Political organisations and clubs structure contemporary politics. From political parties, to environmental organisations, citizens join a host of associations to influence policy-making and the political agenda. But, why do citizens join political organisations much more in some western democracies than in others? Laura Morales explains that there are three types of participatory patterns – a North American model, with extensive membership levels and a reasonably high level of activism within organisations; a northern, or Protestant, European pattern, that combines extensive membership levels and fundamentally passive involvement; and a south European model, where low levels of membership are compensated by intense activism. Drawing on a large number of cross-national surveys and datasets, Morales shows that huge cross-national variations in political membership are not so much related to social or attitudinal differences between these countries’ citizens, and are explained to a great extent by the structure of the political system of each nation.

This is a major and ambitious study. Laura Morales...manages to effect a broad ranging cross-national comparison, as well as an over-time analysis, yielding a host of valuable insights into the causes and implications of political membership.

Peter Mair

This is a very impressive volume in several respects. Its approach connects fields of research which usually do not take note of each other and more specifically, it introduces concepts and ideas of social movement research and of comparative politics into the study of political participation. Also, and most importantly, the author has adopted what one could call a ‘comparative contextual approach’ to the study of political participation, which proves to be very effective in throwing new light on this subject.

Hanspeter Kriesi
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ATTITUDES, RESOURCES, OPPORTUNITIES AND MOBILISATION: AN EXPLANATORY MODEL OF POLITICAL MEMBERSHIP

How can we explain political membership? What factors help us better understand why some citizens join political associations and others do not? What can account for the huge variations in levels of political membership across western democracies? This study proposes a framework that combines individual and contextual variables in the explanation of this form of political participation by taking into account four different sets of factors: attitudes, resources, institutional opportunities and organisational mobilisation.

When trying to analyse any type of political activity, there are several aspects we need to consider: citizens’ willingness or inclination to participate, their ability and capacity to do so, the opportunities they are granted for acting, and the recruitment and mobilisation cues they receive to become involved.¹ As we will see in the next sections, when focusing specifically on political membership, this entails considering four types of factors: citizens’ attitudes, their resources, the opportunities for participation granted by the institutional context, and the patterns of mobilisation and recruitment in which organisations engage.

Motivated to participate?
In democratic societies, the voluntary nature of citizens’ political participation means that anyone who does not wish to participate will not. Thus, in most cases, having the motivation or the inclination to participate would seem as a crucial factor. Positive attitudes and orientations towards politics and participation in public affairs contribute to citizens’ engagement, negative feelings usually prevent it.

A lack of motivation to participate in public affairs may be due to very different reasons.² Citizens may display a clear lack of interest in anything related to politics and the community and prefer to look after their own personal and family affairs. Apathy may be due to a fear of the negative consequences of politics, to its consideration as something useless or irrelevant, or simply to satisfaction with the status quo (Rosenberg 1954). Lack of interest in politics might be conscious or unconscious; very frequently it is linked to a lack of information and a limited
understanding of what happens in the public realm. In this regard, possessing minimal levels of information and interest in public affairs is almost a prerequisite for engaging in political action. Without political information citizens will be unlikely to find reasons to join a political organisation and they will probably ignore the various options among which they can choose.3

However, how much information on political organisations is necessary for individuals to decide to join them is more difficult to establish. Rothenberg (1988, 1989 and 1992) offers data which suggest that not much information is necessary because citizens generally dedicate few resources – time or money – to their contribution. The information held regarding the organisation seems, however, to be much more decisive when their commitment is to be maintained over a long period of time. Therefore, individuals use information for their ‘experiential search’: given that joining a group comes at a very low cost, individuals join political groups to acquire more information on their objectives and how they operate; if they are convinced, they stay with the group; if not, they leave.4

Thus, having an interest in public affairs will partly determine the degree of exposure to sources of political information; it will also determine willingness to devote always limited resources to engaging in political associations. But, in addition to information and an interest in public affairs, citizens also need to grant effectiveness to organised action. They need to feel capable of acting politically and they must also believe that the organisation to which they will contribute their time and/or money will be able to obtain the desired goal.5

Feelings of effectiveness are frequently crucial for overcoming the collective-action dilemma, as citizens invariably tend to overestimate the importance of their individual contribution to the achievement of the collective good pursued (Moe 1980a and b). Political organisations also contribute to this overestimation by stressing the importance of each individual contribution in their recruitment messages. For example, Amnesty International systematically emphasises the value of individual contributions in its human-rights campaigns and for membership recruitment.6 The section ‘Join’ in their website highlights the phrase ‘You can make a difference’. And Greenpeace uses a very similar motto: ‘Your support will make all the difference’. The more political organisations are affected by the collective-action dilemma, the more we should expect them to over-emphasise the impact of individual contribution. Equally, political organisations less capable of providing ‘hard’ selective incentives will need more to assure potential recruits of their effectiveness in achieving the desired collective good.

Nevertheless, for many individuals, having an interest in politics, possessing sufficient amounts of political information, and feeling politically effective is not enough to motivate them to participate and join political organisations. Many individuals act as free-riders, while others choose to co-operate even if facing the same cost and benefit structures. One possible explanation is that some citizens display altruistic preference structures or, rather, that some individuals combine two utility functions: one that maximises group interest and another that maximises personal interest (Margolis 1982). Individuals act altruistically when they
incorporate the effects of their actions on others (the group) and their course of action is such that their strictly personal benefit would have been greater had they ignored those effects.\endnote{7} Perhaps, then, citizens who do not participate in politics purely because they do not ‘want’ to are the ones who only maximise the utility function of their personal interest. In other words, not only political attitudes and orientations matter: preferences and the structure of values (i.e. the utilities) are also relevant for understanding why citizens might be willing to engage in public affairs.

