

Citizenship Norms and the Expansion of Political Participation

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A growing chorus of scholars laments the apparent decline of political participation in America, and the negative implications of this trend for American democracy. This article questions this position – arguing that previous studies misdiagnosed the sources of political change and the consequences of changing norms of citizenship for Americans' political engagement. Citizenship norms are shifting from a pattern of duty-based citizenship to engaged citizenship. Using data from the 2005 'Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy' survey of the Center for Democracy and Civil Society (CDACS) I describe these two faces of citizenship, and trace their impact on political participation. Rather than the erosion of participation, this norm shift is altering and expanding the patterns of political participation in America.

A participatory public has been a defining feature of American politics and historically a strength of the political system. Alexis de Tocqueville's classic treatise on *Democracy in America* (1966) stressed the participatory tendencies of Americans in contrast to European publics. Thomas Jefferson believed that a well-informed electorate is the most important constraint on government. Social scientists maintain that political participation 'is at the heart of democratic theory and at the heart of the democratic political formula in the United States' (Verba and Nie, 1972, p. 3). Without public involvement in the process, democracy lacks both its legitimacy and its guiding force. Moreover, studies of political participation in the 1960s and 1970s stressed the public's high activity levels (Almond and Verba, 1963; Barnes *et al.*, 1979; Verba and Nie, 1972). The political culture encouraged people to participate: Americans were active in voluntary associations, engaged in political discussion and involved in political affairs. Tocqueville's description of America apparently still applied in the mid-twentieth century.

Despite this heritage, there is an apparent consensus among contemporary political scientists that the foundations of citizenship and democracy in America are crumbling. For example, a recent study co-sponsored by the American Political Science Association and the Brookings Institution begins:

American democracy is at risk. The risk comes not from some external threat but from disturbing internal trends: an erosion of the activities and capacities of citizenship. Americans have turned away from politics and the public sphere in large numbers, leaving our civic life impoverished. Citizens participate in public affairs less frequently, with less knowledge and enthusiasm, in fewer venues, and less equally than is healthy for a vibrant democratic polity (Macedo *et al.*, 2005, p. 1).



There is no shortage of pundits and political analysts who proclaim that too few of us are voting, we are disconnected from our fellow citizens, we lack social capital and we are losing faith in our government (e.g. Craig, 1996; Dionne, 1991; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002; Wattenberg, 2002). In his influential book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam concludes:

declining electoral participation is merely the most visible symptom of a broader disengagement from community life. Like a fever, electoral abstention is even more important as a sign of deeper trouble in the body politic than as a malady itself. It is not just from the voting booth that Americans are increasingly AWOL (Putnam, 2000, p. 35).

Indeed, I agree that the American public has undergone profound changes in the past half-century, and this has altered participation patterns and citizens' relationship with government. However, this study argues that prior research has misdiagnosed the process by focusing on only a portion of the political activity, and by mistaking the sources of these changes.

This article first maintains that the norms of citizenship are vital to understanding the political behavior of the American public. There has been a general call for the revival of citizenship to address the problems facing contemporary democracies (e.g. Macedo *et al.*, 2005; Milner, 2002; Putnam, 2000). However, I maintain that there are multiple norms of citizenship; and I present evidence that suggests some norms have weakened, while others have strengthened. My central premise is that the social and political modernization of the United States – and other advanced industrial democracies – over the past several decades has systematically altered the distribution of citizenship norms in significant ways.

Second, I show that previous research has typically focused on the change in what I call duty-based citizenship and its consequences, looking backward to the politics of the past. Alternative norms of engaged citizenship have very different implications for the political attitudes and behavior of the public, and many of these may represent positive developments for American democracy. This article shows how the changing norms of citizenship are affecting one aspect of contemporary politics: the patterns of participation. I draw upon data from the 'Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy' survey of the Center for Democracy and Civil Society (CDACS) that is used by other articles in this symposium.

The evidence of changing citizenship norms and their consequences does not mean that American democracy does not face challenges. Indeed, the vitality of democracy is that it normally responds to such challenges, and the response ideally expands and strengthens the democratic process. By accurately recognizing the current challenges, and responding to them rather than dire claims about political decay, American democracy can continue to evolve and develop. We cannot return to the politics of the 1950s, and we probably should not want to, but we can improve the democratic process if we understand how citizens and their world are really changing.

Assessing Citizenship Norms

Citizenship is a concept with a long history in political science, and its origins can be traced back to debates between Aristotle and Plato over how an Athenian citizen should act. Through the millennia, however, the term has acquired multiple meanings. This may, in part, reflect the importance of the idea of citizenship, so that scholars and political analysts compete to define its meaning.

I begin with an open definition of citizenship: I think of the term as tapping what is expected of the public as 'good' citizens. Reflecting Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba's (1963) description of a political culture as a shared set of social norms, this study defines citizenship norms as a *shared set of expectations about the citizen's role in politics*. A political culture contains a mix of attitudes and orientations, and I believe that images of the citizen's role are a central part of a nation's culture. They tell citizens what is expected of them, and what they expect of themselves. These expectations shape citizens' political behavior. Indeed, these norms of citizenship include many of the values that Almond and Verba stressed in defining a civic culture.

This does not mean that individuals approve of these norms, or that their personal values are consistent with them. The interaction between these norms and behavior is, in fact, an important research question to consider. For instance, someone might say that tolerance is an important norm for a democratic citizen – but then not be tolerant in his or her own political beliefs. In short, I shall define citizenship as a set of norms of what people think people should do as good citizens.

How, then, might citizenship be defined? The exact meaning of citizenship is open to multiple interpretations. The concept of citizenship has a history dating from the first democratic polity, and theorists – republicans, liberals, neoliberals, communitarians, social democrats and others – differ substantially in their definitions of citizenship (Heater, 2004). In other work (Dalton, 2007), I discuss the philosophical history of the concept and its application in empirical social science. Instead of focusing on a single definition, I identify four broad principles that are intertwined with past definitions of citizenship.

First, public participation in politics is broadly considered to be a defining element of democratic citizenship (Dahl, 1998; Pateman, 1970; Verba *et al.*, 1995). Unless citizens participate in the deliberation of public policy, and their choices structure government action, then democratic processes are meaningless. Often this presumes participation in free and fair elections that select government officials, but the range of political participation can be, and should be, much broader. Thus, the norm of political participation should be an essential element of democratic citizenship.

