



Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality.

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ness of regulating cable television because local communities should be left to handle the franchising process. Reason: local cable television franchises ". . . have long possessed a high degree of sophistication." The absurdity of the statement becomes easily apparent upon examination of numerous local franchises granted prior to FCC regulations of March 1972. Most communities, accustomed as they are to franchising such new technological wonders as bus companies, often limit themselves to such earth-shaking community interest matters as protection of streets from buried cable problems, the trimming of trees near pole-strung cables, and a hefty tax on the new system for ailing city coffers. On the other hand, the author recommends the development of a nationwide network for cable television, which will assemble the mass audiences that "television think" assumes must exist for economic viability.

Seiden's book provides extensive and useful data for the cable television scholar: a history of FCC regulation of the cable industry and the court cases affecting it, patterns of local and state regulation that were emerging in 1972, the impact of the new industry on the television industry, and the costs and profits picture to mid-1972 of cable television systems. Of course, the student of cable could assemble most of this information from available sources. The value of this book must rest upon an evaluation of the "television think" conclusions that the author chooses to draw from the data.

EVERETT C. PARKER
United Church of Christ

VERBA, SIDNEY and NORMAN H. NIE.
Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality.
New York, Harper & Row, 1972,
428 pp., no price given

This is a very tantalizing book; it could not concern itself with a more important subject matter. It deals with political participation in democratic societies, particularly in contemporary America. The questions raised are vital: "How much participation should there be? Who should participate? How should political leaders respond to the voice of the people? And, in general, how adequate is American democracy, and how might it be improved?" (p. 1)

Unfortunately, it is only on the opening page that these issues are faced squarely. The talented authors, who have proven themselves powerful researchers in previous works, albeit in the traditions of their elders, rather than coming into their own in this volume choose instead to dig deeper into barren conceptual models (input-output), definitional hairsplitting, and methodological exercises until the substantive issues almost disappear in a dissertation-like tract.

Thus, after much ado, we are told that "participants differ from non-participants in the problems they consider most important and in the solutions they favor for social problems," "that community leaders are more likely to concur with the problem priorities of participants than with those of nonparticipants," and, finally, that "the first major finding of our analysis on the level of the polity (community) is that participation does indeed make a difference." However, "the relationship between participation and responsiveness of leaders is not linear," and so on. (pp. 332-333)

Why, after reading much more of the same, do we sense that all this is somehow both relevant *and* beside the point? Why does it all feel like shadow boxing, when we can readily see the match itself? Because in the name of science, a keen sense of political reality and analysis has al-

lowed itself to be submerged beneath a simplistic theoretical model and the dictates of the particular data.

The theoretical model here is that of inputs, process, and outputs. Participants "input" their activities into the political system; they are "processed" by it; and the effects manifest themselves at the other end—in the actions of the government or leaders. The trouble is that the independent variables, which best explain politics, cut across these distinctions. Thus, both collectivities (classes, ethnic groups) and their mobilizing agents (labor unions, parties) appear on the input, process, and output end, and it is artificial and unproductive to assume otherwise. Hence, what to Verba and Nie seem explanatory variables—the personal attributes of the participants—are often the reflection of other variables—e.g. the level of cohesion (or, solidarity) of a collectivity.

Second, and equally important, the political process, by far the weakest theoretical link of the input-output model, is, to a very large extent, what politics is all about; it needs a much more detailed conceptualization than this model provides.

For instance, the very important route of participation through acting directly on the executive branch (*not* the legislature) is minimized, although in our society it is more consequential between elections than any other role of participation. Maybe even more than the elections themselves.

Last but not least, by relying so heavily on survey data and aggregates of individual attitudes, to the neglect of behavioral and, especially, macro global data, the analysis remains psychological and individualistic, with little feel for the political processes of society. No wonder few of the many who have written on

these aspects are cited. Thus, Talcott Parsons and Max Weber do not appear; the only Marx cited is Gary; C. Bay and S. Wolling are not referred to at all, but G. Almond is cited 17 times as the leading father figure.

The main direction in which the concepts and data pushed the authors is away from coming to terms with their subject. A substantive decision further narrowed the book: the authors decided that political participation in contemporary America should be understood only in terms of acting on the government, excluding action at places "we work and live." However, it seems to me that one essential lesson of the last decades has been that universities, corporations, labor unions, hospitals, and school systems have all been politicized and recognized as "private" governments and institutions in which one must participate if one wishes to share in the business of societal guidance. Too much of our domestic work is carried out in these polities for participation limited to the governmental level to be sufficiently effective. It is, of course, the researchers' prerogative to choose not to cover this mode of participation in their investigation, but I believe they were incorrect in excluding it, by definition, from the subject area.

This book abounds with specific findings of interest to the specialist: correlations of size of city with participation rates; age, sex, income, race, religion, and location as it relates to participation; and so on. One of these days someone will use these data, in conjunction with other data, to answer the questions Verba and Nie raised. They, themselves, are my choice candidates.

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