

Upstairs and Downstairs in Danish Politics: An Analysis of Political Apathy and Social Structure*

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This article is concerned with the structure of political participation in Denmark. Can all forms of political activity be arranged on a single dimension, or are there different clusters of activity? If the latter, do the different clusters appeal to different sections of the population and/or have different attitudinal correlates? The whole question of structure can be seen from both a social and a system perspective. From a social perspective, it is an intriguing matter whether political participation is evenly distributed in different social strata, or – as is often the case – whether political activity is first and foremost a phenomenon associated with middle to high social position. From the system perspective, it is a question of whether mass political participation is integrated with elite activity as in Kornhauser's (1959) model of 'pluralist society', or whether this varies among different kinds of activities.

In the literature, references to results favouring a single-dimension model dominate. Often, the correlations between different activities are shown to be high and positive. Furthermore, political activity is often shown to be associated with social status: participation is more frequent upstairs than downstairs (for example, cf. Milbrath 1965; Martinussen

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1973; Lewin 1970). However, the correlations are never perfect, and this leaves room for the existence of different clusters or sub-clusters (Verba, Nie, Kim 1978). In addition, political participation cannot be expected to be independent of politics and so, for example, mobilization efforts directed towards specific groups may upset the 'normal' picture.

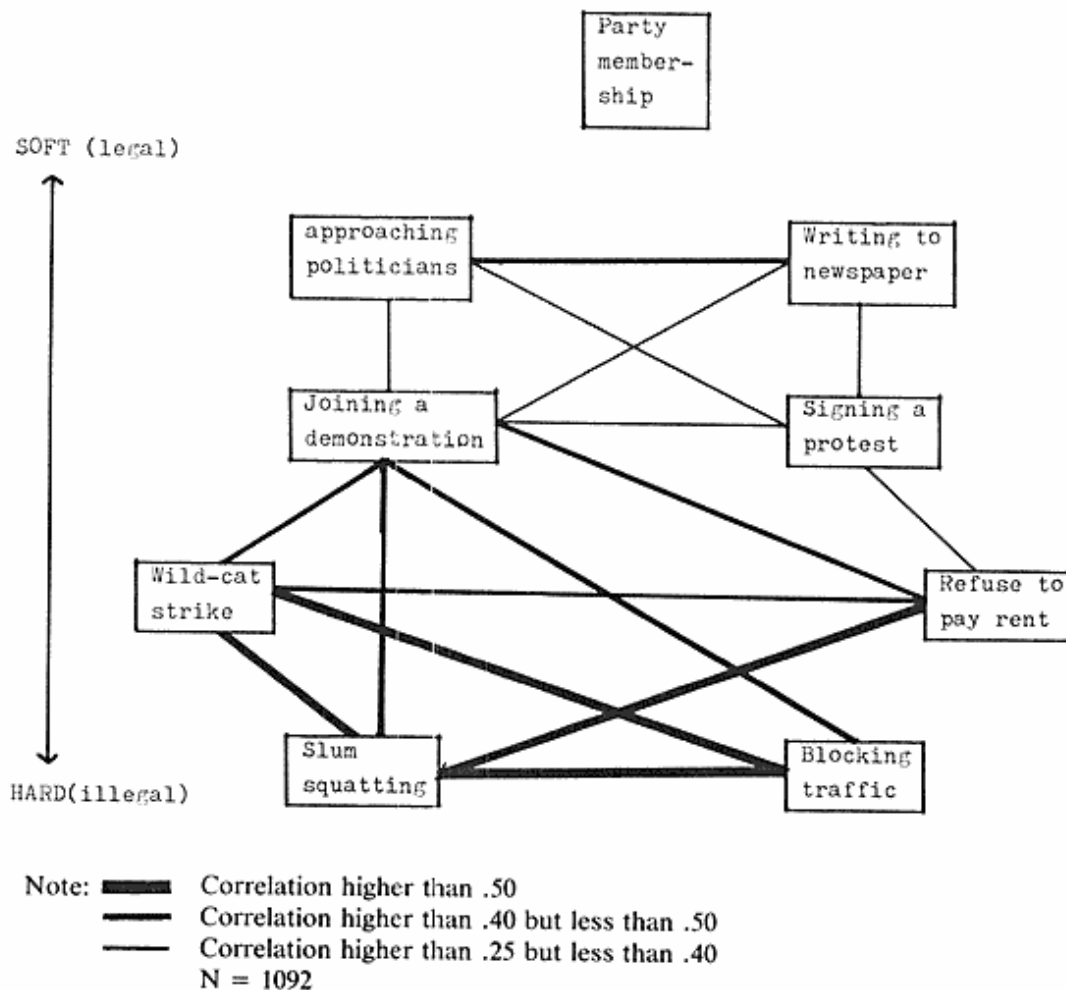
These considerations are especially relevant in the Danish context. Danish political parties have traditionally organized a substantial part of the electorate, in particular such social non-elite groups as workers and farmers. Hence, if political participation is normally an upstairs activity, this should not, to the same extent, be the case for party membership, which should diffuse the unidimensional picture to some extent. Furthermore, a high percentage of party membership would imply that a substantial part of political activity is integrated into the general political system. In the last two decades, however, party membership has declined dramatically. From a social perspective this may mean a 'return' to a more normal, status-biased situation. At the same time different forms of 'unconventional' behaviour have become more frequent. The latter may have different implications from a social perspective. But together with declining party membership, they point to looser integration, a development that conforms with the volatile nature of Danish electoral behaviour in the 1970's. In short, no expectation is very definite, and much depends upon empirical investigations.

