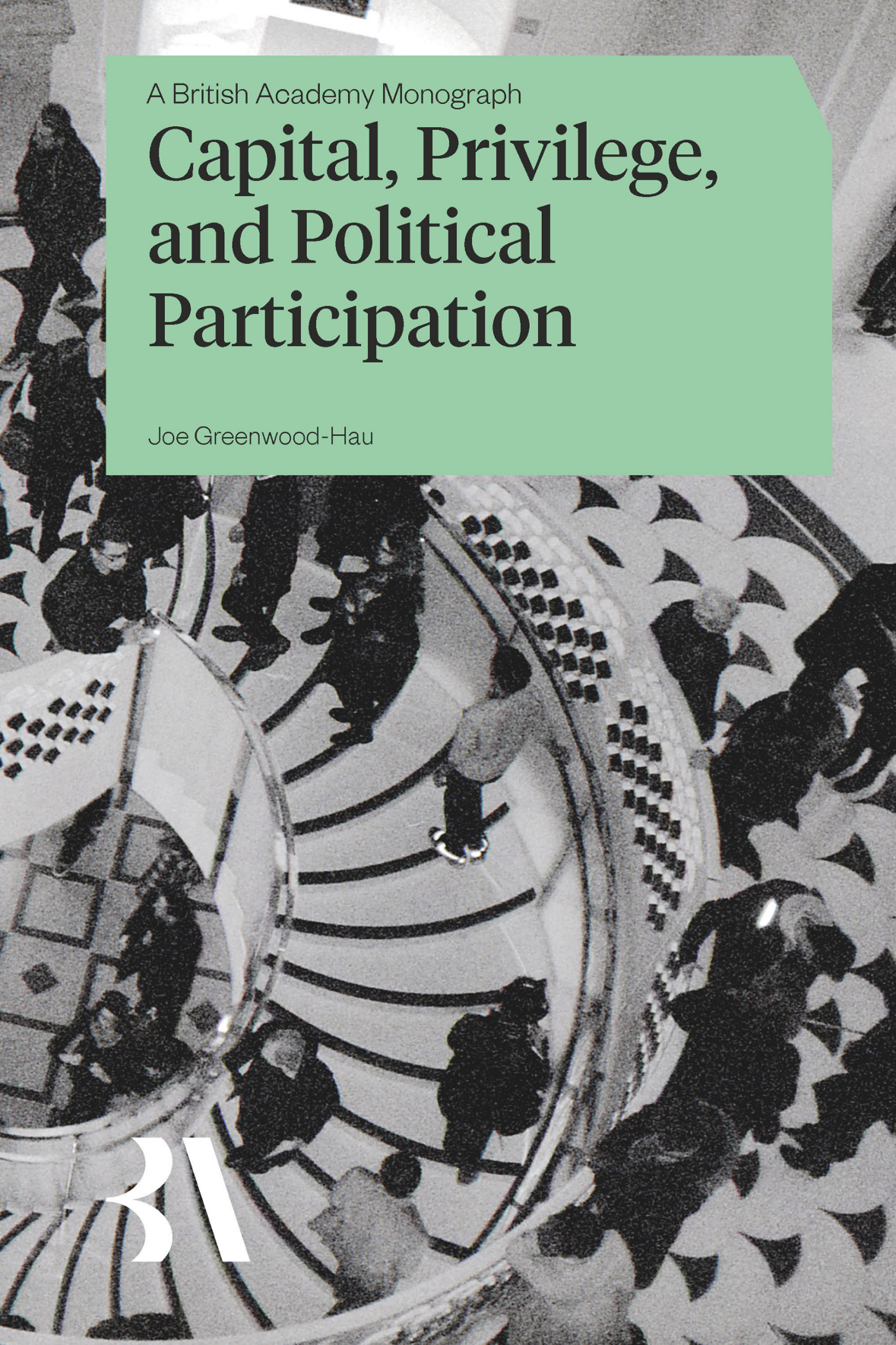




A British Academy Monograph

Capital, Privilege, and Political Participation

Joe Greenwood-Hau

BA

CAPITAL, PRIVILEGE, AND
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

A British Academy Monograph

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Introduction

Political Participation, Privilege, and Capital

Two simple questions lie at the heart of this book. First, why do some people participate in politics more than others do? Second, why do different people participate in politics in different ways? In answering those questions, the book focuses on the role of structural and perceived privilege in facilitating such participation, and on stocks of different kinds of capital (or resources) as a mechanism that reproduces structural privilege. The proposition here is quite a simple one: the advantages and disadvantages afforded to different groups by social structure, and their perceptions of their social positions and the reasons for them, affect their ability and inclination to participate in politics. The book adopts a holistic understanding of each of the concepts in that relationship in an attempt to offer a fuller understanding of capital as a manifestation and mechanism of privilege, the role of the perceptual components of privilege, and how they both relate to a wide array of different kinds of political activity.

The broad conception of political participation that the book adopts moves beyond the common focus on voting (without overlooking it) to include activities ranging from displaying campaign materials to protesting, by way of signing petitions, writing to elected representatives, and attending public meetings. This fits within an understanding of the political nature of behaviour that stems, in part, from its target and the intentions of those who undertake it (van Deth, 2014). In an effort not to overlook participation that may be political, the book also considers activities that may not be explicitly political, such as volunteering for charities. Such activities illustrate the difficulty of drawing a clear boundary between more and less explicitly political participation. The same act of volunteering one's time for two different organisations, both registered as charities, might have quite different political implications, for instance if one charity is an animal shelter and the other focuses on promoting human rights. Thus, the book includes consideration of such activities as a useful comparison point for more explicitly political acts and

to ensure that activities with political implications are not overlooked. This is not a particularly new approach, and there has been important work on the relationship and blurred boundaries between broader civic voluntary activities and their more obviously political counterparts (e.g., Pattie et al., 2004; Verba et al., 1995). It remains important, however, to sustain a holistic account of political participation, and to continue thinking about what the boundaries of such behaviour are.

More innovatively, the book contributes a new account of the factors that shape how much people participate, and the ways in which they do so. It develops an account of the importance of structural privilege for political participation that is explicit in identifying capital as a mechanism that both reproduces such privilege and facilitates political activity. It argues that we must not overlook different varieties of capital and, drawing on a classic account (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986), it focuses on its economic, social, and cultural forms. The suggestion that economic and social capital enable political participation is not a new one, but, in keeping with its general approach, the book deploys a broad understanding of both concepts that incorporates multiple facets of them. At the same time, it moves beyond the common focus on education as a key manifestation of (institutionalised) cultural capital to consider the importance of informal cultural capital. In doing so, it offers the first detailed and extensive account of how numerous different types of informal cultural capital enable a variety of political acts. It does this whilst taking into account the roles of multiple facets of economic and social capital, as well as a range of other factors that relate to political activities. In doing so, it argues not only that capital functions as a mechanism of privilege, reproducing structural inequalities between groups, but also that it acts as a resource that enables political participation.

As well as adopting an expanded understanding of structural privilege, and how it shapes political behaviour, the book also argues for the importance of its perceptual components. It develops an account of those perceptions that incorporates people's explanations for status differences in society, their explanations for and perceptions of their own statuses, and their views of the privilege of people who are involved in politics. These facets of perceptions of privilege are argued to be related to but distinct from the social positions and capital that people hold, and to have their own independent implications for political participation. Specifically, the book argues that people who perceive the role of structural privilege in shaping social positions including their own are likely to be more motivated to undertake political acts. Similarly, people who perceive their social status to be high are more likely to feel able to participate in politics, whilst, by contrast, people who perceive politics to be dominated by highly privileged people are likely to be inhibited from participating. Thus, the book offers not only a conceptualisation of perceptions of privilege but also an account of the implications of their components for political participation.

The contributions of this book, then, are threefold. First, it develops an account of structural privilege that incorporates and focuses on the role of economic, social, and cultural capital, broadly conceived, in reproducing social inequality. Within this, it adds to previous accounts a particular focus on informal cultural capital, manifested in people's pastimes and tastes. Second, it argues for the importance of perceptions of privilege, and develops a conceptualisation of the key components of such perceptions. Together, these two contributions offer an expanded and holistic account of privilege and its implications for political participation. The third contribution, then, is to test those implications. To do so, the book presents a detailed analysis of original survey, interview, and focus group data. The Privilege and Participation Survey that was conducted to underpin the book included extensive batteries of questions about people's political activities, stocks of economic, social, and cultural capital, and their perceptions of privilege. At the same time, in-depth interviews were conducted with Members of Parliament (MPs), volunteers, and activists, whilst interviews and focus groups were undertaken with low-participation members of the public. Together, the survey, interview, and focus group data allow the book to offer an account of how structural and perceived privilege relate to various kinds of political activity, and how people understand and speak about privilege and politics. Additionally, an important sub-contribution here is to consider the survey answers and words of an often-overlooked group: people with low levels of political participation. This allows the book to identify the reasons that such people give for their own non-participation.

As we will see, both in the below overview of the book and its later chapters, the results that emerge from the data analysis are complex and multifaceted. However, they do show that some elements of capital, which is to say structural privilege, facilitate some kinds of political participation. In particular, beyond the effects of economic and social capital, the results show that multiple types of political participation are associated with particular kinds of informal cultural capital. Specifically, it seems that what we might call 'legitimate' or 'highbrow' cultural capital facilitates some kinds of political activity. As such, in some cases, political participation in Britain can be thought of as a culturally distinguished activity. At the same time, the results show that perceptions of the role of structural privilege in society are positively related to multiple modes of political participation, whilst perceptions of the role of privilege in politics are negatively related to those modes. Complementing these findings from the survey data, the analysis of the interview and focus group data shows that there is some ambiguity in how people understand politics, and uncertainty around the precise meaning of privilege when ideas around the concept are probed. Nonetheless, people readily talk about how different elements of economic, social, and cultural capital relate to privilege, and how privilege is related to politics. They also commonly identify a divide between the public and those who are involved in politics, and politicians

in particular, and view privilege as one component of this divide. Perhaps reassuringly, MPs, volunteers and activists, and low-participation members of the public share similar appraisals of the gap between politicians and the public, and the solutions to them.

Structural and perceived privilege do seem to matter for political participation in Britain, and for how people understand politics and the barriers to involvement in it. Arriving at this conclusion was no small undertaking. The Privilege and Participation Survey is large and complex, including hundreds of variables, and there is much more analysis of the data that could be undertaken. Similarly, there are numerous facets of how people speak about privilege and politics in the interviews and focus groups that did not make it on to the pages of this book, and there is certainly scope to read the transcripts from different perspectives, with different conceptual focuses, and with different questions in mind. The book is also attempting to do something that is important and, perhaps, bold: integrate different accounts of political behaviour and different theories relating to privilege into a holistic (if still incomplete) account. It argues that background characteristics such as class, gender, and ethnicity shape the stocks of economic, social, and cultural capital that help reproduce structural privilege and enable or inhibit political participation. This is a broadly sociological account of political behaviour. At the same time, it argues that those same background characteristics shape people's perceptions of the reasons for social inequality, their statuses and reasons for them, and the role of privilege in politics, and that these perceptions of privilege also shape political participation. These perceptual elements of privilege add a more psychological account of political behaviour. Taken together, these arguments offer a combined social-psychological account of the workings of privilege and its implications for political participation that tries to reconcile different accounts of political behaviour rather than playing them off against each other.¹ Although the findings are varied, they do allow us to conclude that capital and perceptions of privilege are related to political participation in important ways.

Considering the Context

The research underpinning this book was conducted during the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government from 2010 to 2015. This was a period in which economic inequality in the UK continued to be an issue (Burkhauser et al., 2016; Gordon et al., 2013; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010), partly due to the economic recession that followed the financial crash in 2008. Relatedly, there were

¹ Note that the book does not overlook important rational choice accounts of political behaviour, but argues that the sociological and psychological factors that it focuses on causally precede such accounts.

ongoing concerns regarding educational opportunities, attainment, and social mobility (Crawford and Vignoles, 2014; Hills et al., 2015; Sutton Trust, 2011) that were linked to debates about the nature of class, and these debates were further fuelled by media coverage of and public engagement with the Great British Class Survey (Devine and Snee, 2015). Concern about inequality was also reflected in public debates about the prevalence of privately educated white men in Parliament (Cochrane, 2010; Hirsch, 2010; Sutton Trust, 2011). This renewed old debates about the role of elites (Cameron, 2003; Dench, 2006; Jones, 2015; Williams, 2006) and, at the other end of the social spectrum, the demonisation of those in precarious circumstances (Jones, 2020; Morris, 2015). Thus, the idea that inequality has important consequences for political representation and participation was common (Beardsworth and Pimlott, 2013; Flanders, 2013; Freedland, 2012; Freeman, 2013; Gilani, 2013; Hutton, 2015; Jones, 2015; Mensch, 2013; Penny, 2013; Richardson, 2015; Sellgren, 2015; Williams, 2013). Given this context, it is fair to describe Britain at the time as a most likely case for observing a relationship between capital, perceptions of privilege, and political participation. Nevertheless, the general proposition that structural privilege, manifested in stocks of capital, and perceptions of privilege may be related to political participation remains relevant. Observing such relationships, as we do in subsequent chapters, contributes to a fuller account of the resources and perceptions held by people who participate in politics in different ways and to different extents.

Considering the context in which the research underpinning this book was conducted also highlights an important limitation of its focus. Context matters, but this book focuses on individual-level drivers of political behaviour. That is to say that it focuses only on what have been described as 'bottom-up' or 'demand-side' factors, and not on 'top-down' or 'supply-side' factors (Evans and Hepplewhite, 2022, pp. 589–591). This means that the book overlooks the activities of parties and politicians as factors that shape political behaviour, despite their clear and well-documented implications in shaping inequalities in such behaviour. Of particular relevance is the extensive literature on how the positioning of parties and who they field as candidates feed into existing participatory inequalities relating to gender (Dassonneville and McAllister, 2018; McAllister, 2019), ethnicity (Banducci et al., 2004; Logan et al., 2012; Uhlaner and Scola, 2016), and class (Heath, 2015, 2018). In short, much of this literature shows that when parties move away from the policy positions of sections of the population (which is to say they do not substantively represent them), those sections are apt to disengage from politics (or turn to alternative, often more radical, parties). Additionally, and particularly importantly, it also shows that when parties fail to field candidates who look like particular groups in the population (which is to say they do not descriptively represent them), this can also prompt those groups to disengage. This book does engage with these ideas in its argument that capital can act as a

signal of status, and in its argument that perception of privilege in politics and the sense that politicians are ‘not like me’ matter. However, these arguments remain centred on the views of individuals in the population, rather than measuring or assessing what parties and politicians do and how this shapes political participation. As such, the book tells a story that relates to only one side of the interaction between the public and political parties and politicians. This is not to say that the other side of the interaction does not matter, and it clearly does, so this limitation of the research should be borne in mind when reading the book. Nonetheless, the book does conceptually expand our understanding of ‘supply-side’ factors and offer new empirical insights into how they shape political participation.

Overview of the Book

Following this introduction, the book proceeds to theoretically consider political participation ([Chapter 1](#)), structural privilege ([Chapter 2](#)), and perceived privilege ([Chapter 3](#)). It then offers empirical accounts of each of those concepts ([Chapters 4–6](#)) before testing the relationships between them ([Chapters 7–8](#)) and concluding. As such, in both its theoretical and empirical sections, the book starts by focusing on the dependent variable of political participation before shifting its focus on to the independent variables that are argued to precede it, which is to say structural and perceived privilege. This structure is adopted so that we develop an understanding of political participation and the previously offered explanations for differences in it before we try to amend and add to those explanations. Thus, although the contributions of this book come in its conceptualisation of structural and perceived privilege, and their implications for political participation, we precede these contributions by theoretically and empirically ‘setting the table’ with our understanding of political participation itself.

[Chapter 1](#) offers an account of what political participation is, taking into account the many different activities that can have political implications, and various typologies of such activities. It pays particular attention to the distinction between individual, contacting, and collective political activities. It then relates these to the argument that many acts may meet an uncontroversial minimal definition of political participation, but that other acts may constitute ‘targeted’ or ‘motivational’ political participation depending on the organisations that they are aimed at and the intentions of those who undertake them (van Deth, 2014). This multifaceted understanding of political participation fits with the view of more and less explicitly political activities that is observed in the empirical chapters. The chapter also offers a whistle-stop tour of drivers of political participation by focusing on three broad accounts of such behaviour: rational choice, psychological, and sociological. These accounts are not argued to be in competition but

to complement each other within a funnel of causality (Campbell et al., 1964, pp. 24–29; Lewis-Beck et al., 2011) that runs from background characteristics (sociological accounts) through underlying dispositions and values (psychological accounts) to the reasoned calculus (rational choice accounts) that may immediately precede decisions about whether and how to undertake political acts. Focusing in particular on the sociological accounts of participation, the chapter notes the often-observed inequalities that exist between more and less marginalised groups in society, particularly in relation to class, gender, and ethnicity. This leads to consideration of an important account, the civic voluntarism model (Verba et al., 1995), that attempts to explain those inequalities in political participation between groups. That account suggests that the unequal distribution of resources, engagement with politics, and recruitment to take political action help to explain those differences in political action between groups. As such, it provides a starting point for the arguments that are developed in the next two chapters, which collectively argue that inequalities in stocks of capital and perceptions of privilege help to explain inequalities in political participation.

Chapter 2 begins by situating the concept of structural privilege, and particularly unearned privilege, with reference to some of the wide literature that addresses the meaning and implications of inequality. It then offers an extended account of economic, social, and cultural capital as conceptualised by Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1986), and their implications for political participation. Here, it pays particular attention to the informal components of cultural capital that are manifested in, amongst other things, pastimes and tastes. The implications of informal cultural capital for political participation have been largely overlooked in previous work, which has instead focused on institutionalised cultural capital in the form of education. In developing an account of the plausible importance of informal cultural capital, the chapter unpacks the distinction between ‘legitimate’ and ‘popular’ cultural capital, which are distinguished by how widespread they are (less and more, respectively) and the extent to which they are or have been socially valorised (more and less, respectively). The chapter argues that, as with its economic and social counterparts, legitimate informal cultural capital acts as a resource that can facilitate participation in a range of environments, including political ones. At the same time, it can also act as a marker of qualification to participate in such spaces and the associated activities. Following this, the chapter moves beyond the historic association between class and capital to argue, building on previous work (Bennett et al., 2009), that capital can be situated within the broader concept of structural privilege that was considered at the outset of the chapter. This allows for inequalities in stocks of capital to be shaped by class, gender, ethnicity, and many other facets of structural privilege. It also allows for the identification of economic, social, and cultural capital as mechanisms that reproduce structural privilege, and as resources that enable political participation. The chapter then concludes by

offering a causal account of this process, building on the civic voluntarism model outlined in [Chapter 1](#), in which background characteristics shape stocks of capital, which then enable or inhibit political participation.

Building on the account of structural privilege offered in [Chapter 2](#), [Chapter 3](#) argues that we must also take account of the perceptual components of privilege. In other words, it argues that there is not a simple process running from structural privilege to political participation, and that how people perceive social inequality, their place within social structures, and their explanations for both also matter for their political behaviour. The chapter begins with a brief consideration of what perceptions are before situating them within two-system models of human psychology (Kahneman, 2011; Marcus et al., 2000). These models differentiate between the fast, automatic surveillance system, which makes many of our daily decisions with little cognitive effort, and the slower, considered disposition system, which is activated when we face more difficult decisions or challenges, and expends cognitive effort to address them. Perceptions (and misperceptions) are argued to be particularly relevant for our fast, automatic, daily decisions, and such precognitive factors have implications for our political behaviour. Of particular importance here, as [Chapter 3](#) goes on to argue, are our group identities (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 2001), which shape how we interact with social environments, including political ones. They also interact with our beliefs about why there is inequality between groups, including the ones that we identify with (Jost et al., 2004).

This leads the chapter to identify four components of perceptions of privilege relating to society, ourselves, and politics. The first component is explanations for status differences in society, which may emphasise individual or structural factors, with the latter equating to a greater perception of privilege. The second component centres on the application of those explanations to one's own social position, and emphasising structural explanation again equates to a greater perception of privilege. The third component is perception of one's own social status, here measured with reference to class, and those with higher self-perceived status see themselves as more privileged (whether that privilege is earned or unearned). Finally, the fourth component centres on perceptions of how privileged people involved in politics are. In all but the last case, [Chapter 3](#) argues that perceiving privilege should drive higher levels of participation in a range of political activities, whilst the fourth component should have the opposite effect. As such, the chapter amends the proposed causal model of political behaviour so that background characteristics shape stocks of capital and perceptions of privilege, which both go on to influence political participation.

[Chapter 4](#) begins our empirical investigation of the concepts at the heart of the book by giving an overview of how people participate in politics and the reasons that low-participation individuals give for not doing so more. After briefly

introducing the survey, interview, and focus group data that the empirical analysis focuses on, the chapter identifies a distinction between more and less explicitly political participation that emerges from how people talk about politics. This distinction maps on to the different modes of political participation that the chapter considers subsequently. It then begins its account of people's participation by observing that individuals are much more likely to support charities than campaign organisations, trade unions and professional associations, or political parties. Whilst their commitment is minimal or moderate, such support for organisations is widespread but largely directed towards charities with less explicitly political causes (e.g., health conditions and animal welfare). The chapter also shows that the specific political acts that people undertake tend to be ones, such as signing petitions or boycotting products, that can be directed towards a range of more or less explicitly political causes. By contrast, activities that tend to be associated with more explicitly political causes, such as protesting and direct action, which also require more effort, are much less widespread. These political acts also map on to the distinction between individual, contacting, and collective activities that was identified in [Chapter 1](#), whilst charitable activities, donating, and voting are shown to each be distinct from those categories.

[Chapter 4](#) then considers the barriers to participation that low-participation people identify, noting the prevalence of lack of time and money as a reason given in relation to organisational involvement and political acts. It also highlights lack of confidence and the sense that such activities are not 'for people like me' as reasons for low involvement in political acts specifically. These observations are complemented by the identification, in how people speak about participation, of personal constraints, systemic disincentives, and negative images of politics as reasons for people not to get involved. Within these categories, people tend to highlight barriers to participation around lack of knowledge and interest, the inaccessible, hierarchical, and unresponsive nature of the political system, and views of politics as inefficacious or irrelevant. Overall, the survey, interview, and focus group data allow the chapter to give a multifaceted account of how people do participate in politics in Britain, and why they say they do not.

[Chapter 5](#) gives a similarly broad account of people's stocks of economic, social, and cultural capital. In relation to the first of those, it considers household income, perceived ease of keeping up with expenses, benefits received, housing status, and types of property owned. Across all these elements, it shows that people tend to hold moderate amounts but that there are notable minorities who are struggling, and smaller minorities who are doing well. These observations are given weight by the ease with which people speak about economic capital, and especially income and property ownership, as a component of privilege. Turning to social capital, the chapter shows that people tend to have acquaintances with particular occupation statuses but also that their networks extend to include a moderate number

of different occupations. They also tend to have networks with larger numbers of people who they interact with infrequently and smaller numbers of people who they are more closely connected to. Perhaps relatedly, their networks are shown to be quite homogeneous in terms of sex, ethnicity, and religion. The chapter also shows that people can rely on their networks, and particularly their friends and family, for help when it is needed, though there is a small minority who are in the unfortunate position of being without such help. This is reflected in how people talk about the importance of social networks, and the help that they provide, especially when they are centred on elite institutions such as private schools. At the same time, they also emphasise the intrinsic value of social connections and see having healthy and happy friends and family as a privilege.

Rounding off its consideration of the three forms of capital, [Chapter 5](#) gives a multifaceted account of people's often-overlooked stocks of informal cultural capital. It shows that people engage in a large number of cultural activities outside their homes but that many of those activities are done infrequently. Indeed, the chapter shows a clear distinction between less widespread and less frequently undertaken legitimate activities, such as attending classical music performances or visiting art galleries, and much more widespread and frequently engaged in popular activities, such as eating out and shopping for pleasure. There is not a simple dichotomy, though, and the chapter also highlights niche activities such as clubbing and going to stand-up comedy. It then shows that there is a sizeable subset of people who undertake holiday activities that involve engaging with the local culture of the places that they visit, which can be thought of as a type of legitimate cultural capital. Similarly, in terms of cultural tastes, there is a smaller subset of people marked by preferences for less common international cuisine, and there are also groups with preferences for blockbuster films and educational films, whilst musical tastes are shown to be very constrained. People talk about tastes and pastimes as features of their lives and of privilege but, with the exception of language and accent, informal cultural capital is not an important component of their understandings of privilege. Instead, as is the case in political and academic accounts, people focus on education as the key element of cultural capital that relates to privilege. Nonetheless, the chapter shows that elements of economic, social, and cultural capital are components of how people understand privilege, and that there is considerable variation in the stocks of those capitals that people hold.

Turning to perceptions of privilege, [Chapter 6](#) considers them as they relate to society, self, and politics. In the first instance, it shows that people tend to emphasise the structural factor of background in their explanations for status differences in society, but that this is closely followed by individual factors such as hard work and ambition. This stands in contrast to the explanations that they offer for their own statuses, in which individual factors are clearly emphasised. Thus, people are

willing to recognise the role of structural forces in shaping social inequality but tend to exempt themselves from the advantages and disadvantages of such forces. This illustrates the importance of measuring the two sets of status explanations separately. The chapter also shows that part of what allows for the divergence between these explanations is the complexity and uncertainty that people express when discussing the idea of privilege. Beyond its links to the forms of capital considered in [Chapter 5](#), [Chapter 6](#) shows that people commonly talk about the importance of class and geography in relation to privilege, both at a societal and a personal level. However, they also stress that it is a relative concept that depends on one's reference point, again in relation to both society and self. This may be part of how they apply different explanations for status to society and themselves. For instance, if people observe the importance of background for prominent members of elites, then they may feel that their own backgrounds have been of relatively little consequence in shaping their own statuses.

[Chapter 6](#) also shows that a surprisingly large number of people will, if given the opportunity, avoid indicating their own status in a class hierarchy. Only half of people actively identify as working or middle class, whilst the remaining half indicate that they have no class identity. This is a remarkable finding in the context of Britain, and highlights the importance of how individuals are asked about their class identities. By contrast, people have no hesitation in identifying the statuses of people who are involved in politics, and politicians specifically, who they consistently view as much more privileged than themselves and society at large. These perceptions of a distinctive class of politicians link to the negative tone that people deploy when talking about them. They commonly stress the self-interested nature of politicians, though some also challenge this view and others recognise the factors that bias their perceptions. Nonetheless, negative views of politicians, and the sense that they are highly privileged, link to barriers around politics not being seen as 'for people like me', and are likely to inhibit political participation. Overall, the chapter highlights that people's explanations for status difference in society and their own statuses, their perceptions of their statuses, and their views of privilege in politics are distinct and important components of perceptions of privilege.

Conceptually and empirically drawing the book together, [Chapter 7](#) investigates the relationships between the concepts outlined in the preceding chapters. That is to say that it tests whether structural privilege, embodied in stocks of capital, and perceptions of privilege are related to a range of different types of political participation. Following the path laid by the previous chapters, it starts by observing that economic capital is, perhaps unsurprisingly, only related to one mode of participation: donating. At the same time, spare time, which is related to economic capital and theoretically enables participation, is shown to facilitate charitable activities and donating. In terms of social capital, the chapter shows that the strength of people's networks, as indicated by the help they receive from people

they know, inhibits collective political activity but facilitates donating. Larger social networks are also associated with higher levels of donating, but almost none of the other components of social capital are related to political participation. The clear exception to this is recruitment, which is strongly and positively related to every kind of political activity except voting. It seems that being asked to participate is, indeed, closely related to participating. Moving on to informal cultural capital, which is where the book adds to conceptions of structural privilege as they relate to political participation, the chapter shows that some elements of legitimate cultural capital facilitate multiple modes of political participation. Attendance at exhibitions is positively related to individual and collective political activities, whilst attending legitimate cultural performances is also positively correlated with the latter and with donating. Further, counter to expectations, popular cultural capital embodied in consumption-based activities is negatively related to contacting political activities and voting. In contrast, the chapter affirms the expectation that work-based civic skills are positively related to individual, contacting, and collective political activities. Even when taking this effect into account, along with those of economic and social capital and a host of other factors, these results show that multiple modes of political participation in Britain are distinguished by their positive association with legitimate cultural capital and negative association with popular cultural capital.

Turning to perceptions of privilege, [Chapter 7](#) shows that structural explanations for status difference in society are positively related to contacting and collective political activities, as well as to donating. In other words, as anticipated, people who perceive the role of privilege in shaping social outcomes are more politically active. At the same time, as also anticipated, people who perceive politics to be a highly privileged domain are less active in the same three modes of participation. Thus, people who see politics as dominated by highly privileged people are less inclined to contact elected representatives, to organise collectively, or to donate to causes that they support. In addition to these observations, the chapter affirms that political interest is strongly and positively related to individual, contacting, and collective activities, as well as voting. This leads to the conclusion that many of the elements of the civic voluntarism model that was introduced in [Chapter 1](#) are still highly relevant to political participation. Specifically, resources (civic skills), engagement (political interest), and recruitment (requests to act) are all consistently and positively related to multiple modes of political participation. The chapter argues that these can be considered particularly politically relevant types of capital, which is to say subsets of cultural (civic skills and political interest) and social (recruitment requests) capital. As such, whilst the results of the chapter affirm many of the insights of the civic voluntarism model, they also show that, beyond these effects, there are effects of economic, social, and cultural capital more widely conceived, and of perceptions of privilege, on political participation.

[Chapter 8](#) tackles the thorny issue of causality as it applies to the relationships considered in the book. Whilst the results in [Chapter 7](#) show consistent relationships between capital, perceptions of privilege, and political participation, even when taking into account a wide variety of other factors that shape such participation, they are not based on a causal analysis. Indeed, the data emerging from the Privilege and Participation Survey, interviews, and focus groups only allow us to observe relationships that could run in either direction. Thus, [Chapter 8](#) recognises that the book cannot provide conclusive empirical evidence of which of the concepts focused on drive or shape others. Nonetheless, the chapter offers an additional analysis to test two plausible alternative causal explanations for the relationships observed in [Chapter 7](#): that capital and perceptions of privilege mediate the effects of age, gender, and class on political participation;² or that political participation is simply another component of privilege alongside capital and perceptions rather than being shaped by them. The chapter shows that few types of capital, except economic capital and social network strength, mediate the relationships between background characteristics and different modes of political participation. Further, even fewer elements of perceptions of privilege act as such mediators. By contrast, civic skills, political interest, and recruitment requests consistently mediate relationships between age, gender, class, and multiple modes of political participation, in line with the causal claims of the civic voluntarism model. As such, the chapter proceeds to test the mediating effects of capital between background characteristics and the civic skills, political interest, and recruitment requests, finding some modest such effects. Together, these findings lead the chapter to conclude that the nature of the causal relationships at the heart of this book remains murky. Whilst the evidence in [Chapter 8](#) is consistent with the civic voluntarism model, it is not conclusive. As such, we must content ourselves with observing that stocks of capital and perceptions of privilege are often related to political participation but that the precise nature of those relationships is not entirely clear.

In the conclusion, the book draws the findings of the preceding chapters together before offering a brief account of the solutions to participatory inequalities that are offered by MPs, volunteers and activists, and low-participation members of the public. Amongst an array of suggestions, the first solution that is consistently spoken about is increased outreach by both political institutions and politicians, and specifically into spaces where the public already are (taking politics to them). Complementing this, the second frequently identified solution is expanded and more consistent civic education, particularly in schools, so that

² The role of ethnicity as a background characteristic could not be investigated because of the unrepresentativeness of the survey sample in that regard. See [Appendix A](#) for an overview of the survey sample's representativeness.

people are equipped to engage with the political system from an early age. Third and finally, people also place emphasis on the need to open up politics by making information more available, accessible, and visible. There is a remarkable amount of agreement about these solutions across the groups that were spoken to, and together they indicate a path towards making politics equally accessible for all. Some of the suggestions also have the potential to address inequalities in participation that stem from structural and perceived privilege, but the conclusion argues that wider work to reduce social inequalities is also needed in this regard. Without such work, there is a continued risk 'that the voices heard through the medium of citizen participation will be often loud, sometimes clear, but rarely equal' (Verba et al., 1995, p. 532).

Unequal Political Participation

Commonplace for Some

Political participation is everywhere and everyday, but not everyone engages in it to the same extent and in the same ways. Recent political events involving participation by large numbers of people include displaying banners in support of Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, mass protests in support of Aleksei A. Navalny in Russia, and the infamous storming of the United States Capitol building by supporters of the outgoing president. On a less dramatic level, we can observe posting and reposting of political materials by millions of people on social media, would not be surprised to walk past a stall in the street gathering petition signatures, and can expect the occasional pleasure or displeasure of answering our front door to volunteers who are canvassing for a political party. We might put our spare change in a collection tin at the supermarket till, make regular donations to causes close to our hearts, or even physically exhaust ourselves to raise awareness of an issue by running much further and faster than we would normally consider rewarding. Many of these acts are so commonplace that they are not considered remarkable, but they constitute the lifeblood of democracy. Unlike voting, they are the day-to-day activities that keep politics working, prompt interest in previously overlooked issues, and make us think about our views on policies and what the government should be doing.

These varied acts of political participation have been categorised in numerous different ways. After enumerating the many ways that people can participate, this chapter gives a brief account of the ways of classifying them. It focuses in particular on the distinction between individual, contacting, and collective political activities, and situates these within a mapping of participation that accommodates the target and intentions of those who do them. This allows for the subsequent distinction, which we observe in [Chapter 4](#), that people draw between more and less explicitly political activities. Following this account of what political participation is, the chapter briefly summarises three key accounts of what

drives such behaviour: rational choice, psychological, and sociological. The latter account suggests the importance of structural privilege, which we turn to in the [next chapter](#), in facilitating political participation. It also, as the chapter argues, can be thought to focus on background characteristics that causally precede those considered by the psychological and rational choice accounts. A sizeable body of sociologically informed work has examined differences in participation between people with different background characteristics, and especially differences based on class, ethnicity, and gender. One such account, the civic voluntarism model, is considered in the final section of this chapter. It argues that differences in political activities between groups can be accounted for by their differing levels of resources, engagement, and recruitment to participate. This is important because it offers a causal account of the processes that explain such differences, and again indicates the importance of structural privilege in facilitating political activities. These features of the civic voluntarism model are used as the starting point for the consideration of privilege, both its structural and perceptual components, in the subsequent chapters.

What Is Political Participation?

There is a ‘kaleidoscope’ of political causes that individuals can support (Cornuelle, 1965, p. 38), including parties of every ideological hue, campaign organisations that focus on issues ranging from military intervention to the protection of the rural environment, and charities that work on concerns as varied as homelessness, international development, and access to sports. Whatever the cause, the specific acts of support available to those who wish to get involved in politics remain similar. These include donating, campaigning in elections, attending meetings, standing for election, and discussing politics with friends, acquaintances, or strangers (Scarrow, 2007), joining organisations, signing petitions, wearing badges, contacting public officials or politicians, and protesting (Goerres, 2009), not to mention voting (Aldrich, 1993; Curtice and Seyd, 2003). Many political activities, not least signing petitions, contacting politicians, and even attending meetings, are now often done online. In that light, some choose to identify online political activities as a distinct form in their own right (e.g., Lilleker and Koc-Michalska, 2017, pp. 27–28), whilst others incorporate them into wider categorisations of political activities (e.g., Grasso et al., 2019a, p. 210). It is also the case that some acts, such as signing petitions, are associated with causes that have a wide variety of political goals, whilst others, such as direct action,¹ tend to be associated with a subset of causes. More broadly, across these many activities, a distinction has been drawn

¹ Direct action includes activities such as flash mobs, lock-ons, and blockades.

between civic and political participation (Zukin et al., 2006), with some arguing that an activity should only be considered political if it 'is intended to or has the consequence of affecting, either directly or indirectly, government action' (Verba et al., 1995, p. 9). Despite its focus on government activity distinguishing political participation from civic voluntarism more generally, there remains a 'fuzzy border between the two' (Verba et al., 1995, p. 7; see also Zukin et al., 2006).

The categorisation of various activities as either civic or political participation indicates that different political acts can be organised into types or modes that can be categorised in different ways. For instance, some differentiate between 'organized civil society' and 'not as well (as in ad-hoc, "temporarily") organized civil society' (Pichler and Kaufmann, 2010, p. 63), whilst others categorise 'different participation acts according to type of influence, initiative required, level of conflict and scope of outcome' (Leighley, 1995, p. 197). There is notable consistency in the distinction between conventional and unconventional participation, with the former described as 'institutionalised', 'traditional', 'normal', and 'legitimate' (Portos et al., 2020; Spanring et al., 2008, pp. 16–17). Conventional participation tends to involve working through existing political institutions, for instance by writing to an elected representative or joining a political party. Unconventional participation does not necessarily eschew all engagement with institutions, but it tends to be less institutionalised or traditional, and includes activities such as boycotting and direct action. A related but more stark distinction can also be drawn between 'pro-system or anti-system' political activities. The former encompasses many conventional and unconventional activities, whilst the latter includes political violence, revolution, and clandestine activity (Gest, 2016), and both can also encompass disengagement.

One particularly encompassing typology of political participation differentiates not only between institutionalised and non-institutionalised modes but also, within the latter, between individual, contacting, and collective activities (Goerres, 2009, p. 160). This three-part distinction has also been applied across both institutionalised and non-institutionalised acts in the United Kingdom (Pattie et al., 2004, pp. 134–137). Drawing on the latter approach, individual activities require little or no coordination with others and include non-institutionalised acts like donating money, wearing a campaign badge, and sharing a post on social media, as well as the institutionalised act of voting. Contacting activities all involve approaching an individual or organisation to raise a complaint or concern, and might be directed towards elected representatives, public officials, companies, or the media. Finally, collective activities involve concerted coordination with other people and include non-institutionalised acts like attending rallies or demonstrations, taking direct action, and going to public meetings, as well as the more institutionalised act of coordinating groups of like-minded people. A benefit of such a comprehensive typology is that it accommodates more recent forms of participation such as

ethical consumerism and online activities (Spannring et al., 2008), both of which can be incorporated into individual activities. It is important to recognise these more recently emerging acts as political activities and take them into account when assessing who gets involved in politics and how. However, despite hopes to the contrary, these newer modes of participation are often undertaken by the same people and groups who were already involved, rather than opening politics to new people (Curtice, 2012; Gest, 2016; Kaase, 1990, 2007; Milbrath and Goel, 1982; van Deth and Maloney, 2012).

Using a typology of political participation that is centred on the nature of the activities, however, runs into the problem that such activities may be deployed in support of causes, and with intentions, that are more or less explicitly political. Different people undertaking some of the activities, and different observers of those activities, may differ in whether they consider them to be 'political'. For instance, the act of signing a petition may be deployed in an attempt to save the playing field that a local amateur football league uses, or to call for the end of sales of arms that may be used in an ongoing military conflict. It is likely that the people signing each of those two petitions will have markedly different views of whether what they are doing is political, despite the fact that the act of signing the petition is the same. Further, two people who both sign the petition about the playing field may also differ over whether they see it as a 'political' act. The ambiguity over what constitutes a political act has been reflected in the expansion of typologies to include more recently emerging political activities. Reflecting the 'fuzzy border' between civic and political activities, this expansion has even encompassed activities that aim 'to impact civil society, or which attempt to alter systematic patterns of social behaviour' (Norris, 2002, p. 16).

In an attempt to circumvent the risk that expanding definitions render everything, and therefore nothing, political participation, Jan van Deth (2014) proposed a way of mapping activities on to different definitions of political participation. Specifically, many conventional or institutional political acts meet the minimalist definition of political participation as voluntary activity that is done by citizens within the sphere of government, politics, or the state (van Deth, 2014, pp. 351–356). Activities that take place outside that sphere, but are targeted at it, may be classed as 'targeted political participation', whilst those that instead aim to solve 'collective or community problems' may be classified as a second variant of such targeted participation (van Deth, 2014, pp. 357–358). Finally, voluntary activities undertaken by citizens that do not meet the first three definitions may be considered 'motivational' political participation if they express 'political aims and intentions' (van Deth, 2014, p. 359). In proposing this mapping, van Deth allows for the same types of activities, whether individual, contacting, or collective, to constitute different kinds of political participation depending on their target and the intentions of those undertaking them. We might think of these differing targets and

intentions as manifested in the distinction between volunteers and activists. As we will see in [Chapter 4](#), many volunteers (and some activists) portray their activities as non-political. More broadly, we also see van Deth's mapping reflected in the recognition amongst low-participation people, volunteers and activists, and MPs that activities may be more or less explicitly political, and that people may undertake apparently political activities without necessarily viewing them as such.

Deploying a multifaceted understanding of political participation that includes a range of individual, contacting, and collective activities reduces the risk that we overlook the participation that some people are undertaking. It also recognises that although they may be conceptually distinct, albeit with a blurred boundary, civic and political activities are closely related. That is to say that civic participation often leads to political participation (Verba et al., 1995, pp. 40–42, 372–375), and less explicitly political activities can prompt their more explicitly political counterparts. What matters for the health of democracy, in this light, is who participates in any of these kinds of activities. If participation of various types is done by a particular group of people, then the voices that are heard, whether by the government, the state, or other organisations, will represent the views of those who are active. The needs and preferences of people who do not participate, or participate less, may be overlooked or even acted against. This means that unequal participation undermines the principle of equal political voice in a democracy, and may feed into a reinforcing cycle in which those who are able, and feel able, to participate have their voices heard and are inclined to participate more. In this light, it is crucial to understand the factors that relate to political participation, and to observe the differences between those who do and do not participate.

What Drives Participation?