A second related category taps what has been called autonomy (Pettersson *et al.*, 1998). Autonomy implies that good citizens should be sufficiently informed

about government to exercise a participatory role. The good citizen should participate in democratic deliberation and discuss politics with other citizens, and ideally understand the views of others. Robert Dahl (1998) and others have discussed how access to information and the free debate of opinions is essential to produce meaningful democratic participation. Other researchers have described such items as representing critical and deliberative aspects of citizenship (Denters *et al.*, 2007).

Contemporary political theorists sometimes overlook the commitment to social order and the acceptance of state authority as essential elements of citizenship. Even democratic governments emphasize the role of the loyal law-abiding individual as a prime criterion of citizenship. Indeed, acceptance of the legitimacy of the state and the rule of law is often the implied first principle of citizenship, since without the rule of law meaningful political discourse and discussion cannot exist. Political philosophy is replete with those who stress the acceptance of state sovereignty – from Bodin to Hobbes to Hamilton – even before the participatory elements of democracy. Similarly, this logic appears in how the US government presents itself to its new citizens.¹

A fourth potential element of citizenship involves our relation to others in the polity. T. H. Marshall (1992 [1950]) described this as social citizenship. The expansion of civil and political rights led to new categories of social rights, such as social services, providing for those in need and taking heed of the general welfare of others. Citizenship thus may include an ethical and moral responsibility to others in the polity, and beyond. The framework of distributive justice provides a theoretical base for equality as a basis of citizenship. Unless individuals have sufficient resources to meet their basic social needs, democratic principles of political equality and participation lack meaning. Although initially identified with the European welfare state and social democratic critiques of capitalism, this idea of citizenship has been embraced by liberal interests in America (Shklar, 1991; Walzer, 1983).

Each of these elements represents potential elements of citizenship, and can make positive contributions to a democratic political culture. However, the public's actual adherence to these norms is unclear. Using data from the 2005 CDACS survey, I measure both the public's attachment to these norms and the implications of these norms for political participation.

Measuring Citizenship Norms

Public opinion surveys have only recently begun to study the public's adherence to different elements of citizenship.² In 2002, the European Social Survey (ESS) asked a battery of items tapping citizenship norms for 22 European nations. The 'Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy' (CID) survey of the Center for Democracy and Civil Society at Georgetown University expanded upon the ESS battery of citizenship questions.³ The CID survey asked:

Table 1: Categories of Citizenship Norms

<i>Categories</i>	<i>CID questions</i>
Participation	Vote in elections Be active in voluntary organizations Be active in politics
Autonomy	Form his or her opinion, independently of others
Social order	Serve on a jury if called Always obey laws and regulations For men to serve in the military when the country is at war Report a crime that he or she may have witnessed
Solidarity	Support people who are worse off than themselves

Source: 2005 CID Survey.

To be a good citizen, how important is it for a person to be ... [list items]. 0 is extremely unimportant and 10 is extremely important.

Notably, respondents are asked how they think a 'good citizen' should behave – the perceived norms of citizenship – rather than personal adherence to each behavior. Table 1 presents the list of items included in the CID battery.

For political participation, the battery asks about the importance of always voting in elections. In addition, the survey asks about the importance of participation beyond voting: being active in voluntary groups (participating in civil society) and general political activity. It is important to note that the citizenship battery does not ask if the respondent actually participates in these activities – the question is whether they recognize such norms of participation as important. The CID survey taps autonomy with a question on the importance of forming one's own opinions. The CID asks four items on adherence to social order: always obeying laws and regulations, willingness to serve on a jury, reporting a crime and willingness to serve in the military. Finally, the CID measures solidarity with an item on the importance of helping others who are worse off in society.

The Two Faces of Citizenship

Although there is a distinct theoretical rationale for these four separate categories of norms, the American public perceives citizenship in terms of a simpler framework. I factor analyzed the interrelationship between items, and this methodology identifies two broad dimensions of citizenship (Table 2).⁴

The first dimension, Citizen Duty, primarily involves norms of social order. The willingness to report a crime is most strongly related to this factor (0.84), closely followed by the other three items on social order. In addition, the responsibility to vote is strongly related to this dimension. Allegiance to the state and voting

Table 2: Dimensions of Democratic Citizenship

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Citizenship dimension</i>	
	<i>Citizen duty</i>	<i>Engaged citizen</i>
Report a crime	0.84	0.12
Always obey the law	0.77	0.09
Serve in the military	0.64	0.15
Serve on a jury	0.63	0.32
Vote in elections	0.56	0.43
Form own opinions	0.29	0.47
Support worse off	0.16	0.65
Be active in politics	0.15	0.80
Active in voluntary groups	0.10	0.84
Eigenvalue	2.56	2.37
Percent variance	28.5	25.8

Note: Table entries are results from a principal components analysis with varimax rotation.

Source: 2005 CID Survey.

have been linked together in discussions of citizenship, at least since Tocqueville. For instance, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service's brochure for new citizens begins its description of the duties and responsibilities of citizens as follows: 'the right to vote is a duty as well as a privilege' (Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1987, p. 11). Similarly, research on voting turnout stresses the importance of citizen duty as a predictor of voting (Blais, 2000; Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). Thus, the clustering of voting and order norms into a single pattern of duty-based citizenship has a strong foundation in prior empirical research and democratic theory (such as Almond and Verba's description of the citizen-subject). The same basic dimension also emerges from the citizenship items in the General Social Survey (GSS).⁵

In contrast, Engaged Citizenship spans several elements that are typically described as liberal or communitarian norms of citizenship. It includes the measure of solidarity, as well as two participation examples: being active in civil society groups and general political activity. This dimension also incorporates the norm of political autonomy: one should form opinions independently of others. The engaged citizen is willing to act on his or her principles, be politically independent and address social needs.