The empirical results in this paper are based upon data from a study of the 1977 general election. In a pre-election wave, 1092 respondents (15 years of age and above, national random sample) were asked by the Danish Gallup Institute (a) whether they were members of a political party and (b) whether they had actually used, or would be inclined to use, one of the following means of influencing politicians or the general public: writing to or approaching a politician; writing to newspapers; signing a protest or petition; joining a demonstration; taking part in a wild-cat strike; blocking traffic; refusing to pay their rent; illegal occupation of dwellings (squatt-ing). From a social perspective the question of influencing politicians or the general public poses a problem of interpretation. One-third of the respondents did not answer the second question. From a formal point of view, these cases could be treated as missing data, and hence excluded from all calculations. Instead, we have chosen to interpret these cases as evidence of no inclination towards using any of these modes of activity. Of course, this interpretation is open to question, and it has at least one important practical consequence: it depresses all percentages. However, these should be interpreted as *minimum* numbers inclined towards the

various activities. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that – apart from that on party membership – the questions measure *propensity* towards different activities rather than *actual* participation in them. Finally, it should be noted that the respondents were also asked questions that related to political interests, communications, and political trust and efficacy.

At first glance the several activities correlated with each other, and a rather clear picture emerged of the overall structure of political participation (cf. Figure 1). There are two main points. First, party membership is not correlated with anything else. Second, to some extent the remaining activities form a connected structure: each activity is linked to another. However, not all links are direct, and – more important – the figure sorts the activities into sub-groups or sub-clusters. At the bottom of the diagram all the illegal activities are closely connected by many links, indicating

Figure 1. The structure of political participation.



high correlations. At the top are the legal activities. Two of these (approaching politicians, and writing to newspapers) are not correlated at all with illegal activities, while signing a petition has only a weak relationship. By contrast, joining a demonstration occupies an intermediate position, forming a bridge between legal and illegal activities. Whether these activities (apart from party membership) should be divided into two clusters is open to discussion. But at least it seems necessary to consider legal and illegal activities as two distinct sub-clusters. Moreover, with party membership completely separate from everything else, it is difficult to subscribe to a unidimensional picture of political activity and participation.

1. Social Position and Political Participation

The different forms of participation may be further illuminated by sketching the social distribution of different kinds of activity. In order to increase economy of space, two indices have been constructed. *Legal activity* is a count of the number of times a person said he had taken part in or would be willing to use one of the following actions: approaching politicians, writing a letter to a newspaper, joining a demonstration, or signing a petition. *Illegal activity* is a similar count for the following actions: a wild-cat strike, refusing to pay rent, occupation of empty dwellings, or blocking traffic.

Both indices vary from 0 to 4. The labels 'legal' and 'illegal' might appear to be too judicial, but in fact there is such a distinction as to the content of the two groups of activities. More important, however, is the fact that the sorting of the activities conforms with the structure of Figure 2 (see below), as well as with a gradation of these activities according to popular approval. The proportion of respondents that approved of the several activities varied as follows: approaching politicians, 19 per cent; signing a petition, 18 per cent; writing to a newspaper, 15 per cent; joining a demonstration, 11 per cent; refusing to pay rent, 7 per cent; take part in wild-cat strike, 7 per cent; occupation of buildings, 4 per cent; blocking traffic, 3 per cent.

The basic findings are presented in Table 1, where the different activities are also considered in relation to social groups. The propensity to participate in such activities indicated in the table must, however, be interpreted in the light of two important reservations. First, the different social variables are strongly interrelated, and so the impact of, say, education upon willingness to take part in illegal activities might be due to the relationship between education and age. Second, there might be interac-

Table 1. Social structure and propensity of participation (percentages).

	Party member- ship	Legal activity	Illegal activity	N =
SEX				
male	11	39	14	510
female	10	31	9	582
AGE				
15-19	4	49	11	70
20-29	4	50	29	209
30-39	10	44	10	185
40-49	14	37	7	158
50-61	14	28	9	205
62-66	16	15	3	87
67-	16	16	2	178
EMPLOYMENT				
worker	5	32	15	322
lower salaried employee	10	43	16	194
higher salaried employee	11	48	13	94
self-employed farmer	40	29	3	73
self-employed, other	16	40	2	98
students, apprentices	3	58	25	77
not econ. active	9	18	3	234
EDUCATION				
low	13	23	7	568
middle	9	43	14	427
high	9	69	25	93
INCOME				
low	11	22	8	249
middle	8	38	13	279
high	10	44	12	339
no information	13	29	11	225
URBANISATION				
Copenhagen	8	43	20	290
provincial towns	9	31	9	420
rural districts	14	32	7	382
total	10	35	11	1092

tion effects, for example, the direction and/or strength of any social factor upon any of the dependent variables might vary with the constellation of the other explanatory variables. Analyses, not documented here however, showed the presence of interaction effects. In a good many cases the correlations between urbanisation and education on the one hand and the different modes of participation on the other, had different numerical strengths, and in one case also different direction for the young and old age groups.

