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Introduction

- On February 9, Shep Melnick and Joanne Linden went to the polls in Amherst, New Hampshire, to cast their ballots in the first presidential primary of 2016.
- During the same month, contributors were making donations in support of their favored candidates seeking the presidential nominations of the two parties. Travis Stanger, an Iowa high school student and part-time McDonald's cashier, made his monthly $3 donation to his candidate of choice. Meanwhile, hedge fund managers Paul Singer and Kenneth Griffin each gave $2.5 million to a candidate Super PAC.
- Blaring their horns, dozens of trucks paraded around the Rhode Island state capitol to protest pending legislation imposing tolls on tractor trailers to fund road and bridge repairs.
- In East Las Vegas, Laura Lozano was working a phone bank, urging Spanish-speaking voters to support her candidate's bid for the presidential nomination and explaining the complexities of how to take part in the upcoming caucuses.
- Hundreds of supporters gathered during the annual Kentucky Right to Life Rally to watch Governor Matt Bevin sign the first piece of legislation of his administration, an informed consent abortion bill.
- Outside the Twin Cities in Minnesota, a group of neighbors formed the Stockholm Township Concerned Citizens Group, hoping to

force Forsman Farms to scale back or drop plans to build a new facility that would house more than a million chickens.

- Resident leaders for Mitchell-Lama developments sent letters to New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio in support of affordable housing in the city.
- More than fifty people signed up to speak at a packed Seattle City Council briefing to give policymakers their views on how to best fight homelessness.
- Maple syrup producer groups from New England and the Upper Midwest as well as the International Maple Syrup Institute and the North American Maple Syrup Council lobbied the Food and Drug Administration to protest the mislabeling by major manufacturers of processed food containing imitation maple syrup.
- Stephen J. Ubl, president of the heavy-hitting trade group, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America or PhRMA, which spent $18.4 million on lobbying in 2015, worked to counter increasing criticism from doctors, consumer advocates, and politicians about the soaring prices of name-brand drugs.[1]

Democracies require mechanisms for the free expression of political voice so that members of the public can communicate information about their experiences, needs, and preferences and hold public officials accountable for their conduct in office. Working individually or collectively, they can communicate their concerns and opinions to policymakers in order to have a direct effect on public policy, or they can attempt to affect policy indirectly by influencing electoral outcomes. They can donate their time or their money. They can use conventional techniques or protest tactics. They can work locally or nationally. They can even have political input when, for reasons having nothing to do with politics, they affiliate with an organization that is politically active. As shown by the examples above, during the short days of mid-winter, 2016, Americans exercised political voice in all these ways.

In this volume, we explore how Americans use political voice to let public officials know what is on their minds and to generate pressure to respond to what is being said. But we are concerned not just with political voice but with equal political voice. Robert Dahl famously said: "A key characteristic of a democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as equals."[2] Later, in another context he argued that "all human beings are of equal intrinsic worth . . . and that

the good or interests of each person must be given equal consideration."[3] If citizens are not equally able or likely to make efforts to let public officials know what they want or need, then some people will wield a megaphone, and others will speak in a whisper. Inequality of political voice has been a persistent and growing aspect of American democracy.

We examine inequalities of political voice—in the participation of Americans as individuals and in the activities of organizations that represent their interests—from a variety of perspectives. Among other topics, we consider:

