Chapter 1
The Decline and Fall of Political Activism?

The conventional wisdom suggests that in the late twentieth century many post-industrial societies experienced a tidal wave of citizen withdrawal from the traditional channels of political participation. Symptoms of this malady include sagging electoral turnout, rising anti-party sentiment, and the decay of civic organizations. Concern about these issues has been expressed in public speeches, leader columns, and academic studies. These voices are heard most commonly in the United States, but similar echoes resonate in many other democracies. But are these fears justified? This book is the last of a trilogy considering related facets of this phenomenon. The first, A Virtuous Circle, developed a critique of the media malaise thesis, demonstrating that attention to the news media was positively, not negatively, linked to political participation. Digital Divide explored the potential of the Internet for civic engagement, and the way that new opportunities online facilitate a more level playing field for challengers and opposition movements with technical skills and know-how.

Building upon this foundation, this book suggests reasons to question and revise popular assumptions of a contagious plague of citizen apathy. In particular, three core claims are advanced, demonstrated, and defended to show that the obituary for civic activism is premature.

First, the study documents mixed trends during the second half of the twentieth century in electoral turnout, party membership, and civic activism, not a steady secular erosion. Chapters will demonstrate that voting participation has been stable in established democracies during the postwar era, not in free-fall, while in contrast growing literacy, education and wealth in developing societies has generated rising turnout. Official estimates confirm that party membership has ebbed since the early 1980s in Western Europe, it is true, but at the same time there has been growth in newer democracies like Slovakia and Hungary. Secularization has shrunk the pool of regular churchgoers in Catholic and Protestant Europe, and modernization undercuts religious faith. Yet despite the rise of the service economy, trade union membership shows a mixed trend across Europe in the last fifty years, not a consistent slump. Moreover postindustrial societies where traditional agencies have become less popular have seen the rise of alternative avenues through protest politics, reinventing political activism. Demonstrations, signing petitions, and consumer boycotts have become far more common since the mid-1970s. Engagement in new social movements, exemplified by environmental activism, has flowered in affluent nations. In sum, indicators point more strongly towards the evolution, transformation and reinvention of civic engagement rather than its premature death. The evidence remains more limited that is desirable in the best of all possible comparative analysis, but nevertheless it is sufficiently robust, comprehensive and reliable across different independent indicators to debunk some common myths.

Secondly, the book examines survey evidence available in many countries around the world in the mid-1990s wave of the World Values Study to analyze who votes, who joins parties, and who belongs to civic organizations. Conventional explanations of political participation commonly focus on social inequalities of class, education, age, gender and ethnicity, as well as cultural attitudes like political interest and confidence. Yet these factors are insufficient by themselves to explain the marked contrasts in national levels of political activism. It is also important to take account of the broader context set by societal modernization, institutional design, and mobilizing agencies. In particular, the early stages of the modernization process generates rising levels of human capital (education, literacy, and wealth) that are strongly related to many dimensions of citizen activism, although this is a curvilinear pattern that tapers off after a certain point (thereby
solving the so-called ‘puzzle’ of electoral participation). This broader context shapes and mediates the impact of social structure and cultural attitudes on civic engagement.

Lastly, multiple newer channels of civic engagement, mobilization and expression are rapidly emerging in postindustrial societies to supplement traditional modes. Political participation is evolving and diversifying in terms of the ‘who’ (the agencies or collective organizations), ‘what’ (the repertoires of actions commonly used for political expression), and ‘where’ (the targets that participants seek to influence). Admittedly it is difficult to substantiate this argument with the limited evidence available. Nevertheless this claim seems both important and persuasive. Protest politics did not disappear with afghan bags, patchouli oil and tie-dyed T-shirts in the sixties, instead it has moved from margin to mainstream. New social movements, transnational policy networks, and Internet activism offer alternative avenues of engagement. The politics of choice appears to be replacing the politics of loyalties. It follows that studies of political participation focusing exclusively on conventional indicators, like trends in electoral turnout in the United States or party membership in Western Europe, may seriously misinterpret evidence of an apparent civic slump. Political energies have diversified and flowed through alternative tributaries, rather than simply ebbed away.

Before proceeding to articulate these arguments, we need to summarize the standard textbook case for civic decline, outline the revisionist interpretation presented in this book, and then describe the comparative framework, the main sources of evidence, and the overall plan of the book.