Table 2. Social structure and propensity of participation: revised percentages and beta coefficients from an MCA-analysis.

	Party membership		Legal activities		Illegal activities		N =	
	young	elderly	young	elderly	young	elderly	young	elderly
SEX								
male	5	12	57	33	29	10	121	389
female	4	13	43	26	21	4	158	424
AGE								
15-19	7		46		10		70	
20-29	3		51		29		209	
30-39		9		42		12		185
40-49		13		36		7		158
50-61		12		30		9		205
62-66		14		16		4		87
67-		16		17		1		178
EMPLOYMENT								
worker	1	8	45	25	25	10	95	227
lower salaried emp.	9	12	54	29	27	8	77	117
higher salaried employee	0	12	35	28	13	8	18	
	76							
self-employed farmer		41		33		2	4	69
self-employed, other		15		34		2	9	89
Students, apprentices	2		56		28		75	2
not econ. active		9		32		6	1	233
EDUCATION								
low	11	12	36	25	16	8	32	536
middle	3	13	46	35	21	5	205	222
high	5	18	76	57	48	3	42	51
INCOME								
low	7	11	57	28	40	7	30	219
middle	2	12	58	31	21	7	70	209
high	5	14	46	33	21	5	112	227
no information	4	13	42	24	26	8	67	158
URBANISATION								
Copenhagen	4	12	55	36	32	14	85	205
provincial towns	4	12	41	26	21	3	115	305
rural districts	5	13	55	29	20	5	79	303
total	4	13	49	30	24	7	279	813

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	Party membership		Legal activities		Illegal activities		N =
	young	elderly	young	elderly	young	elderly	young elderly
PREDICTOR BETAS							
sex	.02	.01	.14	.08	.10	.11	
age	.07	.07	.04	.22	.20	.15	
employment	.26	.27	.13	.07	.14	.12	
education	.11	.05	.23	.19	.23	.07	
income	.07	.04	.13	.08	.14	.05	
urbanisation	.04	.01	.14	.08	.13	.18	

Note: Cells with less than 10 cases are left blank.

'young' means respondent between 15 and 29 years of age, and 'elderly' means 30 years and above.

This had methodological consequences. It is convenient to use a regression model to present joint effects of social factors on modes of participation in order to maximize comparability and economy of space. However, it is assumed in such modes that interaction effects are absent; and this assumption is not fulfilled here. We have taken refuge in the presentation of parallel regression (MCA) results for the young and old generations. The actual division point is at 30 years of age, as an analysis using a more detailed age classification showed this to be the most impressive turning point for the shift in impact (sign/direction) of other variables upon modes of participation. The basic results are presented in Table 2. The entries in the upper part of the table are revised percentages: in short, the percentages in Table 1 are *downgraded* to the extent that their actual levels are below what should be expected from the model in terms of the joint effects of the other explanatory factors, or *upgraded* to the extent that they exceed the expected level. The entries in the bottom part of the table are betas, that is correlation coefficients, adjusted for the effects of other explanatory variables.

Age still turns out to be an important factor in relation to all kinds of activity. Party membership increases with age, whereas the other activities are most popular in the younger generations. But there is a sharp contrast between illegal and legal activities. Willingness to indulge in the former is concentrated in a single age group (20–29 years), whereas the tendency towards legal activity declines much more smoothly. Otherwise, *party membership* is only really related to occupation, with very high percentages among farmers. The previous result showing a correlation

with urbanization turns out to be rather spurious, probably caused by the farmers.¹ There is no relationship with sex, none of any magnitude with education,² and no systematic relation with income. The profile for other modes of participation differs on more points. Both legal and illegal activities are more common among men, a rather surprising finding (especially among the young) in view of the intensive backing these activities win from voters on the left of the party spectrum where women are well represented. The profile also includes an urbanizational aspect: the acceptance of other modes of participation is, for all groups, higher in Copenhagen. Furthermore, with one exception, both types of activity are heavily related to higher education, and this is even more pronounced among the young. The exception (illegal activities among those aged more than 30 years) is of minor importance, as it occurs in a group where the tendency is close to zero.

Some negative results deserve special comments. Higher salaried employees do not stand out any longer as being more active than other groups, but fall below lower employees, workers, students and apprentices. And sympathy for legal actions does not have any definite relationship to income. Overall, this means that this kind of political participation lacks correlation with socio-economic status in the narrow sense of the term (income and employment). Illegal activities are even negatively related to income in the group where it really matters – the young.

From a developmental perspective of society, the change in political participation may be seen in the light of the social restructuring that has taken place. And we may tentatively conclude first that party membership is concentrated among the older generations and farmers, so reflecting a passing society; and second, that legal and illegal participation seems to be most common among the young and educated, reflecting perhaps an approaching society. So far we have considered development in political participation and social structure. This picture may be broadened by including the process from social structure via communication and attitude formation to private forms of citizens' opportunities for influencing their own situation. This problem will be pursued in the next section with political competence as the key-word.