- **Equal Political Voice in a Democracy:** What we mean by political voice and whether equal political voice matters in a democracy (Chapter 2);
- **The Civic Voluntarism Model:** How inequalities in individual political activity are rooted in differences in such resources as time, money, and civic skills; in such psychological orientations to politics as political interest, knowledge, and efficacy; and in the processes of recruitment by which friends, workmates, neighbors, and fellow organization and church members ask one another to take part politically (Chapter 3);
- **Unequal Voice among Individuals:** How active and inactive individuals differ with regard to their education and income, their race or ethnicity, and their gender (Chapter 4) as well as to their preferences, needs, and priorities for government action (Chapter 5);
- **The Role of the Internet:** How the possibilities for political participation on the Internet affect underrepresentation among the young or those of lower socioeconomic status (Chapter 6);
- **Social Movements and Recruitment to Participation:** How processes of political mobilization, whether rooted in protest movements or in ordinary interactions at work, in organizations, or religious institutions, affect inequalities of political voice (Chapter 7);
- **Unequal Voice among Organizations:** How inequalities of political voice among individuals are reinforced by the multiple forms of activity by organizations active in Washington politics (Chapters 8 and 9);
- **Growth of Economic Inequality:** How economic inequality has grown in the past thirty years, leaving some people with enormous resources and others with very few resources for the exercise political voice, and how public policies have contributed to those economic outcomes (Chapter 10);

- **Changing Political Inequality:** How inequalities of political voice have changed in an era of both increasing economic inequality and tinkering with procedural arrangements that govern politics (Chapter 11);
- **Possibilities for Reform:** Whether various procedural political reforms hold the potential to alleviate participatory inequalities (Chapter 12).

This book relies, in the main, on the analysis of participation by individuals and organized interests, but we place the subject in the broader context of the American political tradition and the contemporary increase in economic inequality.

Political Voice, Equal Political Voice, and Democratic Accountability

The exercise of political voice includes any activity undertaken by individuals and organizations "that has the intent or effect of influencing government action—either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies."[4]

Political acts vary in their capacity to convey information about what citizens want and need. The vote is a notably blunt instrument of communication. Although winning candidates often claim a "mandate," in truth they usually have only an imprecise understanding of what was on the minds of the voters who placed them in office. In contrast, the many forms of direct expression of preferences—a sign at a demonstration, an e-mail to a senator's office, a prepared statement at a meeting of the local zoning board—can communicate clear and, in some circumstances, quite specific messages. Organized interests are especially likely to communicate detailed information when they contact public officials, and this information frequently helps in the process of policy formation, although it presents a particular point of view.

Political acts also vary in the pressure they can bring to bear on policymakers to listen and respond favorably to what they are hearing. When individual or organizational activists command valued resources—for example, campaign contributions, blocs of voters, political intelligence, or access to other powerful political figures—targeted public officials usually feel less free to ignore the accompanying messages. The senator engaged in

a tight campaign for reelection, the state legislator drafting a tax bill, and the mayor confronting protests over an incident of alleged police brutality all have incentives to pay attention to activist publics.

THE LEVEL AND DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL VOICE

Public officials, journalists, and political scientists often worry about low levels of citizen participation in politics—especially if voter turnout is not high. We sympathize with these concerns. A vigorous civic life in which citizens are active as individuals and in organizations confers many benefits. For example, for individuals, political engagement can be educational—cultivating useful organizational and communications skills and broadening their understanding of their own and others' best interests. For the political system, citizens who have ample opportunities to express their political views are more likely to accept government actions as legitimate. Those concerned with well-functioning democracy have reason to monitor the level of individual and organized activity and to be uneasy if it decreases.

Still, we are primarily concerned with equality of political voice rather than with its quantity. Equal political voice does not require that everyone takes part. We know that scientific polls can provide a representative picture of public opinion by surveying only a small fraction of the population. Similarly, equal political voice follows if there is proportionate input from those with a variety of *politically relevant characteristics and circumstances:* for example, economic well-being; race or ethnicity; religious commitment; sexual orientation or identity; veteran status; immigrant status; or being a Medicare recipient, a student at a public university, or an employee of a defense contractor. Analogously, equal voice is achieved if varying *attitudes on issues* ranging from gay rights to the minimum wage to the regulation of coal mining to trade policy are expressed proportionately by political activists.

The individuals and organizations active in American politics are anything but representative in these ways. Those who are not affluent and well educated—that is, those of low socioeconomic status (SES)—are less likely to take part politically and are even less likely to be represented by organized interests. What is more, for as long as we have had the tools to measure political involvement, there has been continuity in the kinds of individuals and organized interests represented in politics. Inequalities of political voice are deeply embedded in American politics. Although public issues and citizen concerns may come and go, the affluent and well educated are consistently overrepresented.

