

BOYCOTTS and Dixie Chicks

Creative Political Participation at Home and Abroad



Andrew S. McFarland

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AT HOME AND ABROAD



BY

ANDREW S. MCFARLAND

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Dedicated to my niece, Heather Haddon

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INTRODUCTION

My concern for creative political participation grows out of my previous concern for the study of public-interest lobbying in Washington, D.C. From 1968 to 1975 especially, new environmental and political reform lobbies appeared in the nation's capital to an almost startling degree. This was apparently an important new political phenomenon, which Jeffrey Berry and I were among the first to study. From 1974 to 1985, I spent about half my time in Washington, learning about the policy process, interviewing public-interest-group participants, and having discussions with other scholars with similar goals in Washington. Subsequently, I published three volumes about public-interest groups: *Public Interest Lobbies: Decision Making on Energy* (1976), *Common Cause: Lobbying in the Public Interest* (1984), and *Cooperative Pluralism: The National Coal Policy Experiment* (1993), the latter about negotiations among environmentalists and coal-industry executives.

While I strove to maintain academic objectivity, I did conclude that public-interest lobbies play an important role in the American constitutional order as a means to represent the widely diffused interests in a clean environment and in the elimination of corrupt government practices. Many political scientists and lawyers might prefer to rely on the law and the state to control pollution and political corruption, but I believe that political pressure must bolster legal practice to balance the power of economic-producer interests within a capitalist system. However, while writing these three books, I concluded that environmental lobbies and Common Cause will have continuing and substantial influence, and so my concerns shifted to the identification and prescription of other means to represent dispersed public interests. (I, of course, with enthusiasm support student participation in presidential and legislative election campaigns.)

Public-interest lobbies are a vital supplement to voting, campaigning, and the mechanisms of civic engagement. The concern for civic engagement has recently been a dominant research and intellectual trend in political science, following Robert Putnam's brilliant book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000). Civic engagement focuses on continuing face-to-face interaction among people who thereby learn to trust one another and to build "social capital" as a basis for enhancing cooperation for joint action. Robert Putnam and Theda Skocpol, among others, have found a decline in civic engagement in America since the 1950s. Unfortunately for the reputation of public-interest lobbies, both Putnam and Skocpol find that they are not based on civic engagement but constitute part of the decline in American community in that they consist of elite managers and lobbyists located in Washington, dependent upon checkbook contributors, most of whom never meet in a face-to-face manner. My research is cited as one basis for such observations.

I reacted to the Putnam and Skocpol allegations of public-interest elitism with the belief that while a major contribution to democratic theory, civic-engagement theory does not state everything we need to know about democratic political participation. In particular, I concluded that political participation is a concept similar in structure to political representation, as analyzed by Hanna Fenichel Pitkin in her landmark book *The Concept of Representation* (1967). Pitkin argued that there are separable concepts of representation and that political scientists should be aware of how they use the different types of representation and the functions of each. For instance, a subordinate may represent his boss (one type); a governing committee may be concerned with descriptive representation, that is, the committee membership being proportional to group membership in terms of categories such as sex or race (a second type); King George I of England (1714 to 1727) was a symbolic representative of England (a third type), even though descriptively he was a German. My argument is that similar considerations hold for the concept of political participation and that Putnam and Skocpol are studying one type of participation, while I have been studying another. Scholars must be clear about such distinctions and about the functions of the various types of political participation. Apparently I am a pioneer in applying Pitkin's argument about representation to participation, which is likely this book's major academic contribution.

I set forth this argument in a conference paper and sent it to my colleague Michele Micheletti in Sweden, who had been researching consumer boycotts against business, which I saw as one of the sorts of political participation I had

called “creative participation.” Michele suggested that we edit a book with chapters presenting still other forms of creative participation. Paradigm Publishers has just published that book, *Creative Participation: Responsibility-Taking in a Political World* (2010). Half the authors are European, and half are American.