If asked who participates in politics, we could give many different answers. We might say 'posh people', 'educated people', or 'people who have the time',² all of which hint at the role of privilege in facilitating political participation. Alternatively, we could suggest that 'interested people', or those who 'care about an issue' or 'are angry about something', are the ones who try to change things through politics. On another level, we might think that politically active people are those who 'think they can win', 'can see benefits for themselves', or 'want to improve things for a group that they're in'. Of course, our answers might change if we think about different types of political participation. We probably imagine quite a different person writing a letter about the lack of bin collections to a local

² As we will see in subsequent chapters, people think that free time is a key factor in who participates, but we find little evidence that free time matters for most types of participation, and this reflects previous findings (Verba et al., 1995, pp. 337–343).

newspaper from one who chains themselves to a bulldozer to halt the creation of a fracking site, although it is perfectly possible for one person to do both. We are quite good at drawing on patterns we have observed to answer questions like ‘who participates in politics?’ and tailoring our answers to the particular type of political activity we have in mind. The many different answers we could give, though, can be grouped into three overarching accounts of political behaviour. Broadly, those accounts characterise politically active people as those who think that political activity offers rewards, have strong beliefs or character traits driving them, or are in groups that have tools, skills, and connections that make political activity easy. These characterisations stem from rational choice, psychological, and sociological accounts of political behaviour, each of which we should consider. We can also link these different explanations together in a causal story of the drivers of political participation that runs from a sociological account of the importance of background characteristics through the psychological factors that they shape to the components of the rational calculus that (sometimes) immediately precede the decision to take action.

Rational choice theory has been one of the most influential schools of thought in political science and posits that individuals are self-interested utility maximisers with existing sets of preferences. In this view, humans have the ability, when confronted with a choice, to rank options and choose the one that is most beneficial to them (Ward, 2002). Using the classic example of voting, the theory suggests that individuals consider a series of things when deciding whether to vote and who to vote for. They rank parties’ policies against their own preferences, assess the benefits to themselves of each party being elected, consider the chance that their vote will affect the outcome of the election, and calculate the costs of voting in terms of time and effort. The exceptionally low chance of any individual vote influencing the outcome of an election leads rational choice theory to suggest that most people should not vote. This expectation underpins the much-studied paradox of voting in which most (or at least many) people turn out to vote despite it being strictly irrational for them to do so (Aldrich, 1993; Blais, 2000; Blais et al., 2000; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968). Indeed, voting can be seen as especially irrational because it is an example of collective action in which the benefits of the outcome cannot be withheld from non-voters (Olson, 2009). A newly elected government might implement policies that increase economic growth, improve public transport, or strengthen a freely available public health system, and these will benefit everyone. In these examples, the effects of good government are not felt only by those who vote, or those who voted for the winning party, underlining the apparent lack of incentive to vote.

Work in the rational choice vein has also offered accounts for the incentives that drive party membership (Costantini and King, 1984; Whiteley et al., 1994), group organisation (Olson, 2009), unconventional political behaviour (Finkel and Muller, 1998), civil strife (Gurr, 1968), social movement participation (Opp,

1988), protest (Opp and Gern, 1993), and mass mobilisation more generally (Granovetter, 1978). The debates around the paradox of voting have implications for those accounts of political behaviour as well. In other words, the small chance that any political act will be decisive in leading to desired change implies that people would be rational to refrain from participating beyond the ballot box too. In order to overcome this issue, some have proposed additional components of the calculations that underpin political behaviour, such as the sense of duty or other expressive motivations that attach an immediate benefit to the act of voting itself (Hamlin and Jennings, 2011). Expanding this idea, others have proposed a 'general incentives model' encompassing selective benefits to one's self, collective benefits to one's group, and expressive motivations for political participation more broadly (Pattie et al., 2003, 2004; Whiteley et al., 1994). This model has been found to do a good job of accounting for party activism, and voluntary and political activity, in the context of the United Kingdom. However, although the inclusion of an array of motivations helps rational choice models explain political behaviour, they run the risk of a tautology in which all behaviour becomes rational, and rationality loses its meaning (Blais, 2000).

Others working in the rational choice tradition have argued that humans have limited, or bounded, rationality because they have incomplete information and their calculations may be imperfect (Simon, 1985). Rather than going through the effort of obtaining complete information and identifying the optimal choice, humans choose the first satisfactory option that they identify. So, instead of optimising, they instead tend to engage in 'satisficing' (Simon, 1978, p. 8). As part of this, they may deploy heuristics, or decision-making shortcuts, rather than going through the laborious process of ranking all the options against their preferences. An individual who votes for a party because it has historically been associated with the interests of their class is deploying a heuristic, rather than being purely rational by assessing the potential impact of its policies. If they went through the process of familiarising themselves with the policies of all the parties, they might find that another one better represented their interests, and perhaps even a party with a better chance of victory. Nevertheless, the efficiency of deploying heuristics to make satisfactory decisions (Lupia, 1994) allows people to take an 'all-things-considered' approach (Hamlin and Jennings, 2011, p. 667) and make decisions that may be '*more than rational*' (Elster, 2007, p. 342, emphasis in original). Both the calculus-based original contribution of rational choice theory and its bounded iteration have been highly influential accounts of political behaviour, especially voting. However, some have criticised the theory for providing an incomplete, or even empirically unsupported, account of how humans behave (e.g., Kahneman, 2011, p. 374).

Reflecting the criticism that the theory has received, in introducing the idea of taking shortcuts to speed up decision-making, bounded rationality bridges the

divide between rational choice theory and psychological approaches to accounting for political behaviour. Work in the latter vein has proposed that humans have two systems, based on intuition and reason, that function in parallel to enable decision-making (Kahneman, 2003, 2011; Marcus et al., 2000). The intuitive system draws on emotions (Mutz, 2007) and thoughts that are accessible and frequently used, making them a fast route by which to make decisions. This is the basis for most easy day-to-day decision-making but is monitored by the more considered, and slower, reason-based system. That system assesses the appropriateness of decisions in light of the context and amends or tweaks them when necessary. This makes us remarkably good at adjusting our behaviour to different contexts we are in without expending great conscious effort. We will, for instance, easily behave quite differently at a meal with our best friends than at a local branch meeting of a political party. Most of the time, the intuition system knows how we should handle ourselves in these contexts, but the reason system is also monitoring for those moments when a comment or action is signalled as inappropriate or unusual by others.

Key features of the intuitive system are its ready availability and fast response, which point to the importance of the concept of accessibility in explaining behaviour. Often, the opinions expressed by humans are based on the information that is readily available to them (Tourangeau et al., 2000). The accessibility and interpretation of information are shaped by prevailing narratives (Grasso et al., 2019b; Zaller, 1992), underlying values and beliefs (Feldman, 1988; Oliver and Wood, 2014; Schwartz et al., 2012), and personality traits such as agreeableness, openness, emotional stability, conscientiousness, and extraversion (Gerber et al., 2010). In a similar way, our behaviour reflects the information we have about other people's beliefs and activities. Prevailing narratives may be stocked with information that promotes or stifles political participation, for instance if individuals are socially connected to others who express scepticism and uncertainty about the efficacy of participation and the political system (McCulloch et al., 2012; Partheymüller and Schmitt-Beck, 2012; Pollock, 1983). Along with underlying values (Oser and Hooghe, 2018), such information shapes the beliefs that feed into planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2012; Bruter and Harrison, 2009) and alters psychological states, for instance by invoking hurry (Darley and Batson, 1973) or a sense of social pressure (Gerber et al., 2008; Nickerson, 2008).

The social nature of these psychological influences indicates the importance of group membership and associated identities in shaping opinions and behaviour. The process of perceiving and identifying with groups is affective (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 2001) but also includes cognitive components that shape the level of group abstraction and salient identity in a given context (Turner and Reynolds, 2012). For example, a Scottish woman who enjoys long-distance cycling and supports the Labour Party will reflect the centrality of those things to her

identity when she describes herself. However, she will also have quite different parts of her identity made salient when receiving a patronising comment from a male colleague, attending a rugby game between Scotland and England, discussing the qualities of fell running with a friend, or discovering that she is talking to a member of the Scottish National Party at a friend's house-warming party. The salient identity affects the information that is accessible to the intuitive system and how others are perceived, for instance through the application of stereotypes (Bryan et al., 1986; Uhlmann et al., 2012). Stereotypes pave the way for symbolic politics in which affective responses to individuals or groups are prompted (Goodwin, 2010; Sears, 1993), and even extended to figures only loosely associated with the source of the affective response. For instance, merely mentioning that a cat's owner was Margaret Thatcher or Tony Blair dramatically alters how positive Labour and Conservative supporters are towards the cat itself (Cowley, 2014). This is rather far from the rational choice account of political behaviour, in which people make considered decisions about their preferences. That is to say that psychological accounts speak of deep-seated pre-rational dispositions that are shaped by the environments that we inhabit.

The link between psychological processes, prevailing information and norms, and group identity also points to the importance of sociological accounts of behaviour. These accounts often focus on the impact of social context, including the importance of childhood and formative years in shaping political views and behaviour (Ares and Van Ditmars, 2023; Dinas, 2014; Grasso et al., 2019a, 2019b; Ichilov, 1988; Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Jennings, 2007; Svallfors, 1993; Westholm, 1999). This has led to a focus on political participation amongst young people (Bennett and Parameshwaran, 2013; Norris et al., 2005; Spanring et al., 2008), given that it can shape subsequent behaviour.³ A key factor in our adolescent and early adult years is education, which shapes both electoral (Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017) and non-electoral participation (Staetsky and Mohan, 2011). This could be because those with higher educational qualifications have more central positions in hierarchical social networks (Nie et al., 1996), or because it acts as a proxy for earlier socialising experiences that dispose people to political activity (Kam and Palmer, 2008). It is difficult to disentangle the effects of education on political participation from those of other drivers, and to conclusively identify education as an immediate or long-term cause of participation, or simply a correlate of other socioeconomic drivers (Willeck and Mendelberg, 2022).

The final possibility in relation to the effects of education indicates the importance of other socioeconomic factors in shaping political behaviour. Indeed, a key

³ These long-term and generational effects, which reflect when one was born (and early socialisation experiences), also work alongside life-cycle effects, which reflect one's life stage, to shape political behaviour amongst older people (Goerres, 2009, pp. 160–161).

focus of sociological accounts has been how social characteristics and inequalities between groups relate to political activity. As such, they deal with the effects of privilege. Some groups are advantaged by social structures, which is to say they are privileged, whilst others are disadvantaged, and this may affect how much they can engage with politics. Often, consideration of these inequalities is organised around key social cleavages, most prominently class, ethnicity, and gender (Staetsky and Mohan, 2011; Whiteley, 2009). In relation to the first of those, a great deal of focus has been on the association between class and party support, and more recently on its apparent decline (Achterberg and Houtman, 2006; Best, 2011; Dalton, 2002; Evans and Hepplewhite, 2022; Evans and Tilley, 2012; Heath, 2015, 2018; Lewis-Beck et al., 2011; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Others have considered the role of class in broader participation, including new forms (Caínzos and Voces, 2010), radical forms, and disengagement (Gest, 2016). In relation to ethnicity, much work has considered differences in voter registration, turnout, and party support (Anwar, 2001; Ferree, 2006; Ford et al., 2015; Huber, 2012; Leighley and Vedlitz, 1999; Saggar, 2007), whilst others have focused on descriptive representation (Sobolewska and Begum, 2020), non-electoral participation (Skirmuntt, 2013), and ethnic group conflict (Bergesen and Herman, 1998; Posner, 2004) and cooperation (Habyarimana et al., 2007). Finally, examination of the role of gender in political participation has highlighted and challenged the knowledge gap between genders (Dassonneville and McAllister, 2018; McAllister, 2019; Mendez and Osborn, 2010; Mondak and Anderson, 2004), emphasised the challenges faced by female political representatives (Culhane and Olchawski, 2018; O'Brien, 2015), shown the positive role of quotas in improving descriptive representation (Besley et al., 2017; Tripp and Kang, 2008), and identified the impact of rules (Karpowitz et al., 2012) and recruitment (Fox and Lawless, 2010) on female political participation. In recent years, it has also been observed that the gap in political participation between men and women, with men generally participating to a greater extent than women, has declined and disappeared in some contexts (Burns et al., 2018).

These accounts demonstrate the importance of the inequalities stemming from social structures. That is to say they address the role of structural privilege in sustaining the advantage and disadvantage of different groups in society, which we turn to in more detail in the [next chapter](#). However, they do not address the intricacies of the decision-making processes at work within individuals. Those processes can reinforce or challenge the behaviour that emerges from social structures. To understand the relationship between inequality and political participation, we must consider both people's places in social structures and how they interpret those places. As such, this book draws on both the sociological and psychological approaches to examine how structural and perceived privilege relate to political participation. These can be seen as points in a process that leads from inequalities based on people's background characteristics to differences in political

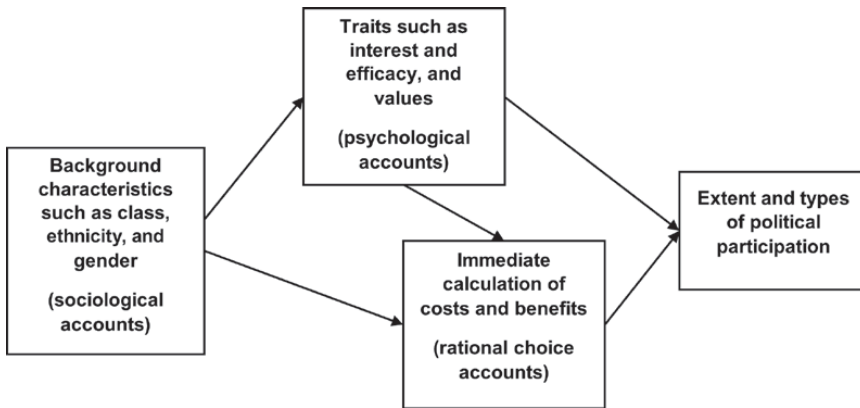


Figure 1.1 The funnel of causality applied to accounts of political participation

participation. The perceptions that result from one's place in unequal structures underpin the assumptions that allow intuitive decision-making, which contribute to decisions about whether or not to participate in politics. Only if the reason-based decision-making system is activated does rational choice theory become relevant to the process. In what some have called the funnel of causality (Campbell et al., 1964, pp. 24–29; Lewis-Beck et al., 2011), a wide array of social and contextual factors shape our psychological dispositions and beliefs, which then influence our conscious decisions and behaviour. A simplified characterisation of this chain of causality is presented in Figure 1.1, and as we move along it, the factors become more proximate, and intimately related, to the extent and types of political participation that people engage in. It is particularly the longer-term and medium-term sociological and psychological factors, which precede the immediate calculus of whether to participate, that we are concerned with in this book.

Unpacking Who Participates

Sociological and psychological factors that relate to political participation are highlighted by the work of Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba. The civic voluntarism model that they propose in *Voice and Equality* (Verba et al., 1995) focuses on how background characteristics translate into differences in political participation. In other words, they seek to provide an explanation for why some people, and certain groups, participate in politics more than others. Focusing on the United States, they show that the likelihood of participating in politics, and the amount of money and time given when participating, reflect the societal cleavages of class, race and ethnicity, and gender. Specifically, the wealthy

participate in political activity more than the less wealthy, Anglo-White people participate more than African Americans, Latinx citizens, and Latinx non-citizens, and men participate more than women (Verba et al., 1995). This demonstrates the importance of social structure, and background characteristics, in shaping political participation, and they seek to unpack the reasons for this.

In explaining these patterns, they argue that people do not participate in politics 'because they can't, because they don't want to, or because nobody asked' (Schlozman et al., 2020, p. 50). That is, the civic voluntarism model proposes that the unequal distribution of resources, engagement, and recruitment makes it easier for some and harder for others to participate in politics. Thinking first about the resource of money helps explain the argument. People with more money are more able to make political donations and are likely to give more money when they do. Since some groups in society, such as those in higher social classes, white people, and men, tend to have higher incomes, they are likely to be over-represented in donations to political causes. A similar idea applies to time, which can also be viewed as a resource, and people with more leisure time might be expected to have a greater capacity to get involved in politics.⁴ Again, if certain groups have more spare time, for instance if they are retired or do not have children at home, then they are likely to be disproportionately represented amongst the ranks of the politically active. The role of civic skills (see also Nie et al., 1996), which Verba, Schlozman, and Brady argue are also resources, is clear if we consider their roots and development:

civic skills are, thus, developed in the course of activities that have nothing to do with politics: making a presentation to a client, organizing a celebrity auction for a charity, or editing the church's monthly newsletter. Once honed, however, they are part of the arsenal of resources that can be devoted, if the individual wishes, to politics. (Verba et al., 1995, pp. 330–331)

We can think of the identification of the importance of unequally distributed resources as a sociological explanation for participation. However, the civic voluntarism model also includes a psychological element in its identification of the role of political engagement. Like resources, the concept of engagement has multiple components: interest in politics, belief in the efficacy of political action, level of political information held, and identification with a political party. The argument here is that people must be psychologically engaged with politics in one or more way to have the motivation to take political action. In addition to the resources enabling participation and the motivation to do so stemming from engagement, they also argue that people must be mobilised. As such, the final element of the civic voluntarism model returns to sociological factors, and centres on requests to take part in political activities. These recruitment requests can come from an

⁴ Though, as noted in footnote 2 above, there is little evidence of this.

array of sources, including family and friends, but the key concern is with requests stemming from workplaces, churches, and secular voluntary organisations. Such mobilisation is important because, whilst we can imagine ‘self-starters’ who have the resources and motivation to participate by themselves, there are some people who need to be prompted to take action.

Drawing the above factors together, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady show a consistent tendency for highly educated people with high incomes, white people, and men to have higher levels of resources, engagement, and recruitment. They then show that each of these factors is associated with a different form of political participation. Higher levels of civic skills, political interest, political efficacy, and political information are associated with greater engagement in time-based participation such as volunteering. The likelihood to engage in that unique and vital democratic act, voting, is greater amongst people with higher levels of political interest, partisanship, and political information. Unsurprisingly, income is unchallenged as the most important factor relating to donating, with people on higher incomes giving more and more often. Overall, resources and engagement are most strongly related to political participation, but recruitment matters too, even if in activating rather than enabling participation. Thus, the civic voluntarism model provides a theoretically and empirically important account of how background characteristics translate into differences in political participation. It also draws together sociological factors, in the form of resources and recruitment, and psychological factors, in the form of engagement. Observing the relevance of those factors does not explain away the participatory inequalities that exist between classes, races and ethnicities, and genders, but it does help us to understand why those inequalities exist. As such, and as portrayed in [Figure 1.2](#), it also offers a causal account in which the effects of background characteristics

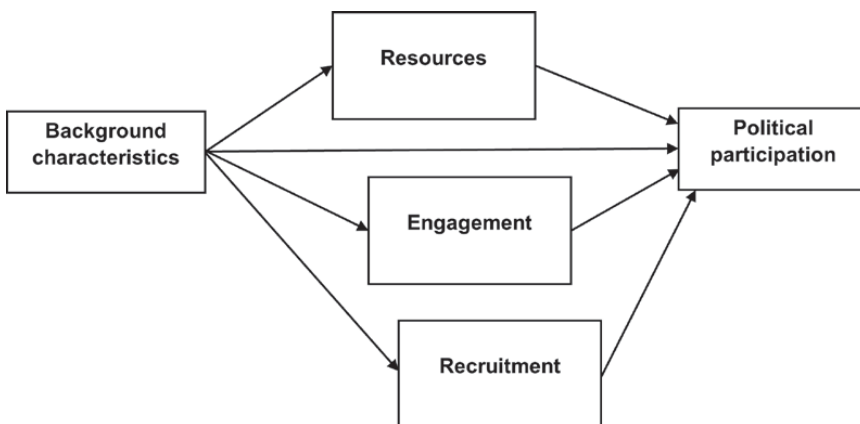


Figure 1.2 The causal account offered by the civic voluntarism model

on political participation work, at least in part, through differences in resources, engagement, and recruitment.

More recently, in *Unequal and Unrepresented* (2020), Schlozman, Brady, and Verba update and expand their findings to show the persistence of divides in political participation. The importance of education and income continues to be of particular note, and inequalities between different races and ethnicities remain, but the participatory divide between the genders is less marked and persistent (see also Burns et al., 2018). The rise of the internet has facilitated greater political participation by younger people, decreasing their gap with older people in this regard. However, as with traditional modes, those in higher social classes participate more than those in lower social classes, and this is also the case with new social movements (Gest, 2016, p. 29; Hilton, 2011; Oser, 2022, p. 520) and online political participation (Lilleker and Koc-Michalska, 2017; Oser et al., 2013; Schlozman et al., 2010). This is partially because social movements and political organisations engage in ‘rational prospecting’ by targeting their recruitment efforts at those who are likely to say ‘yes’ and make a large or useful contribution (Schlozman et al., 2020, p. 138). This means that elected representatives hear less about issues of economic necessity such as health insurance, social security, and other forms of state support than they would if those who participated in politics were representative of the population (for more on the political (under-)representation of the views of the rich and poor, see Bartels, 2018; Lupu and Warner, 2022; Persson and Sundell, 2024). It is also the case that political activists tend to be more radical in relation to the issues that they campaign on, whether economic or social, than citizens more generally (Bale et al., 2020). Strikingly, these inequalities in participation, and what elected representatives hear as a consequence, have been part of the political ‘landscape for at least as long as we have had instruments to measure them’ (Schlozman et al., 2020, p. x). This leads to the observation that ‘the disparities in political voice across various segments of society are so substantial and so persistent as to preclude the minimal democratic requirement of equal consideration by decision makers’ (Schlozman et al., 2020, p. 6).

Towards Structural and Perceived Privilege

People can get involved in politics by undertaking a vast array of different acts, and part of what makes some of these acts political are the targets and the intentions of the people doing them. We are surrounded by more or less explicitly political behaviour on a daily basis, from the obvious, such as a protest in a town centre, to the subtle, such as someone putting a particular kind of coffee in their shopping basket. We need to try and include as many of these activities as possible in our accounts of political behaviour, so that we do not overlook the quotidian acts

that constitute the lifeblood of democracy. It will also ensure that we do not miss out the political participation of people who only engage in a few specific kinds of activities that might not be as regularly measured as, for example, voting. This matters because we know that people participate in politics to different extents, and in different ways. There are contending accounts of these differences but the rational choice, psychological, and sociological accounts of differences in political participation do not have to be viewed as competing or mutually exclusive. As we have seen, they can be reconciled in a causal account that runs from the importance of social structure and background characteristics, through their effects on underlying psychological dispositions, which in turn shape the rational calculus that may precede decisions to participate in politics (or not).

In a similar vein, in the civic voluntarism model, we have seen an account that proposes a causal process running from background characteristics through differences in levels of resources, engagement, and recruitment to differences in political participation. This helps us to understand why groups that are more or less advantaged by social structure are also more or less apt to undertake particular kinds of political activities. Implicitly, this is an account of the workings of structural privilege, in which the advantages and disadvantages experienced by different groups are reproduced through the differences in the tools and behaviours that are readily available to them. Taking this as a starting point, the [next chapter](#) offers an account that is explicitly about structural privilege, and that expands that concept to include a wider array of resources that could matter for political participation. At the same time, the civic voluntarism model incorporates the importance of psychological factors into its account of political behaviour. This indicates the importance of not only accounting for structural privilege but also its perceptual components, which the following chapter offers. Together, the next two chapters build on the understanding of political participation and accounts of why it differs between people that we have encountered in this chapter to offer a more holistic account of the role of privilege or a lack of it in facilitating or inhibiting political activities.

Structural Privilege

Inequality and Privilege

The inequalities in political participation that we considered in the [previous chapter](#) draw attention away from individual explanations for disengagement from politics, such as apathy amongst the disengaged (Yeo, 1974). Instead, they point to the impact of structural forces that shape how easy or difficult it is for people to get involved in politics. The civic voluntarism model provides one account of the processes that link people's backgrounds to different levels and types of political participation, but it is part of a broader story. The political inequalities that it focuses on, in which some groups are marginalised by the unequal distribution of resources, engagement, and recruitment, are a manifestation of wider societal inequalities. Those inequalities result from the workings of privilege, and this chapter offers an account of that concept. After narrowing our focus on to unearned privilege, and its relationship with inequality, the chapter argues that privilege encompasses inherited advantage relating to gender, ethnicity, and class. It makes the case that privilege is represented and reproduced by the unequal distribution of economic, social, and cultural capital. That is to say that stocks of capital are an indicator of the privilege that people have whilst also functioning as a means by which they can sustain their privileged position. The chapter considers each of the three forms of capital, as proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, with a particular focus on the pastimes and tastes encompassed by informal cultural capital. The implications of such pastimes and tastes for political participation have rarely been considered previously. This chapter, and book, seeks to address that oversight. This is because, it argues, all three forms of capital contribute to political inequalities by acting as resources and markers of qualification that facilitate participation by those who hold them. This means that accounting for capital allows us to paint a richer and more complete picture of the privilege that underpins inequalities in political participation.

“Privilege,” both in its legal and its everyday use, indicates what someone or something has in virtue of being singled out for advantageous treatment. A privilege is necessarily reserved for a few not given to all’ (White, 1978, p. 299). Privilege can be positive or negative, entitling the holder to certain benefits or freeing them from restrictions. In the former case, we can think of a member of a club or a loyalty scheme, who can use particular facilities or is given special prices by virtue of their membership. In the latter case, we can think of the immunity from prosecution granted to diplomats by their host countries. Privilege can also be earned or unearned. In its earned form it might be associated with particular positions that one has attained, such as when elected representatives are protected from prosecution for their statements in a legislature. Earned privilege is not associated with particular background characteristics but with formally or informally held positions in society. Of course, such positions may be dominated by groups with particular backgrounds, but earned privilege is not a direct consequence of the individual characteristics of post-holders, or at least it is not supposed to be.

By contrast, unearned privilege is held by certain groups, usually on the basis of particular background characteristics, for reasons other than merit. Such privilege may be explicit or implicit, and it sustains and recreates social structures in which different groups are afforded opportunities or face barriers. Unearned privilege has been described by some as like playing a computer game with the difficulty level set to easy; someone with privilege is not necessarily conscious that the challenges faced by others (who are playing the game set to difficult) have been removed from their life, but their path is easier nonetheless. Others have likened privilege to an ‘invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, code-books, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks’ (McIntosh, 2017, p. 148). Such a knapsack allows the holder to go about their life easily and without considering the advantages that have been bestowed upon them. It is this kind of privilege that is the focus of this book.

The idea of unearned privilege is closely related to wider debates around inequality because the former contributes to and sustains the latter. Many accounts of inequality are concerned with economic differences, whether based on differences in annual income, lifetime income, or wealth. High inequality is related to worse social outcomes in a range of areas including general trust, mental health, obesity, educational attainment, teenage births, violent crime, imprisonment, and social mobility (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010).¹ Higher income inequality has also been

¹ This observation relates to inequality measured by the Gini coefficient which has a value of one if all the wealth in a society is held by a single individual or a value of zero if wealth is distributed completely equally between everyone. This is a widely used measure that nonetheless produces particular estimates of inequality (Atkinson, 1975).

linked to lower trust in government (Zmerli and Castillo, 2015) and lower turnout rates in national elections (Bartle et al., 2017; Larcinese, 2007; Solt, 2008). This contributes to the recreation of inequality because the voting records of elected representatives reflect the views of their wealthy constituents more closely than those of their poor constituents (Bartels, 2016; Schlozman et al., 2020). Thus, the day-to-day advantages of having higher income or more wealth are complemented by policy-making that helps to sustain those advantages. Here, we can think of a wealthy businessman who hires an accountant to ensure that they pay the minimum tax that is legally required of them. At the same time, they can also attend a fundraising dinner and stress their preference for lower taxes to their elected representative.

A powerful case has been made that assessments of inequality should extend beyond economic resources to take account of people's capacities to achieve the things they have prioritised (Sen, 2010). In other words, it is not enough to observe that two people have the same amount of money if one of them cannot easily use that money to do as they wish, for instance if their rights are restricted because of particular characteristics. This points towards the need to measure multiple facets of the privilege that sustains inequality, as this book seeks to do. Beyond money and politics, people's achievements and experiences of life are affected by the prevailing cleavages in society. These relate to characteristics including religion, sexuality, disability, and age, but are most commonly considered in relation to class, ethnicity, and gender. The structural disadvantage faced by working-class people, ethnic minorities, and women constitutes a form of implicit affirmative action in favour of white middle-class men, which is overlooked by opponents of affirmative action policies designed to level the playing field (Duster, 1976). Indeed, blindness to the benefits of being middle class, white, and male has been posited to constitute a non-conscious ideology that pervades society and assigns roles to individuals with little consideration for their abilities or aspirations (Bem, 1970; Ellis, 1980). Experiences of advantage and disadvantage also reflect intersecting experiences based on class, ethnicity, and gender. For instance, the experiences of working-class black women cannot be understood in terms of the social position of working-class people, discrimination against black people in general, or the marginalisation of women in general but only as an intersection of all three with a particular set of experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). Similarly, middle-class white men do not enjoy their privileges separately but in a combined fashion that makes their experiences, again, particular to them. This means that even those campaigning for marginal groups should be alive to the differences in their experiences and not presume to know the best way to tackle that marginalisation (Abu-Lughod, 2002). In other words, we should not forget that people's experiences of advantage and disadvantage are personal to them and that privilege functions in complex and multifaceted ways.

Capital and Politics

One way to capture people's intersecting experiences, which are shaped by their class, ethnicity, and gender, is to focus on their stocks of different kinds of capital. This allows us to respond to the call to look beyond economic resources alone (Sen, 2010) when accounting for inequality and the privilege that sustains it. It is clear that the money and assets that people accumulate over their lives partly reflect the advantages and disadvantages that they have had. But we can also think about how their social connections, and what they can expect to gain from them, reflect and sustain their privilege. And beyond the skills, knowledge, and qualifications stemming from education, we can also think about people's cultural preferences and tastes as indicating and supporting their social positions. People's financial assets, social connections, and cultural preferences stem in part from their background characteristics and experiences of socialisation, and offer a multifaceted way to measure their privilege. This idea has its roots in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who views classes as constituted by their stocks of capital, which

can present itself in three fundamental guises: as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title or nobility. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243, emphasis in original)

The distinction between institutionalised and non-institutionalised, or formal and informal, capital is key. This is especially the case in relation to cultural capital because accounts of inequality in political participation, which routinely account for education, have generally overlooked the role of informal cultural capital. Yet, such capital can act as a resource and a signifier of qualification to engage in a range of social and political contexts. This possibility is examined in the subsequent empirical chapters, which offer a holistic account of the role that the three forms of capital play in political participation in the United Kingdom. In this account, particular attention is paid to informal cultural capital because of its absence from previous accounts of political participation.

The approach here reflects the insights offered by Bourdieu's work *Distinction* (1984), which provides an extensive description of the informal cultural capital possessed by people of different classes in 1960s France. Based on a mix of sources including survey data, interviews, and photographs, the description of his subjects encompasses their musical tastes, artistic preferences, choice of literature, home decoration, trips to the theatre and cinema, food preferences and body shape, clothing and appearance, favoured sports, use of language and speech patterns, and choice of newspaper (Bourdieu, 1984). In each

of these areas, Bourdieu identified 'legitimate', 'middle-brow', and 'popular' tastes. These can be arranged along a spectrum running from the least widespread and accessible tastes, which are 'legitimate', to the most, which are 'popular'. In contemporary Britain, the use of this language or synonyms such as 'highbrow' and 'low-brow' can be controversial because they imply a judgement of the quality of those cultural practices. This is particularly problematic in an era when, as we will see, many people are at pains not to appear snobbish or judgemental about cultural preferences. Despite this, as we will also see, hierarchies of cultural practices do persist, even if they are weaker than they once were, and we need some language to describe them. As such, this book adopts Bourdieu's distinction between legitimate and popular cultural capital without seeking to deploy them in a pejorative fashion. Thus, to describe a cultural preference as legitimate is to observe that it has been assigned some value or designated as worthwhile, rather than that it is better than other cultural practices per se.

The use of the language of legitimacy, then, reflects the idea that cultural capital is distinguished not only on the basis of how widespread it is but also on the basis of the value and worth that it is assigned. It is the combination of scarcity or inaccessibility with desirability that awards legitimate cultural capital its value. We can think, here, of a classic example such as opera, which is performed live in only a few locations that can be expensive to attend, especially when there is an explicit or implicit dress code. At the same time, like the canon in literature, opera is heralded as a set of important and great works that are worth knowing about. This gives familiarity with such cultural forms value, at least in some social circles, whilst at the same time creating an expectation that one should understand them. By contrast, stand-up comedy is more readily accessible, both in terms of the availability of local comedy nights across the country and the number of venues that comedians perform at when touring. Whilst it is possible to pay a great deal of money for a ticket to see a world-famous comedian in a large venue, it is also possible to see stand-up comedy cheaply or, in some cases, for free. At the same time, going to see comedy is generally about having fun rather than gaining an experience that is necessarily seen as desirable, and has few entry requirements in terms of dress or familiarity with the work. Indeed, many comedians deliver routines that are about the experiences of day-to-day life, and thus widely accessible without prior knowledge.

There is not, however, a simple distinction between activities that are worthwhile and those that are just for fun. Within opera and classical music, whilst opinions differ, there are seen to be 'great' and 'lesser' works and composers. The obscurity of the latter will hold cachet in some circles, whilst the renown of the former will be valued by other, larger, groups that may include people who also like the more obscure works. Similarly, within stand-up comedy, attending a show by a little-known surrealist comic at a small, dedicated comedy club has quite different

cultural cachet from attending a stadium performance by a superstar comedian. Again, people can do both, but the group doing the former will be smaller than the group doing the latter. We see this distinction between legitimate and popular tastes within cultural activities in numerous areas, including eating out, going to music gigs, and going to the cinema. Indeed, it signifies something very different to drop into a conversation that you recently went to an art house cinema to watch the latest film by award-winning French director Céline Sciamma than to say that you went to a multiplex to watch the latest big-budget blockbuster by Michael Bay. This loading of cultural tastes with value means that they can matter for political participation because they represent a form of knowledge that can be used as a qualification to engage in contexts with others who have similar tastes. The socially defined value of legitimate cultural capital makes it easier for those who hold it to participate in a range of social contexts, including political ones.

For Bourdieu, the value of capital stems from a market in which individuals and groups compete not only to obtain it but also to define which types are most legitimate. This competition is partly to obtain the best rates for exchanging cultural into economic capital, but also to assert the opposition between different types, the superiority of some, and the inferiority of others. Focusing on all three forms of capital, it is argued, enables the observation of objective social relations and accounts for the complexity of those relations by considering both the volume and composition of capital that is held by different classes (Friedland et al., 2007; Katz-Gerro, 1999). Those stocks of capital, and their relationship with class, are reflected in the concept of *habitus*, in which ‘all the practices and products of a given agent are objectively harmonized among themselves, without any deliberate pursuit of coherence, and objectively orchestrated, without any conscious concertation, with those of all members of the same class’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 173). The middle class has ‘a habitus of order, restraint, and propriety which may not be abdicated ... It is also a whole relationship to animal nature, to primary needs and the populace who indulge them without restraint; it is a way of denying the meaning and primary function of consumption, which are essentially common’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 196). By contrast, the working-class habitus stands for ‘sincerity, for feeling, for what is felt and proved in actions; it is the free-speech and language of the heart which make the true “nice guy”, blunt, straightforward, unbending, honest, genuine, “straight down the line” and “straight as a die”, as opposed to everything that is pure form, done only for form’s sake’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 199). *Habitus* can also be defined as a set of “durably installed” dispositions and perceptions’ that are shaped by experiences stemming from class position and shape future interactions with the world (Grattan, 2012). It is the totality of and connections between all of the habits, preferences, and understandings possessed by virtue of being socialised into a particular class. This fits with the idea that privilege is reflected in and sustained by the three forms of capital in

general, and informal cultural capital in particular. People's class positions and backgrounds shape their socialisation and experiences, with the result that they both inhabit and display a habitus defined in part by class-based cultural practices. As we will see subsequently, habitus and associated stocks of capital are also shaped by other background characteristics besides class, allowing us to think of them as manifestations of privilege. We will also see that, as such, stocks of capital have important implications for political participation.

Relatedly, as was noted earlier, education shapes political participation and is routinely controlled for in accounts of such behaviour. This is partly because it is a key mechanism of socialisation that shapes our stocks of capital and our beliefs. As we have seen, Bourdieu distinguished the formal cultural capital embodied in educational qualifications from its informal counterpart represented by the kinds of tastes and activities considered above. Education is institutionalised through schools, colleges, and universities, as well as the assessment and certification that they offer. It serves many functions including qualifying students, imparting knowledge and understanding, providing skilled employees, instilling initiative and responsibility, and socialising students into prevailing norms. It is also a means by which to transmit advantage and, as such, can sustain inequalities between groups. For instance, a middle-class family might move house to ensure that they are in the catchment area for a high-performing state school, hoping that it will contribute to their children getting better qualifications. In doing so, they use existing economic capital to invest in the formal cultural capital of their children, with the hope that it will be translated back into economic capital when they enter the job market. Investing in their children's education is something that any parent might do, but only some can afford to move into a more expensive area to do so. As such, doing so uses current advantage to create future advantage, sustaining intergenerational advantage.

Amongst the many advantages afforded by education is a sense of qualification to engage with a range of topics, including politics. Such confidence is expressed in a host of settings in which 'it confers the self-certainty which accompanies the certainty of possessing cultural legitimacy, and the ease which is the touchstone of excellence' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 66). This confidence is also linked to the trajectories that people have, and those with the capital to sustain upward mobility can project confidence based on the security of knowing that their future is bright. Such security affords people the ability to relax and, for instance, enjoy cultural pastimes, whilst others feel the need to study or work harder to ensure their future. It can also allow people to make decisions defined by their preferences rather than a sense of necessity, for instance when choosing a degree or career path. Indeed, part of the competition between classes is around the creation of high-status jobs that fit the capital profiles, including educational qualifications, of their members. Thus, education acts as an important component of privilege.

People's background characteristics, such as ethnicity, gender, and class, shape the education that they receive and their capacity to use it to their advantage. All of which indicates that studies are right to take education into consideration when accounting for the factors that shape political participation. However, this book argues that we need to move beyond education to adopt a more holistic account of the mechanisms of privilege represented by all three forms of capital, and including informal cultural capital.

That economic, social, and cultural capital matter for people's social positions and trajectories is apparent in the range of work that has focused on the impact of such capital. We consider a small selection of this literature here to illustrate the importance of all three forms as facets of privilege that reproduce structural advantage and disadvantage. Beginning with economic capital, the wealth and income of parents affect the educational attainment and future occupations of their children (McNeil and Haberstroh, 2022; Pfeffer and Hällsten, 2012). This is partly because wealth provides an insurance function allowing children to make risky educational decisions such as choosing long or expensive courses without concern for the costs of failure. In the United Kingdom, as in other countries, wealth and income are related to an array of important social outcomes including infant mortality, educational attainment, anxiety levels, obesity rates, alcohol and tobacco consumption, drug use, and life expectancy (Midwinter, 2006; Semyonov et al., 2013). This is additionally important in light of the dramatic growth in personal debt that has occurred in the last 20 years, and its implications for the social outcomes of those who are indebted (Antoniades, 2018). Having the advantage of wealth or the disadvantage of debt shapes people's psychological states, the opportunities that they are afforded, and their ability to take advantage of them. Someone who has to work two jobs on minimum wage in order to pay their rent and bills, and look after their children, is unlikely to be able to proactively look for an exciting new job or respond to an advert for a role that could change their life for the better. This extends to their ability to participate in politics as well. They are unlikely to have the time or energy to attend evening meetings in support of a cause that they care about, or to be able to afford to donate to it.

Turning to social capital, competing definitions and focuses in work on it have led to its description as an 'essentially contested concept' (Woolcock, 2010, p. 482). Most famously, Robert Putnam identified it as aggregate levels of engagement with the civic organisations and public spaces that bind society together. Specifically, he defined social capital as the 'features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam, 2000, p. 67). In this view, social capital is both a positive end in itself and an important component of a functioning democracy. Social capital facilitates cooperation that could not happen if enforcement institutions alone regulated human interaction (Cook, 2005), binding

society together and allowing it to function. However, Putnam also distinguishes between ‘*bridging* (or inclusive) and *bonding* (or exclusive)’ social capital, likening the former to ‘a sociological WD-40’ and the latter to ‘a kind of sociological superglue’ (Putnam, 2000). This distinction is key for Bourdieu, for whom social capital encompasses access to social networks of higher or lower social status. It is less a communal resource binding society and more an unevenly distributed asset that sustains class inequalities. In this view, who you know matters, and social connections can improve life chances by ‘opening doors’ for those who know the ‘right people’.

In the United States, elite schools lobby university admissions offices on behalf of their students (Flanagan, 2021), whilst the children of alumni receive preferential treatment in admissions to elite universities (Larew, 1991). As with the above example of the family moving house to ensure access to particular schools, these processes can work without the active participation of the children, though they may be aware of the social capital that they possess (Hughes, 1961). By contrast, many working-class communities in Britain have historically been uprooted and weakened by regeneration projects and movement to new council estates, undermining established social networks (Cohen, 1980). These social networks, and disruption to them, also have implications for political behaviour, especially in early and formative years. For example, turnout is reduced if people leave home before inheriting the habit of voting from their parents (Bhatti and Hansen, 2012a). Declining turnout amongst young people is also associated with later maturation; young people are leaving education, getting married, and having children later. This means that they are less settled in one location with fewer local social connections, so are less likely to vote (Nickerson, 2008; Smets, 2012, 2016). Family, peers, and the political context also shape wider political beliefs and attitudes in people’s formative years (Dassonneville and McAllister, 2018; Dinas, 2014; Grasso et al., 2019b; Ichilov, 1988).

Later in life, people ‘retire’ from voting as their social networks decline with old age (Bhatti and Hansen, 2012b). The likelihood of turning out is also reduced by moving out of social networks or losing connections with them (Armingeon and Schädel, 2015; Dowding et al., 2012), or by discussing politics with non-voters who communicate their scepticism or uncertainty about voting (Partheymüller and Schmitt-Beck, 2012). Concomitantly, social connections and pressure can work to promote turnout, and voting is contagious within households (Nickerson, 2008). Indeed, personal connections are more important than remote messages in mobilisation, and the prospect of having one’s decision to vote or not made public raises turnout (Gerber et al., 2008). However, the social connections that influence political behaviour are not equally distributed across the population. The favours, support, and requests for help that flow from social connections and facilitate social action contribute to different behaviour between groups. Thus, we can add

social capital to economic capital as components of privilege with implications for political participation, leaving just one more to consider.

