Citizen Politics

Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies

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3. Political Participation

Democracy should be a celebration of an involved public. Democracy requires an active citizenry because it is through discussion, popular interest, and involvement in politics that societal goals should be defined and carried out in a democracy. Without public involvement in the process, democracy lacks both its legitimacy and its guiding force. When Germans take the time to cast informed votes, British electors canvass their neighbors, or Americans write their president, the democratic process is at work. The recent global spread of democratization has brought these democratic freedoms to millions of people. The jubilation that accompanied the first democratic elections in Eastern Europe or the open elections in South Africa attests to the value that citizens place on this right.

Although the objectives of participation may be similar for American, British, German, and French citizens, the actual methods and contexts of citizen input often vary across nations. This chapter examines several methods of "conventional" citizen action. By this we mean voting, campaigns, group activities, and other methods normally associated with democratic politics. We are not implying that unconventional forms of participation (protests, demonstrations, etc.) are unimportant; they are, in fact, examined in the next chapter. Instead, the sources and motivations of conventional and unconventional participation are sufficiently distinct to deserve detailed and separate attention.

The Modes of Participation

Most discussions of citizen action equate the public's participation in politics with the act of voting. Voting is the most visible and widespread form of citizen action, but it is not the only means of citizen input. The public's participation in politics is not limited to elections, nor is voting the most effective means of influencing the political process. Moreover, in cross-national comparisons, voting is an imprecise measure of the public's overall involvement in the political process.

A rich set of cross-national studies has explored the different forms of

conventional political action in which citizens may participate (Verba et al. 1971, 1978). These researchers find that people do not use various activities interchangeably, as many early analysts assumed. Instead, people tend to specialize in activities that match their motivations and goals. Specific kinds of activities frequently cluster together. A person who performs one act from a particular cluster is likely to perform other acts from the same cluster, but not necessarily activities from another cluster. They labeled these clusters of activities *modes of democratic participation.*

Researchers have identified several distinct modes of activity: voting, campaign activity, communal activity (working with a group in the community), and contacting officials on personal matters (table 3.1). Separate participation modes exist because political activities differ in the requirements they place on participants and the nature of the action. Sidney Verba and his colleagues (1978) classified the differences between participation modes by several criteria: (1) whether the act conveys information about the individual's political preferences and/or applies pressure for compliance; (2) whether the act is directed toward a broad social outcome or a particular interest; (3) the potential degree of conflict involved in the activity; (4) the amount of effort required; and (5) the amount of cooperation with others required by the act.

Voting, for example, is a high-pressure activity because it determines control of the government, but its policy content is limited because an election involves many issues. Voting also is a reasonably simple act that requires little initiative or cooperation with others. Involvement in political campaigns makes much greater demands on the time and motivation of individuals. Although campaign work occurs within an electoral setting, it can be more policy focused than the simple act of voting. Participation in community groups, communal activity, may require even more effort by the individual and produces a qualitatively different form of citizen input. Citizen groups can control both the methods of action and the policy focus of their activities. Finally, some individuals participate for a very particular reason—to have a pothole fixed or to request other government services —that does not address broad policy questions.

This clustering of activities seems to be a common feature of democratic politics. A replication of the American survey found essentially the same participation grouping two decades later (Nie et al. 1988). The British participation study (Parry et al. 1992) added some political activities and found additional modes; but their basic findings are very similar to American research.[1] Thus, our discussion of citizen action focuses on the three most common modes of conventional participation: voting, campaign activity, and communal activity.[2]

TABLE 3.1
DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND MODES OF ACTIVITY

Mode of activity	*Type of influence*	*Scope of outcome*	*Conflict*	*Initiative required*	*Cooperate with others*
Voting	High pressure/low information	Collective	Conflictual	Little	Little
Campaign activity	High pressure/low to high information	Collective	Conflictual	Some	Some or much
Communal activity	Low to high pressure/high information	Collective	Maybe yes/maybe no	Some or much	Some or much
Contacting officials on personal matters	Low pressure/high information	Particular	Nonconflictual	Much	Little
Protest	High pressure/high information	Collective	Very conflictual	Some or much	Some or much

SOURCE: Verba et al. (1978, 55) with modifications.

Voting

The history of modern democracies has followed a pattern of almost ever-expanding citizen involvement in elections (Rokkan 1970). The voting franchise in most nations initially was restricted to property owners, and long residency requirements existed. The United States was one of the first nations to begin liberalizing suffrage laws. By 1850 virtually the entire white adult male population in the United States was enfranchised. The extension of voting rights proceeded more slowly in Western Europe. These societies lacked the populist tradition that existed in the United States. In addition, social cleavages were polarized more sharply than in America; many European conservatives were hesitant to enfranchise a working class that might vote them out of office. An emerging socialist movement in the 1800s pressed for the political equality of the working class, but mass suffrage often was delayed until war or revolution disrupted the conservative political order. Voting rights were granted to French adult males with the formation of the Third Republic in 1870. Britain limited election rolls until early in the twentieth century by placing significant residency and financial restrictions on voting and by allowing multiple votes for business owners and university graduates. Electoral reforms followed World War I and granted the vote to virtually all British males. Germany, too, had limited the franchise and allowed for multiple votes during the Wilhelmine Empire. True democratic elections with mass suffrage began with the creation of the Weimar Republic in 1919.

During the twentieth century, suffrage rights were gradually extended to the rest of the adult population. Women's right to vote was acknowledged first in Britain (1918); Germany (1919) and the United States (1920) quickly followed. France lagged most of Western Europe in this instance; French women were enfranchised only in 1944. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 removed most of the remaining formal restrictions on the voting participation of American blacks. Finally, in the 1970s all four nations lowered the voting age to eighteen years of age.

In contemporary democracies the right to vote now extends to virtually the entire adult population. There are, however, distinct national differences in the rate at which citizens actually turn out to vote. Table 3.2 presents the rates of voting turnout for twenty-four industrialized democracies from the 1950s to the 1990s. These data display sharp cross-national differences in participation levels across democratic polities. In the United States and Switzerland, for instance, national elections involve barely half of the eligible adults. Voting rates are consistently higher in most European nations, especially in Germany, where close to 80 percent of the electorate cast a ballot in Bundestag elections. Turnout ranges between 70 and 90

percent in most British House of Commons elections and French National Assembly elections.

The other significant pattern in table 3.2 is the trend in participation rates over time. Comparing the two end points for the twenty-one nations with a complete time series, thirteen (including France, Germany, and the United States) have experienced turnout declines of more than 2 percent six have had stable turnout levels (plus or minus 2 percent), and two saw a turnout increase of more than 2 percent. The drop-off in voting rates was exceptionally marked in the first elections of the 1990s. Thus, voting participation is generally decreasing across national boundaries.

