Chapter  3

The Professionalization of Representation: Biasing Participation

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“It is time to abandon the notion of political participation as part of human nature. It is not; it is an unnatural act … Contrary to the suggestions of pundits and philosophers, there is nothing wrong with those who participate; rather there is something unusual about those who do. All too often they are the people 'nobody sent'.” (Fiorina, 1999: 415-416)

The question of bias is one of the most enduring and important in interest group research. It has important normative implications for the characterization of European/EU democracy, political legitimacy and European politics generally. The main debates surrounding bias in the group system centre on the argument that some interests find it easier to mobilize than other (e.g. the privileged position of business). And the general argument that in many areas the group system delivers participation that is
skewed towards citizens with higher status, income and educational attainment.

Contemporaneously, groups are seen as contributing to democracy on two main counts (and several other subsidiary but important ways). First, they are perceived as (effective) representative vehicles delivering public policy outcomes that match citizens’ preferences. Groups also act as political linkage conduits to elites – transmitting citizens’ values, attitudes and expectations; provide authoritative information; place issues on, or push them up, the political agenda; monitor policy areas and implementation processes etc. Second, the internal social capital experiences within groups are seen as democratically crucial – the more vibrant, dense and diverse the organizational universe, the greater the democratic benefit. Groups are perceived as generators of social capital that lubricates the ‘proper’ functioning of democracies enhancing social and political integration – particularly important in the current climate of an alleged ‘crisis of participation’ (e.g. increasing political distrust and low and/or falling electoral turnout). In general, groups are seen as generating the pro-democratic values that bolster democracy and, in the specific EU context, they have the potential to enhance the quality of the political linkage between citizens and decision-makers.

Supply-Side Recruitment

“… a moment’s reflection shows that the people initiate little of what we normally call participation … Acts of participation are stimulated by elites – if not by the government, then by parties, interest groups, agitators, and organizers” (Nagel 1987: 3).

The modern era is characterized by growing professionalization – many groups have mutated into protest business-type organizations (Jordan and
Maloney 1997, 2007): *i.e.* – professionalized, bureaucratic, interest groups staffed by lobbyists, scientists, and public relations and supported by sophisticated fund-raising departments and management structures. Many of these groups have sought to influence policy outcomes largely without the active assistance of members – beyond mobilizing their cheque-books. Professionalization has weakened the links between interest groups and grassroots memberships and has a direct impact on the role of the ‘members’ – it may be somewhat different from that envisioned in the social capital perspective – and participatory bias. Skocpol (1999) noted the ‘shift from membership to management in American civic life’. This shift is not restricted to the US.

Groups have increasingly professionalized their operational activities\(^1\) in the areas of recruitment and maintenance and these practices have further biased participation: skewed recruitment has delivered skewed participation. The fundamental assumption is that it matters who participates! Politicians and policy-makers will respond to the best organized interests that advance the most coherent, compelling and convincing case. Or those who mobilize the most resources or shout the loudest! If some voices are unraised or unheard, the result is likely to be political inequality. The bias in the recruitment of supporters is clearly demonstrated in the environmental sector in the UK. In previous research we found that two-thirds of the environmentally concerned citizens in the UK (\textit{i.e.} individuals holding strong pro-environmental beliefs) were not members of any environmental organization (Jordan and Maloney, 1997, 2007).\(^2\)

