The Noisy and the Silent:
Divergent Preferences and Needs

These unhappy times [the Great Depression] call for the building of plans that... put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid.

—FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT, RADIO ADDRESS, APRIL 7, 1932

Franklin Delano Roosevelt grew up in privilege. Yet as governor of New York and as president of the United States, he spoke for the “forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid.” Despite the inequality of political participation graphically depicted in Chapter 4, might rich people speak for those at the bottom? Is it possible that at the very least, on average those who participate in politics have the same preferences, needs, and concerns as those who do not?

Is Citizen Political Voice Representative?
Voters and Nonvoters

Consider voters first. Are there politically significant policy differences between voters and nonvoters? In an important book on citizen activity, Who Votes?, Raymond Wolfinger and Steven Rosenstone reported little or no difference in policy preferences between voters and all citizens as revealed by answers to a series of forced-choice policy questions in the 1972 American National Election Study. Work following that of Wolfinger and Rosenstone has found similar patterns of quite marginal differences between voters and nonvoters in their responses to survey questions on policy matters.

But a more recent study suggests that the matter is far from settled. Using American National Election Studies data from 1972 until 2008, Jan Leighley and Jonathan Nagler find that Republicans and self-identified conservatives are overrepresented among voters. A closer look at the 2004 data shows that for a variety of economic issues such as trade agreements and overseas tax breaks “voters...are not representative of the electorate on issues that go to the core of the role of government in modern democracies.” In contrast, on social issues like gun control, stem cell research, and abortion, Leighley and Nagler find no systematic bias and consider voters representative of the electorate as a whole.

Beyond Voting—Beyond Attitudes Expressed in Surveys

Voting and attitudes expressed in surveys are among the ways that people’s concerns get communicated to decision makers. People also express their perspectives through acts such contacting officials or protesting that can convey more precise messages to policymakers. Moreover, activities like giving money to political candidates, parties or movements or protesting can be multiplied beyond the enforced equality of ballots. And citizens not only have policy views but, even more fundamentally, they have policy-relevant concerns and needs. People differ in their personal circumstances and dependence on government benefits, in their priorities for government action, and in what they say when they get involved.

BEYOND VOTING: CAMPAIGN WORK AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Using data from the 1990 Citizen Participation Study and the 2005 Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy (CID) Survey project, we were able to locate the average opinion with respect to economic and social issues of several groups defined by their political participation: all citizens, voters, campaign workers, and campaign contributors. We present the results for 2005 in Figure 5.1. The further a group is to the right on the x-axis, the more conservative it is, on average, with regard to economic issues as measured by a question about whether the government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels. The higher on the y-axis, the more conservative it is, on average, in terms of such social issues as abortion and gay rights.
Figure 5.1 also locates the average opinions of those who consider themselves Strong Democrats and Strong Republicans. As expected, the strong partisans are more extreme—with Democrats more liberal and Republicans more conservative—on both the economic and social dimensions.

There are several striking aspects of Figure 5.1. First, these data echo Leighley and Nagler’s finding that the average voter is to the right of the average citizen on economic issues (the horizontal dimension) but is at the same location (on the vertical dimension) as the average citizen with respect to opinions on social issues. Second, opinion on social issues among campaign activists—whether they give time or money—is, on average, more liberal than among voters or all citizens. That is, compared to all citizens and voters, campaign activists have attitudes that push American politics in a less conservative direction on social issues like abortion and gay rights. Third, those who give money to politics push in a conservative direction on economic policy. In contrast, those who are not active are more liberal on economic issues but somewhat more conservative on social issues.

Data from 1990 show a remarkably similar pattern, but amplify these results in an important way. The 1990 questionnaire asked about the size of campaign contributions. Compared to all citizens, all voters and, even, all contributors, those who made large campaign contributions were considerably more conservative on economic issues.¹⁰

**Representing Moderate and Extreme Opinions in an Era of Polarization**

We have just seen that political activists differ from the average citizen in the direction of their opinions. There is another way to think about the representativeness of political voice—in terms of the extremity of opinion. Do political activists tend to take more extreme positions, so that the moderate middle is underrepresented?

The debate on whether the party polarization so evident in Congress has reached down to the level of ordinary citizens provides us with clues. Alan Abramowitz shows that engaged citizens—who are well educated, politically interested, and politically active—are also less centrist in their political views, a relationship that has become more pronounced since the early part of this century.¹⁰ Inverting this logic leads us to expect that political voice underrepresents moderate opinions. Figure 5.2A considers seven categories of people in the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES) ranging from those on the left (extremely liberal) to those on the right (extremely conservative), according to their response to a standard survey item measuring liberalism or conservatism with regard to the percentage undertaking at least one of seven high-information activities.¹¹ The V-shaped line indicates that those who are either extremely conservative or extremely liberal are much more politically active than those in the middle who define themselves as “moderate” or “middle of the road.” In other words, public officials are hearing disproportionately from those at the extremes at the expense of moderates.

We find the same pattern when we examine two political issues using 2012 ANES data. The first, shown in Figure 5.2B, substitutes a scale of attitudes on economic issues for the measure of overall liberalism or conservatism.¹² As before, the line showing participation scores for people defined by their economic liberalism or conservatism is V-shaped, indicating that those at the extremes of economic liberalism or conservatism are much more active than those whose attitudes on economic issues are moderate or
5.2.A. Percentage active by overall ideology scale

5.2.B. Percentage active by political activity and economic issue scale

5.2.C. Percentage active by political activity and abortion attitude scale

**Figure 5.2. Political Activity by Extremity of Political Attitudes (continued)**

mixed. Thus, once again, the moderates are whispering, while those far to their left and far to their right have megaphones. Figure 5.2.B contains two other lines indicating activity associated with the Occupy movement on the left and the Tea Party (Taxed Enough Already) movement on the right. As might be expected, activity associated with the Occupy movement rises sharply among those who are at the left end of the scale measuring economic attitudes, and activity in a group associated with the Tea Party rises even more sharply among those who are at the right end of the scale.