Compared to most other nations, voting levels in the United States appear significantly lower; moreover, the marked decrease in American turnout over the past forty years has exacerbated this pattern. Some analysts cite these statistics as evidences of the American electorate's limited political involvement (and by implication limited political abilities). But a more complex set of factors is at work (Verba et al. 1978; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Flickinger and Studlar 1992; Teixeira 1992, chap. 1). Voter registration systems and other electoral procedures strongly influence transatlantic differences in turnout. Most Europeans are automatically included on the roster of registered voters, and these electoral registers are updated by the government. Thus, a much larger percentage of the European public is registered to participate in elections. In contrast, most Americans must take the initiative to register themselves to vote, and many eligible voters fail to do so. By many estimates, participation in American elections would increase by at least ten percentage points if the European system of registration were adopted (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). The scheduling of most European elections on weekends also encourages turnout, because more voters can find the time to visit the polls. In addition, most European electoral systems are based on proportional representation (PR) rather than plurality-based single-member districts, as in the United States. Proportional representation stimulates turnout because any party, large or small, can increase its representation in the legislature as a direct function of its share of the popular vote.

G. Bingham Powell (1980, 1986) and Markus Crepaz (1990) show that political competition is another strong influence on turnout rates. Sharp social or ideological cleavages between parties stimulate turnout. The more polarized European party systems generally encourage higher voting rates than those found in the United States. When European voters go to the polls, they are deciding whether their country will be run by parties with socialist, green, conservative, ethnic, or even religious programs. Most European elections have a greater potential to make significant politi-

TABLE 3.2
LEVELS OF TURNOUT FROM THE 1950S TO THE 1990S
(PERCENTAGE VOTING)

	1950s	*1960s*	*1970s*	*1980s*	*1990s*
Australia	90	93	93	91	94
Austria	94	93	93	90	84
Belgium	88	86	86	87	85
Canada	74	77	73	73	69
Denmark	82	87	86	86	83
Finland	86	85	78	75	72
France	**75**	**75**	**81**	**70**	**69**
Germany (West)	**84**	**85**	**90**	**86**	**77**
Greece	—	—	78	80	80
Iceland	89	90	89	88	88
Ireland	74	74	76	74	66
Israel	78	80	78	78	77
Italy	90	90	89	84	87
Japan	76	80	78	78	73
Luxembourg	88	84	84	83	87
Netherlands	93	93	83	84	78
New Zealand	91	88	85	89	80
Norway	78	83	82	83	76
Portugal	—	—	88	78	68
Spain	—	—	73	75	76
Sweden	78	86	90	90	87
Switzerland	68	63	53	47	46
Great Britain	**80**	**76**	**75**	**74**	**78**
United States	**61**	**62**	**54**	**52**	**53**
21-nation average	82	82	81	79	76

SOURCES: Mackie and Rose (1990) and data collected by the author.

cal choices than do American elections. Robert Jackman (1987) has shown that the structural incentives for voting also strongly affect turnout rates. He finds that the number of party choices and the structure of legislative power in a system are direct predictors of turnout.

The United States also differs from most other democracies because the American government asks its citizens to vote on far more matters. While the typical European voter may cast two or three ballots in a four-year period, many Americans face a dozen or more separate elections in

the space of four years. Furthermore, Americans are expected to vote for a much wider range of political offices. Only one house of the bicameral national legislature is directly elected in Britain, Germany, and France; the French president is one of the few directly elected European heads of state. Local, regional, and even national elections in Europe normally consist of casting a single ballot for a single office; the extensive list of elected offices and long ballots common to American elections are unknown in Western Europe. Finally, direct democracy techniques such as the referendum and initiative are used only sparingly in France and Britain and not at all in German national politics.

Thus the American political system places unusual demands on the voters to decide on an array of political offices, government bond and tax proposals, and other policy initiatives. Voting in low-information contests, such as voting for local nonpartisan offices, is a real challenge for American voters. It is probably no coincidence that the one European country that has a comparable turnout level to the United States—Switzerland—also presents its citizens with extensive voting opportunities, calling eighty-nine national elections in the period between 1947 and 1975 (for other reasons why Swiss turnout is so low, see Powell 1982, 119).

Rather than count only the number of people who vote in national elections, an alternative measure of participation focuses on the *amount of electing* being done by the public (Crewe 1981). When the context of American elections is considered, the amount of electing is actually quite high:

> No country can approach the United States in the frequency and variety of elections, and thus in the amount of electing. No other country elects its lower house as often as every two years, or its president as frequently as every four years. No other country popularly elects its state governors and town mayors, or has as wide a variety of nonrepresentative offices (judges, sheriffs, attorneys general, city treasurers, and so on) subject to election. Only one other country (Switzerland) can compete in the number and variety of local referendums, and only two (Belgium and Turkey) hold party "primaries" in most parts of the country. Even if differences in turnout rates are taken into account, American citizens do not necessarily vote less often than other nationalities; most probably, they do more voting. (Crewe 1981, 262)

A simple comparison of the electoral experiences of a typical European and American voter highlights this difference in the amount of voting. For example, between 1985 and 1990 a resident of Cambridge, England, could

have voted about four times; a resident of Irvine, California, could have cast forty-four votes in just the single year of 1992.[3]

Turnout rates in national elections thus provide a poor indicator of the overall political involvement of the public. In addition, the simple quantity of voting is less important than the quality of this participation mode. Verba and his colleagues (1978, chap. 3) describe voting as an activity of high pressure because leaders are being chosen, but there is limited specific policy information or influence because elections involve a diverse range of factors. Therefore, the infrequent opportunity of most Europeans to cast a single vote for a prepackaged party is a limited tool of political influence. This influence may increase when elections extend to a wide range of political offices and include referendums, as in the United States. Still it is difficult to treat elections as policy mandates because they assess relative support for broad programs and not specific policies. Even a sophisticated policy-oriented electorate cannot be assured that important policy options are represented in an election or that the government will follow these policies in the period between elections. Consequently, research shows that many people vote because of a sense of civic duty, involvement in a campaign, or as an expression of political or partisan support, rather than to influence policy (Verba and Nie 1972; Conway 1991a).

The limits of voting have led some critics to claim that by focusing mass participation on voting, parties and political elites are seeking to protect their privileged position in the policy process and actually limit citizen influence. Even if this skepticism is deserved, voting will remain an important aspect of democratic politics, as much for its symbolic value as for its instrumental influence on policy. Voting is the one activity that binds the individual to the political system and legitimizes the rest of the democratic process.