Perhaps the most nebulous of the three forms, cultural capital has been measured in many different ways (Kingston, 2001). As outlined above, formal cultural capital is institutionalised through education and ‘choice of school appears as the one real chance that parents get to structure a significant slice of socialisation beyond the home’ (Reay et al., 2011, p. 21). Even when middle-class parents go ‘against the grain’ (Reay et al., 2011, p. 29) by choosing urban schooling for their children, they often do so with specific goals in mind. These may be educational or more broadly experiential, for instance to instil a work ethic or gain diverse cultural experiences in a moderated environment. Parents who choose to send their children to private school may focus on a range of benefits including smaller class sizes, extra-curricular activities, better results and prospects for university entrance, and higher earnings later in life (Crawford and Vignoles, 2014; Walford, 2012). They may also hope that such schools will build their children’s character, instil discipline in them, and generally ‘polish’ them in preparation for their future lives. Hence, academic qualifications represent more than ability in certain fields of study, and also indicate that children have been socialised to be motivated and to understand the expectations in various contexts (Kerckhoff, 1986). For those who go on to university, a ‘degree confirms that the graduate is a responsible, diligent member of society who knows how to conform to its requirements’ (Marris, 2006, p. 159).

Parents can also equip their children with the cultural resources that they need to excel in education (DiMaggio, 1982). This might be by reading to them before bed, playing them classic albums, helping them with homework, taking them to museums or the theatre, or discussing politics around the dinner table. Such activities reinforce the relationship between informal and formal cultural capital. For children without parental support or the ‘right kinds’ of cultural capital to draw on, the educational system can prove alienating as ‘middle-class teachers operate a whole series of linguistic and cultural controls which are “dissonant” with those of [their] family and peers, but whose mastery is implicitly defined as the index of intelligence and achievement’ (Cohen, 1980, p. 86). Further solidifying the hierarchy in educational settings, privileged students sometimes behave disparagingly towards students whose lack of privilege may manifest in disengagement, under-performance, or bad behaviour (Pattillo, 2013; Reay et al., 2011). Such intentionally or unintentionally exclusionary practices can have implications for the rest of people’s lives, not least because they are linked to the formation of the group identities and self-identity that we consider in the [next chapter](#). Thus, the cultural distinctions that may be sustained by teachers and students in educational contexts can build on and reinforce the cultural tastes and pastimes that people inherit and develop before starting school. This reinforcement can produce a sense that

certain activities are or are not ‘for me’ or ‘people like me’, which further shapes the stocks of informal cultural capital that people hold and develop.

We can observe the importance of informal cultural capital in, for instance, consumption habits. Rising general wealth fuels ‘the eclipse of “waste” by “taste”’ (Shipman, 2004, p. 280) as the privileged demonstrate their cultural superiority through consumption of particular brands with associated images. This establishes or reinforces the importance of particular cultural signifiers because the ability to consume excessively loses its value (Galos, 2024; Shipman, 2004). Here, we can clearly see the distinction between discerning, refined, and worthwhile cultural practices, and those that simply involve consumption and enjoyment. This reflects the distinction between legitimate and popular culture that is manifested in someone saying, for example, that they attended the latest production at an avant-garde theatre rather than that they went for drinks with friends at their local pub. Despite the clarity of such signals, cultural distinction is increasingly signified by openness to a wide range of cultural tastes and activities including performances and screenings, musical genres and gigs, and the visual arts (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005, 2006, 2007). High-status individuals now often indicate their distinction by being ‘cultural omnivores’ and rejecting the snobbery of the past. In other words, it is becoming more likely that the person who goes to an avant-garde theatre will also, at other times, enjoy a few drinks at their local pub, albeit that pub may be rather different from a traditional one.

The same high-status individuals may express an inclination towards politics that is part of their middle-class habitus, and this is manifested in higher levels of political interest and participation amongst those with higher educational qualifications (Persson, 2015; Willeck and Mendelberg, 2022). The importance of class can be seen in the domination of politics by those who speak using a particular style and, in so doing, demonstrate their qualification to engage in politics. The dominant mode of political expression means that even representatives of the working classes, such as those who rise through the ranks of trade unions, can end up being detached from the class that they came from. For Bourdieu, this detachment is such that ‘abstentionism is perhaps not so much a hiccup in the system as one of the conditions of its functioning’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 398; see also Heath, 2015, 2018). This leads to the conclusion that the dominant style of political performance acts as a barrier in which non-participants hold ‘suspicion of the political “stage”, a “theatre” whose rules are not understood and which leaves ... a sense of helplessness, is often the sources of “apathy” and of a generalized distrust of all forms of speech and spokesmen’ (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 464–465). Indeed, some types of informal cultural capital are related to particular types of political participation in contexts other than the United Kingdom (Harrits, 2013; Harrits et al., 2010; Laurison, 2015a, 2015b). However, no broad assessment of the relationships between all three forms of capital, measured in detail, and a host of political

activities has been undertaken, either in the United Kingdom or elsewhere. This book offers such a holistic account in which stocks of capital are viewed not as a reflection only of class, as Bourdieu argued, but as an indicator and mechanism of privilege more widely.

Building on the above, we can view the three forms of capital as both indicators and mechanisms for reproducing privilege. As the examples outlined throughout this section suggest, we can use the stocks of capital that people hold as a way to measure their social position. Simply put, people with more economic, social, and legitimate cultural capital are likely to hold privileged social positions, and to have come from privileged backgrounds. At the same time, their possession of those stocks of capital allows them to sustain their social positions. In this sense, capital acts as an enabling resource that can be used to sustain privilege. In part, this is because it allows successful participation and performance in a range of contexts. Amongst those contexts are political ones, in which having the resources of economic, social, and cultural capital make engagement easier. This is an extension of the argument of the civic voluntarism model that we encountered in the last chapter. That model argues that a tightly defined set of resources, along with psychological engagement and recruitment, are unequally distributed between different groups in the population and facilitate differing levels of political participation by those groups. Here, we are expanding that argument by expecting the broader concepts of economic, social, and cultural capital to be unequally distributed between different groups in the population, and also to facilitate differential political participation by those groups. Those groups are defined not only by class, which is why we focus on the idea of privilege. As such, it is important to consider how we can expand the relevance of capital so that it relates to this broader concept rather than class alone.

Capital, Class, and Privilege

The idea that stocks of economic, social, and cultural capital are intimately related to class has been extensively investigated, adopted, and adapted, leading Bourdieu's works to be some of the most widely cited in the world (Truong and Weill, 2012). The most famous example of this in the UK is, perhaps, the Great British Class Survey (GBCS) and the resulting 'class calculator' (BBC, 2013). More than nine million people completed the calculator on the BBC website (Devine and Snee, 2015), answering a few short questions in order to identify their place in the seven-class schema generated by the GBCS, and the results were met with varying degrees of glee and consternation. The project sparked controversy in academic circles, throwing fuel on the flames of existing debates about what constitutes class. Amongst other things, the GBCS was criticised for drawing attention

away from economic inequality and financial insecurity (Dorling, 2013; Tyler, 2015), and for overlooking life-cycle and cohort effects whilst making use of an unrepresentative sample gathered via the BBC website (Mills, 2013, 2015). Others criticised it for failing to account for the roles of gender, race, and sexuality in class (Toscano and Woodcock, 2015), and for exercising power by categorising people and presenting class as a solid structure (Latimer and Munro, 2015; Skeggs, 2015). Some went as far as to question the motives for the research and whether it compromised academic standards (Silva, 2015), whether the research team engaged in enough critical self-reflection about their roles and ideas (May, 2015), and whether the approach was too specific to the British context to be of wider utility (Lui, 2015; Serre and Wagner, 2015).

Preceding the heat and light of the debates around the GBCS, but in a similar theoretical vein, work had sought to adapt Bourdieu's approach in order to investigate how cultural capital relates to class, ethnicity, and gender in the United Kingdom. In *Culture, Class, Distinction*, Bennett et al. focus on distinctions between 'a professional-executive class, an intermediate class and a working class' (2009, p. 55), and the types of cultural capital that they possess. They observe that the power of legitimate cultural capital has declined because the struggle to define the value of cultural capital has resulted in almost all forms being accepted. People are now often keen to avoid the label of 'snob' and thus hesitate to pass judgement on any form of cultural capital in which they are not interested. There are some exceptions, for instance some genres of music provoke strong positive or negative reactions, but the trend is towards acceptance or at least tolerance of diverse forms of cultural capital.

It has become a badge of honour to maintain diverse tastes, leading to the emergence of the phenomenon of the 'cultural omnivore' that we encountered earlier (Bennett et al., 2009, p. 18; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2005, 2006, 2007). This suggests prioritisation of liberal values such as tolerance amongst classes that have begun to deprioritise economic concerns as they enter 'postmaterialism' (Inglehart, 1997). Wide-ranging cultural preferences act as a new form of distinction; in contemporary Britain it is desirable to know, like, and be comfortable with a large range of cultural forms. Part of the reason for a decline in the distinctiveness of working-class culture may be that many of its components have been co-opted by middle-class cultural omnivores. In fact, only a small elite has retained a cultured detachment in their consumption habits, though this may be exaggerated by the reduced distinction between the middle and working classes stemming from cultural omnivorousness (Bennett et al., 2009, p. 93). Nevertheless, the distinctiveness of the upper echelons is maintained by a small number of cultural forms that have not diffused more widely, such as classical music and opera.

The identification of a persistent elite breaks with the tenor of the observations regarding the declining importance of legitimate culture. This small group

of senior people in various fields continues to consume the kinds of culture, such as opera, that act as markers of distinction, whilst holding a more stringent, information-focused approach to newer forms of entertainment such as television (Bennett et al., 2009, pp. 84–93, 135–139). The social circles in which such people move allow them to maintain their relationships with other members of the elite, sustaining a relatively homogeneous group that crosses organisational and sectoral boundaries. The fact that this elite seems to be identifiable and detached has important implications, since national politicians are likely to fall within the group (Cameron, 2003; Walden, 2020; Williams, 2006). If the upper echelons of society are particularly different from the majority of the population, this may detach them from the public and create barriers to engagement. Here, we can think of media images of politicians in formal dress at the Lord Mayor's dinner in London, giving the impression of being rather distant from the lives of most voters.

There are competing trends at work here. Many cultural venues and performances are now more open and accessible than they were in the past, but distinctions between legitimate and popular cultural capital remain. As noted previously, this is partly because legitimate cultural venues and performances are rarer and can be more expensive to attend. These continued distinctions mean that the growth in omnivorous cultural consumption is disproportionately the result of privileged people expanding their cultural repertoires to engage with popular culture. Thus, legitimate culture has not become dramatically more accessible to less privileged people, and this can be observed in the volume of participation in some cultural activities outside the home. Although they are no longer as easily characterised with reference to particular cultural tastes, middle-class people are more likely than their working-class counterparts to attend events and venues associated with their cultural interests. Sometimes the ability to participate reflects access to greater levels of economic capital, but in all cases frequent participation helps to maintain cultural profiles (Bennett et al., 2009, pp. 43–53). By contrast, familial social capital continues to have greater significance for working-class people than for their middle-class counterparts and, to an extent, substitutes for their lower levels of cultural participation (Bennett et al., 2009, p. 71). These observations emphasise the importance of distinguishing between cultural tastes, for instance the kinds of art, music, and food that people like, and the cultural activities that people spend their time doing. This distinction is important subsequently, when we focus on the relationship between cultural activities, rather than just tastes, and how they relate to political participation.

Thus far, the focus when considering differences in the cultural capital held by groups has been on class. However, in line with the claim made above that we should focus on the broader concept of privilege, Bennett et al. argue that other factors contribute extensively to the formation of cultural capital. They show that gender, ethnicity, and age interact with class to create a diverse array of cultural

capital profiles in the United Kingdom. This supports the idea of the forms of capital as indicators not only of class but of an intersectional account of privilege. This recognition of the complexity of the drivers and terrain of cultural capital in contemporary Britain also provides the basis to critique the problem of class determinism. Unlike Bourdieu, Bennett et al. conclude that: 'cultural proclivities are closely associated with social class ... This does not, however, produce exclusive, highly integrated and unified patterns of class behaviour; perhaps it is more useful to see classes as force fields, within the parameters of which individuals vary, though within limits' (Bennett et al., 2009, p. 252). As such, they provide scope for analysis that examines how capital is shaped by multiple factors, including gender, ethnicity, and age, rather than simply being a reflection of class position.

In challenging a deterministic approach to the relationship between class and capital, Bennett et al. lay the foundations for the adoption of the wider concept of privilege. Here, privilege is viewed as the process that translates various background characteristics into unequal societal outcomes. Privilege is a mechanism through which background characteristics lead to advantage or disadvantage and encompasses the socialisation process by which different capital profiles are created. This accommodates the impact of class, ethnicity, gender, and a range of other background characteristics on the capital profile of each individual and the outcomes that are more or less available to them as a consequence of their stocks of capital. Someone born into a family with one or both parents in secure, salaried professions is more likely than someone born into a family with parents in shift-based work in the service sector to live in an owner-occupied home, probably located in an area with access to good schools. They are also more likely to be introduced to other professionals as they grow up, and to have the opportunity to undertake costly extra-curricular activities, whether sporting, musical, or trips to cultural venues. This comparison indicates the importance of class background for the stocks of economic, social, and cultural capital that people accumulate. However, as Bennett et al. have shown, their ethnicity also has implications for their career path and income, who they know, and the cultural activities and reference points that are part of their lives. Similarly, their gender is also likely to impact not only their employment opportunities and rate of pay but also their social circles and the kinds of cultural pastimes that they are introduced to as they grow up. Thus, a key argument of this chapter and book is that capital is both an indicator and a mechanism of privilege, and stocks of capital both reflect and sustain privilege.

Background characteristics shape stocks of capital through socialisation and life experiences, and these stocks of capital sustain the privilege of those with particular background characteristics. There are a host of background characteristics that shape these processes, including disability and sexuality, but here we have focused on the commonly considered characteristics of gender, ethnicity, and

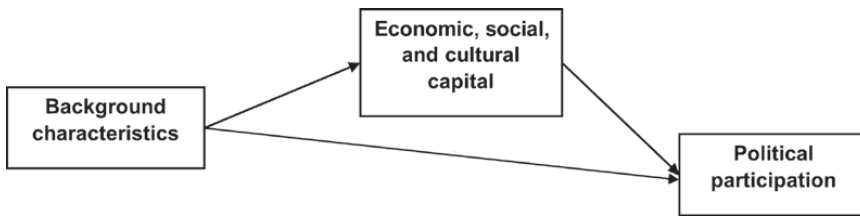


Figure 2.1 The causal relationship between background, capital, and participation

class. There is a causal claim here: these background characteristics causally precede and shape the stocks of capital that people accumulate and hold, and these stocks of capital causally precede and enable political participation. This claim has its roots in the civic voluntarism model that we encountered in the last chapter (Verba et al., 1995, pp. 416–430), which proposes that background characteristics shape the resources, engagement, and recruitment that facilitate political participation. Broadening this claim, here we expand our focus on to the wider array of resources encompassed by the three forms of capital. In both cases, the causal process fits with the account offered by the funnel of causality (Campbell et al., 1964, pp. 24–25), which is adapted to represent the causal argument in Figure 2.1. Within that account, background characteristics constitute long-term drivers of political behaviour, and capital constitutes a medium-term driver that shapes the short-term beliefs and preferences that immediately precede decisions about whether or not to get involved in politics. Thus, capital enables political participation, and we expect the following:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Stocks of economic capital are positively related to political participation.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Stocks of social capital are positively related to political participation.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Stocks of informal cultural capital are positively related to political participation.
- **Hypothesis 4:** Legitimate cultural capital has a stronger positive relationship than popular cultural capital with political participation.

We examine these expectations empirically, and in much more detail, when we move on to observe the results of the Privilege and Participation Survey and associated interviews and focus groups in later chapters.

This adaptation of Bourdieu's work provides a theory of privilege that is lacking in accounts of inequality in political participation, which often focus on one element of capital, one psychological process, or one component of a calculus. Accounting for privilege allows us to take a holistic approach to the links between inequality and politics. It is also more illuminating than focusing only

on background characteristics because privilege is more than a summary of those characteristics. The three forms of capital are rich in detail and indicate the particular circumstances of each individual in a way that observing only their background characteristics cannot. This is not to say that background characteristics do not matter, and it is clear that they shape identities, interactions, and experiences of daily life. Indeed, capital itself is also shaped by those characteristics, but stocks of economic, social, and cultural capital also provide a fuller and more illuminating picture of a person's upbringing and what it has afforded them.

Thus, the picture painted by this chapter is one of the functioning of privilege. Building on the work of Bennett et al., we see that socialisation and life experiences, which are influenced by background characteristics, furnish individuals with the three forms of capital. The resulting capital profiles facilitate the attainment of particular statuses in social hierarchies and access to power that can influence subsequent life outcomes. In this view, the forms of capital are features of the holistic concept of privilege rather than only class. Within privilege can be seen the functioning of other social hierarchies, including ethnicity and gender. These various background characteristics all shape the capital that people accumulate through socialisation and life experiences. Capital thus reflects people's social positions and backgrounds. At the same time, capital recreates privilege by acting as a resource that groups with greater stocks of it can use to sustain their positions. This view takes a step away from the abstract representations of the social world embodied in models that are intended to be simplifications, and towards the complexity of humans' experiences. This is on the grounds that our understanding of political participation gains more from accounting for all three forms of capital than it loses in reducing the neatness and generality of simpler accounts.

Beyond their role in reproducing structural privilege, the forms of capital are also important because of what they signal about those who have them. People who are rich in certain types of capital are likely to identify, and find it easier to engage, with other people who are rich in those types of capital. If the capital that they hold is recognised as valuable, or is associated with particular traits, then it will also shape how others see them. For instance, legitimate cultural capital, perhaps in the form of familiarity with the literary canon, classical music, or haute cuisine, is often associated with being highly qualified or even intelligent. People who hold such capital can seem equipped to participate in a range of contexts, especially those in which legitimate cultural capital prevail. At the same time, their capital enables them to feel that they belong in those contexts. Applying this to politics, if it is disproportionately populated by people with particular stocks of capital, then it might be and feel less open to people without such capital. This would be a departure not only from the civic republicanism and progressive populism of Bourdieu's work (Goldberg, 2013; Grattan, 2012), but also from the ideals

of liberal democracy. The visibility of such inequalities means that they interact with people's sense of status, group identities, and understandings of inequality. In other words, the fact that politics appears to be disproportionately undertaken by certain types of people, with particular stocks of capital, links it to people's perceptions of privilege more generally. We consider this possibility in the [next chapter](#).

Perceptions of Privilege

The Importance of Perceptions

Part of the power of economic, social, and cultural capital stems from the signals that they send to others. When we meet people for the first time, we quickly form judgements of them based on how they appear, how they talk, and what they talk about. For example, if we hear someone with a strong Liverpool accent talking about a night out at the pub, we will know where they are from and might make assumptions about their social class, their wealth, and even their political attitudes. And we can do the same if we hear someone with received pronunciation talking about an excellent performance that they attended at the Royal Festival Hall, or if they also talk about a night out at the pub. We will make judgements about how like or unlike us they are, what their social standing is, and even whether or not we like them. At the same time, we also manage the signals that we send to others, and thus the conclusions that they reach about us. We do this when we choose what to wear for the first day at a new job, mention an obscure exhibition that we saw at the local gallery to someone at a party, or describe watching *Love Island* as a guilty pleasure to our friends. This is because we care about how we are seen by others, whether we fit in, and what our status is. These things, as well as our stocks of capital, affect how we think and feel about ourselves, our place in society, and those around us.

A full account of privilege, then, requires us to consider both structural influences and internal perceptual processes that are key factors in people's behaviour. Two people with similar stocks of capital might behave quite differently if one believes that they are middle class whilst the other believes that they are working class. They might also relate to, and interact with, politics differently if one of them thinks that they achieved their social position because of hard work and ambition whilst the other feels that they arrived there because of their background. Such beliefs relate to one's sense of qualification to participate in politics. Further, structural privilege may relate to political participation in notably different ways if it is

alive in the minds of individuals. Someone who perceives politicians as beneficiaries of privilege and reaches the conclusion that ‘they are nothing like me’ is likely to feel alienated from politics. This might prompt feelings of inefficacy that lead to disengagement or feelings of frustration that galvanise them into action. Either way, their reaction to politics and their inclination to participate are likely to be different from someone who perceives themselves as socially similar to politicians, or who thinks that politicians reached their position through effort rather than privilege. Whilst the last chapter considered the structural components of privilege manifested in the three forms of capital, this chapter focuses on the importance of perceptions, especially the components of perceptions of privilege.

Perceptions, Inequality, and Politics

Questions regarding the origins of perception, how it functions, and its effects have been a matter for both philosophical debate and psychological research (Margolis, 1998; Smith, 2002). Our focus here is on the components of perception that relate to relations and causality (Hopp, 2011). Specifically, we are concerned with people’s perception of their place in social hierarchies (relations), and of the reasons for those hierarchies and their place within them (causality). It has been argued that ‘individual psychology and social inequality relate to each other like a lock and key’ (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010, p. 33). This is because there is a crucial relative component to inequality, with perception of one’s own position being related to perceptions of the positions of others (Maher and Tetreault, 2001). Relative inequality matters not only in economic terms (Atkinson, 1975) but also in relation to class labels and their associated places within a status hierarchy (Bennett et al., 2009; Gidron and Hall, 2017, 2020). People’s class identities can be an important part of how they understand society and politics. For instance, two people who are self-employed, own their homes, and enjoy two holidays a year but respectively consider themselves to be working and middle class are likely to respond differently to class-based political appeals.

Perceptions and self-perceptions are influential because of the psychological system through which they function. The surveillance system (Marcus et al., 2000), or system one (Kahneman, 2011), approximates the rational account of human decision-making as cognitive, considered, and evidence-based. However, perceptions have their main effects through the disposition system, or system two, which is fast and automatic, influenced by emotion (Jenkins, 2018; Mutz, 2007), and shaped by the social context to which it is acclimatised. To enable fast thinking we can use cognitive shortcuts, or heuristics (Simon, 1985), to make decisions without apprising ourselves of all the relevant information (Lupia, 1994). However, because we rely on accessible information (Tourangeau et al., 2000), our

perceptions, opinions, and behaviour may be affected by prevailing narratives in society (Grasso et al., 2019b; Roex et al., 2019; Zaller, 1992). Reception of such narratives is also shaped by personality traits (Gerber et al., 2010) and underlying values and beliefs (Feldman, 1988; Oliver and Wood, 2014), which are formed in childhood and formative years (Dinas, 2013, 2014; Ichilov, 1988; Inglehart and Norris, 2017). The information that is readily available in social contexts shapes the perceptions and beliefs that feed into planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2012; Bruter and Harrison, 2009) and can alter psychological states, for instance by invoking hurry (Darley and Batson, 1973) or social pressure (Gerber et al., 2008; Nickerson, 2008). All of this is to say that our perceptions and self-perceptions are shaped by context, and that they shape our opinions and behaviour unconsciously.

The importance of social context for perceptions and political opinions was observed in the growing tolerance of inequality in formerly state socialist countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union, though this grew more slowly than perceived levels of actual inequality. The changing social context also interacted with social position such that higher-status people's tolerance of inequality grew faster, so was less distant from their perceptions of actual levels of inequality (Gijssberts, 2002). Relatedly, perception of conflict, especially between rich and poor, leads to lower support for democracy and a reduced likelihood of participation in it (Zagórski, 2006). This is part of a wider tendency for negative information, for instance relating to conflict, to be more important than positive information in the formation of political impressions and subsequent behaviour (Lau, 1982). This is reflected in the negative effect of inequality on voter turnout in democratic societies, with lower turnout rates amongst poorer people reducing pressure for redistribution (Bartle et al., 2017; Larcinese, 2007; Solt, 2008). Such disengagement may be underpinned by people with little power heightening their perceptions of relationships between the powerful, perhaps because of anxiety stemming from the perceived threat of an out-group (Simpson and Borch, 2005; Stephan, 1977). This can create a negative feedback loop in which the common sense that politicians are 'not like us' leads to disengagement, which further fuels the sense that politics is distant and unresponsive. The result of this may be an affective response in which we have not only negative perceptions but also negative feelings towards politics.

Such is the strength of affective responses that they can shape our views of neutral objects related to the groups that we like or dislike. For instance, supporters of the Conservative and Labour Parties in the UK alter how positive they are towards the Downing Street cat depending on whether it is described as belonging to Margaret Thatcher or Tony Blair (Ford, 2014). The importance of affect in shaping opinions is reflected in the effects of anxiety. Not only does it have a role in triggering the surveillance system (or system one), but it often drives us to resolve inconsistencies in our opinions, beliefs, and behaviours (Festinger, 2001).

The anxiety caused by the dissonance between those things motivates people to bring them into line with each other, which they may do by changing their behaviour, their environment, or by seeking new information. This reflects the trend for individuals to bring their beliefs and behaviour into line with their roles, be they in work, social, or political contexts (Jones, 1986; Packer, 2008; Taft, 1957; Zhang et al., 2014). In the latter case, voters selectively perceive their preferred candidate's policy positions, a phenomenon referred to as projection, to ensure that those positions match their own. This is especially the case when they hold a positive affective disposition towards the candidate, when the candidate is ambiguous on the policy, or when the policy is important to the voter (Conover and Feldman, 1982; Granberg et al., 1988; Martinez, 1988). Alternatively, if people do not feel able to change their beliefs or behaviour, they may simply avoid the information that prompts dissonance, for instance by not participating in political contexts in which they feel out of place.

Our shifting perceptions and beliefs can affect our behaviour, not only in terms of who we vote for but also whether or not we participate in politics at all. Someone who perceives all political parties as the same, politicians as self-interested, and Parliament as distant and ineffective is much less likely to engage with the politics than is someone who strongly identifies with a party and thinks highly of their policy proposals, sees politicians (from their party) as motivated by doing good, and views Parliament as responsive. These distinctions are exaggerated in unequal societies in which evidence of the political system functioning in favour of a small minority is readily available. This heightens awareness of the gap between the rich and the poor and can fuel an 'us' and 'them' mentality, playing into powerful group identities.

Perceptions of Groups and Status

The importance of group identification can be seen when a child playing football at school identifies as a Manchester United supporter, and therefore not a Manchester City supporter. Or when someone who was born and brought up in Leeds feels different to their colleagues from London. Even a cyclist who gets frustrated with the behaviour of car drivers may be expressing their sense of group identity. In politics, we can also observe the role of group identification when a female MP suggests ways to make the culture at Parliament more welcoming to women. Indeed, it is also at play when a male MP who identifies as a feminist does the same thing. Group identities, and associated positive and negative emotions relating to in- and out-groups, form quickly and easily in social contexts (Ellemers and Haslam, 2012; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 2001). Such group identification begins with social categorisation, or 'the process through which separate

individuals are clustered into groups' (Ellemers and Haslam, 2012, p. 381). This enables social comparison in which 'characteristic group features are interpreted and valued' (Ellemers and Haslam, 2012, p. 381). Ultimately, the process of identification leads to seeing oneself as part of a given group such that the features of the group become associated with the self.

The affective process of identification is complemented by the cognitive processes of self-categorisation (Turner and Reynolds, 2012), in which identification occurs at different levels of abstraction. These range from the individual sense of oneself all the way up to a collective sense of a national or even international 'we'. Self-categorisation depends on the salience of groupings such as gender, ethnicity, class, and nationality, in a given time and place. The extent of the difference between groups is also important and the most different group is often taken as a reference point. This means that patterns of assimilation and contrast stem from identification with or against the salient groups at a given time and in a given context (Turner and Reynolds, 2012). As such, groups such as social classes have their roots not only in social structures but also the process of group categorisation and identification that individuals undertake. For instance, a young woman who grows up in a working-class family and categorises herself as such might not feel that identity particularly strongly until she goes to university and finds herself living with women from middle-class families. At the same time, her working-class identity can combine with her gender identity, or be made less salient by it, if she attends seminars in which the majority of students are middle-class men. Thus, her sense of who she is and the status that she holds relative to others varies depending on the context she is in and the people who are around her.

The importance of group identities, and their implications for our sense of status, can be seen in negative reactions to criticisms when they come from out-groups (Hornsey et al., 2002). Indeed, the threat of comparison with an out-group spurs people to improve their performance in tasks (James and Greenberg, 1989) in order to avoid relative low status. Relatedly, membership of a group that already has low status, especially in contexts where that status is salient, leads to lower self-esteem, aspirations, and performance (Hardin et al., 2012; O'Brien and Major, 2009; Turner and Reynolds, 2012; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010). This is because having low status, and being reminded of it, is psychologically taxing. A sense of low status can also prompt feelings of insecurity, which make people less open to new ideas and settings (Cohen, 2012). This can feed into patterns of self-verification that affirm perceived status, leading to an ongoing cycle of low self-esteem, limited aspirations, and underperformance (Swann, 2012). For instance, in relation to politics, a person might perceive themselves as 'not political' because they do not feel knowledgeable about the topic. If they find themselves involved in a political conversation over lunch with colleagues, it could prompt feelings of discomfort that verify their perception that politics is 'not for me'.

The negative impact of feelings such as anxiety on people's ability to function runs counter to the dual-system theory of decision-making that we encountered earlier, which suggests the motivating impact of negative affect (Marcus et al., 2000). There, negative affect triggered by the surveillance system (or system one) prompts changes in beliefs or behaviour. However, it is more difficult to change one's social status than one's beliefs or behaviour, implying a different response to being in a context in which social status is salient. In other words, it is more challenging to struggle with a low status that implies an overarching inferiority, especially if that status has been assigned from an early age, than it is to deal with one's beliefs or behaviour being inappropriate in a particular setting. It is embarrassing to realise that we have accidentally sworn in front of our boss, and our surveillance system will send us signals to this effect when we see their reaction. However, this is rather different from a teenager being streamed into a class for people with low ability, especially if teachers have previously offered negative appraisals of their abilities. Whilst the former experience is likely to heighten future monitoring to ensure that the person does not swear in front of their boss again, the latter could lead the teenager to make less effort in their studies, withdraw from them altogether, or behave disruptively in classes. Similar responses might be observed when a person is marginalised or treated negatively because of the group that they are in, making the low status of their group salient.

Although low status can be demotivating, and lead to withdrawal from contexts where it is salient, there are strategies that can be used to challenge it (Sidanius, 1993). People can try to leave a low-status group if the boundaries between groups are permeable or they can make themselves appear higher status. A classic example of this is someone who grows up in a working-class household, goes to university and then on to a professional job, and enters the middle class. However, if this route is not open, people can try to redefine the grounds for comparison and prioritise ones that give their group high status. Here, we can think of a working-class person who asserts that it is an honest day's labour rather than the knowledge of abstract concepts gained through a degree that is the most important indicator of success. Alternatively, people can assert that their group's current practice is already high status, for instance when stressing that fun activities such as going to a pub or nightclub are actually better than pretentious pastimes such as trips to the theatre and opera. If none of these strategies work, people can try to identify lower-status groups to compare themselves against. Here, we might think of a working-class man who asserts the value of masculinity over femininity, rather than focusing on his status relative to middle-class men. Finally, people can compete with higher-status groups for better positions, for instance by organising a political party to represent their interests. These strategies echo features of Bourdieu's market for cultural capital, in which classes not only compete to attain it but also to define which types have value. Thus, groups can engage not only in

partisan political competition but also in smaller daily acts that assert the value of their ways of living, including their cultural preferences and habits.

Organising to challenge inequality politically is difficult, however, because there are people who defend existing hierarchies. Such people may have a high 'social dominance orientation' (Sidanius, 1993, p. 214) and greater prejudice against a range of out-groups (Zick et al., 2008). Facing the difficulty of changing hierarchies can disempower those with low status and restrict their options for action (Sidanius and Pratto, 2012), leading to behavioural asymmetry in which 'on the average, the behavioral repertoires of individuals belonging to groups at different levels of the social hierarchy will show significant differences, differences that have been produced by the dynamics of and which, in turn, reinforce and perpetuate the group-based hierarchy system' (Sidanius, 1993, p. 202). Behavioural asymmetry manifests itself in many different ways, all of which are contingent on perceptions of in-groups and out-groups. It can take the form of systematic out-group favouritism or deference amongst low-status groups or, at the other end of the hierarchy, in-group bias. For instance, a hiring panel for a job at a consultancy firm might subconsciously favour a candidate who speaks confidently with a middle-class accent, and who talks about their enjoyment of rugby union and skiing. This bias could exist amongst members of the panel from working-class backgrounds and middle-class backgrounds, who all see the candidate as a 'better fit' for the team. Alternatively, behavioural asymmetry can take the form of self-handicapping amongst low-status groups, resulting in lower performance, especially when their low status is made salient. This might happen when a working-class teenager does not revise for an exam because their teacher has told them that are unlikely to excel in the subject (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010), or when a woman expects a lower pay rise than a man after an equally strong performance review (Major and Konar, 1984). Finally, there is also ideological asymmetry, in which the political ideology of a high-status group is more closely related to in-group favouritism than is the political ideology of a low-status group. We can see this, for example, when members of a high-status group are more likely to favour meritocratic principles that benefit people with the academic qualifications that tend to be held by people in their own group. In all of these cases, the perceptions underpinning behavioural asymmetry are related to cultural cues. The accent and interests of the interviewee for the job, the dress and manner of speaking of the student observed by their teacher, gendered assumptions about how men and women should spend their time, and the value thereof, and efforts to assert the value of particular educational qualifications all draw on or shape cultural signifiers.

The perceptions of in- and out-groups, and understandings of the cultural cues that relate to groups, become entrenched from an early age and lead to both behavioural asymmetries and automatic associations (Galos, 2024; Uhlmann

et al., 2012). This reflects the fact that behavioural asymmetries are also related to the capital profiles outlined in the previous chapter, contributing to the situation in which those who hold certain forms of capital are more able to behave in particular ways, for instance by participating in politics. In other words, someone with the requisite stocks of capital can signal their status in order to fit into social contexts, including political ones, that are dominated by high-status people. They can do this by mentioning mutual acquaintances or the statuses of their social networks, or by referencing pastimes that imply high levels of both economic and legitimate cultural capital. At the same time, they may perceive themselves to be high status and qualified to participate in politics, for instance if they think of themselves as ‘a political person’. This means that they are more likely to feel part of the in-group when in a political context and are more likely to exude a sense of ease and confidence, find it easier to fit into that context, and further affirm their belief that they belong there. This sense of ease amongst those with high-status capital and the perception that they are qualified to participate entrench inequalities in political participation.

The political marginalisation of low-status groups and individuals is also entrenched by the belief that social structures are essentially just (Jost et al., 2004; Rubin and Hewstone, 2004). Holding such system-justifying beliefs has important implications for people’s views and feelings about themselves, their in-groups, and out-groups. High-status people who believe in individual mobility and, by implication, just social structures have a heightened perception of discrimination when rejected from a position they have applied for. By contrast, people in low-status groups instead perceive less discrimination in their rejection if they hold a strong belief in individual mobility (Major et al., 2002). If people are explicitly told that their rejection is due to prejudice, rather than lack of merit, they blame themselves less for the outcome and have higher self-esteem as a consequence (Major et al., 2003). This is part of a wider tendency for system-justifying beliefs to be positively related to well-being within high-status groups but negatively related to well-being within low-status groups (O’Brien and Major, 2005).

There are numerous manifestations of system-justifying beliefs, including the Protestant work ethic, a belief in status legitimacy, a belief in a just world, social dominance orientation, and right-wing authoritarianism (Duckitt and Sibley, 2009; O’Brien and Major, 2009). All these beliefs have perceptual consequences, as people view the world through a lens that justifies inequality. This can be seen clearly in the ‘fundamental attribution error’ (Knight, 1998, p. 203), in which the low status of groups is seen as a consequence of the traits of people in those groups rather than structural factors. Those who hold this view assign low-status groups characteristics such as laziness, lack of work ethic, or lack of money management skills (Knight, 1998). The widespread nature of these beliefs, including amongst both high-status and low-status groups, leads to the claim that those who instead

attribute inequality to structural forces have managed to overcome 'the dominant ideology of individualism, the dearth of coherent philosophical justification for egalitarianism, and a noticeable lack of forthright political leadership' (Knight, 1998, p. 228). Thus, system-justifying beliefs that explain 'differences in the distribution of social and material goods in terms of differences in individual effort, talent, and merit' (O'Brien and Major, 2009, p. 432) are broadly opposed to perceptions of privilege, which require recognition of systemic causes of inequality. This opposition is key because it means that we can expect perceptions of privilege to have the opposite effects from system-justifying beliefs on political participation. Also key is the idea that people apply these beliefs inconsistently. For instance, someone could believe that most high-status people are the beneficiaries of structural privilege but still see their own successes as a consequence of hard work and ambition. Alternatively, someone could blame the low status of groups in society on their failings as individuals whilst explaining their own low status on disadvantages stemming from their background. In each case, their understandings of their place in society are likely to be different from someone who applies the same individual or structural explanations for social position to society and themselves.

Our perceptions of other groups and their statuses affect how we feel about them but also how we feel about our own groups and therefore ourselves. In contexts where we have high status stemming from our group membership, we are likely to boost our performance and feel better about ourselves, especially if we believe that our high status was achieved within social structures that are essentially fair. If we think that the system is just, then high status is earned and defensible, whilst low status is the fault of those who have it. By contrast, if the system is unfair and social structures play an important part in shaping outcomes, then having high status is less rewarding and the low status of others is less attributable to their faults. Thus, it is not only our sense of the status of in-groups and out-groups that matters but also our explanations for those statuses. These group identities, senses of status, and explanations for status have important implications for how we interact with other people and society. They also have implications for our interactions with a political system that is hierarchical and seen to be populated by groups and individuals that are high status.

Status, Explanations, and Political Participation

Our beliefs about the reasons for our status, and the status differences more generally, matter. The key distinction here is between explanations for inequality that emphasise the importance of individual traits, and explanations that emphasise the importance of structural factors. Instead of believing that inequality stems from

differences in things like effort and merit, as people with system-justifying beliefs emphasise, people who perceive privilege stress the role of structural advantage and disadvantage. We might expect these beliefs to prompt different behaviour depending on the status of the person who holds them. We can start by thinking of a low-status person who believes that society is meritocratic. The belief that their low status is the result of a lack of effort or accomplishment could undermine their motivation to challenge that status through political action. Alternatively, it might motivate them to expend effort in order to raise their status and the status of their group within the prevailing meritocratic order, which also channels their energies away from political action. At the other end of that status hierarchy, a high-status person who believes that society is meritocratic has little motive to challenge the societal order, both because their status is high and because they believe that it is just. Indeed, system-justifying beliefs amongst both high-status and low-status people are associated with lower levels of individual and collective action within organisations, as well as political activity more generally (Hafer and Choma, 2009; Hafer and Olson, 1993; Jost et al., 2004; Osborne et al., 2019).

By contrast, we can think of a person who believes that social structure plays an important role in shaping the statuses that groups and individuals have, which is to say someone who perceives privilege in society. If they have low status, they may feel a sense of disempowerment stemming from their belief that society's structures are stacked against them, leading to a lower motivation to take political action. Alternatively, their belief in the unfairness and injustice of society could motivate them to challenge the existing social order by getting involved in politics (Klandermans, 2014; Opp, 1988). The picture is similarly ambiguous in relation to a high-status person with structural explanations for inequality. They may be content to accept the prevailing social order because it benefits them or motivated to be politically active, either in defence of the system or in solidarity with those groups that are not beneficiaries of it. However, ambiguity in these two people's likely political action can be resolved because perceptions of privilege exist in opposition to system-justifying beliefs. This is not a matter of absolutes, and it is possible for someone to believe that unfair structural factors and meritocratic individual factors are at play in shaping the statuses of groups and individuals. However, the more people emphasise privilege in society, the less likely they are to emphasise system-justifying beliefs. Given that system-justifying beliefs are associated with lower political participation, we expect perception of privilege in society to generally be positively associated with political participation (see also Bos et al., 2020). Whatever the mix of explanations for status difference in society that people hold, those beliefs constitute the first component of perceptions of privilege.

The idea that perception of privilege in society is positively related to political participation is complicated by the possibility that people can apply different explanations to their own status than they do to status differences in society

more widely. For example, someone who has done well in life and is acutely aware of the role of privilege in society might talk about how other high-status people 'were born with silver spoons in their mouths' but still consider themselves to be 'self-made' and to have 'got where I am through hard work'. Alternatively, a high-status person who recognises that they have been 'lucky' because of their 'background', and therefore accepts their structural advantage, can nevertheless maintain that society is generally meritocratic. Low-status people may also hold distinct explanations for their own status and status differences in society more generally. For instance, someone can attribute their low status to failings on their part, for instance not working hard enough at school, but generally emphasise that some groups are advantaged whilst others are disadvantaged in society. Finally, a person might assert that they have been disadvantaged by their background whilst nevertheless believing that society generally rewards hard work.

The distinction between people's explanations for their own status and their explanations for status differences in society has not previously been considered, so we do not have evidence of the implications of the former for political participation. There are also competing plausible expectations about how these beliefs might interact to shape political participation. Amongst high-status people who believe that society is beset by privilege, those who see their own status as resulting from effort could be especially motivated to use their hard-won position and the competence underpinning it to challenge ingrained privilege. Alternatively, they could conclude that the system is too difficult to change overall, and that their efforts are better spent defending and building on their individual achievements than on political action. Similarly, a person who blames their low status on themselves but perceives the role of privilege in society more broadly might be demotivated to take political action by the dual burdens of their own failings and the disempowering impact of society's structures. Or they might be motivated to campaign for an improved safety net to ensure that even those who make mistakes in their lives cannot fall too low in society's hierarchy.

People with the alternative sets of contrasting beliefs could also be motivated or demotivated to participate in politics. Someone with high status who recognises their own privilege but stresses the generally meritocratic nature of society might be motivated to utilise their unusual privilege to defend or improve society's just nature. Alternatively, they might see the status quo as functional and, because of their unusual privilege, not consider it their place to intervene in political campaigns to change or conserve it. Finally, a low-status person who sees their social position as resulting from structural disadvantage but still believes that society is generally meritocratic could feel overwhelmed by their peculiar misfortune in being consigned to low status by social structures. This could demotivate them to take political action, given that the broader context is generally just, or it could lead to support for campaigns challenging the kinds of misfortune

they have experienced. The ambiguous implications of these beliefs for political participation may be resolved with reference to the weaker relationship between explanations for own status and political efficacy than between explanations for status differences in society and political efficacy (Greenwood-Hau, 2021). Since political efficacy has important implications for political participation, we expect the relationship between perception of own privilege and political participation to be less important than the relationship between perception of privilege in society and political participation. Nevertheless, these explanations for our own status are distinct and constitute the second component of perceptions of privilege.

