POLITICS AND SOCIETY

An Introduction to Political Sociology

by

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Chapter 6

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

INTRODUCTION

Political participation is the involvement of the individual at various levels of activity in the political system, ranging from non-involvement to the holding of political office. Inevitably political participation is closely linked to political socialisation, but it should not be seen solely as either an extension or the product of socialisation. Moreover, it is relevant to a number of theories important in political sociology. For instance, it is essential to both elite and pluralist theories, though its role in each is profoundly different. Elite theory confines significant political participation to the elite, leaving the masses as largely inactive or to be manipulated by the elite. For pluralism, however, political participation is the key to political behaviour in that it constitutes a major factor in explaining the distribution of power and the deciding of policy. Political participation is just as crucial to Marxist theory: class consciousness leads to action or participation, ultimately in the form of revolution, while neo-Marxists, such as Gramsci and Althusser, explain the survival of capitalism by its ability to control participation through hegemony. Leninist theory stresses the participatory role of the Communist Party as the 'vanguard of the proletariat'. Indeed, unless it is defined narrowly as a synonym for democracy, political participation may be said to be a universal phenomenon, not in the sense that all individuals necessarily engage in political activity, nor that it is equally common in form or extent in all societies, but that it is found in all societies.

Geraint Parry (1972) suggests that it is necessary to examine three aspects of political participation – the mode of participation, its intensity, and its quality. By mode he means what form it takes, whether it is formal or informal, and argues that the mode will vary according to the opportunity, levels of interest (both general and specific), the resources available to the individual, and prevailing attitudes towards participation in the society concerned, notably whether it is encouraged or discouraged. Intensity seeks to measure how many individuals participate in particular political activities and how often they do so, which again is likely to vary according to opportunities and resources. Quality is concerned with the degree of effectiveness achieved by participation, seeking to measure its impact on those wielding power and on policy-making. This too will vary from society to society, according to opportunities and resources, and from case to case.

FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In his book *Political Participation* Lester Milbrath (1965) posited a hierarchy of participation, ranging from non-involvement to holding public office, with the lowest level of actual participation being voting in an election. He divided the American public into three groups: 'gladiators' – those frequently active in politics (between 5 and 7 per cent); 'spectators' – those minimally involved in politics (about 60 per cent); and 'apathetics' – those uninvolved in politics (about 33 per cent). In the second edition (Milbrath and Goel 1977) a more complex hierarchy was adopted which sought to accommodate different types of 'gladiators', especially those who engaged in various forms of protest, rather than suggesting a unidimensional hierarchy. Implicit in the earlier, unidimensional version was the suggestion that those higher up the hierarchy had engaged in or continued to engage in activities lower down the hierarchy. However, in another study of participation in the United States Verba and Nie (1972; see also Verba, Nie and Kim 1978) found a more complex picture and divided their respondents into six groups. These were the totally passive (22 per cent); those whose only political activity was voting (21 per cent); 'localists' (20 per cent), whose only political activity was confined to local politics and issues; 'parochials' (4 per cent), whose only concern was what affected them personally;

'campaigners' (15 per cent), who were involved in politics only in relation to particular issues on which they campaigned; leaving 'total activists', those involved over the whole range of politics, to number 18 per cent. Parry and Moyser (1990) found a similar pattern in Britain, which will be examined more closely later in the chapter.

The concept of a hierarchy of political participation, therefore, need not involve activity at one level as a precondition of activity at another, nor need protest be singled out as a particular form of activity in a hierarchical sense. Essentially the purpose of a hierarchy need be no more than a delineation of different types of political participation linked to the proposition that the higher the level of ticipation linked to the proposition that the higher the level of activity, the lower the level of participation, as measured by the numbers engaged in a particular activity. Figure 6.1 is a hierarchy of political participation in that sense. This hierarchy is intended to cover the whole range of political participation and to be applicable to all types of political systems. The significance of the various levels is, of course, likely to vary from one political system to another, and particular levels may be of greater consequence in one system and little or no consequence in another.