Campaign Activity

Participation in campaign activities represents an extension of electoral participation beyond the act of voting. This mode includes a variety of political acts: working for a party or candidate, attending campaign meetings, persuading others how to vote, membership in a party or political organization, and other forms of party activity during and between elections. Fewer citizens are routinely active in campaigns because this is more demanding than merely casting a vote. Campaign work requires more initiative, and there is greater need to coordinate participation with others (see table 3.1, p. 42). As a result of the additional effort, campaign activity can provide more political influence to the individual citizen and convey more information than voting. Campaign activities are important to parties and

candidates, and candidates generally are more sensitive to, and aware of, the policy interests of activists (Verba and Nie 1972, chaps. 17–19).

Campaign activities can take many forms, depending on the context of electioneering in the nation. In the United States, for example, campaigns are now largely media events. Popular involvement in organized campaign activities is limited (table 3.3). Few Americans attend party meetings, work for a party or candidate, or belong to a party or political club. Steven Rosenstone and John Hansen (1993, chap. 3) present additional poll data that indicate a decreased attendance at political meetings over the past decade. The most frequent campaign activities are individualistic forms of political involvement: giving money to a campaign or trying to persuade others. Personal involvement in campaign discussions has held steady or even increased slightly over the past thirty years. The stimulus of the tight presidential election and the Perot candidacy actually pushed political discussion in 1992 to its highest level ever.

The structure of British campaigns differs in important ways from American elections. British elections do not follow a regular time schedule; the prime minister may dissolve Parliament and call for new elections at almost any time during a legislative term. Therefore, elections are often quickly organized and brief, averaging little more than a month. In addition, British parties depend on a pool of formal party members for the bulk of campaign work. Party members attend political rallies, canvass the constituency during the campaign, and go door-to-door contacting potential voters on election day. Beyond the core of party members, there is limited participation in most campaign activities (table 3.4). Moreover, with declines in the percentage of party members has come a general decrease in organized campaign activities.

Germany's development of a democratic political system during the past thirty years has increased citizen involvement in campaigns and most other aspects of the political process (Ühlinger 1989). Membership in political parties has remained stable or even increased, and participation in campaign activities has grown. For example, 11 percent of the public attended a campaign meeting in the 1961 election; by 1976 this figure had nearly doubled (20 percent). Similarly, beginning in the 1970s, popular displays of party support became a more visible aspect of campaigns. Citizen groups display electoral support independent of the party-run campaigns, so campaign activity now extends beyond formal party members to include a significant proportion of the public. In the 1989 European Parliament (EP) election, for instance, German voters closely followed the campaign in the media and nearly one out of ten spoke with a party worker during the campaign—although the EP elections attract much less attention than

TABLE 3.3
CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY IN THE UNITED STATES
(IN PERCENTAGES)

Activity	*1952*	*1956*	*1960*	*1964*	*1968*	*1972*	*1976*	*1980*	*1984*	*1988*	*1992*
Belong to a club or political organization	2	3	3	4	3	—[a]	—[a]	3	—[a]	—[a]	—[a]
Work for a party or candidate	3	3	6	5	6	5	4	4	4	3	3
Go to meetings	7	7	8	8	9	9	6	8	8	7	8
Give money	4	10	12	11	9	10	16	8	12	6	6
Wear a button or have a bumper sticker	—[a]	16	21	17	15	14	8	7	9	9	11
Persuade others how to vote	28	28	34	31	33	32	37	36	32	29	38

SOURCE: American National Election Studies.

a. Data are not available.

TABLE 3.4
CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY IN GREAT BRITAIN, 1964–87
(IN PERCENT)

Activity	*1964*	*1966*	*1970*	*1974*	*1974*	*1979*	*1983*	*1987*
Canvass	3	2	1	2	2	2	2	2
Work for a party or candidate	8	2	2	2	3	2	2	2
Attend meeting (indoors)	8	7	5	5	6	4	3	4
Attend meeting (outdoors)	8	3	6	4	3	2	—[a]	—[a]
Display poster	—[a]	—[a]	10	9	11	8	12	10
Party member	14	—[a]	10	—[a]	8	—[a]	7	9
Read electoral address	46	49	53	51	43	56	49	49

SOURCE: 1964–75, Gallup (1976a); 1983–87, Hastings and Hastings (1989, 312); participation data for 1979 and party membership data for all years from British Election Studies.

a. Data are not available.

Bundestag elections (see table 3.5). Indeed, German involvement in the 1989 EP election was generally higher than that of British or French electors. Thus past stereotypes of an unconcerned and uninvolved German electorate no longer apply.[4]

The available evidence on party and campaign activity in France is less extensive. Formal party membership has increased during the Fifth Republic, first as a result of the consolidation of a Gaullist majority and then because of Mitterrand's development of the socialist Left. At the same time, there are ongoing debates about the general depoliticization of French politics (Boy and Mayer 1993). Attendance at campaign meetings, public displays of party support, and other campaign activities probably have decreased during the past two decades, though firm empirical evidence is limited. Data from the 1989 EP election show that many French voters followed the campaign, but campaign involvement lagged slightly behind British and German levels (table 3.5).

It is difficult to abstract a general pattern of campaign activity from these diverse national experiences. Overall involvement in campaigns apparently has increased in Germany, held steady in the United States, and declined in Britain and France. Nevertheless, several common trends are at work in each nation. The expanding electoral role of the mass media is lessening the importance of party-organized activities designed to inform the public: campaign rallies, canvassing, and formal party meetings. The media's growing importance has also encouraged the spread of American-style electioneering to Western Europe. British candidates orchestrate "walkabouts" to generate stories for the evening television news, campaigns focus more attention on candidate personalities than in the past, and televised preelection debates are the norm in Germany and France.

In addition to these institutional changes, the public's increasing sophistication and interest in politics spurs campaign involvement. Many individuals are still drawn to the excitement and competition of elections, but now campaign participation is more often individualistic, such as a display of party support or discussing the elections with friends. The *level* of campaign activity may be changing less than the *nature* of the public's involvement.

Communal Activity

Communal activity is a third participation mode. Communal participation can take a wide variety of forms; this is one of the positive characteristics of this kind of activity. Much communal activity involves group efforts to deal with social or community problems, ranging from issues of schools or roads to protecting the local environment. In addition, participation in citi-

TABLE 3.5
PARTICIPATION IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES FOR EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION (IN PERCENTAGES)

	Great Britain	*Germany*	*France*
Followed campaign			
Watched TV program on election	50	61	51
Read newspaper report on election	30	32	26
Read a party poster	11	35	25
Listened to radio on election	18	19	19
Read party materials	32	16	18
Read advertisement about election	15	23	14
Active in campaign			
Talked to people about election	32	40	39
Spoke to a party worker	4	9	5
Tried to persuade someone on vote	7	3	8
Attended a public meeting	1	7	3

SOURCE: Eurobarometer 31A (June 1989).

zen groups can include involvement in public interest groups with broad policy concerns, such as environmental interest groups, women's groups, or consumer protection (Berry 1989; Dalton and Kuechler 1990).