This concept of engaged citizenship theoretically overlaps with the patterns of post-material or self-expressive values that Ronald Inglehart has described in advanced industrial societies (Flanagan and Lee, 2003; Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Rising levels of education, changing generational experiences and other social forces are decreasing respect for authority and traditional forms

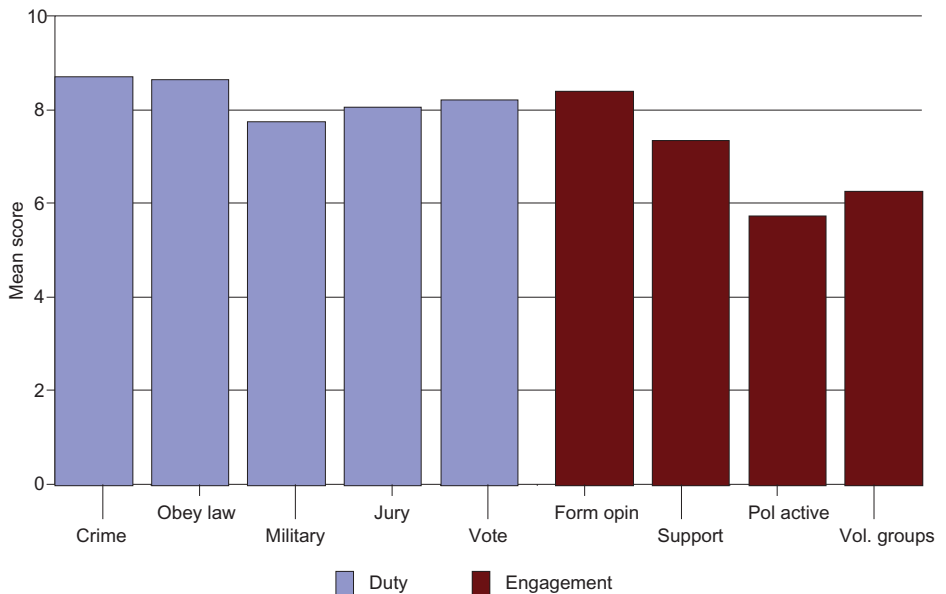
of allegiance as represented in duty-based citizenship. Simultaneously, these same forces are increasing self-expressive values as well as the ability and desire to participate more directly in the decisions affecting one's life. And it is noteworthy that solidarity norms are part of this dimension, since this process of value change is often described in terms of new left-libertarian values.

In summary, there are many potential characteristics that can define the norms of citizenship, and these are discussed in the philosophical literature. However, Americans (and other democratic publics) identify two broad models of citizenship, and these contrasting views of what it means to be a good citizen should have different effects on political attitudes and behaviors.

The Distribution of Citizenship Norms

Having mapped the dimensions of citizenship values that Americans see, the next question is to assess the support for each of these norms within the public. Figure 1 presents the average importance score given to each norm. Although I have emphasized the distinct clusters of citizenship norms, these data make it clear that all these norms are accepted by most Americans. On the 11-point scale used in the CID, all of the items score well above the midpoint of the scale (5.5), and

Figure 1: The Importance of Citizenship Norms



Source: 2005 CID Survey.

several are heavily skewed with means around 8.0. It is not that Americans accept one set of norms and reject others – rather all these norms are recognized as important, with some relatively more important to different individuals.

The items on the left of the figure are the norms most closely identified with duty-based citizenship. Nearly all Americans agree that these are important elements of citizenship. Reporting a crime and obeying the law receive the highest importance ratings, and these are followed by the norm of always voting. The sense of duty is deeply embedded in Americans' notions of citizenship. The four items on the right of the figure are most closely linked to engaged citizenship. Although I have described these as new and emerging norms, most Americans also rank them as important. The solidarity norm of helping those worse off in America receives a relatively high rating, as does the norm of forming one's own opinion. These two items are only slightly below the average of the five duty norms. Respondents attach significantly less importance to the two general participation items, but both still score above the midpoint of the scale. The norms of engaged citizenship receive less attention from the public, but the differences in importance between both sets of norms are modest.

These two sets of norms are not contradictory (since all items are positively correlated in simple bivariate relationships), and all are cited as important by the sample. However, these different norms reflect contrasting emphases in the role of a democratic citizen. Both clusters involve a norm of participation, albeit different aspects of political action. Both define citizenship as a mixture of responsibilities and rights, but different responsibilities and different rights. And both are linked to democratic theory, although neither completely matches the mix of norms posited in previous theoretical models.

Much of the current discourse on citizenship and civic education focuses on the presumed erosion of the norms of citizen duty: longitudinal studies and cross-sectional correlations indicate that citizenship norms are changing. Americans today are less respectful of authority, more distrustful of government and less likely to vote – and these developments may be linked to the erosion of duty-based citizenship (Bennett and Bennett, 1990, pp. 126–33; Nevitte, 1996). Duty-based citizenship is extolled as an example of the values of the 'greatest generation' by a range of political analysts (Brokaw, 1998; Putnam, 2000).

Generational patterns help illustrate how citizenship norms have been changing over time.⁶ There is a strong positive correlation between older Americans and duty-based citizenship norms ($r = 0.20$) – which implies that generational change is decreasing attachment to citizen duty. *But this is only half the story.* Generational patterns also indicate that the erosion of duty-based citizenship is counterbalanced by an increase in engaged citizenship, especially among the young and better educated. There is a negative correlation between age and engaged citizenship ($r = -0.05$). The magnitude of generational differences can be seen by

simply taking the difference between scores on the two dimensions of citizenship. Among 60–69-year-olds, there is a +0.56 difference toward greater importance for citizen duty; among 18–29-year-olds there is a –0.41 gap in the direction of engaged citizenship.⁷ This means that each time an older American leaves the electorate and is replaced by a new young citizen, the relative importance they give to these two citizenship norms differs by nearly a full standard deviation on these scales.

In summary, generational differences reflect the broad forces of social modernization that are transforming citizen values in the United States and other advanced industrial democracies (e.g. Dalton, 2006; Inglehart, 1990). A societal shift in citizenship norms should have distinct consequences for citizen behavior and attitudes. It is not that one set of norms is good, and the other is bad – both reflect positive political values (and some less positive traits).⁸ However, both sets of norms have different implications for the functioning of the political system (Bennett and Bennett, 1990; Dalton, 2007; Denters *et al.*, 2007). To understand contemporary American democracy, we need to examine the consequences of both sets of norms.

Citizenship Norms and Political Action

The norms of citizenship should shape the political behavior of Americans – norms indicate what the individual feels is expected of the good citizen. Citizenship norms may shape expectations of our role as participants in the political process, and our images of the role of government and specific policy priorities. Indeed, since citizenship identifies what is expected of the individual and what the individual expects of government, it should influence a range of political attitudes and behaviors.

This article focuses on one specific consequence of these norms: political participation. Scholars are debating participation trends in contemporary America, and citizenship norms should influence these patterns. One stream of research argues that political participation is decreasing among Americans (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002; Macedo *et al.*, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Although education levels, socio-economic resources, access to political information and the other resources of citizenship have increased substantially over the past several decades, researchers claim that there has been a decline in participation. Most prominent is Putnam's (2000) warning that civic engagement is decreasing to dangerous levels in America. Fewer Americans are engaged in elections, and other evidence points to a drop in campaign activities as another example of electoral participation (Macedo *et al.*, 2005; Putnam, 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Wattenberg, 2002; 2006). Moreover, some of the more pessimistic evaluations argue that Americans want to be less involved in politics. John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse (2002, pp. 1–2), for example, claim that Americans want to be politically disengaged:

The last thing people want is to be more involved in political decision making: they do not want to make political decisions themselves; they do not want to provide much input to those who are assigned to make these decisions; and they would rather not know all the details of the decision-making process.