At the top of the hierarchy are those who hold various types of office within the political system, including both holders of political office and members of the bureaucracy at various levels. They are distinguished from other political participants in that, to varying degrees, they are concerned with the exercise of formal political power. This does not exclude the actual exercise of power, nor the exercise of influence, by other individuals or groups in society.

Holding political or administrative office
Seeking political or administrative office
Active membership of a political organisation
Active membership of a quasi-political organisation
Participation in public meetings, demonstrations, etc.
Passive membership of a political organisation
Passive membership of a quasi-political organisation
Participation in informal political discussion
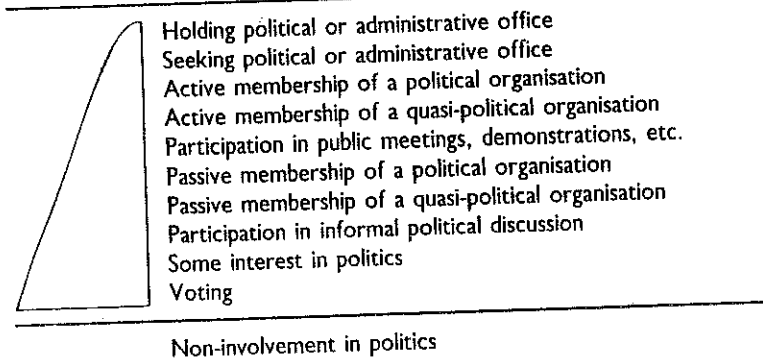Some interest in politics
Voting

Non-involvement in politics

Figure 6.1 A hierarchy of political participation.

Power may not reside among the office-holders, but they remain important because they are normally the formal repositories of power. Any consideration of office-holders must also include some consideration of those who aspire to and seek the offices concerned. The roles of office-holders and potential office-holders, however, will be dealt with in Chapter 7, where political recruitment is considered.

Below those who hold or seek office in the political system are those who are active members of various types of political or quasi-political organisations. These include all types of political parties and pressure (or interest) groups. From the point of view of the political system, political parties and pressure groups may be defined as *agents of political mobilisation*. They are organisations through which individual members of society may participate in certain types of political activity involving the defence or promotion of particular ideas, positions, situations, persons or groups through the political system.

The basic distinction between parties and pressure groups lies in their range of attitudes. Pressure groups are organisations which seek to promote, defend or represent limited or specific attitudes, whereas parties seek to promote, defend or represent a broader spectrum of attitudes. The support that pressure groups and parties receive, however, may be specific or diffuse, stemming, that is, from only a few individuals or groups in society, or from a diverse and large number of individuals or groups. Thus a pressure group has limited objectives, such as the introduction, repeal or modification of certain laws or regulations, the protection of the interests of a particular group in society, or the promotion of particular ideologies, beliefs, principles or ideas. In some cases the objective is especially limited – the abolition of capital punishment or opposition to the siting of an airport, for instance – and the pressure group ceases to operate once its objective has been achieved (or defeated). In other cases the objective is of a continuing nature – the protection or extension of civil rights and liberties or the defence of various economic interests, for example – in which case the pressure group concerned has an indefinite existence.

The range of matters which may give rise to pressure groups is obviously legion, but it is clear that some of these groups will attract only limited, others widespread, support. Trade unions, for instance, may fall into either category according to the size and nature of the industry or occupation in which they operate. Similarly, the

extent to which groups are involved in *political* activity varies considerably, from the group operating entirely within the political sphere to the group which does so only occasionally, even rarely. A group like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, for instance, operates for the most part as a specifically political pressure group, whereas groups like the Automobile Association are not concerned solely or even primarily with providing motorists with a political voice. In Figure 6.1, therefore, the term 'political organisation' is intended to cover both political parties and those pressure groups whose *raison d'être* is primarily political, and the term 'quasi-political organisation' to include those pressure groups and other organisations whose function is only partly or intermittently political.

Political parties, like pressure groups, may enjoy diffuse or specific support, but differ from pressure groups in that they have diffuse rather than specific attitudes. Their objectives range over the whole spectrum of problems with which society is faced, although a particular party may place greater emphasis on some problems or aspects of problems than others. Some parties however, have a broad support base, others a narrow support base. The pragmatic, bargaining mass parties of modern democracies and the totalitarian mass parties of Nazi Germany and various communist states are examples of broad-based parties, while the regional, religious, ethnic and elitist parties found in many parts of the world are examples of narrow-based parties.