This mode is distinct from campaign activity because communal participation takes place largely outside the electoral setting and lacks a partisan focus. Because participation is not structured by an election, a relatively high level of political sophistication and initiative is required of communal activists (table 3.1, p. 42). Citizens define their own issue agenda, the methods of influencing policymakers, and the timing of influence. The issues might be as broad as nuclear disarmament or as narrow as the policies of the local school district—citizens, not elites, decide. This control over the framework of participation means that communal activities can convey more information and exert more political pressure than the public's restricted participation in campaigns. In short, the communal mode shifts control of participation to the public and thereby increases the citizenry's political influence.

The unstructured nature of communal activities makes it difficult to measure participation levels accurately or to compare levels across nations. Still, general impressions of national differences exist. Americans are noted for their group-based approach to political participation. This trait is embedded in the American political culture as far back as the nineteenth century, when Tocqueville commented on the American proclivity to form groups to address community problems:

> The political activity that pervades the United States must be seen to be understood. No sooner do you set foot upon American ground than you are stunned by a kind of tumult; ... here the people of one quarter of a town are meeting to decide upon the building of a church; there the election of a representative is going on; a little farther, the delegates of a district are hastening to the town in order to consult upon some local improvements; in another place, the laborers of a village quit their plows to deliberate upon a project of a road or a public school.... To take a hand in the regulation of society and to discuss it is (the) biggest concern and, so to speak, the only pleasure an American knows. (Tocqueville 1966, 249–50)

Recent studies find that many Americans still favor organized groups for dealing with political problems. And in addition to traditional community-based involvement, a variety of new political movements and single-issue groups have developed in recent years: the environmental lobby, the women's movement, disarmament groups, moral/religious groups, and other organizations. Sidney Verba and his colleagues find that 30 percent of Americans participated in community groups in 1967, and this increased to 34 percent by 1987 (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Verba et al. 1978).

European political norms traditionally placed less emphasis on group activities (Almond and Verba 1963, chap. 7), and the structure of European political systems did not encourage direct citizen contact with elected representatives. Nevertheless, communal activities have also grown in Europe in recent years (Westle 1992). In the early 1970s individuals with similar issue concerns organized into citizen-action groups (*Bürgerinitiativen*) in Germany; participation in these groups expanded rapidly during the 1980s. In 1980, 6 percent of Germans had participated in a citizen-action group; by 1985 membership had increased to 13 percent; it remained at 12 percent in 1989 (Dalton 1993a, chap. 6; Ühlinger 1989). Membership in British citizen groups has also grown markedly. The British Participation Study found that 10–14 percent of Britons were involved in group actions (Parry et al. 1992, 44–45). By most accounts, communal activity is more limited in France. Tocqueville, for example, contrasted American social cooperation with the individualism of the French political culture. The French tradition of individualism continues to the present (Hoffmann 1974; Ehrmann and Schain 1992, chaps. 1 and 3). The average French citi-

zen is somewhat hesitant to cooperate with others and thereby submerge individual interests in those of the group.

The 1990–91 World Values Study gives a glimpse of cross-national differences in the public's involvement in citizen groups. The survey asked whether individuals were members of a local community-action group, an environmental group, or a women's group. Involvement was greatest among Americans (18 percent); Britons (11 percent) and western Germans (11 percent) displayed slightly lower levels of activity, and French participation (8 percent) fell further behind. Furthermore, in most nations membership in these citizens groups exceeded formal membership in a political party. In sum, this form of political involvement is becoming a more common aspect of political action in contemporary democracies.

The Predictors of Participation

The question of who participates in politics is as important as the question of how many people participate. First, the characteristics of participants help us to interpret the meaning of political activism. For example, policy dissatisfaction might either increase or decrease the likelihood of political action. In one instance, dissatisfaction might stimulate individuals to participate in order to redress their grievances; in another instance, dissatisfaction might lead to alienation and a withdrawal from politics. These two alternatives cast a much different light on the significance of participation. Second, if citizen participation influences policy results, then the pattern of participation suggests which citizens are making their voices heard by policymakers and which interests are not represented. Finally, comparing the correlates of participation across nations and participation modes provides insights into the political process in each nation and the distinct aspects of each mode.

We can organize potential predictors of participation into three groupings: *personal characteristics, group effects,* and *political attitudes.* Under the first heading, political scientists stress social status as the personal characteristic that is most strongly related to political action. Following politics requires the time to stay informed and the conceptual abilities to understand complex political issues; social status is often a surrogate for these traits (Brady et al. 1995). Higher-status individuals, especially the better educated, are more likely to have the time, the money, the access to political information, the knowledge, and the ability to become politically involved. So widespread is this notion that Sidney Verba and Norman Nie refer to social status as the "standard model" of political participation (Verba and Nie 1972, chap. 8; Verba et al. 1978; Parry et al. 1992, chap.

4). Therefore, social status is the first variable to add to our inventory of the potential causes of participation.

Another personal characteristic is the individual's position in the life cycle (Strate et al. 1989; Parry et al. 1992, chap. 7). For many young people, politics is a remote world. As individuals age, however, they take on social responsibilities that increase their motivation to develop political interests. People become taxpayers and homeowners, their children enter public schools, and they may begin to draw benefits from government programs. Most studies thus find that political involvement increases with age.

Gender is another personal characteristic that might affect political activism. Men are often more politically active than women in democracies (M. Inglehart 1981; Lovenduski 1986). Differences in political resources, such as educational level, income, and employment patterns, explain a large part of this gap (Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1994). In addition, early life socialization often portrays politics as inappropriate to the female role; this undoubtedly restrains the motivation of women to participate and the willingness of the male world to accept female participation. In an age of changing sex roles, we can determine whether gender is still an important predictor of participation.

Our second group of potential predictors reflect group-based forces. Some group influences may be psychological, such as attachments to one's preferred political party. Because campaigns and elections are largely partisan contests, party attachments can stimulate individuals to action (Verba et al. 1978, chap. 6). A sense of party identification motivates individuals to vote or participate in campaigns as a display of party support; they are concerned that their party win. Conversely, individuals with weak or nonexistent party bonds are less concerned with election results and are less likely to participate.

Participation in social and voluntary groups provides another potential stimulant to political participation. Theorists argue that experience in the participatory decision making of a social club or volunteer organization develops skills and orientations that carry over to the world of politics (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Groups also provide a useful reference structure for judging whether participation is a worthwhile activity in stimulating action (Uhlaner 1989). In addition, certain social groups actively mobilize the involvement of their members. Therefore, participation in nonpolitical groups may also stimulate political involvement.

