VOICE AND EQUALITY

Civic Voluntarism in American Politics

SIDNEY VERBA
KAY LEHMAN SCHLOZMAN
HENRY E. BRADY

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Defining Political Participation

Political participation affords citizens in a democracy an opportunity to communicate information to government officials about their concerns and preferences and to put pressure on them to respond. Americans who wish to take part politically have an array of options: they may express their views directly by communicating with public officials or indirectly by attempting to influence electoral outcomes; they may give time and effort or contribute dollars; they may work alone or in concert with others; they may be active at the national, state, or local level. Since different forms of political activity are differentially effective in conveying information or exerting pressure, it matters how citizens take part.

In this part of the book we lay the groundwork for both an explanation of why people are active politically and an understanding of what and from whom the government hears by looking closely at the nature and scope of participation in America. In this chapter, we explicate somewhat more fully what we mean by voluntary political participation and how various kinds of activity fit into the democratic process. In the chapter that follows, we add descriptive detail about the many ways in which citizens take part. In a discussion that encompasses a wide variety of political activities, we go beyond a catalogue of the kinds of political acts to consider other important aspects of the world of participation. We take into account the *volume* of activity—not only whether or not

people take part in various ways, but how much they do. The analysis of volume will allow us to elaborate the extent to which various activities can apply pressure on the government. In addition, we use our unique data set to describe the *subject matter* of political activity—the issues and problems that animate the various activities in which citizens engage—and thus to shed new light on the information that citizens communicate when they participate. In this way, we provide a richer picture of the state of the voluntary participatory system in America than has heretofore been available.

Voluntary Political Participation

Although we shall have frequent occasion to consider voluntary activity in realms outside politics, our principal concern in this book is the *voluntary political participation* of the American public. Let us begin by discussing briefly what we mean by this. Our purpose in this section is both to set out some of the analytical distinctions that allow us to differentiate voluntary political participation from other forms of human endeavor and to acknowledge the fuzziness of the empirical boundaries that separate various domains of activity. No matter how sophisticated our understanding, however, what really matters are the actual measures. For example, in contrast to what we do here, other analysts have defined involvement in voluntary organizations to encompass membership in a local church or to exclude membership in a union, decisions that have implications for findings about the amount and distribution of organizational affiliation. Therefore, as we proceed, it will be important to make our measures explicit and point out the discretionary decisions about the classification of specific activities that sit on the borders of what are analytically distinguishable domains.

VOLUNTARY POLITICAL ACTIVITY

By *political* participation we refer simply to activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action—either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies. By *voluntary* activity we mean participation that is not

obligatory—no one is forced to volunteer—and that receives no pay or only token financial compensation. Thus, a paid position on a big city school board or a Senator's re-election campaign staff does not qualify under our definition.[1]

The distinction between voluntary activity and paid work is not always clear. It is possible to serve private economic purposes through social and political activism. As we shall see, many people seek to do well while doing good. They undertake voluntary activity for which they receive no compensation—in their churches, in charities, in politics—in order to make contacts or otherwise enhance their jobs or careers. Furthermore, for many of those who participate in politics, the policy issues that animate their activity have consequences for their pocketbooks. Conversely, many people get involved in genuinely voluntary activity that is an extension of their paid employment. For example, an accountant may lend his or her professional expertise as part of unpaid service on a hospital or museum board. Those who work for non-profits or political organizations often extend their commitment with additional volunteer work on behalf of the objectives pursued through their paid employment. In all these cases, the border between voluntary participation and paid employment is blurry.

Finally, we focus on *activity:* we are concerned with doing politics, rather than with being attentive to politics. Thus, we exclude certain activities that might have been embraced by a more encompassing definition. The umbrella of our definition, therefore, does not extend to following political events in the news or watching public affairs programs on television. We have also excluded communications—political discussions among friends, letters to

1. Max Weber distinguished between those for whom politics is an avocation and those for whom it is a vocation. The former enter political life as occasional politicians, who "cast a ballot or consummate a similar expression of intention, such as applauding or protesting in a 'political' meeting, or delivering a 'political' speech, etc."; the latter make politics their major vocation. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology,* ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 83. We are interested in those for whom politics is an avocation. It is, of course, possible that some for whom politics is a vocation do not earn the bulk of their income that way. However, as long as it is their main occupation, they fall outside of our volunteer category. Senators Jay Rockefeller and Edward M. Kennedy are full-time professionals, not volunteers, even though their income may not depend on a government salary.

the editor, calls to talk radio shows—in which the target audience is not a public official.[2]

POLITICAL AND NON-POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Although our main concern is with political activity, our survey gathered extensive information about non-political voluntary activity. The latter is crucial to our analysis because, as we shall see later, it is central to understanding political participation. Indeed, one of the main themes of this book is the embeddedness of political activity in the non-political institutions of civil society.

The boundary between political and non-political activity is by no means clear, an aspect of political and social life in America that complicates the analysis of political and non-political participation. Voluntary activity in both the religious and secular domains outside of politics intersects with politics in many ways. First, as we shall see over and over, participation in these spheres is in many ways a politicizing experience. For one thing, undertaking activities that themselves have nothing to do with politics—for example, running the PTA fund drive or managing the church soup kitchen—can develop organizational and communications skills that are transferable to politics. In addition, these non-political institutions can act as the locus of attempts at political recruitment: church and organization members make social contacts and, thus, become part of networks through which requests for participation in politics are mediated. Moreover, those who take part in religious or organizational activity are exposed to political cues and messages—as when a minister gives a sermon on a political topic or when organization members chat informally about politics at a meeting.

Furthermore, the institutions that provide a context for non-political voluntary participation have a complex relationship to politics and public purposes. For example, churches and, especially,

2. We did measure these activities at the border of political activity and can investigate whether the 60 percent of respondents who indicated discussing national politics and national affairs, or the 52 percent who indicated discussing local community politics and affairs, at least once a week, the 41 percent who watch some type of public affairs program on television at least once a week, or the 4 percent who have called in to express their views on a radio talk show are especially politically active.

non-profit organizations undertake many activities—ranging from aiding the homeless to funding cancer research to supporting the symphony—that are also undertaken by governments here and abroad. Indeed, the sharing of functions among a variety of private, non-profit, and public institutions is one of the hallmarks of the peculiar American political economy.[3]

Involvement in politics extends beyond the functional overlap with public institutions, however. Many voluntary associations and even churches get involved directly in politics, and their attempts at influencing policy outcomes constitute a crucial source of input about citizen views and preferences. Support of an organization that takes stands on public issues, even passive support or support motivated by concerns other than government influence, represents a form of political activity. For many citizens it may be the main form of political participation—albeit often at second hand. The substantial variation among organizations in the extent to which they maintain an ongoing presence in politics and mix political and non-political means of furthering their members' interests presents a challenge for an inquiry like this one. Voluntary organizations range from those like a local softball league or garden club that eschew political involvement to those like the Children's Defense Fund or the Committee on the Present Danger that are deeply involved in politics. Making matters more complicated is the fact that nominal categories that are sensible to respondents frequently include organizations having very different levels of political involvement. For example, most of the organizations that would fall under the rubric of "a hobby club, sports or country club, or some other group or club for leisure time activities" do not take stands in politics; the National Rifle Association, however, is very active politically.

A final source of ambiguity in differentiating political from non-political participation is that the reported motives for activity may be at variance with the outward appearance of the act. For example, many people who engage in activity the effect of which is to influence either directly or indirectly what the government does—who campaign for candidates, donate to corporate PACs,

3. On this theme, see *Between States and Markets: The Voluntary Sector in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Robert Wuthnow (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

join organizations that take stands in politics, or sit on local governing boards—cite non-political reasons for their participation. Among other things, they may indicate that they enjoy the other people involved, that they want to take advantage of recreational opportunities or direct services provided by an organization, or that they want to further their careers. Conversely, as we shall see, some of those who take part in educational, charitable, or social activities associated with their churches indicate that one of the reasons for that activity is to "influence government policy."[4]

The unclear distinction between political and non-political activity is a fact of life in American politics, a fact with significant consequences for how politics operates. It is a fact that, at times, also complicates our analysis since we wish to differentiate between the domains in order to see how they relate to each other. Because it is so difficult to distinguish what is political from what is not, we shall need to proceed cautiously.

What Kind of Political Activity?

Americans who wish to take part in politics can be active in many ways. Studies of political participation traditionally have begun with—and too often ended with—the vote. Although voting is an important mode of citizen involvement in political life, it is but one of many political acts. In this study we move well beyond the vote to consider a wider range of political acts, including working in and contributing to electoral campaigns and organizations; contacting government officials; attending protests, marches, or demonstrations; working informally with others to solve some community problem; serving without pay on local elected and appointed boards; being active politically through the intermediation of voluntary associations; and contributing money to political causes in response to mail solicitations.[5]

4. A fuller explication of respondents' retrospective interpretations of the reasons for becoming involved in voluntary endeavors is found in Chapter 4.

5. Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie explored some of these additional forms of activity in *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). Of the activities included in the present study, they discussed voting, campaigning, individual contacting, and informal community activity. There is a large literature on protest activity, a category not covered in Verba and Nie. See, for instance, Samuel H. Barnes, Max Kaase, et al., *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1979).

This list covers many important ways in which American citizens take part in politics.[6] Moreover, within each of these activities, the possibilities proliferate. A citizen can, for example, do campaign work in a primary or a general election; contribute to a candidate or to a PAC; contact an elected or an appointed official; or protest on a national, state, or local issue. Hence, the range of acts about which we have information is even broader than might appear at first glance.

Differences among the Political Acts

Political acts differ in a variety of ways. Rather than propose yet another typology of political acts, we shall set out three main analytical distinctions among those we study, distinctions that will recur repeatedly throughout our analysis.[7] We focus on these particular distinctions because we think that they are crucial to understanding how different acts function politically. One distinction focuses on what a particular form of participation requires of the

6. Our list of acts is, however, not exhaustive. Among the excluded activities that would fall under our definition of voluntary political participation are attempting to persuade someone to vote a particular way and publicly supporting a candidate or a cause—for example, by wearing a button or displaying a bumper sticker. We were unable to examine another form of participation—activity on referendum issues—because opportunities for this kind of participation depend upon state laws governing ballot propositions and are, thus, distributed unevenly. In addition, James C. Scott (*Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985]) has written of the variety of ways in which the powerless can assert themselves: by malingering, sabotage, gossip, and humor.

Although we did ask about protest, we did not ask specifically about forms of protest—violent demonstrations, rioting, terrorism, illegal activities—that clearly remain outside the mainstream. Obviously, such activities would be difficult to ask about in a survey like ours. Moreover, although not totally foreign to the American context, they are sufficiently rare that it would be difficult to find sufficient cases for analysis—even if people were willing to discuss such activities in an interview.

7. Discussions of the variety of political acts can be found in Verba and Nie, *Participation in America;* Lester W. Milbrath and M. L. Goel, *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Rand McNally College Pub. Co., 1977); Jack H. Nagel, *Participation* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1987); and Barnes, Kaase, et al., *Political Action.*

activist in terms of the mix of resources of time, money, and skills. The other two distinctions focus on the factors affecting what a participatory act can produce in the way of response. Citizen participation influences political elites by communicating information about activists' circumstances, preferences, and needs and by generating pressure—whether the promise of support or the threat of opposition—to pay attention. The combination of what an act requires and what an act can produce is basic to how participation achieves—or fails to achieve—voice and equality in American politics. Let us consider these distinctions more closely.

TIME, MONEY, AND SKILLS: THE REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION

The first distinction among participatory acts is what is required for activity—time, money, or skills. All forms of political activity demand an input, of either time or money. Which one is required is, as we shall see, significant in determining whose voice is heard. Indeed, the contrast between time and money, one not usually dealt with systematically in the empirical analyses of participation, is one of the most important distinctions informing our analysis. There is also variation in the extent to which participatory acts demand skills. The citizen who goes to the polls, attends a demonstration, or writes a check does not need to be especially articulate or well-organized or to be capable of exercising leadership. In contrast, activists who contact public officials, work in campaigns, serve on local boards, or work with others on community problems (or who accompany a contribution with a communication or attempt to organize a demonstration) will be more effective if they are skilled. We have no direct measure of how skillful respondents are—for example, how effectively they write or speak. We do, however, have extensive measures of prior skills: the extent to which respondents undertake in non-political contexts activities such as writing letters and organizing meetings that permit them to practice skills relevant to politics.

INFORMATION: SENDING MESSAGES

Participatory acts vary in the extent to which they convey information about the circumstances and preferences of the participant.