In summary, these studies claim that civic life is diminishing in America.

However, other analysts maintain that the forms of political participation are changing, and that political activity persists, albeit in new forms. Inglehart, for example, described a much more optimistic image of contemporary citizen engagement:

One frequently hears references to growing apathy on the part of the public ... These allegations of apathy are misleading: mass publics *are* deserting the old-line oligarchic political organizations that mobilized them in the modernization era – but they are becoming more active in a wide range of elite-challenging forms of political action (Inglehart, 1997, p. 207, emphasis in original).

As people have become more educated, politically skilled and policy oriented and accept engaged citizenship, they seek different means of influencing policy. Elections provide infrequent and fairly blunt tools of political influence. If one is dissatisfied with the policies of the Bush (or Clinton) administration, waiting several years to vote in the next election as a means of political participation seems like political inaction. Instead, people seek more direct means of influencing policy makers, such as working with public interest groups, direct contact, contentious political action, political consumerism and similar methods (Norris, 2002; Stolle *et al.*, 2005; Wuthnow, 2002, p. 75; Zukin *et al.*, 2006). These participation forms also fit the self-expressive norms of engaged citizens, more so than participation in elections (although engaged citizens may also vote because of the importance of electoral politics). From this perspective, America is witnessing a change in the nature of citizenship and political participation leading to a renaissance of democratic participation – rather than a decline in participation.

The Impact of Citizenship Norms

Citizenship norms provide a framework to understand how and why the patterns of political participation may be changing. Duty-based norms of citizenship encourage individuals to participate as a civic duty, which may stimulate election turnout and participation in other institutionalized forms of action. For instance, Raymond Wolfinger and Stephen Rosenstone describe turnout in these terms: ‘the most important benefit of voting [is] ... a feeling that one has done one’s duty to society ... and to oneself’ (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980, pp. 7–8). André Blais (2000, p. 92) sees duty-based voting in even stronger terms: ‘To use a religious analogy, not voting can be construed as a venial sin: it is a wrong, one that weak human beings should be urged not to commit but may be forgiven for if they indulge in it’. These citizenship norms also parallel Almond and Verba’s (1963) description of the civic culture as limited and allegiant participation in the polity.

Engaged citizenship should also stimulate political action. However, the expressive, participatory emphasis of these norms suggests a shift in the modes of political participation – away from elections and party activity, seen as institutionalized expressions of citizen duty, and toward individualized and direct forms of action. Conceptually, engaged citizenship overlaps with the patterns of post-material or self-expressive values, and Inglehart maintains that post-materialists emphasize participatory norms, elite-challenging behavior and more direct forms of political action (Dalton, 2006; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Inglehart, 1990). The solidarity element of engaged citizenship may also encourage volunteerism and greater civil society activity.

Political participation thus represents an area where contemporary scholarship is divided in describing contemporary politics, and where norms of citizenship may provide a means of assessing this controversy. Duty-based norms of citizenship apparently should stimulate political engagement, especially turnout in elections. The decline of these norms may contribute to the erosion of electoral participation. In contrast, engaged citizenship may shift political action toward direct forms of participation, such as contacting, working with collective groups, boycotts or contentious actions. As a result, a shifting balance of these two patterns of citizenship may reshape participation in America.

One of the riches of the 2005 CID survey is the wide range of participation questions in the survey. The survey asked about participation in thirteen different political activities over the past twelve months, and whether respondents voted in the 2004 election.⁹ My goal is to examine the potential impact of citizenship norms on participation patterns. To isolate these effects, I developed a basic multivariate model. I combined the two dimensions of citizenship with several common demographic controls into a multivariate analysis to explain each of the participation items in the CID survey. I included age because of the debate over the disengagement of the young, education to tap the skills/resources that are central to political action and measures of potential minority mobilization (gender, African-American or Hispanic).

Table 3 presents these regression analyses. Because of the large number of items, I only present standardized regression coefficients, and the unstandardized coefficients display essentially the same patterns.¹⁰ Education is strongly related to virtually all types of political activity; only one education coefficient in the table is non-significant (legal protest). This is consistent with the large body of evidence on the impact of social status on participation (Verba *et al.*, 1995). In addition, age often has a significant relationship with participation, albeit in more varied terms.¹¹ Electoral participation – especially voting – is positively related to age, as are direct action methods such as contacting or donating money to political groups. However, protest and internet activism are negatively related to age, even controlling for the other variables in the model. Most gender and ethnic/racial minority coefficients are not statistically significant.

Table 3: Predicting Participation

Predictor	Electoral activity			Direct action				Protest			Internet activism			
	Vote	Work for candidate	Display campaign material	Contact political figure	Donate money	Work with group	Sign petition	Legal protest	Illegal protest	Boycott	Buy-cott	Visit website	Forward political e-mail	Internet political activity
Citizen duty	0.08*	0.00	0.07*	-0.01	0.01	-0.05	0.00	-0.13*	-0.17*	-0.05	-0.02	0.01	0.01	-0.04
Engaged citizenship	0.03	0.13*	0.18*	0.19*	0.17*	0.13*	0.20*	0.08*	0.08*	0.17*	0.15*	0.17*	0.11*	0.15*
Age	0.25*	0.11*	0.06	0.19*	0.12*	0.01	0.04	-0.10*	-0.01	0.01	-0.07	-0.06	-0.04	-0.05
Education	0.33*	0.13*	0.22*	0.20*	0.13*	0.14*	0.25*	0.02	0.13*	0.21*	0.24*	0.30*	0.30*	0.18*
Gender (M)	0.02	0.09*	0.03	0.07*	0.07*	0.03	0.03	0.00	0.02	0.05	-0.01	0.04	0.05	0.05
African-American	0.05	0.04	0.02	-0.05	-0.03	0.06	0.00	-0.01	0.02	-0.08*	-0.04	-0.04	-0.02	0.02
Hispanic	-0.11*	0.00	0.00	-0.02	-0.01	-0.06	0.00	0.02	-0.02	-0.05	-0.06	-0.03	-0.01	-0.05
Multiple R	0.45	0.36	0.31	0.34	0.26	0.24	0.34	0.21	0.20	0.31	0.33	0.38	0.33	0.27

Note: Table entries are standardized regression coefficients (β); each coefficient represents whether the predictor has a positive or negative effect on each political activity independent of the other predictors. Statistically significant effects (p < 0.05) are noted by an asterisk and a shaded cell.

