined in this book.

### **The Equality Principle**

In terms of democratic theory, Robert Dahl states:

“in making collective decisions, the . . . interests of each person should be given equal consideration. Insuring that the interests of each are given equal consideration, in turn, requires that every adult member of an association be entitled to participate in making binding and collective decisions affecting that person's good or interest. This principle, in turn, requires political equality, which can only be achieved in a democratic system.”<sup>4</sup>

The Jeffersonian argument that participation in the political process produces better citizens is another reason for broad political participation. People who participate typically become more informed about current political issues. This is why analysts often describe elections as a national civics lesson when the populace hears and discusses current policies affecting their lives. Other research suggests that people increase their understanding of the complexity of the democratic process, with positive and negative consequences.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, equal participation buttresses other citizens' rights and needs.

Another powerful argument for political equality is that society and the polity benefit if the whole population is involved in political decisions. People articulate the needs that governments should address. If this input is lacking or distorted, then the decisions of government should be suboptimal. This becomes more problematic because the 'basic model' of political participation states that social status is a strong predictor of who exercises political voice. Governments' are less likely to consider the silent groups that most need government protection or assistance, while the politically engaged garner even more government benefits. If financiers on New York's Wall Street or London's Square Mile lobby for their interests this is normal politics. If blue-collar workers in Ohio or the *Ruhrgebiet* are not involved, their policy views and needs go unheard. The same problem would exist if we reversed the roles of the two groups—although this is very unlikely.

Social problems can fester through governmental neglect, and the eventual social and political costs increase. As a contemporary example, some of the populist backlash about recent globalization policies may result from policies that looked at macroeconomic benefits, while ignoring the microeconomic costs to specific sectors of society. Policy-making that considered both sides of this equation would be more democratic, and presumably more successful in the long run.

Inequality in participation has policy consequences. In the US case, Larry Bartels showed how the alternation of power in Washington because of election outcomes affected

macroeconomic outcomes, such as income growth and income inequality.<sup>6</sup> Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson similarly discussed the role of partisan politics in increasing social inequality in America, as politics responded to the politically rich over the citizenry as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Martin Gilens is even more critical; he shows that representational inequality in the United States is spread across different policy domains and time periods.<sup>8</sup> In short, participation in elections, and the framing of elections by other political actors, can influence who makes public policies and the content of these policies.

The cross-national literature generally reaches similar conclusions. For example, Huber and Stephens demonstrated that partisan politics is the single most important factor that shaped the development of the modern welfare state.<sup>9</sup> The underlying logic in these examples is that if certain sectors of society do not vote or do not press their demands on government, then government policy outcomes are biased.

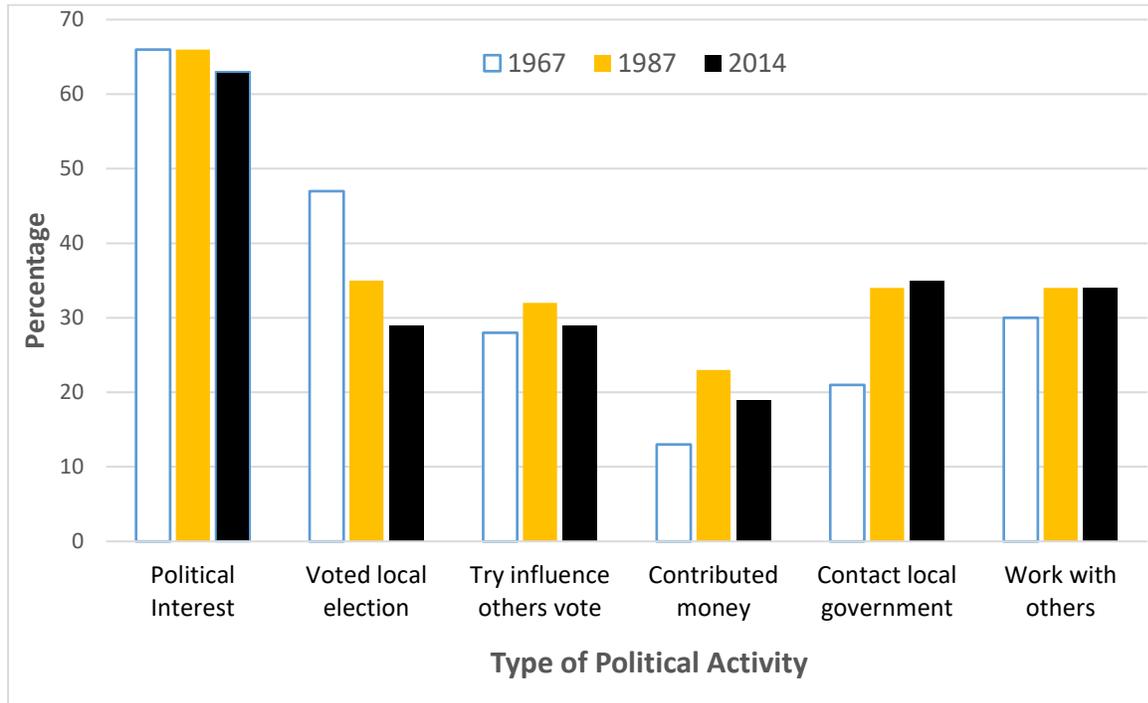
### **Empirical Examples**

The experts often equate democratic participation with the institutions and processes of electoral democracy. In *On Democracy*, for example, Dahl discusses democracy in terms of elections and the mass franchise, paying much less attention to other forms of citizen influence that represent important and in some cases more influential methods of citizen influence over political elites.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, much of the political equality literature focuses on voting turnout, because of its centrality to the democratic process and the availability of empirical evidence.<sup>11</sup>