As is well known, the vote is a rather blunt instrument for the communication of what is on citizens' minds. In contrast, a sign carried at a protest can convey a precise message as to the substance of the issue at hand; a communication from an organization can be even more detailed about the nature of the problem and the action desired; and a direct contact from an individual to a policymaker can add further information about the circumstances of the individual. Electorally-based acts are ambiguous with respect to the information they carry. Campaign workers or contributors may accompany their support with an explicit message about their preferences, but they may also remain silent and invisible. At several points in our analysis, we distinguish information-rich activities that allow the participant to transmit detailed instructions from other activities conveying less explicit information. Although we infer the capacity of an act to carry information from its intrinsic nature, we also have data about the issue concerns, if any, that animated such participation.

Even when the act itself does not convey a precise message, there may be implicit information to policymakers in the politically relevant characteristics of those who take part. Public officials know who is paying attention to what they do. When citizens with identifiable, politically relevant attributes become visible through political activity, they transmit information even if the act itself—in particular, the vote—is not one that accommodates precise instructions.

THE VOLUME OF ACTIVITY: EXERTING PRESSURE

Political acts vary in the extent to which they generate pressure on policymakers to pay attention. The ability of participatory input to turn up the political heat depends upon many factors, including the position, security, resources, and psychological makeup of the public official at whom it is aimed. Therefore, we cannot measure it directly. However, we can—as has not been done in the past—measure a characteristic of political participation that is surely related to its capacity for clout: the volume of activity.

Political acts vary in the extent to which it is possible, or even legal, to multiply the amount of participatory input. When it comes to the volume of political input, the vote is at one extreme.

Although Americans go to the polls more frequently and cast ballots for more offices than do citizens of other democracies, in any particular election, each citizen has one and only one vote. No other political act has this characteristic. Indeed, all other kinds of participation can be described as forms of multiple voting. A citizen may contact many public officials, few, or none at all, devote many hours to working in campaigns, few, or none at all, donate many dollars to political campaigns and causes, few, or none at all, and so on through all the other activities.

Because the metrics are different—hours devoted to activity, dollars contributed, communications dispatched, protests attended—it is difficult to make comparisons across activities with respect to the extent to which it is possible to increase the amount of activity. Still, in spite of legal restrictions on the amount that an individual can contribute to a particular candidate, it is clearly possible to multiply the number of dollars donated to political campaigns and causes to an extent not feasible with other forms of activity. The ceiling imposed on contributions by campaign finance laws is higher than the natural limitation placed on the number of hours that can be devoted to electoral campaigns, writing letters to public officials, community activity, serving on a local governing board, or attending demonstrations by the fact that no one's day has more than twenty-four hours.

To a certain extent, augmenting the volume of activity produces an increase in pressure on policymakers to respond. Although the force of the collective vote outcome is definitive, a single vote has little potential leverage. A candidate for office can ignore an individual voter and suffer no consequences. The stakes are higher when it comes to the campaign volunteer who works many hours or the donor who has written a large check. Under these circumstances, the level of support may be sufficient that the individual participant gains clout.

OTHER DISTINCTIONS

There are additional bases upon which to classify political acts even though they do not form an important touchstone in our analysis. We can, for example, differentiate forms of participation that are ordinarily undertaken alone, such as contacting a public official or writing a check to a candidate or political cause, from those that are typically performed in concert with others, such as attending a demonstration or serving on a local governing board. Although this distinction is not one of our continuing concerns, it will arise when we consider the gratifications provided by various activities. In addition, we could distinguish unconventional from mainstream activities. This distinction, about which much is made in the literature, may not, however, be very significant for our concerns.[8] At the outset, we should recognize that what is considered to be unconventional activity varies substantially with time and place. Many of the citizen activities that are routine in America and other established democracies occasion prison sentences in authoritarian regimes. We do have, as we mentioned, one measure of what might be thought of as unconventional participation: attending a demonstration, march, or protest. Given the variety of groups and causes that adopt these tactics, however, we could argue that protest has, at this point, joined other forms of political participation as a relatively mainstream activity. Although only a small proportion of the American public engages in protest, our sampling technique allowed us to generate sufficient cases for analysis of those who have protested within the past two years.

Summary

In this chapter we have introduced a variety of forms of political activity in which citizens can engage and differentiated them along several critical dimensions. Table 2.1 summarizes our argument by showing for each activity its capacity for conveying detailed information, the extent to which the volume of activity can be multiplied, and the resources of time, money, and skills required for effective participation. It is possible to quibble with the judgments made. For example, it could be argued that the number of communications to public officials can vary as much as the number of hours devoted to campaigns. However, the broad outlines are consistent with the preceding argument.

8. See, for instance, Barnes and Kaase, *Political Action*, and Alan Marsh, *Political Action in Europe and the U.S.A.* (London: Macmillan, 1990).

Table 2.1 The Attributes of Political Activities

Activity	Capacity for Conveying Information	Variation in Volume	Requirements
Vote	Low	Low	Time
Campaign Work	Mixed	High	Time, Skills
Campaign Contribution	Mixed	Highest	Money
Contact an Official	High	Medium	Time, Skills
Protest	High	Medium	Time
Informal Community Work	High	High	Time, Skills
Member of a Local Board	High	High	Time, Skills
Affiliation with a Political Organization	Mixed	High	Time, Skills, Money
Contribution to a Political Cause	Mixed	Highest	Money

It is interesting to note the extensive variation in the patterns for particular activities. Two pairs of activities do exhibit similar configurations: the two forms of community activity, working informally with others and serving on a local governing board; and the two kinds of financial contributions, to campaigns and to political causes. Otherwise, there is tremendous diversity among modes of activity along these three dimensions. This alerts us to the fact that when we consider the wellsprings of activity, as well as the gratifications attendant to it, we must consider not only overall political participation but also particular activities with distinctive sets of participatory characteristics.

3

Political Participation: How Much? About What?

Journalistic accounts yield contradictory stereotypes of the citizen in contemporary American politics. Are Americans still the nation of joiners observed by visitors from nations with less participatory cultures and fewer opportunities for citizen engagement? Or are they too busy getting and spending to divert themselves from individualistic pursuits in order to devote time, effort, or money to common ends? Or are they so politically disaffected that they are disinclined even to get involved? Depending upon what is being scrutinized—citizen attitudes or behavior, voting or other political activities, political participation or voluntary involvement in domains outside of politics—each of these seemingly contradictory characterizations may, in fact, be apt.

In this chapter we describe political activity in America, elaborating the various kinds of activity and considering their volume. In addition, in order to assess whether there is a lot of, or a little, political activity we will apply several comparative yardsticks: comparing activity in the United States with that in other countries, activity today with activity in the past, and activity in political life with non-political activity. Finally, we will look at the subject matter of political activity. This chapter presents a rich array of descriptive information. These data are intrinsically interesting as an elaboration of the state of participation in the United

States. The data presented are also the raw material for the analysis that follows of the participatory process in this country.

How Much Political Activity?

How many people are active in politics in any given year? Figure 3.1 presents the proportion of respondents who report having engaged in each of a variety of political acts. It shows substantial variation across acts.[1] Voting stands out clearly as the most commonly reported activity: well over half the population indicates having voted in the last presidential election.[2] More intensive involvement in the electoral process is much less frequent. Fewer than one in four respondents reported making a campaign contribution, and a much smaller share—fewer than one in ten—indicated having worked as a volunteer in an electoral campaign. Interestingly, the more frequent activities are ones outside of the sphere of electoral activity. Almost half of the respondents (48 percent) reported being affiliated with—that is, being a member of or making a contribution to—an organization that takes stands in politics. These data testify to the important role of voluntary associations as a channel for citizen activity. Other relatively common modes of participation illustrate the importance of activity outside of formally organized institutions. Thirty-four percent of the sample reported having initiated contacts with a government official. In addition, about a sixth reported having worked infor-

1. For the wording of political activity items, see Appendix B.1.

2. As is always the case in surveys, the reports of voting are exaggerated: only about 50 percent of the public voted in 1988. Our figures are consistent with those obtained in other public opinion surveys, including the American National Election Studies. See Warren E. Miller and Santa A. Traugott, *American National Election Studies Data Sourcebook, 1952–1986* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 299. For a discussion of the overreporting of turnout, see Ruy A. Teixeira, *The Disappearing American Voter* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1992), Appendix A.

For participatory acts other than the vote, there is no analogue to the local records that make it possible to validate reported turnout. Although we would expect there to be overreporting of other forms of activity, we have no independent measure of its dimensions. Because other forms of activity are both less frequent than voting and less firmly attached to notions of civic duty, it is possible that the problem is less severe for other activities than it is for voting. For an analysis of the issue of overreporting and its consequences for the study of participation, see Appendix D.

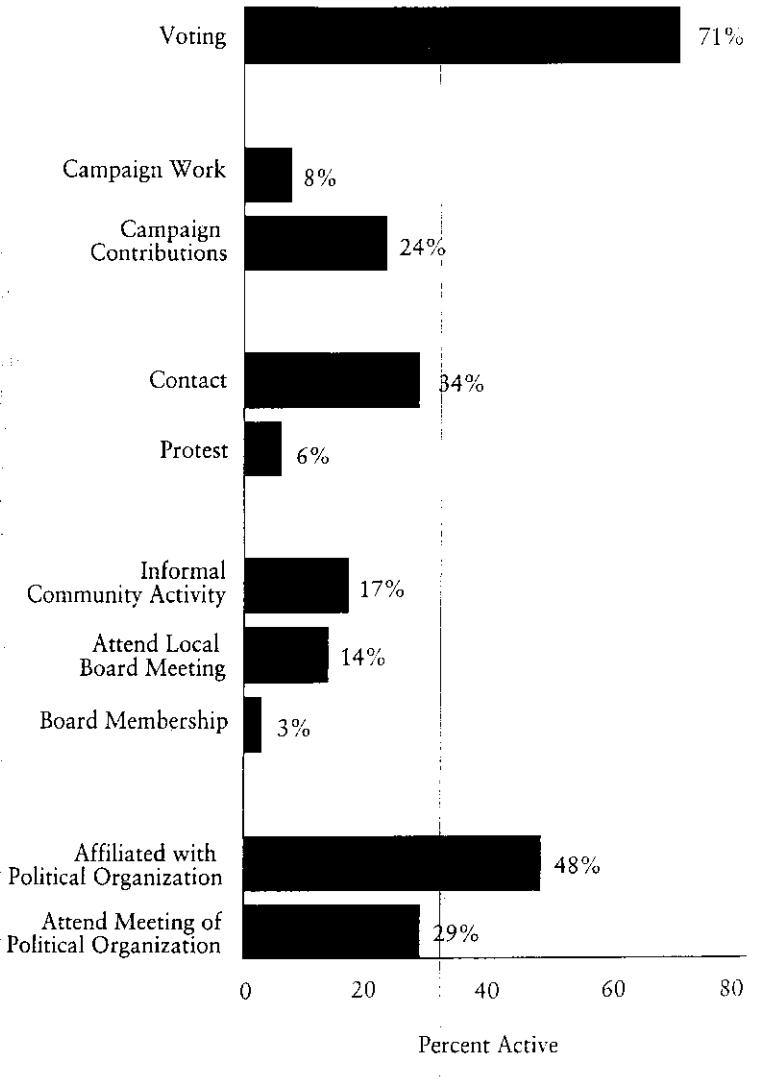

Figure 3.1 Political Activities.
Effective sample size is 2,517 weighted cases. See Appendix A for information about the sample.

mally with others in the neighborhood or community to try to deal with some community issue or problem. The importance of informal activity is highlighted by the fact that fewer respondents reported attending a meeting of an official local board in the same time period. Finally, much smaller proportions have served in a voluntary capacity on a local governmental board or council such as a school or zoning board, or attended a protest, march, or demonstration on some national or local issue.[3]

Do these figures support an image of the American public as active or passive? Whether the numbers are high or low depends, in part, on the standard of comparison chosen. Later in the chapter we present comparative data of several kinds that help in making an assessment. At first glance, however, the proportions do not appear to be high. There is no form of participation, aside from voting, in which a majority of the public engages. It is worthwhile to note, however, that, in a large country, even small proportions of the population translate into a lot of people. Consider a rare act: only 3 percent of respondents indicated serving as a volunteer on a local governing board. Yet this means that several million people, serving without compensation, assume a formal role in running their local communities.

Probing Political Activity

The bare-bones data in Figure 3.1 cannot do justice to the rich variation in the kind of activity in which citizens engage. As mentioned earlier, political activities vary in the extent to which their volume can be multiplied. Moreover, the complexity of the

3. In asking about political activity we were faced with a choice of a proper time frame. Consistent with the recommendations of experts in polling (for example, Seymour Sudman and Norman M. Bradburn, *Asking Questions* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982]), we used the past twelve months as the referent. In deference to the periodicity of the electoral calendar, for electoral activities we asked about the most recent cycle beginning in January of the last presidential election year. For two of the least frequent acts—serving on a local governing board and attending a protest, march, or demonstration—we report data about the proportion having taken part in the past two years. For a further discussion of time frames, see Appendix B.1.i.