Beyond political interest, feelings of efficacy, information and value preferences, the role of other political and civic orientations in influencing citizens’ associational behaviour is much less clear. The growing literature on social capital pays great attention to the relationship between trust in other citizens, social cooperation and membership. In some cases trust is even identified with the very concept of social capital and, in others, both trust and membership are indicators of the existence or absence of it. In most cases it is assumed that the relationship between interpersonal trust and membership is clear and direct; but empirical backing for this thesis is still scarce.

The causal mechanism between interpersonal trust and participation in associations is, thus far, somewhat unclear. Some scholars have argued that, contrary to what Putnam (1993, 1995a and b, 2000) seems to claim, associations that pursue collective goods may contribute more to the creation of social capital than those associations whose goal is to obtain private goods, such as leisure or sports associations.\endnote{8}

In addition to social trust, research on political behaviour has shown that citizens with post-materialist or libertarian values are much more prone to engaging in organisations linked to the NSMs.\endnote{9} But it is much less clear that this type of value preference leads to a general inclination to join political associations.

In short, joining political organisations requires some minimal level of motivation in the form of interest, information, feelings of efficacy, or value preferences. If non-participation is mainly due to citizens’ unwillingness or lack of motivation to participate in politics, any intervention aimed at increasing levels of participation would need to change these individual attitudes and preferences. However, as we will discuss in the following section, in many cases citizens refrain from participating not out of unwillingness or a lack of motivation but because they lack the resources or the opportunities to get involved.

**Enabling participation: individual resources**

In addition to motivation, citizens need to be able to participate: they need resources for political action. Political action is costly and participants, therefore, need resources – whether economic, social, cognitive or time-related. In fact, early studies of political participation emphasised the relevance of individual resources – as well as the mediating role of attitudes.\endnote{10} And one of the main limitations of the classical model of political participation developed initially by Verba, Nie and their various colleagues is precisely the reduction of the explanation of variations
in political participation to factors related to the individual – in particular resources and orientations.\textsuperscript{11}

However, which resources will be relevant for explaining political membership is not self-evident. The cost structure of action varies depending on the form of participation. For example, the cost structure of co-ordinated actions (e.g. protests) is very different to that of co-operative actions (e.g. contributing to or joining an organisation): whilst in the former case the costs decrease with the number of participants, the costs of co-operative action remain constant (Hardin 1991: 366–8). In other words, the resources needed for political action importantly vary depending on the cost structure of the activity.

In general terms, we should expect that people with more resources and a more privileged social and economic position will be more likely to join political organisations, either because they are more aware of their ability to defend their interests; because they are more exposed to political socialisation experiences that favour involvement; because their life experiences build up greater cognitive resources; or because they are more often the target of mobilisation efforts by political organisations.\textsuperscript{12}

Given that social, economic and cognitive resources have an impact in the cost structure of citizens’ political activity, individuals with varying stocks of these resources will most likely have different propensities to join political organisations. For example, citizens with higher incomes face lower costs for contributing financially to political associations than lower-income individuals; citizens with little free time available confront higher opportunity costs for actively engaging in an organisation than someone who has some free time; and citizens with few educational and cognitive resources face greater information costs than those who have them in abundance. Thus, not surprisingly, citizens with greater resources usually tend to join political associations more frequently and in greater numbers and this pattern is likely to be common in most western democracies.

Still, even with motivation and with resources, many individuals will not participate. In many cases, citizens will need to have specific participation opportunities before engaging in politics. Opportunities for participation – provided by the institutional context and recruitment efforts – will very frequently facilitate citizens’ political action.

**Facilitating political action: opportunities for participation**

In many ways, opportunities for participation can be viewed as facilitating political participation. Citizens do not act in a vacuum: most political activities are collective in nature and require co-ordination and/or co-operation between a number of citizens. Rosenau (1973) has already warned of the excessive importance that studies of political participation attribute to personal initiative when explaining how and why citizens participate in politics. This bias in behavioural approaches has recurrently meant neglecting the fact that citizens’ participation occurs in interactive situations and that it tends to be activated by some agent – individual or organisational.
Thus, the political activity of any one individual also depends on various facilitating factors that are beyond his or her control: other people’s actions, organisational recruitment strategies and the institutional opportunities afforded for citizens to have a say. Sometimes, the presence or absence of these opportunities to become engaged will even determine the capacity (or not) to act politically in certain fashions at all. For example, if referenda are not allowed (or are rarely used), direct democratic actions and a certain array of conventional forms of participation linked to these ballots will not be frequent forms of political expression.

In this sense, opportunities for participating in political associations are, to a large extent, a function of the political and social context. In fact, we should refer to ‘contexts’, as we should distinguish between the immediate context or micro-context of citizens (their personal networks), the organisational context or meso-context (the organisational networks around them) and, lastly, the political and institutional context or macro-context. The first two levels shape the direct and indirect contacts individuals will have with organisations and, therefore, the extent to which they are the targets of recruitment for these. The macro-context does also have an indirect impact on citizens’ opportunities for joining political organisations: on the one hand it determines the institutional boundaries of political action; and on the other it conditions the structure of opportunities that political associations face, thereby determining their recruitment and mobilisation strategies. We will briefly discuss the impact of these types of contexts on political membership separately.

**Personal and organisational networks**

As Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) put it, many citizens do not engage in political activities simply because nobody asked them. As they emphasise, recruitment and mobilisation initiatives are crucial for our understanding of political participation. In particular, one important aspect of recruitment and mobilisation processes is that they frequently interact with individual resources. In fact, past research has shown that organisational strategies for political mobilisation are clearly selective: the effectiveness of the mobilising action is maximised by aiming it at people who are most likely to respond positively (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993). This implies that opportunities for participation deriving from the processes of explicit recruitment are often extremely unequal amongst people of different economic strata, employment and occupational background, race and age.