We can think of our perceptions of our own status, different in-groups and out-groups, and their statuses as fitting within a structure of lower- and higher-order beliefs (Bem, 1970). Our deep-seated beliefs shape how we think and behave in our day-to-day interactions, when we rely on the disposition system (or system two). At root, we can think of ‘zero-order beliefs’ that develop from the senses and ‘are the “nonconscious” axioms upon which our other beliefs are built’ (Bem, 1970, p. 6). For example, trust in our senses and the signals that we receive from them is a zero-order belief. ‘First-order beliefs’ rely on zero-order ones and are based on information that is received from the sources that have been judged to be trustworthy. For example, if we hold the zero-order belief that our parents are trustworthy, then identifying with the same political party as them is a first-order belief. Built on these zero- and first-order beliefs is a vertical structure of higher-order beliefs, for example regarding the qualities of a policy proposed by the political party that we identify with, all tracing their roots back to first- and zero-order ones. The order of our beliefs can change over time so that, for instance, if the reason for trusting a newspaper is forgotten (due to habitual readership), then that trust becomes a zero-order belief. Similarly, our beliefs about our identities can become more ingrained over time. For instance, when a child first becomes conscious that their parents describe their family as working class, they may accept the information on the basis of who it comes from but then integrate it into their identity as they grow older, especially if they encounter environments that reinforce that categorisation and make it salient.

We can thus see our self-perceptions as coming from our lower-order beliefs about the sources of information that can be trusted combined with the cues that we receive or remember about ourselves. Often, this means that our self-perceptions rely on the same cues that other people use to perceive us. This is because we learn how to perceive and understand ourselves from our parents, when they teach us how to interpret cues, for instance when they interpret the reasons why we might be upset or explain the behaviour of others to us (Bem, 1967). We thus come to perceive and interpret things about ourselves based on both internal cues such as our identities and external cues such as the behaviour of others towards us. This even means that when particular physiological states are

induced in adults, using drugs similar to adrenalin, they look to available external cues to inform their interpretation of the situation and shape their emotional response (Bem, 1970, pp. 48–53). Similarly, people's evaluations of their lives are affected by having negative or positive memories prompted, but this relationship is moderated by whether an extraneous explanation for their mood, such as the weather, is provided (Schwarz and Clore, 1983). Such is the power of external cues that people alter their own opinions if they undertake behaviour that contradicts their initial opinions (Bem, 1967). For example, someone who supports the nationalisation of public transport but is assigned the task of speaking in favour of privatisation is likely to shift their opinion towards that position. This reliance on the cues that we receive also fits with the observation of self-categorisation theory that we adjust our identity in line with the social context and the salient identities of those around us (Turner and Reynolds, 2012). When we enter a social context, we take cues about whether we fit in from the behaviour of others, such as how they talk and what they talk about, and how they interact with us. These interact with our understanding of ourselves and the components of our identity that are made salient by the context.

Linking this to structural privilege, we can also use the same indicators as the people around us to perceive our privilege or marginalisation, as indicated by our stocks of capital, and the extent to which we fit into the context. This applies when we enter or participate in political contexts, in which we and others provide and interpret cues about whether we are qualified to contribute. This reinforces the cycle in which people who are less privileged, who are less likely to participate in political activity, are also more likely to think of themselves as 'not political' or to consider that politics is 'not for them'. Thus, external cues shape the perceptions that influence subsequent behaviour and therefore the cues that shape our ensuing perceptions and behaviour. Even when our motivations are post hoc rationalisations of behaviour, they can retain significance because of their capacity to influence future behaviour (Verba et al., 1995, pp. 97–99). For example, someone brought up in a context in which political participation is not the norm is unlikely to believe that participation is a civic duty, and the absence of that belief points away from engaging in such behaviour in the future. This can lead to a belief that one cannot engage in political activity, which is likely to contribute to and sustain disengagement. This is partly because we can observe the 'kind of people' who participate in politics and discern whether or not they are similar to us. To the extent that this creates an 'us' and 'them' mentality, it feeds into group identity and creates a situation in which people who are politically active are seen as an out-group on the basis of their shared social characteristics and their political activity.

These reinforcing cycles of cues shaping perceptions, which influence behaviour, work through behavioural intentions. These intentions are also shaped by our attitudes towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived control over

the behaviour (Ajzen, 2012; Yzer, 2012). This means that people who view political activity as a waste of their time, who perceive non-participation as the norm in their group, or who think that they are not the kind of person who can participate in politics are unlikely to intend to participate, and to do so. Linking this to structural privilege, the beliefs that inform behaviour are shaped in part by the capital that we hold. People who are financially comfortable and have spare time may be less likely to hold the attitude that politics is a waste of their time, whilst people who inhabit politically active social networks are likely to perceive political activity as a norm. Additionally, in line with Bourdieu's emphasis on the importance of feeling qualified to participate in politics, people who perceive that they do not hold the right kinds of cultural capital may see themselves as less able to participate in politics. If this fuels a self-perception that they are 'not a political person', it can feed the sense that politics is not worthwhile, is not the norm in their social group, and is not easily within their control.

But it is not only the capital that we possess now that is important in shaping our perceptions. The significance of a certain type of capital at a formative stage of socialisation can influence lower-order beliefs and perceptions that persist after their circumstances have changed. This means that individuals can have perceptions that reflect remembered cues but diverge from their current circumstances. In other words, people can be slow to update their self-categorisation (Cannon, 1980; Friedman et al., 2021), and experiences growing up can shape their adult perceptions and views (Ares and Van Ditmars, 2023; Macfarlane, 2022; McNeil and Haberstroh, 2022). An example of this is someone who thinks of themselves as working class because of their experiences and self-perceptions when growing up, even if they now inhabit a middle-class social position. Memories of parents worrying about bills, going to school with children whose parents did manual jobs, and saving up to go on holiday at the nearest seaside town can be powerful even if someone goes on to earn plenty of money, mingle with professionals, and take two overseas holidays a year. Such status inconsistency is associated with perceiving the political system as more elitist (Eitzen et al., 1976) because it confronts people with a reminder of prevailing social hierarchies. As such, someone who is rich in stocks of economic, social, and cultural capital may still have no intention of participating in politics because they were brought up to believe that the people involved in politics 'aren't like them'.

In addition to drawing on past and present experiences to perceive our social position, we can also transpose our recognition of privilege in one area on to other areas as well (Pinterits et al., 2009). For instance, a woman who has experienced gendered marginalisation might apply her resulting understanding of social structure to marginalisation of ethnic minorities or working-class people. That understanding of social structure might make reference to pay inequality, the idea that it is 'who you know not what you know', or inequalities in educational outcomes.

Thus, we can perceive societal relations and our place within them on the basis of economic, social, and cultural cues (Breyer, 2024), whether current or past. Those with a great deal of valuable capital, or who grew up with it, are likely to have an abiding sense that they have high social status and the resources to back it up. By contrast, those with little capital, and who grew up without it, are likely to recognise their low status and associated precarity. Although low or declining self-perceived status can prompt (radical) political participation (Bolet, 2023; Gest, 2016; Gidron and Hall, 2017, 2020), we can generally expect it to be associated with political disengagement (Gest, 2016; Heath, 2018). These perceptions of our own status, linked to the statuses of the groups that we identify with (Andersson, 2022), constitute the third component of perceptions of privilege.

The final component of perceptions of privilege, perception of privilege in politics, is of undoubted relevance to political participation. Perceiving politics as dominated by privileged people is likely to drive a sense that it is distant, inaccessible, and unresponsive. Indeed, the political advantage enjoyed by the resource-rich in unequal societies results in people with fewer resources disengaging from the political system (Solt, 2008). On a personal level, this can create a negative feedback loop in which disengagement leads people to view the politically active as even more socially distinct. If people with fewer resources dip their toe into politics and find that the people around them tend to be rich in economic, social, and cultural capital, it is likely to affirm their perception of privilege in politics and further alienate them. Therefore, unlike perception of privilege in society and in one's own life, we expect perception of privilege in politics to be negatively related to political participation. Taken together, this expectation and those outlined above lead us to posit the following:

- **Hypothesis 5:** Perception of the role of structural forces in society is positively related to political participation.
- **Hypothesis 6:** The mixed relationship between perception of the role of structural forces in one's own life and political participation is weaker than the relationship outlined in Hypothesis 5.
- **Hypothesis 7:** Self-perceived status is positively related to political participation.
- **Hypothesis 8:** Perception of privilege in politics is negatively related to political participation.

Again drawing on the idea of the funnel of causality (Campbell et al., 1964, pp. 24–25) and the causal claims of the civic voluntarism model (Verba et al., 1995, pp. 416–430), we can add the above hypothesised effects of perceptions of privilege to the causal diagram that we saw at the end of the last chapter. Figure 3.1 does this, and we can see that the causal argument here is that background characteristics shape both stocks of capital and perceived privilege, which then go on to influence

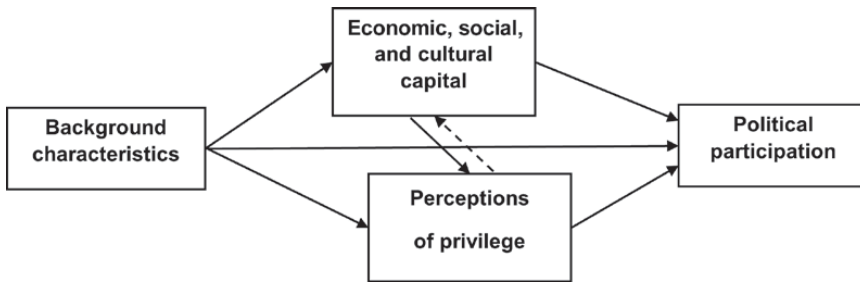


Figure 3.1 The causal relationship between background, capital, perceptions of privilege, and participation

the extent and types of political activities that people engage in. Although it is not the focus of the book, we might also expect stocks of capital to shape perceptions of privilege, and more so than vice versa, as indicated by the arrows between the two concepts. Additionally, the continued presence of a direct arrow between background characteristics and political participation indicates that there may be other elements to those relationships that do not run through capital and perceptions of privilege. Thus, the causal argument here is not that stocks of capital and perceptions of privilege capture the full workings of privilege or the entirety of its impact on political activities. Nonetheless, both are important components of privilege and, as this chapter and the last have shown, both have implications for political participation.

Accounting for Perceptions of Privilege

Our perceptions of privilege are bound up with our group identities, the way we categorise ourselves and others in different contexts, and the statuses of the groups that we identify with. We have seen that those who perceive their status as low, often because of their group identity in a given context, have negative emotional reactions and worse outcomes when their status is made salient. Thus, the cues that people receive about themselves and their groups are important in shaping their self-perceptions. Along with internalised cues from early and formative years, people perceive their status in a hierarchy based on the same external cues that others use to perceive them. As such, when someone enters a context in which they are apparently different from the majority of people, and especially if they have lower status, they are likely to feel out of place. If the daily activities of politics are disproportionately undertaken by people with characteristics or stocks of capital that indicate a certain status, it is likely to act as a perceptual barrier to

participation for others. This is confounded by the fact that, even if low-status groups adopt strategies to challenge the status hierarchy, there are people who are invested in the status quo and see society as essentially just, so defend it.

System-justifying beliefs stand in opposition to perceptions of privilege, and the latter emphasise structural rather than individual explanations for inequality. Perceptions of privilege are constituted by four components: perception of the role of structural forces in society, perception of the role of structural forces in one's own life, self-perceived status, and perception of the privilege of those in politics. These perceptions relate to political participation in complex ways. We expect privileged-based explanations for status difference in society to be positively related to political participation. This is counter to the negative relationship between system-justifying beliefs and political involvement. Explanations for inequality in society should also trump the ambiguous effects of privilege-based explanations for one's own status, though we also expect the latter to be related to political participation. We also expect the psychological burden of low self-perceived status to be associated with lower political participation, and therefore to see greater political activity amongst those with high self-perceived status. Finally, perceiving politicians and politically active people as highly privileged should be negatively related to political participation. Someone who bears the burden of perceiving their status as low and tends to explain inequality with reference to individual traits, whilst also seeing politicians and the politically active as considerably more privileged than them, faces a series of psychological barriers to participation that are likely to work against them being politically active. Thus, perceptions of privilege have important implications for political participation. These implications, and the perceptions themselves, are related to structural privilege but also distinct from them. As such, we need to account for both people's structural privilege, embodied in their stocks of capital, and their perceptions of privilege when considering the factors that relate to political participation. We do this for the first time in the following empirical chapters.

Political Participation and Non-Participation

Diversity in Participation and Non-Participation

There are numerous ways of getting involved in more or less political forms of participation. People might support an organisation, be it an environmental charity or a political party, or undertake specific political acts such as boycotting a product or writing to their local MP. In this chapter we observe a line that interviewees and focus group participants draw between local-level voluntary and community activities, and national-level political activities. This distinguishes more and less explicitly political forms of participation from each other, with the former clearly seen as the domain of politicians and parties rather than local citizens contributing to their communities. This distinction reflects the ‘fuzzy border’ (Verba et al., 1995, p. 7) between participation that is seen as political or not. It is also manifested in people’s support for organisations and in their political acts, which we examine in detail. Throughout, we also consider the kinds of activities that people talk about when asked whether they participate. People mention many ways of participating, from volunteering to voting, and they talk about some of them, such as organising local groups or activities, more than others, such as signing petitions. The activities that people emphasise in discussion often differ from those that are shown to be most widespread by the Privilege and Participation Survey. This suggests that people have a particular image of participation in mind that focuses on quite involved activities but does not always include the quotidian acts that are more widespread. Nonetheless, the distinction between more and less explicit political forms of participation is seen across the survey, interviews, and focus groups.

When investigating what kinds of participation are related to each other, we observe the previously identified distinction between individual activities such as signing petitions or boycotting products, contacting activities, and collective activities such as protest and direct action (Pattie et al., 2004). In addition, we find a charitable mode of participation and see that two of the most common forms of participation, donating and voting, are distinct from the other types of activity. We also see important patterns in how widespread the different modes

of participation are. As we move from the least explicitly political forms, such as supporting charities, to the most, such as collective political acts, we find fewer people who participate, especially frequently. We also find that people talk about participation as multifaceted and participate in multiple ways, but tend to do so infrequently, making a moderate commitment each time. Nevertheless, when we look at all the various ways of participating in politics, it is clear that the pool of people who are willing to undertake at least some activity is sizeable. In other words, although not necessarily amongst their daily activities, political participation is a normal feature of many people's lives.

Just as we see that there are a host of ways for people to participate in politics, we also see that there is a wide range of reasons for non-participation. The barriers to participation that we consider are distinct from the forms of capital and perceptions of privilege that we look at in subsequent chapters, but they are important because they represent people's own accounts of why some people participate less than others in politics. The most commonly selected barriers in the Privilege and Participation Survey are lack of time and lack of money. However, people also identify lack of confidence and politics not being for 'people like me' as prominent barriers relating to more explicitly political forms of participation. We might expect lack of time and money as well as, perhaps, the idea of politics being for some people and not others to be linked to backgrounds and demographics. However, we do not know if this was part of people's thinking when they selected those options. Interviewees and focus group participants also seldom talk about the links between demographics and participation, though some of the barriers that they mention are linked to people's background characteristics. For instance, they talk about health issues and lack of time as barriers, and we might expect these to be related to age and gender, respectively. Overall, the barriers that people talk about most commonly can be grouped into three distinct types: constraints such as health issues, or lack of time or energy; disincentives such as the way that political parties function and the behaviour of politicians; and negative images of politics, often as presented in the media. The array of barriers spoken about serves as a useful reminder of how many reasons there are for people not to get involved in politics. It also, ironically, gives us some cause for hope: both MPs and members of the public share quite a similar analysis of the causes of these divides, perhaps offering the basis for beginning to resolve them in the future.

A Note on How the Research Was Conducted

The research underpinning this book deployed a mixed-methods approach involving conducting a survey, interviews with MPs, volunteers and activists, and low-participation members of the public, as well as focus groups after public

political engagement events. The Privilege and Participation Survey was designed specifically for this research, and asked a host of questions about different elements of political participation, economic, social, and cultural capital, and perceptions of privilege and politics. The survey was tested via cognitive interviews and pilot fieldwork, and was split into two survey waves because of the number of questions. The final surveys were fielded online to a broadly representative sample of 1,405 British adults by the polling and market research company YouGov.¹ Fieldwork took place between March and April 2014, and the average combined time taken to complete both waves was 36 minutes.² The large number of variables included in the survey (201) was intended to measure the key concepts in multiple different ways. This allowed a process of factor analysis to be undertaken, identifying underlying (or latent) tendencies relating to multiple measures of each of the key concepts. This factor analysis found that there are particular types of political participation, capital, and perceptions that each represent a range of different answers that survey respondents gave. These groupings of variables are indicated in this chapter and the next two, and inform the summary index variables that are used in the final two empirical chapters, which test the relationships between the concepts that we are interested in.³

The Privilege and Participation Survey was complemented by in-depth interviews with 14 MPs, 18 volunteers and activists for a range of different charities, campaign organisations, and political parties, and nine low-participation members of the public. The MPs were approached directly with requests to be interviewed, volunteers and activists were contacted via their organisations, and low-participation members of the public were identified via the Privilege and Participation Survey and approached if they had given consent to be contacted. The interviews were further complemented by four focus groups with members of the public who had attended political engagement events. They were recruited either via invitation if they had given consent in the Privilege and Participation Survey, or at the political engagement events themselves, and a total of 18 people participated in the four focus groups. The interviews and focus groups took place between June 2012 and April 2016 and lasted an average of one hour, except the interviews with MPs, which were shorter (averaging 40 minutes). The volunteers and activists, low-participation members of the public, and focus group participants were a good mix in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, and region, and the MPs came from a range of parties

¹ The final sample of 1,405, after attrition between the two survey waves and data cleaning, was 73.8 per cent of the 1,904 respondents who started the first wave of the survey.

² Details of the survey sample's representativeness are in [Appendix A](#). Full details of the survey testing and specific measures included in the survey are provided in online [Appendix A](#).

³ Details of the process of factor analysis, and its results, are provided in online [Appendices A and D](#).

and had varied tenures in Parliament.⁴ Thus, across all of the interviews and focus groups, a range of people with different characteristics, levels of political participation, and opinions were spoken to. Combined with the data from the Privilege and Participation Survey, this allows us to undertake a detailed mixed-methods analysis of how capital, perceptions of privilege, and political participation are related, and how people understand and talk about those concepts.

More and Less Explicitly Political Participation

A common distinction in how interviewees and focus group participants talk about participation is between more and less explicitly political forms. This represents a desire, on the part of some, to recognise the political implications of action that is not commonly viewed as political. It also reflects the ‘fuzzy border’ (Verba et al., 1995, p. 7) between activities that are viewed as political and those that are not. For some, the distinction between more and less explicitly political forms of participation is clearly articulated, whilst for others it is reflected in what they identify as politics (and therefore as not politics). It is most apparent in the comments of MPs when they talk about local campaigners in their constituencies. For instance, a Conservative MP notes that ‘when you do meet community activists and people who are willing to help establish a crèche facility or help establish an after-school club for their children and so forth, what you need to try and get across to them is that they’re actually engaging in low-level politics. But they never see it in that manner.’ This sentiment is expressed in remarkably similar terms by an SNP MP:

Lots of the community activists ... are women and very, very bold women as well, who will take no nonsense from anybody else. They’re great, but they don’t see themselves as being political in any way. They see themselves standing up for the community, and for me that would be the same thing, but that’s not always how people perceive that.

In the same vein, a Labour MP notes that young people ‘are all passionate about social injustice, not only at home, but abroad. They’re all passionate about wanting to save the planet by greening up our environment, but they don’t regard them as being political.’ This hesitance on the part of local campaigners to identify their activities as political might reflect the negative image of politics as inefficacious or irrelevant that we encounter later in this chapter. Nevertheless, it is clear that at least some MPs view community-based campaigns and activities as forms of political participation.

⁴ Full details of the interviews and focus groups are available in [Appendix B](#).

The presence of politics in our day-to-day lives is also reflected in the view of a focus group participant who says that 'politics is everything'. Similarly, another focus group participant lists specific areas of our lives that are affected by politics: 'whether you have to leave a pub at 11 o'clock, whether you're legally able to drive, everything's connected to politics, because it's all about whether the legislation's there empowering you to do what you want to do'. Here, we start to see the idea of politics being about legislating on specific issues. This appears implicitly throughout interviews and focus groups when people talk about policy areas in which they think politicians need to do more, less, or something different. Over the course of the interviews and focus groups, people express opinions about legislation relating to health, education, immigration, youth centres, and crime. The general idea of politics as legislating is made explicit by an Evangelical Alliance volunteer who supposes that politics is 'to do with public policy'. Sometimes, people make the link between politics and legislating implicitly, when passing judgement on the quality of the legislative process. For instance, one focus group participant is concerned that legislation used to reflect 'the voice of the people', but now 'the government dictate to the people', whilst a participant in another focus group says that 'a lot of the time, policies are being made against almost kind of like, to kind of, get elected rather than really look at, what does that policy actually do on the ground?'

The idea of the impact of politics 'on the ground' again reflects the distinction between the activities of people dealing with the consequences of policy in their daily lives and the explicit politics of the process of legislating. This distinction is also manifested in the view of a focus group participant who comments that politics is 'not just what goes on in London is it? Politics, it's what goes on at street level, interaction of people isn't it'. Another focus group participant talks about politics with 'a capital P or a small p'. Most explicitly, a Housing Justice volunteer says that they have a negative view of 'representative democracy whereas I think I'm much more comfortable with participating democracy'. They stress that the latter is 'where I think volunteering and stuff comes in, which is you're playing an important part of public life', and is distinct from seeking to elect 'the representatives that you happen to think are right or of seeking to achieve your broader goals through ... the intervention of the state'. Other volunteers and activists also use the idea of bringing about change through elected representatives and legislation as a counterpoint to their own activities. This view is encapsulated by the William Wilberforce Trust volunteer who, when asked what doing politics would entail, says:

I guess I would be doing something that would be in some way changing the way things are run, rather than just trying to pick up the pieces. So, yes, trying to move for change, I guess, because I don't feel like we're really doing that here – we just accept people who need help, and we see that as a result maybe of a system, but we're not actually trying to change things.

The fuzziness of the boundary between more and less explicit forms of politics is indicated by the fact that volunteers and activists often mention legislation in the context of lobbying. Such activities are mentioned by supporters of ActionAid, Amnesty International, the Evangelical Alliance, and the Royal British Legion. Despite the fact that they or their organisations engage with the explicitly political activity of legislating, these volunteers and activists remain hesitant to identify their own activities as explicitly political.

Finally, low-participation members of the public also talk about legislating but, as with a member of the public in the West Midlands, are more apt to describe politics as ‘the running of the country, really, isn’t it?’ This phrase neatly encompasses both the explicit politics of legislating and the wider idea of politics as ‘everything’. It also encompasses the impact of policy on people’s day-to-day lives, which is often intimately related to their appraisals of politics. Those appraisals are generally negative, as we will see later in this chapter, but can also occasionally be positive, despite their frustrations. This nuanced view is expressed by a member of the public in the North West of England who draws the link between policy and its impact: ‘I wouldn’t say it’s all bad. Somebody has to do it, and I admire anyone who can step up and do it. Because it is a big responsibility. I mean, you’re actually looking after the whole nation. You’re making decisions that can affect everyone’s lives. So, hats off to the people that can do it.’ For low-participation members of the public, and many focus group participants, legislating and running the country are what constitute politics. By contrast, for some MPs and volunteers and activists, these national-level political activities are part of a wider meaning of politics that includes local-level community organising. These different views affirm a distinction between more and less explicitly political forms of participation. All the groups mentioned above would apply the label ‘political’ to participation involving elected representatives and legislation, and we can think of such activities as explicitly political. By contrast, some would label local-level organising as ‘political’ whilst others would not, and we can think of those activities as less explicitly political. In the coming sections, we will observe this distinction manifested in the various organisations that people support, from animal welfare charities to organisations such as 38 Degrees that prompt engagement with legislators, and in different types of political acts that people undertake, from boycotting products with too much plastic packaging to writing to an MP or attending a protest.

Supporting Organisations

People support a wide range of more or less explicitly political organisations in a variety of ways. Their support can be expressed through donations, whether a regular monthly amount or a few coins in collection buckets here and there. Alternatively, they might prefer to give some time by volunteering in a charity

shop, visiting lonely older people, or delivering leaflets for a campaign. Support can also be expressed through the simple act of joining an organisation or, if one wishes to get more involved, taking on an unpaid position of responsibility such as local branch secretary or treasurer. These forms of support might be directed towards charities, campaigning organisations, trade unions or professional associations, or political parties. The Privilege and Participation Survey asked about these four types of organisations and, despite the varying extents to which they are viewed as political, we review the answers relating to all of them.

The most explicitly political organisations are the least widely supported. [Figure 4.1](#) shows that around one in nine people (11.4 per cent) support a political party in at least one way: donating (4.7 per cent); volunteering (3.6 per cent); membership (5.9 per cent); holding an unpaid position (2.0 per cent). The overall figure of one in nine people supporting a party might seem high, but we should bear in mind that the question asked was about whether each of those ways of supporting a party had been done in the last five years. This means that anyone who made a one-off donation or held membership at any point in that period could indicate that they supported a party. We also know that online panels of survey respondents tend to have more people who participate in a range of political activities than is the case in the general population, so levels of support for organisations amongst the general public are likely to be lower. Nonetheless, the patterns in support are of interest.

Trade unions and professional associations have similar levels of support to political parties except for their higher levels of membership (held by 16.4 per cent of people). They remain the most popular type of organisation for membership despite many years of decline (Forth and Bryson, 2015). Campaigning organisations have similar levels of support to political parties, but with a higher percentage of people who donate (8.8 per cent). However, none of these types of organisations are close to being as popular as charities. Three fifths of people (59.6 per cent) have donated to a charity in the last five years, one in six (16.6 per cent) gave up some time to volunteer, one in ten (10.3 per cent) held membership, and one in 20 (5.3 per cent) held an unpaid position. This means that fewer than a third of people (30.6 per cent) did not support a charity in any way in the last five years.

British people, then, much prefer to support charities than any other type of organisation, and this illustrates the divide between more and less explicitly political participation. Campaign organisations, trade unions and professional associations, and, of course, political parties all tend to be clearly engaged in national policy debates, and to run explicitly political campaigns. Whilst some charities also do this, and there is a blurred line between them and campaign organisations,⁵ there are also numerous charities that do not make explicitly political

⁵ For example, one survey respondent, when asked which campaign organisations they support, wrote, 'I was thinking of charities that also have a campaigning element – charities and campaigning organisations are not mutually exclusive, [for example] I support Amnesty International, RSPB.'

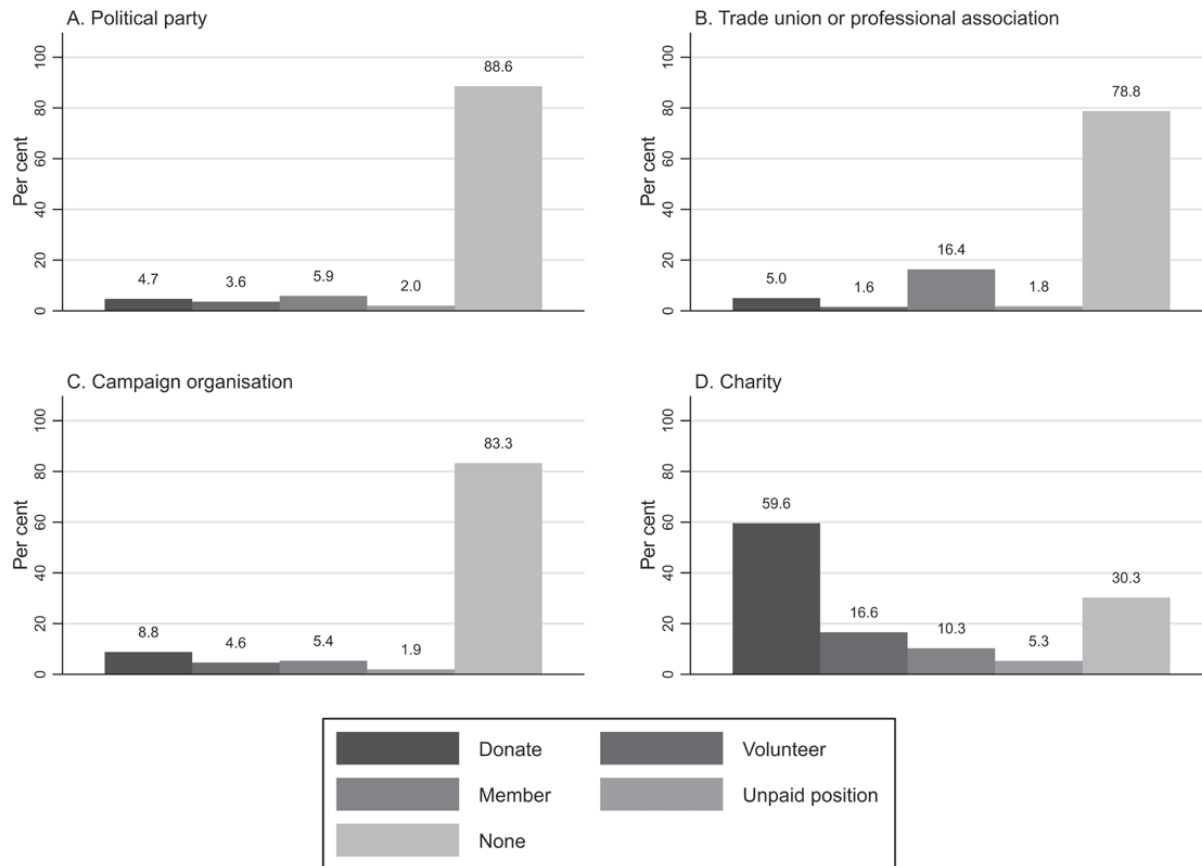


Figure 4.1 Organisational involvement

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,405

interventions. The divide between more and less explicitly political activities is also reflected in the ways that people talk about these kinds of participation. When asked about their participation, low-participation members of the public refer to supporting organisations by visiting charity shops, donating and fundraising, and especially volunteering. One low-participation member of the public in London talks about how he 'had a friend who worked in a charity shop, and I helped him out for a couple of hours but nothing really major', and mentions having done things like Movember in the past. A member of the public, also from London, contemplates doing charity shop work 'further down the line in retirement' and describes herself as 'the type of person that just chucks money into a bucket', especially for animal charities and the RNLI. Another man, in his seventies and living in the North East of England, has volunteered for the Samaritans in the past, whilst a member of the public, living in the South of England, speaks about her interest in volunteering to learn about local history and show people around her home town:

I had an email come through, I think it was from the website [of the local tourist board], or something like that, I can't remember, with a little questionnaire. In it was, you know, 'Would you like to be a volunteer for things like research, or showing people around galleries, and things like that?' I thought, 'Oh, that would be interesting.' I said, 'Yes, I would.' That to me is something quite interesting, because I'd love to do something.

Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of references to volunteering in the interviews and focus groups are made by volunteers and activists, as are many of the references to donating, collecting money, and supporting charity shops. The latter activities are sometimes referenced within the context of speaking about volunteering more widely, as in the case of the ActionAid and Amnesty International activists who mention fundraising as part of their roles or what their organisations do. By contrast, other volunteers and activists identify donating as a substitute for volunteering, for instance the Housing Justice volunteer who speaks about people who 'find it's just not their thing, perhaps, to have hands-on involvement, but they're happy to write a cheque', and the Royal British Legion activist who mentions that inactive members' donations and fees support the organisation's activities.

The Royal British Legion activist also differentiates between 'the members that do and the members that don't do', indicating the varying levels of engagement amongst people who have decided to support an organisation. This is reflected in the references that volunteers and activists make to organising within their wider discussions of volunteering. Taking on positions of responsibility represents a step beyond volunteering to help with the day-to-day running of organisations. Such activities are illustrated by the Evangelical Alliance volunteer who talks about their past work setting up a library for a related organisation, and the

activist for the Campaign for Rural England who took on roles trying to re-recruit former members and then as a 'sort of spokesman for energy waste'. This high level of commitment is also reflected in the campaigning activities of political party activists, who list the conferences they have attended, canvassing that they have undertaken, and other party activities that they have participated in. This is neatly illustrated by the Labour activist who talks about getting increasingly involved in the party. Their words give a sense of quite how remarkable the amount of time and energy activists give to their causes can be:

we did lots of door-knocking, giving leaflets ... we campaigned in Thurrock, in Ipswich ... in Norwich ... I attended the Labour Party's annual conference ... and then, day after, again we campaigned in Ipswich and South Basildon and East Thurrock ... went to Ilford North, and then after that I went to Lowestoft, and then I went to Clacton ... after Clacton, we went to campaign in Stevenage and then we campaigned in Rochester. I forgot Heywood and Middleton ... and then we campaigned in ... so many places, I can't remember. Hove and then we campaigned in Leeds, Pudsey, and then we campaigned in Cardiff.

Political party involvement is also a feature of how low-participation members of the public talk about participation, but they are divided over its desirability. One low-participation member of the public in the North West of England talks about how he would 'love to' become a politician when he is older, whilst a member of the public in the West Midlands is more sceptical of getting involved in political parties and working the campaign trail: 'I think they'd have you running about, and distributing leaflets, and doing this, that, and the other, and be quite happy for you to do that. But they wouldn't want to hear your voice.' MPs also make numerous references to political party involvement and membership, mostly relating to the process leading to their current positions. A neat example of this comes from a Conservative MP talking about how they first got involved in politics:

Then when I left school I wrote to [the local] Young Conservatives, the Conservative office, and said I'm interested in joining – can I join? And what do I do? And they said yes there's meet on a Thursday night at the [local] Conservative Club, and I started going along and literally from the bottom up, month after month, week after week after week, month after month, year after year I've been involved ever since.

MPs tend to think first of party politics when asked about participation, whereas low-participation members of the public are more apt to think in terms of local community involvement and support for organisations that are not explicitly political. The two groups also exemplify a divide between those who engage in minimal levels of participation, such as throwing a few coins in a collection bucket, and those who have chosen to make political participation a defining feature of their lives. These positions represent opposite ends of a spectrum of participation, with activists occupying the space in between, both in terms of the levels and the political nature of their activities. Some activists give a few hours when they can, whilst

others, as we have seen, dedicate large parts of their lives to the organisations that they support. At the same time, some activists choose to focus on causes that are not viewed as political, for instance by volunteering for art galleries or supporting elderly people, whilst others undertake explicitly political activities by campaigning for a political party.

Figure 4.2 shows that the patterns in how much support people give to organisations vary notably depending on the type of support. Amongst those who donate, the percentage of people declines as the amount donated increases, but the distribution is quite flat. Thus, only 11 per cent fewer people donate between £100 and £249.99 per year (19.4 per cent) than £24.99 or less per year (30.4 per cent). Amongst people who volunteer, there is also a decline in the percentage who do so as the frequency of volunteering increases: the largest drop-off is between once a month or less (done by 53.0 per cent) and two–three times a month (12.1 per cent), and the highest frequency of volunteering (daily) is done by the smallest percentage of people (3.4 per cent). By contrast, the number of hours given each time one volunteers is approximately evenly distributed around one of the middle categories (three to five hours, done by 39.2 per cent of those who volunteer). Thus, those who volunteer tend to do so relatively infrequently but give up a full morning or afternoon when they do so, which is no small commitment. These two measures of volunteering, along with the number of ways that people support charities, are also the only indicators of organisational involvement that are related to each other. These three indicators reflect an underlying tendency to be more or less involved in supporting charities.⁶ Given the distribution of organisations supported that we observe below, charitable participation is unlikely to be explicitly political. Nevertheless, in the coming chapters, we consider it alongside the other modes of participation that we identify. Likewise, we also analyse donating, which is not related to other types of organisational support in the factor analysis, as a distinctive and important type of participation alongside those other modes.

Moving to more formal involvement, people make a significant commitment to the organisations that they become members of. Amongst those who are (or have been) members, they tend towards longer membership and approaching half of them (46.1 per cent) have held their longest membership for more than ten years. The small percentage of people who take on the responsibility of an unpaid position also tends to commit a significant number of years, with a majority (56.1 per cent) dedicating at least three years to their longest-held such position. Thus, although around a quarter of people (23.4 per cent) do not support any organisations, and a further two fifths (39.7 per cent) only support one type of organisation in one way, supporters tend to make a moderate or sizeable commitment to their favoured organisation(s), be it in terms of money or time.

⁶ This tendency is identified using the process of factor analysis outlined in online [Appendix A](#).

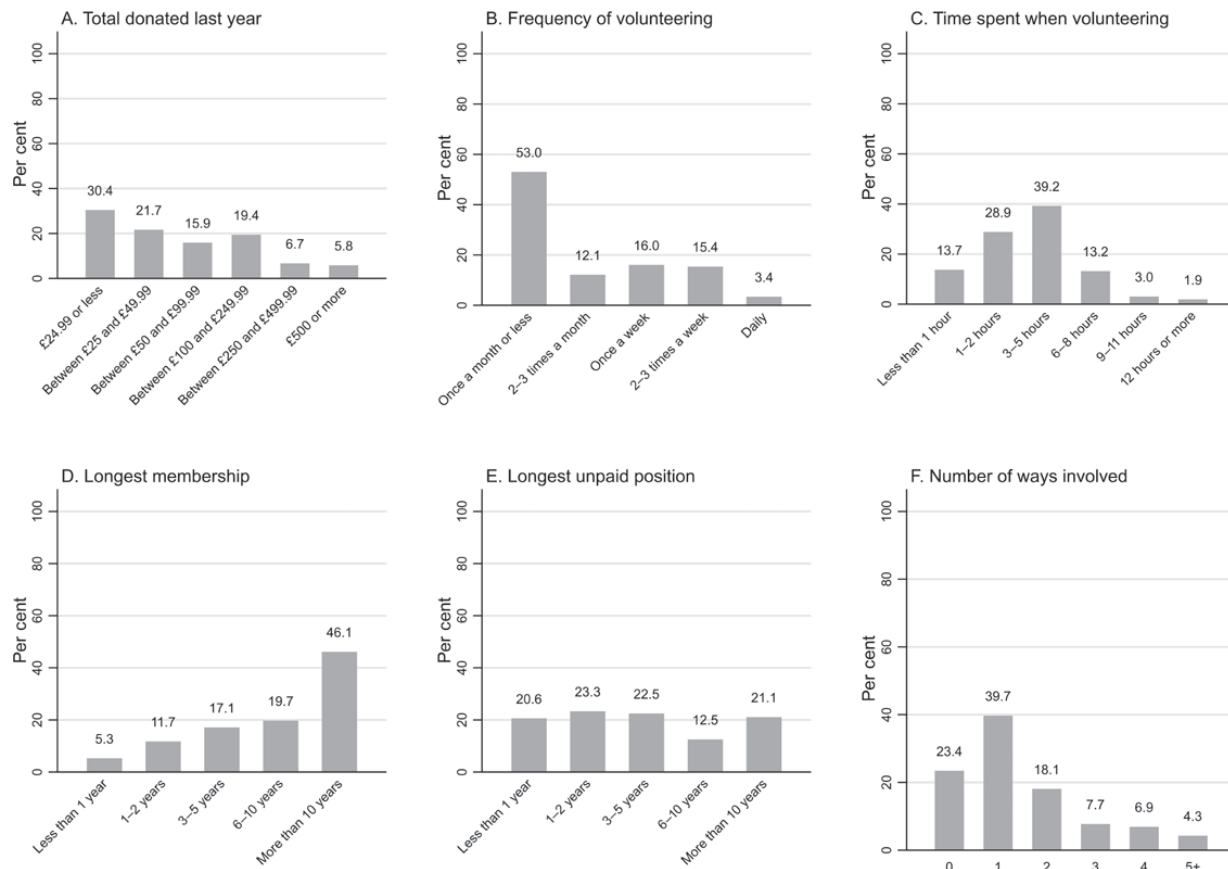


Figure 4.2 Extent of support for organisations

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 116–1,405

We again observe the fuzziness of the line between more and less explicitly political forms of participation in the issues focused on by the organisations that people support. Of all of the organisations named when people were asked to list the ones they support, [Figure 4.3](#) shows that health charities are clearly the most popular. Cancer charities (such as MacMillan Cancer Care and Cancer Research UK) alone constitute the single largest category (14.6 per cent of all named organisations), and, when combined with other health charities (such as the British Heart Foundation) and end-of-life or hospice charities, three in ten organisations supported (30.4 per cent) relate to health issues. By contrast, general progressive organisations (such as 38 Degrees), which are the most explicitly political, make up fewer than three in every hundred (2.8 per cent) organisations listed. Human rights organisations (such as Amnesty International), which are also often explicitly political, constitute a similarly small percentage of those supported (1.7 per cent). However, there are some more popular organisations that venture into making explicit political statements. Specifically, humanitarian and international development organisations (such as Save the Children and Oxfam) are the second largest category of organisations supported (12.6 per cent of all those listed), and organisations working on nature, wildlife, and the environment (which include Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth) are also a sizeable category (7.0 per cent).

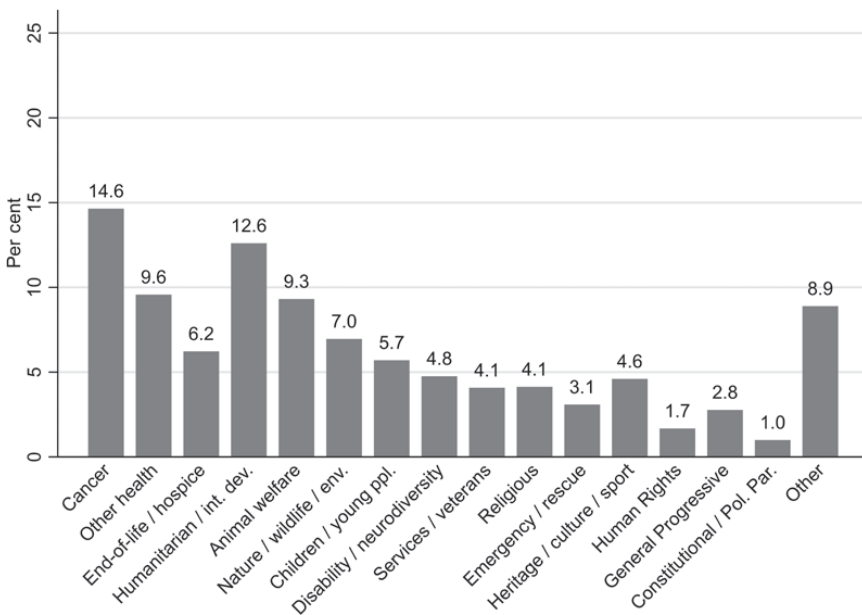


Figure 4.3 Types of organisation supported

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,008

The array of organisations that people support, different ways that they support them, and varying levels of support they give all indicate the great variation that exists in political participation. People can support numerous organisations or none, and they can do so in relation to causes as varied as children's rights in the Global South or a donkey sanctuary in the South of England. They can express this support by dropping a few coins in a collection bucket or setting up a monthly direct debit, by volunteering for a couple of hours a month or a couple of days a week, or by signing up for membership or an unpaid position of responsibility. The Privilege and Participation Survey data indicate that some level of support for organisations is a common feature of people's lives, and moderate levels of support are far from a rarity. Both donating and volunteering are also notable features of how politically inactive people and, unsurprisingly, volunteers and activists talk about participation. These types of political participation are distinct from the party membership and involvement that are often the focus of MPs and party activists' understandings of participation. The distinction between more and less explicitly political forms of participation runs through the types of organisations that are supported, the levels of support given to them, and the causes that they focus on. As we will see, this distinction is also observed in relation to the specific political acts that people can undertake.