American political process proliferates the possibilities for different kinds of participation.

THE VOLUME OF ACTIVITY

We pointed out in Chapter 2 that the vote is unique in that each citizen is limited legally to a single ballot for each election. For any other mode of participation, in contrast, the activist is free to multiply the volume of participatory input: contactors can get in touch with government officials once or frequently; protesters can attend a single demonstration or many of them. The volume of activity is even more variable when it comes to giving time or money—say, to a political campaign. A contributor can give few or many hours, few or many dollars. We can elaborate the data in Figure 3.1 by probing further the volume of activity.

We begin with electoral activity, focusing on the amount of time and money given to political campaigns. Table 3.1 shows, both for the whole sample and for activists only—that is, for those who gave some time or some money—the average amounts of time and money contributed and the proportions making a substantial donation of time (five hours or more a week during the campaign) or money ($250 or more a year). This permits us to distinguish the level of commitment of the society as a whole, including those who are not involved at all, from the level of commitment of those who are at least minimally active.

Considering the public as a whole, we find that the average American gave about 36 minutes a week and about $58 to campaign activity during the 1988 campaign season. Only 4 or 5 percent of the public made what might be considered substantial contributions—more than five hours a week or more than $250. The picture changes somewhat when we consider the amount given by the activists, especially with respect to time. Although only a small share of the public works in political campaigns, those who do take part give substantial time during the campaign: half dedicate more than five hours a week to campaign activity; and not insignificant proportions give more than ten, or even twenty, hours per week during the campaign. On average, those who work in a campaign devote seven and a half hours per week to it. Among

Table 3.1 Time and Money Given to Political Campaigns

	Among All Respondents[a]	Among Active Respondents[a]
TIME		
Mean given per week	0.6 hours	7.5 hours[b]
% Giving 5+ hours per week	4%	49%[b]
MONEY		
Mean contribution per year	$58	$247[c]
% Giving $250+ per year	5%	19%[c]

a. N = 2,517 weighted cases: see Appendix A for information about the sample.
b. Among those who gave some time (N = 213 weighted cases).
c. Among those who gave some money (N = 593 weighted cases).

financial donors, the volume given is also not unsubstantial. About one in five of the donors gives over $250, and the average contribution is $247.[4]

THE NATURE OF ACTIVITY

There are several other dimensions along which forms of participation can vary. For example, citizens who take part in electoral activity can take part in primaries or in general elections or both. Discussing the campaign to which they gave the most time and effort in the 1988 electoral cycle, forty-seven percent of the campaign activists indicated that it included both a primary and general election, 30 percent a general election only, and 23 percent a primary only. As shown in Table 3.2, fully half of the campaign workers were active in a local campaign; the remainder were divided evenly between national and state campaigns.[5] Table 3.2

4. There is also variation in how often citizens engage in such acts as contacting and protesting. Those who get in touch with government officials tend to do so relatively often. In the initial screener survey, only 19 percent of those who indicated having gotten in touch with a public official within the past twelve months made only one contact, and 39 percent indicated having done so four or more times. In contrast, those who report protesting are likely to do so only once. Over half, 53 percent, of the protesters had done so only once, and only 16 percent had done so as many as four times—even though the period covered by our question was two years rather than just one.

5. The figures change somewhat if we consider only those respondents who hail from the fourteen states that had a gubernatorial election in the period covered. In these states

Table 3.2 Targets of Campaign Activity

	Campaign Work[a]	Campaign Contributions
NATIONAL	22%	29%
President	12%	14%
U.S. Senator	5	10
U.S. Representative	5	5
STATE	22	39
Governor	6	12
State senator	4	12
State representative	10	12
Other state official	2	3
LOCAL	50	30
County official	18	10
Mayor	11	6
City councillor	10	8
School board member	8	3
Other city official	3	3
OTHER	4	2
WORKED FOR TICKET	2	—
	100%	100%
	(N = 212)[b]	(N = 595)[b]

a. Respondents who were involved in more than one campaign were asked about the one to which they gave the most time and effort.
b. Weighted cases: see Appendix A for information about the sample.

also shows to whom campaign activists gave as well as for whom they worked. Local campaigns recede in relative importance when it comes to campaign finance: 30 percent of those whose largest donation was to a candidate funded a local candidate; 39 percent contributed to a candidate for state office; and 29 percent to a candidate for national office.

Aside from voting, more citizens initiate contacts with public officials than engage in any other political act. Contacts can go to elected or non-elected officials and to officials on the national,

11 percent of the campaigners worked for a gubernatorial candidate. Because there were contests for the Senate in thirty-four states during the period covered, there is much less change when we consider respondents from these states only: 6 percent of campaign activists in these states worked for a senatorial candidate.

Table 3.3 Contacts with Public Officials

A. Percentage reporting contacts with public officials during past 12 months:		
NATIONAL		
Elected official (or staff)	13%	
Non-elected	8	
STATE OR LOCAL		
Elected official (or staff)	25	
Non-elected	13	
	(N = 2,517)[a]	
B. Most Recent Contact with a Public Official (among contactors):		
NATIONAL	32%	
President		2%
U.S. Senator		15
U.S. Representative		10
Other national		5
STATE	26	
Governor		3
State senator		8
State representative		11
Other state official		4
LOCAL	41	
Mayor		9
City councillor		10
School board member		5
Other city official		17
	99%	
	(N = 855)[a]	

a. Weighted cases: see Appendix A for information about sample.

state, or local level. Table 3.3 presents data showing where these contacts were directed. The figures in part A of the table indicate that citizens are more likely to get in touch with state and local officials than with national officials and with elected officials (or members of their staffs) than with appointed officials. Part B of Table 3.3 gives further information about these contacts (or, if there was more than one in the past year, the most recent contact). We can see the relative weight of contacts to local officials and note the unexpected greater frequency of contacts to U.S. Senators

than members of the U.S. House—a finding that does not hold at the state level.[6]

It is interesting to note, further, how widespread and significant are networks of personal acquaintanceship in the process of citizen contact. A third of the contactors in our survey reported that they knew personally the public official with whom they got in touch. Again, the findings demonstrate the relative accessibility of local officials: the more local the office, the more likely it is that the contactor personally knew the target of the contact. Sixty-nine percent of those who contacted the mayor's office personally knew the person they were trying to reach, compared with 16 percent of those who contacted a U.S. Senator or Representative and 4 percent of those who contacted the White House.

Contacts also vary with respect to the scope of the concern. As part of the battery of items about any participatory act, we inquired whether there were any issues or problems that led to the activity and, if so, who was affected: only the respondent or the respondent's family, the community, or the nation.[7] Contacting was the only activity for which particularized concerns—that is, concerns that pertain only to respondents themselves or their immediate families—figure at all importantly as an animus for involvement: the subject of about one in five contacts at each level of government was a matter of particularized concern. Not surprisingly, however, within any level of government not all public officials are equally likely to be the targets of particularized contacts. The differences are especially pronounced at the national

6. In contrast to contacting, the much smaller number of citizens who reported having attended a protest, march, or demonstration within the past *two* years were more likely to specify a national target. Forty-two percent of the protesters indicated that the issue at stake in the protest (or most recent protest if more than one) was local in character, 50 percent that it was national, and 8 percent that it was international in scope. As we shall see later, the important role of abortion in protests has an effect on the focus of protest activity.

7. In this way, we were able to delineate more accurately the scope of concern of individuals who mentioned "Social Security" or "high property taxes"—problems that would affect many people in circumstances similar to theirs, but could be either particularistic or policy concerns. The actual question was somewhat more complex. See Appendix B.3.

level, where none of the contacts directed to the White House, in contrast to 62 percent of those directed to an official in a national board or agency, involved particularized concerns.

Finally, we can elaborate the range of kinds of voluntary local boards on which citizens sit. About one-quarter of the board members are on elected boards and the remainder are appointed. These boards cover the range of services provided within most local communities, with school boards, general local councils, and zoning boards as the most frequent types.

Affiliation with Political Organizations

A final and important form of political participation—one that once figured prominently in interpretations of American politics[8]—is involvement with the voluntary associations that represent citizen interests in politics. The range of organizations that Americans can join is vast. Indeed, the roster of known American organizations fills several fat volumes and includes organizations as well-known as the Girl Scouts and as little-noticed as the U.S. Hang Gliding Association.[9] What is more, such a listing does not begin to include the myriad locally-based organizations that escape the attention of those compiling a national register.

Organizational involvement intersects with political participation in complicated ways.[10] Most fundamentally, many voluntary associations take political stands, and their attempts at influencing policy outcomes constitute a crucial source of input about citizen views and preferences. Support of such organizations, even passive support, thus represents a form of political activity. However, as we pointed out in Chapter 2, the diverse organizations with which Americans are affiliated vary substantially in the extent to which their objectives and activities involve influencing political outcomes.

8. Following the approach originally put forth by Arthur Bentley, *The Process of Government: A Study of Social Pressures* (Bloomington, Ind.: Principia Press, 1908), analysts of American politics during the 1950s—in particular, David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process; Political Interests and Public Opinion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), and Earl Latham, *The Group Basis of Politics: A Study in Basing-Point Legislation* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1952)—tended to view American politics in terms of the interactions of a plurality of contending groups and to find their influence on policymaking to be determinative. This perspective was criticized by, among others, Lester W. Milbrath, *The Washington Lobbyists* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1963), and Raymond A. Bauer, Ithiel de Sola Pool, and Lewis Anthony Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy: The Politics of Foreign Trade* (New York: Atherton Press, 1963). For contemporary views see, for example, Paul E. Peterson, "The Rise and Fall of Special Interest Politics," in *The Politics of Interests: Interest Groups Transformed*, ed. Mark P. Petracca (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 326–341, and Robert H. Salisbury, "The Paradox of Interest Groups in Washington," in *The New American Political System*, ed. Anthony King, 2nd version (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1990), pp. 203–229.

9. Deborah M. Burek, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Associations*, 27th ed. (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1992).

MEASURING ORGANIZATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Measuring involvement in organizations—especially involvement in political organizations—is complicated. What appear to be relatively technical decisions have implications for both the definition of the subject and the results obtained. Several issues arise: how to define what constitutes organizational affiliation; how to determine whether an organization is political; and how best to elicit full information from a respondent—by asking about organizational membership in general or by presenting a list of organizational categories and, if the latter, which categories to include. In Appendix 3.1 to this chapter, we discuss our rationale for the way we handled these dilemmas. To summarize briefly, we consider either membership or financial contribution to be evidence of organizational involvement. We define as political any organization that, according to the respondent, takes stands on public issues either nationally or locally. And we asked about a long list, shown in Table 3.4, of twenty specific types of organizations. In addition to this organizational census, we asked a longer series of questions about the single organization to which the respondent gives the most time and money—or, if different, the organization that is most important to the respondent. We refer to this battery

10. For a review of relevant literature, see David Knoke, "Associations and Interest Groups," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 12 (1986): 8–9. See also Sidney Verba and Norman Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), chap. 11; Frank R. Baumgartner and Jack L. Walker, "Survey Research and Membership in Voluntary Associations," *American Journal of Political Science* 32 (1988): 908–928; and Bonnie H. Erickson and T. A. Nosanchuk, "How an Apolitical Association Politicizes," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 27 (1990): 206–219.

Table 3.4 Types of Organizations

A. Service clubs or fraternal organizations such as the Lions or Kiwanis or a local women's club or a fraternal organization at a school
B. Veterans' organizations such as the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars
C. Groups affiliated with [the respondent's] religion such as the Knights of Columbus or B'nai B'rith[a]
D. Organizations representing [the respondent's] *own* particular nationality or ethnic group such as the Polish-American Congress, the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund, or the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
E. Organizations for the elderly or senior citizens
F. Organizations mainly interested in issues promoting the rights or welfare of women—an organization such as the National Organization for Women, or the Eagle Forum, or the American Association of University Women
G. Labor unions
H. Other organizations associated with [the respondent's] work such as a business or professional association, or a farm organization[b]
I. Organizations active on one particular political issue such as the environment, or abortion (on either side), or gun control (again on either side) or consumer's rights, or the rights of taxpayers, or any other issue
J. Non-partisan or civic organizations interested in the political life of the community or the nation—such as the League of Women Voters or a better government association
K. Organizations that support general liberal or conservative causes such as the Americans for Democratic Action or the Conservative Caucus
L. Organizations active in supporting candidates in elections such as a party organization
M. Youth groups such as the Girl Scouts or the 4-H
N. Literary, art, discussion, or study groups
O. Hobby clubs, sports or country clubs, or other groups or clubs for leisure time activities
P. Associations related to where [the respondent] lives—neighborhood or community associations, homeowners' or condominium associations, or block clubs

Table 3.4 (continued)

Q. Organizations that provide social services in such fields as health or service to the needy—for instance, a hospital, a cancer or heart drive, or a group like the Salvation Army that works for the poor[c]
R. Educational institutions—local schools, [the respondent's] own school or college, or organizations associated with education such as school alumni associations or school service organizations like the PTA
S. Organizations that are active in providing cultural services to the public—for example, museums, symphonies, or public radio or television
T. Other organizations[d]

a. Instructions to interviewers specified that this category was intended for religiously based fraternal organizations not associated with a particular congregation. It was not intended to include activity within or contributions to a congregation, which were covered in a separate section of the questionnaire. As is so often the case in the world of voluntary action, the boundary is not always clear in particular cases.