The other issue, shown in Figure 5.2.C, is abortion, measured by a seven-point scale in which the most pro-choice position is on the far left and the most pro-life position is on the far right. Consistent with what we have seen for overall ideology and for economic issues, the V-shaped pattern indicates that public officials are hearing a lot more from those with extreme opinions on abortion than from those who are middle of the road. Figure 5.2.C also gives information about issue-relevant movement activity. The bottom two lines in the figure show the proportion in each group defined by attitudes on abortion who are active in the women’s rights and the pro-life movements. Respondents who express the most unambiguous pro-choice views have some tendency to be affiliated with the women's rights movement, and there
is a distinct uptick in the probability of pro-life movement activity among those with the strongest pro-life attitudes.\textsuperscript{14}

The noncentrist issue positions espoused by Tea Party and Occupy supporters on economic issues and by women's rights and pro-life movement supporters on abortion reinforce our discussion in Chapter 3 about the way that political activity is stimulated by specific issue commitments. As predicted by the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM), those who hold issue positions at the extremes are even more politically active than would be expected on the basis of their education, income, and other characteristics.\textsuperscript{15}

**BASIC NEEDS AND UNEQUAL POLITICAL VOICE**

Not only are activists distinctive in the intensity and direction of their opinions, but they also differ from nonactivists in their actual circumstances and in the extent to which they need government support. Consider the data in Table 5.1, which focuses on a crucial aspect of well-being that has been the subject of intense political and partisan debate: health. When it comes to health needs, the electoral activists and campaign contributors from whom public officials hear are not typical of the public. In 2012, they were considerably more likely to assess their health as "very good" or "excellent" and, because the Affordable Care Act had not yet kicked in at the time that this survey was conducted, more likely to report having health insurance. Contributors were twice as likely as nonvoters to say prospectively that they were "extremely" or "very" likely to be able to pay for all their health care in the next twelve months and only one-third as likely to report retrospectively, that, within the last twelve months, they had put off regular health care such as checkups and vaccinations or treatment for an illness or injury because of the cost.

The voters to whom politicians are ultimately responsible and the campaign activists and contributors to whom candidates are exposed and, presumably, beholden differ substantially from the inactives, whose experiences are less visible. The distinctiveness of campaign contributors with respect to such experiences is noteworthy. Observers of elections have commented that the need for candidates to raise vast sums of money to make a credible case for office implies that they spend more and more time rubbing elbows with wealthy donors rather than interacting with constituents. The consequence is that they are more likely to encounter the rarified concerns and experiences of the affluent and less likely to come into contact with those who face such basic problems as needing health care or shelter.\textsuperscript{16}

The same pattern emerges in Table 5.2, which presents similar data for government benefit programs from the 1990 Citizen Participation Study.

**TABLE 5.2. Are Activists Typical? Cutting Back to Make Ends Meet and Receipt of Means-Tested Benefits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cut Back to Make Ends Meet\textsuperscript{a}</th>
<th>Received Means-Tested Benefits\textsuperscript{b}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inactives</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All respondents</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voters</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign workers</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign contributors</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Citizen Participation Study (1990).
\textsuperscript{a}Did any of the following to make ends meet: put off medical or dental treatment, delayed paying the rent or making house payments, cut back on the amount or quality of food, or worked extra hours or took an extra job.
\textsuperscript{b}Indicated that they or any family member in the household received food stamps, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, housing subsidies, or Medicaid.

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**TABLE 5.1. Are Activists Typical? Health**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nonvoters</th>
<th>Political Inactives\textsuperscript{a}</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
<th>Top 12 percent in Activity\textsuperscript{b}</th>
<th>Campaign Contributors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health “excellent” or “very good”\textsuperscript{c}</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has health-care insurance</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to pay for health care\textsuperscript{d}</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put off health care\textsuperscript{e}</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>2,054</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American National Election Study (2012).
\textsuperscript{a}Respondent may or may not have voted but did not engage in any of ten election-related activities (other than voting).
\textsuperscript{b}Top 12 percent on a scale of ten election-related activities (other than voting).
\textsuperscript{c}Respondent rates current health as “excellent” or “very good.”
\textsuperscript{d}Respondent considers it "extremely" or "very likely" that he or she will be able to pay for all health-care costs in next twelve months.
\textsuperscript{e}Respondent or someone in the household has put off getting regular health care (“getting regular checkups and vaccinations as well as treatment for illness and injury”) during the past twelve months because of the cost.
one means-tested program assisting the indigent and a second benefiting elderly people regardless of income that is not means tested.

It is striking whose interests are represented when program beneficiaries exercise political voice. In each case, the beneficiaries of programs that are not means tested were more active than their counterparts in means-tested programs. For some forms of activity, the differences are quite small; for others, the disparities are substantial. While relatively few program beneficiaries made campaign contributions in relation to the program, it is striking, if hardly surprising, that not a single beneficiary of a means-tested benefit did so. Presumably reflecting the role of AARP, the massive membership association that acts as the political advocate for those who are fifty and older, the disparities with respect to joining an organization concerned about the government program from which they benefit are especially noteworthy. In summary, among recipients of non-means-tested benefits, 44 percent undertook at least one political activity in relation to that benefit; among recipients of means-tested benefits, only 18 percent did so.

**What Do They Say?**

A constant refrain of leaders of movements that range from the Tea Party to Black Lives Matter is that their supporters must mobilize politically because no one is listening to their particular concerns. This formulation suggests that what matters is not just what activists think about the issues on the preselected menu presented in a survey but what issues they care enough about to make the subject of their activity. In the context of a survey, affluent liberals might register their views about police behavior or homelessness, but are these the issues about which they organize community efforts or send e-mails to public officials? Or is their political involvement animated instead by a concern with the environment, foreign policy toward Cuba, or a narrow issue connected with work? To assess whether citizen voice through individual activity is representative, we need to consider the actual messages that accompany that activity.