Finally, the citizen's political values represents a third possible influence on participation. For example, political dissatisfaction might influence participation patterns (Farah et al. 1979). The causal role of political dissatisfaction is debated by researchers. On the one hand, policy satisfaction

might increase support for the political process and thereby political participation. In these terms, high turnout rates show the public's basic support of the government. On the other hand, dissatisfaction might stimulate efforts to change policy. From this perspective, high turnout rates show widespread public dissatisfaction with the government. While scholars may disagree on the causal direction of policy dissatisfaction, they regard this as an important potential influence on participation levels.

In a somewhat different vein, scholars are also concerned about the policy or ideology differences across participants (Verba and Nie 1978; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). If participation has an influence on policymakers and the government, then the question whether activists are drawn equally across political camps has important implications for the representativeness of the democratic process. Political participation that is heavily concentrated among liberals or conservatives might distort the policy process. Therefore, it is important to consider the political orientations (and policy preferences) of participants.

Another set of political attitudes includes the cluster of beliefs about the citizen's role and the nature of political action. Beliefs that citizens should participate in politics and that participation makes a difference should stimulate involvement (Nie et al. 1979; Parry et al. 1992, chap. 8).[5] This belief is described as a sense of political efficacy, the feeling that one's political action can affect the political process (Abramson 1983, chap. 8). Conversely, a feeling of political cynicism can lead to political apathy and withdrawal. If one cannot affect the political process, why bother to try?

Among these three groups of potential predictors, the surveys available for analysis include the following factors identified by prior research:

- Educational level
- Age
- Gender
- Political party attachments
- Union membership
- Satisfaction with democratic process
- Left/Right position

It also should be clear that the effects of these variables tend to overlap. Age, for example, should independently influence participation rates; but age is related to the strength of partisanship and socioeconomic status. To assess the actual influence of each variable, we combined them in a summary model predicting political participation. This model provides a measure of the causal importance of each factor on political activism, independent of the effects of the other variables. We separately calculated the

model for voting, campaign activity, and communal activity to compare the causal patterns across participation modes.

Voting

The possible influences on voting were used to predict turnout in the 1992 U.S. presidential election and in the 1989 European Parliament elections (figure 3.1).[6] The thickness of the arrows in the figure illustrates the strength of the causal influence of each factor.

The thick arrows connecting age and voting show that turnout increases significantly with age, especially in the United States ($\beta = .21$), Britain ($\beta = .24$), and France ($\beta = .33$). The figure expresses these causal effects as statistical coefficients, where the effects of age are estimated independent of the effects of the other predictors in the model. If the simple relationship is expressed in percentage terms, about 80 percent of Americans in their fifties claim to have voted, compared to about 60 percent among twenty year olds. Voting turnout follows this life-cycle pattern in all three nations.

The second major influence on turnout rates is the strength of party identification. Because elections are partisan contests, those who identify strongly with a party are more likely to show up at the polls (and presumably cast a ballot for their party). Strong party attachments heighten the motivation to participate in elections. Another organizational influence, union membership, shows a weak influence in stimulating turnout.

The other variables in the model exert some influence on voting turnout, but their effects are weak. Voting rates are slightly higher among the better educated in all three European publics, although educational differences are much more pronounced among Americans. Political values—satisfaction with democracy and Left/Right position—have a negligible impact on turnout.[7] In this most common of political activities, the political bias in participation is minimal.

Campaign Activity

Because the characteristics of campaign activity differ from the simple act of casting a ballot, we might expect that the correlates of campaign activity also differ. We combined several measures of campaign activism into a single index.[8] Then we used our standard set of predictors to explain campaign activism.

Figure 3.2 shows that partisan attachments are strongly related to campaign activity in each of our four nations. Because campaign work is an intensely partisan activity, partisan ties exert an even stronger force than for voting turnout. In percentage terms, for example, 54 percent of the

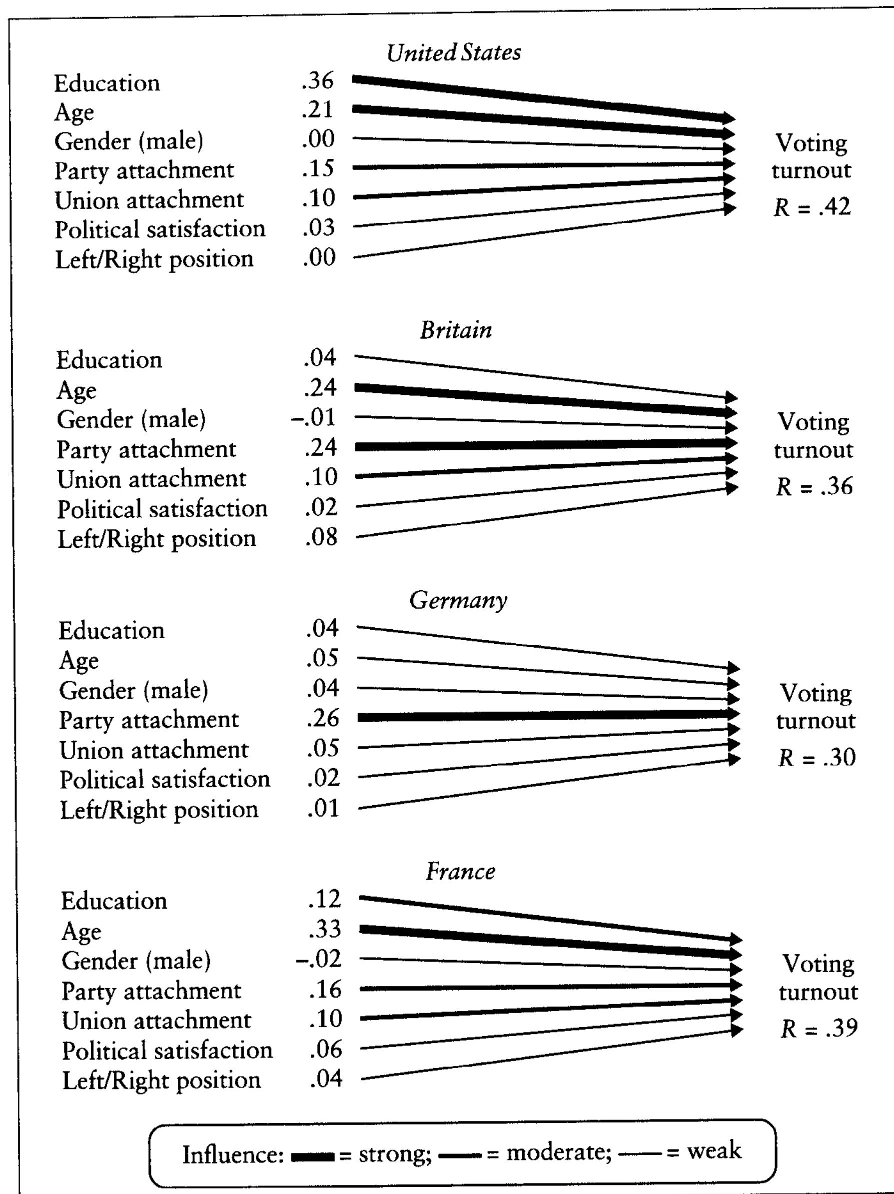

FIGURE 3.1
PREDICTORS OF VOTING TURNOUT

SOURCES: American National Election Study, 1992; Eurobarometer 31A.