The decreasing number of people voting in most established democracies potentially compounds the theoretical (and empirical) problem of inequality.<sup>12</sup> Some research suggests that this trend may be increasing the social status participation gap in voting, which further erodes the equality of the electoral process.<sup>13</sup> This is a worrisome pattern if it generally applies across democracies, a sign that the electoral process may be overlooking those in greatest need of government support.

At the same time, other studies show that the public's involvement in various types of direct and expressive non-electoral political activities has increased, counterbalancing the decline in turnout.<sup>14</sup> As one example, Sidney Verba and I extended part of a battery of participation examples in the United States to span the 1967-2014 timespan (Figure 1.1).<sup>15</sup> Americans are now less likely to vote; the percentage saying they always vote in local elections drops from 47 percent in 1967 to 29 percent in 2014.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the percentage who tried to convince others how to vote has held steady over time, and the percentage who gave money to a party or political cause has increased since 1967.

Moreover, the other forms of political action have held stable or increased over time. The percentage who report contacting the local government over a policy matter has increased by nearly half since 1967. Working with others in the community on a local problem epitomizes Tocqueville's view of grassroots democracy; this is up slightly over time. The broadest measure of political involvement—general interest in politics—shows no significant change over these four decades. These data are only for the United States, but this book describes a similar pattern that applies to other established democracies.

**Figure 1.1 Political Participation Trends in America**

*Source:* Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995, pg. 72), the 2014 General Social Survey Panel.

If we look beyond these conventional activities, citizens today are increasing active in new direct and contentious forms of participation. Compared to the docile days of the mid-twentieth century, more people are signing petitions, participating in protests, and doing other types of contentious action. Political consumerism—buying or boycotting a product for political, environmental, or ethical reasons—is another new form of social and political expression.<sup>17</sup> In addition, internet activism is reshaping the political landscape.<sup>18</sup> By assembling a combination of sources on the American public, for example, the overall level of political activity today is substantially higher than in the supposed high water mark of activism in the 1960s—even allowing for the decline in voting turnout.<sup>19</sup>

We should strongly applaud the expansion of political voice and influence through non-electoral forms of action since increased citizen involvement is a goal of democracies. Yet, these changing patterns of participation may pose a dilemma for democracy if they further increase the participation gap across social groups. Non-electoral forms of action often require more political resources and skills to participate, compared to the relatively simple act of voting.<sup>20</sup> Compared to voting on Election Day, for example, effectively lobbying a city council, speaking at a political meeting, or writing a political blog requires more political skills and resources. An earlier study of political participation in European Union elections concluded that direct, advocacy forms of political participation display greater social status inequalities when compared to voting.<sup>21</sup> Like the old European proverb of beggars sleeping under a bridge, the law treats everyone equally when it comes to opportunity, but it is in the use of opportunities that real inequality exists.

In addition, while voting rules prescribe “one person, one vote”, such institutional limits do not exist for non-electoral types of action. The attentive and politically skilled citizen can join many political groups, lobby their elected officials as often as they wish, and protest about their interests unconstrained by the cycle of elections. There is no legal or institutional ceiling on participation beyond the act of voting. In fact, institutional reforms in recent decades expanded citizen access to the political process outside of national elections.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, changes in the methods of political action over time in affluent democracies may actually increase the size of the participation gap.

This time dimension can be especially important for the study of political inequality because of rising inequality of income and social conditions in many affluent democracies. The stagnation of middle-class incomes, the challenges of a globalized economic system, and the excessive economic riches of the top one percent have influenced political discourse and policy outcomes. The 2008 recession brought these issues into focus, but the contemporary politics of the United States, Britain, and other affluent democracies today show that these controversies continue. Part of our analyses will consider whether the patterns of inequality have changed in recent years.

In summary, the changing patterns of political voice may have simultaneously widened the participation gap across social strata, social groups, and other social sectors. *Thus, my research question asks whether the decline in voting turnout and the parallel expansion of non-electoral participation are systematically affecting the participation gap between social groups.*

I agree with the late Seymour Martin Lipset's advice that to understand any one nation, one needs to compare nations to each other.<sup>23</sup> The literature on Americans' political participation is rich and extensive. However, there are reasons to expect that the American patterns may be exceptional in several areas—while the theoretical and political significance of the topic transcends national borders. This project moves beyond previous studies by assembling a diverse collection of cross-national evidence and longitudinal trends from national election studies to examine social status based inequality in political participation. Determining the depth and breadth of this participation gap has fundamental implications for how we might interpret and address the vitality of contemporary democracies. If this gap vary markedly across nations, for example, it prompts us to look for contextual explanations that might affect the inequality of voice. The most common example is the extensive research on how electoral rules affect who votes in elections. Similarly, legislation affecting the creation and funding of public interest groups may affect levels of civil society activity across nations. Other institutional traits may enable or hinder various types of contentious politics.