In the 1990 Citizen Participation Study, we inquired about the issues that animate citizen activity. Respondents who reported taking part in some form of political activity were asked whether there were "any issues or problems ranging from public policy issues to community, family, or personal concerns" that led to the activity. For those who replied that there was such an issue, we followed up with an open-ended question about the
BOX 5.1 Issues Mentioned by Political Activists

- **Basic human needs**: various government benefits (welfare, AFDC, food stamps, housing subsidies, Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid); unemployment (either as an economic issue or in terms of the respondent's own circumstances); housing or homelessness; health or health care; poverty or hunger; aid to the handicapped or handicapped rights.
- **Taxes**: all references to taxes at any governmental level.
- **Economic issues**: local or national economic performance; inflation; budget issues or the budget deficit; government spending; other economic issues.
- **Abortion**: all references to abortion, whether pro-choice, pro-life, or ambiguous.
- **Social issues**: traditional morality; pornography; family planning; teenage pregnancy; sex education, or contraception; school prayer; gay rights or homosexuality.
- **Education**: educational issues (school reform, school voucher plans, etc.); problems or issues related to schooling of family members; guaranteed student loans.
- **Environment**: specific environmental issues (such as clean air, toxic wastes) or environmental concerns in general; wildlife preservation; animal rights.
- **Crime or drugs**: crime; gangs; safety in the streets; drugs.
- **International**: relations with particular nations or to foreign policy in general; defense policy or defense spending; peace, arms control, or international human rights issues.

Content of those concerns. The bulk of the replies, 86 percent, contained recognizable public policy issues.19

We coded the verbatim responses into the nine categories, presented in Box 5.1, that reflect the dominant policy concerns of citizen activists. The categories reflect in part the era in which the survey was conducted. Had the data been collected twenty-five years earlier, different issues—for example, the war in Vietnam or civil rights—would have figured prominently. Had we been able to replicate the study a quarter century later, some issues—for example, pornography, which has been rendered politically moot by virtue of its easy availability on the Internet—would undoubtedly have fallen out. Others, such as gun control or economic inequality, for which there were so few mentions in 1990 that they were not included under our rubrics, might have gained greater prominence. But overall, we were struck that categories constructed in 1990 do a surprisingly good job of accommodating the issues on the political agenda today.

**ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES**

Although those who are advantaged and disadvantaged20 in terms of education and income are similar in having wide-ranging policy concerns, as shown on Table 5.4, they differ in the distribution of their concerns.21 Compared with the issue-based activity22 of the advantaged, the activity of the disadvantaged is more than twice as likely—and the activity of respondents

| TABLE 5.4. What Respondents Say: Issue-Based Political Activity (Information-rich acts only) 4 |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                                                | All | Advantaged 4 | Disadvantaged 4  | Receives Means-Tested Benefits |
| Proportion of issue-based activity             |     |               |                  |                                |
| animated by concern about:                    |     |               |                  |                                |
| Basic human needs                             | 10% | 8%            | 21%              | 32%                            |
| Taxes                                          | 6%  | 6%            | 4%               | 8%                             |
| Economic issues (except taxes)                | 5%  | 7%            | 1%               | 1%                             |
| Abortion                                       | 8%  | 11%           | 0%               | 4%                             |
| Social issues (except abortion)               | 2%  | 1%            | 5%               | 6%                             |
| Education                                      | 12% | 15%           | 10%              | 18%                            |
| Environment                                    | 9%  | 8%            | 2%               | 2%                             |
| Crime or drugs                                 | 9%  | 6%            | 10%              | 8%                             |
| Foreign policy                                 | 3%  | 3%            | 0%               | 0%                             |
| Number of respondents                          | 2,517 | 425           | 480              | 288                            |
| Number of issue-based acts                    | 1,556 | 432           | 123              | 73                             |

Source: Citizen Participation Study (1990).
4Information-rich acts are those in which an explicit message can be sent to policymakers: contacting, protesting, campaign work or contribution accompanied by a communication, informal community activity, or voluntary service on a local board. The numbers in the cells represent the proportion of such acts having identifiable issue content for which there was a reference to the particular issue.
5Advantaged: At least some college and family income of $50,000 or more.
6Disadvantaged: No education beyond high school and family income below $20,000.
7Numbers shown are the weighted numbers of cases and issue-based acts.
in families receiving means-tested benefits four times as likely—to have been animated by concerns about basic human needs: poverty, jobs, housing, health, and the like. Moreover, the activity of the disadvantaged is more likely to have been motivated by concern about drugs or crime. In contrast, the activity of the advantaged is more likely to have been inspired by abortion, the environment, or economic issues (such as taxes, government spending, or the budget).

When we consider the actual number of communications, however, a very different story emerges. Because the disadvantaged are so much less active than the advantaged, public officials actually hear less about issues of basic human needs from the disadvantaged than from the slightly smaller group of advantaged respondents—even though references to basic human needs occupy relatively greater space in the bundle of communications emanating from the disadvantaged.

Not only are the disadvantaged more concerned about basic human needs, their messages differ in two fundamental ways from those sent by others. First, when the disadvantaged communicate with public officials about such matters of basic human need as hunger or homelessness, they are much more likely (in 56 percent of the cases) than the advantaged (in only 8 percent of the cases) to be concerned about problems that affect them personally, such as a question about eligibility for Social Security, a complaint about the conditions in a housing project, or a request by a disabled respondent for special transportation, to cite some actual examples from the survey. Even when respondents framed human-needs issues as a matter of policy rather than as a solely personal concern, the disadvantaged were much more likely to report that the problem is one that affects themselves or their families as well as others in the community. All in all, of those who communicated to public officials about issues of basic human needs, 71 percent of the disadvantaged but only 29 percent of the advantaged were discussing something with an immediate impact on themselves or their families.

Second, the responses of the advantaged and the disadvantaged can be distinguished in terms of their actual policy content. To the extent that disadvantaged respondents make policy statements about such issues in association with political activity—as opposed to making statements or requests regarding their own personal circumstances—they never suggest reducing public attention to issues of basic human needs. In contrast, the policy messages about matters of basic human needs originating with adv-

vantaged respondents are quite mixed with respect to whether they urge increased or decreased support for government programs aimed at alleviating problems like poverty, hunger, and homelessness. Some advantaged respondents make such statements as "welfare should be done away with" or that they have a "dislike of big government, welfare state, and big brothers."