For the specific case of political membership, the exposure to personal or organisational networks that facilitate contacts with and recruitment by political associations is fundamental. The tasks of contact and recruitment – either directly by organisations or through personal contacts and intermediaries – contribute to the substantial reduction of information costs implicit in the decision to join an organisation. Several studies have shown that citizens who are asked to join a political organisation are always more likely to become members, and Johnson (1998: 60) even claims that ‘collective interests do not explain group membership – recruitment activity does’. It is often not sufficient to have reasons, inclination
and resources to join a political organisation; most people will simply not take the initiative. Organisations need to devote resources and effort to recruiting and informing people of their existence and objectives. Indeed, Hansen (1985) provides evidence that most of the changes in levels of interest-group membership in the United States reflect the changing mobilisation practices of organisations.

Consequently, micro and meso-contexts are of vital importance in understanding why some citizens participate in political associations and others do not, as social and organisational contacts and recruitment efforts are not distributed uniformly amongst all individuals. Citizens’ social networks determine whether one is in contact with other people who engage in associations or not. Similarly, these networks condition the likelihood of being approached by organisations to request one’s support. This has been termed the ‘mobilisation bias’. People with fewer socio-economic resources tend to live surrounded by other people who rarely participate in public affairs, which means that the chances of an acquaintance encouraging them to participate in political organisations are far lower. Likewise, organisations carefully target the type of public they want to reach and they concentrate their efforts on the type of citizens that are most likely to contribute resources or time to their cause.

Hence, the information costs of joining a political association are clearly non-randomly distributed, simply because organisational efforts in mobilising citizens are not random either. Mobilisation is crucial, therefore, because citizens are more likely to join political associations if they are asked to do so and, additionally, because it increases organisational visibility, awareness of organisations’ goals and perceptions of organisations’ effectiveness. Thus, we need to consider the role of personal networks and organisational mobilisation in our models of political membership.

Macro-contexts: institutional opportunities

Whereas the role of factors related to recruitment and mobilisation has received some attention – especially in studies of social movements and of interest groups, the incorporation of contextual factors related to institutional configurations has been mostly limited to electoral participation and behaviour. Some scholars mention the importance of these opportunities for all forms of participation, although in many cases this has been limited to merely theoretical or speculative approaches, or to general expressions of ideal research programmes. Only recently have some researchers made limited attempts to include very general aspects of the political configuration of democracies in their analyses of membership in all types of voluntary associations (Curtis, Baer & Grabb 2001 and Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001).

However, the opportunities for action afforded by specific political configurations are very likely to be relevant for explaining cross-national variations in patterns of political membership. In this line, Hardin (1991: 370) argues that states which most ably respond to citizens’ reformist demands increase the incentives for collective action to adopt the form of group organisation (co-operation) as
opposed to forms of protest (co-ordination).\textsuperscript{18} If political institutions and authorities are receptive to citizens’ demands, the probabilities of success will be, on average, greater. This means that institutional opportunities are likely to affect the anticipated costs and benefits of political action, thus modifying the incentive structures for co-operative action and for joining political organisations.

Moreover, the institutional opportunities for participation that citizens have are also important because they frequently affect different types of individuals differently.\textsuperscript{19} Given that citizens do not reserve a ‘fixed quota’ of resources (time, money, effort, etc.) to dedicate to participation or any other form of altruism, the amount they eventually invest to maximise collective utility will depend on the opportunities for participation they are presented with (Margolis 1982: 24).\textsuperscript{20}

Macro-contexts – mainly institutions and political processes – shape the incentive structure of individual action through various mechanisms. On the one hand, the political context might have effects associated with changes in circumstances. For example, changes in the economic cycle have an impact on perceptions of threat held by specific social groups and frequently provoke distress. This, in turn, frequently stirs political associations to emerge and mobilise in order to voice those feelings of threat and distress. Hansen (1985) and King & Walker (1992) show how situations that threaten group interests contribute to individuals being more likely to join organisations that pursue collective goods. Amongst other reasons, greater mobilisation of organisations during periods of conflict increases the amount of information individuals receive regarding the potential benefits of action (and the potential losses of inaction) at the same time that they are prepared to take more risks.\textsuperscript{21}

A final effect of the varying political situation is related to subsidies and funds for the creation of political organisations, which could be available from various sources but come primarily from governmental agencies. The availability of ‘seed’ money for the creation and maintenance of organisations varies substantially from one period to another and is very dependent on the political priorities set by public institutions or private funders.\textsuperscript{22} This impact on the organisations ‘in supply’ is fundamental because supply creates its own demand (Hansen 1985: 94); and without an adequate supply of organisations demand will have fewer opportunities to develop – given the limits on co-operation imposed by the logic of collective action. Thus, individual decisions to join organisations reflect, in part, opportunities available to do so: even if individuals feel politically or economically threatened, they cannot join groups that do not exist.

Yet, beyond the impact of changes in circumstance in the macro-context, the latter also imposes structural constraints for both the creation of political associations and individuals’ decisions to join them. Firstly, the availability of institutions and organisations able and willing to act as patrons in the creation and consolidation of organisations with political goals varies across democracies. A society’s capacity for ‘patronage’ fundamentally affects the opportunities to form political organisations and to join them. Research in the field of social movements has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of inter-organisational
networks in understanding the emergence of new groups and political actors. Patrons’ and inter-organisational networks provide material resources (money, infrastructures, etc.) and social resources (experience, contacts, leadership, etc.) that contribute to the creation of new organisations. Logically, the existence of these patrons and organisational networks provides the initial investment necessary for creating new political associations.