Meanwhile I decided to expand my original paper into a short book, which would present examples of creative participation in four categories. First, the environment: This category reflects my research into the organization of public-interest lobbies and my opinion that the 200 (of 250) owners of condos in my building, following recycling practices, constitute a form of political participation (100 trips to the recycling bins per year, at 4 minutes each, times 200, constitutes 80,000 minutes of donated time). Second, political corruption: Having spent four weeks traveling in China, I focused on the importance of this country and noted that the 700 million rural Chinese are constantly protesting local-level corruption in spontaneous political action. Chinese rural protest struck me as having something in common with the 1890s communitywide anticorruption protests in the state of Wisconsin, an important predecessor to Robert La Follette’s brand of Progressive reform. Third, political consumerism: A number of European political scientists have written about consumer protest using boycotts and other means, not relying upon government, to influence corporate practices. Political consumerism is also an American phenomenon, but up to now, there has been little social science writing in America about this type of creative participation. In my view, this lack of research is largely due to male (and possibly feminist) prejudice against housewives, who are not seen as having political potential. How many political scientists read the food pages in the *New York Times*? (I don’t either.) To demonstrate political consumerism as worthy of serious study, I invited my graduate student, Catherine Griffiths, to demonstrate in an exploratory treatment that consumerism can be a serious topic for quantitative study as illustrated by survey data and graphical presentation. Fourth, globalization: Globalization is now a cliché; yet, it is absolutely true that citizens are increasingly motivated to public action when the entire planet is the frame of reference rather than just their own country. We can no longer restrict examination of interest groups and political participation to considering public action within just one single country.

As with my work on public-interest groups, I am not claiming that creative political participation is always the most important mode of participation. But if not always most important, it is still very important. We must all pay attention to creative political participation as a type of public action.

For this book, I am especially indebted to Michele Micheletti and Sultan Tepe for intellectual and moral support. Jean-Francois Godbout, Norma Moruzzi, and Karen Mossberger each made a helpful suggestion subsequently incorporated into the book.

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CHAPTER I



CREATIVE PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC INNOVATION

During these times, individual citizens find political participation increasingly paradoxical. Traditionally both citizens and political observers have thought of political participation in terms of such concepts as the Greek *agora* (“forum”) in which the citizens of the polis met together to discuss and take action regarding political issues affecting the community. Or in the West they may have thought of political participation as taking action in pursuit of interests, which were then registered and aggregated by established institutions of political representation, the political participation of Robert A. Dahl’s *Who Governs?* (1961). Yet, often the individual citizen finds him- or herself in the situation of one of the group of hunters in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s (1984) metaphor of the stag hunt. Rousseau posited just two hunters, but I will expand this to a group of hunters. The group of hunters seeks to stalk and surround a stag, to shoot it, and to divide up the prize venison. However, along the way the hunters constantly surprise numerous fat rabbits, an easy kill. The hunters must cooperate to pursue and surround the fleet stag, which they are not certain to accomplish. On the other hand, at any time, any one of the hunters can readily kill a rabbit and return home with meat for a nice meal, although not as desired as a slab of venison. As Rousseau notes, the hunters are caught in a paradox of participation. Each may himself be willing to reject a rabbit for the uncertain prospect of venison, but the individual hunter cannot be sure that all of the other hunters think the same way. If a single hunter shoots a rabbit, the stag, forewarned, will rush away at high speed, as will the other rabbits, except for the victim. Accordingly, the incentive for an individual

hunter is to shoot a rabbit immediately before some other does and drives away all the other rabbits, let alone the stag. The individual thus settles for the sure acquisition of a smaller self-interest rather than cooperating with all the other individuals to obtain a much greater common good, stalking and surrounding the stag. And better to shoot a rabbit, before someone else does, thereby leaving the first individual with nothing at all—no rabbit, no stag. The individual is caught in a paradoxical system of participation in group action.

Rousseau's stag-hunt metaphor brilliantly foreshadows one of the central preoccupations of American social science during the last half century—the concern for dilemmas in gaining human cooperation, particularly in situations of imperfect communication. Cooperation dilemmas are frequently referred to as “prisoners’ dilemmas” after a game-theory model parallel to Rousseau's stag hunt (Axelrod 2006). Two prisoners are held but separated, so they cannot communicate with each other. The jailors pressure each to confess and separately inform each prisoner of his situation. If both refuse to confess, both are set free. If both prisoners separately confess, each will get a moderate sentence. If one prisoner confesses, but the other refuses, the confessor will receive a light sentence, but the refuser will get a severe sentence. In this situation, one expects Rousseau's outcome: In order to avoid the worst (no rabbit, no stag), each prisoner will confess (get a rabbit) and will not cooperate for the best outcome (the stag). This is largely because each prisoner will expect the other prisoner to go for the rabbit; therefore, each prisoner will go for the rabbit rather than risk getting nothing at all (a severe sentence). And they cannot cooperate to get the best outcome. During the last half century, psychologists, sociologists, economists, and political scientists have built thousands of experiments and behavior models around the paradox of the prisoners’ dilemma.