Participation in parties or pressure groups may take an active or passive form, ranging from holding office in such an organisation to the provision of financial support through the payment of subscriptions or membership dues. No sharp distinction between active and passive membership is intended and the individual may move from one to the other as circumstances vary. There remains, nevertheless, a basic commitment to the organisation through membership, which may have some political significance, both for the organisation and the individual, by strengthening the bargaining position of the organisation and influencing the political behaviour of the individual.

For various reasons individuals may not belong to any political or quasi-political organisations, but they may be persuaded to participate in some form of public meeting or demonstration. This form of participation may be spontaneous, but it is often organised by political parties or pressure groups as part of their political activity.

Many, perhaps in some cases all, of the participants will be members of the organising bodies, but not necessarily, and non-members may be persuaded to support the objects of the meeting or demonstration. Such activity is, however, intermittent and does not have the continuous nature of even the minimal commitment of membership of a political or quasi-political organisation. None the less, in hierarchical terms it is a more active form of participation than passive membership of a party or pressure group and involves fewer individuals in society.

Another intermittent form of political participation is that of informal political discussion by individuals in their families, at work or among friends. Obviously, the incidence of such discussions varies both among individuals and in relation to events. More discussion is likely during election campaigns or at times of political crisis, while discussion may be inhibited or encouraged by the attitudes of the family, fellow workers or friends.

Some people may not discuss politics with anyone, however, but may still have some interest in political matters and maintain that interest through the mass media. They will be able to keep themselves informed about what is happening and form opinions about the course of events, but they will tend to limit their participation to this and, possibly, to voting.

The act of voting may be regarded as the least active form of political participation, since it requires a minimal commitment which may cease once the vote is cast. Furthermore, regardless of other restrictions which may exist, the act of voting is inevitably restricted by the frequency of elections.

In considering political participation, however limited it may be, some attention should be paid to those who do not participate at all in the political process. Whether this is by choice or because of factors beyond the control of the individual remains to be seen.

Two matters have been deliberately excluded from the hierarchy in Figure 6.1: alienation and violence. This is because neither can be properly considered in a hierarchical sense. It will later be argued that alienation may result in participation or non-participation: an individual who feels hostile towards society in general or the political system in particular may withdraw from all types of participation and join the ranks of the totally apathetic, or may become active at various levels of participation. Participation does not necessarily

involve acceptance of the political system and alienation may be expressed by political activity as well as inactivity.

Similarly, violence may manifest itself at various levels in the hierarchy, most obviously in the form of violent demonstrations or riots, but also through various political and quasi-political organisations, some of which may regard violence as an effective means of achieving their ends.

THE EXTENT OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The data shown in Table 6.1 relate, of course, specifically to Britain, but the basic picture that emerges is universal in that the higher levels of political participation involve only a tiny proportion of the population, the lowest levels a majority: in short, politics is essentially a minority activity. Although in countries like Britain and the United States opinion-poll evidence shows that more than 50 per cent of the population express *some* interest in politics and between 60 and 75 per cent say they sometimes discuss politics with other people, only 15–20 per cent say they are very interested. Of course, in many societies the highest level of participation is in elections, although electoral turnout varies considerably from one country to

Table 6.1 *A hierarchy of political participation in Britain, 1989.*

Question: Which of the things on this list have you done in the last two or three years? (percentage replies)

Stood for public office	I[a]
Taken an active part in a political campaign	3
Written a letter to an editor	5
Urged someone outside my family to vote	10
Been elected an officer of an organisation or club	13
Made a speech before an organised group	13
Presented my views to a local councillor or MP	13
Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP	15
Helped on fund-raising drives	31
Voted in the last election	68

Source: Jacobs and Worcester (1990), Figure 16.3, Socio-political activism (based on a MORI Opinion Poll).
Note: [a] The 650 MPs and 26,000 local councillors in England, Scotland and Wales comprise 0.07 per cent of the adult population.