2. Political Competence

Much of the effort in Scandinavian mass communication research during the past decade has been devoted to mapping what have been termed 'information gaps' or 'communication gaps'.³ In this context information

refers to the individual's possibilities to achieve surveillance and understanding of society and thus ease his way towards participation in societal decision-making (Lundberg 1972). Consequently, the amount of information ascribed to an individual may be evaluated from his possibilities of receiving relevant communication and his generally acquired knowledge. The differences in levels of information – the information gaps – are usually treated in two different ways. In the political debate there is the well-known differentiation in the level of information, mainly considered in terms of civic knowledge, between the rulers and the ruled. The second approach, and the one used here, is that which considers systematic differences in levels of information across different social groups. Differences that are found with a background in social structure are, from an egalitarian, participatory, democratic point of view, undesired. Remedial actions should be taken either by finding and strengthening compensating mechanisms, or – more radically – by changing the social structure.

Even so, from a participatory point of view, it would be advantageous to consider communication gaps rather than information gaps. The concept of communication gap is well fitted with a model in which the chain of individual influence can be described as follows:

1. social position
2. received information
3. accumulated understanding, knowledge, ideas
4. imparted information, participation
5. influence on one's own situation; 'power'

In this process it is worth noting that the term communication is used as information *to and from*, that is a two-way communication process (points 2 and 4). Very often, critics of the present system of political and civic communication have argued that the weakness lies not so much in the limited amount of information transmitted from the politicians and administrators, but rather in the comprehensibility and utility of the information transmitted from the citizens to the politicians and administrators (point 4).

We shall treat *social position* mainly from the 'underdog' framework developed by Galtung (1964).⁴ The main points would appear as follows:

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Political potential; characteristics</i>
1. sex	male
2. age	middle-aged (30–50 years)
3. employment	white collar, self-employed

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 4. education | high (10 years or more) |
| 5. income | high (above D.kr. 60,000 in household income) |

As a summary measure of *political potential*, we have constructed an index as follows: sex, age, and employment have been coded dichotomously as 0 or 1. We have, however, made a further break on education (10–12 years of formal education, or more than 12 years) and on income (D.kr. 60,000–89,000 in yearly household income, and over D.kr. 89,000). The index therefore can vary between 0 and 7.

Received information is evaluated in terms of listening to news broadcasts, watching the main evening news on television, and reading newspapers. An index of mass communication activity was constructed on the basis of the respondent's exposure to these media contacts: it ranges from 0 to 3.

Accumulated understanding/knowledge is crudely indicated by the responses to nine different political attitudinal questions, and is admittedly only a vague indicator of what should be tapped: it does, however, also measure the degree of coherency in attitudes.

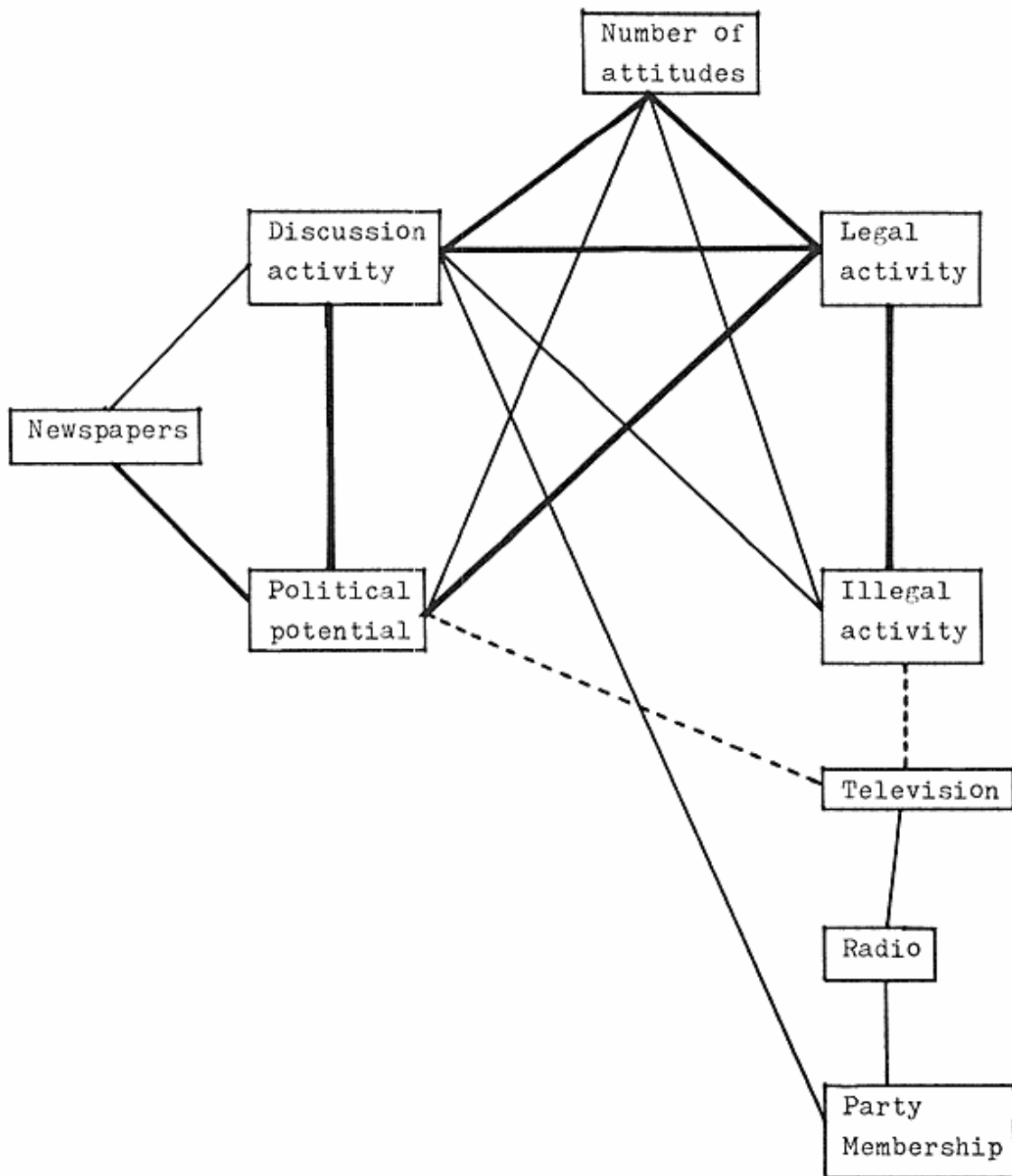
The number of discussion groups in which the respondent takes part is used as an indicator of *imparted communication*. *Participation* is treated as in the previous section: legal and illegal activities, and party membership.