Source: 2005 CID Survey.

My primary interest, however, is the impact of citizenship norms while controlling for these other factors. Citizen duty, which combines norms of voting and social order, is significantly related to electoral participation. This reinforces the impression from prior research that election turnout often reflects a socialized sense of civic duty. It may seem tautological that feelings of citizen duty encourage participation – voting or displaying campaign material – but the impact of these norms does not extend beyond electoral politics. Citizen duty is not related to various examples of direct citizen action, such as contacting political figures or working with a group, and has significant negative relationships with protest activities. In other words, those who primarily define citizenship in terms of citizen duty have a circumscribed definition of the active citizen: these norms encourage electoral participation but do not carry over to other forms of action, and actually discourage participation in protest.

In contrast, engaged citizenship taps participatory norms that are broader than electoral politics. The engaged citizen is more likely to participate in boycotts, buying products for political or ethical reasons, demonstrations and other forms of contentious action. These effects are even more striking for internet activism, which is unrelated to citizen duty but strongly related to norms of engaged citizenship. In other words, the norms of citizen duty lead to participation in electoral politics, but do not encourage a broader repertoire of political action. Other analyses from the 2004 General Social Survey display an even clearer pattern, presumably because the GSS citizenship battery is more evenly balanced across the four types of norms listed in Table 1 (Dalton, 2007, ch. 4). The GSS data show that citizen duty is strongly related to electoral participation, but negatively related to protest and internet activism. In contrast, in the GSS survey engaged citizenship is virtually unrelated to electoral participation, but stimulates protests and internet activism.

The contrasting correlates of participation in electoral politics versus contentious and new forms of political action highlight how changes in the distribution of citizenship norms can transform the patterns of participation. Focusing on either citizenship dimension in isolation provides only a partial answer of how political participation is changing. While the decline in duty-based citizenship may erode turnout in elections, it is also lessening the normative impediment to alternative forms of participation that are negatively associated with citizen duty. Concomitantly, the spread of engaged citizenship may stimulate participation, especially in new forms of activity outside the electoral arena. In addition, given the causal forces behind these participation patterns, this shift may be a continuing feature of democratic politics.

The Changing Patterns of Action

It may seem audacious to argue that changing citizenship norms are *expanding* political participation, because a large body of research maintains that there is a

long-term decline in virtually all forms of political activity (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002; Macedo *et al.*, 2005; Putnam, 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Wattenberg, 2006). Consequently, this section briefly revisits the evidence of participation trends in America.

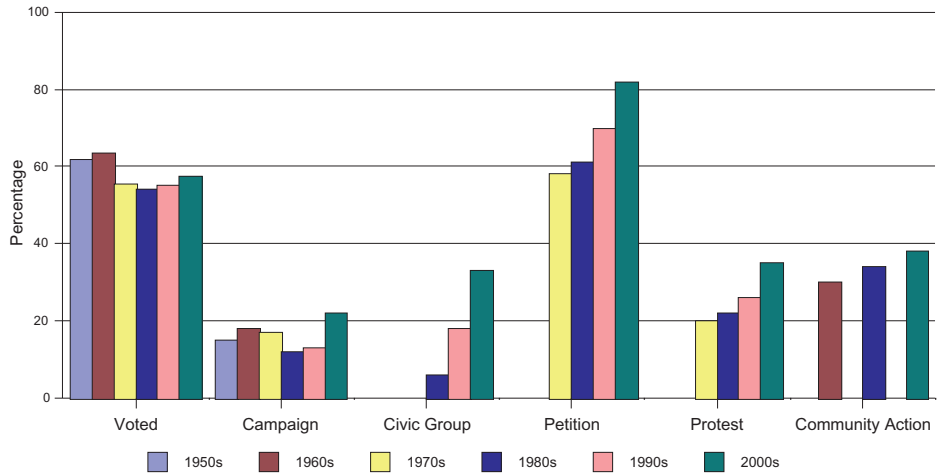
The empirical evidence on long-term trends in political participation is ambiguous. Surprisingly, comprehensive high-quality longitudinal data on the participation patterns of Americans are relatively rare. For instance, the American National Election Study has a rich battery of items on campaign activity that extends back to the 1950s, but the study does not regularly monitor non-electoral participation. The Political Action/World Values Surveys have asked about protest activities over time (Barnes *et al.*, 1979; Inglehart, 1990), but the early Political Action questions on other forms of participation have not been routinely replicated. Even when recent surveys include a large battery of participation items, such as the CID, the wording of questions normally differs in ways that make time comparisons problematic.¹²

Consequently, much of the evidence of declining participation comes from trends based on the Roper and DDB Needham Life Style surveys (e.g. Macedo *et al.*, 2005; Putnam, 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). However, these are lower-quality commercial polls with changing methodology over time.¹³ Putnam discusses some of the methodological issues concerning two sources in extensive detail (Putnam, 2000, pp. 420–4). However, if high-quality academic trends vary from the trends in these marketing samples, the choice of the most reliable database seems evident.

Since there is no single definitive high-quality source for trend data on American participation patterns since the 1960s, I assembled the evidence from the major academic surveys to provide the best accounting possible (Dalton, 2007). Figure 2 presents a brief summary of these findings. The first set of columns tracks the declining turnout in presidential elections by decade since the 1960s, based on turnout as a percentage of the voting eligible population. As Michael McDonald and Samuel Popkin (2001) have shown, previous statistics that did not correct turnout for non-eligible citizens tended to overestimate the decline in turnout.¹⁴ These adjusted statistics show that overall voting rates have decreased from the 1960s to the present, but the rate of decrease is less than estimates that included the non-eligibles. In addition, even discounting the marked rise in turnout in the 2004 election, rates of voting have been relatively flat since 1972.