Undertaking Political Acts

There is a range of specific acts that people can do in support of causes. These might stem from existing organisational involvement, such as membership, or they might be one-off expressions of support. Drawing on previous work by Pattie et al. (2004), we observe three broad types of political acts alongside the charitable mode identified above: individual, contacting, and collective.⁷ As [Figure 4.4](#) shows, the most popular kinds of political acts can be done by individuals with little or no collaboration with others (these are shaded light grey): signing petitions or taking online actions such as sharing a post on social media (panel A), boycotting products or companies (panel B), and urging others to act (panel C). The latter of those requires some interaction with others but not necessarily in a formal or organised setting. For instance, someone might urge a family member or friend to sign a petition, donate to a cause they care about, or vote for a particular party. Nevertheless, that need for interaction may be related to the lower proportion of people who never urge others to act: three fifths (58.3 per cent) never do so,

⁷ The grouping of political acts into these types is done based on the process of factor analysis outlined in online [Appendix A](#).

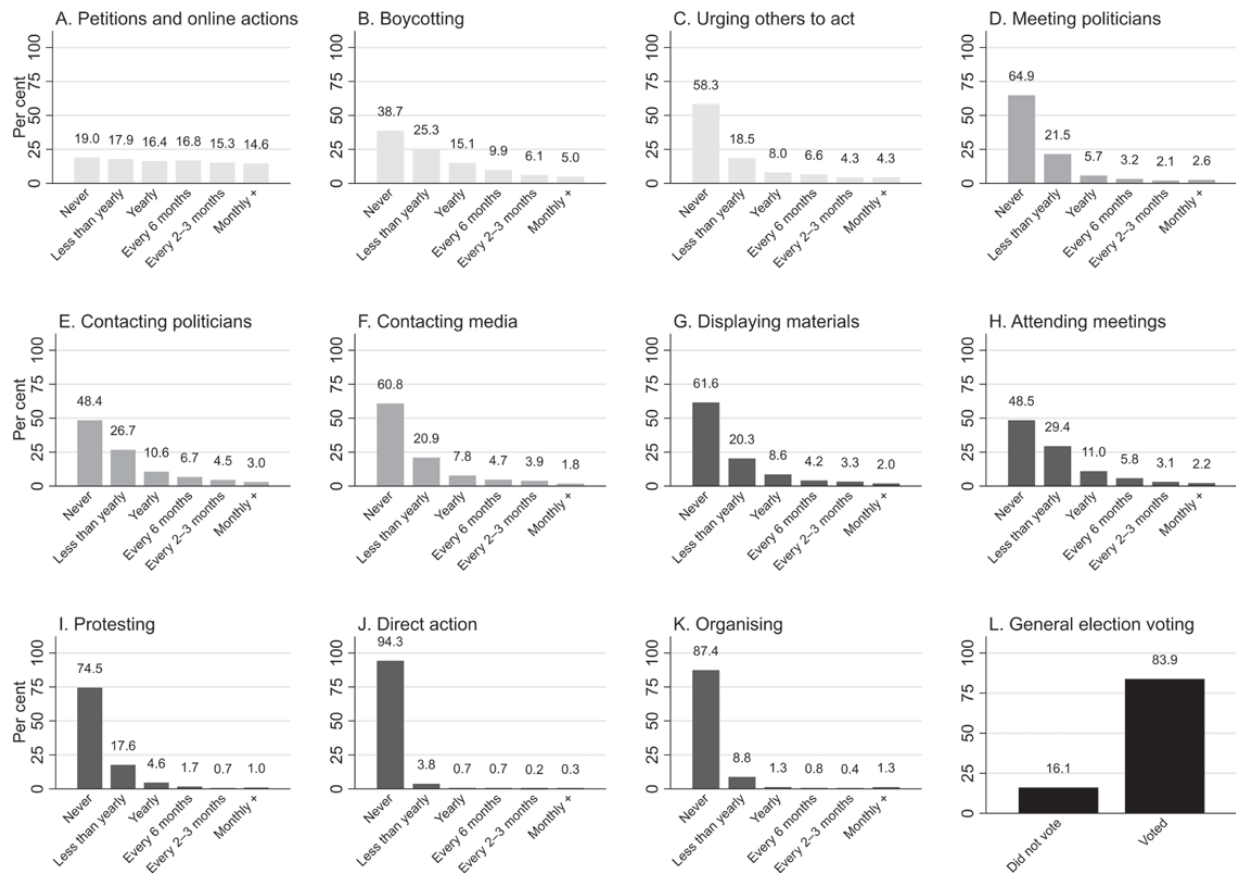


Figure 4.4 Political acts

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,405

compared to two fifths who never boycott products or companies (38.7 per cent) and one fifth who never sign petitions or take online action (19.0 per cent). In the cases of boycotting and urging others to act, we can additionally observe a pattern in which the number of people declines as the frequency of activity increases. As we shall see, this pattern applies to a wide range of political activities.

Less popular than individual activities but still widespread are political acts that involve contacting elected representatives or the media (shaded medium grey). Approaching two thirds of people never meet elected representatives (64.8 per cent, panel D), whether councillors or MPs, whilst three fifths never contact the media (60.8 per cent, panel F) and almost half never contact politicians (48.5 per cent, panel E). As with two of the three individual acts (boycotting and urging others to act), there is a clear pattern in which the percentage of people undertaking the acts declines as the frequency of activity increases. Lots of people are willing to take individual and contact-based action in relation to issues that they care about, but most of them only do so occasionally. This pattern also exists for political acts that centre on collective action (shaded dark grey), but such acts are much less popular. With the exception of attending meetings (never done by 49.5 per cent, panel H), most people never do these acts. Three fifths (61.6 per cent) never display materials (panel G), three quarters never protest (74.5 per cent, panel I), approaching nine in ten do not organise meetings or groups (87.4 per cent, panel K), and exceeding nine in ten never take direct action such as flash mobs or lock-ons (94.3 per cent, panel J). Again, the sample for the Privilege and Participation Survey is likely to over-represent politically active people, so these activities are probably done by even smaller percentages of the general population.

Reflecting the distinction between more and less explicitly political acts, individual acts do not necessarily require any engagement with parties or politicians. Signing petitions or sharing posts online, boycotting products or companies, and urging others to do likewise can be deployed, for instance, to save a local football club threatened by a building development, promote greater biodiversity in a nature reserve, or call for greater taxation of wealthy people to fund public services. By contrast, contacting acts tend to be explicitly political in nature. It is unlikely that people will take the step of writing to or meeting an elected representative, or of writing to the media, without thinking of their cause as political. Similarly, collective political activity covers types of participation that are likely to be thought of as political by those who do them, especially in the cases of protest and direct action. Thus, whilst it is possible that those who organise meetings or groups, or display materials, might not think of those acts as political, such acts are the most likely to be explicitly political in nature.

Together, these measures of participation again allow us to observe that many people are willing to make a small or moderate amount of effort to take action regarding issues that they care about. Most of those who take action do so

occasionally, and their numbers decline as frequency of activity increases. People are also most willing to take acts that require less time and energy. Individual acts can often be done at home or when already out shopping and are the most popular type of activity. By contrast, collective acts require considerable effort to coordinate with others, attend meetings, and, in some cases, risk legal repercussions. Unsurprisingly, they are the least popular type of activity. Contacting acts, which require moderate time and energy, sit in between these two extremes. Finally, the peculiar democratic act of voting (panel L), which requires the effort of a trip to the polling station (or registering for a postal or proxy vote), clearly bucks this trend. More than four fifths of respondents (83.9 per cent) voted in the 2010 general election, meaning that those who did not vote are the smallest group of non-participants across any of the political acts.⁸ Given that the turnout in 2010 was 65.1 per cent, this is the clearest indicator we have that the survey sample is more politically active than the population at large. The high level of turnout also means that voting is not closely associated with any of the other types of political acts. Since almost everyone voted, they include people who undertake individual, contacting, and collective acts, and people who do not. Therefore, in subsequent chapters we consider voting as a distinctive and important type of participation alongside donating and the individual, contacting, collective, and charitable modes that we identify.

Reflecting its widespread practice, voting is commonly spoken about in the interviews and focus groups. The low-participation members of the public who were interviewed, despite undertaking very few or no other political acts, all reported voting. In line with previous work on the drivers of voting (Blais, 2000; Gerber et al., 2008), some make reference to their sense of duty to do so even if they are unsure who to vote for. This view is expressed by a low-participation member of the public in the South of England: 'If you don't know which party to vote for, you know, how is your vote going to be valuable, because you might vote for one party and it turns out to be the worst decision you've ever made? I just felt I was duty-bound to vote.' Rather than talking about their own voting, MPs are apt to speak about why people vote the way they do and, especially, why some do not turn out. Sometimes these comments strike an optimistic tone, as when a Conservative MP speaks about how the UK resolves its constitutional questions democratically and enthuses about turnout in the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence: '85 per cent is, pretty much, everybody. There won't be many who didn't vote, and why? Well, because it mattered. They really thought that this was it.' More commonly, however, they focus on low or declining turnout and express concern, as when a Labour MP notes that in one constituency in their local area, '49 per cent of

⁸ Respondents were asked about how they voted at the time of the 2010 general election, rather than being asked to recall their vote at a later date. As such, these answers were already held by YouGov and were included in the data alongside the answers to the survey questions.

people voted. So, then 51 per cent didn't. Well, that's just extraordinary. That's just shocking, and that just leads to alienation. I think that is really dangerous.'

Political party activists bridge the gap between members of the public and MPs in terms of how they talk about voting. They often recount their past voting behaviour when explaining how they came to support their party. For instance, a UKIP activist explains that in 1997 they voted

Referendum [Party] as a protest. That was my motivation, but I was very excited at the New Labour government, and I remained so. I was very much a Labour supporter right through until 2001, until the next general election, and did the same thing, remained a Labour supporter but voted UKIP in 2001 on the very same issue.

Like the members of the public who talk about their voting behaviour, this is a personal account of the activist's relationship with politics. At the same time, party activists convey the same concern as MPs regarding wider voting patterns and turnout. For example, another UKIP activist talks about the 'social disconnect between what was once the working-class party, that was Labour, and, you know, and the actual working classes', and how that has driven support for their own party. By contrast, a Plaid Cymru activist mentions families who have been Labour supporters for generations and will never contemplate switching parties. The same activist also considers the difficulty of convincing non-voters to vote, and the challenges of voting itself: 'you've got to decide who you're going to vote for, then you've got to go to the polling station, and you've got to know what to do, and if you've never done it before, it can be quite intimidating'.

Even amongst people who vote frequently, the process of deciding who to support can be fraught, as illustrated by the words of focus group participants. One, a Labour supporter, says, 'I didn't vote Labour in the last election, but I didn't vote at all because ... I couldn't vote for the other parties', whilst another says, 'it gives you this real dilemma. I've voted at every election but sometimes I have misused my vote deliberately cos I can't bring myself to vote for the main parties.' Recognition of the sometimes difficult decision facing voters sits within a wider understanding of voting as desirable. This is reflected in the discussion of compulsory voting that took place in two of the focus groups. One participant stresses that 'it's more revolutionary to spoil your paper, but ... to actually not to do anything at all is just apathetic', whilst a participant in another focus group observes, 'if you've got to do that [impose compulsory voting], I think you've gotta allow people the option to vote their disinterest as well, though'. The desire to ensure that voting is undertaken by as many people as possible is also manifested in the extended discussion of lowering the voting age that took place in one focus group, which centred on whether people younger than 18 are interested and educated enough to vote. This concern regarding turnout, and the identification of a duty to vote, indicates the special place that the act holds in the pantheon of political activity.

The prominence of electoral politics in conceptions of political participation is also reflected in the number of references to contacting politicians that interviewees make. Amongst low-participation members of the public, comments range from the member of the public in the South of England who says that 'I've no idea who my MP is, where the surgery is, even if I wanted to do something like that [contact them]', to the member of the public in the North West of England who contacted their local council about the swings in the park that they take their children to and would 'definitely consider ... having a sit-down conversation with' their local MP. Volunteers and activists also talk about contacting politicians and the press, sometimes independently and sometimes as part of their roles. For instance, an Amnesty International volunteer emphasises how contacting politicians has tangible consequences: 'little things that you do ... that might end up, someone raising a very important issue in Parliament the next day, just because you sent them an email. It's very small, but you definitely see the impact very, very quickly.'

On the other side of the relationship, MPs discuss many features of dealing with contact from constituents, ranging from the role of online campaigning organisations (such as 38 Degrees) in driving contact to the difficulty of balancing constituency work with the demands of Westminster and their personal lives. Their concerns about the volume of contacting are reflected in one Labour MP's observation of the role of power in the relationship between MPs and their constituents: 'the customer complaints desk becomes king because by default you become the person with the magic wand who comes to fix things because that's what your power does. What I think is interesting and again, particularly as a progressive I feel this, is we've allowed power to become by default about making decisions.' Seeking to challenge this power inequality, the same MP talks about how they attempt to promote the idea of empowerment to their constituents: 'I always say to people, "I am your worst nightmare as an MP because I'm going to get you involved, I'm going to ask you whether you've spoken to your neighbours, whether you've owned your own power in this, whether you've complained already, whether you have thought about how you can change things."'

The desire to prompt action by constituents, as well as a sense of their capacity to intervene in politics, indicates the importance of other forms of participation. Despite their emphasis on voting and contacting, MPs and members of the public identify multiple ways that people can participate. These range from simply paying attention to politics to the more demanding act of demonstrating. They also mention expressing one's views, attending meetings, taking online action, and signing petitions. More frequently, they talk about organising local groups, meetings, or events, and these references again reflect the difference between more and less explicitly political participation. In relation to more explicitly political acts,

MPs talk about such activities when recounting how they got involved in politics. One Liberal Democrat MP mentions campaigning activities and a local party organising role as steps towards elected office:

I was in university but I wasn't involved in politics then. But I guess I had a little bit of a social conscience when I left university. I joined the Labour Party; I had been involved in certain issues like opposing corporal punishment and against apartheid before but not in a party context. How did I get involved in electoral politics? Well when I was in the Labour Party, I was the constituency secretary and we were thinking of putting together a list of candidates to stand.

By contrast, members of the public talk about organising that is not explicitly political, such as the low-participation member of the public in the West Midlands who was treasurer of his local Young Farmers branch where he grew up and had also been secretary of a local cricket club and a football club. Less formally but also related to sport, a member of the public in the North West of England talks about the difficulty of organising a local football team. He does so in the context of observing a decline in the sense of local community, which we consider further in the [next chapter](#):

The teams have gone around here. There used to be loads of football teams and as the world changes and the pubs go and the youth clubs go, you know? So, we've just had a kick about really, but I was trying to get the basis of a football team sorted, but nothing materialised from it as yet. So, we're just waiting to see what happens this summer.

Here we can see that even forms of participation that are far from explicitly political can be related to people's wider ideas about what their communities and areas should be like, giving their activities a political flavour. In the reference to youth club closures, we can also see that political decisions shape activities that are less explicitly political. It also hints at frustrations with such decisions, and such frustrations become more explicit when we consider how people talk about various reasons for not being involved in politics in the coming sections.

Barriers to Participation

Thus far in this chapter, we have observed a common trend in support for organisations and in undertaking political acts: as the frequency and time or energy required increase, the number of people who participate decreases. But is this trend only about the time and energy required, or are there other barriers to participation? To answer this question, we turn to a neglected group of people: non-participants. The Privilege and Participation Survey asked people who do no political acts, people who support no organisations, and people who do neither what the

reasons for their non-participation are.⁹ They could select as many answers as they wanted, and [Figure 4.5](#) shows that the reasons for non-participation are similar regardless of the type of participation we consider, though with a few notable differences. More than two fifths (44.0 per cent) of people who do not support organisations (panel B) cite lack of money as a reason, whilst the figure is closer to one third (35.2 per cent) for people who neither support organisations nor do political acts (panel C). Lack of money is the most cited reason for non-participation amongst both of these groups, perhaps reflecting the importance of donating as a way of supporting organisations.

Lack of money is also cited by three in ten (30.3 per cent) of those who do not undertake political acts (panel A) and is the second most popular reason for their non-participation. However, this group is notably more likely to cite lack of time (38.9 per cent) as a reason for non-participation, and also prominently selects lack of confidence (29.4 per cent). Whilst lack of time is also commonly selected by those who do not support organisations (38.7 per cent), it is lack of confidence that distinguishes those who do not do political acts, and this is also the case amongst those who neither support organisations nor do political acts (27.4 per cent cite lack of confidence as a barrier). Also of note is the one fifth of all non-participants who give the reason that participation is ‘not for me’ (20.6 per cent, panel A; 18.4 per cent, panel B; 20.5 per cent, panel C). This reason can imply two things: first, that politics is not to their taste; second, that politics is not open to them. The exact wording of the answer in the survey was, ‘Those sorts of things aren’t for people like me.’ This implies the latter meaning, that politics is closed to, or more difficult to access for, the respondent because of their characteristics. Together, the four most cited reasons for non-participation indicate a mix of practical (time and money) and perceptual (confidence and who participation is for) barriers to participation. This mix hints at the importance of both the structural and perceptual components of privilege for participation. Access to spare time and money and the self-confidence and belief that participation is for you are not randomly distributed across the population but are structured by inequality.

Panel D of [Figure 4.5](#) also shows that most people who do not participate cite only a small number of reasons why that is the case: half (50.5 per cent) give just one reason, and approaching nine in ten (87.4 per cent) give three or fewer reasons. Non-participants do not indicate that they are confronted by an array of barriers, and instead focus on a few important reasons for not getting involved. Whilst time,

⁹ These are small groups of respondents: there are 188 people who do not do any political acts, 192 who do not support any organisations, and 125 who neither do acts nor support organisations. This means that we must be careful with figures based on their answers because these people are unlikely to be representative of non-participants more widely. Thus, the figures amongst non-participants more generally might be considerably lower or higher than we estimate based on the answers to the survey.

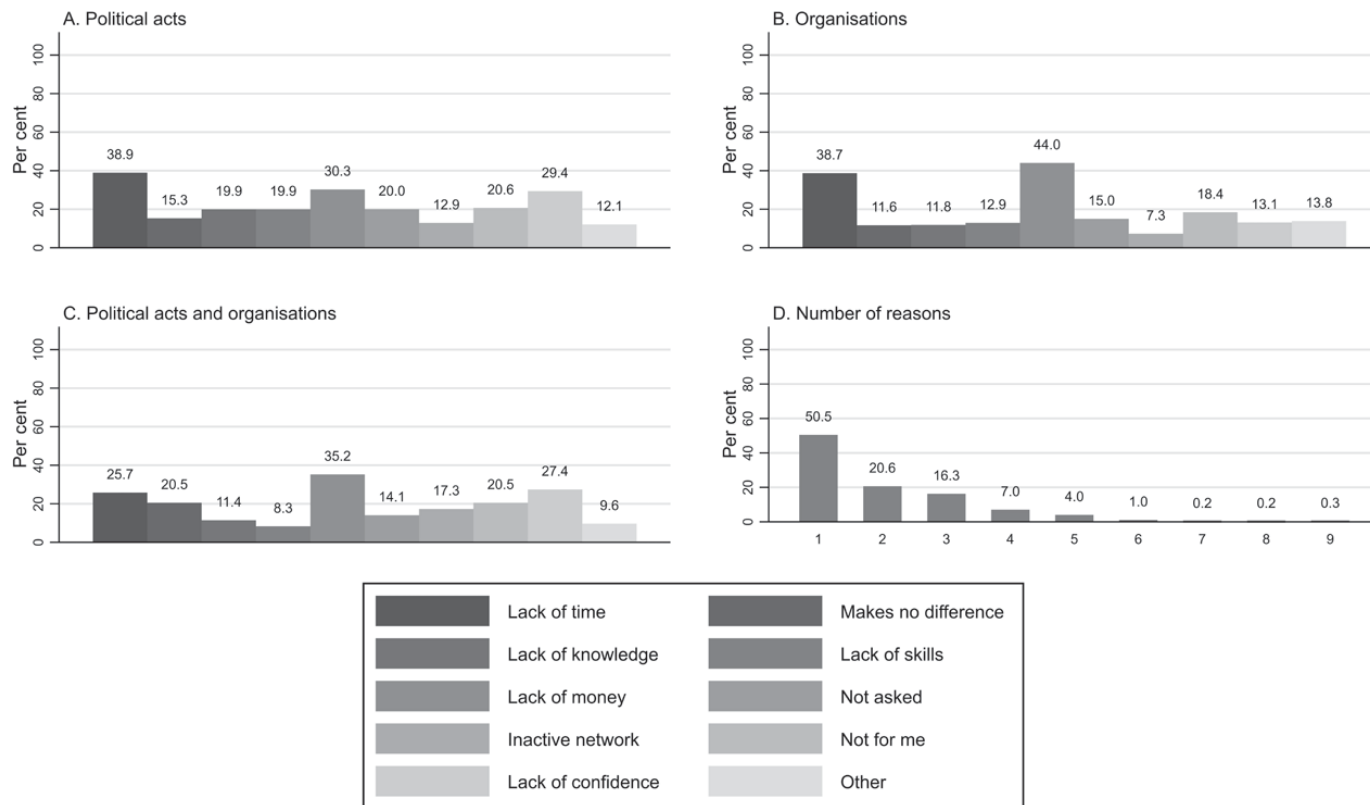


Figure 4.5 Reasons for non-participation

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 505

money, confidence, and the feeling that such activity is not for them are key, the other reasons are almost all selected by between one in ten and one in five people. Those reasons include a sense of inefficacy, lack of knowledge or skills, and lack of requests or contacts who would ask. This indicates that, whilst people tend to cite only a small number of reasons for their non-participation, there are numerous barriers at play at the aggregate level. The web of reasons for non-participation is also reflected in the barriers to participation that are talked about by focus group participants and interviewees. Indeed, the array of barriers that they talk about reminds us of an important point that can be easy to forget: there are lots of good reasons for people not to participate in politics. Those reasons can be split into three broad categories: personal constraints on people's abilities to get involved, disincentives within the political system, and negative images of politics.

Personal Constraints on Participation

The most popular reason for non-participation selected in the Privilege and Participation Survey, lack of money, is rarely mentioned in the focus groups and interviews. By contrast, lack of time, which was also widely selected in the survey, features prominently amongst the constraints mentioned by volunteers and activists as well as low-participation members of the public. Lack of confidence is also stated in the focus groups and by volunteers and activists, but less so by low-participation members of the public and, especially, MPs. Interviewees and focus group participants also talk more about reasons for non-participation that were selected less, or did not feature, in the survey. One of the most frequently mentioned barriers across all of the different groups of interviewees is lack of knowledge. MPs often offer it as an explanation for people not getting more involved in political parties and electoral politics, and as an explanation for the gap between politicians and the public. One Conservative MP expresses both these sentiments when noting that most people 'have no clue as to how you end up becoming a Member of Parliament or, you know, a member of the cabinet or a prime minister' and that they 'get it when, you know, people are doctors and nurses and policemen and firemen, and so on. There's a career path that they can clearly see, whereas around politics, there's a sort of opaqueness to how people progress.'

Similarly, when discussing their decision to serve in the military and its implications for their subsequent activities, a Royal British Legion volunteer talks about the importance of understanding one's career path for political participation, and how such understanding relates to privilege: 'Like my parents didn't say to me, "Do you want to map out the future in the military?," where a privileged family would say, "This is how you've got to map your life out if you want it to go in a certain direction."' More often, however, activists talk about lack of knowledge in terms of people being unaware of the issues that might motivate them to get

involved. This can be seen as quite a passive lack of awareness, as when an Enrych activist talks about needing to know ‘that people get lonely, and you need people around to be happy’ in order to be motivated to volunteer with elderly people. In other cases, it is viewed as an active lack of awareness, as with the ActionAid activist who thinks that many ‘people live in quite [an] ignorance-is-bliss kind of thing. They bury their head in the sand.’ Sometimes, it is also clear that lack of knowledge is perceived as a barrier even when it is not. A Tate activist explains that in ‘the ad for volunteers, I think it was already written ... that you don’t need to know about [art]. But, again, perhaps people who have this assumption wouldn’t read the ad.’ Similarly, moving to more explicitly political forms of participation, a Plaid Cymru activist also stresses the perceived importance of knowledge: ‘Well, I think some people think that “I don’t know anything about politics, it’s nothing to do with me, and I’m not clever enough to do anything about that, you know.”’ This feeling that one must have appropriate knowledge clearly links to Bourdieu’s sense of being qualified to participate in politics.

The need for knowledge is also reflected in how members of the public speak about politics, with a low-participation member of the public in London indicating the knowledge needed to vote: ‘you just need to know, basically, a party’s policies. Do you believe in it – yes or no? Okay yes, so it’s going to be that person rather than that person.’ Knowledge of the voting system itself can also be important, as stressed by a member of the public in Scotland who says, ‘I’ve spoken to people that are in the polling booths, and people just haven’t got a clue a lot of the time, just what they need to do.’ The need for knowledge also extends from voting to navigating a career in politics, and a member of the public in the North West of England admits, ‘I mean, I don’t even know the process. What do you actually do? Do you just wake up one day and say, “Right, okay, I’m going to get into this. I’m going to be an MP one day.”’ This emphasis on voting and becoming an MP again illustrates that low-participation members of the public tend to focus on the explicitly political task of ‘running the country’. Such politics is clearly perceived as an area in which knowledge of the system is needed in order to participate, whether in the basic act of voting or if one intends to reach the heady heights of elected office.

The kinds of political knowledge that people can lack, and the lack of which can inhibit political participation, are also illustrated by the focus groups. Each one took place after a public political engagement event, so participants often discussed the things they had learned at the event, many of which related to political institutions. For instance, one participant says that they learned ‘about Parliament being kind of divorced from government, and I’ve intertwined the two together and apparently that’s not true’, whilst others mention learning about how early day motions work, the small proportion of members of the House of Lords who are hereditary peers, and efforts to draft a written constitution for the UK. Some

participants also talk about things they do not know, such as the name of their local MP, and one remains uncertain and hesitant about a number of things, including whether the people running the events are 'employed by Parliament or ... the government, and I, I know there's a difference between government ... what is the institution of Parliament – I'm sorry, how is that funded?' There is also a concern expressed about the consequences of lack of knowledge for electoral behaviour, with one participant emphasising that people who complain about government policy 'obviously weren't really paying attention' before voting. Two other participants respond that 'maybe they didn't understand' and 'yeah, I don't think enough people know about it and what it meant'. These comments indicate how gaps in knowledge relating to political institutions, figures, and policies can inhibit participation, and also how knowledge is linked to the idea of being qualified to participate. Most explicitly, one participant says, 'my entire life I've been told that, well, you know that young people should "get into" politics and you should "get into" politics, he should "get into" politics, and I don't, still don't, know after all this time how you can "get into" politics'.

Focus group participants and all types of interviewees also cite lack of interest and having other priorities as constraints on participation. The discussion of disinterest is sometimes marked by the implication that it is an innate characteristic that is difficult or impossible to change. For instance, one participant says that 'there's a, like, a group that just don't want to know, totally disinterested, and you can't reach out to them no matter what'. Another participant comments that the public outreach event they attended before the focus group is 'trying to persuade people who already aren't interested in politics, but surely if you're here you are interested in it'. The idea of disinterest is also reflected in how some low-participation members of the public talk about themselves. One member of the public in the South of England says, 'just, there's no interest. I don't know – I can't explain it'. A member of the public in London is more willing to venture an explanation for her lack of interest: 'I've never had a great interest in it; it's not something that I've had a natural inclination towards'. The same interviewee mentions that she is more interested in travelling, swimming, and reading novels than in politics, and it is clear that she does not have an underlying interest that is constrained by circumstances.

Other low-participation members of the public talk about priorities that act as constraints on their ability to participate. One member of the public in the South of England talks about having no time because she worked multiple jobs for years, including whilst her daughter grew up, and finds it 'so lovely now to know that I've got a weekend, and that's it, my weekend to do what I like'. More explicitly making the link, a member of the public in the North East of England observes that 'if you've been flogging your guts out all day, you don't want to be coming in at night and then going around to a party meeting and sorting things out'. A similar, if somewhat more dramatic, need to prioritise other elements of

one's life is indicated by one focus group's extended discussion of the necessity of keeping a job and not risking it by getting involved in political activity that might be controversial or result in arrest. MPs also talk about people's other priorities, and the point is neatly summarised by a Conservative MP who says that people 'don't need to worry about politics because they've got a job and they've got a house and they've got a family and they've got other more important things to worry about'.

The discussion of people having other priorities also leads some interviewees to describe participation as a luxury. This idea is reflected in the optimistic stance of some interviewees that a lack of participation stems from fewer visible problems in society, and from contentment. This small number of positive comments, however, pales by comparison to the range of negative constraints that are identified. A particularly stark illustration of this is offered by a low-participation member of the public in the North West of England, who is the only interviewee to mention health issues as a constraint on her participation. She emphasises the importance of her migraines, which affect almost every facet of her life:

Sometimes I struggle to look after my kid. I am a single mum. So, sometimes I have, I struggle regularly to just get to places because they come on very suddenly. I like to drive, but I have to rely on public transport, buses, trains, things like that – the wobbling actually makes the migraines; that brings them on. So, I use taxis – it's very, very expensive, and sometimes I have to take my son to school in a taxi and the school is only two minutes away. So, that's how bad it can get. And making plans – I don't make plans. I don't generally make plans to go out or anything like that – it's just how I'm feeling in the day and I just go from there. Which is not always good for my son, and it can get very depressing for myself.

The often personal nature of health issues contrasts with the social nature of the most commonly mentioned constraint on participation: the decline in local communities. Similarly evocatively described, this issue is particularly stressed by focus group attendees and low-participation members of the public. One focus group participant talks about a time in the past when 'the doors were open, kids played out, and it wasn't sort of like ... what we had was a community'. A member of the public in the North West of England also describes the need for local 'togetherness': 'You're not in each other's kitchens all the time, having a cup of tea, but if you wanted to, you could do that and feel no fear about it, you know? It's, "What are you doing?" "Chatting." "Come in, have a cup of tea." That's gone – those days are gone.' The sense of a loss of community is also manifested in people's occasional discussion of feeling alienated or not knowing enough people to get involved in activities. The way that these concerns are spoken about, and the words of the woman describing the impact of her migraines, give us a powerful reminder of the multitude of good reasons, both social and personal, for people not to participate in politics.

Systemic Disincentives to Participation

Whilst constraints on participation often relate to personal interests and circumstances, the disincentives that people talk about tend to focus on institutions and systems. Political structures are clearly the most cited disincentive to participation and are talked about extensively by focus group participants and low-participation members of the public, and to a lesser extent by activists and MPs. At a general level, the problem is succinctly summarised by an SNP MP who characterises politics as ‘men in suits’, a Labour MP who labels it ‘a closed shop’, and a Conservative MP who says, ‘I think the big [disincentive] is just the establishment – how do normal people break into that?’ Another Labour MP speaks about the roots of a system that is designed for deference:

People talk about a halcyon era in participation and a halcyon era of politics and democracy in the UK. I don’t recognise that. I recognise a politics in the 19th and 20th century that was extremely elitist and exclusive, and actively disempowered people because it said that there was a certain group of people who had the right opinions and your job was to find them. It was not to collaborate with them and be part of that.

This view is also reflected in the words of an activist for the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, who argues that people are ‘thoroughly disempowered’ by a system in which ‘their sense of power and influence is that ... the MP is going to pursue’ the issues that they raise. It is also reflected in how low-participation members of the public talk about the political system. One low-participation member of the public in the North East of England stresses the difficulty of changing the political system: ‘it’s a huge problem to fix. It really is absolutely enormous, and you’re up against, as I say, centuries of tradition.’ Another man, in his forties and living in Scotland, notes that he is ‘not particularly happy ... in terms of the political structure of how the country is organised’, whilst other interviewees speak about the problems of centralisation of government at national and local level, and within political parties. People also highlight problems with who is recruited into politics, and a member of the public in London speaks of the need for more people with a ‘street mentality’ in the political system. The sense of politics as ‘men in suits’ is also reflected in the words of a member of the public in the North West of England, who observes that in order to become MPs, people ‘must have support, and that support comes from people with money. And when you have money, you have contacts. And when you have contacts, that’s where it comes into play.’

Focus group participants also emphasise the problems of the political system. One says that the UK’s ‘three- or four-hundred-year-old traditions’ do not ‘really help things’, whilst another, less moderately, says, ‘I’d abolish it, I’d abolish the Parliament all together’ because the ‘country’s still run by the rich for the

rich'. These concerns do not relate only to how Parliament functions, and some participants mention problems in local government, and institutions of the state more widely. One raises the issue of their council having closed meetings to decide where to make budget cuts, whilst another talks about the 'machinery of local party politics' being 'exclusive' and restrictive. Other participants focus on problems with how decisions are made. A particular issue is the power of party whips, with one participant saying that it is 'a real shame that you, you have these whips whipping people or saying "Okay, you've gotta come and say, you've gotta vote for the government", and half the time, do they know what they're voting for?' The same concern leads a participant in another focus group to propose a system of 'independent MPs' and 'open public forums within, within your area where you could actually, you know the, your MP's agenda would be driven by what people there want'. This conception of parties instructing elected representatives how to behave is most succinctly expressed by the participant who says 'once you're in that machine, you know, that's the problem'.

The idea of party machines indicates a malaise with how parties function that is also reflected in negative comments, especially by MPs. One Conservative MP observes that parties 'tend to approach [the public] for a membership [fee]. You know, £25 a year, for which they get very little back in reality other than, you know, more invitations to more things where they have to pay more money.' A number of MPs in the 2010 intake, elected in the wake of the expenses scandal, comment that parties are not keeping up with the changing mentality of the electorate and newer MPs. This is exemplified by a Conservative MP, who argues that 'the new members are much more reflective of what the general public wants, but we're still in the minority, and then the other thing is that the party machines are being left behind, because ... I would argue the change in the way we do politics is accelerating'. The outdated approach of parties is reflected in an anecdote told by another Conservative MP, who was required to wear a suit to his selection but declined the request to take his wife because 'she wasn't standing; I was standing', and whose complementary comments regarding the incumbent MP (from another party) were 'deemed not to fit in with expectations'. Lest we think these issues are only commented on by Conservative MPs, a Liberal Democrat MP recognises that some people prefer to join a campaign organisation than a party to avoid being 'bound ... by their policies and approaches. So, I think that puts people off. And there seem to be boring meetings in small rooms when you could be watching telly, playing golf, whatever.' A Labour MP also says that public disengagement from politics is 'the fault of the political parties', whilst another talks about the need for greater 'democracy and accountability inside a political party, to make sure that those who are in positions where they're representing people are doing so, not just to fulfil their own, kind of, you know, grandiose ambitions'. More broadly, another Labour MP observes that

The left has never been very good at talking about working with people. They always talk about working for people. These poor, benighted people who have been working down the pits. What we ought to do is make sure they have hospitals. Why don't we see what they want to do? Why don't we ask them? Why don't we find ways of working together to get their ideas out of it because, I tell you, when you do, it's a transformative type of politics.

Inflexibility and unresponsiveness also feature in how low-participation members of the public speak about political parties. One low-participation member of the public in Scotland notes that 'it doesn't matter what the individual [MP] does. They're being whipped or they're being told how to vote – it's an irrelevance.' Similarly, a member of the public in the North West of England stresses the need for better representation of people in local communities: 'Because I don't think it's the people sitting up there, I think it's the people here, living around us. That's where it starts. They're supposed to be our voices.'

Problems with Britain's political structures and parties are also reflected in many of the other disincentives to participation that interviewees talk about, first amongst which is the negative behaviour of those involved in politics. Perhaps surprisingly, MPs are the most withering in their comments, which commonly reflect issues including tribalism and the use of inaccessible language. They identify problems including the 'confrontational style of politics,' 'the sheer pettiness' of politicians, parroting of party lines, using 'a hundred words when you can answer the damn question in five,' treating 'going to the constituency like something they have to do three times a year,' and failing to 'appreciate the difficulties that so many people have'. It is remarkable that these descriptions of politics are offered by people who have made it their career, but members of the public are hardly more positive. People with low levels of participation talk about politicians who 'emphatically keep repeating the same thing, and they emphatically keep doing the exact opposite,' or who get away with behaviour that people, 'you know, if they did the same at work, they'd be sacked instantly'. Similarly, whilst some focus group participants talk about positive interactions that they have had, others report negative experiences with MPs 'who you just never saw', who are 'aloof', or who are abrasive when spoken to at surgeries. One participant talks about the response when contacting an MP: 'all you ever get back is a House of Commons letter sent through the post ... just with a basic thing saying I've seen ... I've passed this to the relevant department of the local authority'. This sense that elected representatives do not pay attention to the issues raised by their constituents is most starkly expressed by another participant, who says that 'they don't listen and don't care, so our opinion doesn't really matter about. I mean, I'm interested in it, but nothing I do or say will make any difference.'

MPs' responses to members of the public are also mentioned by MPs themselves, and by low-participation members of the public. A Liberal Democrat MP

recognises that, in the role, 'you have to spread yourself across 60,000 people, and sometimes the experience isn't very personal' but thinks that constituents who contact their MPs are often 'a bit surprised by the sort of level of service and help they can get or the willingness of MPs to engage with them'. By contrast, an SNP MP talks about the way that some MPs

don't seem to get the difficulties that people find themselves in. There seems to be this assumption that they're not working hard enough or they're not trying hard enough, but they're trying a whole lot harder and working a whole lot harder and struggling a whole lot harder than any of them have ever had to do.

This lack of care for people in difficult situations is powerfully illustrated by the low-participation member of the public in the North West of England who suffers from chronic migraines. She sought help from her MP when her benefits were withdrawn, and her story indicates how a poorly handled query from a person in need of assistance can contribute to disengagement from politics:

I was made to go to the local job centre to find a job. And even my own GP couldn't understand how they were doing that. It took two years after court proceedings for me to get back on my benefits. And even after, actually, in one way it worked in my favour, because once I got them, I had all my medical proof and everything, the judge actually ordered not just for me to have my back pay for my benefits but my benefits to be going up, giving me a higher payment. Because there is this thing about illness that bumps up my benefit, they had that in place and I should have been on that from the beginning. But for those couple of years, I was going through absolute turmoil. I wrote to my local MP, and all I got back in return was the fact that, you know, everybody has been affected by the changes that happened.

Negative Images of Politics

There are clear links from the disincentives to participation to the third type of barrier that people speak about: negative images of politics. We can particularly see this in the image of politics as inefficacious or irrelevant. This is embodied in the recognition by MPs that some people think involvement in politics 'doesn't make any odds' or 'doesn't make a blind bit of difference', and in the specific flaws in the political system that they identify. One Labour MP talks about 'silo thinking' in policy-making, which fails to take a holistic view of the interrelated causes of inequality, whilst a Conservative MP condemns the rise of 'retail politics' as 'the antithesis of dealing with the important issues which actually, I think, most people want politicians to do'. This appreciation of the perceived or actual inefficacy of the political system is expressed most eloquently by a Labour MP, who expounds at length on the topic:

It's efficacy. It's actually whether, even if they think that you mean what you want to try and do, you can make it happen because they don't see participation as making it happen and they don't see the structures as being about participation in the first place, and that collapses into a morass of, cynicism is the wrong word for it. I think a default defunctness about it all.

The same MP goes on to differentiate two responses to that sense of inefficacy: challenging the system, and disengaging from it. Both of these responses can also be seen in the ways that low-participation members of the public talk about the inefficacy of the system. Some are clearly angry about specific decisions that have been taken, such as the low-participation member of the public in Scotland who complains about his local council misspending public funds and repeatedly investing in a public infrastructure project despite it being late, over budget, and arguably unnecessary. Frustrations such as these feed a general sense of anger with the political system, expressed by the member of the public in the North West of England: 'They say they want to help with this and they want to do that. You know, I don't see it. I really don't see it.' The view that politics is inefficacious or irrelevant is most succinctly captured by a member of the public in the South of England who, until recently, was a single parent working multiple jobs: 'Whoever is in power, it doesn't seem to change anything for me at all.'¹⁰

Similar sentiments are also expressed by some of the focus group participants, one of whom remarks that 'no matter who's in power, whatever, it's, the status quo, though, it's not gonna change, it's gonna stay constant, no matter what'. Another participant links this general sense of politics being inefficacious to specific acts of contacting politicians: 'all I can do is vote, or send a tweet, or write a letter and then hope that they would read it, but that's really not gonna make a difference'. One participant thinks that perceived inefficacy explains disengagement by the wider public, who 'don't think whatever [politicians are] sayin' is gonna affect their lives on a ... on a personal level, day to day'. Volunteers and activists express similar sentiments, including the Prisoners' Advice Service volunteer who thinks that 'some people just will not be involved in politics at all, because they just feel the politicians won't do anything to help them or they're out of touch with them'. In the words of a Labour Party activist, this leads people to be disillusioned 'because they believe that their wishes are not being heard and the parties don't really listen to them, and they actually don't deliver what they pledge'. Indeed, activists themselves experience this disillusionment, with a William Wilberforce Trust volunteer finding the time it takes to make changes in British politics 'a

¹⁰ The data from the Privilege and Participation Survey corroborates this sense that politics is inefficacious, as shown in online [Appendix B](#).

bit off-putting', and a Housing Justice volunteer expressing scepticism that politicians can deliver change: 'I just don't believe them, because the ideals are totally right but the world is complex and so it can't be delivered.' This recognition of positive motives being constrained again indicates a systemic rather than individual problem, as we saw in the comments regarding political structures acting as disincentives to participation.