Moreover, I probe into the consequences of the participation gap across nations. Full political equality is an impossible goal, especially if one expands the scope to include non-electoral participation. Therefore, what are the consequences of inequality in the opinions expressed by the active public and heard by policy makers? And are there ways to moderate this inequality and bring the democratic process into better balance?

### **The Sources of Inequality**

It is implausible that full equality in political voice will ever be achieved. Yet, this is an inquiry into the inevitable inequality of participation. The sources of this participation gap can vary, however, and hold different implications. Some forms of inequality may be more or less

randomly spread throughout the population, without great bias in how social strata, religious groups, regional populations or other subgroups are represented. For instance, personal interests vary. Some people are disinterested in sports and do not know the teams or the rules of the game; other people decide to distance themselves from politics because of their personal preferences. Even when voting is compulsory, some people decide not to vote. If non-participation is a relatively random personal choice, then the consequences might be real while still reflecting the principle of equal opportunity.

Of greater concern is when inequality stems from factors that limit a person's potential to participate and are often beyond the individual's control. The most direct example of this follows from the civic voluntarism model of Verba and his colleagues.<sup>24</sup> In their terms, *people participate because they can, they want to, or someone asked them*. Thus, three main factors influence the decision to participate: politically relevant skills and resources, political attitudes that encourage participation, and connections to groups or people who ask one to participate.

### **Skills and Resources**

Research almost universally finds that higher social status (e.g., education, higher status occupations, and income) provides essential skills and resources that enable people to participate in politics. Higher-status individuals, especially the better educated, are more likely to have the time, the money, the access to political information, and the ability to become politically involved. A university graduate is often more effective in persuading a member of Congress with a letter or email, than someone with a limited education. Thus, these traits generally influence most forms of political activity, from voting to participating in a demonstration. So widespread is this notion that many researchers describe social status as the “standard model” of political participation. Therefore, this is where I focus our inquiries into the contemporary participation gap (see chapter 3).

The advantages of higher social status often develop from early life experiences because of class stratification in family life, income, and educational opportunities.<sup>25</sup> So some of these differences are nearly inherited, rather than earned. Other benefits of social status come higher levels of education that help people learn about society and improve their communication skills. A well-paid job provides resources that enable people to contribute to political campaigns and have the discretionary time to be politically active. Even if a person works hard to improve their social status, there remain political inequalities between the well off and the less affluent.

The skills and resources component of civic voluntarism model is also important because these traits are unevenly distributed throughout the population in ways that can reflect varied policy interests. Social class is one of the historical bases of voting choice. If one class votes more often than the other, then equality, representativeness, and policy outcomes should be affected. Especially in the US with its complex registration and voting systems, the class biases in voting turnout can be considerable. This also can apply to other forms of action that make substantial demands on participants.

I focus on social status because its effects may carry over to other population groups. A participation gap across racial/ethnic groups may be at least partially due to inequalities in social status.<sup>26</sup> For example, if Hispanics participate less in American politics, or Afro-Caribbeans are less active in Britain, this may reflect their modest resource/skill endowments. Former *Gastarbeiter* in Germany have limited political skills and resources—and political influence—in their new home. Similarly, the participation patterns of women may at least partially reflect their position in the social structure.<sup>27</sup> These patterns would imply that narrowing status differences

across population groups could decrease other participation gaps—so that democracies should find ways to facilitate participation by marginalized groups.

The impact of skills and resources also appears to vary across different forms of political action.<sup>28</sup> Disposable income might be more important for political contributions, than for protesting. Educational skills might be more important for contacting and organizing activities than for attending a rally. Or, a trend away from time-based activities (such as working in a campaign) toward money-based activities (such as campaign contributions) will affect who participates in electoral politics. Thus, if the patterns of political participation are changing over time, as I argue in this book, this may affect the size of the participation gap.

In addition to the above considerations, there is some evidence that these resource/skill gaps have increased over time. Politics is becoming more complex, and seemingly follows the Alice in Wonderland example of how we have to run just to stay in place. The relatively tranquil politics of the 1950s and early 1960s now contrasts with political debates on a wider set of policy issues, confronting a more and more complex international economic system and international conflict. Inevitably, however, people with higher levels of social skills and resources are more active in all forms of political action. The politically rich are using more means of political action and using them more effectively.

### **Countervailing Factors**

Social inequality is a long-standing challenge to democracies. When mass electoral politics expanded in the early 1900s, social democratic movements, labor unions, and leftist parties mobilized their supporters to participate. Churches did the same with their congregants. This produced historic highs in voting turnout and lessened the class bias in voting. Even today, the participation literature argues that social groups and civil society activity are potential correctives to class inequalities in political voice.<sup>29</sup> If civil society groups can mobilize the poor to engage in collective action, facilitate political voice among racial and ethnic minorities, and represent the views of the unrepresented—then the social status gap in voice can partially be mediated.