The next columns describe campaign participation as the percentage of the public that has engaged in two or more activities based on the American National Election Studies (ANES).¹⁵ Campaign activism spiked upward in the 2004 election because of the polarization of the campaign and the debate over the Iraq War. In contrast, Putnam (2000) cites the Roper data series and claims a marked decrease in electoral activity between 1973 and 1994.¹⁶ However, even without the 2004 election, the ANES statistics show a relatively flat pattern of campaign

Figure 2: Trends in American Political Participation



Sources: Voting: average of presidential turnout (VEP) from http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm; campaign activity: participated in two or more campaign activities, ANES time series; civic group: member of at least one public interest group, WVS (1980, 1990, 1999); petition: signed a petition, Political Action Survey, WVS (1980, 1990, 1999); protest: participated in one of four challenging acts, WVS (1980, 1990, 1999); community action: worked with group on local problem, Verba/Nie 1967, 1987; Social Community Survey 2000.

activity over time – hardly evidence of a mass disengagement from politics. There are no more definitive data on electoral participation than the ANES, and these data run counter to the impressions gained from lower-quality commercial polls.

When one turns to other forms of political action, the trends are distinctly more positive. The World Value Survey measures membership in four ‘civic groups’ that represent new forms of political engagement (environmental groups, women’s groups, peace groups and a civic association). In 1981 only 6 per cent of Americans reported that they were a member of one of these four groups; by 1999 this had increased to 33 per cent. The Verba *et al.* (1995, p. 72) participation studies in 1967 and 1987 asked about participation in groups addressing a community issue – the essence of Tocquevillian democracy. The 2000 Social Capital study replicated this question. Community participation has also increased, from 30 per cent in 1967 to 38 per cent in 2000.

Similarly, signing petitions and participating in more challenging protest activities display a marked increase from 1975 to the present based on the Political Action/World Values Survey. Again, this contrasts markedly with the Roper trends, which indicate a 10 per cent decline in signing petitions over essentially this same time period (Putnam, 2000). In addition, the question on whether one protested in the last year that is available from the Verba *et al.* (1995, p. 72) 1987 survey and the 2000 Social Capital study describe a steady level of protest activity.

If we could extend the protest time series back to the quieter times of the 1950s and early 1960s, the growth of protest activity would undoubtedly be dramatic. Protest has become so common that it is now the extension of conventional political action by other means.

The questions on political contacting are asked in more varied formats in different surveys, so assembling a definitive series is more difficult. However, there is evidence that contacting is increasing. In 1967, Sidney Verba and Norman Nie reported that about a quarter of the public had ever contacted a local or national politician on a political matter. The 2004 GSS found that 43 per cent of Americans said they had ever contacted a politician to express their views. In addition, the CID survey found that 20 per cent had contacted a politician or local government official in the last twelve months.¹⁷

Because it did not yet exist, the internet was not included in the classic studies of American participation in the 1960s and 1970s. The 2005 CID survey found that 17 per cent of Americans had visited a political website in the past year, 13 per cent had forwarded a political e-mail and 7 per cent had participated in other political activities over the internet. Those who had engaged in any of these activities exceeded the percentage that had donated money to any political group, worked for a party or candidate or displayed campaign materials over the same time period.

Similarly, the use of political consumerism is apparently increasing among contemporary publics (Stolle *et al.*, 2005). The CID survey found that 18 per cent of Americans say they boycotted a product for political reasons in the past year, and 22 per cent say they deliberately bought a certain product for political, ethical or environmental reasons. Indeed, attention to environmental practices, labor standards and human rights issues are becoming steadily more apparent in the marketing of products from a globalized economic system. The numbers are still modest, and the uses are still growing, but the internet and political consumerism are both adding to the tools of political activism, especially among engaged citizens.

In summary, the dire claims about the political disengagement of the American public are not supported by the evidence from these major academic studies of political participation. And even the decline in election turnout is more modest than past claims, once the turnout calculations are adjusted for the increasing percentage of non-eligibles. In short, the sky is not falling. Rather than an absolute decline in political action, the changing norms of citizenship are shifting the ways Americans participate in politics – decreasing electoral participation but increasing other forms of action. Compared to the halcyon days of the 1950s to 1960s, the American public today is more politically engaged in more different forms of political action.¹⁸ Moreover, participation has increased most noticeably in the forms of action that are most strongly linked to norms of engaged citizenship.

Citizenship and Democratic Political Participation

Many political observers are concerned about the decreasing political involvement of Americans, and what this implies for American democracy (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002; Macedo *et al.*, 2005; Putnam, 2000; Wattenberg, 2002; 2006). Indeed, the most recent report of the National Council on Citizenship (2006, p. 4) repeats this mantra: 'the world's longest and most successful experiment in democracy is at risk of losing the norms, networks and institutions of civic life that have made us the most emulated and respected nation in history'.

Turnout in elections has decreased in the United States, and in most other Western democracies. This downward trend in turnout has captured the attention of political analysts. Elections are important because they select political elites and are the source of democratic legitimacy, and they are a simple and significant means of engaging the mass public in the democratic process. The erosion of duty-based norms, as seen in generational and other social patterns of citizenship, apparently contributes to declining voting turnout. Fewer Americans today feel that they should vote as an expression of civic duty.

However, this is only one part of the total story of changing citizenship norms and the patterns of political participation. As social modernization has reshaped the norms of citizenship and the political skills and resources of the public, this alters the calculus of participation. Duty-based citizenship has a restrictive definition of participation – it dissuades people from participating in direct, challenging activities. Therefore, the weakening of duty-based norms can broaden the repertoire of political action by lessening the negativity associated with non-electoral participation.

Simultaneously, the spread of engaged citizenship should stimulate individuals to participate in activities that give them more direct say and influence. Many engaged citizens will still vote because of the importance of elections to the democratic process. However, their participation repertoire also includes more direct and individualized forms of action. The cognitively mobilized, engaged citizen favors direct action over campaign work, and volunteering is preferred to party activity.

Consequently, while election turnout has declined, the repertoire of political action has actually expanded, and people are now engaged in other ways (Dalton, 2007; Norris, 2002; Zukin *et al.*, 2006). Participation in election campaigns is still common. In addition, more people today make the effort to contact directly their elected representative or other government officials. More people are working with informal groups in their community to address local problems. A variety of contentious activities is now part of the citizen's repertoire of political action. When one adds internet activism and political consumerism, the forms of action are even more diverse. Ironically, Putnam's (2000) Social Capital survey replicated four questions from the Verba/Nie participation series: general political interest,

attending a rally, working with a community group and protest. Despite the *Bowling Alone* thesis of decreasing political engagement, none of these four questions displays a statistically significant decrease from the Verba/Nie participation 1967/87 baselines. Rather than disengagement, the repertoire of political action is broadening.