EQUAL VOICE—EQUAL CONSIDERATION

One of the hallmarks of democracy is that the concerns and interests of each citizen are given equal consideration in the process of making decisions that are binding on a political community. As we shall demonstrate repeatedly in the pages that follow, the disparities in political voice across various segments of society are so substantial and so persistent as to preclude the minimal democratic requirement of equal consideration by decision makers. Public officials cannot consider voices they do not hear, and it is more difficult to pay attention to voices that speak softly. If some stakeholders express themselves faintly and others say nothing at all, there is little or nothing for policymakers to consider. As Lindblom and Woodhouse comment: "If poorer, less educated minorities participate less, their judgments about what problems deserve government's attention will attain less than proportionate weight in the process of partisan mutual adjustment."[5]

Because politics involves conflict among those with differing preferences and clashing interests, it is inevitable that politics will not leave all contenders equally satisfied with the outcomes. Yet it is not only feasible but desirable for all to be heard and for everyone's views to be considered on an equal basis.

Equal voice is not an absolute prerequisite for achieving equal consideration. Public officials have mechanisms besides participatory input from individuals and organizations for learning what is on the minds of citizens. They can, for example, consult polls or follow the media. And the influences on policy include many additional factors—ranging from an incumbent's values and ideology to partisan pressures to a desire to take a political career up a notch—other than policymakers' perceptions of what the public wants and needs. These other factors may substitute for equal voice. Still, if votes, campaign contributions, e-mails, lobbying contacts, comments on proposed agency regulations, or amicus briefs come from an unrepresentative set of individuals and organizations, equal consideration will be compromised and government policy will likely reflect the preferences and needs of the active part of the public.

MEASURING INEQUALITIES OF POLITICAL VOICE

Equal voice seems essential for democracy, but because voice can be expressed in so many ways, there is no fully satisfactory way to assess degrees of inequality across acts measured in different metrics.[6] We can compare the

political input from a small protest with only ten demonstrators to one that is a hundred times bigger. But how do we compare the weight of a protest that attracts a crowd of 1,000 to the weight of 1,000 votes or 1,000 e-mails?

To complicate matters further, political acts vary in the extent to which activists can multiply their volume. At one extreme, within limits, votes have equal weight. We are each allowed only one per election contest. But the principle of one person, one vote does not obtain for other kinds of participation. Individuals are free to write as many letters to public officials, work as many hours in campaigns, or join as many political organizations as their time and commitment allow. When it comes to the extent to which the volume of activity can be multiplied, contributions to political campaigns and causes present a special case. Although there are no legal constraints on the number of phone calls a citizen can make to public officials or the number of marches a protester can attend, the fact that there are only twenty-four hours in a day imposes an implicit ceiling. In contrast, some lingering campaign finance laws to the contrary, there is no upper limit on the number of dollars that a person with a big bank account can contribute.

Individual and Collective Political Voice

Implicit in the concept of equal political voice is equality among individuals. In the vast political science literature concerned with public opinion and political participation, the individual is the main actor in the democratic system. However, the voice of a single individual is usually fairly weak. When individuals are coordinated within organizations, they can be a more potent force. Political voice in America is often the voice of organized interests speaking loudly and clearly.

Political participation by the public and by organized interests are often studied separately from one another with different frameworks and methods. When it comes to inequalities of political voice, however, they are two faces of the same thing. We consider politically active organizations of many kinds:

- Membership associations of individuals: for example, unions like the Teamsters, professional associations like the American Medical Association, and citizen groups like the Sierra Club;
- Trade associations like the National Restaurant Association that bring together firms in an industry;
- State and local governments that have residents but not members; and

- Memberless organizations like corporations, hospitals, and even universities, which do not have members in the ordinary sense but have important sets of stakeholders.

In considering political voice through organizational activity, we ask the same questions about political organizations that we ask about individual citizens: What interests do they represent through what kinds of activity, and how equal or unequal is that representation? The results for organized interests parallel the findings for individuals and show the extent and durability of political inequality in America.