On the other hand, the institutional configuration of each political system conditions the channels of participation available and these channels then structure the incentives for joining political associations. The political opportunity structure (POS) determines whether the political system is more or less receptive to citizens’ demands as voiced by associations. If political structures are open to the accommodation of interests expressed through organisations, citizens will have greater incentives to join them. If the political system is, on the contrary, closed and hostile to the demands of citizen organisations, the effectiveness of collective action will be limited and citizens will find few reasons to bear the costs of cooperation in organisations. Additionally, these costs will increase, given that it will be necessary to devote greater efforts to achieve the desired goals. Hence, the POS affects both the benefit and cost structures of co-operative action.

Consequently, this study takes into account three aspects that, largely, define the level of openness of a political system: the level of accessibility; the degree of fragmentation of the political elites; and the porosity of the bureaucratic decision-making system.

Firstly, the level of decentralisation of the government and the availability of institutions of direct democracy determine how accessible the political system is for citizen organisations. Several studies have discussed the relevance of the decentralisation of political structures as an incentive for participation. Hansen (1985: 81), for example, argues that decentralisation affects the probability that the collective good will not be provided if the individual does not co-operate. The greater the decentralisation of the government’s political functions, the smaller the size of the population affected by the latter and the greater the impact of individual action on the final result of collective action. For her part, Nanetti (1980) considers that the introduction of decentralised structures in local politics favours citizen participation because it contributes to making issues more visible and to focusing the efforts of local associations on specific actions whilst, at the same time, increasing the feeling of effectiveness of the political action.

Additionally, decentralised, federalist or de-concentrated political systems encourage the creation of political organisations due to the fragmentation of power in different bodies and at different levels of government. Thus, by multiplying the opportunities to affect democratic decision-making processes, they encourage the formation of organisations. Yet, this multiplying effect might also be due to much simpler reasons: federalist and decentralised states provide a hierarchical structure that organisations can effectively mimic for their own organising (Skocpol, Ganz & Munzon 2000).

The availability of institutions of direct democracy also seems to contribute to
the proliferation of political associations and groups, by offering additional opportunities for citizen organisations to participate in the political decision-making process and by providing an alternative means for traditional lobbying activities (Boehmke 2000 and 2002). In addition, these institutional mechanisms reduce the cost of co-operation – as they are regulated and conventional processes – and they noticeably increase the visibility of organisations, thus reducing information costs (Kriesi & Wisler 1996).

Secondly, the fragmentation of elites might favour political membership by increasing political pluralism, contributing to greater political competition between parties and increasing the political vulnerability of those in power. When the political elites are fragmented, citizen organisations are better able to establish political alliances with political actors who intervene in decision-making processes (e.g. governing or opposition parties) and thus will more frequently achieve their goals.

Finally, the degree of porosity of the interest-intermediation system also contributes to structure the incentives for co-operative collective action. Research on social movements has traditionally considered that pluralist intermediation systems and ‘weak’ administrative systems have a greater channelling capacity for the demands of organised citizens, since interest groups have more chances to influence the decision-making processes (Kitschelt 1986, Kriesi et al. 1995: 31). In addition, pluralist systems tend to allow the incorporation of a greater number of different demands, as no group enjoys a privileged or monopolist situation. However, other aspects of interest-intermediation systems are also relevant, particularly the level of conflict. Consensual intermediation traditions and patterns of conflict-resolution include negotiation systems and structures that allow the incorporation of different demands from citizen organisations, while conflictual systems very often give rise to zero-sum games and the exclusion of certain preferences and demands. Clearly, the expected benefits of organised action will be, on average, greater in the former than in the latter systems of interest-intermediation.

The analytical model
In accordance with the framework discussed in previous pages, this investigation approaches the study of political membership with an analytical model that attempts to explain this type of participation by taking into account the impact of four main types of factors (Figure 1.1). On the one hand, factors related to individual attributes: citizens’ political motivation and resources. On the other hand, factors related to the context in which citizens decide and act: the opportunities for participation granted by political structures, and the patterns and processes of mobilisation and recruitment into organisations around them.

Political attitudes and orientations such as feelings of efficacy, an interest in politics, political information, and post-materialist value structures, will shape expectations about the impact of the individual contribution to the achievement of the political goal, as well as the expected returns from the activities of the political organisation. In turn, individual resources have a clear impact on the relative
magnitude of the costs citizens will have to bear for joining political associations. Thus, individuals with greater political motivation and greater resources are expected to be more likely to join political associations in all western nations.

But these individual-level factors are not sufficient if we are to understand why, in some western democracies, citizens are much more likely to join political organisations than in otherwise similar societies. In order to explain cross-national differences among western countries, we need to identify to what extent the institutional and mobilisation context fosters or hinders their citizens’ participation in political organisations.

The institutional and mobilisation contexts are expected to have a direct impact on individuals’ behaviour and to account – at least partially – for cross-national variations in political membership. Political opportunities structures will mould the cost-benefit structure of joining: open political systems are expected to reduce the costs of action and to increase the expected returns of organised activity. Organisational mobilisation and structures will affect expectations of individual impact – by reinforcing feelings of efficacy through mobilisational cues; perceptions of the degree of support by other citizens and the expected costs of action – primarily by reducing information costs.

However, both sets of factors are also expected to have an interactive effect on certain groups of individuals, in such a way that they promote or discourage, in varying degrees, the participation of individuals who have different levels of resources. This potential interactive effect is of the utmost importance, as it would mean that the political context, and political institutions in particular, impinge on the way social inequalities are transformed into political inequalities. Thus, it is particularly interesting to explore the extent to which institutional opportunities and mobilisation patterns by organisations increase (or diminish) participatory inequalities stemming from social inequalities in education, income or gender.

Finally, the model will also consider – although to a much more limited extent, due to the lack of suitable network data – the impact of recruitment efforts within personal networks. The different types of personal networks to which citizens are exposed are expected to shape individuals’ political orientations and attitudes: having acquaintances already engaged in politics will contribute to more positive dispositions, through the effect of socialisation processes. But having active ‘alters’ will also reinforce positive expectations about others contributing to the political goal, based on the experience that others do actually also join political organisations. Finally, citizens embedded in networks of active ‘others’ will have to bear lower costs in order to engage in political groups, as they are more frequently exposed to recruitment and mobilisation efforts.