another. In the pre-Gorbachev Soviet Union and the former communist states of Eastern Europe turnouts of more than 99 per cent were the norm, and some Third World countries, such as Egypt, claim similarly high figures. A number of liberal-democracies, such as the Netherlands, Austria, Italy, Belgium and Australia regularly experience turnouts in excess of 90 per cent, although voting is compulsory in Australia and Belgium; average turnout in West Germany, Denmark, and Norway is 80 per cent, in the United Kingdom and Canada 70 per cent, and in Switzerland and the United States 60 per cent or lower. These figures relate to national elections (and sometimes referenda) and turnout in regional and local elections, by-elections, and primary elections for choosing party candidates are invariably lower, often as low as 30 per cent.

Most other forms of political participation attract a far smaller proportion of the adult population, particularly small if the passive membership of parties and pressure groups is excluded. Such data give prima-facie support to elite theories, but fall far short of proof, since only further investigation would reveal whether the politically active minority actually constitutes an elite – a matter pursued further in Chapter 7.

There is ample and widespread evidence that political participation at all levels varies according to SES, education, occupation, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, the area and place of residence, personality, and the political environment or setting in which participation takes place. The characteristics shown in Figure 6.2 reflect tendencies, not absolute behaviour patterns. These tendencies, however, are based on a large number of studies, and although studies of liberal-democracies in general and the United States in particular predominate, a growing number are based on other types of political systems and other countries (see Milbrath and Goel 1977). The characteristics are clearly not mutually exclusive: for instance, a working-class male may not have had a full-time education beyond the secondary level, but is likely to belong to a trade union; similarly, a middle-class female may have had post-secondary education, but not belong to a union. In both instances these are conflicting characteristics and it is difficult to construct a matrix which demonstrates the relative importance of each. Nevertheless there is clear evidence that individuals subject to a number of reinforcing characteristics or pressures are more likely to participate in politics than individuals subject to cross-pressures.

Higher levels of participation	Lower levels of participation
More education, especially higher education	Less education, especially only secondary or primary
Middle class	Working or lower class
Men	Women
Older, especially middle-aged	Younger and elderly
Married	Single
Urban residents	Rural residents
Longer residence	Shorter residence
Social involvement and membership of groups or organisations	Less social involvement and/or conflicting group membership
White	Non-white
Ethnic majorities	Ethnic minorities

Figure 6.2 Socio-economic characteristics and political participation (Source: Milbrath and Goel (1977), pp. 86–122).

The association between socio-economic characteristics and participation needs to be looked at with some care, partly because there are important exceptions to the tendencies suggested in Figure 6.2 and partly because changes can and do occur over time. Two examples will suffice to illustrate the first point. For instance, rural residents in Japan are an important exception to the generalisation that participation is greater among urban dwellers. In the same way, in many Third World countries people living in rural communities have a much stronger sense of identity than those living in rapidly expanding urban areas and participation is often higher in rural areas. The second example reflects the existence of strong trade union movements in a number of European countries and in Australia and these are associated with increased levels of manual or working-class participation where unions are closely associated with one political party.

Much the best and most important example of a changing tendency is the participatory gap between men and women in countries like Britain. Thus Parry and Moyser, citing Milbrath and Goel, comment:

A standard finding has been that there is a gender gap in citizen participation in favour of men. The evidence of the present survey is that this view must be revised, since the

118

participatory gap in favour of men is now very slight indeed in Britain. ... [Indeed if] we then control for resources along with other personal factors, such as age, the gender gap actually reverses itself for overall participation and women are seen to be more active, relatively, than men in party campaigning and collective action as well as voting. (Parry and Moyser 1990, p. 159)

This finding is confirmed by Pippa Norris (1991, p. 74) who, using data from the 1987 British Election Study and the 1986 British Social Attitudes Survey, concludes that 'the conventional view is no longer valid ... as men and women are remarkably similar in their mass behaviour and attitudes across all modes of participation', with the important exceptions of seeking and holding political and administrative office. How far such findings are applicable to women in other, similar political systems is not clear, but evidence of the involvement of women in what Parry and Moyser call 'collective action' – operating through formal or informal groups – can be found in other countries and may be particularly associated with the growth and impact of the feminist movement. As Parry and Moyser (1990; p. 160) found, within a particular category significant differences may emerge: 'the single woman is more active than the single man and the most active, in relative terms, are female single parents ... one small group of women ... are intensely participatory – members of feminist groups ... they were in the top 6 per cent of participants and were particularly involved in collective and direct action rather than voting or contacting.'