**RACE OR ETHNICITY**

We can ask analogous questions about the messages that accompany the participation of non-Hispanic whites, African Americans, and Latinos. Table 5.5 shows that African Americans and Latinos were much more likely to mention basic human needs, education, children or youth, civil rights or minorities, and crime or drugs. Non-Hispanic white respondents are more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.5: What Latinos, African Americans, and Non-Hispanic Whites Say: Issue-Based Political Activity (Information-rich acts only)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proportion of issue-based activity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic human needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic issues (except taxes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social issues (except abortion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children or youth (except education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime or drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil rights or minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of respondents</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of issue-based acts</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Citizen Participation Study (1990).

*Information-rich acts are those in which an explicit message can be sent to policymakers: contacting, protesting, campaign work or contribution accompanied by a communication, informal community activity, or voluntary service on a local board. The numbers in the cells represent the proportion of such acts having identifiable issue content for which there was a reference to the particular issue.

*Numbers shown are the weighted numbers of cases and issue-based acts.
likely to have focused on taxes and other economic issues. They are also more likely to mention abortion.

The particular emphasis in these 1990 data on issues of crime, violence, and drugs by African Americans and Latinos deserves mention. Among candidates and public officials, these issues have been the traditional bailiwick of non-Hispanic white conservatives. In contrast, the minority and non-Hispanic white liberal politicians who represent African American and Latino constituencies have often kept issues like drug use and crime at arm’s length. It is noteworthy how importantly these issues figured on the agenda of the citizen activists whose communities are most affected by them. More systematic content analysis reveals that blacks and Latinos were somewhat more likely than non-Hispanic whites to mention drugs and to refer to their own neighborhoods or communities in discussing these issues, while non-Hispanic whites were somewhat more likely to discuss a neighborhood effort to set up a crime watch. With the more recent emergence of the opioid crisis and the Black Lives Matter movement, we would expect a different pattern if we conducted the survey again today.

We were also interested in the extent to which the concerns associated with political activity involved civil rights issues. We include under this rubric both general references to “civil rights,” “racial issues,” or “discrimination” and specific concerns—for example, getting translators for Spanish-speaking prison inmates, hiring more minority teachers in the school system, or opening up the all-Anglo cheerleading squad to Hispanics in a majority-Mexican-American high school. Table 5.5 indicates that 6 percent of the information-rich, issue-based activity of both African Americans and Latinos involved reference to such issues. These issues figured in a very small proportion, less than 1 percent, of the participation of non-Hispanic whites. Because African Americans and Latinos constituted only a fraction of the population, and because in 1990, African Americans were somewhat—and Latinos were substantially—less likely to participate than were non-Hispanic whites, only an extremely small proportion of the messages communicated through the medium of information-rich participation concerned policy matters germane to civil rights or racial or ethnic minorities. Moreover, public officials heard as much about these matters from non-Hispanic whites as from African Americans and Latinos combined. In terms of content, since some of the references to civil rights issues by non-Hispanic whites consisted of negative views of affirmative action, what public officials heard from non-Hispanic whites was more mixed than what they heard from either of the other groups.

GENDER

Given women’s traditional role in the family as well as the particularistic orientation to politics that has been ascribed to them since the ancient Greeks, women might be expected to bring to politics narrower, more personal or family concerns. To investigate, we examined the contacts with government officials, which are often focused on narrow personal concerns. We discovered that men and women who got in touch with public officials did not differ in whether they were motivated by personal or public concerns. Discussing their most recent contact, 22 percent of the men and 21 percent of the women indicated that the subject was a matter of particularized concern. Thirty-five percent of the women who contacted public officials indicated that the issue of concern affects the whole community, and 25 percent stated that it affects the entire nation (or the whole world); the analogous figures for men who contacted officials were 38 percent and 22 percent, respectively.

### Table 5.6. What Men and Women Say: Issue-Based Political Activity (Information-rich acts only)\(^a\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue-Based Activity</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of issue-based activity animated by concern about:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic human needs</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic issues (except taxes)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social issues (except abortion)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children or youth (except education)</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime or drugs</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil rights or minorities</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of respondents</strong></td>
<td>1,191</td>
<td>1,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of issue-based acts</strong></td>
<td>821</td>
<td>736</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Citizen Participation Study (1990).

*Information-rich acts are those in which an explicit message can be sent to policymakers: contacting, protesting, campaign work or contribution accompanied by a communication, informal community activity, or voluntary service on a local board. The numbers in the cells represent the proportion of such acts having identifiable issue content for which there was a reference to the particular issue.*

*Numbers shown are the weighted numbers of cases and issue-based acts.
When it comes to the actual issues that animate activity, there was also more similarity than difference between women and men in the 1990 data. Table 5.6 shows the proportion of information-rich, issue-based activity arising from concern about various subjects. Both men and women participate about many things with a similar, though not identical profile of concerns. For example, education figures more importantly in the activity of women, who have traditionally been the family members more likely to deal with teachers and schools. Also, women were twice as likely as men to refer to abortion.

Apart from the issue of abortion, women's issues—for example, sexual harassment or discrimination against women—were mentioned extremely rarely as the subject matter of activity. Women discussed these issues in connection with just under 1 percent of their information-rich, issue-based activity, and men did so even less frequently. All those who did act on this concern thought that the government should be making greater efforts to help women. But overall, public officials were hearing very little on the subject in 1990.

**Conclusion**

What decision makers hear from political activists is not representative of the opinions, concerns, and needs of the general population. Activists are more conservative on economic issues and sometimes more liberal on social issues. They are more extreme on both economic and social issues, so that the moderate middle is underrepresented. Activists have less need for health care, they are less likely to have to cut back on spending to make ends meet, and they are less likely to use government benefit programs. In addition, those who benefit from such non-means-tested programs as Social Security or Medicare are much more likely to undertake political action—for example, to make a voting decision or to contact a public official—in association with that program than are beneficiaries of such means-tested programs as food stamps (now SNAP) or Medicaid, who are by definition economically needy.