If we are to achieve a more complete understanding of the decisions citizens make with regard to political participation, we need to adopt more systematic and encompassing models of analysis. Limiting our studies to individual attributes or to contextual factors alone is unsatisfactory. We need, therefore, to combine different levels of analysis if we are to better understand individuals’ political behaviour. And this study aims at moving a step forward in that direction.
Political opportunity structures: openness of the political system

Expected benefits from joining

Expected costs of joining

Expected likelihood of others joining as well

Expected impact of the individual contribution

Decision to join a political organisation

Organisational structures and mobilisation strategies: past and present

Personal networks: family, friends, neighbourhood, workplace

Individual resources and SES

Individual orientations and attitudes

MACRO-CONTEXT

MESO-CONTEXT

MICRO-CONTEXT

THE CITIZEN

Figure 1.1: The analytical model

Font and line patterns identify the various levels of analysis for each set of factors: individual, micro-contextual, meso- and macro-contextual.
The next section will discuss some definitional issues that are relevant for the research design that will be developed in the remaining parts of this book. Its main goal is to address the following questions: how can we distinguish ‘political’ from ‘non-political’ associational involvement? What exactly is an association and how do we distinguish associations from other social institutions and organisations? What is ‘membership’?

POLITICAL MEMBERSHIP: SOME DEFINITIONS

This study will, therefore, focus its attention on a specific form of political participation: political membership. But, what do we mean exactly by political participation and political membership?

Our starting point is a somewhat modified version of the well known definition of political participation proposed by Verba, Nie & Kim (1971: 9), partially developed from Milbrath’s (1965). Political participation is, thus, defined here as the acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and the actions they take, including new issues on the agenda, and/or changing values and preferences directly linked to political decision-making.

This definition excludes the requirement that these acts must be legal and incorporates activities aimed at including issues on the political agenda and changing social values and preferences. This takes into account activities intended not to influence the selection of governmental personnel but to attempt to redefine what should be considered of public concern and, therefore, subject to political debate.

However, given that this research deals with political membership as a specific type of political participation, we need to provide a definition of political associations and to make explicit what distinguishes them from other associations. The definition of associations proposed by Knoke (1986: 2) is extremely useful for this study:

A minimum definition of association is a formally organized named group most of whose members –whether persons or organizations – are not financially recompensed for their participation.

Knoke’s definition is useful in distinguishing associations from other social and political institutions such as the family, groups of friends, and other organisations, which are frequently included in notions regarding the ‘third sector’. On the one hand, associations are distinct from other organisations, such as foundations or government agencies, in that very few individuals receive payment for their activities in the former (Knoke & Prensky 1984). On the other hand, associations are different from economic organisations such as companies, in that they are institutions that seek solutions to individual or collective problems that are different from those of the market (Knoke 1990b: 5).
Within the entire set of organisations we call associations we can distinguish a subset formed by those aimed mainly at political action: political associations. Yet, the problem lies in defining the political nature of an organisation. In what sense is an organisation ‘political’? Lane (1965: 75) contends that there are notable differences between a political and a non-political organisation and links political organisations to their effects on (1) the political process, and (2) the political interests and motivations of their individual members. Likewise, Knoke (1990b) considers the distinction between political and non-political associations to be crucial from many different angles. First of all, although associations often have mixed goals, some associations emphasise their political objectives more. Simultaneously, these differences in goals have important consequences for aspects such as the associations’ sources of funding and their budget priorities (79–81). Secondly, the reasons, motivations and interests that lead citizens to join political groups are fundamentally different from those which lead them to join non-political associations. The provision of services, material benefits and social incentives are much more important in the latter than in the former. For members of political associations, motivations which are related to the collective good pursued by the associations they join are much greater. Additionally, the motivations of members of political associations are much more varied (132–5).

Therefore, the definition of political associations used in this study employs similar defining criteria as displayed in the concept of political participation. Hence, political associations are defined as those formally organised groups that seek collective goods (whether pure public goods or another type of collective goods) and which have as their main goal to influence political decision-making processes, either by trying to influence the selection of governmental personnel or their activities, to include issues on the agenda, or to change the values and preferences that guide the decision-making process.

This definition of political associations is similar to that provided by Knoke (1986: 2) with regard to interest groups: ‘when associations attempt to influence government decisions, they are acting as an interest group’. Nevertheless, the fundamental problem of the concept of interest group is that it tends to exclude political parties, as they (or their elected officials) are usually – with bureaucrats – the object of pressure from these groups. For this reason, in this study, the more general concept of political associations is preferred. Lastly, and with the aim of distinguishing political associations from social movements or citizen protests, this definition requires some level of formal interaction between individuals within the group. In other words, this investigation is primarily concerned with associations and organised groups, although their level of organisational formalisation may vary from one case to another.

Additionally, the definition proposed in this study stresses the relevance of goals as the main defining criterion. Members may have very different reasons to join an association, and these might even differ substantially among individuals in any given association. Thus, the crucial aspect is not so much exactly what citizens look for when they join a political association but what are the collective
goals that the organisation seeks to achieve. Clearly, any individual might join a political party or an environmental organisation just to make friends but this misses the point. What is most relevant, and what forms the basis of the definition employed in this study, is what organisations do with the capital – financial, human, and social – they have. In this sense – as we will discuss later – trade unions and business organisations are clearly to be regarded as political organisations, as some of their primary goals are to exert influence on political decision-making processes, on the selection of governmental personnel, and on the political agenda.