Alternatively, changes in civil society activity may contribute to growing inequality. Research links the declining membership of labor unions in affluent societies to decreases in voting turnout.<sup>30</sup> Secularization has also eroded the influence of churches as vehicles for mobilization. At the same time, the educated and affluent have the skills and resources to be more active in a wide variety of civil society groups with social and political connections. This means that group mobilization that once may have lessened SES participation gap now might exacerbate the differences.

Citizen attitudes and orientations also may affect the participation gap. A powerful example comes from a classic study of minority protest in Detroit, Michigan during the turbulent 1960s. Most observers felt that the protestors felt alienated by the political system and their ability to influence government, hence they protested. In fact, the Detroit Area Studies found that protestors were more likely to feel politically efficacious—they protested because they felt they could influence government.<sup>31</sup> A contemporary study of participation in Detroit found that feelings of efficacy were a strong predictor of who participated in various aspects of local politics.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the general importance of efficacy as a predictor of voting, conventional forms of action, and contentious participation is widely observed in the participation literature.<sup>33</sup>

The norms of the political culture can also affect participation patterns. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba found that feelings of civic duty were a strong motivation to participate in elections.<sup>34</sup> Such feelings among those with limited political skills and resources could

encourage them to overcome the barriers to participation. Yet there are also claims that these norms of civic duty are decreasing in contemporary democracies. A 2014 survey in the United States, for example, asked about six “civic-minded” activities: voting, volunteering, serving on a jury, reporting a crime, knowing English and keeping informed about news and public issues. Of the six, only voting and volunteering were embraced about as strongly as they were in a 1984 survey.<sup>35</sup> Similar angst about the decline of civic duty is common in other established democracies. If civic duty once boosted citizen participation, its erosion may widen the participation gap based on political skills and resources.

### **Contextual Factors**

A nation's institutional or contextual traits may also affect the size of the participation gap, potentially with differential effects on various types of activity. Characteristics of a society, such as levels of development and income inequality, may interact with citizens' personal resources. In addition, features of the political system might increase (or lessen) the barriers to participation, thus increasing overall activity and possibly affecting the inequality of action. For example, the procedures for voting can influence turnout levels, and laws governing non-profits can affect civil society activity. Another category involves the traits of the party system as intermediaries in the participation process.

Recent scholarship has focused on how national levels of income inequality affect participation patterns.<sup>36</sup> The prevailing logic is that higher income inequality increases the variance in skills and resources within the population, which drags down overall participation. Moreover, those at the bottom of the social structure may feel excluded by elected elites and government officials who devote greater attention to the well-off who vote, contact them and contribute to campaigns. These processes may generate a downward spiral, where the participation gap across income groups grows and then reinforces itself further.

I see a developing consensus in the cross-national research findings. Higher levels of income inequality seem to lessen overall participation across nearly all forms of action—political interest, voting, working for a political group, or contentious political actions.<sup>37</sup> Most researchers, but not all, find that the participation gap by income tends to widen at higher levels of income inequality. This means that inequality can have a double effect in creating political inequality; it lowers participation overall and widens the participation gap across income groups. Our study examines this topic with additional cross-national evidence, applied across different forms of political action.

A related stream of research asks if the development of a strong welfare state can lessen the SES participation gap. The logic is that welfare states redistribute resources that improve individuals on the lower rungs of social strata, which better equips them to become active citizens.<sup>38</sup> Other welfare state programs can lessen education gaps or especially benefit at-risk populations. In other words, welfare state regimes may augment the social position of lower status citizens to diminish social status inequalities in participation.

There is cross-national evidence to support the welfare state hypothesis. Frederick Sott showed that welfare state provisions can equalize SES differences for political discussion and voting.<sup>39</sup> Mario Quaranta showed that levels of a social democratic welfare state also appear to lessen education and income differences in protest activity across European democracies.<sup>40</sup> The breadth of the surveys we use allows us to extend these analyses cross-nationally and to compare effects across different forms of action.

Contextual effects also include the structure of political institutions and political procedures. A rich literature examines how features of the electoral system influence levels of voting turnout.<sup>41</sup> One of the most often cited, and empirically validated, propositions is that proportional representation (PR) electoral systems increase turnout compared to single member district (SMD) systems. Research links this turnout increase to the inclusiveness of PR electoral systems in which a larger number of parties compete in elections and are represented in parliament. A PR system creates an incentive to vote even at the margins.