\(^{1}\) For example, Shaiko (1999: 184) points out that (in the US), ‘an organization could request a list of 10,000 names with the following characteristics: white, female, married with grown children out of the home, Gold Card holder, home owner, registered Democrat, household income over $100,000, purchases merchandise through catalog mail-ordering, contributes money to political campaigns, wears glasses, reads\textit{ Newsweek}, and drives a foreign car’. (More recently, groups have outsourced membership activities to intermediary organizations, this has increased the distance between the member and the group [Fisher, 2006]. Within the past decade face-to-face direct dialogue contact has become widespread throughout Europe and groups have outsourced recruitment to specialists.)
In seeking to account for the differences between participators and nonparticipators we found that the supply of participation by groups was an important factor. For example, we discovered substantial differences in the areas of income, educational attainment and occupation. Table 1 shows that members are comparatively affluent: 53% of members have household incomes over £30,000 per year – the comparable figures for the pure nonmembers and environmental nonmembers are 16% and 29% respectively. Members are also more highly educated and are concentrated in managerial/professional occupations. The socio-demographic differences between members and nonmembers are generally consistent with Verba et al.’s (1995: 468) notion of representational distortion in their work on civic voluntarism. However, the demographic differences between the two sets is highly noteworthy because the environmental nonmembers are already members of other (non-environmental) organizations. Why do they not join environmental groups?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL Nonmembers (n=264)</th>
<th>MEMBERS (n=341) **</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under £20k</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£20–£30k</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>£30–£40k</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£40–£50k</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>+£50k</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION*</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL Nonmembers (n=119)</th>
<th>MEMBERS** (n=211)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-University</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Educational qualifications were collapsed into two groups. The University educated group included: Teaching Qualifications; University Diploma; and University or CNAA First Degree.
Apart from resources, a second explanation for their nonparticipation could be attitudinal or behavioural: *i.e.* they are not committed environmentalists. However, in general both groups shared comparable levels of environmental concern and claimed to be engaged in activities such as recycling, buying organic food and using public transport. If these are not differentiating dimensions then what explains the significant demographic differences?

The differences between environmental nonmembers and members fit the pattern of *supply-side* recruitment (Bosso, 2003; Johnson, 1997; Jordan and Maloney, 1997, 2006, 2007) – or what Verba *et al.* (2000) identified as *rational prospecting.* Many organizations work efficiently (and effectively) at locating and recruiting an attainable membership. Recruitment will be frustrated if the predisposed member cannot afford the subscription. *Thus, groups deliberately market themselves among those best able to afford support.* Members are more affluent and better educated and these qualities are further replicated as a result of groups’ recruitment activities. Taking both groups of nonmembers together only 12% of those with household incomes below £20,000 said that they had been asked to join an environmental organization (but refused). The figure for those earning in excess of £20,000 was almost double: 23%. A self-reinforcing process of *segmented mobilization* witnesses groups recruiting on the basis of their existing membership profiles. The leading position of the Royal

<table>
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<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL Nonmembers (n=229)</th>
<th>MEMBERS**(n=305)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional/Managerial</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/Sales</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled manual worker</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-skilled or unskilled manual worker</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Jordan and Maloney (2006: 138)*

\[*p* \(0.05\); **p* \(0.01\)
Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in the UK and its ten-fold increase in membership in the last 30 years (from 98,000 in 1971 to over 1 million in 2004) reflects the success of efficient recruitment more than a spontaneous increase in the public affection for birds. A widespread collective interest does not itself necessarily generate a group. Bosso (1995: 111) similarly notes that the growth in mass membership environmentalism in the US, ‘did not just happen simply because environmental issues became more important. It also was cultivated as part of a conscious effort by many environmental leaders to build member bases’. These professionalized public interest groups are particularly important in the argument about participation because it is such bodies that produce the large numbers of ‘members’ that appear so impressive in discussions about the decline of party and the creation of alternative modes of participation. In summary, a self-reinforcing process of segmented mobilization witnesses groups recruiting on the basis of their existing membership profiles: skewed recruitment delivers skewed participation.

That the supply-side is crucial has significant democratic implications. Large numbers of participation studies have highlighted that those who stand to gain most from participation tend to be those who are least involved. Our work suggests that non-involvement also results from a lack of asking.¹

¹ The importance of professionalized recruitment strategies received further confirmation when the routes into membership of ‘other’ groups by environmental nonmembers, and into environmental group for members are compared. Two profoundly different lists…something missing?? Members of organizations other than environmental groups self-starting (37%) and social networks of friends, relatives and colleagues (34%) were the two most common paths. For environmental group members the comparable figures were 31% and 12%. Supply-side features emerged as important for members: 39% responded to at least one group invitation (postal appeal, press advertisement or a magazine insert). The corresponding figure for environmental nonmembers’ paths into ‘other’ groups was 18%. In short, environmental nonmembers appear less open to supply-side recruiting; for them, the social network ‘pull’ was more decisive in their joining decision.
Participation, Patronage and Policy-Making