Influence on one's own situation/'power' is measured in subjective and formal terms. Power and its distribution may be considered the ultimate concern of an analysis of political participation. However, the processes themselves may often contain elements of value; participation, for example, may be seen as a counterpart to alienation. This problem area is dealt with here on the basis of two questions on efficacy and two on trust.

2.1 Social Position, Political Communication and Direct Participation

The main structure of the elements of political participation and communication is illustrated in Figure 2. What stands out immediately is that unconventional participation (legal as well as illegal) is *not* related in a positive way to any form of mass communication, but rather to communication in the form of discussion in various informal groups. By contrast, conventional participation (party membership) is rather well integrated into the system of communications, with links to both broadcasting and discussion activity. On balance therefore, party membership differs also from unconventional participation with respect to communication forms, offering a further reason for differentiating between different forms of

Figure 2. Interplay between social position, received information, number of attitudes and imparted information/participation.



Note: **—** Correlation higher than .25
— Correlation higher than .10 but less than .25
- - - Correlation less than .10
 N varies between 865 and 1092

participation. Viewed from another angle, an interesting finding is that most forms of mass communication are of little direct relevance for most kinds of political activity, whereas personal communication is directly linked to all forms of political participation.

It should not, of course, be concluded that the media are unimportant for the political participants, but only that *variations in media use* are not paralleled by *variations in political participation*. But even this modest interpretation of the findings points to a feature of mass society. The general information system is not tightly connected with participation, which is linked more with discussions in smaller, more fragmented sub-groups of the population. Further, it is worth noting that with regard to received mass communication, voters occupying a social position that gives them a high political potential are characterized by a well-developed habit of reading several newspapers: by contrast, they do not use the electronic media more frequently. These differences between social groups in their reception of mass communication are illustrated in more detail in Table 3.

Table 3. Social position and received information (Pearsonian correlations).

	Number of newspapers read	Watched TV news	Number of news broadcasts listened to	Total mass communication received
Education (high)	.13	-.12	-.02	-.07
Income (high)	.27	-.08	.02	.00
Sex (male)	.11	.02	.05	.06
Age (old)	-.07	.24	.03	.20
political potential (high)	.28	-.12	.01	-.03

Note: N varies between 866 and 1092.

First, it is significant that the reception of mass communication, *taken as a whole*, is so evenly distributed over different social groups. On average the adult population spends between four and five hours daily with the media. But it is only within the past two years or so that watching television has shown an increase with the increase in age. Television has not yet been totally socialized into the society.⁵ But the structure of the use or reception of mass communication is clearly connected with social position, for example the connection between high political potential and intensive newspaper reading. The reasons for this are mostly to be found

the fact that newspapers offer very good possibilities for selective information seeking. Other results do show that the differences between social classes are not found so much in the time spent on newspaper reading, but on the number, kind and copy read. For the more highly educated brackets of society it also mirrors the fact that television rather serves the function of entertainment, and newspapers (and other means of communication) the function of information (cf. Blumler and Katz 1974).

In other words, the immediate possibilities, because of the uniform use of the total system of mass communication, are rather alike for different social groups. There is only a limited indication that a better social situation goes with better possibilities of obtaining information. However, other methods or measures point towards a favouring of the upper social brackets in both the contents of the media and the prevailing forms of presentation.⁶ It is to be expected, then, that the political communication system is somewhat generous to 'the upstairs', but hardly so to 'the downstairs'. The channels are there, however, and in use by almost all.