As for the messages sent through political participation, activists with low levels of education and income were much more likely than their more advantaged counterparts to report that their activity was animated by a matter of basic human need, such as hunger, housing, or health care. Similarly, African Americans and Latinos were more likely than non-Hispanic whites to indicate that their political participation was anchored in a concern about basic human needs. In addition, when these groups characterized their issue-based political activity, they were much more likely to identify a problem in their own lives. It is a truism about lobbying that public officials listen more carefully to those who are directly affected by the policies they advocate and who speak on their own behalf. Presumably, the analogous principle applies to communications from individuals: stories about basic human needs sound different to policymakers when told by those who are in need. Stories about the need to control crime in the community sound different to policymakers when told by residents.

Looking more closely, we discovered that, because of differences in rates of participation—and, in the case of Latinos and African Americans, because they are numerically relatively small groups in the adult population—public officials are hearing less from the disadvantaged or from racial or ethnic minorities, even about the issues that weigh relatively heavily in their bundles of participatory concerns. Compared to those who are well educated and affluent, the disadvantaged send fewer participatory messages concerning matters of basic human needs. What is more, in terms of the actual content of such messages, the advantaged communicate a mixed set of policy preferences with respect to whether government should be doing more to address issues of basic human needs. In contrast, to the extent that they speak at all, disadvantaged participants are uniformly favorable to greater government assistance.

In short, we have good reason to believe that public officials are receiving a skewed set of messages about what citizens care about, want, and need in policy terms.
6

Do Digital Technologies Make a Difference?

- More than 116,000 Texans signed an online petition—posted at Change.org by a victim of sexual assault—proposing to alter Texas prison rules to prohibit those serving terms for violent crimes from going online to seek pen pals.
- Business leaders sent letters and e-mails urging Tennessee legislators and Governor Bill Haslam to reject proposed legislation requiring all students in public schools and universities to use bathrooms and locker rooms that matched their gender at birth.
- In a state with no mandate for maximum class size and larger-than-average public school classrooms, a Portland, Oregon, parent whose first grader was assigned to a class with thirty-two students posted a video on YouTube advocating smaller classes.
- Seeking to persuade the state to require their insurers to cover their losses, members of the Connecticut Coalition against Crumbling Basements used Facebook and Twitter to locate other Connecticut homeowners whose basements were collapsing as the result of defective concrete.

Digital technologies have changed the way we shop, navigate unfamiliar streets, listen to music, make airline reservations, keep up with friends, and look for romance. The ongoing technological revolution has also opened up new possibilities for citizen politics: for gaining political information more quickly and easily than ever before; for broadcasting opinions about political subjects to friends, to the media, and to public officials; and for disseminating messages to large numbers of like-minded people and coordinating them for joint action; and for undertaking such political actions as registering to vote, making a campaign contribution, or signing a petition from the comfort of an easy chair. Digital participation certainly broadens the options for taking part, and it may bring new people into politics, but is it bringing new kinds of people into political activity? Even if these rapidly evolving technologies are effective in generating additional political activity, is the new activity simply replicating the same participatory inequalities? The development of the Internet immediately generated optimistic predictions about its democratic effects:

Extensive claims have been made about how the Internet changes everything, including politics. Enthusiasts have speculated that this medium will at long last eliminate the dominance of the established mass media, create an engaged and active citizenry, and redistribute power in more egalitarian ways. They assert that we should free democratic theorizing from the constraints of advanced industrial or post-industrial society and replace liberal democratic pluralism with direct democracy, strong democracy or more radical democratic theories.

We, too, were initially hopeful that digital technologies, if more and more widely accessible, might act as the trip wire disrupting participatory inequality.

To investigate whether Internet-based citizen participation alters the powerful association between social class and participation, in the summers of 2008 and 2012, we collaborated with Lee Rainie and Scott Keeter of the Pew Internet and American Life Project to design surveys about the use of digital technologies and about political activity both off and on the Internet.

All studies of the impact of digital technologies on democratic politics—including, of course, this one—are hampered by the fact that they report on a moving target. Technological changes clearly proceed much more quickly than the time line for publication in political science.

In addition, these two surveys reflect the particularities of the two presidential campaigns in which Barack Obama, a candidate who made self-conscious efforts to incorporate digital technologies into his campaigns, was running. Obama held special appeal for persons of color as well as younger voters—who tend not to be politically active and, because they have not reached their peak earning years and may not even have completed their educations, have relatively low levels of SES. Therefore, these surveys would
be more likely to understate than to overstate the extent of class- and age-based participatory inequalities.

Nevertheless, just as it has become abundantly clear that the anonymity afforded by the Internet (where "nobody knows you're a dog") has hardly led to a flowering of civil discourse, patterns of unequal political voice are replicated in digital participation. Although Internet access has grown, it remains stratified by class and race, a phenomenon widely known as the "digital divide." Moreover, access to the Internet has not led to an upsurge of participation among those who are less likely to take part in traditional ways.

**Does the Internet Increase Citizen Participation?**

Because the Internet lowers barriers to citizen political activity, observers have been optimistic that the Internet would raise political participation. Certain forms of political participation—in particular, making campaign donations and contacting public officials—are simply easier on the Internet. The networking capacities of the Internet are also suited to facilitate forming political groups, recruiting adherents and sympathizers, and mobilizing them to take political action—either online or offline. Moreover, the Internet provides a wealth of political information and opportunities for political interaction, discussion, and position taking.

However, the Internet may have the effect of repackaging political activity instead of increasing it. Rather than citizens undertaking additional actions, they might simply be transferring online what they would have undertaken offline. In fact, investigations of whether Internet use enhances political activity show mixed results.

**The Digital Divide and Participatory Inequality**

Even if it were unambiguous that Internet use increases political participation, more political activity does not necessarily imply a less unequal distribution of activity. While we often associate the Internet with emergent groups and underdog candidates operating on a shoestring and seeking support from the previously inactive, the Internet has also been used effectively by established interests. As Pippa Norris notes, if an increase in political participation derives from the same people, or the same kinds of people, who are already active, a likely result is the replication, or even the exacerbation, of existing political inequalities.