This logic is at the heart of Arend Lijphart's arguments about the benefits of 'consensual' political systems in stimulating participation.<sup>42</sup> Consociationalism works to incorporate more citizens into the electoral process and lessen political inequality because proportional representation in parliamentary systems gives citizens a more effective voice and representation. Several studies have demonstrated this relationship for voting turnout.<sup>43</sup> However, other research shows that the positive effects of consociationalism on voting are counterbalanced by negative effects for other activities, especially non-electoral forms of action.<sup>44</sup>

Another institutional hypothesis maintains that the relative centralization/decentralization of political authority can influence participation levels and the participation gap. For instance, federal systems provide different arenas for organizing action and challenging policy makers. Federal systems might, therefore, facilitate non-electoral participation such as contacting, communal group activity, and even protesting.<sup>45</sup> Dalton and Weldon found that turnout in national elections is lower in federal systems, but all other forms of participation are more common in federal systems.<sup>46</sup>

A final category of contextual factors involves the party system. The number of parties competing in elections and the diversity of party choice appears to have a positive effect on turnout rates. Political parties that mobilize the working class and under represented minorities can significantly increase turnout rates and narrow the participation gap.

However, these partisan factors may be less relevant to other forms of participation. Solt found that the number of parties competing in elections is positively related to protest activity.<sup>47</sup> The implicit logic is that a large number of parties offers more potential agents to mobilize contentious actions. However, other research concluded that the number of political parties and the ideological diversity of parties has a negative effect on non-electoral participation.<sup>48</sup> This study argued that strong party systems tend to channel participation into the electoral arena, as Lijphart had claimed, but at the cost of political activity outside of elections. Yet even these studies did not address the question of whether these partisan traits affected the size of the participation gap. We can add new evidence to this debate.

Despite the wealth of research on contemporary participation patterns, the answers to many of these questions are incomplete. We know that social status based inequality is an inevitable reality for democratic participation—but the size of this participation gap across different forms of participation is uncertain. There is continuing debate on how social groups, attitudes, and other factors mediate this participation gap—and whether this gap is increasing. We know institutional context matters, but there are mixed results on which aspects of context affect which forms of participation. By focusing on the levels and sources of inequality cross-nationally, I try to provide more definitive evidence on these points.

## **The Empirical Base of this Study**

One's research questions determine the type of empirical resources required to study the topic. Our objective is to describe the patterns of political participation across the established democracies. This requires broad cross-national evidence for democracies as a group as well as individually. Equally important, the cross-national variation allows us to examine how context shapes political participation, and hopefully how patterns of participation affect the representation of the public's voice.

Thus, this research focuses on the advanced industrial democracies where patterns of citizen engagement are most extensive, and where previous research has developed our general theories of democratic participation. This includes the established democracies of Western Europe, North America, East Asia, and Australia/New Zealand.

The decision to focus on this subset of nations reflects our theoretical query. The institutional rules of democratic engagement are well-defined and generally accepted in these nations. Affluent democracies also share relatively similar socio-economic conditions, levels of education, and access to a free press. The analyses and interpretation become increasingly complex if we tried to find comparability in occupations and participation in nations as diverse as Sweden and the Philippines. In addition, civil society groups often mobilize participation, and in broad terms, these are comparable across the established democracies. Consequently, comparing these nations should determine the common patterns that established democracies share, as well as identify significant deviations from these patterns.

In new and developing democracies, many of these traits may be in question. In post-communist Europe, for example, civil society groups are still limited and their political involvement may reflect the pattern of the nation's political transition. In other new democracies in Asia or Latin America, the contrasts in social economic development with the affluent democracies may dominate the empirical results. The need to develop norms of active citizenship, contentious discourse and open access to information also can vary widely. In some of the developing democracies, democratic rights and the ability to participate are constrained. Thus, the theoretical questions of developing engaged citizens in new democracies would push our inquiry in a valuable—albeit quite different—direction.<sup>49</sup> Still, at times we consider these developing democracies so readers can see some of the contrasts.

To the extent possible, we also want to track political participation over time to assess whether the increasing complexity of politics and changes in the political context have affected levels of inequality. Here, however, we confront surprisingly limited empirical resources. The national election study series in most nations dutifully track electoral participation, but often skip over other forms of political action. Early cross-national research projects were similarly limited, often focusing on only one aspect of participation (such as the World Values Survey focus on protest activity). Current research now gives full attention to the various modes of political action, but it is difficult to project this evidence backward in time.

Trends for the last decade or two are relevant to our inquiry, but we want to consider the broader question of whether the relationship between citizens and the state has changed in fundamental ways during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To the extent possible, we assemble a cross-national and cross-temporal mix of evidence to provide a richer picture of changing participation patterns and their implications.

The bulk of the empirical evidence in this book comes from the two citizenship modules conducted by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP).<sup>50</sup> Research teams include these

modules as an addition to a national study of political or social attitudes. The data were largely collected through area probability samples using in-person interviews or a supplement to in-person interviews.

In 2004 and 2014 the ISSP asked a battery of questions on different forms of participation—from voting in the last national election to online participation. Approximately three dozen nations participated in each of the two ISSP waves. I focus on the roughly a dozen and a half established, affluent democracies that are in both waves (Table 1.1). Occasionally I compare the patterns in these established democracies to the other nations in the ISSP.