The late political economist Mancur Olson Jr. applied the idea of cooperation dilemmas to political behavior in *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965). Olson began with the basic economic concept of public goods, that is, goods that are jointly supplied and not appropriated by some agent (if one person in an area has the good, then all people have it). The basic example of a public good is clean air: If clean air is supplied to one person in an area, then all people in that area must have it. Olson's key observation is that many public policies of government provide public goods: national defense, safety from crime, systems of public health, a common monetary system, and so forth. Then Olson applied another key observation to interest-group behavior. If an interest group seeks a public good, or merely even a collective benefit, for everyone within the group,

why should the individual contribute to the public action by the group if the individual will get the collective benefit regardless whether he participates? Still another Olsonian observation was that this problem is most likely to crop up if the group comprises numerous individuals (say more than one hundred). It will then seem to the individual that his contribution to public action makes little difference, and if the public action succeeds, the individual will get the collective benefit anyway. Of course it then follows that in such large group situations, it is not rational for any individual to contribute to the public action; hence, the public action will not occur, resulting in the lack of provision of some widely valued collective benefit. On the other hand, if just a few agencies, such as individuals or corporations, take interest in some public action, the few agents (say ten or fewer) are each likely to make their contribution because each contribution makes a difference, and each agent expects the few other agents to realize this; thus, all make the contribution to the public action, thereby providing the benefit to the small group. Then, however, the bottom line is that if we consider political participation to be the aggregation of interests by representative institutions, the few will defeat the many because this logic of collective action holds that the few will engage in public action while the many will not participate in public action. Or in everyday language, the special interest will defeat the public interest.

Let us examine the situation of individuals caught within these paradoxical systems of action without communication: the stag hunt, the prisoner's dilemma, the logic of collective action. In such dysfunctional systems, individuals may prefer to cooperate, but they cannot cooperate without being able to communicate. In chasing the stag, the hunters are scattered through the forest. The prisoners are purposely held in separate cells. In the logic of collective action, the costs involved for one individual to communicate with hundreds or even thousands or millions are ordinarily too prohibitive for the individual to act. I refer to individuals caught in these dilemmas of cooperation without communication as "scattered."

A second aspect of the situation of the scattered individuals caught in these paradoxical systems of action is that they are frequently seeking to cooperate to attain a common good. The hunters seek to cooperate to surround and kill the stag. The isolated prisoners seek to be set free. The scattered individuals in Olson's logic of collective action seek to gain a "collective benefit" or "public good." In such situations, systems blocking communication frustrate individuals' desire to cooperate to attain a common or public good. True, Olson's collective-action paradox also applies to systems of organizing more than one hundred units that

may be seeking a particular interest, as when hundreds of small businesses (say bakeries) seek to form a trade association to lobby for a given benefit. But Olson's paradox applies most poignantly to democratic theory in situations in which the diffused interests of millions of scattered citizens cannot be organized, as in the case of millions damaged by pollution or suffering a monopolistic price increase. I refer to such individuals as seeking *commonweal* goals, in respect to the language of seventeenth-century American colonists and to avoid the greater moralistic shading of phases like "the common good" or "the public interest."

A third characteristic of these paradoxes blocking common action is that *no established political institutions* exist to coordinate cooperation among the scattered individuals seeking the commonweal. One could imagine in the stag-hunt example that there might be institutional coordination, as when all the hunters are soldiers under the command of a leader, to forewarn them against shooting a rabbit. One could imagine that the prisoners, rather than being criminals rejecting the laws, could again be soldiers, each expecting the other to follow previous instructions given in training (e.g., do not confess). The perhaps millions of scattered individuals caught in Olson's logic of collective action cannot form an interest group to lobby the legislature for their collective benefit. In fact, the political philosophy of liberalism argues that the activities of the state must solve the paradoxes of seeking the commonweal. Such philosophical liberals (in the European sense) are critical of the need for an expansive state but grant the need for the state to act to coordinate cooperation when paradoxes of action block private individuals from acting to attain the commonweal. Nineteenth-century classical economics and its successors therefore grant the need for the state to provide "public goods" when they cannot be attained through private cooperation (Olson 1965, 102). Christian, Muslim, Aristotelian, Marxist, and other theories of the state normally do accept the need for established political institutions to act to coordinate cooperation for the commonweal but regard paradoxes of participation as arguments secondary to other ethical foundations for the state.