For some time, social observers have been concerned that the digital divide is leaving behind a substantial portion of the public—with implications for equal opportunity in economic life and equal voice in political life. During the 1990s, concern about unequal access to the Internet led to a mandate in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 specifying that "elementary and secondary schools and classrooms, health-care providers, and libraries should have access to advanced telecommunication services." The Act created a program of federal grants under the E-Rate program. According to a September 2000 report by the Department of Education, fully 75 percent of all public schools and districts and 50 percent of libraries had applied for funds under the E-Rate program. By the turn of the twenty-first century, 95 percent of public libraries offered Internet access to patrons.

Although the metaphor of the digital divide originally referred to lack of hardware access and suggests a chasm separating techno have-nots from the techno have-nots, it is now more appropriate to think of a continuum ranging from those who have no digital access or experience to those who use the Internet with great frequency in a variety of ways on a variety of devices. But what is critical for our concern with participatory inequalities is not simply that some Americans have been left behind in the technological advances of recent decades but that the digital divide mirrors the socioeconomic stratification of political activity in the United States.

Early adopters of new technologies tend to be disproportionately affluent and well educated. If the technology takes off and the price comes down, use becomes more widespread and includes the less affluent, thus reducing stratification. Pew data for 2008 and 2012 about Internet use and, for comparison, cell phone ownership, illustrate that pattern. Overall, in the four years separating the surveys, the share of respondents who could be categorized as Internet users—that is, who either use the Internet or send or receive e-mail, at least occasionally—increased from 75 to 90 percent. At the same time, ownership of cell phones (or other hand-held devices) rose from 75 to 91 percent. Figure 6.1 shows, for five quintiles of socioeconomic status (SES), that both Internet use and cell phone ownership are structured by SES. However, the digital divide has closed much more substantially for cell phone ownership than for Internet use. At the high end of the SES ladder, both Internet use and cell phone ownership were nearly universal in 2008 and 2012. At the low end, while cell phone ownership rose from 45 to 83 percent over the period, Internet use increased less sharply (from 44 to 66 percent).
However, an important exception shows up in the pattern of the association between Internet use or cell phone ownership and the characteristics that predict political participation. The young, who are relatively inactive politically, are more likely than their elders to be both Internet users and cell phone owners. Every study of Internet access and use, no matter what the measure, shows a steady decline with age.

Figure 6.2 shows that, in 2012, 96 percent of those between eighteen and twenty-four years of age, compared with only 48 percent of those seventy-one and older, use the Internet or e-mail at least occasionally. The generation gap for cell phone ownership is slightly less pronounced: the corresponding figures are 94 percent and 65 percent. Since the young are less active than their elders in most forms of political participation, digital technologies may have a potentially significant counterstratification effect. However, this age-related digital divide may diminish as members of the younger generation come of age and replace their tech-phobic elders.

Using the Internet does not necessarily mean using it for political purposes. The overwhelming share of Internet use is for nonpolitical activities that range from purchasing shoes to viewing pornography to keeping up

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**Figure 6.1. Internet and Cell Phone Use by SES Quintile, 2008 and 2012**

*Source: Pew Internet and American Life Surveys (2008 and 2012).*

**Figure 6.2. Internet and Cell Phone Use by Age**

*Source: Pew Internet and American Life Survey (2012).*

**Figure 6.3. Finding Information on the Internet about Politics or about Someone You Might Know or Meet, 2012**

*Source: Pew Internet and American Life Survey (2012).*
with friends on a social networking site. How does the use of the Internet for political purposes compare to its use for these economic, personal, and social purposes? Figure 6.3 shows, for Internet users only, the share of respondents at each step up the SES ladder using the Internet to look for news or information about the 2012 campaigns or politics in general compared to the share using it to search for information about somebody they know or might meet. When it comes to using the Internet to find information, there is clearly more class structuring if that information is political rather than social. These data confirm our suspicions that, beyond the demographic biases in digital access, online political opportunities might simply reproduce familiar patterns.

**Using Digital Technologies to Mobilize Participation**

Earlier we mentioned that digital technologies facilitate political mobilization. Various digital media, ranging from e-mail to social networking to Twitter, make it nearly costless to multiply the number of specially crafted messages targeted at selected publics to recruit political activists. Figure 6.4, which presents 2012 data about the proportion of respondents who were asked to take political action through various media, demonstrates that digital political recruitment figures significantly in mobilization efforts. Thirty-seven percent of those surveyed had been recruited by at least one of the digital methods: an e-mail, a request on a social networking site, a text message, or a tweet. In contrast, 59 percent reported at least one request through traditional offline means: a letter, a phone call, or an in-person encounter.

As we discussed in Chapter 3, those who seek to get others involved in politics seek to expend their time and effort on recruitment as efficiently as possible. Therefore, they aim their requests at the kinds of people who would be likely to say yes and, upon assenting, to follow through with effective participation—for example, a compelling communication to a public official or a large contribution to a candidate. The result is that requests for traditional forms of offline political participation are structured by the same factors, including SES, that predict political participation.

Do we get the same results for recruitment to online political participation? Figure 6.5 shows the association between SES and requests for political activity through on- and offline channels. As expected, offline requests by letter, by phone, or in person rise sharply across the rungs of the SES ladder. Contrary to rosy predictions that the Internet would have an

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**FIGURE 6.4. Requests for Political Activity Offline and Online**

*Source: Pew Internet and American Life Survey (2012).*

**FIGURE 6.5. Requests for Political Activity Online or Offline by SES Quintile**

*Source: Pew Internet and American Life Survey (2012).*

*Note: The measure of requests offline is having been asked at least once by letter, by phone, or in person. The measure of requests online is having been asked at least once by e-mail, by text, by tweet, or through a social networking site.*
equalizing impact on politics, the likelihood of digital recruitment by e-mail, text, tweet, or through a social networking site increases no less steeply with levels of SES. When we consider digital recruitment of Internet users only, shown by the dotted line in Figure 6.5, the association is still apparent, though somewhat weaker, indicating that stratification by SES of requests is shaped by more than the digital divide.\footnote{\textsuperscript{18}}

**The Representativeness of Online and Offline Political Participation**

We can investigate directly whether political participation on the Internet overcomes the representational biases of offline political activity. The 2012 Pew survey asked about a series of political activities, four of which can be performed either online or offline: contacting a national, state, or local government official; sending a "letter to the editor"; and making a political contribution. Using these items, we constructed separate activity scales for online activity and for offline activity for those acts with online counterparts.\footnote{\textsuperscript{19}} Overall, online political participation is somewhat less common than engagement in their traditional offline variants. Twenty-eight percent of respondents took part online in at least one of the four acts, and 41 percent engaged in at least one in its offline version.