“It may be cynical to say so, but what use are ‘members’ when lawyers, scientists, and policy experts are far more valuable in day-to-day policy debates … The emergence of “virtual membership” via the Internet only reinforces the perspective that members as such are little more than organizational wallpaper, a collective backdrop for professional advocacy”. Bosso (2003: 410)

Skocpol (1995) reported that nearly 50 percent of some 3,000 social welfare and public affairs groups established between the early 1960s and the 1980s, had no members. In a recent UK population survey, Pattie et al. (2004: 77-8, 98-9) found that donating money to groups was the most popular participatory activity (62 percent). While Verba et al.’s (1995: 67, 518) US survey noted that 69 percent of those who had taken part in political campaigns were wholly checkbook participators. As Wolin (quoted in Shaiko: 1999: 106) observed, ‘The new politics has special conceptions of membership, participation, and civic virtue: a member is anyone who is on a computerized mailing list, participation consists of signing a pledge to contribute money; civic virtue is actually writing the check’. These individuals should be referred to as supporters and formally distinguished from members. As Crenson and Ginsberg (2002: 2-3, 182-3) highlight, financial contributions

“… to political organizations is the only activity to register an unambiguous gain since the 1950s … As a result, environmental groups have few members, civil rights groups field more attorneys then protestors, and national political parties engage in activation of the few rather than mobilization of the many”.

Being a supporter – as opposed to a member-based organization circumvents the problems of internal democracy and policy interference. Thus checkbook participation is widely accepted by many citizens. Groups see it as the most efficient way to mobilize and – more crucially from a civil society perspective – many citizens see such limited involvement as attractive. On the demand-
side, most members/supporters are content to embrace a politically marginal role and contract-out their participation to groups and many do not see membership of groups as a means of being ‘active in politics’. Indeed, quite the reverse. Many citizens perceive passive involvement as a ‘benefit’ and would consider leaving organizations that sought to impose the ‘cost’ of active involvement in group activities. ⁴ A staff member from the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) said that the organization positively encourages active involvement. However, it has been partly forced into protest business-type behaviour by the reluctance of the many members to move beyond passivity:

“We think we’d lose them if we did that (press for more active membership) because they’re people who want to give money and they don’t want to do anymore than that . . . It’s much easier to recruit people who just want to pay money than recruit individuals into an organizations where they potentially see it as a time-related activity . . . So the whole task has to be geared around saying ‘oh don’t worry, we’re not expecting you to come to meetings and things, we just want your support’.”

(Quoted in Jordan and Maloney 2007: 158–159)

In his study of NGOs in the development policy area, Warleigh (2001: 623) found that these bodies were staff-dominated and made ‘… little or no effort to educate their supporters about the need for engagement with EU decision-makers … Moreover – and perhaps more worryingly – I found no evidence that supporters are unhappy with this passive role, displaying at best little interest in the EU as a focus of campaigning or locus of political authority’. ⁵

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⁴ Of course for some active involvement is a benefit of membership.

⁵ Jordan and Maloney (2007: 158–159) also cite similar evidence of staff dominance and the attractiveness of passivity for members of campaign groups in the UK. A representative of the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) argued that the council positively encourages active involvement, but many members view this as an additional cost (that may lead to exit). The CPRE representative said the organization treads very carefully in trying to activate supporters: ‘We think we’d lose them if we did that (press for more active membership) because they’re people who want to give money and they don’t want to do anymore than that ... My remit has been to develop a supporter base as opposed to a member base. It’s much easier to recruit people who just want to pay money than recruit individuals
Later he notes that several group leaders conceded that a lack of membership ‘… participation was a problem for their credibility’ (Warleigh, 2001: 634). Sudbery (2003: 89) quoted a Senior Policy Officer from the European Platform of Social NGOs as stating that, ‘we do not have direct contact with supporters, but rely on member organisations to bring the issues to our attention’. She (2003: 90) also found that with limited resources, groups preferred ‘effective results’ over raising awareness. A senior representative of the European Environment Bureau (EEB) said that ‘While ideally it would be good to get people involved … my role is not to encourage the most participatory governance, but to ensure the best results for the environment’. (Sudbery, 2003: 91-92).

In terms of the democratic expectations, one aspect of this professionalized recruitment is that it allows a low cost form of involvement. Here ‘cost’ refers both to cash and time. In other words, the rather ‘light’ participation is not some sort of poor substitute for ‘real’ involvement, but it is what citizens want. Democratic theorists judge participation by the degree of personal involvement. However, much group participation seems to be chosen because it is undemanding in terms of personal effort.

