DEFINING AND MEASURING DEMOCRACY

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More Participation, More Democracy?

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In any attempt to measure the extent of democracy, the degree of popular political participation must constitute one of the indices. Democracy meant originally the 'rule', or 'power', of 'the people'. To put it at its most simplistic, a regime in which the people exercised no part in rule could not qualify as 'democratic' (although some may have claimed that it did). But, conversely, should one conclude that the more the people participate in politics, the more democratic the system of government? Unfortunately, things are not so simple.

The definition of democracy as the power of the people is derived from its Greek original. This fact, however obvious, may still alert one to the difficulties in taking popular participation as a measure of democratization, not least because of the discontinuities between the ancient and modern experiences of 'democracy' (see Farrar, 1988; Finley, 1973; Held, 1987). The prime political discontinuity is that in Athens the term 'power' of the people meant something that it cannot mean in the modern world. The 'people', meaning the citizens, exercised control over policy by *direct* acts of will in the assembly. In addition, the citizens had the opportunity to be chosen, by lot, to carry out the executive tasks of government. Clearly citizen participation in the modern world is very far removed from this. As John Dunn puts it: 'in no modern state do its members, male or female, decide what is in fact done, or hold their destiny in their own hands. They do not, because they cannot' (1992: vi).

Thus democracy as the 'power' of the people has to be attenuated to 'rule' of the people or to some rather weaker term which captures the elements we associate with modernity – institutionalized popular influence, procedures of accountability. In the era when something to be called democracy was reinvented (even if termed 'republic'), the claim advanced in its favour was its superiority to the direct popular forms of the ancient world rather than any element of continuity (Wokler, 1994). This is seen in Federalist Paper 63, where one element in the 'most advantageous superiority' of the American system lay in 'the total exclusion of the people in their collective capacity' from any share in government. It is not, in fact, that popular

participation is being totally excluded – in republican terminology it is one of the elements in mixed government. But this participation is to be mediated through political leaders who, with relative rapidity, became professionalized (Pizzorno, 1970).

Citizen participation thus ceased to be the *paramount* indicator of democracy. It has been joined by several others – the competitiveness of élites, the representativeness of representation, the control of bureaucracy, the independence of the judiciary, freedoms of various kinds. Thus when Dahl opened his treatment of democratization in *Polyarchy* (1971) he employed two broad indicators. One was, indeed, participation – measured by the right to take part in elections and office. The other was 'public contestation' (competition for office and political support). This is taken to be a measure of 'liberalization' (Dahl, 1971: 1–9). Each element, Dahl suggests, is possible in the absence of the other. Political contestation may increase without a corresponding increase in participation, thereby creating competitive oligarchies such as existed in nineteenth-century Europe. Equally, participation in elections may be provided without increasing political choice. It is only when liberalization occurs in tandem with participation that one can speak of democratization (or of the emergence of polyarchies, since Dahl would add a range of other indicators for full democratization to be identified). Thus, in isolating participation as an indicator of democracy, no claim is being advanced that it is *the* indicator. Indeed, the significance to be attached to participation, or to various forms of participation, turns very much on the conception of democracy which is held.

A broad distinction can be drawn between a 'participatory' or 'radical' conception and a 'realist' conception which places its stress on political leadership, accountability and representation (see Nordlinger, 1981: 207; Sartori, 1987: 39–55). In distinguishing these two dispositions, one is doing some disservice to the nuances of various theorists by putting into a single camp writers who do differ in various ways. To place Pateman, Gould and Barber into the 'participatory' school is not to deny significant differences in emphasis. The same is true for such 'realists' as Schumpeter, Sartori and Nordlinger. Nevertheless, the distinction between the approaches will serve the purpose of suggesting how conceptions of democracy can result in contrasting evaluations of participation.

The participatory democrats may trace a genealogy from ancient models of citizenship or, within modern thought, from Rousseau or from J. S. Mill and G. D. H. Cole. None believes that existing democracies live up to their ideals of participatory citizenship. Indeed, contemporary institutions serve, rather, to discourage such ideals and so participationists look for changes in the structures of

politics to widen citizen involvement. People would not only go to the polls but would also attend party meetings, take part in referendums and even 'participate' in the executive arm of government and the workplace. The process of taking part becomes integral to democracy. Deliberation, the search for consensus, the desire to encourage the reticent or the less privileged to have their say, the educative effects of involvement – all are valued in different ways (see Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970: 42). For all, the decisive test of a democracy is its capacity to encourage its population to play an active role in its government.