The Case for Civic Decline

There is widespread agreement among varied democratic theorists ranging from John Jacques Rousseau to James Madison, John Stuart Mill, Robert Dahl, Benjamin Barber, David Held and John Dryzak that mass participation is essential to the lifeblood of representative democracy, although conceptions differ sharply over how much civic engagement is thought either necessary or desirable. On the one hand, theories of ‘strong’ democracy suggest that citizen activism is intrinsically valuable. Mill argued that by actively participating in the civic life, rather than allowing others to take decisions in their own interest, people learn and grow. In this view, involving the public can make better citizens, better policies and better governance. On the other hand, Schumpeterian democrats believe that the essential role of citizens should be relatively limited, confined principally to the periodic election of parliamentary representatives, along with the continuous scrutiny of government actions. Nevertheless even this minimalist view sees voting participation as one of the essential features of representative government, alongside many other institutional safeguards.

Opportunities for widespread public engagement in public affairs, so that all voices count in the policymaking process, are not sufficient in themselves to ensure that representative democracies work effectively. Non-democratic regimes well understand the symbolic power of legitimating events as demonstrated by pro-government rallies organized by the police and military in Nigeria, plebiscitory elections in one-party predominant states like Singapore, Algeria and Belarus, and anti-American protests mobilized by ruling elites in Iraq. In elections during the 1990s in Uzbekistan, Angola and Equatorial Guinea, all governed by non-democratic regimes, over 87% of voters flocked to the polls. By itself, public participation does not guarantee the workings of representative democracy. Arguably it is not even the most pressing challenge facing many transitional and consolidating democracies. But at least some minimal opportunity for electoral choice in determining the rulers in government is one of the necessary but not sufficient conditions for Schumpeterian democracies. Widespread disengagement from civic life is problematic if political participation functions as a mechanism to hold elected officials to account, to articulate and express public demands and grievances, and to train and educate future political leaders. There should be concern if lack of participation undermines confidence in the legitimacy of representative governments,
eviscerates the lifeblood of the more fragile democracies, and reinforces social inequality and the disadvantages facing poorer groups, women, and ethnic minority populations already at the margins of power.

The standard view emphasizes a familiar litany of civic ills that are believed to have undermined the democratic channels traditionally linking citizens to the state. Elections are the most common way for people to express their political preferences and the half-empty ballot box is taken as the most common symptom of democratic ill health. The idea of representative democracy sans parties is unthinkable, yet studies of party organizations suggest the desertion of grassroots members, at least in Western Europe, during recent decades. An extensive literature on partisan dealignment has established that lifetime loyalties anchoring voters to parties have been eroding in many established democracies, contributing towards sliding turnout, and producing a more unstable electorate open to the sway of short-term forces. Political mobilization via traditional agencies and networks of civic society like unions and churches appears to be under threat. Structural accounts emphasize that union membership is hemorrhaging due to the decline of jobs in manufacturing industry, changing class structures, flexible labour markets, and the spread of individualist values. Theories of secularization, deriving originally from Max Weber, suggest that the public in modern societies has been abandoning church pews for shopping malls. The bonds of belonging to the plethora of traditional community associations and voluntary organizations may be becoming more frayed and tattered than in the past. Putnam presents the most extensive battery of evidence documenting anemic civic engagement in America, displayed in activities as diverse as community meetings, social networks and associational membership. Surveys of public opinion suggest growing public cynicism about government and public affairs has become pervasive in the United States, at least before the events of 11th September, while citizens have become more critical of the institutions of representative government in many other established democracies.

Given the weight of all this accumulating evidence, the conventional perspective suggests that traditional political activities that arose and flourished during the late 19th and early-20th centuries peaked in the postwar era and waned in popularity today. Common activities for our parents and grandparents, like attending party conferences, union branch meetings, and town hall rallies, may appear as musty, quaint and outmoded to the Internet generation as the world of 18th century Parisian political salons, 19th century Yorkshire rotten boroughs, and early 20th century Chicago party machines. The conventional wisdom has set policy alarm bells ringing from Washington DC to Brussels and Tokyo, although prognostications differ about 'what is to be done' because there is far greater consensus about the diagnosis of the symptoms than the cure.