Nevertheless, the problem is not solely, nor fundamentally, to define what a political association is from a theoretical or analytical point of view. The more challenging aspect is to distinguish political from non-political organisations when addressing the data available on associations and membership. Finding a satisfactory operational definition of which associations should be classified as political is difficult. As Verba, Schlozman & Brady (1995: 58–9) very correctly point out, technical decisions on how to measure the political nature of an association have very significant substantive implications.

As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter two, various alternatives exist for distinguishing between political and non-political associations when we are using survey data of representative samples of a population of individuals. We can use as the main definitional criterion the level of political activity the association engages in, obtaining this information either from survey respondents’ perceptions or from the type of activities respondents claim to engage in within the organisation. When we cannot get this type of information on associations’ political activities, we might classify them according to some theoretical criterion and the analyst’s best judgment.

In this study, in most cases, there is no other option but to resort to the latter type of operational classification between political and non-political associations. The cross-national survey data employed throughout the volume does not include explicit questions regarding associations’ political activities. Thus, the theoretical definition of political associations presented on previous pages is used to classify organisations, judging from the type of primary goals they can be assumed to pursue.

In addition to the distinction between political and non-political associations, in some parts of this study I analyse what type of political organisations western citizens join. More specifically, some attention is paid to the distinction between ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ political associations, a differentiation which has already been used in other research related to political membership and, certainly, in a long list of studies of new social movements (NSMs).

Much has been written on what distinguishes ‘old’ from ‘new’ politics, particularly when comparing political parties and social movements. Some scholars have highlighted that traditional political organisations differ from new ones in their ideology and the values they defend. While the former build their ideological frameworks around distributive values, the latter are characterised by their defence of libertarian values. Others highlight the different logics of participation – instrumental
in traditional organisations and expressive in those related to the NSMs\textsuperscript{40}; their contrasting organisational structures (decentralised and participative in the case of the NSMs, centralised and hierarchical in traditional political associations)\textsuperscript{41} or the forms of action that are more characteristic of each type of political associations (leaning more towards protest in the case of NSM organisations as opposed to the more institutionalised forms of traditional political organisations).\textsuperscript{42}

Nevertheless, these aspects are not particularly useful when establishing a criterion for classifying specific organisations and groups into the categories of ‘new’ or ‘traditional’ political associations. Some of them are even challenged by specialists in the NSMs subfield. Rucht (1990) rejects the validity of the distinction based on the different logics of action (expressive as opposed to instrumental) because both logics are present in all NSMs, although one may prevail in certain periods. In fact, Rucht demonstrates how the majority of NSMs are either ambivalent or power-oriented (instrumental) as regards the logics of action they pursue. A similar problem arises from the distinction based on their organisational structure. Although in many cases ‘new’ politics organisations adopt loose, decentralised structures, and make much use of participatory democracy, this is not always the case. Some organisations which undoubtedly are related to ‘new’ politics show organisational traits that are extremely hierarchical and have few or no mechanisms of participatory democracy – particularly all the big multinational organisations, such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International. In contrast, some political parties are adopting more decentralised and participatory structures and rules (most notably, Green parties and left-wing libertarians). This very argument is also valid for forms of action: although ‘new’ politics is very much related to protest and non-conventional forms of participation, this is not exclusive to new organisations, nor is it the only form of action in their repertoire. Therefore, most of the differentiating characteristics between ‘old’ and ‘new’ politics put forward in the literature on NSMs are not glaringly obvious in practice and many are common to both types of politics and organisations.

What might be, then, a suitable criterion for differentiating one type of political organisation from another? The alternative proposed in this study is to employ as the distinctive characteristic what we could call the nature of the representative link. ‘New’ political organisations are characterised by their lack of a representative link with specific sectors of the population; in other words, with a specific constituency. On the one hand, these organisations do not engage in the representative mechanisms that would link them to constituencies: they do not run for elections, and they cannot claim representative mandates for any subset of citizens. On the other hand, their demands, the issues they stand for, are universalist in their aims: when environmental, peace or human rights organisations defend their causes, they are not claiming to represent a specific constituency; rather they defend these issues in the name of all (human) beings.

In contrast, traditional political organisations (political parties, unions, and special interest groups) are the political actors par excellence in the representation of the interests and demands of specific sectors of society. On the one hand, traditional
political associations are directly involved in electoral politics in different fields, which creates representative links to specific constituencies. Political parties represent their voters, unions represent the workers who vote for them – and, stretching the representative link, the set of workers in their economic sector – and interest groups represent the professionals or the industries whose interests they defend.

Additionally, one of the main objectives of ‘traditional’ organisations is to gain representative power within the political system. ‘New’ political organisations, however, do not consider themselves intermediary organisations and do not seek to play this role within political institutions: representation of a constituency is not the goal of these organisations. Thus, there is no representative link between these associations and specific constituencies, either formal or self-proclaimed. Furthermore, representing a constituency implies negotiating with the representatives of other constituencies and the demands of these ‘new’ groups are not negotiable (Offe 1988).

However, of most importance is not how they portray themselves or what their intentions or platforms are but the dynamics by which traditional and new political organisations defend their goals. These different dynamics are related not so much to the type of interests or demands they stand for as to the representative linkages they have (or fail to have). Being an agent of representation for a constituency requires competing with other agents for that representative status. ‘New’ political organisations are free from this type of competition. This does not mean that they do not compete on other fields: ‘new’ political organisations do compete for social and human resources, for patronage, for economic support, for media coverage and, to a certain extent, for political opportunities. However, they do not compete for representative status and neither is one of their main organisational goals to perform well in the competition for representation.