This is not the case for the realists. Sartori, for example, contends that democracy is 'the by-product of a competitive method of leadership recruitment' (1987: 152). The search for indicators of democracy will start with the competition between political leaders. It will not end there because competition is not itself democracy but produces democracy. It does so because the leaders can only win the competition by appealing to the people. Hence democracy 'still results from the sheer fact that the *power* of deciding between the competitors is in the hands of the demos' (Sartori, 1987: 151; original emphasis). Thus the index of democratization would also be sought for in some, probably qualitative, account of the '*responsiveness* of the leaders to the led' (Sartori, 1987: 156; original emphasis; but see also below).

The popular input required is at once all important yet minimal. It is all important in that elections constitute the decisive point in democracy. It is minimal in that the ordinary citizen is asked to do little more than turn out on election day. Indeed, Schumpeter (1952) would go so far as positively to discourage citizens from intervening between elections.They are urged to respect a division of labour between themselves and the professional politicians. In short, for Sartori and Schumpeter, participation, apart from voting, is not taken to be a key indicator of democracy. Representation or élite responsiveness would be more relevant.

Participation as a multiple indicator

That one theory should pay special attention to one mode of participation – voting – and virtually none to others is a reminder of the multidimensionality of 'participation'. This has been stressed by most studies of participation since the work of the Verba and Nie team (Parry et al., 1992; Verba and Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1978). The various modes of taking part in politics – voting, party campaigning, group activity, contacting representatives and officials, protesting – have a number of different characteristics, not least their effects on

Table 3.1 *Five modes of political participation and associated levels of activity (N =* c. *1,570)*

Activity	% Yes/At least once	% Often/Now and then
(A) Contacting:		
Member of parliament	9.7	3.4
Civil servant	7.3	3.1
Councillor	20.7	10.3
Town hall	17.4	8.9
Media	3.8	1.6
(B) Groups:		
Organized group	11.2	6.7
Informal group	13.8	6.4
Issue in group	4.7	2.3
(C) Protest:		
Attend protest meeting	14.6	6.1
Organize petition	8.0	2.1
Sign petition	63.3	39.9
Block traffic	1.1	0.3
Protest march	5.2	2.1
Political strike	6.5	2.3
Political boycott	4.3	2.3
(D) Party campaigning:		
Fund-raising	5.2	4.3
Canvasing	3.5	2.6
Clerical work	3.5	2.4
Attend party rally	8.6	4.9
(E) Voting:		
Local	86.2[1]	68.8[2]
National (% voted 1983)	82.5	
European (% voted 1984)	47.3	

[1] % some or more
[2] % most or all

political outcomes. Hence there is a strong argument for treating each mode of participation as a distinct indicator of democratization. For Britain, which will serve as an illustration, some idea of the broad participatory modes and their specific activity levels is given in Table 3.1.

The table indicates fairly clearly the modest levels of activity to be found over a five-year period. The first column of figures shows the percentages of those who have performed the activities at least once in the period. Contacting at local level scores respectably but few activities even make double figures. The second column sets a slightly

Table 3.2 *Overall political activity scale (N = 1,434)*

Score	%	Cumulative %
0	3.2	3.2
1	3.9	7.1
2	5.2	12.3
3	8.6	20.9
4	9.6	30.5
5	14.1	44.6
6	8.8	53.4
7	7.8	61.2
8	6.4	67.6
9	5.8	73.4
10	3.8	77.2
11–20	17.1	94.3
21–30	3.5	97.8
31–40	0.7	98.5
41–50	1.0	99.5
51–60	0.4	99.9
61–100	0.1	100.0

Note: Min. = 0; Max. = 86.0; Mean = 8.2; Median = 6.0; Mode = 5.0.

higher standard and includes only those who declared that they had performed the acts either 'often' or 'now and then'. By this criterion, activism drops to very low levels indeed (see Parry et al., 1992). The core of people sustaining participation in Britain is proportionately small although in absolute numbers they may appear to have a greater presence (assuming that 1 per cent represents something over 400,000).