Elsewhere there are obvious grounds for greater optimism. The last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a dramatic expansion in free elections worldwide. Countries as diverse as the Czech Republic, Mexico and South Africa celebrate a political renaissance. Since the onset of the 'third wave' in 1974, the proportion of states that are at least electoral democracies has more than doubled and the number of democratic governments in the world has tripled. Many hoped that these developments would deepen and enlarge the opportunities for citizens to become engaged in public affairs and governance. Yet even here there remain multiple problems in civic life. In many states the establishment of free and fair elections has not necessarily been accompanied by the robust institutionalization of democracy through more effective party competition, freedom of expression and association, respect for justice and the rule of law, guarantees of human rights, and government transparency and accountability. Many newer democracies, such as those in the Andean region, have developed the architecture of competitive electoral institutions but failed to create the supporting foundations of vibrant civic societies, while deep-rooted political mistrust is apparent throughout Latin America, allowing the danger of occasional reversions to authoritarian rule.
Countervailing Trends and Forces

Yet despite the conventional wisdom, there are good reasons to question popular assumptions that civic decline has become pandemic throughout older democracies, and that it has failed to flourish and take root in the stony and uncertain ground of newer democracies. Not all indicators, by any means, point towards consistent and steady secular deterioration across all dimensions of political activism. Instead, after a few minutes thought, even the most casual observer of current events will quickly identify many complex contradictions, crosscurrents, and anomalies. In the 2000 US presidential election, for example, many commentators deplored the fact that only half the American electorate voted, despite the tightest presidential contest in forty years, the importance of the outcome, and the three billion dollars spent on the campaign. Yet a year later the dramatic events of the destruction of the World Trade Center generated a coast-to-coast outpouring of patriotic displays from flags to army volunteers, a flowering of community giving from an estimated one billion dollars in charitable donations to lines of volunteers at blood banks, and a massive resurgence of the news audience.

Similar counter-flows are found elsewhere. The UK general election in June 2001 prompted a pervasive mood of campaign apathy, the lowest turnout since the First World War, and hemorrhaging party membership, generating official government reports on how to improve voter participation. Yet in recent years not all the British public has been disengaged, instead there have been multiple demonstrations, blockades, and direct action protests by disparate groups concerned about animal rights and genetically modified food, road development plans and fuel taxes, the rights of Muslim citizens and the state of race relations. Across the Channel, France has often seen similar outbreaks exemplified by port blockades by fisherman, farmers dumping manure on the steps of the French parliament, violent anti-globalization protests against MacDonald’s, and industrial action by truckers. US air strikes on Afghanistan in the aftermath of these events triggered daily street protests stretching from Jakarta, Nairobi and Karachi to Belfast, Berlin, and Boston.

Moreover protests are not merely symbolic politics, they can have critical consequences. In Belgrade an estimated half a million opposition supporters took to the streets in a general strike demanding the resignation of President Milosevic, leading to his downfall and eventual trial before an international court in The Hague. In the Philippine a peaceful uprising of people power on the Manila streets, a melange of lawyers and students, businessmen and middle-class housewives, caused the abrupt ejection of President Estrada from power. The young are assumed to be politically lethargic. Yet anti-capitalist demonstrations among this generation have rocked summits of world leaders from Seattle to Quebec, Gothenberg and Genoa, forcing reconsideration of issues of debt repayment by poorer nations.

The major examples of counterbalancing tendencies come from protest politics but in certain circumstances even traditional electoral channels have proved remarkably popular. In August 2001, for example, East Timor’s first free elections since independence from Indonesia and Portugal generated long lines at the polls and 91% of electors voted. In June 1999, 89% of South Africans cast a ballot in parliamentary elections. In 1998, despite violence and intimidation during the campaign, the Cambodian general election saw lengthy queues at polling stations, 94% turnout, and a strong challenge to the governing party. Voting apathy is not universal.

These phenomena may or may not be related. Taken together, however, even the causal observer would acknowledge that the pervasive idea that the public has become disengaged from all and every form of civic life oversimplifies a far more complex and messy reality. These anecdotal observations suggest it is time for a more thorough reexamination of the systematic evidence, with an open mind to findings running counter to the conventional view.
To consider these issues, the first aim of this book is to examine the standard claim of a pervasive, long-term erosion of political activism experienced in many countries around the world during the postwar era. Although often widely assumed, in fact the evidence of secular decline often remains scattered and patchy; consistent and reliable longitudinal trend data is limited; and most previous systematic research has been restricted to case studies of particular countries, particularly the United States, and comparative evidence among established democracies in Western Europe, making it hard to generalize more widely. Given these limitations, this study aims to update the analysis and examine the broader picture of trends in recent decades where evidence is available across many nations.