Willingness to recognise constraints on politicians indicates nuance in the public's views of politics, which is also reflected in their appraisals of the sources of their views. Sometimes interviewees and focus group participants cite specific examples such as Prime Minister's Questions, but more often they talk about the portrayal of politics on social media, in traditional media, and in the general public discourse. MPs, whilst citing media coverage as a reason for negative views of politics, are keen to stress that all of the blame cannot be pinned on the media. This is exemplified by the Conservative MP who expresses frustration that disagreements within parties and departures from the party line are always presented as splits, and with the traditional refereed 'ding-dong' format of political debates in the media. At the same time, they stress that 'obviously MPs always blame the media, so I'm feeling a bit guilty because we're always attacking the media. But I think the media do have a degree of responsibility.' One focus group had an extended discussion of the role of the media in shaping public opinion by publishing stories that they think 'the majority of the population may want to hear', which causes MPs to think '"we've gotta make a statement; we've gotta do something about it"'. Some low-participation members of the public also recognise that their views of politics are influenced by media coverage but express scepticism about its trustworthiness and the motives behind it. One member of the public in the North West of England encapsulates this view when he says:

Now, how else are we going to know about what goes on? I mean, if that's our only point of reference for anything, then the world's in a bad place anyway, you know? You should always, at least, hear it from the horse's mouth when it comes to stuff, you know, because then you can make a better opinion of it. I mean, the media, they can build up and destroy anyone in a week.

Despite their reservations about the reliability of sources such as the media, interviewees and focus group participants still subscribe to, and express, negative views of politics that are often informed by those sources. Specifically, as we have seen, they do view politics and political participation as inefficacious or irrelevant to their daily lives. Together with the personal constraints and systemic disincentives that they identify, these negative images of politics represent significant barriers to participation, at least in the sense that they are perceived to make participation more difficult or less desirable.

A Participatory Gap and a Perceptual Bridge

Throughout this chapter, we have observed the distinction that interviewees and focus group participants make between more and less explicitly political participation. To a large degree, this distinction also maps on to the distinction between low- and high-intensity forms of participation. These distinctions represent different ends of two dimensions along which all of the types of participation that we have looked at can be arrayed. Generally speaking, people are less likely to engage in either the most explicitly political or highest-intensity types of participation. When we consider support for organisations, we often see that the numbers of people decline as the extent of involvement increases, whether that be in terms of amount of money donated, frequency of volunteering, or the number of ways that people support favoured organisations. Nevertheless, such support reveals widespread but moderate participation through the number of hours that people give when they volunteer, and the length of their memberships. Thus, it is not always the case that a higher intensity of activity is associated with fewer people participating. A great number of people are willing to participate by supporting organisations to a small or moderate extent, and such participation is a relatively common facet of people's lives. We can see from the types of organisations that they support, however, that they tend to be happier directing their support towards causes that are relatively 'non-political', such as health issues and animal welfare.

People's preferences for less explicitly political participation are also observed by the kinds of community volunteering that they talk about, in contrast with the party engagement that MPs are more apt to focus on. Indeed, MPs recognise that even the most active community campaigners often balk at describing their activities as political. This is reflected in the types of political acts that people prefer to undertake, and they engage to a greater degree in individual political acts such as signing petitions or taking online actions, and boycotting products or companies, that can be done in relation to causes that are not explicitly political. Moving towards more explicitly political forms of participation by contacting elected representatives or the media, and even more so by undertaking collective political acts such as protesting and direct action, reduces the number of people who engage in those activities. In line with our expectations, individual, contacting, collective, and charitable activities are related but distinct modes of participation. These are not mutually exclusive modes, and the people who engage in more explicitly political and intense forms of participation are a subset of those who are willing to undertake less political and less intense forms of participation. Thus, despite the vast array of ways for people to participate, we observe a situation in which most individuals do so to a minimal or moderate extent, often preferring the relatively uncontroversial causes highlighted by prominent charities. This leaves the more intense and explicitly political forms of participation to a smaller

subset of dedicated campaigners. The reasons for this decline in involvement as we move towards more explicit and intense forms of participation are almost as numerous as the many forms of participation themselves.

We have observed a host of barriers to participation identified by non-participants, as well as the various personal constraints, systemic disincentives, and negative images of politics that are spoken about by people with widely varying levels of participation. The most common barriers to participation that non-participants identify are lack of time and lack of money. They also commonly identify lack of confidence and the idea that politics is not for 'people like me' as barriers to political acts but not to supporting organisations. Interviewees and focus group participants also talk about lack of time and confidence, as well as knowledge and interest, within the first group of barriers to participation that they identify: personal constraints. These reasons for non-participation tend to function at the individual level and are quite distinct from the second group of barriers that they identify: disincentives to participate. These overwhelmingly focus on flaws in the functioning of political structures, including parties, which are seen as inaccessible, hierarchical, unresponsive and slow to change, promoting deference to elected representatives, and offering very little reward for those who get involved. Add to this list the negative behaviour of some politicians and the disincentives to participate are manifold. They also clearly link to the third group of barriers that people talk about: negative images of politics. These are largely reflected in views of politics as inefficacious or irrelevant, which express a common scepticism about the functioning of the political system and act as a barrier to participation in their own right.

Sometimes negative views of politics stem from dissatisfaction with specific local decisions, and sometimes they stem from a more general sense that nothing ever changes. People are also aware that they are influenced by media coverage and, in that light, sometimes moderate their negative views of politics. Here, as throughout their discussion of the barriers to participation, we see a hopeful commonality: to a great extent, MPs and the public share their analysis of those barriers. Both groups talk about many of the same personal constraints that make participation difficult, and despair at the flaws in existing political structures, whilst identifying similar negative images of politics and their sources. Thus, this is an area in which MPs are doing a good job of reflecting the views of the public, and this might provide grounds for a shared approach to overcoming some of the barriers to participation that people face. The commonalities in the barriers to participation that are identified by different groups give them additional weight, underlining the importance of considering them alongside the factors that we investigate in the coming chapters. Like some of the barriers identified in this chapter, people's stocks of capital and perceptions of privilege may relate to their background characteristics and help us to understand differences in how people

participate, and the extent to which they do so. Indeed, many of the forms of capital that we consider relate to some of the barriers that people talk about. For instance, economic capital can shape the amount of spare time that people have available, whilst cultural capital encompasses knowledge of politics. Similarly, perceptions of privilege in politics relate to the people's sense of whether politicians are like them, and thus whether politics is for people like them. As such, the [next chapter](#) considers how economic, social, and cultural capital are distributed in the population and spoken about by people, and the following chapter does the same for perceptions of privilege. This allows us, subsequently, to investigate whether such factors are related to political participation.

Economic, Social, and Cultural Capital

The Many Forms of Capital

Capital, in its many forms, is all around us in our daily lives. From the money in our bank accounts to the friends who we message and the things we learn when we watch the news, we are constantly accumulating and using capital. In each case, it can be seen as a resource at our disposal: we can spend money, ask friends for help, or use knowledge of current affairs to answer questions. Of course, this does not mean that we spend our whole lives thinking in terms of resources: we also do jobs because we enjoy them, stay in touch with friends because we like them, and watch the news because we take satisfaction from knowing what is going on in the world. However, whether or not we think of them as such, our stocks of economic, social, and cultural capital embody key components of structural privilege that can facilitate political participation. That is to say that capital enables participation in a range of social contexts, including political ones, and both reflects and sustains privilege.

As this chapter shows, each form of capital is multifaceted, from the distinction between income and wealth in economic capital to the features of social capital relating to status, size, and strength of our networks, and the numerous different activities and tastes that reflect our cultural capital. We will examine these many facets of the capital that people hold and also the ways in which they talk about them. In relation to economic capital, we look at people's incomes, ease of paying bills, the benefits they receive, and their property ownership, finding that most people have moderate amounts of economic capital, but that significant minorities struggle with too little to get by comfortably. We also find that the facets of economic capital that people talk about are money and work, and to a lesser extent time and housing. Despite economic capital being less multifaceted than its social and cultural counterparts, it is the form that interviewees and focus group participants make most reference to. This indicates the particular importance of economic capital to people as well as its prominent role in narratives about privilege.

In terms of social capital, we consider the statuses of people's acquaintances, as well as the size, intensity, homogeneity, and strength of their social networks. We see that there is a tendency for people to have acquaintances from particular subsets of occupational statuses but also to maintain networks with people from diverse occupations. We also observe that people have small numbers of close friends but maintain larger and looser, but homogeneous, networks of acquaintances. They spend more time and effort on their close relationships and, perhaps in return, can generally rely on the strength of those ties when they need help from family and friends. When people speak about social capital, they focus on the importance of informal networks of friends and acquaintances, and to a lesser extent on more formal associations. Both of these are less common features of how people talk about privilege than their economic and cultural counterparts.

Turning to informal cultural capital, we focus on people's activities outside the home, what they like to do on holiday, and their tastes in relation to food, music, and films. We find distinct sets of pastimes relating to legitimate cultural performances, exhibitions, entertainment-orientated shows, and consumption-based activities, the latter of which are by far the most popular. There is also a group of holiday activities focused on experiencing and learning about local culture that distinguishes a subset of the population. Similarly, there are subsets of the population with tastes for world cuisine, and for blockbuster or educational films, whereas tastes for musical genres tend to be constrained and unrelated to each other. Despite these tendencies, people talk very little about tastes and pastimes as components of cultural capital, and focus instead on the importance of institutionalised cultural capital in the form of education. When they do talk about pastimes and tastes, they tend to draw a boundary between legitimate and popular culture, and also to talk about the importance of language in distinguishing privileged from less privileged people. However, their focus is clearly on the importance of education, especially private schooling and universities. Whilst recognising the role of these institutions in reproducing privilege, they remain ambivalent towards them. Many people do, however, see such institutionalised cultural capital as an asset that assists people over their lives. This sense extends to other types of capital, stocks of which are also viewed as resources that make people's lives easier.

Economic Capital

Words such as resources, assets, and stocks can be used to describe all three forms of capital but are most readily associated with the economic form. Economic capital can be earned, accumulated, held, invested, and expended, and is often used as a metric of a person's place in society. Whilst it is thought of in terms of income and wealth, the latter including property ownership, it is more multifaceted than

this and also encompasses debts and ease of paying them, and support received from the state. These components of economic capital are related to each other because greater income tends to lead to the accumulation of assets, and thus wealth, which translates into less need for state support and lower debt or greater ease in paying for it. However, these things are also distributed in distinct ways such that possessing one type of economic capital is not always associated with possession of other types. For example, someone who bought a three-bedroom house in the South of England in the 1970s and now lives on a modest pension might have considerable wealth but below average income. By contrast, someone in London who is in the fifth year of their career after graduating from a professional postgraduate degree might have higher than average income but lots of debt and no immediate prospect of getting on to the property ladder, meaning that they have little or no wealth.

As [Figure 5.1](#) shows, the different facets of economic capital are indeed differently distributed, though we see minorities at the extremes of the distributions in each case. In other words, most people have a little or a comfortable amount of economic capital but smaller groups of people are very poor or very rich. This commonality means that all of the measures of economic capital can be summarised by a single index.¹ The general tendency for most people to have moderate amounts of economic capital can be seen in relation to household income (panel A), in which the most selected categories are £15,000–£19,999 (12.4 per cent) and £15,000–£29,999 (12.1 per cent), and more than half of people (52.0 per cent) have household incomes between £15,000 and £39,999.² Meanwhile, less than a fifth of people (18.2 per cent) have household incomes below £15,000, and around one in three (29.8 per cent) have household incomes of £40,000 or above. Middling levels of economic capital are also manifested in the more than three quarters (77.6 per cent) of people who have no or only occasional difficulties keeping up with their bills (panel B), meaning that a large majority of people are managing to stay on top of their finances. Nevertheless, this still means that one in five people (20.5 per cent) constantly struggle to keep up with their financial obligations or, worse, are already falling behind or having financial problems. This is a sizeable minority of the population, and the impact of such financial hardship on their daily lives should not be underestimated.³

In recognition of the financial burdens faced by many in the population, the state in the United Kingdom offers a range of benefits that are related to economic

¹ This index is based on the process of factor analysis outlined in online [Appendix A](#).

² At least some respondents did not provide answers in relation to each of the variables indicating economic capital, with the smallest number of missing values ($n = 9$) relating to the number of types of property owned. The largest number of missing values relates to household income, for which a quarter of respondents ($n = 343$) did not provide an answer. This may reflect a particular hesitance to share income information, which can be seen as private, or the cognitive difficulty of estimating gross annual income at the household level.

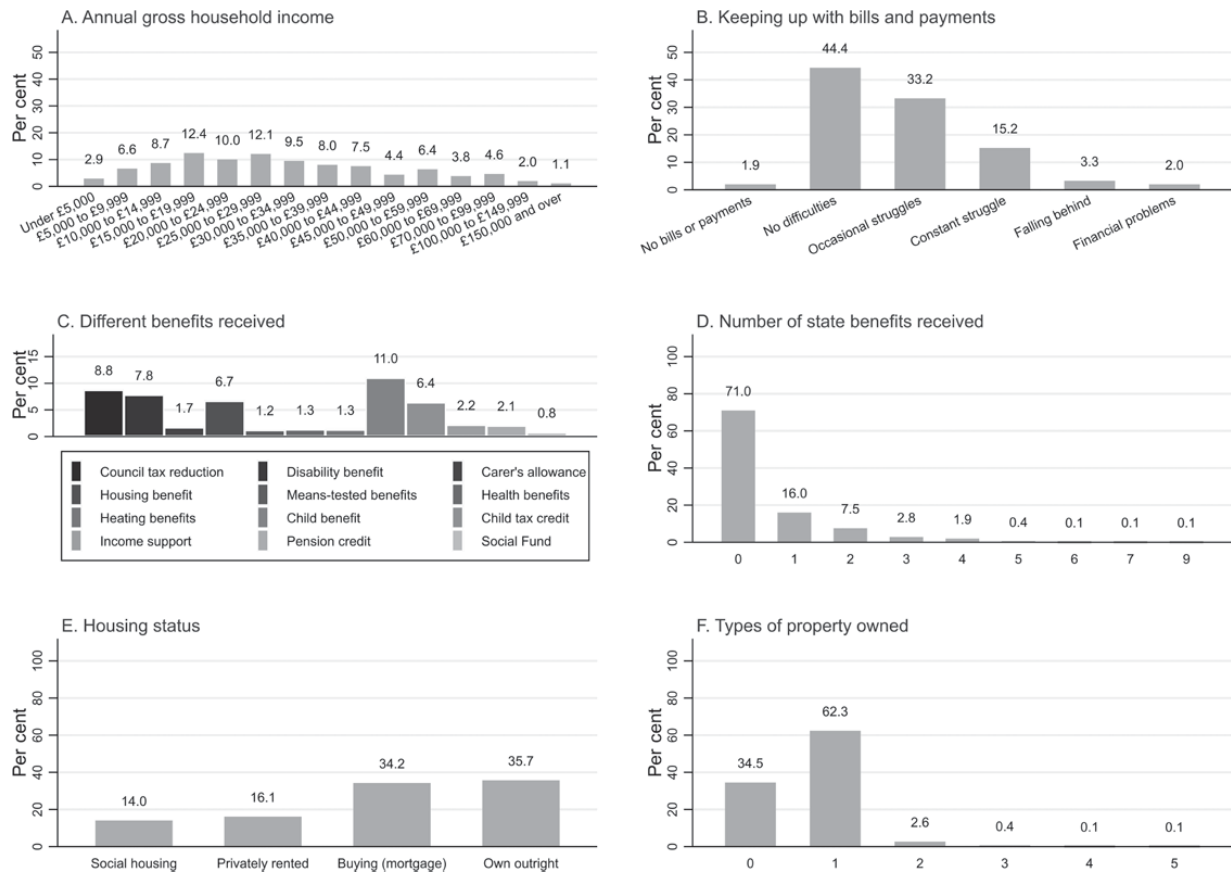


Figure 5.1 Economic capital

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,062–1,405

need or other circumstances. Such benefits can be taken as an indicator of (a lack of) economic capital because they are often designed to help people meet their basic needs or are targeted towards people who face particular demands on their finances, for instance relating to children, old age, or disability. Of the 12 benefits that the Privilege and Participation Survey data cover (panel C), only child benefit is claimed by more than one in ten people (11.0 per cent), whilst council tax reductions, disability benefit, housing benefit, and child tax credit are each claimed by between one in ten and one in 15 people. Of those five, only housing benefit is means-tested, whilst the remaining four relate to circumstances that often entail additional financial burdens but do not necessarily indicate hardship. Nevertheless, we can assume that receipt of multiple benefits is likely to indicate somewhat straightened economic circumstances. Counting the number of benefits that people receive (panel D), we can see that seven in ten (71.0 per cent) receive no benefits and a further one in six (16.0 per cent) receive one. The distribution then declines as the number of benefits received increases, and around one in eight people (12.9 per cent) receive two or more benefits. As with ability to keep up with bills and payments, the data on benefits indicates that most people generally have enough economic capital to get by, but a notable minority face economic difficulties.

Turning to wealth, most people own an important and, in the context of the United Kingdom, widely held asset: their home (panel E). Seven in ten people (69.9 per cent) either have a mortgage (34.2 per cent) or own their home outright (35.7 per cent), whilst the remaining three in ten either rent privately (16.1 per cent) or from a social housing provider (14.0 per cent). Given that social housing is allocated on the basis of a series of criteria relating to need, it is generally the case that those who live in such properties are not rich in economic capital. Thus, again, we see a sizeable minority who are in particular economic need, whilst the majority of the population have enough to get by or even accumulate wealth. However, that accumulation does not extend to the purchase of additional property. When asked whether they own residential property with a mortgage, residential property outright, buy-to-let property, land, or commercial property, only one in 30 (3.2 per cent) indicate ownership of more than one type. Of those who own land or commercial property, many may need to do so for businesses

³ Part of the story of keeping up with financial obligations is perceptual, which is to say that two people with identical incomes and outgoings might place themselves in different categories in terms of how easy they find it to keep up with their bills and debt payments. Each of the other indicators of economic capital is weakly negatively correlated with reported ability to keep up with bills and debts, such that those with more of each other type of economic capital tend to feel more able to keep up with their financial obligations. However, the weak correlations show that the perceptual component of keeping up is also important. Further, we should bear in mind that feeling that one is struggling, which might have roots in earlier life experiences, is an important burden in addition to the material impact of having less economic capital.

that they run, such as a farm or a shop. Thus, owning property that one can simply rent or sell to maximise returns is a luxury that is beyond the reach of most.

The importance of owning one's home is reflected in the frequency with which focus group participants and, especially, interviewees talk about it. Discussion of the topic in the focus groups largely centres on problems with housing policy, whereas interviewees are more apt to talk about having a home as a feature of privilege. This view is expressed by volunteers and activists, MPs, and low-participation members of the public. For example, an Enrych volunteer notes that 'sometimes it's a privilege to have a roof over my head', whilst a British Museum volunteer describes privilege as 'having a nice company car, big house'. A Labour MP develops this point:

those who have got a family foot in the door with significant property assets are advantaged in so many ways, um, whether they are inheriting a share from Granny in order to pay off their student debt, or to give them their first deposit, and get them on the housing ladder, which is increasingly impossible for those who have no assets.

One member of the public from London talks extensively about this advantage, and notes that 'all my friends for example, they own their own houses. My parents, they've never owned a house – it's been mostly council.' This leads them to argue that 'the one silver lining for me is when I do finally get there I can sort of lay back and think, "Oh, not one person really helped me with this. I did this all myself."' Here we can see that the kind of property one lives or grew up in holds wider implications for the kind of life that one has. These implications can be closely related to people's class identities, as when a UKIP volunteer says, 'I came from a working-class family, grew up on a council estate', and a Liberal Democrat MP emphasises their modest but middle-class upbringing by noting that 'we lived in our own house – we didn't live on a council estate'. Such shorthand phrases can be overused, however, leading one member of the public from London to observe that 'I get bored of hearing the old, "Oh, I've come from a council estate", because that gets old as well, doesn't it.'

Like housing, the way that people talk about their work also has implications for class and status identity. This is often the case when people mention their upbringings and the work that their parents did, for instance when an Evangelical Alliance volunteer says:

I guess, average beginnings really. I mean, my father worked for WH Smith – he was manager of a local branch. He had very little education due to health problems in his childhood, but he had a reasonably good job. My mother also worked in the retail trade. So, we certainly didn't come from the top of the ladder.

The centrality of work to people's lives is expressed by a low-participation member of the public from the South of England. She gives a potted history of her employment and how it was changed by becoming a parent and going through a divorce:

'I was a nurse for about 25 years. Then I was a driving instructor for about five years. Then I was out of work due to the divorce and having a baby. Then got back into work doing mainly office work.' Here, work is talked about in very practical terms, as a necessity fitted around the other events in her life. This links to the importance of spare time as a component of economic capital. The amount of time that people have to dedicate to political activities, should they wish to, is significantly affected by how much they have to work and whether they are paid enough not to have to expend further time and energy worrying about making ends meet. This is highlighted by a Housing Justice volunteer who says that 'I'm from a position in society where I have enough time to spend [volunteering]. I don't have to work two jobs on the minimum wage to feed myself. I've got enough time to put into things, and I think it's important that people find something to ... fill their life.' By contrast, the woman who described her changing career also stresses the inflexibility of her work schedule. In doing so, she highlights the links between work, money, and time:

up until about a year ago, I had a weekend job. A couple of years before that I had three jobs. I just literally was working full-time during the week, and then I had two weekend jobs for a long time. It was the only way I could manage financially. So, there was just no time to do anything at all. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't do it.

More than just a resource that enables activities, this highlights that money, or at least a certain amount of it, is a necessity and must be prioritised at the expense of other things such as spare time. At the same time, money is also used by many people to express their experiences and identities in a way that positions them within society. Specifically, people are keen to establish themselves in the middle of society's distribution: not too poor but also not too rich. This is a particularly common feature of how volunteers and activists talk about themselves when discussing why some people participate and others do not, and whether privilege could account for that. We can see this when an Evangelical Alliance volunteer says, 'I've always been reasonably well off without being, you know, in the, kind of, super tax bracket.' The similarity of these words with how other volunteers and activists describe themselves is remarkable: an Enrych volunteer says, 'I'm not rich. I'm not poor'; an ActionAid volunteer notes of their family that 'we're not filthy rich, but it's not too much of a struggle'; and a Housing Justice volunteer talks about their 'solid middle-class upbringing. Not massively wealthy but certainly by no means struggling.' The experience of being in the 'comfortable middle' of society is expanded upon by a Liberal Democrat MP who describes their upbringing as one in which they could

Go to bed each night knowing there's food in the fridge as it is now, larder as it was when I was growing up because we didn't have a fridge. The notion that I had clean clothes to put on in the morning, that I wouldn't go hungry, I wouldn't go cold. And

that my parents had a job and money was coming in – we were comfortable without being stinking rich.

The role of economic capital in people's backgrounds, as distinct from their current circumstances, is also talked about by numerous interviewees and focus group participants. A host of volunteers and activists recognise the importance of growing up in a family that has money, from the Science Museum volunteer who describes privilege as 'being born into money' to the UKIP activist who identifies privilege as growing up 'never having to worry about financial issues, never having to, it does come down to money doesn't it, somebody who hasn't had to struggle for a living probably'. Low-participation members of the public also talk about the implications of coming from a family that has money. Some are concerned with specific consequences of such backgrounds, such as the low-participation member of the public in London who notes that there are people who 'don't need to worry about paying the rent or these things, perhaps'. Others emphasise how privileged backgrounds link economic and cultural capital, particularly with reference to education. One member of the public in the South of England summarises this perspective particularly well when she describes a privileged person as someone who is 'born into a wealthy family. They're able to attend private schools, they don't have to go to a 9 to 5 job like the rest of us. They can indulge whatever interest they've got.'

Whilst many recognise that having money affords opportunities to pursue one's interests, there are others who stress that money does not buy happiness. A British Museum volunteer talks about how 'some people see my friend's father as having a nice company car, big house, but when I see how stressed he is, that doesn't seem like he's a privileged person', whilst a William Wilberforce Trust volunteer speaks in more general terms: 'You might meet someone who was brought up in a very well-off family, like, they might be the most miserable person you've ever met.' Concomitantly, there are some people who argue that there are benefits to struggling to get by. This is best exemplified by the low-participation member of the public in the North West of England, who says:

I wouldn't want anybody to be absolutely poor. But to be able to manage day to day to what you have, to work around. You know, that's an achievement. That's how I see it. That's a credit to the person. If everything is just easy for you and, you know, just handed to you, spoon-fed as they say, I mean what do you learn?

By contrast with such life lessons, others emphasise the negative impact of not having enough money. One focus group participant talks about his niece, who earns

three pounds 50 an hour, and yet when I was her age I was lookin' to move out of home. She's never gonna be able to do that ... on three pound 50 an hour. She, and then when she gets to 18 or 19, six pounds an hour – good god, you know it's like where can they go?

This is a common theme in the focus groups, and another participant talks about their own experience of doing an apprenticeship in which they were 'gettin' about 55 quid a week after travelling'. Participants also mention how difficult it is to live on the minimum wage or having to work long hours to make ends meet, and therefore having no time for family. Thus, despite some recognition of the achievement of getting by with little economic capital, most people who talk about it emphasise the hardship and difficulty that results from not having enough.

Overall, we see some overlap between the kinds of economic capital that the Privilege and Participation Survey asked about and the kinds of economic capital that people talk about. The survey results show that most people have a moderate amount of each type of economic capital but that there are significant minorities with much more or much less than average. This is the case in terms of income, ability to keep up with bills, state benefits received, and home ownership, whilst owning additional properties is removed from the other types in its rarity. Most of these elements of economic capital are also talked about by people, though they place a particular emphasis on the importance of home ownership and work. The latter is often closely linked to class identities, and people also use money as an indicator of status, asserting their place in the 'comfortable middle'. As well as identity implications, people talk about the material implications of money and work, and they emphasise how both things impact on the availability of time to do things that they enjoy or value. They also recognise the struggles that can stem from a lack of money and the concomitant link between having economic capital and being privileged. Thus, people speak about many of the facets of economic capital that the survey asked about and, when they do so, emphasise that such capital is a desirable asset and a facet of privilege.

Social Capital

The Privilege and Participation Survey measured five elements of social capital: the status, size, intensity, homogeneity, and strength of people's social networks. Those elements are distinct from each other,⁴ though they all reflect the nature of the social capital that is held and what people can expect from their networks. Starting with status, someone who is part of a network that includes CEOs, journalists, and barristers inhabits a very different milieu, and probably has quite different social experiences, from someone who is part of a network that includes electricians, bus drivers, and shop workers. The occupations of people who know each other have implications beyond their shared or distinct experiences of working life and relate to the knowledge and skills that are prevalent in the network. In other words, one might hope to gain different sorts of assistance from a friend

⁴ This is confirmed by the process of factor analysis outlined in online [Appendix A](#).

who is a doctor than from a friend who is a builder. It is also the case, as [Figure 5.2](#) (panel A) shows, that some widespread types of occupation are particularly prevalent in social networks. Almost three quarters of people (73.1 per cent) know someone who is a professional employed by the state, such as a teacher or a nurse, whilst two thirds (65.8 per cent) know someone who is in a technical or skilled manual occupation, such as a mechanic or a plumber.

More widely, all of the occupational types asked about are known by sizeable groups of people. More than half of people (55.8 per cent) know someone in a traditional profession such as a solicitor or accountant, in a clerical or administrative occupation such as a secretary or office clerk (55.3 per cent), in a semi-routine service occupation such as sales or a catering assistant (53.4 per cent), or who is unemployed (52.8 per cent).⁵ Between a third and half of people have acquaintances in each of the other types of occupation, and only technical professionals such as engineers or scientists (30.0 per cent) and senior managers (29.1 per cent) fall slightly below this. Thus, it is not the case that a small number of occupational types is very widely known whilst others are known by almost no one. Indeed, more than half of people (54.5 per cent, panel B) have acquaintances from between five and ten different types of occupation. On average, people know between six and seven different occupational types (mean = 6.6), but the flat distribution shows that there is quite a lot of variation in this number. There are small numbers of people who know very few or very many occupational types, but a large majority of people have acquaintances in at least a few different occupations. Some types of occupational acquaintances are associated with others, as indicated in the shading in the upper half of [Figure 5.2](#) (panel A).⁶ There are three broad groups of associated occupations: manual (dark grey), service (medium grey), and professional (light grey). Thus, whilst people have acquaintances with differing occupational statuses, they also tend to have a degree of homogeneity in their social networks.

The size of our social networks is important for things like how many people we can ask for help from, how many different influences we have in our lives, and how likely we are to meet new people. [Figure 5.3](#) shows that almost three quarters of people (73.6 per cent) have two or fewer friends who they speak to daily (panel A), but this figure falls to half of people (50.3 per cent) in relation to friends spoken to weekly (panel B), and to four in ten (39.5 per cent) for friends spoken to monthly (panel C). In other words, people have small numbers of close friends and larger numbers of friends who they are less close to, or at least less in contact with. This tendency to have greater numbers of looser social contacts is also

⁵ Although the question specifically asked whether people know someone who has 'No job (long-term unemployed)', it is possible that some people include homemakers and retired people in this category.

⁶ Again, this is confirmed by the process of factor analysis outlined in online [Appendix A](#).

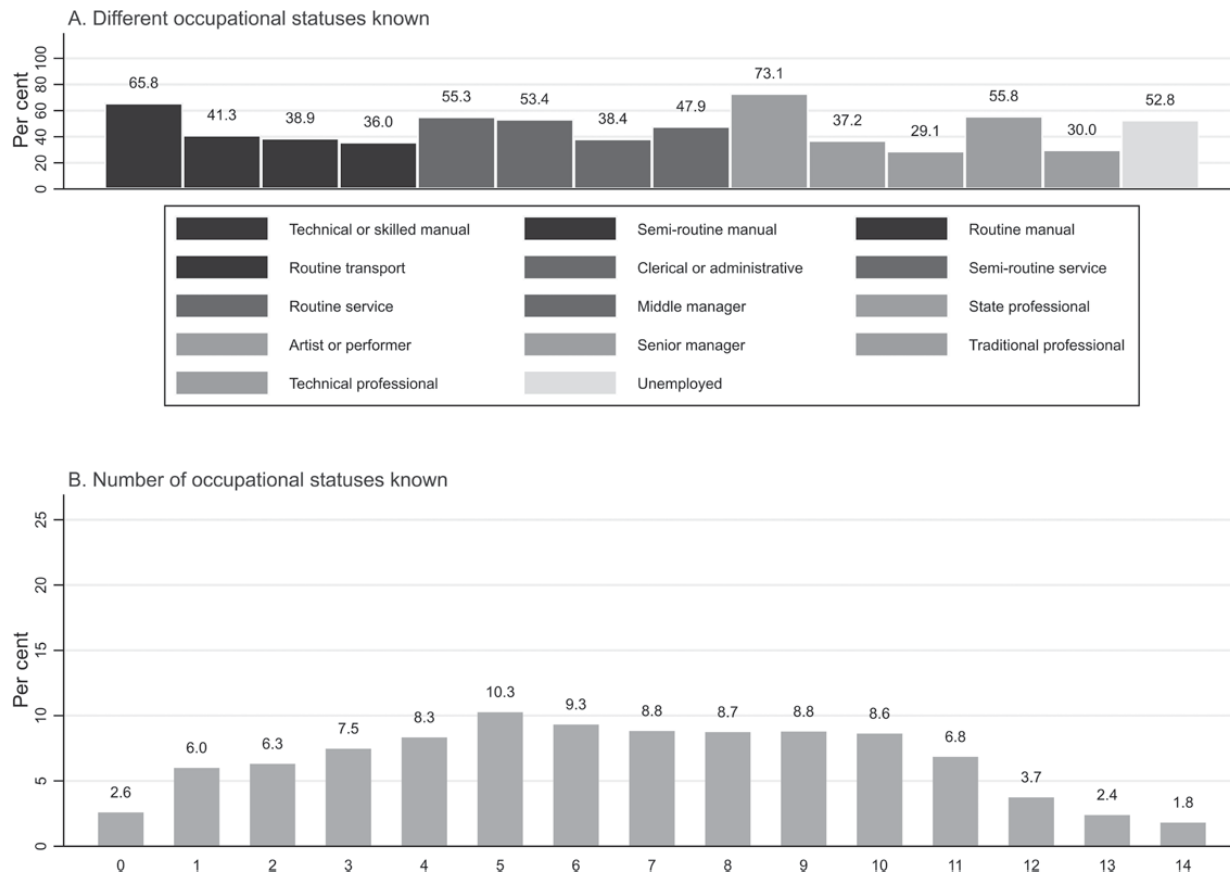


Figure 5.2 Occupational statuses of acquaintances

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,405

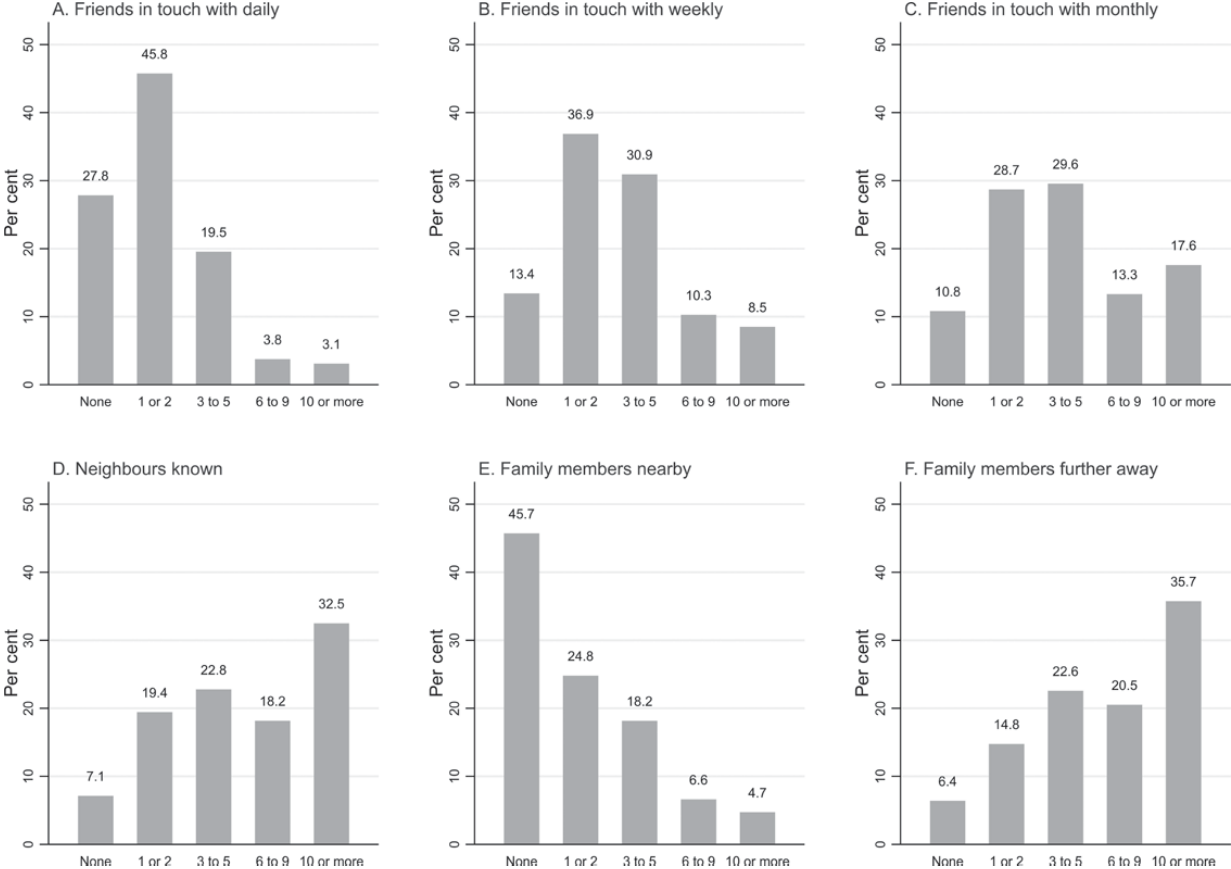


Figure 5.3 Size of social network
Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,405

reflected in how many of their neighbours people know (panel D), with half (50.7 per cent) indicating that they know at least six of the people who live near them. Thus, most people are embedded in moderate or large networks of neighbours and loose friends, with smaller numbers of close friends who they see or talk to frequently. This trend is also reflected in relation to family networks. Seven in ten people (70.5 per cent) have two or fewer family members who live nearby, whilst almost eight in ten (78.8 per cent) have three or more family members who live further away.⁷ The greater size of more distant social networks is notable because it is often through these looser connections that requests, ideas, and trends pass, leading some to emphasise the ‘strength of weak social ties’ (Granovetter, 1973).

The strength of weak ties can be seen when we turn to the intensity of social networks, or how active they are, as shown in Figure 5.4. We begin with the frequency with which people talk to their neighbours (panel A), which six in ten people (60.0 per cent) do at least once a week. This is more than twice the number who see friends at home (29.1 per cent, panel B) or go out with them (25.6 per cent, panel C) at least once a week. Of course, these are rather distinct forms of interaction, and exchanging a few polite words with a neighbour involves rather less commitment than going out for a meal with friends. Nevertheless, it is clear that people have many weak social ties and that they expend at least some effort to sustain them. They expend the least effort in socialising with their colleagues (panel D), and almost half of people (47.9 per cent) never do so. That includes people who do not work and therefore cannot socialise with colleagues,⁸ but we can also see that the distribution declines as the frequency of social interaction with colleagues increases. Within those who socialise with colleagues at all, a majority (66.0 per cent, or 34.4 per cent of people overall) do so a few times a year at most. Although many people see their colleagues on a regular basis in the workplace, the minimal level of socialising outside work is again reflective of the prevalence of loose social networks. People know a lot of people, perhaps quite well, and interact with many of them frequently, but they tend to go beyond standard daily conversations on a less frequent basis. Unsurprisingly, they prefer to focus more of their social energy on their close friendships.

Beyond status, size, and intensity, the diversity of our social networks matters because it affects the range of ideas, experiences, and requests that we are exposed to, as well as the different types of support that we can ask for. As Figure 5.5 shows, most people are part of rather homogeneous friendship groups in terms of gender, religion, and especially ethnicity. On average, people indicate that almost two

⁷ Nearby is defined as within a 15–20-minute walk or a 5–10-minute drive.

⁸ We can assume that if people stay in touch with former colleagues socially, such relationships are likely to constitute friendships.

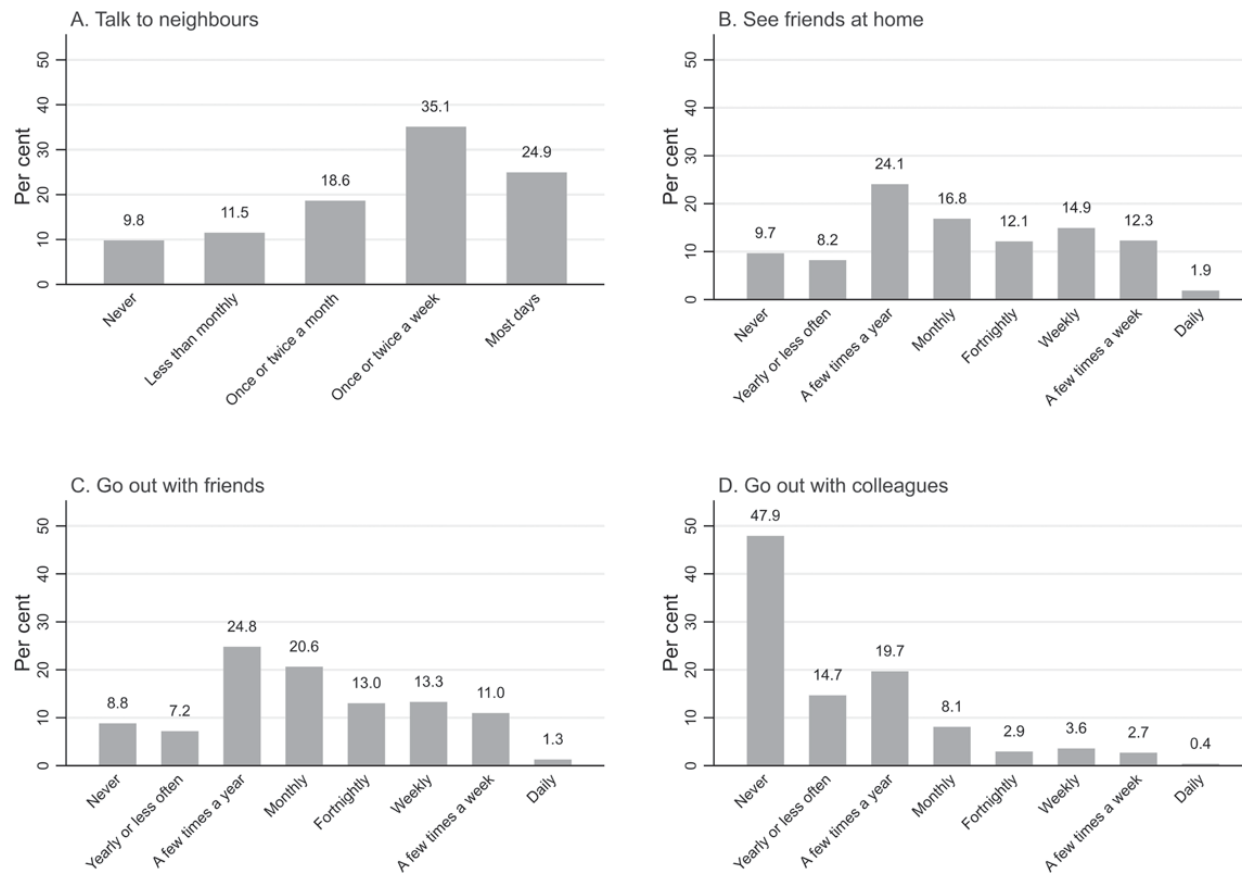


Figure 5.4 Frequency of social interactions

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,405

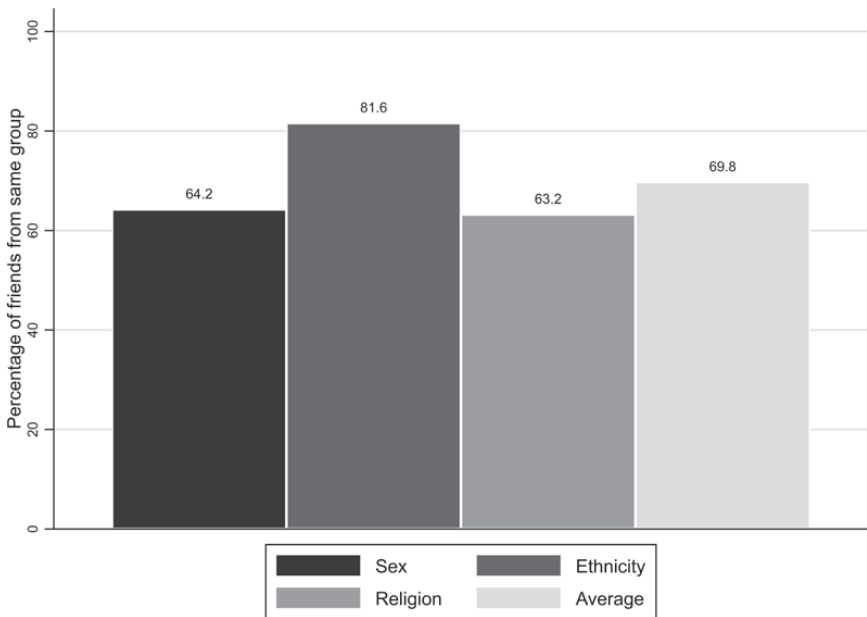


Figure 5.5 Homogeneity of social network

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,316–1,340

thirds of their friends (64.2 per cent) share their gender, a similar proportion (63.2 per cent) share their religion, and four fifths (81.6 per cent) share their ethnicity. Given people’s propensity to overestimate the prevalence of minority groups (Duffy, 2019; Kahneman, 2011), we can assume that, if anything, they understate the homogeneity of their friendship networks. Thus, people tend to have homogeneous social networks in at least three regards, meaning that they are likely to be exposed to familiar ideas, experiences, and requests, and to be able to draw on support from people who are similar to themselves in those regards.