There is also evidence that political activity has increased among some black and Asian groups in industrial societies. The growth of the civil rights movement in the United States, following the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown* v. *Topeka Board of Education* in 1954 that separate schooling for blacks was unconstitutional, is a case in point. Black demands for political action to enhance social and political equality intensified under the leadership of Martin Luther King. Violent protests also developed, especially in the later 1960s, but black political participation undoubtedly increased generally and became especially intensive among small groups in the black population. Similarly, the growth of the black and Asian population in Britain from the 1950s onwards eventually led to greater political activity in particular parts of the country, notably in urban areas and

119

parliamentary constituencies in which there were significant concentrations of blacks and Asians. In the case of Asians the impact of the Moslem religion added a further dimension, vividly illustrated by the bitterness aroused by Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*. In the Labour Party, Black Sections were formed in the 1980s and in the general election of 1987 one Asian and three black candidates were elected Labour MPs. The picture that emerges in both the United States and Britain is one of generally lower levels of participation among non-whites compared with whites, but also of increasing non-white participation and a growing number of political activists among non-whites.

EXPLAINING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Milbrath and Goel suggest that participation varies in relation to four major factors: political stimuli, social position, personal characteristics, and political environment. To these need to be added skills and resources and commitment. The more the individual is exposed to political stimuli in the form, for example, of discussing politics, belonging to an organisation engaged in some form of political activity, or having access to relevant information, the more likely is political participation. The latter, however, also varies according to the individual's personal characteristics: the more sociable, dominant and extrovert personalities are more likely to be politically active. As already suggested in Figure 6.2, social position, as measured by education, place of residence, class and ethnicity, affects participation considerably. The political environment or setting is also important in that the political culture may encourage or discourage participation and the form or forms of participation regarded as most appropriate. Thus the 'rules of the game', such as the electoral franchise, the frequency of elections, the number of offices to be filled by election, attitudes towards meetings and demonstrations, the extent and nature of parties and pressure groups, and so on, are all significant variables.

It is also important, however, to take account of the skills possessed by and the resources available to the individual. Social skills, analytical skills, organisational ability, oratorical skills are all likely to increase participation, but activity also requires resources, notably time and, not infrequently, money, either directly in the form of

subscriptions or donations or indirectly in the form of affording time off or assistance in kind. Resources may also take the form of contacts and relations with other individuals and the influence and power that may result from such contacts and relations. In most cases the individual also needs commitment, commitment to an ideal or a cause, a leader or an organisation, although this more than anything raises questions concerning the explanation of political participation.

Figure 6.3 suggests the way in which the variables influencing political participation interact, starting with the individual's perceptual screen of knowledge, values and attitudes through which the individual initially considers actual or potential political situations. The individual may be subject to various political stimuli, including motivation, but account must also be taken of the skills and resources available and the individual's personality. This produces a decision on whether to participate or not, for action or inaction, which feeds back to the perceptual screen in the form of experience.

It is also clear from the work of Verba and Nie (1972) cited earlier and from Parry and Moyser (1990) that political participants constitute a number of more or less self-contained clusters, as shown in Table 6.2 which demonstrates that 'voting apart, political participation in Britain is sustained by slightly less than a quarter (23.2 per cent) of the population' (Parry and Moyser 1990, p. 150) and, more interestingly, the more active participants concentrate their efforts largely within particular modes. The largest category (8.7 per cent)