The degree to which voters hold political opinions is closely connected with their social position, and this is even more so for their engagement in discussions (Table 4). The finding that imparting communication is strongly related to social position is important in the sense that the closer one approaches active political influence, the stronger the reflection of the social hierarchy, even at the level of the voter. Education and income in particular are important preconditions for partaking in discussions, but less so for holding opinions. The political implication of this, if the goal is a more egalitarian, participating society, should not be hard to comprehend.

With the increase in the level of education, which has accelerated in the last two decades, it might be expected that communications and participation gaps would be close to disappearing. On the other hand, other factors may also be at work. In order to investigate this more closely, a further

Table 4. Social position, number of attitudes and imparted information (Pearsonian correlations).

	Number of attitudes	Number of discussion groups
Education (high)	.05	.28
Income (high)	.13	.22
Sex (male)	.17	.08
Age (old)	.09	-.15
political potential (high)	.19	.29

Note: N varies between 867 and 1092

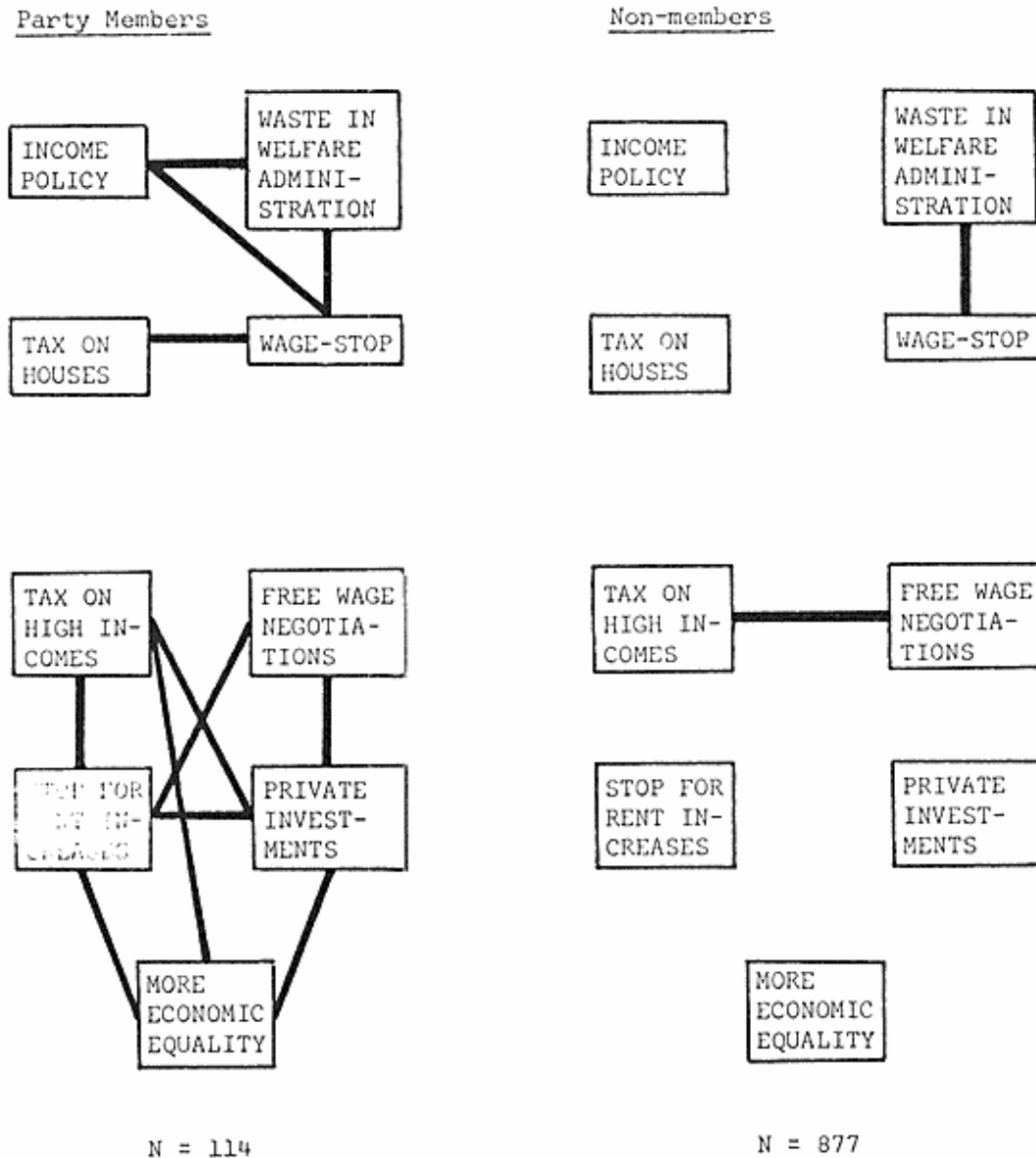
multivariate analysis has been undertaken on how social position and political participation influenced both received and imparted communication.⁷