The second major aim of the study is to analyze and explain the variations in levels of electoral turnout, party membership and civic activism in countries around the world today. There are substantial contrasts among contemporary societies, for example in national elections held during the 1990s, electoral turnout remained remarkably high (over 85%) in democracies as diverse at Iceland, South Africa, and Uruguay, but it fell below 50% in the United States, Jamaica and Switzerland. As subsequent chapters demonstrate, there are similar cross-national divergencies in many other common dimensions of civic life, including in the membership of parties, religious-organizations and trade unions, as well as in the propensity to protest through demonstrations, strikes, and boycotts. In seeking to explain these national differences, the book focuses on modernization theories, suggesting that long-term processes of societal and human development (including rising levels of literacy, education and wealth) are driving patterns of political participation. But rather than adopting a monocausal theory, the study also explores how far levels of activism are shaped by political institutions and the structure of the state, the role of mobilizing agencies like parties, unions and churches, social inequalities of resources, and cultural attitudes held by groups and individuals.

Lastly the conclusion aims to reflect more generally on the nature of political participation and whether the standard indicators used to monitor civic energies are capable of capturing alternative forms of political expression and activism through new social movements, transnational policy networks, and Internet channels. If modes are evolving then political science may be in danger of lagging behind. The heart of this book therefore explores whether many common dimensions of political participation have eroded during the late twentieth century, as many assume, analyzes the reasons for cross-national patterns of civic engagement in many countries, and considers the consequences for democratic governance.

Comparative Framework

This study seeks to understand these issues by comparing countries around the globe, maximizing the advantages of the ‘most different’ comparative strategy. Much existing research on political participation is based upon the United States, as well as established West European and Anglo-American democracies. Yet it is not clear how far we can generalize more widely from these particular countries. Patterns of participation that gradually evolved with the spread of democracies in the mid-19th and early 20th century, following the long-term process of industrialization, are unlikely to be the same as those found in Latin American nations that have experienced authoritarian regimes and military rule, or Central European states which lived under communist party hegemony. If distinctive historical experiences stamp their cultural mark on these nations, in a path-dependent pattern, they may continue to influence patterns of political activism today.

Moreover as the earliest comparative studies have long stressed, political systems offer citizens widely different structures of opportunity to become engaged in their own governance. In pluralist societies like the United States, for example, voluntary organizations, professional associations, and community groups commonly mobilize people into politics, with the church playing a particularly important role.
contrast in Western Europe, mass-branch party organizations often play a stronger role. And in many developing societies, such as the Philippines and South Africa, grassroots social movements draw people into protest politics and direct action strategies. In short, patterns of activism in both Western Europe and the United States may prove atypical of the range of transitional and consolidating democracies in Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Given these considerations, this study follows the well-known conceptualization of Prezeworski and Teune in adopting the 'most different systems' research design, seeking to maximize contrasts between a wide range of societies to distinguish systematic clusters of characteristics associated with different dimensions of political activism. Clearly there are some important trade-offs involved in this approach, notably the loss of the richness and depth that can come from case-study comparison of a few similar countries within relatively similar regions. A broader canvass increases the complexity of comparing societies that vary widely in terms of cultural legacies, political systems, and democratic traditions. Yet the strategy of attempting a worldwide comparison, where data is available, has multiple advantages. Most importantly, the global framework allows us to examine whether, as theories of societal modernization claim, patterns of political activism evolve with the shift from traditional rural societies, with largely illiterate and poor populations, through industrial economies based on manufacturing base, with a growing urban working class, to post-industrial economies based on a large service sector middle class.