Creative Political Participation

Sometimes scattered individuals seeking public action toward a commonweal goal but, lacking established political institutions to pursue that goal, must engage in *creative political participation*. The scattered individuals must then

create some new vehicle for cooperation to undo the system of scattering—the logic of collective action or the various barriers to communication causing dilemmas of cooperation. Native American hunters coordinated the pursuit by communicating through animal cries; American military prisoners held by the North Vietnamese communicated through a system of tapping on cell walls; environmentalists and corruption opponents overcame the logic of collective action around 1970 by devising systems of entrepreneurial organization employing direct-mail technology. Subsequently, through the 1970s and 1980s, direct-mail-based public-interest groups established themselves as a new institution for political participation among scattered citizens seeking commonweal goals (Bosso 2005; McFarland 1984). Other types of creative participation for commonweal goals include the formation of transnational advocacy networks, transcending the established boundaries of national organizations, and engaging in boycotts and other actions against current policies of major business corporations (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Micheletti 2003).

Scholars need to pay additional attention to *creative participation as civic innovation*. This parallels the difference between Olson's collective benefits and the traditional economics concept of public goods. As noted, a rather large group of scattered agents (individuals or businesses) will have difficulty mobilizing its collectivity into a lobby to pursue a common group interest or collective benefit. However, that benefit may be a special interest, such as organizing sugar growers to get import quotas that increase the price of sugar. On the other hand, there are public goods or collective benefits that benefit almost everyone within some defined area. The most famous public good is clean air, one of many such environmental public goods.

I use the phrase "civic innovation" to refer to creative participation to organize new modes of cooperation to obtain a public good, a benefit for everyone within some civic boundary. From the standpoint of the planet as a whole, civic innovation includes initiating new forms of public action transcending national boundaries and seeking the commonweal of the entire planet. Some people at least part of the time regard *civitas* as pertaining to the entire world.

The concept of political participation resembles that of representation as presented by political philosopher Hanna Fenichel Pitkin (1967) in a work that has met consensual acceptance by political scientists. Pitkin pointed out that there are several separable uses of "representation"; for instance, when George I of Hanover was imported to be the British monarch, one might say that he was not "descriptively representative" of the British because he was German and did

not speak English. On the other hand, upon becoming the monarch, George I was “symbolically representative” of the British as the wearer of the crown and a descendant of William the Conqueror and the Tudor Henry VII. After differentiating several concepts of representation, Pitkin showed that they should not be confused with one another but might adhere together in some political situation. A similar observation can be made about the concept of political participation as illustrated below.

Different Concepts of Political Participation

I refer to the situations of the stag hunt, the prisoners’ dilemma, and the logic of collective actions as paradoxes of political participation because we have in mind other situations in which there are few such dilemmas for cooperation in public action. The first such traditional form of action and political idea is the *political forum* or the *agora* (the marketplace). The classical civilizations of Athens and Rome valued political participation by the entire citizenry (a restricted group) in the central forum or marketplace to discuss jointly political issues affecting the citizenry with the goal of establishing common action, coordinated by leaders representing the citizenry. This is the forum model of political participation (Arendt 1998; Pateman 1970). It has played a central role in the humanities since the Renaissance. In the United States, the forum model was joined by the similar town-meeting model in which the farmers and merchants of a New England township would meet together, discuss issues, and elect the board of selectmen. In both academic and everyday political heritage, we regard the political forum as an institution furthering political participation (Mansbridge 1983).

A second model of political participation I term the *interests-and-institutions* (I&I) model. This form of political activity, and the modeling of it, is most familiar to the American citizen. This is the political participation referenced by classical liberal political theory. Citizens are seen as individuals who act in politics to express and further their own interests. The political system incorporates a set of institutions that register and aggregate the individual interests as they are expressed in action within the context of the aggregative institutions. There are four basic forms of political participation within the I&I model (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995, added movement protest). The first is expression of interest in the institution of elections through voting. The second is expression of interest through campaigning for representatives in the