

Researchers on modernization have assumed that in developing nations political participation is a destabilizing force which exacerbates socioeconomic inequality. Seligson and Booth argue that the available data do not necessarily support this assumption. In fact, they argue, some forms of participation, especially communal participation, may create resources and hence serve to enhance infrastructure development and individual life chances. However, this sort of participation may also serve indirectly to bolster repressive regimes and hence may perpetuate basic structural problems and the extreme inequality between rich and poor in Latin America.

1. Development, Political Participation, and the Poor in Latin America

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Since the publication of Samuel Huntington's seminal works on political development (1965, 1968), political participation in developing countries has been linked to political decay. Huntington explains the participation-instability linkage this way:

The relationship between social mobilization and political instability seems reasonably direct. Urbanization, increases in literacy, education, and media exposure all give rise to enhanced aspirations and expectations which, if unsatisfied, galvanize individuals and groups into politics. In the absence of strong and adaptable political institutions, such increases in participation mean instability and violence. (1968, p. 47)

More briefly, he states that "modernity breeds stability, but modernization breeds instability" (1968, p. 41). In essence, participation for Huntington constitutes a process of demand-making within political systems that, through competition for the scarce resources of less developed nations, outstrips the distributive capacity of political institutions and engenders social conflict.

In a later study with Joan Nelson, Huntington (1976, p. 42) concludes that "in the earlier phases of development, higher levels of political participation promote lower levels of socio-economic equality." Thus, Huntington and Nelson regard participation as not only destabilizing for political systems, but as increasing the inequality of resource distribution as middle sectors accumulate scarce public goods at the expense of the poor. We contend, however, that recent research on political participation in the developing nations of Latin America requires a reevaluation of this theory. While we believe that much of Huntington and Nelson's argument is theoretically and empirically sound, they fail to appreciate fully the motivations for participation and its great diversity. This leads them to overlook some important aspects of the partici-

participation-development nexus which must be considered.

The key to understanding the problems with the Huntington and Nelson analysis can be found in their statement that "the purpose of political participation is to affect governmental decision-making" (1976, p. 50). This assertion reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of participation. The statement implies that *all* forms of participation have the same purpose, namely, to affect government decision-making, despite their previous passing acknowledgement of the multidimensional nature of political participation (1976, pp. 12-15). Hence, Huntington and Nelson appear to discount the possibility of different forms of participation having different objectives.¹ In essence, this amounts to a conceptual unification of participation. By thus treating participation throughout their analysis as an undifferentiated phenomenon, they disregard the very diversity of citizen activism which they initially acknowledge when they refer to the multinational findings of Verba, Nie, and their colleagues (Verba et al. 1971; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1973; Kim et al. 1974). Thus, rather than build their theory around the well-recognized diversity of participatory modes, Huntington and Nelson wrongly assume a singularity of purpose.

We argue that the redistributive goal of affecting governmental decision-making is only *one* purpose of citizen activism. There are many others. Different activities with different goals have been widely observed. Such participation is often not linked to altering the decisions of formal governmental institutions, but in fact *creates resources for individual and collective consumption*. Many of the papers in this volume demonstrate that such nonredistributive and resource creative political activities occur with great frequency among the poor, and that such actions have important implications for development.

Huntington and Nelson's exclusive focus upon governmental decision-making as the object of citizen activism stems directly from their definition of political participation, which assumes that public authorities are the only elements of societies who determine the "authoritative allocation of values" (1976, p. 5). Although we agree that public officials do indeed allocate values in societies, we disagree that governments are the only important allocators of values. What Huntington and Nelson disregard is that citizens, independently of formal governmental institutions, collectively create resources which satisfy their own needs, and informally allocate scarce resources for collective benefit. Several of the papers in this volume show in detail how citizens create and distribute resources (or what we will later call public goods) and allocate them outside the realm of governmental control.

Our conceptualization of political participation, as we have pointed out elsewhere (Booth and Seligson 1978b; Booth 1978) permits the inclusion of both decisions made by formal governmental institutions and resources allocated informally. We define political participation as "behavior influencing or attempting to influence the distribution of public goods" (Booth and Seligson 1978b). This definition has the virtue of being broad enough to include the

phenomena Huntington and Nelson regard as participation without excessively restricting its focus to the institutions of formal government.