The approach adopted in this study maximizes the comparison of nations at many different levels of societal modernization today, including some of the most affluent countries in the world like Sweden, Germany and the United States, those characterized by middle-level human development and transitional economies typified by nations such as Taiwan, Brazil and South Africa, as well as poorer rural societies, like India and China. Some states under comparison are governed by authoritarian regimes while others have experienced a rapid consolidation of democracy within the last decade. Today the Czech Republic, Latvia and Argentina are ranked as equally ‘free’ as West European nations with a long tradition of democracy, such as Belgium, France, and the Netherlands. The approach adopted here follows in the footsteps of Verba, Nie and Kim’s seminal seven-nation study published in 1978, which compared participation in Austria, India, Japan, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the United States, and Yugoslavia, although the current research benefits from the easier availability of data and compares many more nations to allow more reliable cross-national generalizations.

Classification of Nations

Countries were classified for analysis according to levels of human development. The Human Development Index produced annually by the UNDP provides the standard measure of societal modernization, combining levels of literacy and education, health and per capita income. This measure is widely used and it has the advantage of providing a broader indicator of the well being of a society than simply levels of economic income or financial wealth. The only distinction made to the standard UNDP classification used here is that nations ranking highest in human development were subdivided into ‘postindustrial societies’ (the most affluent states around the world, ranking 1-28 with the highest HDI score in the UNDP index, and mean per capita GNP of $23,691) and ‘other highly developed societies’ (ranking 29-46 by the UNDP with mean per capita GNP of $9006). This subdivision was selected as more precise and consistent that the conventional use of OECD member states to define industrialization, since a few OECD member states like Mexico and Turkey have low development, although in practice most countries overlap.

Over the years there have been many attempts to measure levels of democracy and the Gastil index measured annually by Freedom House has become widely accepted as the standard measure of democratization. Freedom House provides an annual
classification of political rights and civil liberties around the world. For this study, the history of democracy in each nation state worldwide is classified based on the annual ratings produced from 1972-2000. An important distinction is drawn between 39 older democracies, defined as those with at least twenty years continuous experience of democracy (1980-2000) and a current Freedom House rating of 2.0 or less, and 43 newer democracies with less than twenty years experience of democracy and a current Freedom House rating of 2.5 or less. Following the Freedom House rankings, other countries were classified based on the most recent ratings (1999-2000) into semi-democracies (which are often referred to as 'partly-free', 'transitional' or 'consolidating' democracies) and non-democracies (which includes a wide variety of regimes lacking political rights and civil liberties, including military-backed dictatorships, authoritarian states, elitist oligarchies, and ruling monarchies). Appendix A lists the classifications of countries used throughout the book, based on these measures.

In practice it remains difficult to disentangle the complex relationship between human and political development. In the early literature many researchers argued that the modernization process was closely related to the spread of democratization. Figure 1.1 illustrates the strength of this association in the mid-1970s and the strong correlation (R=.49) during this era shows that most countries clustered in a predictable pattern around the regression line. Even so, there were a few outliers with relatively high levels of human development and yet restricted political rights and civil liberties, such as the Communist governments in Romania and Hungary and the dictatorial regimes in Spain and Chile, as well as some poorer countries with democratic governments, such as India, Papua New Guinea, and Botswana. Yet this general relationship between democracy and development altered significantly in later decades following the ‘third wave’ revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Figure 1.2 illustrates the nature of this association across all the nations under comparison in the late 1990s. The figure shows a greater scatter around the line, especially among semi-democracies and non-democracies. This association has important implications for attempts to disentangle the influence of human and democratic development, and for the classifications used in the analysis. All the older democracies except India are relatively affluent and modern societies, and almost all the newer democracies are also moderately developed societies. Nevertheless there is a wide distribution of semi-democracies and non-democracies by level of human development, as shown by the stark contrasts between affluent Bahrain, Brunei Darussalam and Singapore on the one hand and the poorer societies of Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan on the other. As discussed in the next chapter, the modernization process brings greater education, literacy and affluence, which are associated with mass participation in democracy, but outliers like India and Singapore illustrate that there can be important exceptions to this pattern.

[Figures 1.1 to 1.3 about here]
variables. Where appropriate, the book also draws on many other sources of public opinion surveys for time-series and cross-national data, such as the 1973-76 Political Action survey, the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) conducted in the mid-1990s, and the 15-nation Eurobarometer (1970-2000).