WHO IS SPEAKING WHEN AN ORGANIZATION SPEAKS?

When individuals exercise political voice, they are representing themselves, and there is no ambiguity as to who is speaking. However, questions about representation immediately arise with organizations. Individual membership associations presumably communicate the interests of their members. But whose interests? Those of the executives who run the organization? The staff that support them? The board to whom they are accountable? The rank and file membership? If so, which ones among the rank and file? The old or the young? The most privileged or the least?

This problem is even knottier for the vast majority of politically active organizations that are not membership associations composed of individuals. Which of the various stakeholders are being represented when a corporation or a museum speaks in politics? In short, an organization may have a powerful voice in politics, but it may not be clear whose voice it really is.

MEASURING UNEQUAL VOICE WHEN ORGANIZATIONS ARE SPEAKING

When we move from the political voice of individuals to that emanating from political organizations, the problem of how to measure inequalities of political voice is exacerbated. Because organizations that are active in politics have very different numbers of members, we cannot count each organization as an equivalent unit as we would with individual citizens. The nation's largest membership association, AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons) has nearly 38 million members. In contrast, the professional association of skin cancer surgeons, the American College of Moh's Surgery, has fewer than 1,300.[7] Indeed, the majority of

politically active organizations—including some real heavy hitters like Boeing, which spent $21.9 million on lobbying in 2015—have no members at all.[8] On a level playing field, how much voice would each of these organizations have?

We shall consider ways to think about this question. For all the limitations on our ability to measure political voice with precision, the differences we find across individuals, aggregations of individuals, and organizations are sufficiently striking that there can be no doubt about the existence and persistence of real inequalities of political voice in America.

Who Exercises Political Voice? The Somewhat Level Playing Field of Democratic Citizenship

With some notable exceptions, the rights that inhere in citizenship place most members of the political community on an equal footing. The clearest and most basic requisite for equal political voice is the right to express that voice. For most forms of political activity, the right to take part is very widely dispersed and is not restricted to those who are formally citizens of the United States and eligible for a U.S. passport. As we proceed, when we discuss "citizen" activity, we generally include under that umbrella all adult members of the mass public residing in the United States, including resident aliens whether or not legal. Occasionally—for example, when we treat forms of activity such as voting that are restricted to those with formal citizenship status—we use the term "citizen" in its narrower legalistic sense.

As applied to the states through judicial interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment, the basic participatory rights of the First Amendment—freedom of speech and press, the rights of assembly and petition—are generally available to all within the borders of the United States, regardless of citizenship status.[9] In fact, within limits, such rights may be available to noncitizens, even those who do not reside in the United States. The op-ed pages of major newspapers often feature opinion pieces by foreign commentators. Although their communications might not be heeded or even answered, non-Americans are free to get in touch with American public officials. Aware of the worldwide repercussions of American electoral outcomes, foreign visitors have been known to take part in presidential campaigns while visiting the United States.

The right to take part in particular ways is sometimes limited to subgroups of the relevant political community. For example, although making campaign contributions has been interpreted as a form of protected speech

by the Supreme Court, foreigners are not permitted to donate to federal campaigns. Moreover, citizens residing in one town are not free to vote in the elections of an adjoining town. They may not even be free to attend town meetings in a neighboring community, even though an issue on the agenda—say, a pending decision to close the bridge that spans the river—might have an impact on them.

Important categories of citizens—including those without property, African Americans, and women—have been excluded from the franchise in the past. When Virginia Minor sued the Missouri voting registrar who denied her application to register under the Privileges and Immunities clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in 1875 that, although Minor was a citizen, the franchise is not necessarily a right protected from state infringement.[10] Although racial, gender, and economic barriers to the vote have fallen after a long and bumpy journey, even today some categories of citizens are denied the vote. Children—whose First Amendment rights are also circumscribed—are the most obvious example of citizens who lack access to the ballot. Another category is convicted felons. All but two states have some restrictions on the voting rights of felons, restrictions that fall quite disproportionately on blacks, Hispanics, and the poor.[11] Nevertheless, despite the qualifications to the universal right to take part politically, political rights and liberties act as an equalizing force for political voice.