**Table 1.1 The International Social Survey Program Nations.**

<b>Nation</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2014</b>
Australia	1914	1432
Austria	1006	1033
Belgium	--	2264
Canada	1068	--
Denmark	1186	1758
Finland	1354	1505
France	1421	1201
Germany	1232	1718
Iceland	--	1497
Ireland	1065	--
Japan	1343	1593
Netherlands	1823	1638
New Zealand	1370	--
Norway	1404	1459
Portugal	1602	--
Spain	2481	1755
Sweden	1295	899
Switzerland	1078	1235
United Kingdom	833	1579
United States	1485	1262

Source: 2004 and 2014 International Social Survey Program, established democracies only.

Note: Table entries are the weighted N for each nation.

The 2004 survey has been extensively examined, albeit with different theoretical interests.<sup>51</sup> Another strength of the present study is the pairing of both surveys. Separate analyses of two surveys provide, in a sense, an immediate replication that shows the robustness of the results for a slightly different set of nations. Moreover, these two surveys span a tumultuous decade including the 2008 Great Recession in the United States and the financial dislocations in Europe following the banking crisis, sovereign debt problems, and conflicts over the Euro. For this reason, the early chapters building the individual level model compare both years. Then the hierarchic models merge these two years in a final comparative analysis.

In addition, this research draws upon a variety of other studies, many of which have a

longitudinal component. Several chapters draw upon a participation battery of identical participation questions asked in the United States between 1967 and 2014 (see Figure 1.1 above). Other chapters utilize time series for the election study series in several established democracies. The mix of evidence fills in the picture of how participation patterns are changing.

I have tried to write a book that is accessible to a wide audience from university researchers, to students in political science, to citizens interested in this topic. Sometimes the current approach in empirical research skips over the causal mechanisms to present an elaborate multivariate, multilevel statistical model that includes everything except the kitchen sink. There is a value to such models, and especially in merging individual and contextual influences on participation. However, sometimes these methods can miss the causal mechanisms at work by concentrating on coefficients in very complex multivariate models. This book presents extensive empirical evidence in a step-by-step fashion. I present multilevel hierarchic models as the culminations of the analyses, combining the cumulative results from the individual-level analyses with national-level contextual factors in Chapter 8.

By bringing together the empirical evidence for a larger number of democracies I map the broad contours of political action, determine whether the participation gap is systematically changing, and consider the implications for democratic politics.

### **Plan of the Book**

This book is organized into three sections. The first section builds a model of political participation that focuses on social status as a source of unequal voice. Chapter 2 describes the participation patterns in contemporary democracies based on the ISSP surveys. There are distinct modes of political action, and these modes structure the analyses that follow. Chapter 3 develops the basic model linking social status to participation, describing how this varies across modes of action and across nations. This shows that the social status participation gap is quite large, especially for non-electoral forms of political participation. Chapter 4 examines the importance of social group membership in mobilizing participation. At one time in history, the labor movement and religious groups engaged people to participation in mass democracy. As the patterns of civil society activity have changed, how does contemporary group membership interact with social status to affect the participation gap?

Experts attribute the decline of voting to younger generations, and the rise of new forms of action also centers among the young. Therefore, Chapter 5 focuses on the generational dimension of participation. Chapter 6 then adds political attitudes to the model. Norms of citizenship and feelings of political competence are strong influences on actual participation. Finally, the dramatic rise of internet-based activity prompted a separate Chapter 7 on these forms of action. Since the ISSP surveys contain only a single question, I turn to evidence from the United States to examine the participation gap in online activism.

The second section examines how contextual factors can shape political action and influence the SES participation gap. Chapter 8 studies how the national context affects individual participation patterns. Steve Weldon and I consider both the political and economic context of action in a multi-level analysis of participation. Chapter 9 tracks how the social status gap in participation has changed over time. Longitudinal evidence on participation patterns is rare. However, by assembling a quilt of various empirical studies, I find that the SES participation gap for turnout and other forms of conventional and contentious action seems to be increasing over time.

The third section considers the political implications of the SES participation gap we have observed. Chapter 10 compares the relationship between inequality in participation and various policy priorities. The analyses assess the relationship between social status and policy views, and then ask whether activists accentuate or moderate these patterns. Activists generally hold preferences different from less active citizens, but not in the direction that is widely assumed. Finally, Chapter 11 discusses the implications of the findings and considers ways to mediate the negative consequences of the participation gap so that all of societies' needs are addressed.

### **Conclusion**

Arend Lijphart used his 1996 presidential address to the American Political Science Association to make both the political and normative arguments that inequalities in voting turnout are detrimental to the democratic process: “unequal participation spells unequal influence—a major dilemma for representative democracy.”<sup>52</sup> I agree with Lijphart, but I think the situation has become more complicated over the subsequent two decades.

The good news is that in most established democracies more people are more politically active in more varied ways than was the case a generation or two ago—even allowing for the decrease in voting turnout. This marks a positive expansion of democracy. More voice means a larger role for the public in the political process.

At the same time, these trends may exacerbate the inequalities in who participates and which voices policy makers now hear. It is not good for the individuals involved, and not good for the democratic process and society overall, if factors beyond a citizen's control minimize their political voice.