NOTE: Analyses are based on individuals aged 18 and older in the United States and 19 or older in the Eurobarometer study.

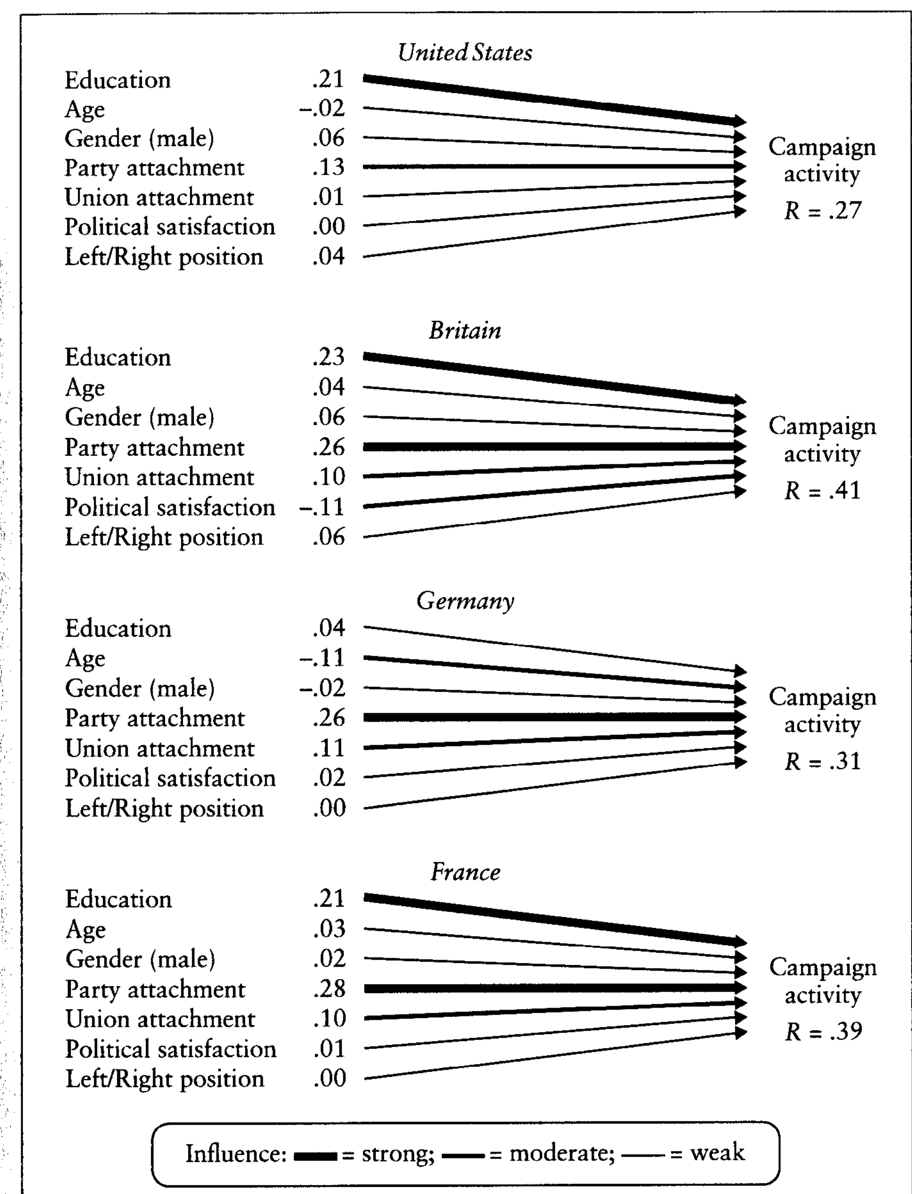

FIGURE 3.2
PREDICTORS OF CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY

SOURCES: American National Election Study, 1992; Eurobarometer 31A.

NOTE: Analyses are based on individuals aged 18 and older in the United States and 19 or older in the Eurobarometer study.

strong partisans in the United States participated in at least one campaign activity, compared to only 33 percent among nonpartisans.

The greater initiative required by campaign activity also means that the political skills and resources represented by education have a greater influence on participation rates. Campaign activists in the United States, Britain, and France are disproportionately drawn from the better educated. At the same time, union involvement also stimulates campaign activity among Europeans, indicating that unions are mobilizing this sector into the political process.

For both voting and campaign activity, gender differences in participation are small and inconsistent. Males vote at a higher rate in Germany and the United States, females are more frequent voters in Britain and France. The effects of gender on campaign activity are equally limited and varied across nations. Earlier research found a clear tendency for men to be more active than women (Verba and Nie 1978; Dalton 1988, chap. 3). Although we are analyzing only a single survey, the findings suggest that gender differences in participation may be decreasing (Inglehart 1990, chap. 10). The gender image of politics may be lessening as more women enter the political process and gender roles in society narrow.

Communal Activity

Figure 3.3 presents the predictors of participation in citizen-action groups for our three European nations.[9] This mode requires a great deal of initiative and sophistication from the participant. As a result, education is the strongest predictor of political action. The better educated are significantly more likely to participate in communal activities. The other personal factors—age and gender—generally exert little influence. The one exception is in Germany, where the young are more active in citizen groups. This may reflect younger Germans' inclination toward more direct, participatory styles of political action.

Working with a community group is distinct from voting and campaign activity because communal participation is generally not a partisan activity. In fact, in many instances participants are drawn to public interest groups because they lack strict party allegiances. Consequently, the figure shows that party ties have less impact on communal participation than on voting or campaign activities. We also find that union membership is less influential than for the other two participation modes because citizen-action groups lie outside the normal domain of union-based politics.