Table 6.2 *Types of political participation in Britain, 1984–85.*

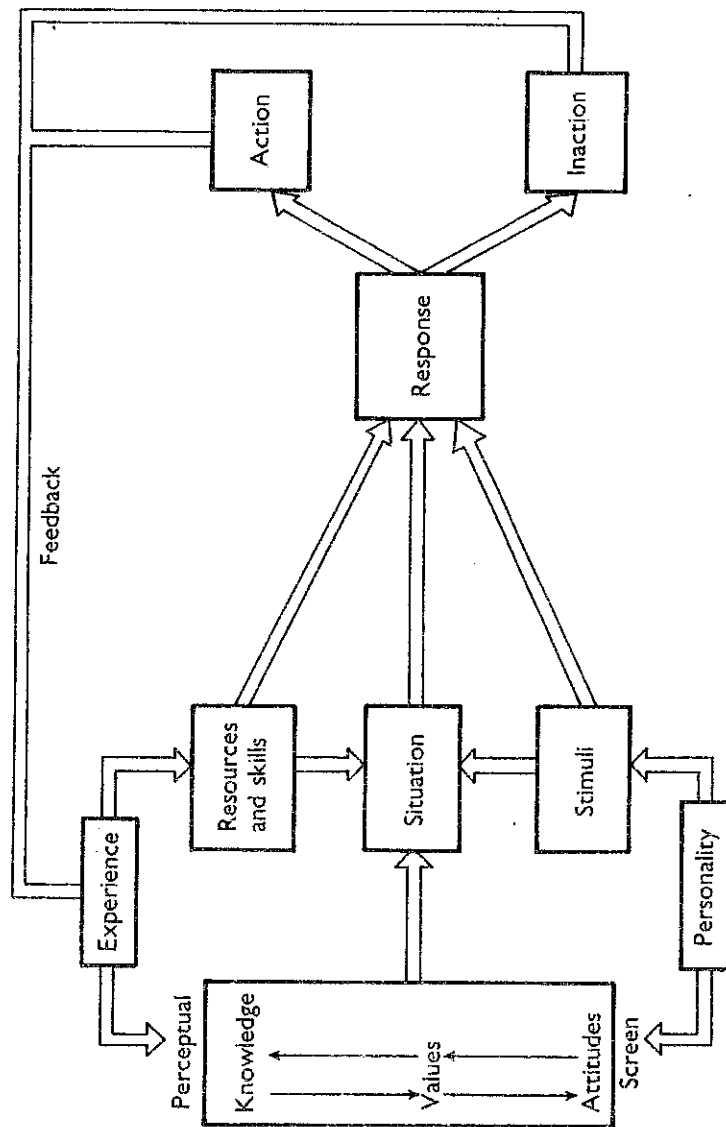| Type	%	
Almost inactive	25.8	
Just voters	51.0	
Collective activists	8.7	
Contacting activists	7.7	Total
Direct activists	3.1	activists
Party campaign activists	2.2	= 23.2%
Complete activists	1.5	
Total	100.0	

Source: Parry & Moyser (1990) p. 150.

Figure 6.3 A model of political participation.

engaged in collective action and operated through formal and informal groups; the second largest (7.7 per cent) engaged in contacting MPs, civil servants, local councillors, and the media; the third largest but much smaller group (3.1 per cent) engaged in direct action, such as blocking traffic and protest marches, political strikes and boycotts; the fourth largest (2.2 per cent) were almost exclusively involved in campaigning for a political party, especially fund-raising and canvassing for support; and only the fifth group (1.5 per cent) engaged in political activity across the range of modes. A tiny proportion (0.2 per cent) 'had used physical force against political opponents' (Parry and Moyser 1990, p. 149) and were excluded from further analysis because they were so few in number.

The study also showed that resources 'constituted a major basis for activism' (1990, p. 163), but that values, as measured on a left–right spectrum played on even more important part, with 'high involvement at the extremes of the spectrum but with a left-ward bias' (1990, p. 162). Most important of all, however, was the finding that participation does have an impact by getting issues onto or higher up the political agenda and actually influencing policy. Parry and Moyser anticipate that levels of participation are likely to increase, especially with the spread of educational qualifications and a growing willingness to use less conventional methods to influence those holding political power.