Some previous surveys of organizational membership have considered—erroneously, in our view—membership in a church or synagogue as a voluntary association membership. For a discussion of this issue and extensive bibliographical references, see David Horton Smith, "Voluntary Action and Voluntary Groups," *Annual Review of Sociology* 1 (1975): 249; and Aida K. Tomeh, "Formal Voluntary Organizations: Participation, Correlates, and Interrelationships," *Sociological Inquiry* 43 (1973): 96.

b. Respondents were instructed to include their activity in any organizations of which their employers were members. For example, a corporate manager who is an officer of a trade association would have recorded that activity in this category even though it is the firm, rather than the respondent, that is the actual member of the organization.

c. For the organizations in categories Q–S, respondents were asked about giving time as well as about membership and making donations.

d. Instructions to interviewers specified that if respondents insisted upon a particular categorization, their wishes were to be honored. To the extent that respondents sought assistance or were open to suggestion in placing organizations in categories, however, interviewers were advised to suggest that respondents put an organization in the first category on the list for which it was appropriate when, as is often the case, it straddled two categories.

of detailed follow-up questions about the respondent's most important organization at various points in the analysis.

HOW MUCH INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS?

Organizational involvement is very widespread in America. In response to the list of organizations with which they were presented, fully 79 percent of the respondents reported organizational involvement—either membership or financial contribution—and 41 percent indicated four or more affiliations.[11] And many respondents reported affiliation that is political in nature. Sixty-one percent of those indicating organizational involvement (or 48 percent of all respondents) are affiliated with an organization that takes stands in politics.

This definition, of course, requires a rather low level of commitment as evidence of organizational involvement. We have more detailed information on the degree of involvement. Of those indicating some kind of affiliation with at least one organization, 65 percent reported that they have attended a meeting within the past twelve months; 42 percent reported that they are active members, that is, that they have served on a committee, given time for special projects, or helped organize meetings; 28 percent reported that, within the past five years, they have served on the board or been an officer of an organization with which they are still involved. As a mode of activity by which individuals take part in political life, voluntary organizations are clearly a significant factor.

Table 3.5 decomposes these aggregate figures into the twenty categories of organizations and gives a good deal of basic information about the distribution of memberships and the nature of involvement. It shows the proportion of the sample that is affiliated with each type of organization (defined as being either a member or a contributor to an organization). It also provides information about the extent of involvement, showing the proportion of those affiliated who attend meetings as well as the proportion whose affiliation is limited to monetary contributions—that

11. As is so often the case in survey research, when it comes to organizational involvement, how questions are asked matters greatly for the results obtained. Our initial telephone screener included a general question about membership in organizations—"for example, unions or professional associations, fraternal groups, recreational organizations, political issue organizations, community or school groups, and so on." Respondents who indicated membership in any organizations were asked how many and whether any of them ever take any stands on any public issues—either nationally or locally. Only 49 percent of respondents indicated organizational membership in answer to the general question contained in the screener, and a mere 8 percent indicated four or more memberships. Thirty percent reported membership in an organization that takes political stands.

Table 3.5 Types of Organizations and Nature of Affiliation

Organizational Type	Among All Respondents[a] % Affiliated[c]	Among those Affiliated[b] % Attend Meetings	% Give Money but No Meetings	% Say Organization Takes Political Stands
Service, Fraternal	18	50	35	30
Veterans'	16	16	70	59
Religious	12	63	30	27
Nationality, Ethnic	4	45	32	61
Senior Citizens'	12	25	20	61
Women's Rights	4	33	52	79
Union	12	52	16	67
Business, Professional	23	66	13	59
Political Issue	14	20	65	93
Civic, Non-partisan	3	60	21	59
Political or Conservative	1	20	71	95
Candidate, Party	5	39	49	94
School	17	42	50	18
Literary, Art, Study	6	72	15	16
Hobby, Sports, Leisure	21	52	17	18
Neighborhood, Homeowners'	12	66	11	50
Charitable, Social Service	44	14	79	16
Vocational	25	50	34	43
Cultural	13	14	71	25
Other	4	32	44	30
All Organizations	79	65	55	61

[a] N = 2,517 weighted cases: see Appendix A for information about the sample.
[b] To determine weighted case base for percentage attending meetings, percentage giving money attending no meetings, or percentage indicating that organization takes stands in politics, multiply percentage affiliated (in first column) by 2,517.
[c] Affiliation: member or contributor.

is, who give money but reported never attending a meeting. Finally, it reports the proportion of affiliates who said the organization takes political stands.

Across the categories there is, not surprisingly, a broad range in terms of the proportion of respondents who are affiliated, the nature of the affiliation, and the proportion of those affiliated who indicated that the organization takes political stands. We will highlight a few of the many details. In terms of involvement, a near majority, 44 percent, indicated affiliation with a charitable or social service organization. In general, these are minimal affiliations with organizations such as the United Way. The bulk of participation in charitable or social service organizations—nearly 80 percent—is limited to a contribution. At the other extreme, a mere 1 percent reported involvement with an ideological organization that supports general liberal or conservative causes. This is, once again, an example of what is basically checkbook membership: nearly three-quarters of the affiliates give money but never go to a meeting. Similarly, two-thirds of those involved in cultural organizations and a majority of those involved in veterans' groups and youth organizations are donors but not members. At the other extreme, at least half of those involved in fraternal, religious, non-partisan civic, literary, art, or discussion groups, hobby or sports clubs, neighborhood or homeowners' associations, business, professional, or farm groups, and unions indicated having attended a meeting in the six months preceding the interview.

The variation in the share of those affiliated who indicated that the organization takes stands on public issues seems to reflect in a reasonable way the differing purposes of the various types of organizations. Nearly all the respondents in a political issue organization, a general liberal or conservative group, or an organization that supports candidates—in contrast to fewer than one in every five in a literary, art, or discussion group, a charity or social service organization, or a hobby or sports club—reported that the organization sometimes takes stands on public issues.[12]

12. There is some question as to whether respondents, especially those whose commitment is limited, really know whether their organizations take stands in politics. Like hypothesis testers, they might make two kinds of mistakes: imagining organizational activity in politics where it does not exist or failing to know about it when it does. Presumably, the latter error would be more common than the former. Reading actual interviews, which contain the names of organizations mentioned by respondents, provides some evidence of their failure to recognize the political activities of organizations. From time to time an organization that has been prominent on the political scene is recorded as not taking stands in politics.

In accounting for the perception of an organization's engagement in politics, Frank Baumgartner and Jack Walker suggest that the actively involved are more likely to report that an organization takes political stands ("Survey Research and Membership in Voluntary Associations," p. 923). At first glance, our data lend substantial support to this contention: among those affiliated with at least one organization, 70 percent of those who had attended a meeting within the past six months, but only 44 percent of those who had not, reported affiliation with an organization that takes political stands. However, these data do not make any provision for ensuring that respondents—who, if affiliated at all, are likely to be affiliated with more than one organization—are finding politics in the *same* organizations whose meetings they have attended. Indeed, when the data are disaggregated and analyzed separately for each organizational affiliation, the relationship is much more modest: using the affiliation as the unit of analysis, when respondents indicated attendance at meetings, they reported political stands in 44 percent of the cases; when they indicated no attendance at meetings, they reported political stands in 39 percent of the cases.

Thus, the evidence is mixed as to whether Americans are a nation of gregarious organizational activists or have retreated to the privacy and relative inactivity of checkbook participation. For many kinds of organizations, citizen involvement is limited to writing checks. Many of these are the kind of charitable cause for which making contributions is a traditional form of involvement. Nonetheless, it is interesting that other organizations also fall into this category. Still, nearly two-thirds of those affiliated with an organization devote the time and effort necessary to attend a meeting.

Patterns of Political Involvement

We were concerned to investigate, from several points of view, the way in which political participation is patterned. Is most of the political participation the work of a small group of activists, each of whom engages in several activities? Or are most activists specialists who take part in only one way? Seventeen percent of the public does nothing at all in politics, and another 18 percent does

nothing beyond voting. Thus, just over one-third of respondents do nothing in politics other than, possibly, go to the polls.[13] Another 9 percent engage in a single activity, and the remaining 57 percent undertake more than one political act, beyond voting.

We were also curious to know whether there are particular people who do a lot of one kind of activity and nothing else, or particular kinds of participation such that those who undertake them are specialists in that activity only. For example, if protesters are alienated from the political process and convinced that mainstream activity is useless in eliciting concessions from an unresponsive system, we might expect them to concentrate on protesting and eschew other forms of involvement. Similarly, some citizens might specialize in informal community activity, preferring the neighborhood as a locus of activity and avoiding partisan political campaigns.

In fact, the data lend little support to the idea of such specialization. We have already seen that only a small proportion of those who are politically active beyond voting engage in only one other political activity. Nor are there particular activities for which we find specialization. We might have expected protesters to be specialists, but the vast majority of them (93 percent) engage in some other activity beyond voting. The same is true for other kinds of activists as well.

We considered specialization from one additional, and quite different, angle. For each activity we asked whether the focus—the official to whom a contact was addressed, the issue at stake in the protest, and so on—was local, state, or national. It turns out that, while a substantial portion of those active beyond voting concentrate solely on local politics, there are very few specialists in national politics. Fully 92 percent of those who are in any way politically active beyond voting engaged in some activity with a state or local focus—for example, campaigned for a state or local candidate, contacted a state or local official, or sat on a local governing board. However, while only 8 percent of political activists focused their voluntary efforts in politics exclusively on the national scene, 51 percent focused solely on state and local politics. Forty-one percent combined activity at the state or local level with national-level participation. In summary, then, there is greater evidence for local specialization than for act specialization.

13. Our definition of what constitutes a voter is not a very demanding one. Anyone who voted in the preceding presidential election or who reported having voted in all or most presidential or local elections is considered to be a voter.

CHECKBOOK PARTICIPATION

It may be useful to consider one kind of activity specialization—checkbook participation—somewhat further. Throughout this inquiry we shall be concerned with the distinction between modes of activity that demand contributions of money and those that require giving time. As we shall see when we consider changes in the amount of political activity over the last two decades, one mode of participation that seems to have increased is making campaign contributions. Rapidly rising campaign costs, the enhanced role of paid professionals—rather than amateur volunteers—in managing campaigns, and the development of sophisticated telephone and mass mail techniques of raising money have conspired to augment the role of the citizen as a writer of checks.[14] As we shall see throughout this book, making contributions is, in many respects, distinctive as a mode of citizen activity. Hence, if money were to replace time as the primary medium of citizen input, the consequences for politics would be substantial.

Has America become a nation of contributors whose political activity is limited to giving money rather than time and effort? The data do show a great deal of checkbook participation. If we consider the proportions who donate time or money or both to political campaigns, we find that many more people give only money than give only time or give a combination of time and money. Of those who take some part in political campaigns, there are more than twice as many people (69 percent) who limit their involvement to check writing than there are people who give only time or who give both time and money. (Twelve percent of the campaigners give time but not money, and 19 percent give both.) It is, in fact, difficult to give time without also being expected to give

14. Corresponding changes are taking place in the world of non-profits and charities outside politics, as well.

money—but the opposite is not true. For many people, political activity consists of giving money and nothing else.[15]

How Much Participation? Some Benchmarks of Comparison

Although the language used so far gives clues to whether we consider the amount of political activity we have uncovered to be a lot or a little, there is clearly no absolute answer to the question of whether Americans are active or passive. We can get some purchase on the issue, however, by considering some comparative benchmarks. One point of reference is the comparison between the United States and other democracies. Another is variation over time within the United States. A third standard by which political participation in America can be measured is one less often referred to, the level of voluntary activity in organizational and religious domains outside of politics.