We believe that the narrowness of Huntington and Nelson's definition of participation reflects a general intellectual climate that has kept most participation research from adequately examining the political behavior of the poor. To put it bluntly, many researchers share an elitist bias that keeps them from understanding the nature of political participation among the poor (see Lipsitz 1970). Simply because the poor do not take part in national political institutions as intensely as do wealthier citizens does not mean that the poor do not participate at all. As the Valentines (1968) have shown, Oscar Lewis's well-known characterization of the "culture of poverty" which asserts, among other things, that the poor do not take part, fails to understand that the poor often have alternative participation mechanisms imposed by the context of poverty and by their exclusion from the decision-making and distributive benefits open to other citizens. Like Lewis, political scientists studying participation have usually overlooked much of the participatory activity which takes place among the Latin American poor.

While there has been considerable new research on political participation in Latin America (Booth and Seligson 1978a), the publication of the papers included in this volume brings to light several new studies which focus sharply upon the political activities of the poor. The findings reported may well startle many who cherish the notion that mass political activism is infrequent, undifferentiated, unstructured, and irrational. Participation among the Latin American poor far exceeds in intensity and continuity levels conventionally expected, is multidimensional, has a clearly differentiated structure, and follows rational patterns.

Perhaps more important than the specific characteristics of participation mentioned above, however, is its significance for development. One thread which runs through all the papers is the existence of several arenas of participation in which different types of public goods are distributed. As Bienen points out in his recent study of Kenya, "political participation takes place in different contexts, national and local, and it has different forms and meanings for different groups" (1974, pp. 194-195). In Latin America, one of these, the national arena, has been characterized by the manipulation of the participation of the poor in the interest of elites and by the exclusion of the poor from the equitable distribution of public goods (Adams, chapter 2; Baylis 1978; Booth 1978; Dietz and Palmer 1978; Forman, chapter 4; Loveman, chapter 14; Scaff and Williams 1978; Booth 1979).

The papers in this volume provide several examples of elite manipulation of mass participation. The essays by Forman (chapter 4) and Loveman (chapter 14) detail means by which the political culture of rural Brazil and the national political parties of Chile subordinate peasant political activity to elite interests. Handelman (chapter 12) shows that participation by workers who belong to PRI-manipulated unions in Mexico is both less effective and less intense than that of the members of the radical, more independent unions. Greaves

and Albó (chapter 13) detail how effectively the Bolivian government can suppress miners' strikes. Booth (chapter 8) discusses how divided Colombian and Guatemalan national elites have promoted political violence among the poor as a means for intimidating or eliminating their opposition. Hence, only on the rarest occasions are the poor involved in national-level agenda setting, and consequently the major issues of system structure, control, and value orientation remain beyond the influence of the poor. Perhaps only during revolution do the poor become involved in determining such critical issues of social structure, and as the cases of Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Bolivia so tragically reveal, even then elites may manipulate and victimize the poor.

We cannot, however, ignore the other arenas -- such as the community and local government -- where the poor do make their influence felt. In such arenas, where resources are even more scarce than at the national level, rather than seeking solely to redistribute public goods -- as Huntington and Nelson suggest -- participation may actually *create* new public goods. Thus, such activity is truly developmental in at least two ways. First, it adds to the value stock or capital infrastructure of the society. Second, it creates and nurtures institutions and patterns of collective problem solving.

The focus at the local and communal level highlights the distinctiveness of citizen activity between elites and masses. As Bienen asserts, "for elites, political participation is essentially the competition for positions, status and wealth . . ." (1974, p. 193). These kinds of activities are almost exclusively redistributive or resource consumptive. It is this sort of participation that has led Huntington and Nelson correctly to conclude that citizen activity can lead to political decay by carving up the limited resource pie. Indeed in the Latin American case, competition among elites and mobilized middle sectors has been shown to result in a "parcelling out of the state" (Malloy 1977; Rosenberg and Malloy 1978). Such cases as Argentina and Uruguay demonstrate graphically that the competition may reach such intensity that it can destroy the state, leaving in its wake a praetorian society.

Bienen rightly emphasizes, however, that "demands and participation must be kept analytically separate" (1974, p. 194). In other words, not all participation has the essentially redistributive or demand-making nature assumed by Huntington and Nelson. For the poor, for whom the state often fails to provide any resources, the creation of their own public goods through collective effort and expenditure becomes imperative for the enhancement of life chances. At the local and communal levels, poor people often find that the only way to satisfy their most pressing needs is to create their own resources.