Table 3.2 presents the levels of participation in an alternative form – this time merging the five modes into one general scale running from 0 to 100 (see the note at the end of this chapter for the scale construction). Hence the average citizen (median) scores only 6 and the most frequent score (mode) is 5. Because of the near universality of voting at least once in a five-year period, only 3.2 per cent score zero. But equally only 2.2 per cent score above 20. Where one would draw the line between activism and quiescence or between 'gladiators' and 'spectators', to use Milbrath's terminology (1977), is somewhat arbitrary, but, wherever it is drawn, the activist category will contain a small minority of the population.

Voting

For very obvious reasons, voting has been traditionally taken as the prime indicator of democratic participation. As has been pointed

out, it plays the crucial role in the realist theory and its significance would not in general be denied by participatory democrats. Yet, even assuming that the other characteristics of an election are in existence (genuine choice, lack of fraud, etc., etc.), there are a number of problems in taking voting turnout as the prime democratic test.

Voting is the one political activity which is performed by the vast majority of the population. This gives it an exceptional importance but also means that it is a highly atypical measure of activism. Furthermore, voting turnout is often manipulated by the political class as well as being affected by electoral laws such as on registration (Steed, 1972). Hence, it is not necessarily the case that 98 per cent turnouts represent a deeper mass commitment to democracy than figures around 70 per cent, or, as in the USA, around the 50 per cent mark.

Indeed, despite the importance of elections in the realist school, it is not clear how important voting *turnout* is to the argument. It is the mere fact of the election – the opportunity to throw the rascals out, the chance of exercising a veto – which matters (Riker, 1982). It is not necessary to attribute to all members of the school the 'defence of apathy' which was found in some writers of the 1960s. Nevertheless, it is understandable that Schumpeter's strictures on the political rationality and competence of citizens should find echoes in such works as McCloskey's much cited, even notorious, article on consensus and ideology. For him, the potentiality for authoritarianism and ideological inconsistency amongst the wider population meant that it was a blessing in disguise that they did not participate more actively (McCloskey, 1964: 376–9).

There is little sign of this in Sartori. Although he is much exercised about the lack of understanding, the crisis of under-comprehension, the poor quality of political information (Sartori, 1987: 115–30, 428–39; 1989), his concern is rather for the lack of understanding of the politician than of the ordinary citizen. Certainly questions of competence offer further reasons for his rejection of participatory or 'referendum democracy'. But, revealingly, and in some contrast here to Schumpeter, the incompetence of the mass is less crucial: 'If, in fact, elections decide about who will decide, the implication is that the burden of rationality does not rest – in the electoral theory of democracy – on electorates: It is shifted on to their representatives' (Sartori, 1987: 110).

For the participatory democrat, the problem with employing voting as a measure of democratization is that, as it operates in liberal democracies, it carries an excessive burden. An average of twelve crosses on a ballot paper in a lifetime is an insufficient test of democratic citizenship. Moreover, as Verba and Nie have argued

(1972: 322–7), voting is something of a blunt instrument. Whilst it is egalitarian, it also conveys relatively little information to élites as to policy preferences. One answer may be to increase the opportunities to vote and to do so in ways which allow the voter to discriminate more finely between policies both as to their benefits and their costs (see, for example, Barber, 1984: 284–90).

At a more obvious level, the multiplicity of offices open for election in the USA provides a very different perspective on the usual picture of voting turnout in that country. As Ivor Crewe has noted: 'The average American is entitled to do far more electing – probably by a factor of three or four – than the citizen of any other democracy' (1981: 232). Thus turnout in general elections is less important as an index than the quality of the vote. Russell Dalton's question remains pertinent: 'Why have the electoral opportunities of European citizens not kept pace with the general expansion of democratic politics?' (1988: 57).

Other modes of participation

To remedy the thin quality of voting, participatory democrats seek for supplementary modes of citizen activism. Compared with voting, a greater intensity and specificity of participation is possible, but, under present conditions, the experience is generally shared only by small minorities. Even in the USA, which 'out-performs' most other countries, in no mode does anywhere near a majority get involved. In Britain, for example, the vast bulk of the population engage in none of the activities of contacting, party campaigning, group work or direct action (see Table 3.1), and the intense activists can appear almost eccentric in the extent of their deviation from the norm.