In making these comparisons, it is critical to understand the extent to which the particular results, although not their broad outlines, depend upon the definitions used. It is not simply that, as always, question wording has implications for survey results. In addition, the placement of the threshold of activity—that is, how much activity is necessary before it is counted as activity—has consequences for how much activity we find. Finally, the unclear boundaries between various realms of voluntary activity complicate the matter. As we have indicated, we differentiate political, secular non-political, and religious domains of voluntary participation. These three domains interpenetrate in ways that are substantively important but that render indistinct the borders between them. Findings about the rates of activity, therefore, depend upon how this complex terrain is divided and which kinds of voluntary activity fall under which rubrics. As we proceed, we shall attempt

15. If we were to consider all political activities, including those where giving money is not usually an option—contacting officials, informal community activity, protesting, and the like—we would have to qualify our conclusion somewhat. If we consider all political acts beyond voting—most of which demand time but not money—we find that more than twice as many citizens give time only to politics than give money only.

to make clear the definitions that underlie our findings and the possible implications of those definitions for the results.

Participation in Cross-National Perspective

Figure 3.2 provides data for cross-national comparison, showing the proportions of citizens in the United States and four other industrialized democracies who engage in various kinds of political activity. The data confirm a point often made about citizen political activity: the United States lags far behind other democracies when it comes to voting turnout. However, this difference is not evidence of generalized American laziness, but rather reflects the peculiarities of American institutions—voter registration requirements and the weakness of American political parties as agents of mobilization.[16] When it comes to the other political activities shown in Figure 3.2—campaigning, attending political meetings, becoming active in the local community, and contacting officials—Americans are as active, or substantially more active, than citizens elsewhere. The differences in community activism and contacting are especially striking, with Americans two or more times as likely to be active.[17]

Changes over Time

Longitudinal data tell a confusing story about political participation in America. We might be led to contradictory expectations with respect to changes in political participation. On one hand, the past few decades have witnessed a remarkable increase in levels of educational attainment within the American public, which would suggest concomitant increases in political activity. On the other, it is common to observe that American citizens have abandoned politics over the past several decades. This perspective is buttressed by public opinion polls showing that Americans are alienated from

16. See G. Bingham Powell, Jr., "American Voting in Comparative Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 80 (1986): 23–37.

17. The proportions active in the United States differ somewhat from other data in this chapter because the data come from a different study at a different point in time.

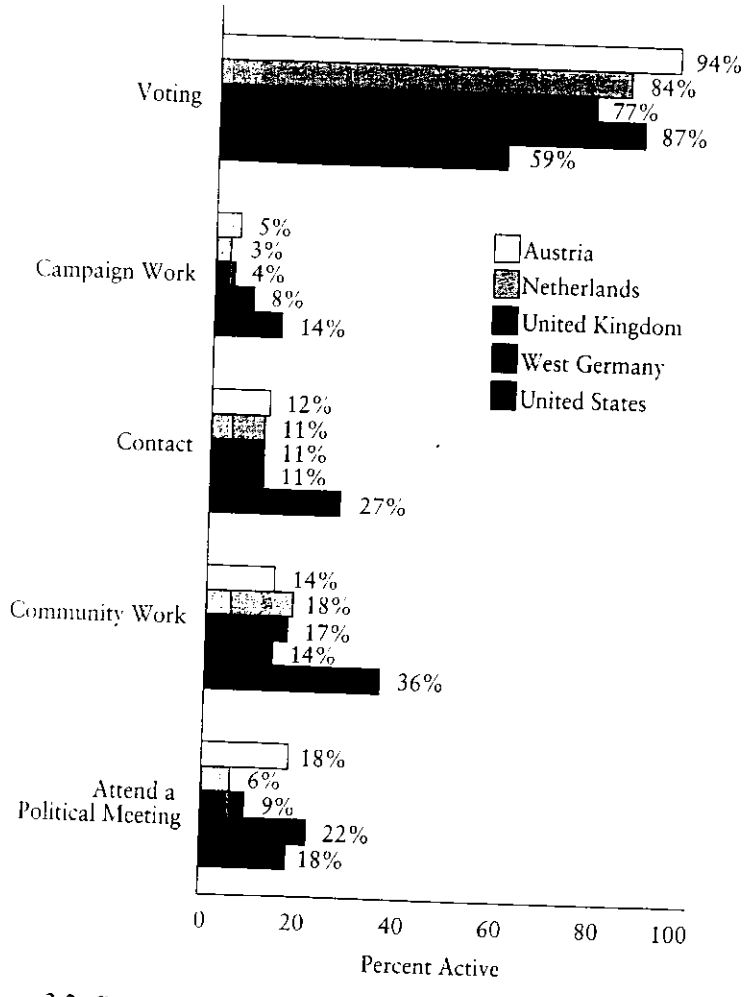

Figure 3.2 Comparative Activity Rates: Five Countries.

Sources: Average voting rates: Calculated for elections after 1945 (except for the Netherlands where the vote is for elections after 1967 when compulsory voting was eliminated). From Ivor Crewe, "Electoral Participation," in *Democracy at the Polls*, ed. David Butler, Austin Ranney, and Howard Penniman (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1981), pp. 234–237.

Other activity rates: Samuel H. Barnes, Max Kaase, et al., *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979), pp. 541–542.

politics and fed up with politicians.[18] Of a piece with this interpretation of political withdrawal are the well-known data on the decline of electoral turnout in America. From a recent high of 63 percent in the 1960 election, voting in presidential elections diminished gradually to the point where it was just over 50 percent in 1988 before rebounding somewhat in 1992.[19] As is sometimes pointed out, many more eligible voters abstain than vote for the winning candidate.

Data about a wider range of political acts suggest that the falloff in voter turnout may not be part of a general erosion in political participation. Table 3.6 presents the data from Verba and Nie's *Participation in America* study in 1967 and from the National Opinion Research Center's 1987 General Social Survey (GSS) that replicated the 1967 questions on the proportion of the public engaging in various political acts. The basic message is one of continuity. The data point, once again, to the well-documented decline in voting turnout. However, they also indicate that the drop in turnout has not been accompanied by a general decrease in citizen activism. In 1987, citizens were about as likely to report involvement in electoral politics—persuading others how to vote, working in a campaign, or attending a political meeting—as they had been two decades before. The frequency of two activities has changed substantially, but in opposite directions: there has been an increase in the proportion reporting having contributed to a political campaign and a decrease in the share mentioning mem-

18. Among the many examples, see Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider, *The Confidence Gap: Business, Labor, and Government in the Public Mind* (New York: The Free Press, 1983); and E. J. Dionne, Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics* (N. Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1991).

19. The literature on this phenomenon is voluminous. See, for instance, Richard A. Brody, "The Puzzle of Participation," in *The New American Political System*, ed. Anthony King; Paul R. Abramson and John H. Aldrich, "The Decline of Electoral Participation in the United States," *American Political Science Review* 76 (1982): 502–521; Lee Sigelman, et al., "Voting and Non-Voting: A Multi-Election Perspective," *American Journal of Political Science* 29 (1985): 749–765; Ruy A. Teixeira, *Why Americans Don't Vote: Turnout Decline in the United States, 1960–1984* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987); Carol A. Cassel and Robert C. Luskin, "Simple Explanations of Turnout Decline," *American Political Science Review* 82 (1988): 1321–1330; Warren E. Miller, "The Puzzle Transformed: Explaining Declining Turnout," *Political Behavior* 14 (1992): 1–43; and Teixeira, *The Disappearing American Voter*.

Table 3.6 Percentage Engaging in Fourteen Acts of Participation, 1967 and 198

Specific Activity	1967	1987	Absolute Change	Relati Chan
VOTING				
Regular voting in presidential elections	66	58	−8	−1
Always vote in local elections	47	35	−12	−2
CAMPAIGN				
Persuade others how to vote	28	32	+4	+1
Actively work for party or candidate	26	27	+1	+
Attend political meeting or rally	19	19	0	
Contribute money to party or candidate	13	23	+10	+7
Member of political club	8	4	−4	−5
CONTACT				
Contact local official: issue-based	14	24	+10	+7
Contact state or national official: issue-based	11	22	+11	+10
Contact local official: particularized	7	10	+3	+4
Contact state or national official: particularized	6	7	+1	+1
COMMUNITY				
Work with others on local problem	30	34	+4	+1
Active membership in community problem-solving organization	31	34	+3	+10
Form group to help solve local problem	14	17	+3	+21

Source: 1967 data, Verba and Nie, *Participation in America*, data file. 1987 data, National Opinion Research Center, General Social Survey.

bership in a political club. The former nearly doubled while the latter was cut in half.

When it comes to non-electoral political participation, the GSS data point in directions that are not inconsistent. While local community activity rose slightly, the proportion indicating having contacted local or national government officials increased much more substantially. Both proportionately and absolutely, the growth was largest for issue-based contacts—that is, contacts about matters of public policy rather than particularistic concerns. Nevertheless, the latter have risen as well, especially on the local level.

The over-time data are consistent with recent changes in the institutions that mobilize citizen activity and represent citizen interests. What we see at the level of the individual may reflect, in part, the widely discussed decline of political parties and invigoration of interest groups. However, it probably reflects as well a parallel transformation of both sets of institutions, whereby nationalization and professionalization have redefined the role of citizen activist as, increasingly, a writer of checks and letters. The rise of mass mail and electronic communications and the concomitant rise of citizen groups and political action committees dovetail with an enhanced responsiveness to constituency concerns among electorally insecure legislators to provide an institutional context for growth in the proportion of citizens who contact government officials and make campaign contributions. The obverse of these developments, the relative weakening of parties as local organizations, is reflected at the citizen level in the erosion of the numbers who are members of local party or political clubs.

The data in Table 3.6 are somewhat at variance with data presented by Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen.[20] On the basis of an impressive data set that encompasses a much larger number of time points but a somewhat more restricted set of activities, they report a more general decline in activity. Their data are consistent with the data comparing 1967 and 1987 with respect to the increase in campaign contributions, although they note, as others do, a decline in giving in the late 1980s.[21] The sharpest difference between the data in Table 3.6 and Rosenstone and Hansen's data concerns citizen contacts with government officials. While Rosenstone and Hansen report a decline in the proportion writing to Congress, Table 3.6 indicates an increase in the proportion contacting government officials, an increase that is consistent with the available information from the recipients of such communications.[22]

20. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: MacMillan, 1993), chap. 3.

21. On this point, see also Frank J. Sorauf, *Inside Campaign Finance: Myths and Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), chap. 1.

22. Congressional offices report a major increase in the flow of such communications. See Orval Hansen and Ellen Miller, *Congressional Operations: The Role of Mail in Decision-Making in Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Responsive Politics, 1987); and

Unfortunately, accurate longitudinal data are not available for another important form of political participation, involvement in political organizations. However, observers of interest groups in Washington have documented an unambiguous increase in the number of organizations active in national politics and the birth of many new citizens' groups.[23] While the number of organizational involvements has presumably risen with the number of active organizations, it is less clear how actively engaged members are in staff-run organizations that require of members only the commitment of writing a check.

Although we are not in a position to make any kind of definitive evaluation of these discrepant data, several conclusions do seem possible. Since 1960, there has been an unambiguous decline in voter turnout. At the same time rates of other kinds of political participation have not eroded so sharply. Indeed, over the period some forms of activity—making contributions to electoral campaigns and political organizations and, probably, contacting public officials—have actually increased. As for the remaining kinds of participatory acts, the trajectory is less clear. However, what is unambiguous is that, in toto, political activity has not grown at rates that we might have expected on the basis of the substantial increase in levels of educational attainment within the public.[24]

Voluntary Activity outside of Politics

A final way to evaluate Americans' engagement in political activity is to compare it with their involvement in voluntary activities outside of the political realm. The broad terrain between the individual and family, on the one hand, and the institutions of public authority, on the other, is populated by an abundance of non-political institutions connected with almost every aspect of life: a multitude of voluntary associations that never get involved in politics as well as the rich array of churches and other religious institutions.

Non-political activity is widespread—indeed, more widespread than political activity—in America. The data in Figure 3.3 make this clear. Fully 68 percent of the respondents in our survey reported affiliation—either membership or contribution—with an organization that does not take stands in politics. Moreover, citizens are active in these organizations. Among those who are affiliated with non-political organizations, more than half indicated having attended a meeting in the past year; one-third reported being active members, that is, serving on a committee, giving time for special projects, or helping organize meetings; and 22 percent reported having, within the past five years, served on the board or been an officer of an organization with which they are still involved.

The analogous figures for religious involvement show an equivalent level of commitment. Fully 69 percent of our respondents either consider themselves members of a local church, synagogue, or other religious institution or attend services regularly in the same congregation. Only 13 percent of respondents never attend religious services; in contrast, 32 percent attend at least once a week, and 57 percent at least once a month. Furthermore, those who are affiliated with religious institutions tend to be active. Thirty-six percent of church members (or a quarter of all respondents) reported having given time within the past year to educational, charitable, or social activities associated with their churches—over and above attending services.[25]

Figure 3.3—which also contains data from the screener survey

Stephen E. Frantzich, *Write Your Congressman: Constituent Communications and Representation* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

23. See Jack L. Walker, "The Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups in America," *American Political Science Review* 77 (1983): 390–406; and Kay Lehman Schlozman and John T. Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), chap. 4.