The political rights of organizations are not as broad as the rights of individuals. Organizations have free speech rights for communicating on public issues, but such rights may be constricted when it comes to partisan participation in elections. Nonprofits with 501(c)3 tax status must limit their lobbying or lose the tax deductibility of donations made to them. Starting with the Tillman Act of 1907, which prohibited corporations from giving money to federal candidates, restrictions have been placed on contributions from corporations. Recently, the right of corporations and other organizations to make electioneering expenditures has been contested in the courts, and the Supreme Court has ruled to permit greater freedom for such involvement.

Who Exercises Political Voice? The Tilted Playing Field of Unequal Participatory Factors

The equal right to act does not inevitably lead to equal political voice. It functions as a form of political equality of opportunity, a necessary but not

a sufficient condition for political action. In Chapter 3, we focus on the participatory inequalities stemming from disparities in the factors that shape the activity levels of rights-bearing individuals. Among the factors that promote political activity are the motivation to take part; such resources as knowledge and skills, money, and time that provide the capacity to act; and location in the social networks that serve to stimulate activity and to mediate requests for participation.

THE PERVASIVE ROLE OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

The factors that foster political participation are not independent of one another. Those who have the skills and information to take part are more likely to want to do so. Reciprocally, those with a concern about politics are predisposed to make efforts to learn the relevant skills. Similarly, those embedded in social networks are more often asked to take political action and to get involved politically. Moreover, those with the capacity to participate effectively—those who are able to contribute generously to a campaign or to make a coherent statement at a school board meeting—are more likely to be the targets of such requests. Thus, the processes that nurture political voice interact to create unequal political voice.

At the root of these self-reinforcing processes is SES. The well educated are likely to have a stockpile of a variety of other participatory factors: for example, to have the kinds of jobs that inculcate civic skills and generate high incomes; to be politically interested, knowledgeable, and efficacious; and to be connected to the networks that mediate requests for political activity. As we have continued our now decades-long investigation of unequal political voice, we have been surprised to uncover, under every intellectual rock we excavate, the deeply embedded and durable character of socioeconomic inequalities in political voice. Inequalities of political voice are found in every cross-sectional analysis, and they are linked to such politically relevant circumstances as living in dilapidated housing, needing Pell Grants, and suffering such problems of basic human need as having to cut back spending on groceries. They persist over time and flow across generations. The same biases apply to political voice expressed through organized interests—a fact that, over time, has consistently led to overrepresentation of the concerns and needs of business and other resource-endowed publics. However we look at the issue and however we analyze our wide-ranging data, SES always seems to return to the center of our explanation for differences in political voice.

OTHER BASES OF THE INEQUALITY OF POLITICAL VOICE

Our concern with inequalities of political voice extends to any politically relevant attribute—that is, to any characteristic that might become a source of conflict in politics. We emphasize how political voice varies with SES because it is not only significant for political conflict but also an important causal factor in the explanation of individual differences in political activity. Income and education are strongly associated with political participation. They also connect to many other attributes that, while not causal factors useful in explaining unequal political voice, are germane to political conflict in America.

Of particular concern is unequal voice on the basis of gender and race or ethnicity.[12] In a statistical analysis that controls for differences in people's characteristics that are rooted in SES (that is, in what is commonly referred to as "multivariate analysis"), disparities in participation among non-Hispanic whites, African Americans, and Latinos[13] or between men and women can be largely or fully understood in terms of these differences. That SES is behind racial or ethnic and gender differences in political participation does not justify the conclusion that these differences are all about SES and that race or ethnicity or gender is irrelevant. As long as there are politically relevant issues associated with policies that have a differential impact on men and women or on Latinos, African Americans, and non-Hispanic whites, it matters for politics that public officials hear disproportionately from members of some groups. If, for example, politicians hear less from African Americans because they are poorer and less well educated than whites, the fact remains that they have less voice, which is consequential for them as African Americans.