Finally, turning to the issue of patronage. In the US, Cigler and Nownes (1995: 82-4) found that 50 percent of the public interest groups they surveyed received 50 percent of their funds from patronage. The figure for membership fees was 36 percent. Kriesi (2006) reported that in six medium-sized European cities on average only 38 per cent of voluntary associations’ income came from membership dues and 10 per cent from donations. Some 12 per cent came from government sources and a further 8 per cent from

into an organizations where they potentially see it as a time-related activity which they don’t have time to do basically … So the whole task (of recruiting people) has to be geared around saying ‘oh don’t worry, we’re not expecting you to come to meetings and things, we just want your support’.
sales of services. Groups try to ‘solve’ the membership problem by increasing income streams. Organizations that are heavily reliant on patronage may not require a grassroots membership (see above). The EU has provided significant levels of funding to many civil society organizations. At least the Commission could credibly argue that laudable rhetoric has also been matched by significant financial commitment. As Greenwood (2007: 343) notes ‘… the Commission’s role in stimulating the emergence of citizen interest groups, and in funding and nurturing them … really catches the eye’. It spends approximately 1 percent (1bn) on funding groups and almost the entire (300) citizen interest group universe (excluding Greenpeace) mobilized at the EU level receives some EU funding. Some groups are close to being almost entirely solvent on the basis of EU money (e.g. 80-90 percent of the funding of the European Network Against Racism and the European Social Platform comes from EU institutions and Social Platform organizations receive 60-90 percent of their funding from EU sources) (Greenwood 2007: 343-344). Without being mean spirited, this funding is not all aimed at extending participatory democracy and ‘bring citizens in’ and in some respects such patronage can be seen as counterproductive. First, some funding is designed to engender lobbying that will strengthen the bargaining positions of DGs. Greenwood (2007) cites Bauer’s (2002) example of the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (DG EMP) and the European Anti-Poverty Network relationship as a ‘lobby sponsorship’. Bauer (2002) presented this as a case of the Commission ‘… creating its own constituencies with the clear intention of raising support for particular policy solutions and, thus, of influencing deliberations and indirectly setting political priorities’ (Bauer, 2002: 389; cited in Greenwood, 2007: 344). Secondly, there is also a negative externality to patronage – it can obviate the need for members. If

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There is also the ‘danger’ that patronage may affect the tactics and strategies and policy positions of groups. Groups heavily reliant on patronage may not want to engage in activities

\[\text{endfootnote}\]
institutional sources are prepared to fund organizations to operational levels of 80-90 percent then members become a luxury. Crenson and Ginsberg (2002: 147) argue that in the US the new politics of policy-making advantages expertise and technical knowledge over the mobilization of large numbers of citizens. As they conclude, this new politics is open “… to all those who have ideas and expertise rather than to those who assert interest and preferences”.

Those admission requirements exclude the great mass of ordinary citizens. Similarly, Chaskin (2003) – who focussed on the attempt at fostering neighbourhood democracy – highlighted the importance of expertise and argued that this was partly driven by the professionalization of public agencies.

Directly at the EU level, Saurugger (2007: 397) more than hints at the tension that exists between being representative, responsive and accountable on the one hand, and acting as an efficient policy-making partner, on the other. The more efficient groups are at:

“… representing their interests in a constructive, precise and coherent manner, the more influence they exert. These activities, however, require major expertise on the group’s and movement’s side which contributes to modeling the style of militancy and leads to greater internal professionalization. Thus, the organizational structures of civil society have reformed to match better the perceived access structure of the European political system … Organized civil society – organized as groups or social movements – has a tendency to become increasingly professionalized to represent the interests of their constituency in an efficient way” (Saurugger, 2007: 397-398).

that may be frowned up by their sponsor or occupy policy positions too distant from the major funder’s standpoint.