The final component of social capital that we consider, strength of one’s network, can be measured with reference to help received from the people we know. This might take the form of putting in a good word with a potential employer, assisting with packing and unpacking when moving home, taking care of children, reviewing a curriculum vitae, or providing a loan in an emergency. Figure 5.6 shows how many of 13 different types of help people have received from their partner(s) (panel A), family (B), friends (C), family friends (D), and colleagues (E). It is clear that people are more apt to draw on help from their family and friends than from family friends or colleagues. More than half of people (56.5 per cent) have received at least three different forms of help from their family, and a similar percentage (52.0 per cent) have received at least two forms of help from

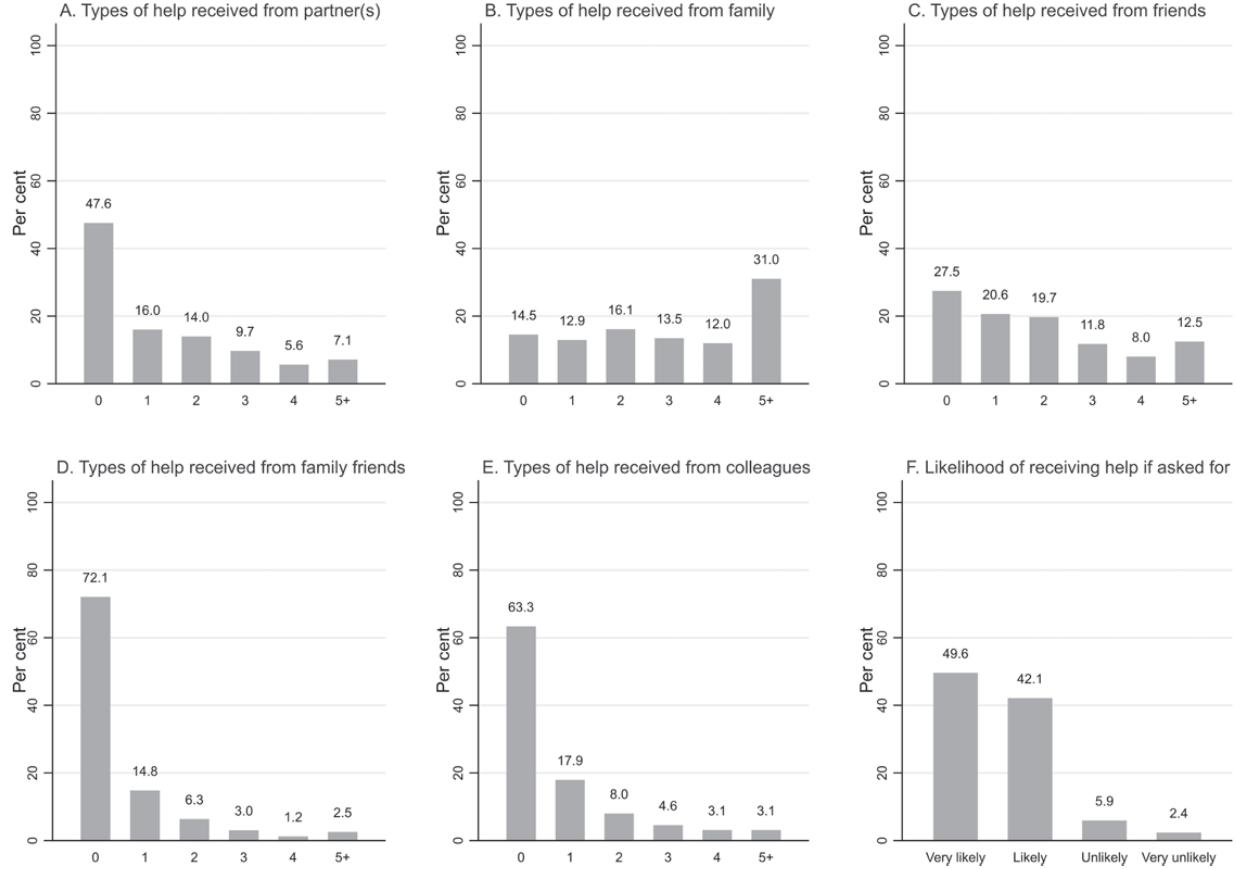


Figure 5.6 Strength of social network
Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,405

their friends. By contrast, approaching nine in ten people (86.9 per cent) have received one or fewer forms of help from family friends, whilst the figure is eight in ten (81.2 per cent) for colleagues.

Help received from partners falls between these extremes, and slightly less than two thirds of people (63.6 per cent) have received one or fewer forms of help from someone they are in a relationship with. This small amount of help, when compared to that received from family and friends, may reflect the fact that these types of help are often an intrinsic part of relationships. For instance, a couple can pool their financial resources to purchase a home, or can share childcare responsibilities, but might not think of these things as helping each other because they are integral to the relationship. However, people can and do draw on help from at least two close social networks, in the shape of family and friends. This is reflected in their perceptions of the likelihood that they would receive help if needed (panel F). Nine in ten people (91.7 per cent) think that they are very likely or likely to receive help if they asked for it, leaving a small minority in the invidious position of not feeling able to rely on help from social networks. By contrast, a different small minority are in the fortunate position of being able to draw on help from family friends and colleagues as well as family and friends.

We can see the importance of social networks, and the requests for help that they facilitate, in the ways that volunteers and activists talk about how they ended up in their positions. The clearest example of this is the ActionAid volunteer who recognises that they were ‘probably lucky to get [their] position’ because they ‘met up with someone who I knew who worked here, and she happened to pick up the job description on her way out of the office that day’. Interviewees and focus group participants also mention the importance of social ties, either in their own lives or more generally. A UKIP activist notes that they have been lucky to have close and supportive family living nearby, and a low-participation member of the public from London talks about how their parents have always inhabited a ‘tight-knit community’ in London where people ‘helped one another’. The importance of local community, the decline of which was identified as a barrier to participation in the last chapter, is reflected in the discussion between three participants in a focus group:

First participant:	What you think of, like, you go back to the 1940s, 50s, what you think about as like a, a northern working-class community ... that doesn't exist anymore. Does not exist.
Second participant:	I mean even when I was ... when I was growing up it was like I lived on a, on terraced street in [my home town] and, I knew everybody in that street, from an early age ...
Third participant:	You don't get that now.

Second participant: And they were always aunts and uncles even though they weren't but it was, you know, the doors were open, kids played out, and it wasn't sort of like, oh what a halcyon happy, it was, but it was a, what we had was a community.

There is a clear sense of nostalgia in the above discussion, which suggests an intrinsic value to community and social connections. However, social capital also has significant material implications that are illustrated by a William Wilberforce Trust volunteer who talks about the importance of having 'family, or something like that, support network, of friends to take you in' to avoid homelessness, before noting that 'I'm living at my parents' house right now because I don't have enough money to move out. If I didn't have my parents, I don't know what I'd do, you know?' The presence of this safety net illustrates how social capital, as well as economic capital, can function as a component of privilege. This is further indicated by the Science Museum volunteer who describes privilege as 'knowing the right person,' a point that is developed further by a member of the public from London: 'If you're friends with someone who owns a publishing company or whatever, it may be then it's very easy to get [a journalism] internship ... Then easy to get a job from there ... It's not based on what you can do, it's based on who you know.'

The link between social capital and finding work is also related to the cultural capital embodied in education, and especially private education. The role of elite private schools in sustaining the link between social and economic capital is highlighted by an Enrych volunteer who talks about how students at Eton can approach their friends' fathers in order to find internships and jobs. This point is also developed by a low-participation member of the public from the South of England who talks about watching a documentary about Harrow School:

There was a very telling scene at the end of the series, where old Harrovians came back to the school to meet the ones who were about to leave. Job offers were just laid out on a plate for them, you know? That still goes on, obviously. So, I think, you know, if you do come from that kind of background, you move in those circles, and then those contacts are made. Like, they showed so clearly in that programme that, you know, you can walk into a job that the rest of us wouldn't have a chance of getting. Just because you went to the right school.

The link between elite education and social networks also extends to universities. A Labour MP notes that the array of student societies at their local Russell Group university is much larger than at their local post-92 university and that this affords students at the former institution additional experiences and opportunities. Here, we also start to see the importance of formalised networks based around associations or organisations. Interviewees and focus group participants talk about formal associations less than informal social networks but mention the

importance of two types in particular: youth organisations and churches. A Royal British Legion volunteer notes the importance of two organisations in shaping their childhood experiences: 'we all, even as children, we all were in the Scouts and the Cubs and so on and so forth. So that all brings you into the uniformed society.' Similarly, a member of the public from the West Midlands talks about how they acted as treasurer of a Young Farmers' organisation when they were growing up, which helped them get their first job. In both cases, youth organisations had significant implications for their future careers and lives. Involvement in churches can have similar implications, as when a UKIP activist talks extensively about exploring their faith and engaging with various churches and evangelical organisations, and how this process was closely related to the development of their political involvement.

A Liberal Democrat MP links the roles of youth organisations and churches when talking about how their involvement in both led them to meet a barrister who provided the reference for their first job. This again indicates how consequential such associations can be for people's subsequent lives. Indeed, these are classic examples of social capital in action: being part of formal and informal networks delivers the connections that result in help and support when finding employment, and the requests that prompt one to participate in other activities, whether political or not.

Social networks are not always so instrumental, and a low-participation member of the public from the North West of England talks about their positive experiences of youth clubs without those experiences having any particular implications for their subsequent life: 'When I was growing up, I probably went to about four youth clubs, at least three in a week. So, different areas, so obviously I'd have different groups of friends. Well, mainly, one group of friends would go to those three different youth clubs, you know? It was great, because it kept people off the streets.' Here we see the value that such associations have for sustaining friendships and local communities rather than in terms of future jobs. Other interviewees also talk about the value of friendship and how it is sustained by voluntary and social spaces. A Tate volunteer who moved to the United Kingdom speaks of the importance of building friendships as a motive for their activities:

As am immigrant, of course, you don't have a lot of connection in your new country, so, there is the people you meet in work, or your studies, otherwise, my [partner's] friends, but it would be a bit strange not to have my friends, my own friends, not just, like, rely on [their] social circle, so, there is this as well.

The fundamental importance of friendship is illustrated by the response of a Shelter volunteer to the question of whether they have been lucky in their life: 'yes, very fortunate. Because I have been suicidal, people have been there to support me when I needed them, so I had a good network of friends, I guess.' Beyond

its material implications for future work and its participatory consequences, then, one of the most basic forms of social capital, friendship, has profound implications for people's lives.

Unlike economic capital, the elements of social capital that people talk about are distinct from the ones that the Privilege and Participation Survey focused on. The results of the survey showed that people tend to have acquaintances with particular occupational statuses but are far from restrictive in this regard. On the other hand, they do have rather homogeneous networks in terms of gender, religion, and ethnicity. They also tend to have a small number of close friends alongside wider networks of looser friends and acquaintances, and to prioritise the former in terms of the time that they spend with them. It is these close friends and family who provide help and support to people when they need it. However, people do not tend to talk explicitly about these facets of social capital, and instead emphasise the importance of social ties in shaping their lives. They also stress the importance of local community and often do so whilst expressing a sense of sadness at its decline. When they do talk about social capital as an asset, it tends to be related to private and university education and the roles that they play in creating and sustaining networks that help with finding work. Thus, whilst some types of social capital are considered to be assets, and components of privilege, people also emphasise the innate importance of friendship and the happiness that it brings.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is the most nebulous of the three forms that we consider, which may help explain why a multifaceted conception of it has been largely absent from accounts of political participation. There is only one, institutionalised, feature of cultural capital that is commonly included in accounts of political behaviour: education. Educational qualifications are official, certificated indicators of particular types of cultural capital, in the form of knowledge and skills that people have accumulated. However, as outlined in [Chapter 2](#), cultural capital extends beyond such formal qualifications to encompass a host of activities that people engage in and tastes that they hold. In their spare time, people might choose to play a sport, visit an exhibition, or go to the cinema. Within each of those activities, they will also express their tastes. For instance, they might choose to play cricket or football, to see a collection of artefacts relating to ancient Egypt or a selection of memorabilia relating to The Beatles, or to watch the most recent Greta Gerwig film or James Bond's latest outing. By contrast with institutionalised educational qualifications, these pastimes and tastes represent non-institutionalised, or informal, cultural capital. They are seldom identified as factors that relate to political behaviour, so we are entering new territory by considering them as such in this book.

As also outlined in [Chapter 2](#), there is an important distinction within people's pastimes and tastes between legitimate and popular cultural capital. Legitimate pastimes and tastes are designated as worthwhile and valuable whilst tending to be less widespread and accessible. By contrast, popular pastimes and tastes tend to be more widespread and accessible, and not to hold the same cultural cache as their legitimate counterparts. As we will see, however, some types of cultural capital that lack the valorisation of legitimate types are still far from widespread, and might be better thought of as niche rather than popular. To illustrate the distinction between legitimate and popular culture, we can think of the difference between liking lacrosse and liking football. The former is marked not only by the expense of participating in it but also, and relatedly, by its rarity and its association with refinement. By contrast, football is exceptionally widespread in Great Britain and, despite a process of co-option by middle-class people over recent decades, remains generally accessible and associated with popular and working-class culture.

One of the best indicators of informal cultural capital is the activities outside the home that people choose to do in their spare time. Some commitment is involved in pursuing these pastimes since they often entail travel and the expense of an entry fee. As such, they are active expressions of cultural preferences. Starting with legitimate pastimes, [Figure 5.7](#) shows that exhibition-based activities such as visiting museums (panel A), galleries (panel B), and historic buildings (panel C) are engaged in occasionally by most people. More than half (51.3 per cent) go to museums at least once a year, whilst the figure is higher for historic buildings (57.4 per cent). By contrast, galleries are less popular and are visited less than once a year by two thirds of people (65.2 per cent). This lower level of attendance has some similarities with attendance at legitimate cultural performances. More than half of people (55.5 per cent) attend the theatre less than once a year (panel E), whilst the trend is exaggerated in relation to classical music and opera (panel D) as well as dance and ballet (panel F). Approaching two thirds of people (63.9 per cent) never attend the former, whilst nearly seven in ten (69.4 per cent) never attend the latter, making them amongst the least popular pastimes in the Privilege and Participation Survey data.

It is not, however, only legitimate forms of cultural capital that are unpopular: majorities never go to nightclubs (62.8 per cent, panel H) or stand-up comedy shows (53.2 per cent, panel I), and two fifths (40.0 per cent) never attend live music gigs (panel G). These pastimes, which we might think of as popular cultural performances, are actually only marginally more popular than the legitimate cultural performances considered above. They are also notably less popular than the exhibition-based cultural pastimes that we began with. By contrast, by far the most popular pastimes are those that centre on consumption. Seven in ten people

(71.4 per cent) eat out with friends at least four times a year (panel J), and the figure exceeds three quarters (76.8 per cent) for going to pubs, bars, and cafés (panel K). Shopping for pleasure (panel L) is slightly less popular but still done at least four times a year by six in ten people (62.5 per cent). Further, participating in one type of consumption-based activity is associated with participating with the others. This is also the case for the three other types of cultural capital that we considered previously, as indicated by the colour-coding of the charts⁹: dark grey for exhibitions, mid-grey for legitimate performances, and light grey for entertainment-orientated shows.

The colour-coding indicates that the activities within each type of cultural capital are related but not that people engage exclusively in each of these types of pastimes. So, for example, people who go to museums frequently are also more likely to go to historic buildings and art galleries frequently. This does not mean, however, that they do not also like going shopping for pleasure, eating out, or going to pubs and cafés. Indeed, each of the overarching types of pastime is positively associated with the others, albeit sometimes weakly. Nonetheless, there are distinct groups of people who tend to particularly enjoy exhibitions, legitimate cultural performances, entertainment-orientated shows, and consumption-based activities. We can clearly see the distinction between legitimate and popular or niche cultural capital here, with exhibitions and performances in the former camp and shows and consumption-based activities in the latter. Perhaps indicating their distinction, it is the legitimate types that are most closely related to each other.

The remaining five cultural pastimes are not strongly related to each other or to the four types that we have already covered, and they encompass both the most and the least popular activities that we have data on. Going for a walk for pleasure (panel P) is the most popular pastime and is done twice a month or more by a majority of people (54.4 per cent), and at least four times a year by almost eight in ten (78.6 per cent). By contrast, more than eight in ten people (84.3 per cent) never go to the bingo, and only one in 14 (7.3 per cent) go at least once a year. In between these extremes, we can see that watching and playing sport (panels O and Q) are never done by a majority (50.4 per cent and 58.8 per cent, respectively), whilst going to the cinema (panel M) is done at least once a year by more than six in ten people (63.5 per cent). Thus, we have four distinct types of cultural pastime and a set of miscellaneous pastimes that are either rather popular or rather unpopular. We can also see that most people undertake quite a range of pastimes, even if not regularly (panel R). Seven in ten (71.0 per cent) do between eight and 15 of the activities at least occasionally. Thus, although there are distinct types of

⁹ These associations are confirmed by the process of factor analysis outlined in online [Appendix A](#).

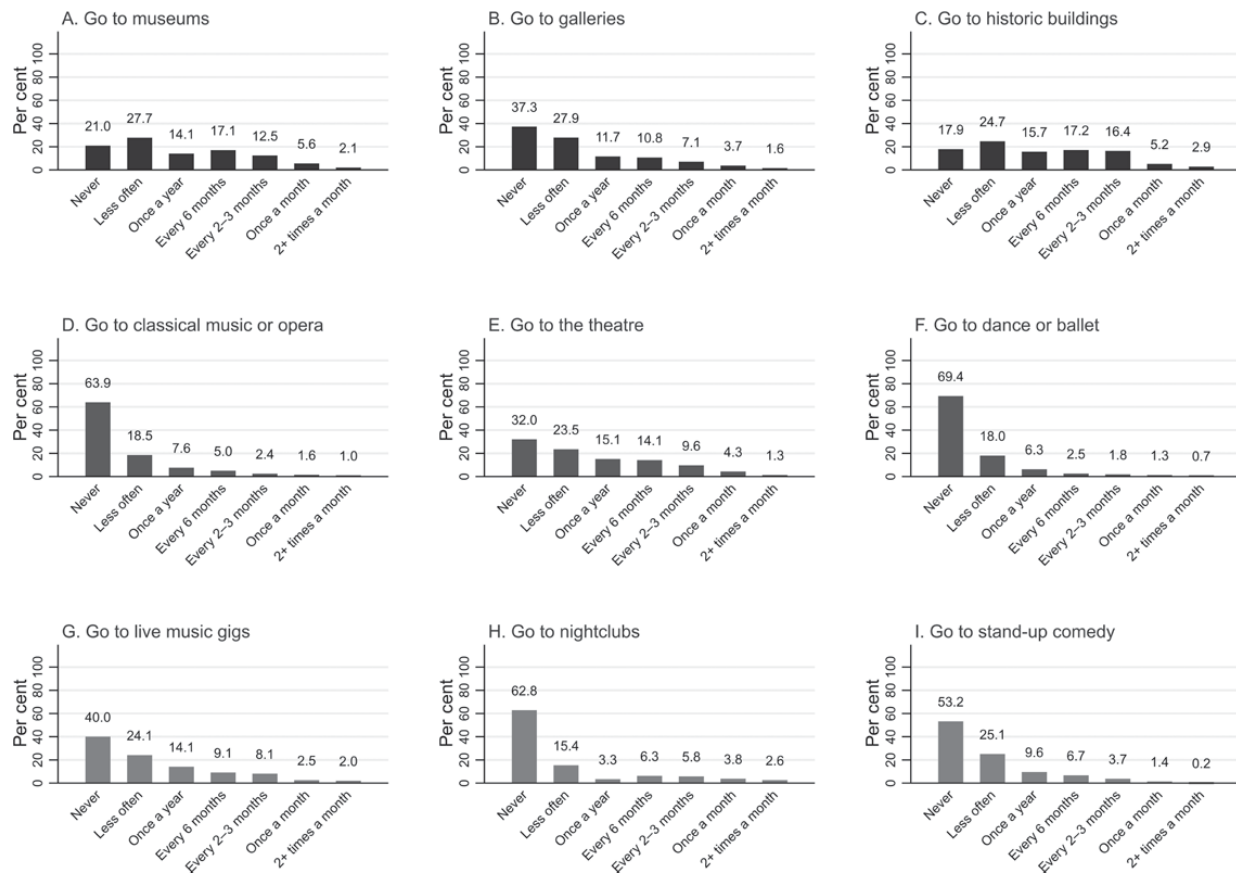


Figure 5.7 Cultural activities outside the home

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,405

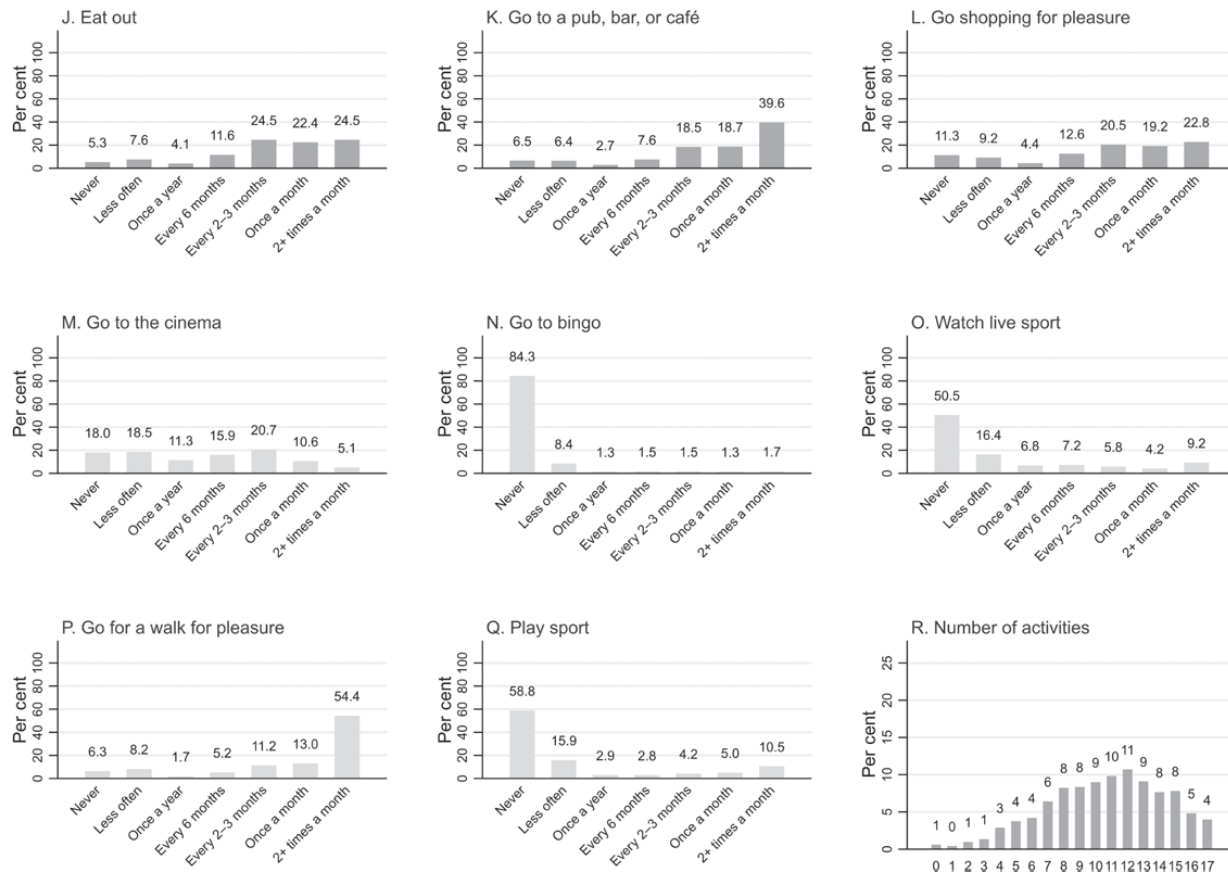


Figure 5.7 continued

pastimes that tend to be associated with each other, it is also the case that people are willing to undertake a host of different cultural activities. People might have particular activities that they favour, but they are also open to doing a range of other things now and then.

Like activities outside the home, activities on holiday represent an important expression of cultural preferences. Since people have a small amount of time on holiday and must prioritise what they do with it, we might expect there to be clear distinctions between types of holiday activity. As [Figure 5.8](#) (panel A) shows, the most popular holiday activities are related to each other and all entail engaging with the local culture of the destination. Sightseeing is done by four in five people (80.9 per cent), whilst visiting beauty spots is done by seven in ten people (71.4 per cent).¹⁰ Less popular but still associated with these activities are trying local cuisine (done by 59.4 per cent) and learning about local history or culture (done by 54.0 per cent). Three further holiday activities are also popular, and done by at least half of people, but not closely related to the first four: reading (done by 55.0 per cent), relaxing by doing as little as possible (58.1 per cent), and shopping (48.4 per cent). The remaining three activities are the least popular, each being done by less than one in five people: going on tours (18.6 per cent), doing organised activities such as pony treks (9.0 per cent), and going clubbing (14.6 per cent). The number of holiday activities that people do has a similar distribution to activities outside the home. A plurality of people (20.0 per cent) does five of the activities asked about (panel B), and people are roughly evenly distributed on either side of this peak. Thus, people tend to favour activities that entail engaging with local culture when they go on holiday but also extend their activities to include things that allow them to relax.

Whilst pastimes exhibit tastes in themselves, there is also scope for variation in tastes within them. For instance, when people go on holiday, they might take the latest Booker Prize-winning novel or some pulp fiction. When they go to a gallery, they can opt for exhibitions of work by contemporary artists or by Renaissance masters. And when they listen to music at home, they could opt for jazz and blues or electronica. Thus, people can do nominally the same activity but have dramatically different experiences based on their tastes. These tastes matter because, like the activities considered above, they are components of informal cultural capital and can act as a resource that is used to qualify people to participate in certain settings. These are not qualifications that are routinely policed, though people sometimes express jovial dismay at the tastes of their acquaintances, but they can contribute to a sense of ease and an ability to fit into settings where tastes are shared.

¹⁰ By contrast with the questions about cultural activities outside the home, survey respondents were only asked whether or not they do each holiday activity rather than the frequency with which they do them.

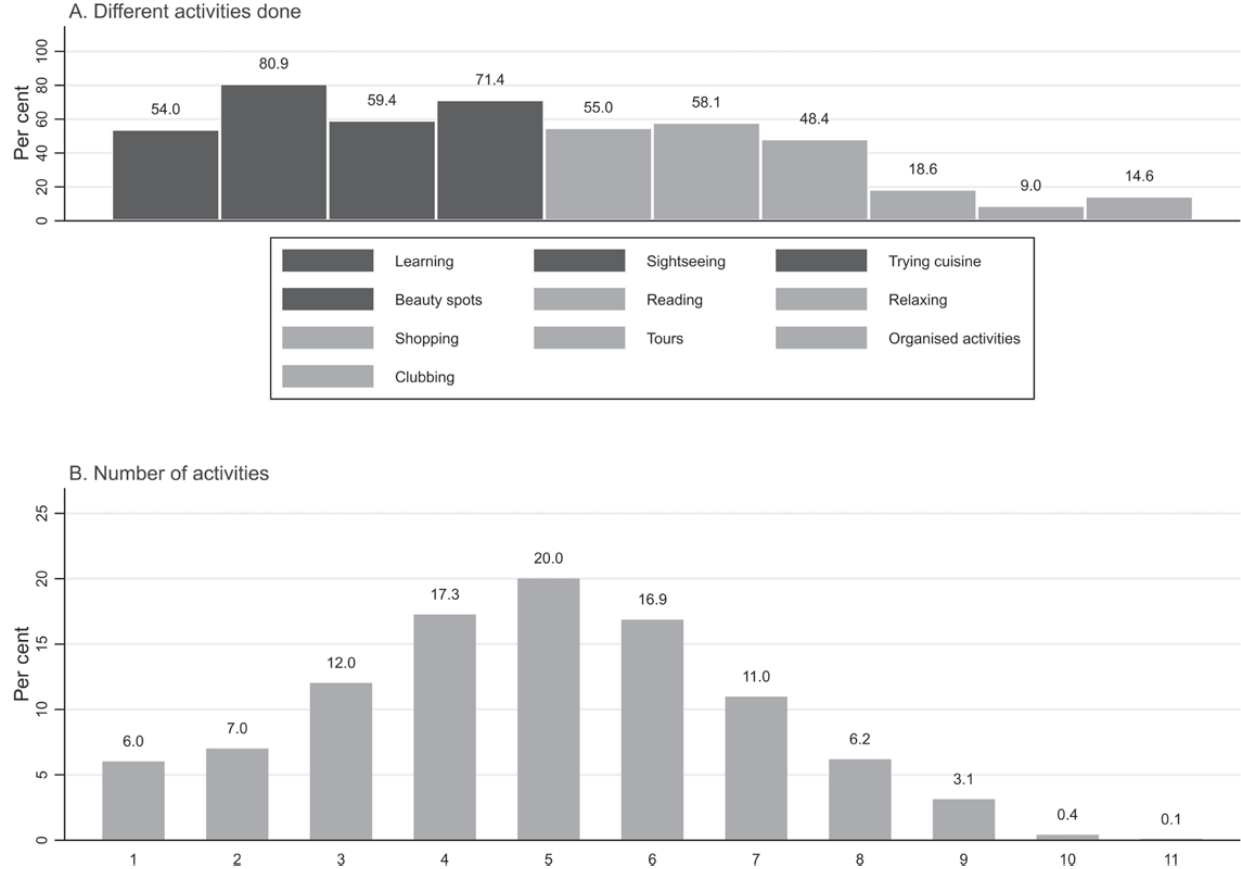
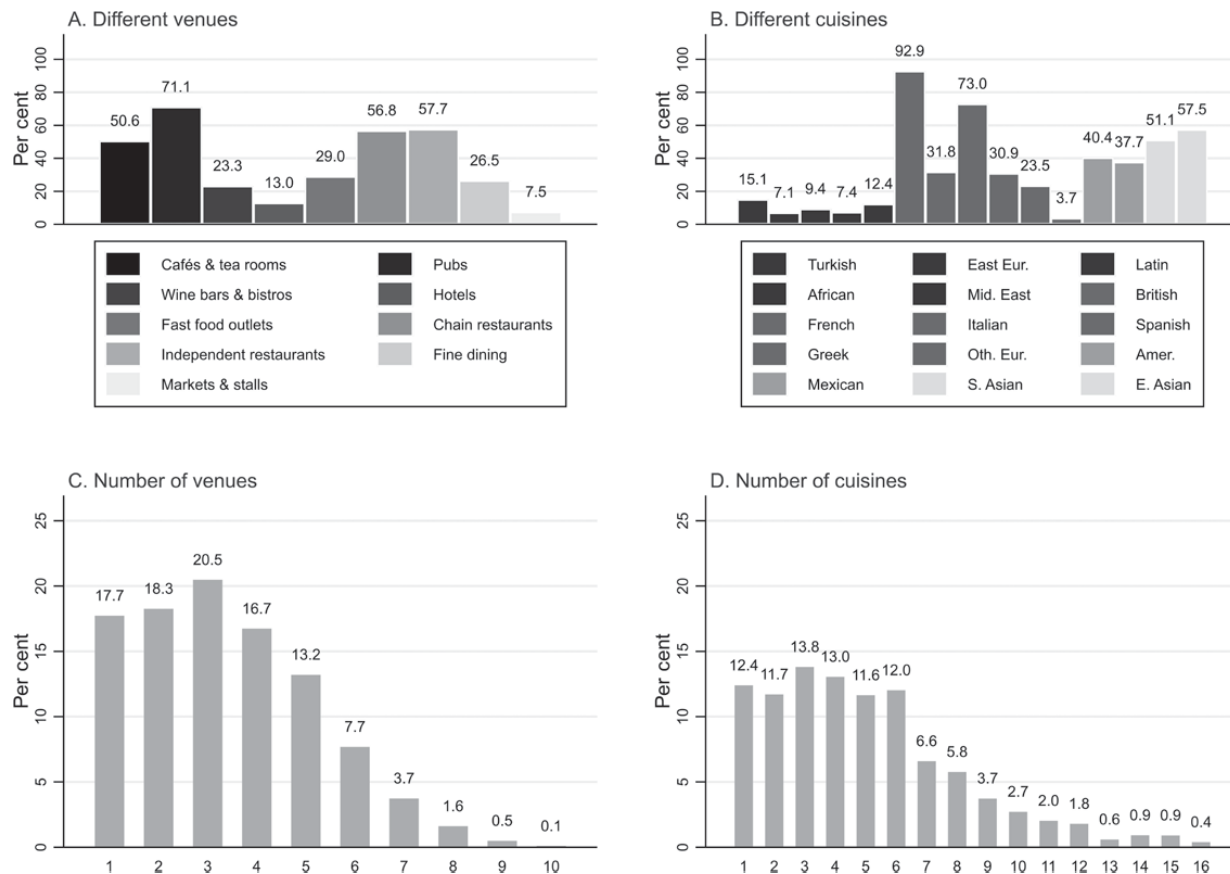


Figure 5.8 Cultural activities on holiday
Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,405

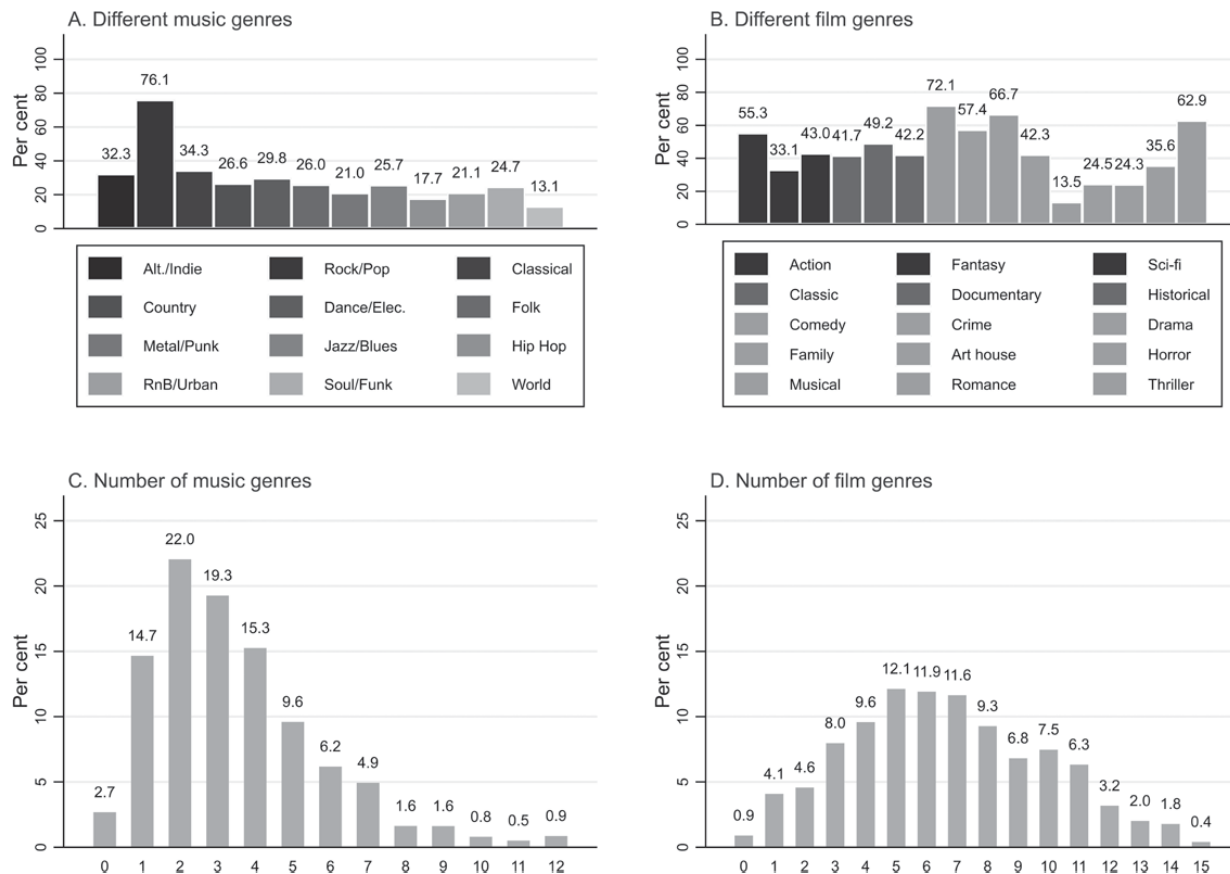
This role in helping people fit into settings is particularly important because individuals tend to have a moderate range of tastes. This can be seen when we look at their culinary preferences in [Figure 5.9](#). When going for food and drink outside the home (panel A), pubs are particularly popular venues and are visited at least occasionally by seven in ten people (71.1 per cent), whilst more than half also visit independent restaurants (57.7 per cent), chain restaurants (56.8 per cent), and cafés and tea rooms (50.6 per cent). The remaining types of eateries are each visited by less than a third of people, with markets and street stalls (7.5 per cent) and hotels (13.0 per cent) being particularly unpopular. There are not any strong relationships between visiting different types of food outlet, and it may be that people simply pick the venues that are most readily available and convenient for them.

Reflecting a similar tendency, the most popular types of cuisine are widely available in the United Kingdom. Nine in ten people (92.9 per cent) eat British food, seven in ten (73.0 per cent) eat Italian food, and more than half eat East Asian (57.5 per cent) and South Asian (51.5 per cent) food. Whilst European (dark mid-grey), American (light mid-grey), and Asian cuisines (light grey) are each geographically related, people do not display strong signs of holding tastes for such confined groups of cuisines. Indeed, the only cuisines that are related to each other are the ones that are less widespread (dark grey). People who like Turkish cuisine (15.1 per cent) are also more likely to like Eastern European (7.1 per cent), Latin American (9.4 per cent), African (7.4 per cent), and Middle Eastern (12.4 per cent) cuisine. We might think of the people who seek these types of food out as having a taste for less commonly available world cuisines, which may be a marker of cultural legitimacy in the same way as watching world cinema. This is especially so because most people have quite restricted culinary tastes: more than half (56.5 per cent) visit three or fewer of the nine types of eateries (panel C), and half (50.9 per cent) eat four or fewer of the 15 cuisines (panel D). Thus, people who seek out a wide variety of different culinary experiences, and especially those that are not commonly available, are a small and distinct group within the population.

[Figure 5.10](#) (panel A) shows that people's musical tastes are also quite restricted and only one genre stands out as popular: rock and pop. It is listened to by more than three quarters of people (76.1 per cent), whilst none of the remaining 11 genres are listened to by much more than a third. The least popular genre, world music, is listened to by fewer than one in seven people (13.1 per cent). Further, people do not tend to dabble in lots of different types of music (panel C), with almost six in ten (58.7 per cent) listening to three or fewer genres. This stands in marked contrast to tastes in film, which are more eclectic (panel B). Five of the genres are watched by at least half of people: comedy (72.1 per cent), drama (66.7 per cent), thriller (62.9 per cent), crime (57.4 per cent), and action (55.3 per cent). Of the remaining nine genres, only three are watched by fewer than a third of people: horror (24.5 per cent), musical (24.3 per cent), and art house (13.5 per cent).

**Figure 5.9** Culinary tastes

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,405

**Figure 5.10** Music and film tastes

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,405

The popularity of numerous different kinds of film is reflected in how many genres people watch (panel D), with more than half (54.5 per cent) viewing between four and eight. Tastes in film also differ from tastes in music in the sense that some of them go together. People who watch action films are also more likely to watch fantasy and sci-fi films, and we can think of this as a taste for blockbusters. At the same time, people who watch classic films also tend to like watching documentaries and historical or biographical films, which indicates a taste for educational films. The remaining genres are not particularly associated with each other, but the eclectic nature of film tastes suggests that whilst people might prefer certain types of films, they are also willing to try a range of different genres.