Furthermore, it is not exactly a coincidence that persons of color and women command fewer of the SES-based resources for political activity than do non-Hispanic whites or men. Indeed, these gaps in SES are intimately connected to the structures that sustain social and economic distinctions on the basis of race or ethnicity and gender in America. For these reasons, even though we give higher priority to SES in our analysis of inequalities of political voice, it is essential not to dismiss inequalities of political voice anchored in other bases of political cleavage.

TIME AND MONEY

A consistent theme throughout our investigation is the contrast between the roles of time and money in the exercise of political voice. Mark Hanna,

President McKinley's highly successful campaign manager, supposedly remarked more than a century ago: "There are two things that are important in politics. The first is money, and I can't remember the second." We might not go quite as far as did Hanna—many factors do matter in politics—but money certainly deserves a place of honor among the factors that facilitate political activity. While individuals use money to make contributions to electoral campaigns and to political organizations and causes, organizations use financial resources for many political purposes—to staff an office, hire lobbyists and other experts, make donations from their political action committees, or engage in independent spending in elections.

When political voice is based on inputs of dollars rather than hours, the possibilities for inequality of political voice expand. In contrast to time, there is no ceiling on income and wealth, and individuals are much more unequal when it comes to money than when it comes to time. Individual activity in making financial donations is, not unexpectedly, highly stratified, with a substantial gap between the affluent and the less well off. Moreover, compared to inequalities in income, inequalities in spare time are much less likely to adhere to the boundaries of politically relevant categories—not only SES but also race, ethnicity, and gender. Instead, the unavailability of extra time results from such life circumstances as paid work and having children at home.

For several reasons, including the strength of First Amendment protections, the United States allows more freedom in using market resources to influence political outcomes than do other countries. Because financial resources are so unevenly distributed and because differences in income hew to the fault lines of important political conflicts, political money raises the dilemma of how to reconcile inequalities of market resources with the desire to establish a level playing field for democracy.

Equal Voice and the Dilemmas of Democratic Governance

Could a circumstance of equal political voice endanger the democratic process? Philosophers of public life going back to the ancient Greeks have differed in the extent to which they trust the judgment of the public and in the role they assign to ordinary people and to those who are deemed wiser and more experienced in the ideal democracy.[14] At the Founding, James Madison expressed apprehension about those "particular moments in public affairs when the people, stimulated by some irregular passion . . . or misled

by the artful misrepresentations of interested men, may call for measures which they themselves will afterwards be the most ready to lament and condemn."[15] Reflecting similar concerns about the lower classes, Alexander Hamilton argued: "The republican principle . . . does not require an unqualified complaisance to every sudden breeze of passion, or to every transient impulse which the people may receive from the arts of men."[16]

Distrust of the public is no longer as acute as it once was, but there is still reason for skepticism about the capacities of ordinary American citizens for enlightened self-government. Quantitative studies dating back at least to the 1950s demonstrate that many Americans have only limited commitment to civil liberties, tolerance for dissenting views, and command of political information—especially if they are not well educated.[17] Governing depends on expertise, on the capacity to understand and judge potential policies, and on the ability to make complex policy decisions that balance the concerns of many actors. The diverse members of the public, who have widely varied preferences and needs, devote limited attention to policy issues, making them ill equipped to judge among alternative policies. Equal voice for all—regardless of educational level, interest in and knowledge about politics, or relevant experience—might lead to government that is less effective, less efficient, and less prudent.

The institutional arrangement designed to resolve this tension is representative government. Representative democracy moves decisions away from the direct control of the citizens and into the hands of representatives who, relying on their own judgment and expertise, supposedly render politics more open and tolerant and policy more effective. Representative government thus ameliorates many democratic mischiefs: policy based on expertise would mitigate citizen incompetence; elected elites who are more committed to civil liberties would bolster support for the democratic process; the intermediation of representatives would reduce the danger of tyranny by a majority faction that squashes minority rights or by minority factions uninterested in the common good. Although there are plenty of episodes—the McCarthy era and Watergate come immediately to mind—suggesting that this characterization is idealized, more than two centuries later, American democracy remains based on representative government.