Well-educated citizens taking advantage of new participation opportunities is a positive development for democracy. Many of their concerns address issues shared by the public at large, empowering the citizenry. They are being good citizens in representing their interests. So the political process should not consider limiting their participation. However, if there is wide gap in who participates, and the loud voice of some drowns out the weaker voices of others, this is not beneficial for those who are not heard or the polity overall. This book's goal is to assess the situation across established, affluent democracies, and then discuss the implications for citizens and these political systems.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Stephen Ansolabehere and James Snyder, *The End of Inequality: One Person, One Vote and the Transformation of American Politics*. New York: Norton, 2008.
- <sup>2</sup> On April 4, 2016 the Supreme Court reaffirmed Reynolds vs Sims. Texas proposed district lines based on the number of eligible voters rather than the total population. The courts rejected Texas's proposal arguing that districts should represent roughly equal numbers of the total population. Other contemporary legal conflicts in the US involve the disenfranchisement of felons and restrictions on registering or voting, such as ID requirements or the restrictions on early voting or straight ticket voting. Even worse, the courts often note that state governments enact these policies in an attempt to limit the participation of specific social groups.
- <sup>3</sup> Bruce Cain, Russell Dalton, and Susan Scarrow, eds. *Democracy Transformed? Expanding Political Access in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003; Graham Smith, *Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- <sup>4</sup> Robert Dahl, Equality versus inequality, *American Political Science Review* (1996) 29: 639-648.
- <sup>5</sup> Geraint Parry and George Moyser, *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, ch. 12. This study uses panel data to study the consequences of participation.
- <sup>6</sup> Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation and Princeton University Press.
- <sup>7</sup> Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer--and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011.
- <sup>8</sup> Martin Gilens, *Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- <sup>9</sup> Evelyne Huber and John Stephens, *Development and Crisis of the Welfare State: Parties and Policies in Global Markets*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- <sup>10</sup> Robert Dahl, *On Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. Shumpeter's classic work on democracy is another notable example: Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. New York: Harper, 1943.
- <sup>11</sup> Aina Gallego, *Unequal Participation Worldwide*; Christopher Anderson and Pablo Beramendi, Left parties, poor voters, and electoral participation in advanced industrial societies, *Comparative Political Studies* (2012) 45: 714-746; Frederick Solt, Economic inequality and democratic political engagement, *American Journal of Political Science* (2008) 52: 48-60. On the United States, see Jan Leighley and Jonathan Nagler, *Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality, and Turnout in the United States*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013; Martin Wattenberg, *Where Have All the Voters Gone?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- <sup>12</sup> Gallego, *Unequal Political Participation Worldwide.*; Klaus Armingeon and Lisa Schädel, Social inequality in political participation: The dark sides of individualization, *West European Politics* (2015) 38: 1-27; Mark Franklin, *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- <sup>13</sup> Wattenberg, *Where Have All the Voters Gone*; Armingeon and Schädel, Social inequality in political participation; Gallego, *Unequal Political Participation Worldwide*; Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Renewal of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.
- <sup>14</sup> Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Caroline Lee, Michael McQuarrie, and Edward Walker, eds., *Democratizing Inequalities: Dilemmas of the New Public Participation*. New York: New York University Press, 2015; Gianpaolo Baiocco and Ernesti Ganuza, *Popular Democracy: The Paradox of Participation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017; On the United States, see Russell Dalton, *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2015, ch. 4;

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Cliff Zukin et al., *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Sidney Verba and I submitted a proposal to the General Social Survey to replicate the Verba/Nie trend questions on the 2014 GSS under their program for module proposals. I am indebted to Sid for this collaboration. The data are available through the GSS website. Chapter 5 presents additional analyses.

<sup>16</sup> Voting in national elections has rebounded from its nadir in 1996. See U.S. Election Project at George Mason University (<http://www.electproject.org>)

<sup>17</sup> Dietlind Stolle and Michele Micheletti, *Political Consumerism Global Responsibility in Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 7.

<sup>19</sup> Dalton, *The Good Citizen*, ch. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995; Kay Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012; Nancy Burns, Kay Schlozman and Sidney Verba, *The Private Roots of Public Action*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2001; Sidney Verba, Norman Nie and Jae-on Kim, *Participation and Political Inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>21</sup> Russell Dalton, Bruce Cain, and Susan Scarrow, Democratic Publics and Democratic Institutions. In Bruce Cain, Russell Dalton, and Susan Scarrow, eds. *Democracy Transformed? Expanding Political Access in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *Democratic Innovations*; Cain, Dalton, and Scarrow, eds. *Democracy Transformed?*

<sup>23</sup> He repeated the following quote in many publications: “he who knows one country, knows no country.”

<sup>24</sup> Verba, Schlozman, and Brady. *Voice and Equality*, pp. 19-21; Henry Brady, Sidney Verba and Kay Schlozman, Beyond SES: A resource model of political participation, *American Political Science Review* 91(1995) 89: 271-94.

<sup>25</sup> Sidney Verba, Nancy Burns, and Kay Schlozman, Unequal at the starting line: Creating participatory inequalities across generations and among groups, *American Sociologist* (2003) 34: 45-69; Mario Quaranta and Giulia Sani, The relationship between the civic engagement of parents and children: A cross-national analysis of 18 European countries, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (2016) xxx.