An important part of that willingness to use less conventional methods to influence public policy has manifested itself in the form of what have been called 'new social movements' (NSMs). These are essentially a species of pressure or interest group expressing different concerns and operating in ways different from those traditionally associated with pressure groups. Offe (1985) identifies four criteria which distinguish NSMs from traditional pressure groups: issues, values, modes of action, and actors. On issues, NSMs are concerned with matters such as: 'the body, health and sexual identity; the neighbourhood, city, and physical environment; the cultural, ethnic, national, and linguistic heritage and identity; the physical conditions of life, and survival of humankind in general' (Offe 1985, p. 829). Their values tend to be universalistic rather than specifically socio-economic, with a stress on 'autonomy (with their organisational correlates of decentralisation, self-government, and self-help) and opposition to manipulation, control, dependence, bureaucratisation, regulation, etc.' (1985, p. 829). The internal operation of

NSMs is characterised by informal organisation, a blurring of the distinction between members and leaders, and an emphasis on widespread voluntary activity and fund-raising. Externally, NSMs often adopt non-negotiable positions, find compromise difficult, and have no concessions to offer in negotiation. Those active in NSMs do not fall into traditional left–right, liberal–conservative, or socio-economic groupings, but into categories based, for example, on age, gender, a locality, or a concern for the whole human race. Socio-economically their members tend to be drawn from the new middle class of what Offe calls 'the human service professions' and white-collar, public-sector workers, some elements of the traditional middle class, especially those with more extensive education, and socially and politically peripheral groups, such as the unemployed, students, housewives and the retired. The development of NSMs is particularly associated with the growth of state interests and with the concomitant expectations that governments can and should provide solutions to an increasingly wide range of societal problems.

The development of NSMs also focuses attention on the question of motivation, which needs further discussion, not least because a variety of motivational theories have been put forward, ranging from the instrumental to the psychological. Parry (1977) divides explanations of political participation into two types, the instrumental and the developmental.

Instrumental theories regard participation as a means to an end, that is for the defence or advancement of an individual or group of individuals and as a bulwark against tyranny and despotism. Thus the instrumentalist argues that individuals are the best judge of their own interests, that government involving the governed is more effective, that those affected by decisions have a right to participate in the making of decisions, and that the legitimacy of the government rests on participation. The ultimate inheritors of instrumental theory are therefore utilitarians and pluralists.

Developmental theory argues that the ideal citizen is the particip-ant citizen and participation is therefore seen as the exercise of socie-tal responsibility. Participation is a learning experience which develops or produces a citizen conscious not only of rights but of duties and responsibilities. Such a view can be found in the writings of Aristotle, J. S. Mill, de Tocqueville, and Rousseau, and is also an important part of both conservative and socialist ideas. For the con-servative, however, the stress is on the responsible individual citizen

and therefore on individual action; for the socialist it is on society's responsibility for the individual and therefore on collective action.

A different type of motivation is essentially economic. The leading advocate is Anthony Downs in *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Downs (1957, p. 300) offers a rigorous theory of participation which, although intentionally limited to voting behaviour, can be applied to other levels and types of participation. He posits a rational, calculating individual who seeks to minimise costs and maximise gains operating in a system in which 'parties act to max-imise votes, and ... that citizens act rationally'. It is a theory which, while easy enough to understand, is less easy to prove or disprove. None the less, it is possible to illustrate its likely operation by exam-ining electoral turnout. A large electorate, frequent elections, and long ballots involving many decisions by the voter, commonly produce a lower turnout and the Downsian explanation is that indi-viduals find it more difficult to perceive their best interests in such circumstances because the outcome is more difficult to predict. On the other hand, closely fought elections, important elections, and those where the issues are clearly defined, commonly produce a higher turnout. The Downsian explanation is that important elec-tions affect individuals' interests, that individuals are more likely to be able to affect the outcome of a closely fought election, and that clearly defined issues enable individuals to perceive their interests more easily. It is, however, important to note the considerable stress laid on perception, and perceptions may or may not be accurate though they may still form the basis of rational behaviour.