Grande (2002: 130) makes the point that professionalized representation in the EU could be “… justified for reasons of system effectiveness, but the democratic quality of their activities is dubious from the perspective of both representative and participatory models of democracy” (quoted in Saurugger, 2009).
As Skocpol (2003: 134) acerbically concludes:

All in all, the very model of what counts as effective organization in US politics and civic life has changed very sharply. No longer do most leaders and citizens think of building, or working through, state and nationwide federations that link face-to-face groups into state and national networks. If a new cause arises, entrepreneurs think of opening a national office, raising funds through direct mail and hiring pollsters and media consultants … Organizational leaders have little time to discuss things with groups of members. *Members are a nonlucrative distraction* (italics added).

Why spend a great deal of organizational resources seeking and servicing members, when patronage permits fully focussed professional lobbying? It appears that the groups have responded to the changing policy-making context. Affecting outcomes now requires less membership muscle and more policy expertise and professionalism.

**Responsiveness**

The social capital expectation is that groups should be open with transparent decision-making processes and an accountable and responsive leadership in order to promote democracy itself. However, as Berry (1977: 187) notes, the most interesting aspect about many public interest groups is not that they are oligarchic in practice, but that there are not even symbolic concessions to a democratic structure. The leadership is self-selected and democracy is underpinned by *loyalty* or *exit*, but not *voice* (Hirschman 1970). Many of these organizations are engaged in a *fierce* competition for membership support and loyalty – exit is a real threat. Loyalty is particularly important to these organizations because a large percentage of membership operates on a revolving-door basis. In short, if a group fails to deliver on either action and/or outcomes, then members are free to join a competitor organization. This pressure ensures responsiveness and representation of membership
interests in a market-like efficient manner. Group leaders are also limited by members’ stated or latent values and expectation. In other words, members may occupy an ‘empty seat’ in many decision-making forums and there is a process of anticipated reactions: leaders know that members’ ultimate recourse is to vote with their feet. Dahl (1961: 89-90) maintains that “… the relationship between leaders and citizens in a pluralistic democracy is frequently reciprocal: leaders influence the decisions of constituents, but the decisions of leaders are also determined in part by what they think are, will be, or have been the preferences of their constituents”.

Many groups undertake sophisticated market research to gauge members’ views on a variety of issues and group direction is steered (to some extent) by supporter/member attitudes. Group intelligence on members’ views is highly sophisticated as the ‘science’ of marketing, recruitment and retention has advanced in recent years. If group leaders perceive that a significant proportion of their members are opposed to a specific policy proposal they may shy away from campaigning on it for fear of provoking a mass exodus. In market driven societies many groups conform to dominant structure and offer involvement on a supplier/customer basis. Citizens are free to buy group membership in the same way that they buy other goods and services. Democracy is, thus, provided by the choice to participate or not; or which group to support. Of course, within groups there is a sort of power of democratic control via anticipated reactions. Realistically there may have to be a limited expectation of democratic vitality within groups, but there may be democracy in the choice between groups.

**Participation and Bias: Is it all ‘bad’?**

Is bias always a negative phenomenon? Beyond the ‘negative’ aspects of skewed participation can there be ‘positive’ biases? The alleged pathology of
unrepresentativeness and the arguments about the decline of civic and political involvement require more examination than the headlines suggest. First, as political advocates, some groups perform a surrogate function acting on behalf of constituencies that lack resources. There are logistical and practical reasons why groups may not seek to mobilize their constituencies, most notably where the clientele base is children, or animals or the mentally ill (Crenson and Ginsberg 2002: 151). However, it could be argued that while much of this participation is by or of, it is not necessarily for, a class. These middle class participators are engaged in the advancement of many causes that benefit constituencies and interests beyond their own immediate location. Imig (1994) talks of ‘advocacy by proxy’ to describe how individuals are mobilized to act on behalf of client groups (e.g. Make Poverty History, children, mental health).

Secondly, there may be redistributive or progressive elements to skewed involvement. It should also be emphasized that many socially and politically disadvantaged citizens share several concerns with active resource rich citizens (e.g. crime, environment, education, health care, security etc.). In this respect, affluent civic-minded citizens disproportionately patronized many interest of mutual concern. For example, in the environmental survey discussed above many non-joiners reported a lack of disposable income as a major reason for their non-membership and the demographics lend support to these views as being more than post hoc justifications. As a form of cross-subsidization, the contribution of their wealthier co-citizens ensures that this interest is represented (almost akin to business travellers subsidising the airfare costs in economy).
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