As a whole, received communication is still very much independent of social position, with the exception of the age factor, which turns out to be even stronger when reduced for other factors. This stresses the point that the elderly are becoming more and more a 'lost' group, with declining imparted communication and strongly increasing received communication. The mass media have taken over the role of direct social contacts and so not only reduce the older groups' possibilities of exerting influence; the elderly also become more dependent upon political mass communication in forming their political views. This is only partly counteracted by these groups' more stable attitudes formed through the aging process.⁸ Moreover, the elderly are a growing part of society. So are the better educated, and their strong tendency to impart communication more than others also holds true when other social variables and activities are controlled. Income, when other factors are controlled, does not seem to be so vital for the amount of imparted communication as do age and education. Furthermore, regardless of social position, an increase in political participation is accompanied by an increase in imparted communication and in holding opinions. This is the case for both legal and illegal activities, but less so for party membership. Consequently, it seems that political activity leads to a more powerful position than would otherwise have been the case for the given social position (cf. Kjellmor 1977). In order to strengthen this conclusion, we have found it worthwhile to look not only at the number of opinions held and the quantitative aspect of discussions, but also at the connection between participation and the *coherency* of the political picture as perceived by voters.

2.2 The Opinion-Structuring Effects of Party Membership

Party membership seems to have a structuring effect upon political opinions. While the same may be true of legal and illegal activities, the relevant data are not available. The point of departure is the observation by Converse (1964) that correlations between opinions were rather small in the mass public, but higher among the political elite, and the corresponding interpretation of this as an indication of a missing (liberal-conservative) structure in mass political opinions. The interpretation may be called into question by the argument that correlations as properties of popula-

Figure 3. Political opinions among party members and others.



— correlations at .25 or above

Note: Different criteria (cutting points at .20, .25, .30 and so forth) may yield different structures. However, only when the criteria approximate 0.00 does the structure for non-members have the same well-knit pattern as for party members.

tions do not necessarily imply anything about individuals. As mentioned by Converse, small correlations could, at least theoretically, be the result if each individual structured his opinions in his own, highly idiosyncratic way. However, this possibility is rather unlikely in practice, and in the

following small correlations will be taken as indications of missing structure.

A post-election survey contained a set of questions referring to economic policies. Some of the questions were of a rather conventional left-right character, while others had a more specific reference to the ongoing debate over incomes policy. The problem is whether there is a structure of opinions that is different for party members and non-members. For that purpose, correlation matrices were constructed for each sub-population. From these matrices graphs were drawn, using .25 as the criterion for deciding whether different opinions were linked to each other or not (Figure 3).

From Figure 3 it can be seen that there is a much stronger structure (more links) among party members than among non-members. This can hardly be explained by evident background factors such as education or a socially elite position of party members, for neither of these features are characteristics of party members. Instead, a more simple explanation seems to be closer to the heart of the matter: parties introduce voters to a political 'world' and/or attract more interested people, and this world incorporates a structure of political opinions. Danish parties have been described as bingo clubs. They are, but they are also more than that. Education and high status are factors linked to political interest and competence. But the same holds true for party membership, and one may at least hypothesize that card-holding substitutes to some extent for lack of education and social status.

If the latter holds true, the decline in party membership casts a dark shadow over the prospects for future political participation. A system without viable party organizations is likely to be characterized by a structure of participation dominated even more by the well-educated and the gainfully employed. These categories may be the 'bearers' of the future; numerically they are ascending groups. But such a system is also likely to leave broad and more 'lay' sectors of the population outside the political system. The 'unconventional' forms investigated in this paper do *not* at present offer clear promises of being alternative ways of involving non-elite groups in political activity. On the contrary it is common to both forms of unconventionalism that they mobilize the more well-situated sectors of the population. Hence, whereas party membership compensated for a weak political position due to low social status, unconventional political participation reinforces the political advantage that voters already have because of a high level of social status. Put negatively, while unconventional political activities are often carried out *for* the workers,

they are not often performed *by* them, and the puzzling general problem is what will be the place for them and other non-elite groups. Admittedly, other possibilities could be available for indicating a solution. But the problem is there, and should not be belittled.

3. Trust, Efficacy and Modes of Participation

The system perspective may be illustrated further by a discussion on the behavioural impact of different attitudes towards the political system. One school of thought stresses the positive correlations normally found between such variables as participation, trust, efficacy and tolerance. At one end of a continuum one should find the trusting, tolerant, efficacious participants, and at the other the distrusting, intolerant, inefficacious and apathetic sectors of the population. Another approach takes account more of the concrete combinations of different variables, asking, for example, what happens when trust goes together with efficacy (cf. Finifter 1970; Paige 1971; Muller 1977; Barnes & Kaase 1979). No findings can be considered undisputable, but quite often it has been found that efficacy is a condition for participation and that combined with trust it leads to conventional political behaviour, whereas some form of protest behaviour is more likely when it is combined with distrust.

The most interesting point is that even protest is not a result of general alienation from the political system. This has consequences for the general discussion – whether one should prefer a definition of democracy solely in terms of competing elites, or rather include high citizen participation in the definition. If high participation can be both conventional and unconventional, legal and illegal, and if it can be combined with both trust and distrust, then any definite conclusions about what is good for the system may well be premature.