Are these levels any indication of the extent or health of democracy? There are various ways of interpreting them. One would be to argue that it is dissatisfaction rather than satisfaction which is likely to lead people to contact their local councillor or go on a protest demonstration. In Britain, dissatisfaction with the poll tax introduced by the Conservative government in 1989–90 stimulated widespread protests, sometimes in unlikely localities. Hence, activism may indicate widely felt concern not only about policy but also about the capacity of the political system to respond to felt needs. Some kinds of protest, including extreme forms of direct action, are attempts to draw the attention of élites to issues which have been ignored. In all these ways, activism may indicate a failure of democracy as much as its success. The interpretation of quiescence (the dominant motif of Table 3.1) is equally problematical. Quiescence may for some reflect satisfaction, but this certainly cannot be assumed for all. Some may feel so estranged as to 'exit'; others may feel the costs of action outweigh the benefits; yet others that the problem is insoluble. Hence no facile inferences can be made about the mood of the people and the health of democracy.

The political

Underlying this discussion is an assumption that the activities delineated above do indeed constitute the realm of meaning for 'political participation'. Yet this, too, raises problems that affect how measures are to be constructed – problems revolving around the question: what is 'political' participation (Parry, 1972)?

Difficulties are, for example, often raised about the political character of much contacting of representatives and officials by individuals. How far should these activities count as participation within a democracy? If one were to confine one's attention to what ordinary citizens regarded as 'political' actions or issues, the sphere of political science would be considerably reduced. In Britain, fewer than 20 per cent of local respondents regarded their action as 'political'. More regarded local issues as political, but even here fewer than half perceived housing, transport matters, law and order or environment and planning problems in this light (Parry and Moyser, 1988: 38–51). The reasons are a matter of speculation but 'politics' has a common association with party involvement, whilst 'political' has long carried pejorative connotations.

Politics is a constructed term and one need not be restricted by ordinary language. Nevertheless, there is another reason why some contacting activity might be construed as non-political and, hence, irrelevant as a democratic indicator. It can be argued that what Verba and Nie (1972) labelled 'particularized contacting' – getting in touch with representatives and officials about a personal or family matter –lacks the generality which is conceptually part of the political. This is a persuasive argument in principle. In practice it is more questionable. First, the sharp distinction between the private and the public can be difficult to draw. It is a shrewd tactic to dress private advantage in the clothes of the public interest – many environmental matters are of this kind. In other cases there is a genuine mixture of the personal and the public. Parents raise issues over the availability of a school place for their child and may themselves, or as a consequence of the accumulation of such queries, thereby elevate this into a problem for the local authority. Equally, private 'consumer' complaints about public housing and other services can, when concentrated, become major issues of local politics, precipitating further collective 'political' activity. Secondly, it is a mistake to dismiss the consumerist

element in contacting as irrelevant to any measure of democracy. Responsiveness to complaints about service implementation may not be the most noble aspect of democracy but it is not to be disregarded as an element in generating the respect and support of citizens. There is that much truth in notions of a citizens' charter – better a combination of voice and loyalty than to encourage alienation and exit!

Participation and political opportunity structures

For participatory democrats, the reorientation of civic life they seek would entail an expansion of the opportunities to participate. The realists, by contrast, would be largely content with the opportunities that have evolved in the liberal democracies. The range of these opportunities is perhaps more open to unambiguous cross-national comparisons. Mention has already been made of the frequent opportunities to American citizens to vote. Similarly, the countries in which the referendum or the initiative is available can be readily enumerated. But the opportunity structures can go much further than this. Mill (1991) suggested the incorporation of as many persons as possible in jury service or in parish offices, forming part of his school of public spirit. To them he famously added his advocacy of worker co-operatives. This 'would realize, at least in the industrial department, the best aspirations of the democratic spirit' (Mill, 1965: 793).

The widening of participatory opportunities may encompass the bureaucracy, education, social services, the family (Held and Pollitt, 1986, offers a useful survey). Nearly all involve some form of decentralization or devolution and many require fundamental challenges to the domination of organized knowledge systems. From a participatory standpoint, such structures of opportunity should be included within an index of democratization, although in many cases there will be argument about their unalloyed democratic nature. Examples might include elected parental government of schools, lay involvement in the operation of some social services such as day-care centres, running housing co-operatives, participation in local environmental protection agencies, and citizen input into allocation of medical resources (for various possibilities, see, for example, Boaden et al., 1982; Gyford, 1991). Similarly, the expansion of 'third force' organizations between the market and the state in Britain and America has led to a new arena of participation (Ware, 1989a, 1989b). But distinctions have to be drawn between the consumerist and the citizenship orientations of these developments. Some, perhaps the majority, constitute efforts to decentralize services to the

local government or welfare consumer. Others are more bottom-up and part of an attempt at increasing citizen participation (Gyford, 1991; Hoggett and Hambleton, 1987).