Figure 6.6 presents data for quintiles based on SES and shows that, whether on- or offline, political activity rises sharply with SES.\footnote{\textsuperscript{20}} The solid top line shows the proportion who undertake offline at least one of the four activities that have online and offline versions; the dashed bottom line shows the proportion who take part in at least one of the online counterparts of these four activities.

The dotted middle line in Figure 6.6 shows the proportion who engage in at least one of the four Internet-based political activities among Internet users—that is, among those who use the Internet or e-mail at least occasionally. On one hand, because Internet use itself has a social class component, when we consider the online political activity of Internet users only, the SES gradient is, not surprisingly, slightly less sharp than when we consider all respondents. On the other hand, the data make clear that lack of access is only a small part of the story of the class structuring of online political activity. At the upper end of the SES scale, where Internet use is nearly universal, the level of online activity is not affected by lack of access to hardware. In contrast, some—but only a small part—of the participatory deficit of those at the bottom end reflects lack of Internet access. Thus, far from acting as a great equalizer, political activity on the Internet seems to replicate familiar patterns of socioeconomic stratification. It does so not only because the digital divide has a social class component but, more importantly, because lower-SES Internet users are not using the Internet to take part politically.\footnote{\textsuperscript{21}}

The patterns for age groups, shown in Figure 6.7, are quite different. Age is much less powerful in structuring political activity than is SES: the distance between the most and least active of the seven age groups is much smaller than the distance between the lowest and highest of the SES quintiles. Most forms of political participation have been shown to rise with age until they peak in middle age before falling off among the elderly. We see the roughly curvilinear pattern in the scale of four offline acts for which there are online counterparts, shown by the solid top line in the figure. However, when it comes to online activity, shown in the dashed bottom line, we see a contrasting pattern. The likelihood of undertaking online political activity is lower among those older than seventy. For those under seventy, however, there is no relationship between age and online political participation. In contrast to what we observed for offline political activity, the absence of online...
activity among the elderly represents, we assume, not a fall-off from previous Internet-based participation but instead a case of never having used the Internet. This suspicion gains credence when we consider the online activity of those who use the Internet or e-mail at least occasionally, shown by the dotted middle line in Figure 6.7. Among Internet users, online political participation rises gradually across age groups until it drops off among those over seventy. Still, it is notable that the traditional underrepresentation of the young among political activists is not evident for political acts undertaken online.

### Citizen Politics and Social Media

The activities just considered are political acts that existed before the advent of the Internet, allowing us to compare them in their off- and online manifestations. Clearly, such a definition of participation is extremely restricted, omitting multiple forms of traditional participation that have no digital analogue: for example, attending a protest, volunteering for a candidate for office, or working with community members to solve a local problem. Reciprocally, there are Internet-based forms of political engagement without an offline counterpart—in particular, political involvement anchored in social media. In the spirit of “the Internet changes everything,” we wondered whether the evolving possibilities for political engagement on social media disrupt the recurrent patterns of SES stratification. The past decade has witnessed striking growth in the availability and use of various social media. In the 2008 Pew survey, 25 percent of respondents reported that they used a social networking site like Facebook or LinkedIn or used Twitter. By 2012, that figure had risen sharply to 59 percent. The increase is not simply a matter of the narrowing of the digital divide. Considering Internet users only, the figures are 33 percent and 69 percent, respectively.23

Social media provide opportunities for political engagement. A member can, for example, use a social network site to join a group that is involved in political or social issues, to follow political figures, or to post links to political stories or articles. Such possibilities for political engagement through social media do not simply reproduce participation as we have defined it so far. They instead reflect some of the distinctive civic tastes of post-Boomer cohorts: their preference for participatory forms that are anchored in non-hierarchical and informal networks and that eschew such traditional political intermediaries as campaigns, parties, and interest groups.23

These possibilities for political engagement through social media sites may lead to conventional forms of online and offline political participation. In a well-known pattern, new technologies initially resemble the older technologies they eventually replace before their unique capacities have developed. For example, before the power of visual images was refined, early campaign ads on television used talking heads with wordy messages suitable for radio. In certain ways, as increasing numbers of politicians move from maintaining Web sites to establishing a presence on Facebook, what is happening is almost the opposite. More conventional forms of political discourse and advocacy have also established a beachhead in the world of social media.

Of course, most social media use has nothing to do with politics. Still, among Internet users, a growing minority—7 percent in 2008 and 29 percent in 2012—used social media for political purposes.24 Even though these forms of political involvement are, on average, less demanding than the activities that we usually group under the umbrella of political participation, they might indicate future trends.

The data in Figure 6.8 make clear that among Internet users, social media use (of all sorts) has grown substantially in recent years and, not surprisingly, that the young are much more likely than their elders to exploit these rapidly developing Internet capabilities. In both years, social media use declines
come the familiar structuring of political participation by social class. Figure 6.9 shows social media use among SES groups for all respondents and for Internet users. Consistent with what we have seen, at each step along the SES ladder, social media use is higher in 2012 than in 2008. When we consider all respondents, the digital divide introduces an SES bias in social media use. However, among Internet users, there is no consistent association between SES and social media use. In 2008, Internet users on the lowest rung of the SES ladder were the most likely to be social media users. For the other four SES quintiles, there is no obvious pattern.25 By 2012, the line for Internet users is essentially flat and shows no association between social media use and SES.