The Danish data suggest that the different modes of participation cannot be associated with the same set of attitudes towards the system. In the pre-election survey two questions tapped trust/distrust, and two tapped efficacy.⁹ Two indices were constructed, and are presented in Table 5. All forms of participation covariate with high efficacy, but differ as regards trust. At one end, party membership is rather clearly linked with trust, at the other illegal participation has, if anything, a covariation with distrust; by contrast, variations in legal activities along the trust-distrust dimension are rather insignificant.

Table 5. Trust, efficacy and modes of participation (percentages).

		Party membership			Propensity towards participation in at least one legal activity			Propensity towards participation in at least one illegal activity		
		TRUST			TRUST			TRUST		
		High	Med.	Low	High	Med.	Low	High	Med.	Low
EFFICACY	High	16	16	9	51	49	46	8	18	14
	Medium	18	11	11	43	28	35	10	10	14
	Low	8	4	3	31	25	28	11	9	5

Note: N varies between 26 and 288

However, once again there are some age-specific relationships. Calculations were made separately for the two broad age groups of young and old defined previously (Table 6). Among the young, both legal and illegal activities are most popular when *distrust* goes with efficacy. Among the elderly there is hardly any pattern, as far as illegal activities are concerned, but the legal activities are especially popular when *trust* is combined with efficacy and in so far as the pattern resembles that for party membership in the general population. However, most of the variation is due to efficacy, whereas the differences along the trust dimension remain more indistinct.

Table 6. Trust, efficacy and political participation (percentages).

		Propensity towards participation in at least one legal activity			Propensity towards participation in at least one illegal activity		
		TRUST			TRUST		
		High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
<i>The Young</i> EFFICACY	High	44		66	25		38
	Medium						
	Low	46		43	14		14
<i>The elderly</i> EFFICACY	High	48	43	30	5	13	4
	Medium	38	27	30	4	7	9
	Low	20	15	19	5	6	0

Note: N varies between 20 and 209. 30 years of age is the threshold to the group of the elderly.

The whole matter deserves further investigation. Two hypotheses, however, could be postulated. First, party membership – creating organizational links to the political elite – is not so common among the young.

Second, legal and illegal activities outside the parties are more common among the young, and in this group there is a closer connection to distrust than among the elder generations. It might be concluded that political participation, instead of being a correlate of support for the system, will become an expression of opposition and protest.

4. Conclusion

This analysis has a serious limitation: the data were collected at a single time-point (January–February 1977); hence, conclusions cannot be drawn about developmental aspects. However, taking the decline in party membership as a premise, and combining it with the age-specific patterns, one might arrive at a picture suggesting some possibilities for the future. First, political participation is likely to be increasingly status-biased, linked to high education and white-collar occupation, thus leaving broad sectors outside more active political life. Furthermore, and just as important, the system is also likely to be less well-integrated. Political parties to some degree did unite the political elite and the masses through establishing channels of communication. The same does not hold true to the same extent for the more unconventional forms of participation: these activities, moreover, are more prevalent among the young, combining with attitudes to indicate a lower level of trust in the system. The perspectives may be evaluated differentially, according to political preference. However, they are well in accord with other features of Danish politics in the 1970s, especially the break-up of the previous stability. In general, therefore, the picture of the future is not at all that of the smooth running, harmonious democracy which until recently was part of the conventional picture.

NOTES

- 1 The high beta for occupation among the young is due to a high proportion of party members among farmers and other self-employed groups, but there were too few cases for the results to be reported separately.
- 2 More precisely, a slight negative relationship among the young is juxtaposed by a light positive relationship among the elderly, but none of the betas is great, especially that for the elder generations.
- 3 For example, the so-called information gap project initiated in 1973, a major undertaking by the audience research department of Swedish Radio and research projects investigating civic information. For an overview, cf. Nowak 1977; Abrahamson 1977.
- 4 However, peripheral position such as geographical distance from the centre is only marginally considered, because of the rather homogeneous distribution of the population. In addition, the Danish rural culture, with its 150 year-old tradition of political activity and

- cultural involvement, makes the employment bracket 'independent farmers' unique, at least compared with the other Nordic countries and most of the Anglo-Saxon world. Hence, we include farmers among the potentially powerful groups.
- 5 This has been found quite clearly in Denmark and Sweden, though not in Norway where television was introduced only in 1960 (reported in frequency studies by the respective broadcasting organizations).
 - 6 See different Finnish reports on the problem of comprehensibility: for example, Finnish Broadcasting Company 1972.
 - 7 Details can be found in the relevant working paper upon which this article is based: Nielsen & Sauerberg 1978.
 - 8 Data from the Danish Election Study project: only marginal research has been done empirically in this field. However, the conceptualization and discussion of 'para-social functions' of the media began in the 1950s.
 - 9 The statements measuring trust were: 'In general one may be confident that our political leaders arrive at the decisions which are best for the country', and 'The politicians pay too little attention to the opinions of the voters'. Statements measuring efficacy were: 'Often politics are so complicated that I don't really understand what is going on', and 'I know so little about politics that I really shouldn't vote'.

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