24. See on this, Norman H. Nie, Jane Junn, and Kenneth Stehlik-Berry, *Education and Citizenship in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

25. As with political activity, there is some likelihood that non-political activity is exaggerated. Analyses of religious affiliation and attendance suggest systematic overreporting in these domains. See Kenneth D. Wald, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and David C. Leege, "Church Involvement in Political Behavior," in David C. Leege and Lyman A. Kellstedt, eds., *Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), chap. 6; and C. Kirk Hadaway, Penny L. Marler, and Mark Chaves, "What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance", *American Sociological Review* 58 (1993): 741–752.

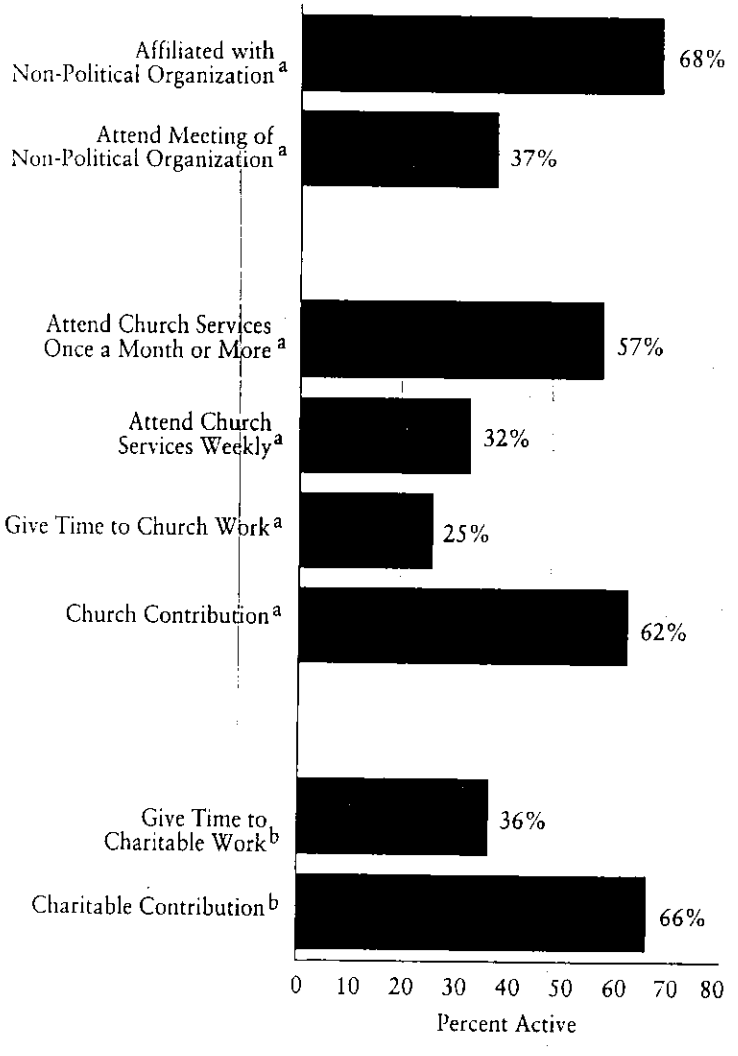

Figure 3.3 Non-Political Activities.

a. N = 2,517 weighted cases: See Appendix A for information about sample.
b. Screener sample: N = 15,055.

on contributions of time or money to charity—shows clearly that the level of participation in these forms of extra-political voluntary activity is quite high and is more or less equivalent across the domains of church, secular non-political organization, and charity.[26] In addition, beyond nominal membership, Americans are more likely to make financial contributions than to donate time. This generalization, which holds for contributions to religious institutions, secular non-political organizations, and charities, is one to which we shall return frequently. The figures about the relative importance of giving money are consonant with data that show—on the basis of a variety of indicators ranging from PTA memberships to participation in bowling leagues—a decline in non-political connectedness.[27]

A comparison of Figures 3.1 and 3.3 underlines several themes. Overall, a higher proportion of citizens take part in non-political than political activities. More citizens reported giving some time to church-related or charitable activities than indicated contacting a government official or working informally on a community problem, two of the most frequent forms of political participation beyond the vote. Comparing attendance at meetings of political and non-political organizations, we see a similar pattern. Likewise, by a substantial margin, more citizens give some money to charity, a secular non-political organization, or a religious institution than contribute to a political campaign or a political organization—and the year in question was a presidential election year.[28]

The greater commitment of citizens to non-political voluntary activities is seen most clearly if we reconsider the volume of activity—the amount of time or money given. Table 3.7 repeats data

26. The questions about charity asked in general about time spent or money contributed over the past twelve months to "charitable or voluntary service activities . . . in some way to help others." Because a great deal of charitable effort emanates from religious institutions, we specifically asked about donations of time or money other than those made in church. There is, therefore, a great deal of overlap between the activity referenced by these questions and that covered in the extensive section on voluntary organizations in the follow-up interview.

27. Robert C. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6 (1995): 65–78.

28. Estimates by other surveys of the amount of voluntary non-political activity in the United States vary widely. See Appendix B.2.c for a discussion.

Table 3.7 Time and Money Given to Political and Non-Political Activity

	Campaign	Charity	Church
AMONG ALL RESPONDENTS[a]			
TIME			
Mean given per week	0.6 hours	1.7 hours	0.9 hours
% giving 5+ hours per week	4%	8%	6%
MONEY			
Mean contribution per year	$58	$191	$402
% giving $250+ per year	5%	16%	31%
AMONG ACTIVE RESPONDENTS			
TIME[b]			
Mean given per week	7.5 hours	4.5 hours	3.1 hours
% giving 5+ hours per week	49%	23%	20%
MONEY[c]			
Mean contribution per year	$247	$283	$634
% giving $250+ per year	19%	24%	49%

a. N = 2,517 weighted cases: see Appendix A for information about sample.
b. Active respondents are those who give some time. See Appendix B.1.
c. Active respondents are those who give some money. See Appendix B.1.

from Table 3.1 on the amounts given to political activity and compares them with the amounts given to charity and church. Considering the public as a whole, we find a sharp difference in the level of resources dedicated to charitable and church activities, on one hand, and political campaigns, on the other. With respect to time, the average American gave about 36 minutes per week to campaign activity during the 1988 campaign season but about 102 minutes per week to charitable activity and 54 minutes per week to church activities throughout the year. A parallel—but much sharper—distinction holds for financial contributions. In that election year, the average American gave over three times as much to charity—and seven times as much to a religious institution—as to political campaigns.

The picture changes somewhat when we consider the activists only, especially with respect to time. Although a smaller share of the public takes part in political campaigns than gives time to

church or charitable work, their involvement during the campaign season appears to be more intense. Those who work in a campaign give more time during the campaign: on average, they devote seven and a half hours per week, and half dedicate more than five hours per week to campaign activity. The weekly commitment of time is smaller for those who are active in charity or church work. However, the figures for religious and charitable voluntarism are still substantial—especially since the figures for the time spent on work associated with a church or charity represent the weekly average for the entire year, while the figure for campaign activity is the average per week during the campaign only. Among financial donors, in contrast, those who make charitable or church contributions give on average more than does the average member of the much smaller group of campaign contributors—with those who contribute to church giving more than twice as much as those who contribute either to campaigns or to charity.

These data underscore a well-known fact about the public: politics is not at the heart of the day-to-day life of the American people. Beyond the domains of work and the family, which are the main concerns of most people, politics takes a secondary place to church and to other voluntary activities. Although Americans are relatively active in politics, the bulk of voluntary participation in this country takes place outside of politics.

NON-POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN CROSS-NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Cross-national data underscore these themes. Americans are known as joiners, and associational life in America is probably unparalleled in the number of organizations and the diversity of their concerns. We have already seen that—with the exception of voting turnout, which is lower in the United States than elsewhere—citizens of other democracies are no more active, and in some respects are less active, than Americans. As shown in Figure 3.4, this tendency holds for voluntary involvement outside of politics as well: Americans have a deserved reputation for high levels of participation in voluntary associations and, especially, religious institutions. Figure 3.4 indicates that Americans are more likely to be members of voluntary associations, in general, and religious organizations, in particular, than are citizens of other nations. What is more, not

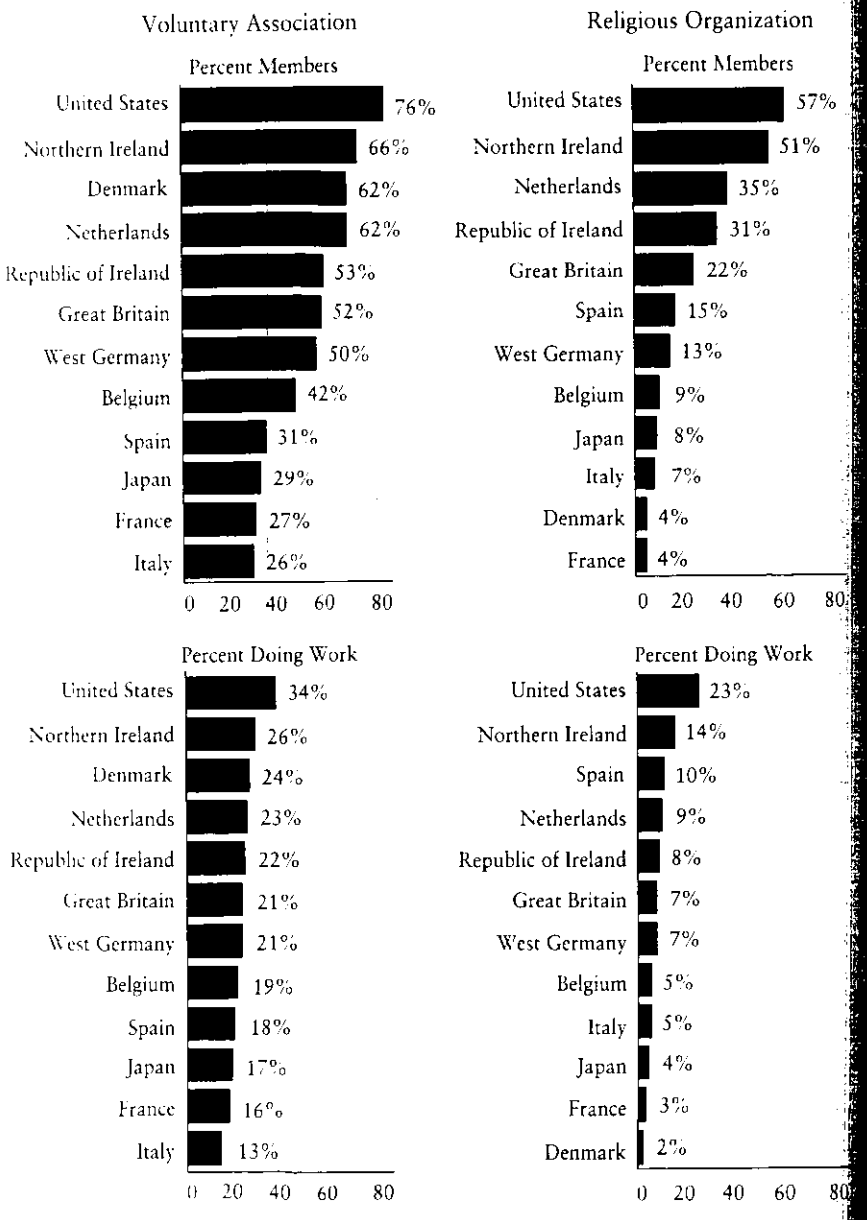

Figure 3.4 Comparative Activity Rates: Voluntary and Religious Organizatio
Source: Gallup Poll, 1981. Survey Conducted for the Leisure Development Center.

only are they more likely to be members, but they are correspondingly more likely to do work within these organizations.[29] Thus, once again, we see evidence both of the relatively high levels of participation in the United States and of the strength of the nonpolitical voluntary sector. Because of the intrinsic significance of voluntary action outside politics, and because of the complex relationship between political activity and voluntary participation in other domains, we shall return to these themes over and over as we proceed.