Therefore, instead of just lamenting the decline of duty-based citizenship, we should also consider the positive implications of new patterns of political participation. This change in political activity affects the nature and quality of citizen influence. Verba and Nie (1972, ch. 3), for example, describe voting as an activity of high pressure because government officials are being chosen, but there is limited specific policy information or influence because elections involve a diverse range of issues. Therefore, the infrequent opportunity to cast a vote for a pre-packaged party is a limited tool of political influence. This influence may increase when elections extend to a wide range of political offices and include referenda, as in the United States.¹⁹ Still, it is difficult to treat elections as mandates on specific policies because they assess relative support for broad programs and not specific policies. Even a sophisticated policy-oriented electorate cannot be assured that important policy options are represented in an election or that the government will follow these policies in the period between elections. Indeed, the importance of citizen duty as a predictor of voting turnout and party work illustrates how these citizenship norms motivate turnout.

In contrast, non-electoral methods of political action expand the potential influence of the citizenry. For instance, citizens can focus on issues of greatest concern. The issue might be as broad as nuclear disarmament or as narrow as the policies of the local school district – citizens, not elites, decide. In addition, when participation expands beyond elections it allows citizens to select how and when they participate, since they do not have to wait until the next election to be active. People might petition their local city council, or if that does not work, they can turn to community groups to find supporters. If it will be effective, they might attempt to protest or otherwise draw public attention. Non-electoral participation gives citizens more control over the focus and locus of political action, which should presumably increase their influence in the political process.

Political institutions are also adapting to accept and encourage these new forms of citizen access (Cain *et al.*, 2003). For example, Environmental Impact Reviews (EIRs) and other consultative hearings are becoming a regular part of American policy making; this requires that governments provide new means for citizen input, and people use these new channels of influence. Local, state and national governments have expanded open-government provisions, so public scrutiny and consultation are more possible. In states with referendum procedures, their use has grown over the past several decades (Bowler and Glazer, 2008). Local governments are increasingly experimenting with, and adopting, deliberative forms of public consultation (Rosenberg, 2008). Even the legal system has been reformed to allow public interest lawsuits and expand the adjudication of rights claims.

Environmental groups, consumer groups and other public interest lobbies have found this an effective new means of influencing policy formation and administration. In short, these other modes of action expand the influence of citizen participation, and thus can improve the quantity and quality of political participation.

Certainly we should not dismiss the decrease in voting turnout as unimportant. Elections select political elites and are the source of democratic legitimacy, and they are a simple means of engaging the mass public in the democratic process. And if young Americans do not vote, this lessens their representation in the political process (and may change election outcomes). This realization has stimulated efforts to re-engage young people in elections. These are worthwhile pursuits because of the importance of elections. However, if one wants to increase electoral participation among the young, one should begin by recognizing their different kinds of citizenship norms. Reforms may be more effective if they are embedded in a framework of engaged citizenship, rather than appeals to citizenship as a duty (compare the different perspectives and advice of Eisner, 2004; Wattenberg, 2006).

It would be equally worthwhile to recognize that young Americans want to connect to their government in new ways, and to explore reforms to facilitate these new participation channels. For instance, research suggests that increased opportunities for youth volunteering will carry over to political activity in adulthood (Campbell, 2006). Partisan politics can be reshaped to fit better the citizenship norms of the young (Eisner, 2004). The goal of participation reforms should not only be to encourage young people to act like their grandparents (and vote), but also to develop new forms of access in tune with these changing norms of citizenship.

In summary, the trends in political activity represent changes in the style of political action, and not just changes in the level of participation. The new style of citizenship seeks to place more control over political activity in the hands of the citizenry. These changes in participation make greater demands on the participants. At the same time, these activities can increase public pressure on political elites. Citizen participation is becoming more closely linked to citizen influence. Rather than democracy being at risk, this represents an opportunity to expand and enrich democratic participation.

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Notes

An earlier version of this article was presented at the Conference on Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy (CID) Survey Project at the Center for Democracy and Civil Society, Georgetown University, December 2005.

- 1 A pamphlet prepared by the Immigration and Naturalization Service for prospective citizens describes the Constitution's importance as first 'everyone is protected by the law' and then 'everyone must obey the law' (Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1987, p. 3). Then comes a discussion of the rights provided in the Constitution's Bill of Rights, which is paired with a discussion of the duties and responsibilities of citizenship: voting, serving in the army and paying taxes (Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1987, pp. 12–3). The centrality of obedience is quite clear in what the United States tells its new citizens.
- 2 The 1984 General Social Survey and the 1987 Swedish Citizenship Survey included some initial questions on the duties of citizenship (Bennett and Bennett, 1990; Petersson *et al.*, 1989, ch. 8). The 1998 Swedish Democracy Audit systematically studied these norms (Petersson *et al.*, 1998). The European 'Citizens, Involvement, Democracy' (CID) project replicated several of these items across a set of European nations in the late 1990s (Denters *et al.*, 2007). The 2004 International Social Survey Program also has a module on citizenship, and this includes the General Social Survey in the US.
- 3 In-person interviews were conducted with 1,001 respondents between 16 May and 19 July 2005. Interviewing was conducted by International Communications Research (ICR) using a clustered, area-probability sample of households and random selection of respondents. For additional information on the survey visit the website: <http://www.uscidsurvey.org/>. The ESS asked only six citizenship items, while the CID survey includes a broader number of items that span more evenly the potential elements of citizenship. The 2004 ISSP survey includes an overlapping set of ten items.
- 4 Factor analysis is an iterative statistical method, balancing theory and empirical patterns rather than yielding a single empirical result. An un-rotated analysis has all items loading positively on the first dimension, which normally occurs when a battery of items is rated on a single scale such as importance. The eigenvalues in the CID survey indicated two dimensions to these items. To distinguish between different aspects of citizenship, I used a varimax rotated factor analysis. An oblique rotation finds a 0.43 correlation between these two dimensions (direct oblimin rotation). The 1987 Swedish Citizenship Survey (Petersson *et al.*, 1989, ch. 8) included eight citizenship items and also identified two dimensions. The first was obeying the law, which overlaps with my duty dimension, and the second was 'creating the rules', which overlaps with my engagement dimension, except that voting loaded on this second dimension in the Swedish survey. The European CID study also included eight items and they produced three dimensions: law-abidingness, public-spiritedness and socio-political awareness (Denters *et al.*, 2007). The latter two dimensions overlap with what I call engaged citizenship.
- 5 The GSS produces a more 'balanced' measure of both dimensions because it has a more even set of items across the four categories. The CID survey, for instance, had only one autonomy and one solidarity question, but four social order questions. In other work (Dalton, 2007) I identify two comparable dimensions from the 2004 International Social Survey in both the United States and other advanced industrial democracies.
- 6 Because items have different weights on two dimensions of citizenship, I use the factor analyses from Table 2 to create factor scores for each dimension. Factor scores provide a standardized distribution for each dimension that compares responses relative to the total sample (mean = 0.0). Figure 1 implies that duty-based norms are more common among Americans, but the level of responses depends on the choice of items in the survey. The GSS, for instance, has a smaller gap between the importance rankings on both dimensions because it has a more balanced set of items (see Note 5). In either case, my primary interest is the correlates of both citizenship dimensions and how levels change across time or groups.
- 7 That is, this age group has a value of +0.30 on the citizen duty factor score, and -0.26 on the engaged citizenship score; in contrast, the youngest age group has a value of -0.24 on the citizen duty factor and +0.17 on the engaged citizen factor. Thus, demographic change between these two age groups represents a significant shift in the distribution of both norms.
- 8 However, it is quite apparent that analysts such as Damon (2001), Putnam (2000) and Wattenberg (2006) lament the decline of citizen duty among younger Americans, while not giving equal attention to the lower levels of engaged citizenship among seniors. For example, a recent blue-ribbon study of civic life in the US projects a very negative image of American youth and the implications of generational change: 'Each year, the grim reaper steals away one of the most civic slices of America – the last members of the "Greatest Generation"'. This is a cold generational calculus that we cannot reverse until younger Americans become as engaged as their grandparents' (National Conference on Citizenship, 2006, p. 8). I test this hypothesis in the analyses below.
- 9 The question asked: 'During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? First, ...'. For the full list of political activities and the question wording, visit the project website: <http://www.uscidsurvey.org/>.
- 10 Because I use factor scores to measure citizenship norms, the standardized and unstandardized coefficients display similar patterns for these two variables. For simplicity, I present OLS regression results instead of logit analyses that would be more appropriate for a bivariate dependent variable. To validate my broad findings, I also created indices of different modes of action to verify these OLS results with a more continuous index. The unstandardized coefficients and full regression results for Table 3 are available from the author.
- 11 Age relationships in a cross-section survey are difficult to interpret. I start with the general expectation that political interest and involvement increase through the life cycle. From the life-cycle perspective, if younger Americans vote less than older Americans today, their turnout will generally increase as they age. Thus, when there are small or even