<sup>26</sup> Aida Just and Christopher Anderson, Opinion climates and immigrant political action: A cross-national study of 25 European democracies, *Comparative Political Studies* (2014) 47: 935–965; Aida Just and Christopher Anderson, Immigrants, citizenship and political action in Europe, *British Journal of Political Science* (2012) 42: 481–509.

<sup>27</sup> Burns, Schlozman and Verba, *The Private Roots of Public Action*.

<sup>28</sup> Dalton, Cain, and Scarrow, Democratic publics and democratic institutions; Sofie Marien, Marc Hooghe and Ellen Quintelier, Inequalities in non-institutionalized forms of political participation, *Political Studies* (2010) 58: 187-213, demonstrates this with the 2004 ISSP.

<sup>29</sup> Verba, Nie and Kim, *Participation and Political Inequality*; Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady. *The Unheavenly Chorus*.

<sup>30</sup> Aina Gallego, *Unequal Participation Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, ch. 5; Mark Gray and Miki Caul. Declining voter turnout in advanced industrial democracies, 1950- 1997, *Comparative Political Studies* (2000) 33:1091-1122; Benjamin Radcliff and Patricia Davis, Labor organization and electoral participation in industrial democracies, *American Journal of Political Science* (2000) 44: 132-141.

<sup>31</sup> Nathan Caplan and J. Paige, A study of ghetto rioters. *Scientific American* (1968) 219: 15-21.

<sup>32</sup> Marissa Marshall, Citizen participation and the neighborhood context: A new look at the coproduction of local public goods, *Political Research Quarterly* 57 (2004): 231-244.

<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey Karp and Susan Banducci, Political efficacy and participation in twenty-seven democracies, *British Journal of Political Science* (2008) 38: 311–334.

- <sup>34</sup> Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- <sup>35</sup> Connie Cass, "5 things about Americans' slipping sense of duty," Associated Press, December 29, 2014.
- <sup>36</sup> Solt, Economic Inequality and Democratic Political Engagement; Frederick Solt, Economic Inequality and Nonviolent Protest, *Social Science Quarterly* (2015) 96: 1314-1327; Mario Quaranta, Collective and private resources and the inequalities of political protest in European countries, *Journal of Civil Society* (2014) 10: 294-316; Andrea Filetti, Participating unequally? *PARtecipazione e CONflicto* (2016) 9: 72-100; Anderson and Beramendi, Left parties, poor voters, and electoral participation in advanced industrial societies.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> G. Esping-Anderson, *The Three Worlds of Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.
- <sup>39</sup> Solt, Economic Inequality and democratic political engagement.
- <sup>40</sup> Quaranta, Collective and private resources and the inequalities of political protest in European countries.
- <sup>41</sup> Andre Blais, Turnout in eElections. In Russell Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, eds. *Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; Norris, *Democratic Phoenix*.
- <sup>42</sup> Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, pp. 276-80.
- <sup>43</sup> Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty Six Countries*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999; Norris, *Democratic Phoenix*.
- <sup>44</sup> Russell Dalton and Steven Weldon, Democratic structures and democratic participation: The limits of consociational theory. In Jacques Thomassen, ed. *Elections and Representative Democracy: Representation and Accountability*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014; Tom van der Meer, *States of Freely Associating Citizens: Cross-national Studies into the Impact of State Institutions on Social, Civic and Political Participation*. PhD thesis, University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands, 2009, ch. 5.
- <sup>45</sup> Katerina Vrablikova, *What Kind of Democracy? Participation, Inclusiveness and Contestation*. Routledge, 2016, ch. 4.
- <sup>46</sup> Dalton and Weldon, Democratic structures and democratic participation.
- <sup>47</sup> Solt, Economic inequality and nonviolent protest.
- <sup>48</sup> Dalton and Weldon, Democratic structures and democratic participation.
- <sup>49</sup> Two good examples are Verba, Nie, and Kim. *Participation and Political Equality*; Norris. *Democratic Phoenix*. I am still somewhat skeptical that adding control variables for democratic development fully captures the differences in participation environments across established democracies and autocratic states.
- <sup>50</sup> I want to thank the ISSP principal investigators who shared the data that provides the foundation for this research. More information is available at [www.issp.org](http://www.issp.org). The data and documentation are available for free from the GESIS data archive in Germany.
- <sup>51</sup> Dalton, *The Good Citizen*; Vrablikova, *What Kind of Democracy?*; Catherine Bolzendahl and Hilde Coffé Are 'good' citizens 'good' participants? Testing citizenship norms and political participation across 25 nations, *Political Studies* (2013) 61: 45-65; Catherine Bolzendahl and Hilde Coffé, Citizenship beyond politics: the importance of political, civil and social rights and responsibilities among women and men, *British Journal of Sociology* (2009) 60: 764-791;
- <sup>52</sup> Arend Lijphart, Unequal participation: Democracy's unresolved dilemma, *American Political Science Review* (1997) 91: 1-14.