What is the role of political voice—and equal voice—in a democracy based on representative democracy? Within the American consensus on the wisdom of representative government as a compromise between rule from above and rule from below, there have been serious differences with

regard to the extent to which public officials should defer to the expressed preferences of the public or exercise their own independent judgment in governing. The Progressives of the early twentieth century—who, in reaction to the corruption of party bosses, institutionalized such procedural arrangements as initiative, recall, and referendum—clearly believed in shifting the balance toward direct popular rule. In contrast, Joseph Schumpeter took a quite different view in his classic *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*.[18] In his rather restricted interpretation of the role of the people in representative democracy, the task of the citizenry is to elect officeholders. Given the limited capacities of the public and the need for expertise in policymaking, citizen participation should begin and end with electoral participation. After they elect leaders from the choices offered, citizens should then leave the more expert elites free to rule.

From our perspective, all versions of representative government require continuous information from a representative group of citizens about their problems and experiences that might otherwise be overlooked. However, none addresses the fact that political activity by individuals and organizations derives disproportionately from the affluent and well educated. We take no position on the eternal question of the extent to which public officials in American democracy should be guided by the preferences of the public or by their own good judgment. Still, we believe firmly that broad exposure and information about everyone's wants and needs will permit whoever rules to do so more wisely.

EQUAL VOICE, MAJORITY TYRANNY, AND "MINORITIES RULE"

A related concern is reconciling support for equal voice with a concern about majority tyranny. For many issues in American politics, a relatively indifferent majority on one side is opposed by an intense but smaller public on the other. This pattern characterizes controversies as diverse as gun control, consumer product safety regulation, and community conflicts over the siting of facilities like sewage treatment plants or even new schools. That democratic procedures ordinarily provide for the majority to prevail raises no concerns about majority tyranny when the losers in the minority are not deeply invested in the outcome. However, if the losing minority has strong and intensely held views, majority rule may be more problematic—particularly if the triumphant majority compromises the basic rights of the minority or if the losing minority is defeated over and over on issue after issue.

How should a minority that cares deeply—especially a group that constitutes a more or less permanent minority—be treated in a democracy? Can equal voice be harmonized with deference to views that are intensely held? As Madison observed in "Federalist No. 10": "Measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority."[19] In fact, Madison makes clear later in the essay that American government was designed to ensure that minority viewpoints have opportunities to block majority factions.

To ignore the fact that some people care deeply about a particular issue while the large and politically quiescent majority are more or less indifferent would seem unreasonable. Yet to allow an intense and active minority to prevail over and over again has other risks. The history of American political conflict demonstrates that majority tyranny is not the only danger and that an intense minority often carries the day in policy controversies, a circumstance sometimes dubbed "minorities rule." Indeed, later in life Madison expressed concern about the need for ordinary citizens to have a voice in politics and demonstrated greater congeniality to majority rule.[20]

As they seek to navigate between tyranny by majorities and rule by intense minorities, policymakers will be better informed if they hear all perspectives instead of having some systematically shouted while others are whispered. However they balance majority rule and deference to intense minorities, decision makers will benefit from equal voice.

Unequal Voice in the New Gilded Age

As we shall see in Chapter 10, systematic data substantiate that we do, indeed, live in a New Gilded Age. The concentration of income and wealth among the very rich has reached levels not witnessed since the 1920s. The minimum wage, which peaked in real terms in 1968, is now worth less than it was in the late 1970s, when wages for everyone below the top layer of earners began to stagnate. The proportion of those below the poverty line who are desperately poor has increased. These and related economic developments reflect such market forces as globalization and technological change. However, they are also influenced by, and reciprocally, have consequences for, politics. Not only is government policy part of the story of increasing economic inequality but the increase in economic inequality also has implications for unequal political voice in politics.