- negative age relationships, this is either evidence of contrary life-cycle effect (perhaps protest becomes less common as one ages) or that generational change is moderating life-cycle patterns. However, to disentangle these forces is beyond the analyses I can present here.
- 12 For example, surveys often change the time reference of the question, asking whether individuals have done an activity over the past year, two years or longer. The 1967 Verba/Nie survey, for example, did not have a clear time reference, but it was replicated in 1987. Verba *et al.* (1995) was largely based on a new 1989 survey with differently worded questions that typically asked about activity over the previous twelve months. Neither the 1967/1987 nor 1989 Verba/Nie surveys have been systematically replicated in recent years. The Political Action surveys (Barnes *et al.*, 1979) used an ordinal scale of activity for conventional activity that has not been repeated in more recent cross-national surveys (i.e. its response options were: (1) often; (2) sometimes; (3) seldom; and (4) never). Other questionnaires vary the focus of activity or the types of activity combined in a single question.
 - 13 There are major methodological differences between the academic surveys I present here and the commercial polls. The Verba *et al.* surveys and the 2004 GSS were conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. The American National Election Studies are conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. Both of these academic surveys utilize random area probability sampling selection and in-person interviews and make extensive efforts to generate high response rates and representative samples. The Roper surveys used a mix of area probability sampling and quota or random-walk selection of respondents at the last stage, so these are not fully random samples. The sampling methods also changed during the Roper time-series collection. In addition, the Roper poll's short fieldwork period and commercial orientation would imply less accuracy of these data. And because of the method of respondent selection, one cannot estimate an accurate response rate. The DDB surveys used by Putnam and the National Conference on Citizenship are mail surveys. The initial lists of names are not generated on a systematic random sampling basis. Individuals are selected on a stratified quota basis from the mailing lists, and invited by mail to participate in a mail panel. The survey is mailed only to those who agree, and is returned by mail. Putnam reports the response rate only among those who agree to join the mail panel; an accurate estimation of the response rates is presumably well below the CID, GSS and ANES. In addition, the DDB surveys included only households with a married couple from 1974 until 1985. See the more extensive discussion in Putnam (2000, pp. 420–4).
 - 14 For additional information on these alternative measures of turnout, and turnout rates for more recent elections, see McDonald's website: http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm
 - 15 I counted the frequency of five campaign activities: working for a party or candidate, going to a meeting, giving money, displaying a button or bumper sticker or trying to convince another how to vote.
 - 16 In his presentation, Putnam calculates change as the ratio of participation at two time points (Putnam, 2000, Table 1, p. 45). Thus, when the number who worked for a party drops from 6 per cent to about 4 per cent, Putnam would report a 33 per cent decline, which seems to exaggerate changes based on small absolute changes. Instead, I report the simple change in the percentage active; the difference between 6 and 4 is 2, not 33.
 - 17 Putnam reports that there has been a 23 per cent decline in writing to a member of Congress and a 14 per cent declining in writing to a newspaper by calculating these as ratios (Putnam, 2000, p. 45). However, in terms of actual activity levels, the Roper data show virtually no substantial change in contacting levels which hover at 5 per cent or less.
 - 18 Using the modes of participation discussed above, the data conservatively suggest that total political participation has increased by at least a third since the 1967 Verba and Nie survey. Estimates based on different surveys and sometimes different questions are only suggestive, but it is important to make such estimates. I excluded petitions and looked for median values to have a conservative estimate of change. For each form of activity discussed in this section, I used the best academic survey estimates (and in a few cases my own projections) to compare participation rates in the 1960s and 2000s. I used the following percentages for the 1960s and 2000s: voting, 63.5, 57.5; campaign activity, 18, 22; contacting, 25, 35; community activity, 30, 38; protest activity, (15), 35; political consumerism, (5), 20; and internet activism, 0, 10. Summing for both periods implies that total activity increased by approximately one-third.
 - 19 Indeed, there is evidence that the contemporary public is voting more often on more ballot items than electorates a generation ago (Cain *et al.*, 2003, ch. 2). And the increased frequency of voting opportunities appears to decrease participation in any single election.

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