There are almost certainly considerable opportunities in these arenas to increase participation in matters about which the ordinary person, as consumer or citizen, has the capacity to be well-informed (Parry, 1989). In the same way, a participatory democrat would wish to enhance the representative process. Although pluralist democracies place such stress on representation, it is arguable that they are insufficiently representative in at least two ways. First, the interests are represented in an unequal and somewhat haphazard manner. Secondly, the interests are not themselves organized internally in a sufficiently democratic manner.

The conventional pluralist response to the first problem is to leave things to the operation of the pressure group market. The biases, under-participation and obstacles to entry in this market are sufficiently well-known at least to call into question its bland acceptance, and most pluralists now accept this (Dahl, 1982). Another response in recent years has been the revival of interest in earlier forms of pluralism based on functional representation (Hirst, 1989). Alongside, and distinct from this, there has been a new interest in group rights (Kymlicka, 1989). In general, if representation is one measure of democracy, then the extent to which the density and complexity of modern civil society is registered may need to be incorporated into the scale. Generally the objective is a denser system of representation (see also Bobbio, 1987; Leca, 1992).

The second dimension of any group representation, whether or not formalized, is the internal democracy of the groups. The propensity of all groups towards oligarchy means that they are not necessarily representative of those whom they purport to represent. This has, from a radical standpoint, long been a powerful argument against the democratic claims of orthodox pluralism (McConnell, 1966). It is, however, as significant in the case of the representative quality of local community activists as in the case of national corporate representation. Thus, in *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy*, Dahl (1982: 80) made the point that systems of corporate pluralism raised fundamental issues of the alienation of final control over the public agenda from citizens and elected representatives. Decentralizing will not therefore be democratic if it means devolving to unaccountable oligarchies (Smith, 1985). For the realist democrat, by contrast, all this is irrelevant. It is one of the errors of the anti-élitists, Sartori assets, that they 'seek democracy in structures, not in *interactions*' (Sartori, 1987: 151; original emphasis).

Equality and participation

As potentially significant to a democracy as the amount of participation is the equality of that participation – a major concern of the Verba and Nie team. Indeed, the dilemma that Verba and Nie raise is that simply to increase the level of citizen participation, without any other concomitant changes, could be to reinforce inequality. Moreover, the more effective the participation, the more the advantaged in society might be able to get themselves heard (see also Pizzorno, 1970).

One person, one vote is, supposedly, encapsulated in electoral systems. This makes voting a relatively egalitarian mode of participation. But one person, one voice is certainly not true of any other mode of citizen activity. The multidimensionality of participation means that the various modes are not skewed in precisely the same way (Parry et al., 1992; Verba and Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1978). In the UK, for example, it seems that greater individual resources in terms of wealth or education do not translate into higher participation across every dimension of activity. However, perhaps more significant is that those who are disadvantaged under-participate (Parry et al., 1992: 63–84). They have not succeeded in compensating for their weak economic position by raising their political voices (Parry and Moyser, 1991).

If all modes of participation are reduced to a single overall scale (which can be misleading in the way it irons out important variations), the skew in participation appears more consistent. This can be seen in Table 3.3, which provides illustrations of the ways in which participation levels (using the 0–100 scale, see the note at the end of this chapter) can vary according to social or personal background. Thus the usual association between participation and education is upheld. That combination of personal resources which is summarized by the concept of class also shows the advantage that the salariat possesses, although other class differences are relatively small. Gender differences in citizen participation are slight, which perhaps only highlights more the unequal position of women at élite levels. If one brings into the account 'collective resources' such as membership of voluntary groups, it is seen that this is strongly associated with higher levels of activism. The more one is a joiner, the more one participates. Clearly there are many interacting forces involved, but for present purposes the interest lies in the generally positive association between personal resources and group membership. The group world, on the whole, is also the world of the advantaged. The voluntary groups to which the less advantaged belong tend to be the least politically active and thus do not give a boost to participation