The American Public: A Profile

In spite of the contemporary image of Americans as a nation of passive spectators mesmerized before their television screens, these comparative metrics suggest that there is a great deal of voluntary activity in the United States both within and, especially, outside politics. The activity may be intermittent and peripheral to Ameri-

29. Because of the complexity of these domains, the absolute numbers derived from surveys about voluntary participation are dependent upon the precise referent of the question. The reader may note that the data from our study contained in Figure 3.3 indicate that almost one-third of Americans reported doing some work in their churches—over and above attending services. The Gallup study reported in Figure 3.4 indicates that about one in four Americans does work for a religiously connected organization. The discrepancy reflects differences in the focus of the questions. Similar discrepancies emerge from data about participation in voluntary associations. Robert Dahl cites cross-national data showing that, because membership in such occupationally related organizations as professional associations and, especially, trade unions is very high in many northern European nations, particularly the Nordic democracies, Americans are not the most likely to be members of organizations. See Robert A. Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy: Autonomy vs. Control* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 67–68. See also Graham K. Wilson, *Interest Groups in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 132–144, and Schlozman and Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy*, pp. 59–63. There seems to be no dispute, however, about the number and variety of associations in the United States and the particular American propensity for involvement in non-economic organizations. Moreover, the 79 percent figure for organizational affiliation (both political and non-political) obtained by using our detailed list of organizations puts the United States on a par with the levels reported by Dahl for Sweden. The sensitivity of results to question wording, however, suggests that cross-national comparisons must be treated with caution. Curtis, Grabb, and Baer provide data from a number of countries that show a very high level of religious involvement in the United States. They offer, however, some qualifications to the view that Americans are at the top in terms of membership—especially active membership—in general. See James E. Curtis, Edward G. Grabb, and Douglas E. Baer, "Voluntary Association Membership in Fifteen Countries: A Comparative Analysis", *American Sociological Review* 57 (1992): 139–152.

cans' basic concerns, but it is activity nonetheless. The amount of activity, however, does not necessarily tell us how many activists there are. For many activities, especially the more difficult political acts, the percentage who have been active is quite small. Only in voting, attending church, and making cash contributions to charities and religious institutions is a majority of the public active. If activity were clearly hierarchical—that is, if all those who engaged in an activity carried out by a smaller proportion of the population could be counted on to engage in those activities carried on by a larger proportion—we might find a fairly large proportion of the population engaging in no voluntary activity, either political or non-political, and a small proportion accounting for the major share of the activity by taking part in multiple ways.

It makes sense, then, to see how members of the public sort themselves into types of activists. Figure 3.5 provides an overview of the distribution of the public across the three domains of voluntary activity: political, religious, and secular non-political. We have used the following definitions of activity in each of the domains:

Political. Engaged in at least one political act beyond voting.
Secular non-political. Member or contributor to a non-political voluntary organization or charity.
Religious. Gave time to church activities (beyond attendance at services) or gave money to church (beyond school fees).[30]

This is a quite inclusive definition. Anyone who belongs to a non-political organization or has written a check to a church or to a charitable or political cause is considered to have crossed the

30. Political activity includes: worked in an electoral campaign; made a campaign contribution; contacted a public official; attended a protest, march, or demonstration; served without pay on a local community governing board or attended meetings of such a board on a regular basis; worked informally with others to deal with some community issue or problem; is a member of or made a contribution beyond dues to an organization that takes stands in politics.

Secular non-political activity includes: member of or contributor beyond dues to an organization that does not take stands in politics; spent time on charitable or voluntary service activities to help others or contributed money to charitable or voluntary service activities and organizations (outside of church).

Church activity includes: spent time on educational, charitable, or social activities associated with church (aside from attending religious services); contributed to religion (aside from school tuition).

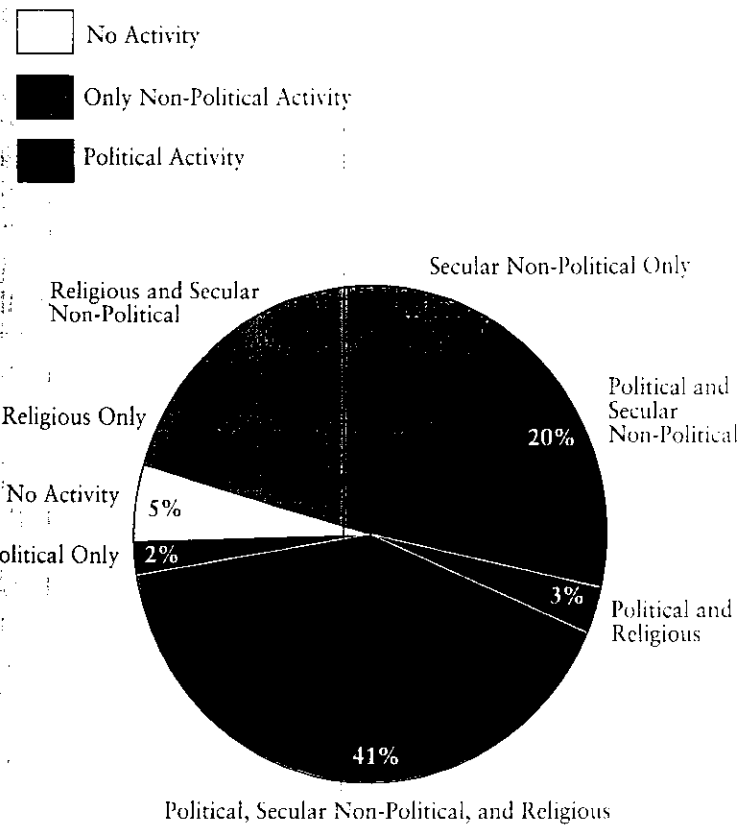

Figure 3.5 Types of Activists.
N = 2,517 weighted cases. See Appendix A for information about sample.

threshold to activity. Still, the definition is not as inclusive as it might be. Someone who just voted and did nothing else would not be counted as engaging in political activity; similarly, attending church services but doing nothing else in one's church does not make one active in church in this definition. The definition, however, seems useful in locating those who take almost no role in religious, organizational, or political life. Using this definition, we find only a very small proportion of the public, 5 percent, to be totally inactive.[31]

31. This group is genuinely inactive. Not only do they not take part in any of the activities subsumed under the umbrella of the definition, but they are much less likely than

Considering separately the three domains of voluntary activity, we find the following: 65 percent of the sample reported some kind of political activity beyond voting; 64 percent some kind of activity in a religious institution beyond attendance at religious services; and fully 85 percent some kind of secular non-political activity. What is more, most of these activists do not confine themselves to a single domain of involvement: a mere 2 percent of the sample indicated political activity only; 5 percent reported church activity only; and 10 percent secular non-political activity only. At the other end of the continuum, 41 percent of the respondents reported at least some activity in all three domains.

The Subject Matter of Political Activity

Surveys often ask about the difficulties respondents face in their personal lives, the problems they believe face the nation, or the issues they consider important in an election. However, no survey before the Citizen Participation Study has inquired about the issues that animate citizen activity. In our survey, we asked about the subject matter of political activity. These data give us a unique opportunity to enrich our understanding of what is behind voluntary participation. Each time a respondent reported having taken part in political activity, we 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 the 63 percent of participants across all political activities who replied that there was such an issue, we followed up with an open-ended question about the content of those concerns and a closed-ended item about who was affected.[32] We received a range of replies, the bulk of which, 86 percent, contained recognizable public policy issues.[33] In terms of who is affected by the issue or problem, across

other members of the public either to vote or to attend church services regularly. Half of the inactive group as defined in the text is totally disconnected from voluntary activity in that they reported neither voting in 1988 nor going to church regularly nor any other activity. If one were looking for true isolates who take no part in political, religious, or organizational life, it would be this group, which constitutes 2.4 percent of the public.

32. See Appendix B.3. If more than one issue or problem was listed in response to the open-ended item, the closed-ended question was asked about the first one mentioned.

33. The 14 percent of responses that did not contain recognizable policy issues were distributed as follows. A small proportion—4 percent across all the political activities—

all political activities—except for contacting public officials—the overwhelming majority of participants indicated that the issue at stake affected others beyond themselves and their families. About one-fifth of those who contacted a public official indicated that the activity was aimed at an issue limited to the individual and his or her family. Otherwise, most political activity is described—in proportions that reflect quite reasonably the nature of the activity—as affecting either the entire community or the entire nation. The point is worth underlining. Political activity, in general, is not about personal problems but about public issues.

Reading the verbatim responses indicates that respondents can make these kinds of distinctions. Appendix 3.2 to this chapter contains a random sample of responses about the issues and problems behind four kinds of contacts: those to local officials defined by respondents as affecting either the whole community or themselves and their families; and those to members of Congress defined by respondents as affecting either the whole nation or themselves and their families. These are unexpurgated "word bites," transcribed as recorded by interviewers: we have not filled in the obvious blanks, spruced up the grammar, or, most important, corrected miscategorizations in respondents' self-codings. These answers give us confidence that respondents can distinguish quite well—although not perfectly—between particularistic concerns and matters of policy and between issues affecting the whole community and issues affecting the whole nation.

THE NATURE OF THE SUBSTANTIVE CONCERNS

A closer look at the range of substantive concerns yields a better understanding of the nature of these policy concerns. We coded the verbatim responses into the following categories, which reflect the dominant policy concerns of citizen activists:[34]

could not be coded either because the respondent was confused and inarticulate or because the interviewer was sloppy in recording and editing. Another 10 percent represented coherent and "codeable" problems or concerns that did not constitute public policy issues. Examples include the following statements describing the issues or problems behind campaign work:

To see New York have its first black mayor.

My husband was running for office. He was the best-qualified candidate.

We needed another conservative.

34. Let us clarify a few aspects of the coding. First, a single political act may have be-

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 (e.g., 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.

It should be noted that the categories differ with respect to whether they encompass respondents who disagree with one another. Those mentioning abortion have sharply differing opinions on the issue. In contrast, those mentioning the environment tend to agree in favoring environmental preservation. Those opposing environmental regulation would be more likely to express their concern by citing an issue like the need for economic development.

inspired by more than one issue concern. The contactor who expressed concern about "public housing, teenage pregnancy, and the child care bill" would have been coded as mentioning three separate issues. In addition, these categories are not exhaustive. Issue concerns ranging from gun control to local economic development for which we have codes have been omitted from this list because they were mentioned by so few activists.

For each political act for which a codeable policy concern was expressed, Table 3.8 summarizes the subject matter. The entries in the cells represent the proportion of those activists discussing any codeable policy concern who mentioned, among other things, an issue that fell under the rubric of one of the above categories. In interpreting Table 3.8, it is critical to recall that the data reflect, in part, the era and the place in which the survey was conducted. If we had collected data two decades before, different issues—for example, the war in Vietnam or civil rights—would have figured prominently, especially in conjunction with acts such as protesting. Moreover, the data clearly represent the American political agenda. The prominence that activists give to the issue of abortion, for instance, would presumably not have appeared had the data been collected elsewhere.

The data make clear that different modes of political participation serve as the vehicle for carrying different kinds of messages to public officials in ways that might not have been fully anticipated. Because there is so much variation among participatory acts in the issue concerns they convey, we shall examine each act separately.

Electoral Activity. Reflecting the common wisdom that informs electoral politics today—that is, that matters related to economic performance are dominant—nearly half of the voters who gave a codeable policy response discussed economic issues or taxes. Interestingly, the concern about the economy and taxes that voters bring to the polls does not extend to other forms of activity. Activists are less than half as likely to report these concerns in connection with other kinds of participation, including other acts related to elections. Indeed, only 12 percent of campaign workers cited economic concerns and 7 percent mentioned taxes. Beyond these issues, voters identified a variety of others: more than a quarter cited educational issues, presumably in connection with local elections; and nearly one in six discussed abortion. With respect to working in campaigns or making campaign contributions, no one set of issues took precedence and a variety of issues were cited. The data illustrate a point we shall make many times: the danger of generalizing from voting to other participatory acts. Votes appear to turn on the economy much more than do other acts.

Table 3.8 Issues and Problems behind Political Activity (percentage mentioning particular issues)[a]

	Electoral Activity				Contacts			Protests		Community Activity	
	Vote	Campaign Work	Money to Candidate	Money to Organization	Particularized	Local	National	Local	National	Informal	Board
Human Needs	11	14	19	7	25	7	13	10	2	6	11
Taxes	32	7	6	5	13	10	2	9	0	5	1
Economy[b]	20	12	18	13	2	8	6	14	0	2	2
Abortion	17	18	13	22	0	1	17	4	45	2	0
Social Issues[c]	1	3	5	4	0	1	6	6	3	2	0
Education	28	26	19	11	9	15	7	29	1	8	29
Environment	9	6	7	22	3	5	15	10	18	8	16
Crime, Drugs	7	11	17	3	1	8	3	5	6	22	8
International	15	4	7	12	1	1	8	0	9	0	0
Weighted N:	700	97	53	138	147	272	190	39	77	351	53

a. Among those respondents who mentioned a codeable policy concern when asked about the issue or problem connected with their activity.
b. Not including taxes.
c. Not including abortion.