Olson (1965) argues that rational self-interest leads the individual to weigh the costs of participating in group or collective action against the benefits of being a member of the group, pointing out that gains made by group action are not necessarily available only to members of the group. It is also questionable whether individuals necessarily approach social or political matters in such a calculating fashion: participation may meet other needs, most obviously psycho-logical needs. At the same time, writers like Downs and Olson argue powerfully for rationality being a significant factor in explaining political participation.

There are strong statistical correlations between levels of political participation and levels of what is known as *political efficacy*, that is the individual's sense of political effectiveness, the feeling that it is possible to influence politics and policy (see Milbrath and Goel 1977,

pp. 57–61). Higher levels of political efficacy correlate with other variables, such as higher SES and higher levels of education. It is also argued that political participation may meet individual psychological needs (Milbrath and Goel 1977, pp. 46–9 and 74–85). Such views have long been associated with the concept of the authoritarian personality, but also more widely with ego-satisfaction, self-esteem, and social recognition. Weber suggested four ideal-type explanations of social and therefore political action and behaviour, such as participation. Two are rational – the 'purposively rational' and the 'value-rational' – and two non-rational (but not irrational) – the 'affective action' and the 'traditional action' (1947, pp. 115–18. See also Giddens 1971, pp. 152–4). Purposive-rational behaviour is that in which the individual evaluates a possible action in terms of the cost and benefits of means and ends, whereas value-rational behaviour does not question ends but evaluates the costs and benefits of particular means. Rational economic behaviour of maximising benefits and minimising costs to achieve a considered goal is an example of purposively rational action. Accepting a religious or ideological ideal as a goal and seeking the most effective means of achieving it, subject, of course, to any constraints imposed by the ideal, is an example of value-rational action. Affectual action is governed by the emotions and traditional action by custom and habit. Although Weber's ideal-type explanation of social actions and behaviour can be criticised for failing to explain how changes in behaviour occur, that is, moving from one type of action to another, it explicitly recognises the importance of values and of meeting individual needs.

Robert Lane (1959) has usefully summarised the role that political participation may fulfil for the individual: as a means of pursuing economic needs, as a means of satisfying a need for social adjustment, as a means of pursuing particular values, and as a means of meeting subconscious and psychological needs. In this context it is important to consider not only those who participate politically but those who do not. Non-involvement in politics has been variously ascribed to apathy, cynicism, alienation, and anomie, but some distinction between these states of mind needs to be drawn (see Milbrath and Goel 1977, pp. 61–74). Defined simply, apathy is a lack of interest, cynicism is an attitude of distaste and disenchantment, while alienation and anomie both involve a feeling of estrangement or divorce from society, but where alienation is characterised

by hostility, anomie is characterised by bewilderment. The available evidence suggests that the totally apathethic are, at the very least, cynical, and more often alienated or anomic. Apathy, cynicism, alienation and anomie, however, are all matters of degree and may therefore affect not only those who shun all forms of participation, but also those who are involved in political activity. Relative degrees of apathy, cynicism, alienation and anomie may account for non-participation at the higher levels of political participation while not precluding activity at the lower levels of the hierarchy. Alienation, far from taking a passive form, may also result in considerable political activity, particularly that involving violent political action and revolution. Non-involvement or low levels of participation may be the result of factors largely beyond the individual's control, most obviously where particular groups of individuals are denied the formal or legal right to participate or are forcibly prevented from exercising their rights or their desire to engage in some political activity.

CONCLUSION

There is every reason for agreeing with Dowse and Hughes (1986, p. 288) that 'there is little systematic theory relating social, psychological and political variables to participation in politics', but that participation is related to social and psychological variables and to the individual's skills and resources cannot be doubted. Furthermore, it is important to see political participation as part of wider social behaviour, not isolated from it. This makes it all the more difficult to research. Motivation is especially difficult to investigate, since not even the individual may be aware of that motivation, or may seek to conceal it, while for observers the difficulties are, if anything, greater. The reliance on essentially inferential data is understandable, but leaves a crucial gap in the research, which, like that into political socialisation, needs to be linked more closely with psychological studies and with the wider use of longitudinal research. Nowhere is this more important than in the more active forms of political participation, not least in that study of those who seek and hold political and administrative office – the field of political recruitment.