The distinction between ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ political organisations proposed in this study partly stems from the typology proposed by Kriesi (1996: 152–4), who distinguishes social movement organisations (SMOs) from traditional political organisations (parties and interest groups) depending on the level of direct participation of the constituency in its political actions. However, the distinction used in this study, based on the representative link, goes slightly beyond Kriesi’s proposal by arguing that the different forms of political action undertaken by ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ organisations are due to the different nature of their relationships with organisations of the same type, with citizens, and to the issues they defend. It is not just that NSM organisations tend to mobilise their members directly whilst traditional political organisations do so to a much lesser extent; rather that the type of issues they stand for (universalist) and the way in which they put these forward (outside of representative institutions) requires this type of political action. In the absence of representative links to constituencies, political action must take the form of mobilisation, almost by necessity.

In this regard, it is very illuminating that when ‘new’ political organisations get into the dynamics of ‘traditional’ ones, there is little to distinguish between them.
Thus, when environmental movements create Green parties, engagement in representative politics almost completely transforms them into a different ‘species’. And frequently this will mean getting into trouble with their origins and grassroots, especially because representative politics requires negotiation and the trading-off of some goals for others.

Finally, a few words are needed about the political behaviour that will be the primary focus of this study: engagement in political associations. Different concepts can be used when defining engagement in organisations: militancy, activism, affiliation, and membership. By simply listing them, we detect their connection to varying levels of activity within the organisation. Yet, it is not essential to be particularly active in a political association in order to be a political participant: merely joining or paying fees supports the organisation in its attempt to influence the political process. Therefore, the concepts of affiliation and membership would most suitably define the type of behaviour we are interested in. The term affiliation, however, implies a formal process of registration with the association, but many political groups have a formal organisation that is looser than this but should still be included in this study. Hence, the concept of membership is the best suited for this investigation.

A last definitional issue is the need to distinguish between members and non-members. The definitions of membership, and the requirements that individuals must fulfil to be considered members vary from one organisation to another and it is therefore impossible to offer a single operational definition of political membership. This, of course, introduces difficulties for measurement. These are solved in this study pragmatically, as we will see in greater length in Chapter two, and entail using survey respondents’ claims of membership as the only criterion.

Chapter two spells out in greater detail the methodological implications of these definitions and also provides a comprehensive description of the object of analysis: political membership.

NOTES

1 Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) provide a very complete conceptual and analytical framework for tackling the central issue of why citizens (do not) participate. They offer three distinct types of response, which are not mutually exclusive: citizens do not participate because they do not want to, because they can not, or because nobody has asked them to. This study builds upon Verba, Schlozman & Brady’s framework and tries to improve it through the further development of explanatory elements neglected in their study: institutional opportunities.

2 The lack of motivation for participating in public affairs is, generally, not independent from socio-economic resources and socialisation. Its separate discussion is only for argumentative purposes.

3 In this sense, political information is better conceived as a cognitive resource rather than as an attitude. However, given its close link with political interest it is probably better to discuss and analyse it together with attitudes and orientations.
4 Johnson’s study (1998: 45) supports Rothenberg’s model on the ‘experiential’ search for membership of political groups, as the turnover rate in the environmental groups studied by Johnson is very high (around 30 per cent) and everything seems to indicate that it is much higher among new members (around 50 per cent). However, one problem with Rothenberg’s proposal is that, in keeping with his rationalist approach, he presents the situation of joining a group as an express intentional act of the individual. The citizen ‘seeks’ an organisation to join and this search process is ‘experiential’. In this study, however, a somewhat less rationalist approach is favoured; as Rothenberg himself would term it, a more ‘sociological’ approach. In many cases, the process which leads citizens to join a political association is the result of coincidences, social contacts and inertias which, as we shall see, are related to their social environment or micro-context.

5 Past research has shown that perceptions of effectiveness are very important for citizens’ motivations to participate, both in terms of the ability of political action to change things or achieve its objectives (external efficacy) and in terms of the individual’s personal capacity to contribute significantly (internal efficacy) to the course of action. Nevertheless, it seems that internal efficacy has a more decisive effect on political action than external efficacy (Madsen 1987, Parry, Moyser & Day 1992).

6 After the successful 2002 campaign to save Safiya Hussaini’s life from being stoned to death in Nigeria, the Spanish branch of Amnesty International launched another campaign to save Amina Lawal’s life from a similar death penalty. The campaign was entitled ‘Thanks to you’, and went on to argue that thanks to individual contributions and actions Hussaini’s life had been saved. Clearly the goal was to emphasise the effectiveness of individual action even to affect political decisions in regions that may seem remote to many western citizens.

7 Ahn, Ostrom & Walker (2003) prefer to model this individual not as an altruistic one but as one with heterogeneous motivations – the ‘inequity-averse’. While altruists have utility functions that combine their own payoffs with payoffs received by others, the inequity-averse would respond to utility functions that incorporate the aggregated result of (in)equality of income.

8 Critical comments on Putnam’s theses in this regard can be found in Tarrow (1996), and Boix & Posner (1996).

9 See, for example, Flanagan (1987), Inglehart (1990 and 1997), and the articles in Müller-Rommel & Poguntke (1995) and in Clark & Rempel (1997).

10 See, for example, Verba & Nie (1972), and Verba, Nie & Kim (1978).

11 Many have criticised this ‘atomisation’ of the individual when studying participation, as it neglects the fact that many forms of political action require co-operation with other people or depend on social interaction (see, for example, Przeworski 1974, Knoke 1990c, Huckfeldt & Sprague 1993, Leighley 1995).


17 Van Sickle & Dalton (2005) include contextual factors to explain protest action, but their indicators are probably too crude to be considered real indicators of the political context: Freedom House scores on levels of democracy.

18 Koopmans (1996) makes a similar claim based on empirical analyses of participation and protest in several European countries.

19 On the interaction between contextual opportunities and individual characteristics, see Leighley (1995 and 2001) and Anduiza (2002).