Contacting Public Officials. More than any kind of activity, contacting is distinguished by the control the participant can exercise over the timing of the activity and the content of its message. In Table 3.8 we differentiate among contacts on a particularistic issue, on a community issue, and on a national issue. In descending order of frequency, the particularistic contacts focused on three matters: basic human needs, taxes, and education. It is interesting that, in comparison to all of the more "public" modes of participation, particularized contacting is the most likely to convey concerns related to basic human needs—even though concerns about such needs can be framed as policy issues like homelessness or spending on welfare instead of particularistic concerns like the need to straighten out a Social Security payment or establish disability eligibility. Contacts on issues affecting the community focused most heavily on educational issues and taxes. Contacts on issues affecting the nation were varied in substance. The most frequent topic was abortion, followed by concerns about the environment and basic human needs.

Protesting. As with contacting, the subject matter of protests differs substantially depending on whether the issue is seen as affecting the community or the nation. With respect to issues affecting the community, education predominated followed by economic issues. Considering that protest is a political act that requires little in the way of resources and, therefore, is often characterized as the weapon of the weak, what is noteworthy is how little of the protest activity dealt with issues of basic human need: one in ten of the protesters on issues of local import and only 2 percent of the protesters on issues of national import mentioned basic human needs. Environmental concerns did figure prominently among the subjects of protests on issues affecting the nation. We were not prepared, however, for the extent to which abortion forms the subject of demonstrations about issues affecting the nation: nearly half the protesters on issues affecting the nation mentioned abortion as the subject. Of them, nearly three-quarters, 72 percent, hold pro-life views as registered on a seven-point scale measuring attitudes toward abortion.

Community Activity. Those who engaged in informal community activity mentioned a variety of issues, the most frequent of which were crime and drugs. The issues identified by members of

local governing boards—educational and environmental concerns—reflect the boards on which most of them sit, school boards and zoning boards or park commissions.

THE SUBJECT MATTER OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY: A SUMMARY

Our findings about the subject matter behind political participation are a reflection, in part, of the particular time when the survey was conducted, but several general conclusions are possible about the many and varied issues to which activists referred. There is a division of labor among political acts in terms of the substantive messages they carry to policymakers. The subject matter of these messages usually appears to be linked to the appropriate act. For example, the kinds of issue concerns mentioned by particularized contactors—a personal tax problem, help for a relative—could hardly be dealt with in the context of another form of participation. In addition, there are differences in the subject matter of activity directed at local, as opposed to national, officials—differences that are clearly related to the substance of local and national politics.

Beyond that, however, the different concerns associated with different political activities are somewhat surprising. For example, there is no particular reason to have expected that crime and violence should have ranked so much higher on the agenda of informal community activists than of protesters or contactors with community-level issue concerns, or that voters should have been so much more attuned than campaign workers to economic issues and taxes. With respect to the findings about voting, it seems that voting is unique when it comes to the issue concerns behind it—just as it is unique in so many other ways.

Another striking finding is how much participation, across activities, is inspired by the issue of abortion. Those who protested on an issue affecting the nation were especially likely to have mentioned abortion, but other activists also cited abortion as an issue. In contrast, concerns about basic needs weigh heavily among the issues mentioned in conjunction with the activity that is least concerned with the making of general policies, contacting on particularistic issues. Activity aimed at influencing policy—as opposed to the handling of a particular case—is much less likely to convey a message about basic human needs. This is most notable in relation to protesting. Although it is purportedly the mode of participation available to those with few resources, it is striking that issues of basic human needs were mentioned so infrequently in connection with protests.

Conclusion

Along with the preceding one, this chapter provides a preliminary conceptual map to the terrain of voluntary political participation—activity that is undertaken without threat of coercion or promise of financial compensation and that has the intent or effect of influencing what the government does. Although this is a domain of human endeavor that can be distinguished analytically, the empirical boundaries that define it are in reality quite fuzzy: in practice, it is not always easy to differentiate what is political from what is non-political; what is done without financial reward from what is done in the expectation of future career enhancement; or what is activity from what is evidence of psychological involvement with politics.

We employed several comparative standards in order to get some purchase on the question of whether the amount of political activity in the United States is a lot or a little. Although Americans are less likely than citizens of other democracies to go to the polls, they are otherwise as active, or more active, than citizens elsewhere. However, when one uses the comparative standard of the level of participation in the secular and religious domains of voluntary activity outside politics, the level of political participation in the United States looks less impressive. Americans give more time and money to charity and to their churches than they do to politics. The data underscore the important role of non-political secular and religious institutions in the United States.

Appendix 3.1: Measuring Organizational Involvement

As we indicated, measuring organizational involvement raises complex issues.[35] One issue is whether to ask about organizations in

35. For the organization questions, see Appendix B.1.g. For a fuller discussion of the issue of measuring organizational affiliation as well as for an explication of the measures

general or to present a more detailed list of types of organizations. We did the latter and asked about a long list of types of organizations, twenty categories in all. These types—for which examples were given to jog the respondent's memory—covered the full range of kinds of organizations to which individuals can belong. The categories, presented to our respondents on a card, were selected to make sense to respondents. Since these categories were designed to be readily understood by respondents, they often combine organizations with similar substantive focus, but very different organizational characteristics. Although these organizational categories are useful for illustrative purposes, we shall ordinarily find it more illuminating to consider analytical dimensions than actual organizational categories. The list as presented to our respondents is shown in Table 3.4.

Another issue in measuring organizational involvement is the definition of affiliation with an organization. Membership, in the usual sense in which one joins the Masons or the American Medical Association, is not a prerequisite for organizational involvement. Besides card-carrying membership, there are two other avenues to organizational involvement. First, citizens can support an organization simply by writing checks without ever becoming members. In an era in which organizations take advantage of computerized mass mailings and cheap long-distance rates to raise money, organizational affiliations that are confined to making financial contributions are increasingly common. Moreover, it is possible to give time in an organizational setting—by, for example, volunteering in a hospital or a school—without any kind of formal membership. Thus, in order to discern organizational affiliations that are not memberships in the ordinary sense, we inquired, for each of the twenty types of organizations, about membership and about making financial contributions as well as, where appropriate, giving time.[36]

used to determine both organizational involvement and whether organizational involvement entailed political activity, see Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Voluntary Associations in Politics: Who Gets Involved?" in *Representing Interests and Interest Group Representation*, ed. William Crotty, Mildred A. Schwartz, and John C. Green (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1994).

36. A similar approach was employed by Frank R. Baumgartner and Jack L. Walker, who brought many of these concerns to the construction of a battery of items about organizational involvement that was used in the 1985 pilot to the National Election Study. Although they did not inquire about donations of time without formal membership, they asked about contributions as well as membership and used a list of ten types of organizations that had been designed to provide categories for the political issue and citizen advocacy groups that have become increasingly prominent in American politics since the 1960s. Their results are reported in "Survey Research and Membership in Voluntary Associations." Unfortunately, their questions were not included in the subsequent full National Election Study.

Finally, we had to deal with the fact that organizations fall along a long continuum in terms of the extent to which their goals and activities are politically relevant. Organizations that resemble one another in many respects—substantive concerns, organizational forms, the amount and kinds of support emanating from members—may differ substantially in the level of their involvement in politics. What this means is that the boundary between political and non-political organizational involvement is very indistinct, and an important form of *political* participation is difficult to distinguish from analogous voluntary activity that is not germane to politics. Especially when an organization combines political and non-political means of furthering members' goals and interests, those who are affiliated may not be motivated by political concerns or attentive to its political activities. Still, their support of the organization constitutes a significant, though perhaps latent, kind of political action. In order to establish whether an organization is politically engaged, we relied on the perceptions of our respondents. For each organization mentioned, we asked whether it sometimes takes stands on public issues—either nationally or locally. We define as political any organization that, according to the respondent, takes stands on public issues.

Appendix 3.2: Examples of Open-Ended Responses on the Subject of Citizen Contacting

A. CONTACTS TO LOCAL OFFICIALS ON A PARTICULARIZED ISSUE

Mosquito problem in standing water on my street.
It was a personal concern. The water department had me

down for $2,500 for a 4-flat building with only 5 people and I sent this problem to him . . .

My husband was in the process of getting a taxi license from the city, problems with bureaucratic process.

Permit for a family outing.

A better job. That's it.

A problem with the dock at our cottage. We needed his help to get the Dept. of Natural Resources to move quicker so we could rebuild our dock.

That I don't get my mail correctly. It has zip codes & address correct but still doesn't send my mail and I do a lot of mail contact.

Damage to our property from neighbors, lack of gutters.

Change of schools for my two boys.

Crime; yes, we have a family business and it was broken into and that's why I contacted the mayor to see what could be done to prevent it from happening.

I had a complaint. I had a complaint about another business. It was not political.

Was getting information about a rehab program. Housing rehabilitation.

Assessment. Property assessment.

Policy issue, being evicted, having the town help you make delays.

This had to do with zoning laws in the borough. Nothing else.

To fix my driveway—school bus turns around in it.

B. CONTACTS TO LOCAL OFFICIALS ON A COMMUNITY ISSUE

A plan to redevelop our area with large skyscrapers of mixed use.

Appointment of commissioner of health.

Transfer a principal of a school to another school—did not want this to happen.

It was the drug problem in this building and on the block.

Transportation issue.

Community problems; planning and gang violence.

A community project for AIDS.

About zoning problems in Glendale.

The public policy issue involving the entire community. The realignment of school district boundaries as it relates to race in Pasadena.

Community, economic development, housing, more improvements in plans for, ideas by who, that's about it.

Getting permits for buildings.

We had a lot of problems with trash in my neighborhood and I wanted some help to get it cleaned up.

Drugs, housing, poverty, more community participation, creating new programs for kids, recreation centers.

I want to improve Chinatown.

C. CONTACT TO A SENATOR OR REPRESENTATIVE ON A PARTICULARIZED ISSUE

I needed help with a refugee. I work with refugees. That's it.

Some problems with the IRS, that was enough.

Apply for temporary residence in the U.S.

Compensation for a relative; gov't agencies could help; several environmental and health issues that are coming for vote; that's it.

Passes to Government buildings.

Social Security problem for my mother.

The problem with the IRS. To do with taxes. My personal taxes. My error but I didn't know it. IRS wouldn't listen to me.

I was bidding on building a U.S. Marshall's holding facility and contacted them to get a list of the bidders.

Boundary dispute with the state. The state said part of our house was on state-owned property.

Poor mail service. That's it. It took me 5 days to get your letter mailed from Columbus, Oh. to Ft. Wayne. That's too long.

Personal problems. Just personal.

We couldn't find my Vietnamese kid's green card and he had to go to immigration.

I had to ask him to send birthday greetings to a relative who turned 100.
Personal concern. Concerning the taxes on cigarettes and beer and a new post office. That's it.
I was looking for information about a book I needed.

D. CONTACT TO A SENATOR OR REPRESENTATIVE ON A NATIONAL ISSUE

Policy—environmental concerns.
Women's rights to choose.
Public housing, teenage pregnancy, the child care bill.
Banking, something to do with putting a cap on interest rates.
The oil industry.
This was a post-card campaign to the congressman stating I did not want my tax $ to go to Defense.
U.S. Senator about Pro-choice.
Abortion.
El Salvador. Our continuing high level of support for the military in El Salvador; a million and a half a day and my concern about that.
Art censorship.
Amendment to the constitution protecting the flag. I am against it, I wrote the White House.
Involved in the U.S. govt.'s refusal to participate in an international resolution regarding the improvement of worldwide air quality.
The legislation before Congress regarding Israel—Jackson Bannock Act, 400 million deficit.
El Salvador's persecution and ousting of Bishop Garcia.
Public policy issue, has to do with agricultural imports per my board position as University of Illinois trustee.
The Clean Air Act; I wanted it to pass and be strengthened; that's it.
The treatment of veal calves; it was about the veal calf protection act.

4

Interpreting Political Activity: A Report from Activists

In this chapter, we bring our analysis closer to the world of political participation as experienced by the activists. Social scientists often deal with the issue of what leads a person to engage in some activity in terms of a statistical relationship between various characteristics of the individual and the conduct in question. In Part III of this book, we adopt this strategy—using a large array of social and psychological characteristics to explain political activity within the framework of a complex causal analysis. Here we approach the problem more directly by asking respondents to tell us why they were active. How do they understand what animated their activity? What did they expect to achieve from it? This approach provides a richer understanding of the meaning of political participation to those who take part.

The common characteristic uniting the activities about which we are concerned is that they are voluntary. Nobody is forced to engage in them. While social norms may support citizen involvement in its various forms, they hardly make it obligatory in the ordinary sense of the word. Moreover, this is, by definition, activity that is not paid. Under the circumstances, it makes sense to ask why people invest their time and their money in voluntary activities. In this chapter we do just that: we not only ask *why* people participate—a question that underlies a large portion of this book—but we ask *them* to tell us. We explore voluntary activity from the