The Plan of the Book

Analytical Framework

Chapter 2 outlines the analytical and conceptual framework for explaining patterns of political participation, and considers the reasons why the process of societal modernization may have transformed many key dimensions of civic engagement. The discussion is grounded within broader theories of political participation drawn from classic landmarks in the literature from Almond and Verba (1963) onwards, especially the typology of multidimensional participation developed by Verba and Nie (1972) and by Verba, Nie and Kim (1978), the research on protest potential developed by Barnes and Kaase (1979), work on social movements by Tarrow (1992) and others, studies of transnational advocacy networks by Keck and Dinneck (1998), and theories of social capital following Putnam (2000). The core model outlined in this chapter combines five factors which can help explain patterns of participation including: the level of societal modernization in each country; the structure of the state; the role of mobilizing agencies; the resources that individuals bring to the process; and, the motivation that draws citizens into civic affairs.

Electoral Turnout

The book then turns to examine electoral turnout as the most common form of conventional participation, although also one of the least demanding. Chapter 3 maps national patterns of electoral turnout as a proportion of the voting-age population (Vote/VAP) worldwide, and compares trends during the last fifty years, based on the analysis of national election results from International IDEA. Patterns are compared across traditional, industrialized and post-industrial societies as well as among different types of political systems, including older and newer democracies, semi-democracies and authoritarian regimes. Based on modernization theories, the chapter explores whether broadly similar trends in turnout are found among nations at roughly similar levels of human development. The study confirms that electoral participation dropped in the United States from 1945-2000 but it also shows that, contrary to much popular speculation, there was a significant drop in turnout during the same period in only ten other postindustrial societies (including Australia, Canada, Austria, New Zealand, Switzerland and France). Most Western nations show a pattern of stability or trendless fluctuations during the second half of the twentieth century, while a few like Sweden, Greece, and Israel have seen rising voting participation during this era. There was a modest dip in turnout experienced during the 1990s across Western Europe, but this returns levels to the status quo ante found in the postwar decade. A broader comparison of worldwide trends during the last half of the twentieth century reveals that almost twice as many countries have seen rising rather than falling turnout, with steady gains in many developing societies in Latin American, like Mexico, Brazil and Chile, as well as among smaller states in the Pacific and Caribbean region.

Yet even among relatively similar types of society, like Switzerland and Sweden, or the United States and the United Kingdom, there remain substantial contrasts in how many citizens vote. Chapter 4 examines institutional explanations for these differences. Structural variables can affect the costs of participation, such as the time and effort required to cast a ballot, and also the anticipated benefits of participating, including the symbolic and instrumental rewards of voting. Based on a soft version of rational choice theory, the study assumes that, ceteris paribus, people will be more likely to vote where costs are low whereas the benefits are high, for example in close parliamentary contests in majoritarian electoral systems where even a few votes can determine which party enters government. The chapter analyzes the role of the direct institutional factors, such
as the use of compulsory voting and the facilities for casting a ballot, and indirect institutional variables, including the type of electoral system. The chapter concludes that after controlling for levels of human and democratic development, political institutions and rules still matter. Voting participation is maximized in elections using proportional representation, with compact electoral districts, regular but relatively infrequent national contests, competitive party systems and presidential contests. Legal rules also count, such as the period of the enfranchisement of women and the use of literacy requirements. Moreover institutions and rules matter more for turnout than specific voting facilities, like the registration process.

Chapter 5 goes on to analyze motivational and resource-based explanations of electoral participation, drawing upon the International Social Survey Program data in 22 nations, to see how far cross-national patterns of turnout can be accounted for by the role of structure, culture and agency. Structure involves the impact of patterns of social inequality, including the major social cleavages of gender, class, race/ethnicity, and generation. Culture includes a variety of attitudes such as support for democracy, satisfaction with government performance, political interest, efficacy and trust, and the strength of partisan loyalties, as well as broader traditions determined by religious, colonial and communist legacies. Agency concerns the way that social networks like unions, churches and community associations draw citizens into public life. The study confirms the importance of all these factors in predicting turnout, even after controlling for human development and the broader institutional context.

**Political Parties**

Part II turns to consider cross-national differences in support for the institution of political parties, and whether there has been a widespread erosion of membership and activism. Parties traditionally represent one of the central organizations linking citizens and the state, and in established democracies any partisan decline may have significant consequences for how far citizens can influence governments. Party organizations are compared in the light of debates about the erosion or transformation of party support. Chapter 6 sets out Duverger’s ideal-type of mass-branch parties, where parliamentary leaders are based on a broader base of active members in local areas, and an even wider circle of loyal voters in the electorate. The study then examines trends from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, and also cross-national patterns of party membership and activism, using the World Values Study. This survey data is compared against estimates of party membership derived from official party records in Western democracies. The results show that patterns of party membership vary considerably cross-nationally, even within similar types of society and global regions. Rather than a consistent slump in membership, the evidence suggests a more complex pattern, with party support growing in some newer democracies, even if there has been a fall in many Western democracies.