The papers in this volume reveal repeated instances of peasants and the urban poor organizing their communities to provide critically necessary public goods. For example, Fishel (chapter 5) reports on the extensive history of communal organization and project participation among peasants in highland Peru. Seligson and Booth (chapter 6) reveal widespread communal organization and improvement activity in rural Costa Rica. Moore (chapter

15) shows how urban squatters in Guayaquil organize to create public goods. Varela (chapter 11) points out that the smaller and more isolated from the state are Mexican peasant communities, the more intense and efficacious are their organizational and problem-solving activities.

In essence, then, we argue that communal activism, a major mode of activity among lower-strata groups, increases the stock of public goods and enhances institutionalization rather than depleting it. Thus, ironically, in direct contrast to participation among elites and mobilized middle sectors, political participation among the poor may contribute materially to developmental progress.²

Despite these arguments, some may question the significance of local and communal political participation among the poor. Indeed, as Adams (chapter 2) argues, some forms of local activity may "rank close to being the trivia of political participation." Forman, (chapter 4) going even further, holds that such participation may actually serve to bolster repressive regimes and to support the continued inequitable distribution of public goods by ameliorating the deprivation of the poor and hence reducing pressures upon the national political arena. While we are somewhat sympathetic with the positions taken by Adams and Forman, we believe their comments, to a certain extent, treat political participation from the same perspective as Huntington and Nelson by focusing primarily upon its implications for the state. One must, however, also examine the importance of such activity for individuals. Thus, we would agree that the construction of a rural schoolhouse or the opening of a neighborhood cooperative store might have an insignificant impact upon the overall level of national economic or political development. But such events can make an important difference in the lives of individuals living in such communities. By delivering basic commodities at reasonable prices, a cooperative store may improve the nutrition of children whose parents shop there, and hence help to reduce one crippling impact of poverty. In a similar fashion, a rural school can help nurture minds that otherwise might be crippled by illiteracy. The very acts of planning, resource development, and cooperation required to carry out such projects can leave residues of organization, interaction patterns, participatory skills, and problem-solving models that further political development.

Ultimately we remain with a paradox. Communal participation, by helping alleviate some of the more acute manifestations of poverty for individuals and increasing economic development independently of the state, may by these very acts help perpetuate regimes responsible for the gross inequities between rich and poor in Latin America. This leads us precisely to the agonizing question of the costs of revolution versus the costs of non-revolution. As Barrington Moore (1966) has dramatically shown, revolutions—particularly those in the twentieth century—have had extremely high costs in terms of loss of human life. At the same time, however, the failure of most Latin American nations to alter profoundly their social structures perpetuates the grinding, dehumanizing costs of poverty which waste the human potential of the great

masses of society.

Obviously we cannot resolve such a paradox in this essay. Nevertheless, the papers in this volume demonstrate that the poor have the capacity to participate and to do so in contexts which are relevant and beneficial to them. Consequently, those who blame poverty upon the poor because of their alleged "political incapacity" (Banfield 1958) are simply wrong. Similarly developmental theorists who argue that the poor should remain excluded from effective national arena participation because of the inherently redistributive and irrational nature of their actions ignore the substantial *political capacity* of the poor. The poor are victims not of their own cupidity, but of exploitation by dominant strata and by the unjust nature of the international political and economic order. We thus believe that further efforts in developmental theory should be expanded in scope to incorporate these findings concerning the developmental potential of participation by the Latin American poor.

Notes

1. Huntington and Nelson are not the only researchers who make the analytical error of disregarding the diversity of participation's motives and forms. Ironically, Verba and Nie (1972) themselves conceptually reaggregate participation after devoting a significant portion of their analysis to isolating separate modes. They then proceed to use a single, combined participation index for the great majority of their subsequent analysis, thereby largely vitiating the potential utility of their contribution. Milbrath and Goel's (1977) review of the literature on citizen activity often falls victim to the same tendency, especially by failing to stipulate precisely at given moments to which activity they refer.

2. For a similar argument based on normative grounds for all forms of peaceful citizen activity, see Scaff and Williams (1978). They argue that political development is less a technical process of institutionalization than one of increasing justice, which they state is well-served by even redistributive participation.