At the same time that economic inequality has increased, citizen politics in America has changed in ways that further enhance the long-standing participatory advantage of the well educated and well-off. Reflecting the relationship between education and income, the affluent have always spoken loudly and clearly in politics. While the rich have been getting richer, forms of activity based on money are occupying more space in the bundle of participatory acts through which Americans express political voice. The great political money chase enhances the relative importance of money in electoral politics, giving very, very affluent donors greater access to candidates and rendering successful candidates increasingly indebted to their funders. There has been simultaneous growth in organized interest activity, where the availability of economic resources has made it possible to hire more and more experts and lobbyists.

Procedural changes to the rules governing politics over the past decade, discussed in Chapter 12, have exacerbated patterns of participatory inequality deeply rooted in social structure. A series of federal court decisions, the best known of which is the 2010 Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United* v. *FEC*, have effectively lifted many of the limits on campaign money. We now have sufficient experience with this new campaign finance regime to know that at the same time that money has become more important in electoral politics, those with the wherewithal to make substantial contributions have become more important as well.

Procedural changes in voting at the state level also threaten to magnify participatory inequalities. Some states have legislated new requirements—some of them quite strict—for producing identification in order to cast a ballot. The impact of these new rules is not yet fully clear, but there is concern that voters of limited income and education—in particular, persons of color—will be disproportionately affected by the new requirements. At the same time that voter ID laws threaten to make it harder to vote in many states, a less-noticed contrary trend has eased ballot access in a majority of states. Unfortunately, even when such reforms as election day registration, online registration, early voting, and no-excuse absentee voting raise turnout (and they do not always do so), such procedural changes do not necessarily democratize the electorate. Even if voters show up at the polls in larger numbers, the additional voters mirror the characteristics of the core voters who show up without fail.

We were once asked whether what we were finding is an old disturbing pattern or a new disturbing trend to which we could only answer "Both."

Over and over in what follows, we demonstrate that pronounced inequalities of political voice are a longstanding feature of our politics and that such inequalities are anchored firmly in inequalities of education and income. However, both economic and political developments in the New Gilded Age are exacerbating the inequalities of political voice that have for so long characterized democracy in America.

A Note on Data

To pursue these multiple themes, we draw on evidence from various sources. However, for our systematic analyses, we rely principally on data from four sources:

- **The Citizen Participation Study**. Although the data from this 1990 survey are now more than a quarter century old, this survey contains the most comprehensive set of measures of individual participatory acts, the factors that facilitate participation, and the institutional contexts of adult life—work, nonpolitical organizations, and religious institutions.[21]
- **American National Election Studies (ANES)**. The ANES focus on forms of individual participation associated with elections and only occasionally include items about nonelectoral forms of activity. Still, they provide an invaluable ongoing portrait of the American electorate that dates back more than half a century. Electoral participation follows a zigzag pattern, spiking in years with presidential elections and falling off in the congressional elections two years later; therefore, unless otherwise noted, we use only the data from the surveys conducted in presidential election years.[22]
- **Pew Internet and American Life Project**. These surveys, which replicated some of the questions on the Citizen Participation Study, included items about Internet use as well as political engagement and activity both on the Internet and offline.[23]
- **Washington Representatives Study**. We have assembled the most extensive and comprehensive database to date of organizations active in Washington politics. The more than 33,000 organizations in the database include all the organizations listed in the 1981, 1991, 2001, 2006, and 2011 editions of the *Washington Representatives* directory[24]—along with additional organizations listed in archival sources as having been politically active by, for example, testifying in

> Congress or filing an amicus brief. For each organization, we coded information about its history, the kinds of interests on behalf of which it advocates, and the activities it undertakes in the quest for policy influence.[25]

Our practice throughout is to use the most recent available data set that allows us to answer the intellectual questions we are posing and, whenever possible, to use other data sets to check our results. Because the Citizen Participation Study contained such rich measures, it often permits more complex—if cross-sectional and possibly dated—analysis. When we use that survey, we do so because we could not find a more recent data set containing appropriate measures.

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