Table 3.3 *Overall political activity scores by various social and personal characteristics*

(A) Education	No qual.	Below 'O' level	'O' level	'A' level	College & FE	Degree
Score	6.6	7.8	8.5	10.3	10.8	13.9
(N)	(686)	(169)	(247)	(89)	(146)	(98)

(B) Class		Working class	Manual & forepersons	Petit bourgeois	Routine non-manual	Salariat
Score		7.2	7.9	7.2	7.6	11.2
(N)		(445)	(76)	(127)	(231)	(301)

(C) Gender	Male	Female
Score	8.7	8.1
(N)	(621)	(806)

(D) Member of parties, trade unions and formal groups	None	1	2	3	4	5
Score	5.2	6.8	7.3	9.9	11.5	18.3
(N)	(366)	(350)	(267)	(230)	(111)	(106)

Note: Each set of scores represents the bivariate relationship, i.e. not controlling for the other factors. For a multivariate analysis, see Parry et al. (1992).

(Parry et al., 1992: 85–111). Of course, there are very many individual exceptions. And it does not exclude the possibility that some of the advantaged may be active in groups which campaign for the disadvantaged. Nevertheless, the capacity of the better-off to organize collectively in their own defence should no more be neglected in examining political participation than it is in studies of pressure politics in general.

A final summary way of seeing the way in which, even in a country often regard as an exemplar of democracy, unequal resources can relate to participation is presented in Table 3.4. Here the overall political activity scale is set alongside a scale of 'resources' comprising educational qualifications, wealth and number of organizational memberships (see the note at the end of this chapter for scale construction). This emphasizes quite dramatically that the more

Table 3.4 *Political activity score by resource level (N = 1,210)*

Resource score	Activity score	% in category
0	3.94	1.5
1	4.45	6.6
2	6.11	8.6
3	5.90	10.3
4	6.53	11.6
5	7.58	11.9
6	7.59	11.2
7	9.43	8.2
8	8.07	8.2
9	9.84	5.5
10	9.87	5.4
11	13.93	4.1
12	13.90	3.3
13	16.64	1.7
14	20.13	0.9
15	24.81	0.5
16	41.29	0.3
17	51.71	0.2
	Mean: 8.39*	Total: 100.0

* Missing data on the resource variable affect the mean score slightly compared with Table 3.2.

resources one possesses, the more likely it is that one will participate in politics. Those at the bottom have only a faint voice; those at the top speak up more. These considerations have clear implications for the expansion of the opportunity structure. It could well be the case that devolved centres of decision-making would increase the opportunities for the advantaged to participate – and to do so with greater effectiveness – in policies which are of material concern to themselves. Decentralization can protect autonomous spheres of action for well-entrenched, well-resourced groups. Many examples could no doubt be cited where protection of the local environment was the public screen behind which better-off residents campaigned to resist developments which might have benefited the unemployed or the poorly paid. The common accusation of 'NIMBYism' directed against local participants can itself be a weapon employed by major interests, but its very currency is some recognition that the public interest may suffer at the hands of participating groups.

Thus decentralization which may appear to enhance one measure of democratization – the opportunity to share in decision-making – does not necessarily ensure the achievement of equality in terms of

either input or output. Indeed, it may create inequality and unfairness. To the degree that fairness requires uniformity of consideration and treatment, this can point in the direction of a significant measure of centralization. At the very least, the autonomy of devolved centres of decision-making must be constrained by some minimal constitutional rules.

The effectiveness of participation and democratic responsiveness

There are at least two dimensions to the 'effectiveness' of participation. One would be the extent to which the most active participants are representative of the concerns of the mass of the inactive population. The second is the degree to which the élite appear to respond to citizen participation. Neither dimension proves easy to measure.

The representative nature of the activists is, of course, closely related to the equality of participation. Even if activism is skewed in the favour of the advantaged, this does not *necessarily* mean that their priorities differ entirely from those of the worse-off. In the UK comparison, the *agendas* of activists and inactive showed some divergences but they were not very strong. There was some tendency for the less active to give higher priority to material issues of wages and unemployment, whereas the active put more emphasis on 'quality of life' matters or on education (Parry and Moyser, 1991: 89–92). Moreover, when one turned the emphasis around to look at who expressed concern about what issues, there was some evidence that such 'issue-publics' contain an over-representation of those who might be expected to have a material benefit. Thus the salariat and the wealthy were more evident in environment and planning matters, the highest educated were more highly represented amongst those expressing concern about education. Even so, the university-educated were also highly interested in matters of unemployment which did not necessarily affect them personally and directly (Parry et al., 1992: 254–66).