Broad political orientations exert only a limited influence on communal activity. In Britain (β = –.18) and France (β = –.10) satisfaction with the functioning of democracy diminishes communal participation; but in Ger-

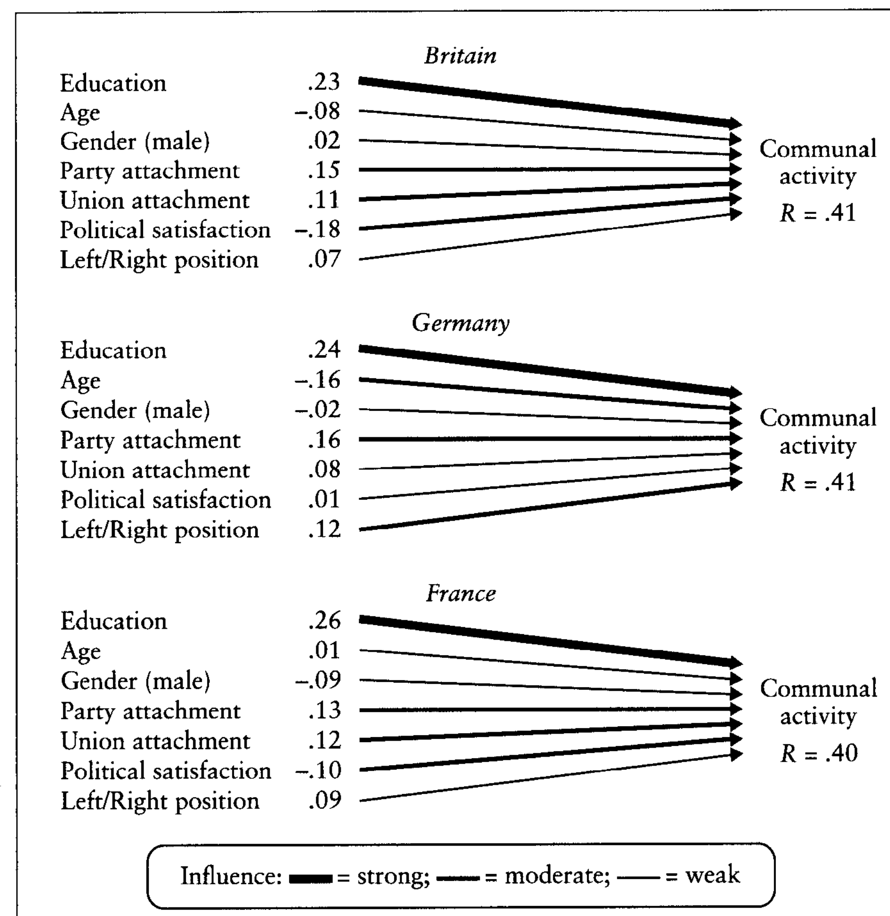

FIGURE 3.3
PREDICTORS OF COMMUNAL ACTIVITY

SOURCE: Eurobarometer 31.

many this variable has little influence. There is a slight tendency for Leftists to be more involved in citizen groups, but again these differences are modest in each nation.

The causal relationships for the three participation modes are fairly similar across nations. Two national deviations deserve attention, however. For all three participation modes, social status has a much stronger influence on political activity in the United States than in the other nations. American differences in voting by education (β = .36), for instance, are far greater than in Britain (β = .04), Germany (β = .04), or France (β = .08).

Moreover, Ruy Teixeira (1992) has shown that educational differences in turnout are increasing in America. We expect some differences in participation rates between social strata, but too large a gap implies that certain groups are excluded from the democratic process.

Most European democracies have avoided the problem of large social-status differences in voting turnout. Strong labor unions and working-class parties mobilize the working class and the less educated and equalize participation rates across social strata. Indeed, union membership is more strongly related to participation among European electorates, and the extent of union membership is much greater among the European working class. The weakness of these organizations in the United States, when coupled with the restrictive registration requirements of the American electoral system, has created a serious participation gap between social groups. In a provocative book, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1989) argue that this class bias was an intentional consequence of the U.S. system of voter registration. Regardless of the intent, this system has limited participation by the poor and the less educated. This large participation gap in the United States shows the need for some method of maximizing the involvement of all social groups in American politics.

A second national difference involves the age variable. In Germany the young participate more than the old in campaign and communal activities, which is a direct reversal of the normal life-cycle pattern.[10] This age relationship reflects German historical conditions. In the 1970s Germany experienced a "participatory revolution" that greatly increased public involvement in politics, and the young were at the forefront of this revolution (Kaase 1982). The persisting tendency for the young to be politically more active reflects the continuation of this process and the ability of alternative groups, such as the Green Party, to attract the young into the political process.

Changing Publics and Political Participation

This chapter has provided an overview of conventional political participation in the United States, Britain, Germany, and France. Voting turnout in these nations and other Western democracies is high, averaging more than 70 percent in most electorates. In addition, a sizable proportion of the populace is involved in more demanding political activities, such as campaigns or communal participation.

From the participation levels for specific modes, one can describe the overall patterns of involvement across nations. Americans come closest to the pattern of multidimensional participants. Turnout in elections is low,

but Americans are active in campaigns and community activities at relatively high levels. Germans also are a relatively participatory public. Turnout rates are much higher than in the United States, and Germans are involved in campaign and communal activities. The British patterns of participation focus on voting, with modest involvement beyond the ballot box. In their more extensive analysis of British participation patterns, Parry and his colleagues (1992, chap. 10) note with some dismay that a quarter of the British public are almost completely inactive, and less than 2 percent are active across several modes. Based on the limited available evidence, we expect the French to display limited involvement in group and campaign activities, focusing their conventional participation on voting.

Our findings show that contemporary electorates are involved in politics. Yet a paradox remains. Measures of political information, interest, and sophistication in chapter 2 display a clear increase over the past few decades. Several scholars have pointed out that rising levels of education, increased media consumption, and changes in the age composition of Western electorates should increase participation (Teixeira 1992; Topf 1996a). In overall terms, conventional participation levels are not increasing significantly; in some areas participation actually has declined. Voting turnout rates have decreased in the United States, Britain, Germany and France. With the exception of Germany, campaign activity has held steady or declined slightly. Richard Brody (1978) refers to this as "the puzzle of political participation." Why are some aspects of political participation decreasing, if the public's political skills and resources are increasing?

Steven Rosenstone and John Hansen (1993) suggest that a major explanation for the decline in turnout in the United States lies in the decreasing ability of political organizations to mobilize individuals into action (also Abramson and Aldrich 1982). The political parties are less active in bringing individuals to the polls and getting the public involved in campaigns. Another argument stresses the disenchantment of voters with the political process, leading to decreased involvement in politics (Burnham 1982; also see chapter 12). Growing social isolation and the decline of community is another explanation (Putnam 1995; Teixeira 1992, chap. 2). Although these arguments carry some weight, they are partially circular in their logic. People are less active in partisan politics because fewer people are actively involving others in politics; people are less active because they doubt the efficacy of action.