With regard to political involvement on social media, Figure 6.10 shows a somewhat bumpy pattern for 2008, with the digital divide a factor only for the lowest SES group. By 2012, political engagement on social media is not only more common at all levels of SES, but a familiar pattern also can be discerned. Although the slope is not especially steep, political engagement

precipitously as age increases, and in all age groups social media use rose over the four-year period. The increase is much less substantial for those younger than twenty-five, simply because the overwhelming majority of the youngest adults used social media in 2008.

The pattern is similar but not identical for the minority of Internet users who become politically involved on social media. As with general social media use, political involvement on social media falls off sharply across age groups. Once again, there was a marked increase even across a brief period of four years. However, when it comes to political engagement on social media, the growth was less pronounced among older respondents and sharpest among those in their late twenties.

**FIGURE 6.8. Social Media Use among Internet Users by Age, 2008 and 2012**


Note: To reflect the changing digital environment, the measures of being a social media user were somewhat different in the two surveys. In 2008, a social media user reported using at least one of the following: Twitter; a ‘micro-blogging service’; or a social networking site such as MySpace, Facebook, or LinkedIn. In 2012, a social media user reported using at least one of the following: Twitter; or a social networking site like Facebook, LinkedIn, or Google Plus.

**FIGURE 6.9. Social Media Use by SES Quintile, 2008 and 2012**


Note: To reflect the changing digital environment, the measures of being a social media user were somewhat different in the two surveys. In 2008, a social media user reported using at least one of the following: Twitter; a ‘micro-blogging service’; or a social networking site such as MySpace, Facebook, or LinkedIn. In 2012, a social media user reported using at least one of the following: Twitter; or a social networking site like Facebook, LinkedIn, or Google Plus.

**DOES POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA SEVER THE SES LINK?**

When we investigated then-emergent social media in 2008, we were hopeful that the possibilities for political engagement on social media might over-
on social media rises steadily with SES, a pattern that is only partially explained by the digital divide. Once again, social class intrudes into the expression of political voice.

**A Brief Note on Race or Ethnicity and Gender**

Before leaving the subject of Internet-based political activity, let us return to our concern with two other sets of politically relevant categories: race or ethnicity, and gender. Figure 6.11 shows that, just as we saw in Chapter 4, political participation is highest among non-Hispanic whites and lowest among Hispanics, with African Americans in between. However, the disparities in political activity among the three groups are wider for online than for offline participation. One striking aspect of the data in Figure 6.11 is that, in contrast to what we saw for SES-based differences in political activity, the gaps do not narrow when we consider the online participation of Internet users only. Further analysis shows that socioeconomic disparities among non-Hispanic whites, African Americans, and Latinos do not fully

**FIGURE 6.11. Political Activity Offline and Online by Race and Ethnicity**

*Source: Pew Internet and American Life Survey (2012).*

*Note: The measure of offline political activity is having undertaken at least one of the following offline: contacting a national, state, or local government official; signing a petition; sending a "letter to the editor"; or making a political contribution. The measure of online political activity is having undertaken at least one of these activities online.*

**FIGURE 6.12. Political Activity Offline and Online by Gender**

*Source: Pew Internet and American Life (2012).*

*Note: The measure of offline political activity is having undertaken at least one of the following offline: contacting a national, state, or local government official; signing a petition; sending a "letter to the editor"; or making a political contribution. The measure of online political activity is having undertaken at least one of these activities online.*
explain the gaps in political participation online. Thus, race and ethnicity play an independent role apart from SES with regard to online activity.36

As for differences between men and women, the data in Figure 6.12 show no significant gender disparities in either offline or online participation.37

Conclusion

Not unexpectedly, in recent decades the possibilities for political voice through the Internet grew markedly and changed in form—even in the four-year period separating the 2008 and 2012 Pew surveys. Not only are more Americans connected to the Internet, but the Internet also provides increasing opportunities for political engagement both through traditional activities that can be undertaken on the Internet and through social media.

Although these revolutionary technological changes provide citizens with new means of expressing political voice, they have not severed the deep roots that anchor political participation in social class. Although the digital divide—that is, the gap between those who have access to and use of the Internet and those who do not—has become somewhat narrower in recent years, it hews closely to SES level. The class structuring of the digital divide is partly, but only partly, responsible for the fact that online political mobilization and activity are strongly associated with SES. Even though these associations are weaker when we consider Internet users only, the probability of either being asked online to take part in politics (by e-mail, text, tweet, or through a request on a social networking site) or engaging in the online counterpart of a traditional offline participatory act rises with SES.

The new and rapidly changing world of social media also presents opportunities for political involvement of a somewhat less demanding nature than offline involvement. The early days of social media showed some promise that the SES stratification of participation might be overcome. As social media use has grown, diffusing beyond the youngest age group, durable patterns of socioeconomic bias in political engagement have reappeared.

But in one respect, the rapidly evolving opportunities for political engagement online do not simply mirror traditional patterns. While the digital divide reinforces the class bias in political participation, it does the opposite when it comes to age. It is well known that younger citizens, who are underrepresented when it comes to expressing political voice, are especially likely to be Internet users. As a result, disparities among age groups in the various forms of online political participation tend, at present, to be quite muted.

7

Social Movements and Ordinary Recruitment

- In December, 1773, a group of angry, hatchet-wielding men boarded three ships anchored in Boston Harbor, descended into the cargo holds, hacked open chests of tea, and dumped the contents overboard to protest an import tax, imposed by the English Parliament, on tea sold to Americans. The Boston Tea Party is sometimes considered the event that made the American Revolution inevitable.

- Organized by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a group met in Seneca Falls, New York, in July 1848, to discuss the “condition and rights of women.” The declaration that emerged from that convention contained the revolutionary assertion, “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal” and the equally revolutionary demand for women’s right to vote.

- To win recognition of the United Auto Workers as their bargaining agent, autoworkers locked themselves in General Motors Fisher Body Plant Number One in Flint, Michigan, on December 30, 1936. After a sit-down strike lasting several weeks, the workers gained, among other concessions, permission to speak to one another in the lunchroom.

- Four African-American students at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College sat down at the lunch counter at a Greensboro, North Carolina, Woolworth’s in February, 1960. Although they