There are, however, limits to evidence of this sort. First, it refers to agendas – to the priorities given to issues – not to solutions. This problem will be taken up again below. Secondly, the political opportunity structure is again relevant. Many of the material concerns of the disadvantaged, such as wages or unemployment, are less amenable to effective citizen political participation. By comparison, local problems of planning or traffic control or school closure may permit more opportunities and access for effective intervention.

The degree of responsiveness of élites to citizen participation

would appear to be a central index of the rule of the people. Yet it is notoriously difficult to examine. Studies of party manifesto commitments and governmental legislation have offered some comfort to notions of electoral accountability (Hofferbert and Budge, 1992). However, the extent to which citizens make an input into the manifesto, other than through the rule of anticipated reactions, is questionable. Within participation studies, use has been made of concurrence measures (Parry et al., 1992; Verba and Nie, 1972). It has to be admitted, however, that there are significant limits to their use. They correlate the priorities of the active and less active members of the public. Although they seem to suggest that élite priorities correspond more closely to those of the activists, even controlling for background factors, the agreement is over agendas not solutions. It is not necessarily informative to know that there is a concurrence as to what *needs* a solution if we do not know whether there is a similar agreement as to the *best* solution. This is not to dismiss concurrence. Rather, it may need to be refined and developed.

For some in the realist school, a vague indication of agreement on agendas may be all that can reasonably be expected. The public may have a notion of the issues which affect them but only the political class has a clear conception of the alternative solutions in any detail (Nordlinger, 1981). That is what the political class is elected to do. Elections have decided who is to govern and provide only weak indications of what is to be done (Sartori, 1987: 109). Such theories also put a different gloss on the idea of leadership responsiveness as a measure of democracy. The argument is familiar from traditional discussions of representation but is one with abiding relevance. To cite Sartori again:

> . . . responsiveness is but one of the elements of representative government. A government that simply yields to demands, that simply gives in, turns out to be a highly irresponsible government, a government that does not live up to its responsibilities. A representative is not only responsible to, but also responsible *for*. (Sartori, 1987: 170; original emphasis)

The distinction between responsiveness and responsibility implies that quite sharp divergences between the views of citizens, whether participants or inactive, and political representatives should cause no misgivings to a liberal democrat. Yet again the argument is that, in the last analysis, only one mode of participation needs to be taken into account in the indices of democracy – the free vote at election time between alternative sets of professional politicians (but see Beetham, 1993: 64).

Problems of indices

There seem to be no entirely uncontestable indices of participation such that we can say, without further explanation or qualification, that more of the activity in question presents solid evidence that democracy is more extensive in the collectivity. Rival theories of democracy point to very different evaluations of participation in general and of its sundry components.

Lurking behind this is a larger question about the validity of indices in the political or social sciences in general, and it may be worthwhile alluding briefly to some examples of the way this great debate has impinged on studies of participation. Political scientists often wish to draw comparisons between participation levels in different countries. Raw figures are sometimes cited. Yet contextual qualification usually speedily follows. Earlier, mention was made of voting levels in the UK and the USA. These had then to be placed in the context of the differing political opportunity structures for voting. But this would only be the beginning of the problem in sorting out the factors explaining, for example, American exceptionalism as it manifests itself in the different modes of participation. First, a high level of political participation in country A and a low level in country B may not indicate a more participatory culture in A but may be a compositional effect. The differences may be simply due to the higher average level of education in A than in B. Controlling for compositional effects may transform the relative standings of countries on the participation index (see Przeworski and Teune, 1970; see also Verba et al., 1978: 32–45). A second difficulty faced by these comparative approaches lies in discerning whether there exists a deep structure common to the participatory patterns in each country (see Verba et al., 1971)). The first stage of removing compositional effects presumes both that the basic relationship between resources and participation, and the differentiation between the various modes of participation, are similar in each country compared. If these relationships differ, then comparison becomes virtually meaningless, because, in a sense, the phenomena being investigated are fundamentally incomparable. It was, of course, the claim of Verba et al. (1978: 24–7) that not only did such a deep structure exist, but that also it was evident even when faced with the toughest test of its presence by the employment of a 'maximum difference' research design in which highly contrasting cultures are deliberately chosen for study.