20 Another way of conceptualising opportunities for participation is to see them as being more circumstantial in nature. Rosenau (1974) and Beck & Jennings (1979) discuss the varied opportunities granted by the emergence of new issues or new political conflicts and how these may affect different social groups to a greater or lesser extent.

21 In addition, fluctuations in circumstance affect different political organisations differently, depending on the type of selective incentives they offer. Groups which offer intangible selective benefits (supportive or expressive) are more vulnerable to economic and ideological changes because, these being ‘luxury’ goods, the demand for them is very elastic to changes in price, revenue and tastes (Hansen 1985).

22 Walker (1991: 78) presents very interesting data on the evolution of patronage in the creation of different interest groups in the United States. Of more relevance to the argument presented here is the evolution of citizen groups: between 1960 and 1983 they have seen contributions from foundations quadruple and aid from private companies and the government almost double in relation to the support received by organisations created in the period from 1836–1929. See other discussions of the various trends and consequences of public and private funding of movement organisations in Jenkins (1998), Jenkins & Haleli (1999), Brulle & Jenkins (2005), Minkoff & Agnone (2006).


24 See, for example, Kitschelt (1986), Kriesi (1989) and Tarrow (1994). The concept of POS and its application in this study is discussed in greater detail in Chapter six.

25 Chapter six presents in detail the definition of each of these aspects, as well as their empirical operationalisation. For the moment a summarising reference to some of the most relevant hypotheses will suffice.
This is a common claim in the research on social movements. See, for example, Kitschelt (1986), Koopmans & Rucht (1995), and Rucht (1996).

The model shown in Figure 1.1. focuses on the hypothesised links between the ‘explanatory’ factors and political membership and attempts to provide the possible micro-mechanisms between the former and the latter through the main elements of the rational calculus of collective action. Research on social psychology shows that, indeed, these elements are interconnected but this is of no primary importance to this study. In fact, micro-mechanisms are only spelled for analytical and theoretical purposes, as they will not be subject to empirical testing in the remaining parts of the book due to the lack of data on these elements of rational decision-making.

When referring here to private citizens only bureaucrats and other agents of public administration who influence public decisions due to their position within the bureaucratic or governmental apparatus are excluded. However, this definition is not intended to exclude, as Huntington & Nelson (1976: 5) or Verba, Nie and their colleagues (1971, 1972 and 1978) do, the activities of political party leaders, candidates or interest group professionals, thereby distinguishing between professional politicians and participants. To use the same example offered by Huntington & Nelson (1976: 5) in rejecting the distinction between voluntary participation and mobilised participation – ‘it would not make sense to say that a soldier who is conscripted does not participate in war while a voluntary soldier does’ – it does not seem very reasonable to consider that the general leading the soldiers is not participating in the war simply because he is a military professional. Therefore, professionals should be included in the concept of political participation. This is purely a conceptual debate, as the type of information available for this study, which comes mainly from national surveys, does not allow us to distinguish between political professionals and ‘common’ citizens.

The concept of organisation is, clearly, broader than that of association and covers a larger number of objects. One definition of organisation is, for example, that offered by Stinchcombe (1965: 142): ‘a set of stable social relations deliberately created, with the explicit intention of continuously accomplishing some specific goals or purposes. These goals or purposes are generally functions performed for some larger structure.’

A discussion of the definition of the third sector and its relationship to concepts such as civil society and the non-for-profit sector can be found in Salamon et al. (1999: chapter one and Appendix A). It is important to stress that these terms are not employed here because they refer to a broader object of study. This study is only concerned with associations and, more specifically, political associations.

Curiously, Lane (1965: 75) anticipates the debate on social capital over thirty years and states: ‘Clearly, there are marked differences between a bowling club and a political club and these differences will undoubtedly be associated with the effect of the organisation upon (1) the political process and (2) the political interests and motives of the individual members.’

I use the terms political associations and organisations interchangeably; and the latter does not include the state (although it is sometimes considered a political organisation) or other governmental bodies.

van Deth (1997) also distinguishes between political and social organisations by looking at their main objectives and, later, to the results of a factor analysis (van Deth & Kreuter 1998), but without relating his classification to a definition of political participation.
In another piece, Knoke (1982: 173) refers to ‘social influence associations’ and he equates them with organisations oriented towards political objectives. He defines them as organisations which: ‘have as a major objective the changing or preserving of societal conditions, for which they must usually influence decision makers in other institutions (legislatures, government agencies and executives, courts, etc.) to apply their authority and resources to implement the policies and programs preferred by the associations.’

However, it is important to stress that what is commonly included under the label of interest groups also comes under the term political associations employed throughout this study. The problem is that, as Baumgartner and Leech (1998: chapter two) point out, the terminology may vary substantially with respect to what is included in the category of interest groups. In fact, one of the problems highlighted by these scholars is the terminological confusion in this subfield. Some researchers limit the consideration of interest groups to formal associations and organisations which defend public or private interests, while others include all types of organised interests, thereby including corporations, institutions, cities, etc. Whatever the interpretation, this study is not strictly concerned with interest groups as a whole, rather with the subset of organisations which is generally included in this category: political associations.

This is the option favoured by Verba, Schlozman & Brady (1995: 59).

The alternative employed by Verba, Nie & Kim (1978: 100).

See, for example, Dekker, Koopmans & van den Broek (1997), Wessels (1997), and van Deth & Kreuter (1998).


This does not necessarily mean that they do not engage in institutional politics, rather, when they do, they are not representing a certain constituency but act as some sort of advisor or monitor of the policies and decisions adopted.

Kriesi also considers movement-supportive organisations (media, churches, shops, etc.) and movement associations (self-help groups, and clubs), but these are distinct from both SMOs and traditional political organisations in that they do not generally engage actively in mobilising collective action.

A reflection on the concept of membership can also be found in Baumgartner & Leech (1998: 30–3).