Chapter 7 explains reasons for the cross-national differences in party membership, establishing that modernization processes, in particular the spread of electronic media, are important factors driving this process. Party membership is usually greatest in societies with low diffusion of the broadcasting media. This suggests that parties make most effort to mobilize and retain grassroots activists where traditional face-to-face campaigning predominates, but parties face lesser incentives to recruit members where alternative channels of mass communication are easily available to connect directly with voters. Moreover organizational networks and political interest are stronger predictors of individual party membership than the standard social factors like gender, age, class, and education.

**Social Capital and Civic Society**

Part III focuses on debates about the role of civic society, generated by the work of Putnam and others. Chapter 8 considers theories of social capital. Putnam’s definition has two components: associational activism and social trust. The study compares alternative measures of belonging to many common types of voluntary
associations, social clubs, and civic organizations. The study concludes that social trust, but not associational activism, is strongly related to levels of human and democratic development.

Chapter 9 examines whether traditional agencies of mobilization like trade unions and religious organizations have weakened over the years, due to long-term secular and structural trends, and considers how far these agencies boost levels of political participation. The chapter concludes that, far from a uniform secular trend, union density has varied substantially in Western Europe during the postwar period, with some nations experiencing falling membership but other remaining stable, and yet others managing to recruit new members and boost their rolls. In contrast, secularization does receive confirmation from the available data on church attendance in Western Europe, with a fall found during the last thirty years in most countries, although from different levels.

Chapter 10 analyzes new social movements and protest politics, building upon work on ‘unconventional’ participation from Barnes and Kaase and others. The study examines where protest activism is most prevalent, comparing societies by levels of human and political development, and whether the social background of the protest population has ‘normalized’ in terms of gender, class, generation, and race/ethnicity. New social movements are exemplified by environmentalism, so countries are compared to see whether environmental activists are particularly inclined towards protest politics. The chapter discusses the role of the Internet in facilitating transnational advocacy networks that transcend national borders, concerning issues such as human rights, conflict resolution, women’s equality, environmental protection, and trade/debt. Finally the concluding chapter draws together the major findings throughout the book, and considers their implications for changing patterns of civic activism, for broader normative theories of democracy, and for understanding the voice of citizens in the democratization process worldwide.
Figure 1.1: Democracy and Human Development, 1975

Figure 1.2: Democracy and Human Development, 1998-9
Figure 1.3: Democracy and Human Development, WVS nations, 1998-9

Note: The Position of the 53 Societies compared in the World Values Study, mid-1990s
1 Ronald Inglehart claims that there is also a shift in the 'why' (if the left-right issues of the economy have been replaced by concern about the post-materialist quality of life issues), but this argument is not pursued in depth here. For details see Ronald Inglehart. 1997 Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies. Princeton: Princeton University Press.


4 Details are from International IDEA database Voter Turnout from 1945 to 2000. www.indea.int. See Appendix A for the detailed classification of all nations.


17 For details of these results see the International IDEA database *Voter Turnout from 1945 to 2000*. [www.indea.int](http://www.indea.int). For more recent election results see [www.electionworld.org](http://www.electionworld.org).

18 Voting turnout here is measured by votes cast as a proportion of the voting age population (Vote/VAP) as explained further in chapter 3. Details are from International IDEA database *Voter Turnout from 1945 to 2000*. [www.indea.int](http://www.indea.int).


25 The main differences are the exclusion of Hungary and Poland (ranked as by UNDP as highly developed), Mexico and Turkey (both ranked as medium developed), and the inclusion of Singapore as post-industrial. Hong Kong is also included in the UNDP list but excluded from this study, as a dependent territory. See Appendix A for the detailed classification of all nations.

26 Societies are defined based on the annual ratings provided by Freedom House since 1972. *The level of freedom* is classified according to the combined mean score for political rights and civil liberties in Freedom House’s 1972-2000 annual surveys Freedom of the World. www.freedomhouse.org