We think it is necessary to look beyond the electoral arena and reconsider how political sophistication and participation patterns are interrelated. Increasing political sophistication does not necessarily imply a growth in the level of all forms of political activism; rising sophistication

levels may be more important in changing the *nature* of participation. Voting, for example, is an area where elites and political organizations traditionally can mobilize even disinterested citizens to turn out at the polls. High turnout levels often reflect the organizational skills of political groups rather than the public's concern about the election. Moreover, citizen input through this participation mode is limited by the institutionalized structure of elections, which narrows (and blurs) the choice of policy options and limits the frequency of public input. A French environmental group bluntly stated its disdain for elections with a slogan borrowed from the May Revolts of 1968: *Élections—piège à cons* (Elections—trap for idiots). This aversion to partisan politics is shared by environmental groups in general (Dalton 1994, chap. 9). An increasingly sophisticated and cognitively mobilized electorate is not likely to depend on voting and campaign activity as the primary means of expanding its involvement in politics.

The growing political skills and resources of contemporary electorates have had a more noticeable impact on increasing participation in areas where activity is citizen initiated, less structured, and more policy oriented (Dalton 1984; Inglehart 1990, chap. 10). The self-mobilized individual favors referendums over elections and communal activity over campaign work. The use of referendums has, in fact, increased dramatically in Western democracies in recent years (Butler and Ranney 1994; Cronin 1989). Similarly, the activity of citizen lobbies, single-issue groups, and citizen-action movements is increasing in nearly all advanced industrial democracies. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, chap. 3) similarly find that issue-based contacting of political elites has significantly increased among Americans. Even the electoral arena might be reinvigorated in Europe by expanding the public's decision-making responsibilities to include primaries, preference-ranking mechanisms for party-list voting, or candidate ranking within party lists. Why have the electoral opportunities of European citizens not kept pace with the general expansion of democratic politics?

The new style of citizen politics thus seeks to place more control over political activity in the hands of the citizenry. These changes in participation make greater demands on the participants. At the same time, these activities can increase public pressure on political elites. Citizen participation is becoming more closely linked to citizen influence.

Notes

1. Parry et al. (1992) add items on protest and political violence that form another mode in their study of British participation. Bettina Westle (1992) reviews the broader European literature on this topic. A study of Buffalo residents by Milbrath and Goel (1977) identifies the same four modes and two additional ones: communication and protest. Their communication mode is a residual category that encompasses the additional items Milbrath and Goel added to their participation list, and the protest mode is studied in the next chapter.

2. Verba and Nie (1972) originally found that only 4 percent of the American public is active primarily through contacting officials on personal matters. These individuals tend to be sophisticated, but also unconcerned with broad political issues. Because of the very small size of this group, we do not include this fourth participation mode. Parry and his colleagues (1992, chap. 3) find that contacting is more common in Britain, especially for the new examples of local contact that they included in their study. Similarly, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, chap. 3) find that the frequency of issue-based contacting among Americans almost doubled between 1967 and 1987, involving almost a quarter of the public. So this participation mode is exapanding.

3. The British votes include local council, county, the 1987 House of Common election, and the 1989 European Parliament election. The American votes include both primary and general elections: four votes in the primary for federal offices and two for state offices (these six offices were filled in the general election), one vote for a county supervisor, three votes for judges, four for the junior college school district, three for city government, three for the water district, and fourteen state initiatives and referendums.

4. Initial comparisons between eastern and western Germany suggest that citizens in both regions participate at roughly the same levels. Easterners lag a bit behind on measures of party and campaign involvement, but display comparable levels of voting turnout and political interest (Dalton 1993a, chap. 6; Westle 1992).

5. Even though feelings of efficacy are important, a valid measure was not available in the surveys we analyzed, so this is not included in the models that follow. For more on the impact of efficacy, see Dalton (1988, chap. 3), Rosenstone and Hansen (1993, chap. 5), and Parry et al. (1992).

6. The analyses in figures 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 are based on multiple regression analyses; figure entries are standardized regression coefficients. The European Parliament elections attract less interest than national parliamentary elections, which may affect our findings. Turnout as reported by our respondents is 54 percent for Britain, 75 percent for Germany, and 54 percent for France. We decided to use this election because it was held simultaneously in all three European nations and we have comparable public opinion data from the Eurobarometer survey. In addition, these European turnout rates are fairly comparable to participation in U.S. elections.

7. Political satisfaction in the European samples was measured by a question on the respondent's satisfaction with the way democracy functions in his or her nation. In the United States, satisfaction was measured by a question on trust in government.

8. Campaign activity in the European samples was drawn from Eurobarometer 31A (table 3.5). Activism was measured by a count of participation in the following actions: talked to friends about the campaign, spoke to a party worker, attended a meeting, read party material, or tried to persuade others. Campaign activity in the American survey was measured by a count of the activities listed in table 3.3, p. 49.

9. The measure of communal participation is taken from Eurobarometer 31. Respondents were asked about "taking part in citizen's action groups." We coded these responses: (1) would never do, (2) would do under exceptional circumstances, (3) would do for important matters, and (4) have done. Comparable data are not available for the United States, but see Dalton (1988, 54–56) for analyses of earlier American results.

10. A similar finding was presented in Dalton (1988, chap. 3).

4. Protest Politics

Occasionally, citizen participation bursts beyond the bounds of conventional politics to include demonstrations, protests, and other forms of unconventional activity. Although protesters often go beyond the normal channels of democratic politics, they are nevertheless an essential part of the democratic process. The protests that accompanied the civil rights demonstrations in the United States during the 1960s, the environmental protests of the past decade, and the people-power protests that brought democracy to Eastern Europe illustrate how the public can force political systems to respond, to change, and to grow.

Protest is not new to Western democracies. The United States has experienced political conflict throughout its history (Tilly 1969). The colonial period saw frequent revolts against taxation, property restrictions, and other government policies. When rural elements allied themselves with the urban poor and the bourgeoisie, an American revolution against British control became inevitable. After independence, political conflict continued with the growth of workers' movements and agrarian/populist movements in the 1800s. Abolitionists, suffragettes, and other political groups used large-scale, nonviolent protests and demonstrations throughout the past century. The early half of this century was a period of often intense and violent industrial conflict.

A revolutionary tradition is even more deeply ingrained in the French political culture (Cerny 1982). Many French Leftists trace the foundations of French democracy to the revolutions of 1789, 1830, and 1848, as well as the Paris Commune of 1871. Between these dramatic political events, French society displayed a high level of protest and collective violence for most of the past century (Tilly et al. 1975, chap. 2). Food riots and similar conflicts were widespread in the mid-1800s, and industrial conflict developed during the second half of the century and the early 1900s. A call to the barricades stirs the hearts of many French citizens, contributing to historically high levels of unconventional political activity. In the words of one expert, protest in France is a national way of life.

Protest and collective have action occurred on a more limited scale in