A more thoroughgoing attack on the employment of transnational, transcultural indices comes from the 'interpretivist' school. For such commentators, the meaning of 'participation' is specific to a culture, sub-culture or even individual. Thus Schwartz (1984) argues that

participation is a subjective phenomenon which is contingent on the 'conceptual lens' through which the world of action is observed. For him, an Iranian and a Westerner would attach quite different meanings to participation, making comparison impossible except by a form of cultural imperialism which imposes one set of concepts and meanings on everybody (Schwartz, 1984: 1128–32; see also Parekh, 1993: 171–2).

There must be something in such claims. There are problems in, for example, comparing participation in the 'foundation elections' of Central and Eastern Europe with the 'normal' elections of established democracies (see articles in *Electoral Studies*, 9(4), 1990). In general, they remind us of the need to scrutinize the 'functional equivalence' of indicators closely, and not to rely on just one or two alone. Beyond that, an answer may also be provided by the very cultural imperialism to which Schwartz refers – the dissemination of Western liberal democracy (for Sartori, the only democracy) and of its conceptual frameworks. For it is only within a context of agreed political vocabularies that we can make sense of producing indices of democratization. But, as we have seen, even where there is some consensus on the concept of democracy, different conceptions give rise to alternative proposals as to what should enter into the index and with what weighting.

Note

The overall political participation score (0–100) in Tables 3.2–3.4 is calculated as follows. Nineteen items had responses scored: 'Never' = 0; 'Once' = 1; 'Now and then' = 3; 'Often' = 5. The two national and European voting items were scored: 'Yes, voted' = 1; 'Did not vote' = 0. The local voting items were scored: 'Never' = 0; 'Some elections' = 1; 'Most elections' = 2; 'Every election' = 3. This gives a maximum of 19 $\times$ 5 + 2 $\times$ 1 + 3 = 100. Note that this maximum score is over a five year period. The survey was carried out in 1984–5 and was funded by the ESRC, whose support is gratefully acknowledged. The co-directors were Geraint Parry and George Moyser. The overall resources scale (0–19) is calculated by adding educational qualifications (0 for none up to 5 for degree), wealth (0 for lowest 5 per cent in wealth to 5 for richest 5 per cent), and number of organizational memberships (0–9). This gives a scale of 0 to 19 but the highest resource score attained was 17.

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4

The Duration of Democracy: Institutional vs Socio-economic Factors

Axel Hadenius

In an article on the lessons to be learnt, especially in Latin America, from the political changes that have taken place in Southern Europe, Arend Lijphart points out the importance of institutional arrangements for the maintenance of democratic rule.The message is, for example, that a proportional electoral system is more conductive than the plurality formula, that the parliamentary mode of executive selection is better than the presidential, and that a decentralized, federal form of government is preferable to a centralized, unitary one (Lijphart, 1990: 71–81). These proposals link up with a main tenet in Lijphart's work, namely the establishment of such political institutions as can further cooperation between different groups in society and hence could contribute to the reduction of political conflicts. The argument is thoroughly elaborated in his seminal study, *Democracy in Plural Studies* (1977: 25–44), where he advocates a so-called consociational democracy, a democracy of compromise and accommodation, which beside proportionalism and decentralization is marked also by grand coalitions and decisions made by mutual veto.

Lijphart may serve as the pivotal figure of the 'school' which emphasizes the significance of political institutions for the upholding of democracy. Notwithstanding that certain social and economic circumstances might have a detrimental effect in the context, these obstacles, it is held, can be circumvented by means of skilful political engineering; it is foremost a matter of finding the appropriate institutional solutions to the problems.

An opposite view has been maintained by scholars of a politico-cum-sociological bent, amongst whom Seymour M. Lipset stands out as the most prominent representative. Lipset has not ignored the institutional side of the matter however. In his classic study on the prerequisites of democracy, he recommends, for instance, the application of federalism and parliamentarism, and an electoral system in accordance with the plurality method. Yet he makes clear that 'such variations in system of government, while significant, are