Despite the prevalence of a range of cultural activities and tastes, illustrated by the results of the Privilege and Participation Survey, they are not a major feature of how people talk about cultural capital. Instead, interviewees and focus group participants focus on institutionalised cultural capital in the form of education, and especially private schooling and university. Whether talking to activists, MPs, or members of the public, private schooling is frequently mentioned. This is not surprising given the centrality of education in experiences when growing up, its influence on subsequent life, and the importance it is assigned by many parents. Its prominence in people's discussion of cultural capital also reflects its status as a policy area addressed by government and the media, by contrast with the lesser focus on informal cultural capital embodied in pastimes and tastes.

Nevertheless, people do recognise the importance of informal cultural capital. This was observed in the emphasis that interviewees and focus group participants placed on lack of knowledge and skills as a barrier to political participation in the previous chapter. Activists in particular speak frequently about knowledge and skills as important for their roles and offer a lack of those things as a common explanation for non-participation. This emphasis highlights the porous boundary between institutionalised and informal cultural capital. Both knowledge and skills are developed in institutionalised educational contexts, as well as through informal interaction with parents, relatives, and friends. The link between the two is highlighted by the Labour MP who talks about children who grow up having 'dinner table conversations' being better prepared for the university environment. This also indicates an additional component of informal cultural capital that is related to education: language.

Language is treated as a prominent indicator of privilege by a range of interviewees. An Evangelical Alliance volunteer talks about identifying people who are privileged through 'obvious things, accent and dress, and language and so on,' and a William Wilberforce Trust volunteer mentions assessing privilege by looking 'at your clothes, your job, the way you talk.' Despite this, many people think that using such indicators is problematic. A low-participation member of the public from London initially says that they would assess someone's privilege by asking,

'do they speak well? Are they well groomed? Are they well dressed?' However, they go on to say, 'even that, that sometimes can be a deceit – that's not always the case. I think really the biggest factor is getting to know someone – that really is it.' Two different low-participation members of the public from the North West of England emphasise that you should 'never judge a book by its cover', and a UKIP activist says that 'you can't necessarily tell by accent because people say I'm quite posh, but I come from a working-class area in [my home city] so I'm not really posh at all'. Encapsulating this ambivalence, an Amnesty International volunteer says, 'I am very guilty of hearing the way someone talks and being, like, well, that guy definitely went to a private school, at least.' Language is also used as an indicator in people's own lives, as indicated by a Royal British Legion volunteer who explains that 'once I personally went into the military, I then realised that I had limited vocabulary ... So that's why I took a degree later in life, and that influenced me a hell of a lot.' In this case, language is such a powerful signal of qualification that it contributed to a decision that had significant implications for the direction of the person's subsequent life.

Pastimes and tastes can also act as signals of privilege and qualification. However, when interviewees and focus group participants talk about such activities, often they simply outline their preferences or interests. For example, a low-participation member of the public in London talks about being 'super into fitness', travel being 'massive for me', and liking 'good girlie books, nothing particularly taxing, just novels', and going 'out for dinner'. Similarly, a member of the public in Wales emphasises the importance of spending time with her family, talking about how they 'go for walks together, go on holiday', and 'the boys will all get together and play football, and my daughter and my granddaughter and me will go off to London'. Pastimes and tastes also feature in how people talk about their childhoods, particularly amongst volunteers and activists. A Science Museum volunteer talks about visiting museums both as a child and as a parent, whilst a Housing Justice volunteer highlights that they 'played cricket for the village cricket team'. A Tate volunteer lists an impressively wide array of cultural activities that they participated in as a child: 'I did ballet – I didn't really like it. I studied music theory. I played the oboe. I was into orchestras. I learned how to swim ... Oh yes, I did paintings and pottery and stuff like that as well.' Often, these childhood cultural activities are remembered with fondness, as when a British Museum volunteer says:

It sounds really silly but when I was growing up, I remember films like *Clash of the Titans* on the telly, and I just think they're magical, and watching programmes about Egypt as well. I remember finding it really magical and, I remember when I came to London, this is one of the first places I came to, and just walking into the gallery with all the Egyptian sculpture; I was just pretty wowed by it.

The value of childhood cultural experiences is also emphasised by a Liberal Democrat MP:

what we, as a society, need, is we need to invest more in our young people's non-education. And whether it be cultural, whether it be sporting, whether it be ... any of the uniformed organisations, the cadets, sports clubs, swimming clubs, or whatever, gymnastics. You know, young people enjoy life, and if they're not enjoying life, what's the point of being a young person?

However, different types of informal cultural capital are not always viewed as equally valuable, and there are clear indicators of the distinction between legitimate and popular types. Sometimes this includes quite strong judgement of cultural output, as when a low-participation member of the public in the North East of England talks about how he 'couldn't believe some of this stuff that's on television. My mate's partner, she watches something called *Geordie Shore* and *TOWIE*. I was in one night, waiting for them getting ready for going out, and I'm watching this thinking, "This is a piss take, surely?" No, it wasn't.' At other times, cultural hierarchies are referenced more casually, as when a British Museum volunteer mentions the emphasis on education in their upbringing, and that 'we weren't just stuck in front of *Transformers* every day and left to get on with it'. The importance of using spare time to undertake legitimate cultural activities is emphasised by a Tate volunteer who differentiates between weekends spent going for walks or to museums and weekends spent at home:

you have the impression that you have used the weekend well, or that you've, sort of, wasted it a little bit. I mean, sometimes it's good to waste it, especially if you're very tired, if you have worked very, very hard and you just need some rest, a cup of tea in front of a film is just basically the best thing you can do ... But if you do that every weekend, I just think that you have the impression that you're wasting your weekends, or missing things that the city has to offer.

Sometimes the distinction between legitimate and popular culture is linked to their appeal, as in a discussion between two participants in a focus group after an art house film screening in London:

First participant:	Movies like this, I mean, you won't find a big audience – there is no interest, very little interest.
Second participant:	No, but ... I mean the number of people in London, it's a free event with, with drinks, wine, you know, and it's not even full.
First participant:	Yes but ... the topic has to be appealing. Why would somebody ...
Second participant:	I think there's enough people in London to be appeal, find that a film like that appealing, that, I just think people don't know ... I just don't think it's, known about.
First participant:	I don't know – I'm sure if there'd been another movie they would've just flocked in.
Third participant:	You reckon?

- First participant: Yes, um, as, it's a, it's an art movie really, it's not a blockbuster, so ...
- Second participant: No but there's loads of people that like art movies like that.

This discussion illustrates Bourdieu's emphasis on the emotionally detached, analytical, and intellectually challenging nature of legitimate culture, reflected in the characterisation of the film as not 'appealing'. This is contrasted with the appeal of more easy-going, emotionally engaging, and enjoyable popular culture represented by blockbuster films. Further, the idea that legitimate cultural capital is reserved for a select subset of the population is reflected in the assertion that such an art house film 'won't find a big audience'. Thus, we see that people sometimes recognise a distinction between legitimate and popular culture, in which it is understood that the former is challenging and less appealing, whilst the latter is easy-going and more appealing. This distinction also highlights the value that different kinds of informal cultural capital hold. It is not necessarily that legitimate cultural capital is seen as bad, but it requires effort, and its reward is not necessarily in having fun. Hence, engaging with and accumulating legitimate cultural capital can be seen as worthwhile, facilitating cultivation of oneself. In this sense, like its economic and social counterparts, cultural capital holds value.

The Importance of Capital

This chapter has given holistic and detailed insight into how the three forms of capital are distributed in the British population and how they are talked about by volunteers and activists, MPs, and members of the public. We have seen that most people have moderate levels of economic capital but that there are sizeable minorities who have low levels and are likely to be struggling financially, at least to some extent. Most people also have acquaintances with a range of occupational statuses, though they tend to know certain occupations more than others, and their networks are homogeneous in terms of gender, ethnicity, and religion. They also tend to have small numbers of close friends within wider networks of looser friendships and to expend more time and effort on maintaining the former than the latter. It is also the former networks that they tend to receive help from when needed, and only a small minority are in the invidious position of not being able to draw on such support.

The widespread but moderate levels of economic and social capital stand in contrast to the rarity of some facets of informal cultural capital, especially those that are legitimate. Examples of this are the infrequency with which most people attend art galleries or performances such as opera and ballet, and the small number of people with a taste for less widely available international cuisines. These

pastimes and tastes represent legitimate cultural capital in the Bourdieusian sense, being both uncommon and designated as worthwhile or valuable. On the popular side, by contrast, some types of cultural capital are common features of people's daily lives. These centre on consumption-based activities such as eating out and shopping for pleasure, and a taste for blockbuster films. Crucially, however, we also find types of informal cultural capital that transgress the boundary between legitimate and popular. In this camp are the preference for engaging with local culture and sights when on holiday and the taste for educational films, both of which may be viewed as valuable but are also widespread. Attending entertainment-orientated shows such as comedy and live music gigs also transgresses the boundary because it is a niche activity but not distinguished in the sense of being widely valorised.

The three forms of capital and the different types within them tend to be positively related to each other, even if weakly so. This indicates, despite the types of capital being distinct, that having more of one sort is associated with having more of other sorts. These associations, combined with the differences in how widespread different types are, paint a nuanced picture. People tend to have some kinds of capital in particular, but to accumulate others as well. Thus, there are differences in the kinds of capital that people have, but there are some people who are rich in many different kinds. This reflects a privileged position and enables them to participate in a range of social contexts, including political ones. Further nuance is added to these observations by the prominence that people give to different types of capital when they speak about them. In the economic domain, people emphasise the importance of homeownership, work, and money. The latter two have particularly important implications for people's identities and sense of status in society, which they often assert as being in the 'comfortable middle'. In terms of social capital, people talk about the importance of networks in shaping their lives, and some highlight a sense of loss at the decline in local communities that they have experienced. Many also talk about the role that networks play in securing work and easing paths through life.

The fact that the social networks people talk about are often organised around shared educational experiences highlights the feature of cultural capital that people speak about most frequently. The emphasis that interviewees and focus group participants place on the importance of private schooling and university education stands in contrast to the focus of the Privilege and Participation Survey on informal cultural capital. Indeed, the feature of informal cultural capital that people talk about most frequently, language, is only briefly touched upon by the survey.¹¹ People do talk about pastimes and tastes, sometimes drawing an implicit

¹¹ The survey asked respondents whether they felt that they had a regional accent and how they would describe it.

distinction between legitimate and popular culture, but not as frequently as they talk about education and language. Thus, in relation to cultural capital in particular, there is a notable divide between the stocks of capital that are revealed by the survey and the kinds of cultural capital that are emphasised in interviews and focus groups.

There is, however, a common understanding of capital as an asset. Despite having some reservations about the value of certain types, for instance when mentioning the life lessons that can be gained from financial hardship, all three forms of capital are generally seen to be valuable and associated with having an easier life. Indeed, people often cite types of economic, social, and cultural capital as facets of privilege. As we will see in [Chapter 7](#), they also commonly draw links from those features of privilege to involvement in politics, especially its upper echelons. This reflects the context of the interviews and focus groups, which explicitly covered people's engagement with politics and asked them about privilege, but these links are often made without great cognitive effort. They also often echo common features of public narratives about politics and can be considered an accessible part of people's understanding of politics and its relationship with privilege. The ease with which people link capital to privilege and politics offers *prima facie* evidence that the concepts are related. It also indicates how privilege and politics are perceived, and we examine these perceptions in more detail in the [next chapter](#).

Perceptions of Society, Self, and Politics

Perceiving Privilege in Different Contexts

Our perceptions of privilege depend, in part, on who we have in mind when thinking about it. Our reference point might be a high-status individual, such as a member of a royal family, someone in a marginalised group, such as an ethnic minority, or a broader idea, such as the ‘average person’. Our choice of reference point is affected by context, and this means that an individual or group can simultaneously be high and low in privilege, depending on who they are compared to. For example, a solicitor who is married, has one child, is buying their home, and comfortably covers their monthly outgoings might feel rather underprivileged when reading an article about a billionaire property magnate with a superyacht and a private jet. At the same time, they may recognise their privilege when compared to a single parent of two young children who works as a cleaner in an office, lives in social housing, and struggles to pay their bills. If we shift the focus to a subsistence farmer with a small plot of land in rural India, who did not complete schooling and struggles to afford to educate their children, both of the preceding people might feel privileged simply to have been born in a wealthy country with free education such as Britain.

These sorts of comparisons are at play when people think about privilege as it relates to society, themselves, and politics. Perceptions of politicians and political institutions, and how distant they are from the population, are shaped in part by people’s views of society and themselves. The above solicitor might have been the first person in their family to go to university and have memories of their parents struggling to pay for things when they grew up. This could lead them to focus on the prestigious private schools that some politicians have attended, underlining their sense that politics is a domain for privileged people. Alternatively, they might see themselves as an example of the meritocratic nature of society in action and be proud of their career. This might lead them to emphasise the commonality between their job and the jobs of many people who enter politics, and thus see less

of a gap between politics and society. This perceived commonality is less available to the cleaner, predisposing them to see politics as a domain dominated by people who are privileged and, therefore, distinct from them and ‘normal people’. That said, they might also emphasise the importance of education to their children and aspire for them to go to university and get a graduate job. This could lead them to see politics as a domain that is open to those who work hard and to view people in politics as having emerged from, and being reflective of, society more widely.

Making assessments of privilege, whether in society, as it relates to oneself, or in politics, requires multiple considerations. Many of those considerations were asked about in the Privilege and Participation Survey, and this chapter considers people’s answers relating to the four components of perceptions of privilege that [Chapter 3](#) outlined. In the first section, we observe people’s explanations for status differences in society, which are the first component of perceptions of privilege. In the second section, we turn to the second and third components, their explanations for their own status and their self-perceived class. Lastly, in the third section, we examine how privileged people perceive those involved in politics to be, which is the fourth and final component. The measures of each of these perceptions in the Privilege and Participation Survey data are considered alongside how people speak about them in the interviews and focus groups. This paints a complex and multifaceted picture of privilege that includes ideas relating to status, class, geography, and family. We additionally see that people’s accounts of privilege are also often highly relative, recognising that comparison points matter and that one’s position can change. This relativity links to the uncertainty that some people express when talking about privilege. Thus, the idea of privilege is often alive in people’s minds, but they do not always have a solidified conception of what it is. Despite these nuances, within each of the four facets of perceptions of privilege that we consider, we can distinguish between people who perceive the importance of privilege to a greater or lesser extent. Further, there is a clear commonality in how people perceive and speak about privilege: almost everyone considers politics to be a domain of privilege.

Perceptions of Privilege in Society

As outlined in [Chapter 3](#), we are concerned with unearned rather than earned privilege, and thus with statuses, positions, and resources that are granted to people on the basis of their backgrounds and membership of advantaged or disadvantaged groups. As such, explanations for the different statuses that people have in society constitute a key component of perceptions of privilege. Someone who attributes the different statuses that people have to individual explanations, such as hard work and ambition, does not perceive unearned privilege to the same

extent as someone who attributes those differences to structural explanations such as background and group-based inequality. Both of those people also have a distinct understanding of society from someone who attributes different statuses to chance or inevitability, who therefore sees both individual endeavour and unearned privilege as less important. These sets of explanations are not mutually exclusive, but we might expect people, when asked to select the most important explanations for status difference, to emphasise either individual, structural, or fate-based factors.

Figure 6.1 shows that the most popular explanation for status difference in society is people's backgrounds (panel C), which is ranked as the most important factor by two fifths (41.0 per cent) of people and placed in the top three by two thirds (66.0 per cent). The other structural explanation for status difference, in the form of group-based inequality (panel D), is amongst the least popular and is ranked as the most important factor by only one in 21 people (3.5 per cent) and in the top three by one in six (16.6 per cent). By contrast, both of the individual explanations for inequality are popular: hard work (panel A) is ranked first by a quarter of people (24.6 per cent) and ambition (panel B) is ranked first by approaching a fifth (18.1 per cent), and both are ranked in the top three by more than half of people (55.9 per cent and 52.6 per cent, respectively). Neither of the fate-based explanations is popular, although approaching three times more people rank luck (27.9 per cent, panel E) rather than inevitability (10.3 per cent, panel F) in their top three.

The fate-based explanations for status difference do not have a particularly strong relationship with the other explanations, nor with each other.¹ However, the four individual and structural explanations (shaded in dark grey) are related to each other such that people tend to select one type of explanation or the other. People who rank hard work as important are also likely to do the same with ambition, emphasising the role that individual endeavour has in determining status. They are also less likely to rank background and group-based inequality as important, and so they de-emphasise structural factors. Of course, the opposite is true of those who rank structural explanations as important, and they are concomitantly less likely to emphasise individual explanations. This group of people place a greater emphasis on the role of unearned privilege in shaping social outcomes. For our purposes, they can be said to perceive privilege in society to a greater extent than people who emphasise individual endeavour, and also than the small group who emphasise fate-based explanations. In terms of perceiving privilege in society, then, it is differing emphases on structural or individual explanations for status that allow us to distinguish between people who perceive unearned

¹ These relationships are tested using the confirmatory factor analysis process outlined in online Appendix A.

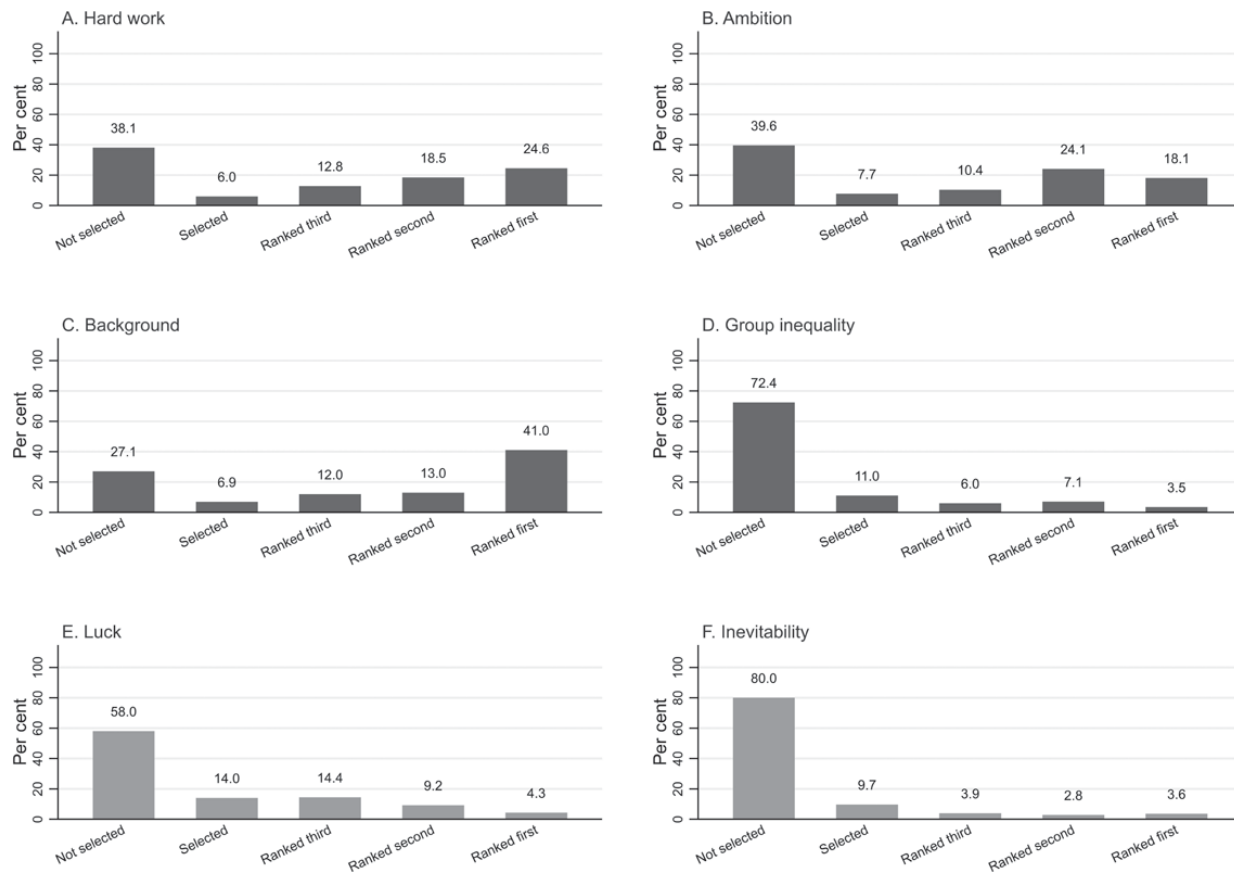


Figure 6.1 Reasons for status difference in society

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, $n = 1,405$

privilege to a greater or lesser extent. This is the first of the four components of perceptions of privilege.

We saw in the last chapter that some types of economic, social, and cultural capital are features of how people talk about privilege, but there are many other things that they associate with the concept as well. When talking about privilege in society, it is often linked to ideas of status and exclusivity. Many interviewees make comments similar to an observation of a low-participation member of the public from Wales that privilege is ‘something you’re born into, status or money’. Sometimes this status is manifested in the behaviour of those who hold it, as when an Enrych volunteer recalls hearing a privately educated person saying that they are ‘more or less better than somebody, you know, that has not been [to private school]’. At its worst, this status hierarchy not only elevates those with privilege but devalues those who are marginalised. This can be seen when a Housing Justice volunteer talks about the homeless people that they work with, reporting: ‘the way people treat them in the street and stuff, that you know they’d never treat you like that because they just see them and they know they’re homeless, and people, like, pee on them in the street and stuff – it’s ridiculous’. Such unpleasant outcomes lead a Shelter volunteer, who describes privilege as ‘a social convention’, to say that ‘all humans are just as important as each other, really. That’s my perspective. I don’t believe in hierarchies, but I acknowledge that I’m within one. I don’t know. I guess I don’t like the idea of privilege. I guess I’m more interested in equality.’ This stands in contrast to the Conservative MP who argues that those with privilege should act with responsibility, but also that ‘certain protections should be afforded to a select few for the public good. For me, in any society there’s going to be hierarchy, there’s going to be variations in access to wealth and power, so there is always going to be privilege.’ With the exception of this view, privilege is rarely considered in positive terms, and is usually talked about in relation to the advantages given to some group at the expense of others. Indeed, this is implicit in the comments relating to status and exclusivity, which involve some people having things that others do not. This idea can also be seen in people’s consideration of the demographic cleavages that relate to privilege. Age is seldom viewed as one of these cleavages, but gender is spoken about in relation to both privilege and politics by numerous interviewees and focus group participants. Indeed, people so closely and consistently associate gender with privilege and politics as to rarely refer to those concepts without linking them, and we return to these comments in detail in the [next chapter](#).

Class is a much more common feature of how people speak about privilege independently of its relationship with politics. The significance of class in society is emphasised most succinctly by a Tate volunteer who moved to the United Kingdom as an adult: ‘Of course I was aware that in Britain there is still a very strong class system, but I was just amazed at how it pollutes all kinds of things in everyday

life.' They go on to say, 'in Britain you have this thing where class society is not even questioned. It's not questioned by the upper classes, the middle classes, or by the working class.' A Royal British Legion volunteer, who was previously a military officer, affirms the idea that such hierarchies are seen as natural, at least by some:

the circle of people I'd mix with would be the senior ranks. And I think we all establish that pecking order in life. And also that the guys at the lower level, the grunts and the lance corporals and whatever, that sort of rank, they will always stick together because they have this, I don't know, using the word ethos, mentality.

Outside the context of military ranks, the factors that underpin class hierarchies are not agreed upon. A Conservative MP argues that private education 'doesn't really matter, because if you are growing up in an environment, where your parents are really wealthy, frankly, it doesn't really matter, because they're going to give you the wealth anyway, so you're going to have the choices.' By contrast, a Labour MP stresses non-economic components of class: 'Um, you know the, middle-class student from a single-parent split family in a relatively, um, poor postcode, actually brings with them an enormous amount of privilege, in a lot of circumstances.' Although they emphasise different elements of class privilege, both MPs recognise that it has a role in shaping outcomes. However, they also disagree over how important class is compared to other factors, with the Conservative MP placing emphasis squarely on individual drivers of inequality when they say that the 'worst sort of poverty is the poverty of ambition, poverty of aspiration'. This challenge to the role of class in shaping social outcomes is developed more fully by a Prisoners' Advice Service volunteer:

And you shouldn't put yourself in that box. Even if somebody else has advanced in a certain way because of their background, it doesn't mean you should feel that you can't also go in that certain direction because you're not from the same background as them. No. Don't you see yourself smaller than somebody else. Everyone has to look at themselves individually, even though society bombards you with, you know, class systems and everything else, I think everyone should just look at themselves individually, because things can turn out differently for different people at any time, no matter where they're from.

A Labour MP is more sceptical about the capacity of individuals to overcome inequality when they emphasise the marginalisation of people in poverty from 'mainstream society' and politics, as well as the difficulty of individually or collectively overcoming this marginalisation:

And, you know, I think what we see now with this government is the use of privilege to actually, kind of, you know, close down opportunities for ordinary working people, so that's just going to again make matters worse ... And, rather than, I think the, sort of, trends that there were perhaps in the eighties. You know, when the attack was there on the coal miners or the steelworkers, that this could be fought. I think that a lot of that, kind of, collective solidarity that was there then just isn't there anymore.

These competing views neatly illustrate the distinction between people who emphasise individual versus structural explanations for inequality, which we also observed in the data from the Privilege and Participation Survey.

Beyond class, there are a host of factors that interviewees and focus group participants associate with privilege. Most common amongst these is geography, which is frequently spoken about in passing when people describe their lives and backgrounds. In other words, where people grew up and live are important reference points for them. Beyond this, however, people also link geography to privilege, both implicitly and explicitly. In the former case, geography can be shorthand for social status, as when a Prisoners' Advice volunteer talks about the reasons that people end up in prison: 'it may not be just because of where they live – it could just be issues'. By contrast, a focus group respondent references Kensington as an area that everyone will understand as privileged, and later draws a distinction between people on benefits and those with 'cushy jobs' who 'live out in the countryside'. A Conservative MP also draws a stark line between the statuses of different areas of London when they say that 'if you went to a polo match in Windsor Great Park, you would see a lot of people there who probably don't understand what it's like to live in Uxbridge or Hayes'. Other people are specific about the benefits that some areas offer, such as the Tate volunteer who talks about the importance of 'being in the right neighbourhood so that your kid goes to the right school, or they will transmit certain things, like, basically going to the opera, the cinema, to exhibitions, things that will enhance their children's chances to get into the best education institutions and then get the best jobs'.

In this comment, there are echoes of the 'metropolitan networks' based around the generous provision of events in London identified by a Labour MP. In other words, some areas are rich in opportunities to engage in a range of cultural activities, including legitimate ones, which are not available to those who live elsewhere. The particularly London-centric nature of cultural provision is also reflected in the words of the Plaid Cymru activist who notes that 'the media is London-based. Nearly everybody in Wales watches London-based news, London-based documentaries'. This concern with the focus of activities on the capital city is also reflected in the comments of a Liberal Democrat MP and an SNP MP, both of whom note that it is challenging simply to travel to London from their constituencies. Here, we see a practical element of geographical privilege: some places have better transport links than others, meaning that some are more peripheral than others. This issue also functions at a local level, and an Evangelical Alliance volunteer talks about the 'logistical problems [including transport] to try and integrate two separate' schools in their local area when they were growing up. As with the quote from the Tate volunteer about local availability of cultural activities, this comment identifies the importance of local educational provision. This is also emphasised by two Conservative MPs who talk about 'a good local school' being a

feature of privilege, and about being constrained by growing up in an area where schooling assumed that a male student would 'be a miner or maybe ... work in steel work'.

Education, both formal and informal, is also linked to another element of privilege that people relate to society and, especially, their own lives: family. An Amnesty International volunteer emphasises the importance of 'a culture of education within your family'. Other interviewees talk about the role of family in transmitting interpersonal skills and a willingness to work hard, which support achievements in educational settings and beyond. Others talk in more general terms about 'being born into the right families', and here we start to see the intrinsic value of family. Comments stressing this tend to be highly personal, as we will see later in this chapter in relation to people's perceptions of their own privilege. However, a Housing Justice volunteer expresses the sentiment in general terms when they highlight the value of 'living really close to all of your extended family and seeing your extended family every day or at least every week for pop down for tea, you know, everybody living around the corner ... that very close, intimate life'.

By contrast with its tangible components, an important feature of how people perceive privilege is their uncertainty. When first asked about what privilege means, many activists, MPs, and members of the public are not sure how to answer. A Campaign for the Protection of Rural England volunteer admits that 'I'm feeling a bit stuck', and a Shelter volunteer says that 'I'm not sure. It's a difficult one to, kind of, like, try and think through.' A UKIP activist delays their answer with repetition when they say, 'privilege. Privilege, privilege, well that's a very good one, privilege', whilst a Housing Justice volunteer asks for clarification: 'The concept of privilege? Do you mean being born with a silver spoon in your mouth?' Similarly, a Conservative MP says, 'I find that difficult to answer really', whilst a Labour MP asks, 'privilege in what context?' Another Conservative MP wishes 'I'd done the etymology of privilege before I came here. What [does] privilege actually mean if we look at a dictionary definition?' One low-participation member of the public in the North East of England admits that 'I'm lacking the words to express things at times' and goes on to say that privilege is 'nebulous', whilst a member of the public in the West Midlands defers to the interviewer when they ask, 'it's something a bit higher, isn't it?' Sometimes this uncertainty is linked to the idea that it is difficult to tell whether someone is privileged by looking at them, and multiple interviewees use the term 'you shouldn't judge a book by its cover'. However, there are also many expressions of uncertainty about what the concept of privilege means more generally, which is something that we do not observe in answers to the survey questions. People are generally quite happy to indicate what they think the drivers of inequality and indicators of status are, when presented with a list of options, but they are more circumspect when asked to explain what they think privilege

is. One of the reasons for this uncertainty is the final feature of privilege that is touched upon by numerous interviewees and focus group participants: relativity. This is neatly illustrated by the member of the public from London who says, 'I don't know – I don't have everything, but I know I have a lot more than a lot of people so, therefore, even I'm privileged.'

People often use other countries as a reference point when describing privilege in relative terms. A Prisoners' Advice Service volunteer explains that what constitutes a privileged person 'depends on which part of the world they live in,' and makes reference to the availability of free education as a key indicator. An Enrych volunteer argues that poor people in some countries 'are very privileged when they have water, running water, and electricity,' and a low-participation member of the public in Wales talks about 'looking at the news, and seeing refugees and everything, you realise, "Yes, we've got a lot – we are in a privileged country."' Extending the latter point, others mention the political culture of a country, and a focus group participant says that 'we're lucky in this country that we can think by ourselves, I think – we're not forced into any kind of situation where we are in a dictatorship, or in a religious ... fanatical, type of government.' Similarly, a Conservative MP draws a contrast between how political conflict is resolved in some parts of the world, with 'violence, gun shots, war, cannon tanks on the street', and how it is resolved in the United Kingdom:

There's a television debate and there's a few posters put up and there's lots of shouting and then, you know, then a few people cry at the night, 'we've lost,' and then everything carries on as normal. Carry on then – that's fine. The people who lost say, 'oh well, we lost, but we'll keep ... and things just move on and it's actually amazing.

To a lesser extent, people also comment on the relative nature of privilege within the United Kingdom, and a Labour activist bridges the gap between international and within-country comparisons when they say that 'people in Britain are still more privileged than lots of other people in the world ... but then again, a lot of people didn't have the opportunities that David Cameron had'. This indicates that privilege is, in part, defined by the reference point that one chooses, which is neatly illustrated by a member of the public in London: 'Everyone knows that they've got something. I think everybody knows somebody who's worse off than themselves. It's a bit like when you watch Jeremy Kyle, dare I say it? You can be having a really bad day and think to yourself, "Actually, my life's not that bad after all."' Here we see that a relative understanding of privilege in general can easily be applied to views of one's own position. This highlights the relationship between people's perceptions of privilege in society and in their own lives. Nevertheless, people's views of privilege in their own lives are distinct and, as we will see in the next section, not always consistent with their views of privilege in society.

Perceptions of Own Privilege

The importance of distinguishing perceptions of privilege in society from perceptions of privilege in people's own lives is clear in [Figure 6.2](#). People are much more likely to attribute their own statuses than status differences in society to hard work. Half of people (50.0 per cent) rank hard work (panel A) as the most important factor in shaping their status, which is twice the number who rank it as the most important factor in driving status differences in society. The reverse is true for background (panel C), which is the most popular explanation for status difference in society but is selected by less than a fifth of people (18.4 per cent) as the most important reason for their own status. When we consider how many people rank it in their top three explanations (47.1 per cent), background is pushed into third place by hard work (81.3 per cent) and ambition (56.0 per cent, panel B). Fate-based explanations are also more popular in relation to one's own status than status difference in society, and luck (panel E) is ranked in the top three by two thirds (41.7 per cent), whilst inevitability (panel F) is included by approaching a quarter (23.3 per cent). This means that group-based inequality is the least popular explanation for people's own statuses and is ranked in the top three by only one in ten (10.6 per cent).

Clearly, then, people are apt to take credit for the status that they have achieved, stressing the role of their hard work and ambition. Many people do allow for the impact of their background, but far fewer than recognise its role in shaping status differences in society. Some prefer to emphasise the luck that has shaped their status, and many more highlight its role than they do in society more widely. Overall, this means that people are less willing to recognise the role of privilege in their own lives than in society at large, emphasising individual and, to a lesser extent, fate-based explanations for their own statuses, and focusing less on structural explanations. The dark grey colour-coding in [Figure 6.2](#) indicates that the four individual and structural explanations for people's own status are related to each other. As with explanations for status difference in society, people who emphasise hard work as a reason for their status are also more likely to highlight ambition, and less likely to emphasise background and group-based inequality as factors. Again, then, there is a tendency for individual and structural explanations for status to stand in opposition to each other, and we can consider the people who emphasise the latter to be perceiving the role of privilege in their own lives. This is the second component of perceptions of privilege.

Continuing our focus on background, although many do not stress its role, more than four fifths (81.8 per cent) acknowledge that it had at least a small influence on their status. Amongst those people, a third (32.8 per cent) think that it had an equally positive and negative impact (panel G), whilst more than two fifths (45.4 per cent) think that it had at least a little bit of a positive influence and half as

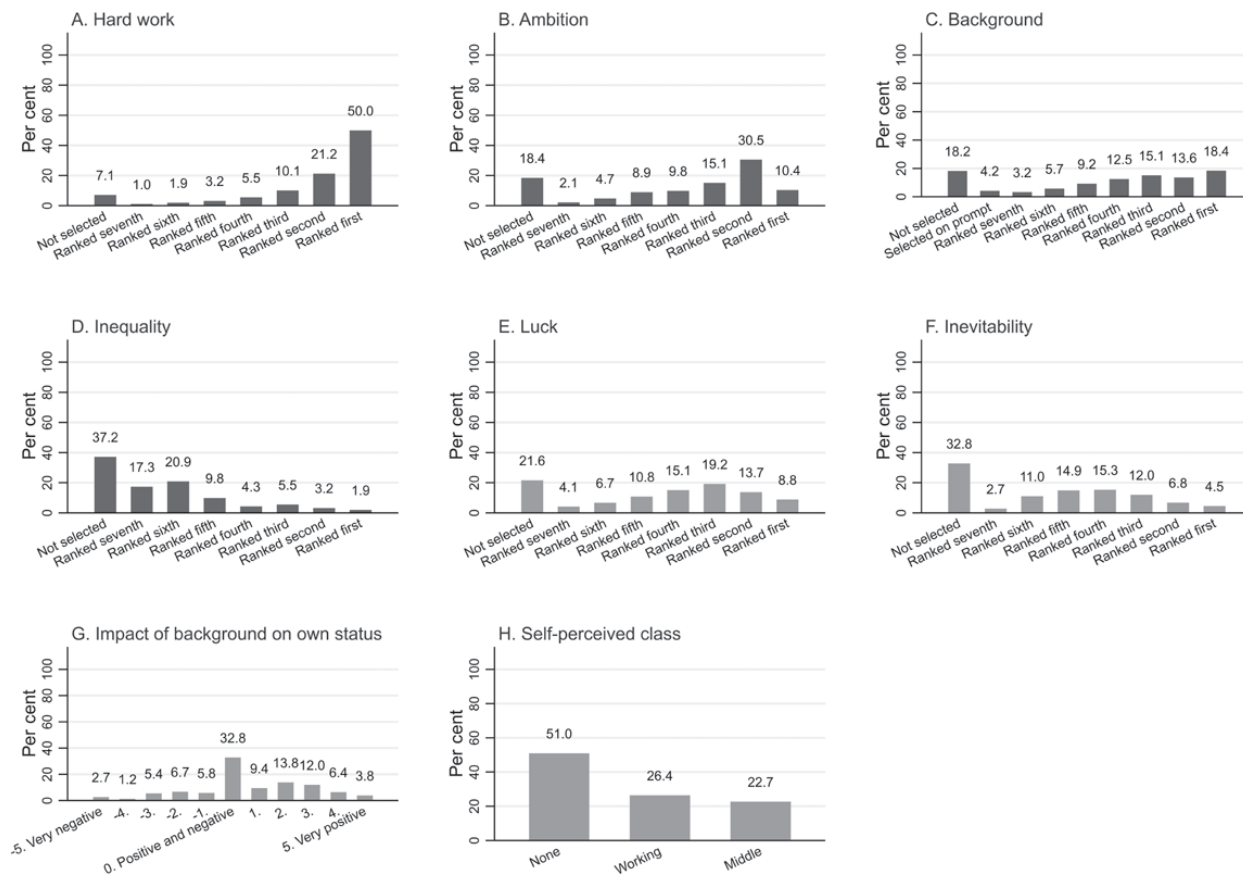


Figure 6.2 Own status and reasons for it
Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,405

many (21.8 per cent) think it had some negative impact. Whether positive, negative, or mixed, these people are reporting a sense that structural factors played a part in shaping their current status and can be said to perceive the role of privilege in their own lives. By contrast, when given the option, half of people (51.0 per cent) indicate that they do not feel part of a social class (panel H), meaning that they do not see a relationship between their status and a key structural hierarchy.² This, in itself, is a remarkable finding in the context of Great Britain, a country that for many is synonymous with an obsession with class. The waning of class identities that this suggests does not imply that those people have no other important identities. Nor, indeed, does it rule out the possibility that their lack of class identity is itself an important identity. However, it contrasts with the identities of the half of people who feel like they belong to a class. Slightly more than half of those people (53.8 per cent, or 26.4 per cent of people overall) identify as working class and the remainder (46.2 per cent, or 22.7 per cent of people overall) identify as middle class. Those who identify themselves as having a class position are aware of an important social structure that impacts on their lives and perceive privilege to a greater extent than those who identify with no class. Similarly, those who perceive their own position to be middle class are likely to recognise a level of privilege afforded to them that is less likely to exist for those who identify as working class. This perception of one's own class status is the third component of perceptions of privilege.

Interviewees and focus group participants also talk about how privilege relates to themselves and their lives, and they do so with reference to many of the same features that they talk about in relation to privilege in society. This suggests at least some commonality between how people perceive privilege in general and how they perceive it as relating to their own lives. Specifically, they make reference to the role of demographic traits such as gender, ethnicity, and especially class. They also highlight the importance of geography and mobility as features of privilege, and speak of the important role of family, both intrinsically and in terms of the material and educational advantage that it can transmit. However, there are also some differences, and, when relating privilege to their own lives, people make less reference to status and exclusivity than they do when talking about privilege in society more generally. This may reflect their greater willingness to attribute privilege to other people, which we saw in their survey answers regarding status in society and in their own lives, and their desire to view themselves as 'average' or in the 'comfortable middle', which we saw in the last chapter.

² This illustrates the importance of question wording. Here, respondents were first asked, 'Do you feel like you belong to a particular social class?', and then, if they answered 'Yes', they were asked to write their class. These written answers were manually coded into working-class and middle-class categories for analysis. However, we can safely assume that if people were given a simple categorical question, a larger proportion would identify with one of the classes listed in the answer options.

Again, people rarely talk about age as a feature of their own privilege, but a few people do mention gender. An Amnesty International volunteer says that 'I'm probably privileged that I'm a man' and gives the example of the 'choices my parents let me make, compared to my sister, say'. Similarly, commenting on multiple demographic traits, a low-participation member of the public in Scotland recognises that his perspective and experiences have been shaped by the fact that he is 'a middle-aged, white, heterosexual male, living in the UK'. The privilege that men enjoy is recognised by an SNP MP who notes that she has 'never faced any potential barriers' because of her gender, but that 'I know that's not the case for everybody, sadly'. Comments such as these are not frequent, and people are more apt to make passing reference to the role of gender in privilege when talking about society and politics than when talking about their own lives and experiences.

They also make relatively few comments linking their own ethnicity to privilege, or lack thereof, and such comments are overwhelmingly made by people who are, in the context of Great Britain, in ethnic minorities. Whilst numerous interviewees and focus group participants are willing to talk about immigration in general terms, or as a policy issue, two speakers give personal accounts of their experiences. The first person, an Amnesty International volunteer who came to Britain as a refugee, gives the example of encountering 'networking', or using social capital to one's advantage, as an immigrant. They find this notion 'alien', saying that 'the idea that you can just build a relationship just for the sake of some other end, or whatever, is very strange'. The second person, a focus group participant, explains their experiences in more general terms:

when I was very little, were um, and we came to England from Uganda, so we got deported from Uganda ... so, kind of, growing up in the seventies, eighties was quite a tough time for the UK sort of thing, and, um, probably the earliest political memory was a lot of hostility towards, um, sort of immigrants.

Such hostility, however, is not reserved only for first-generation immigrants, and a participant in a different focus group echoes the experience: 'I'm Muslim, yeah, and I, I, sometimes, you know, I mean I, I've been born here, I've lived here and I've, I've put up with racism most of my life.' Thus, although references to ethnicity as a feature of privilege in people's own lives are rare, they give an insight into how it confronts those without such privilege in their daily lives. These comments highlight the absence of experiences of immigration or marginalisation based on ethnicity from how ethnic-majority and non-immigrant interviewees and participants talk about privilege. This absence, and the lack of need to think about their ethnicity, indicates a privilege in itself.

By contrast, references to how class relates to privilege in one's own life are common and, as we saw in the last chapter, often relate to economic, social, and cultural capital. We also saw that people use their stocks of capital, particularly

economic, as an indicator of their place in social hierarchies. Class is also used in this way, as we see when a Housing Justice volunteer describes themselves as 'solid middle class' or a UKIP activist talks about having a 'working-class background'. However, comments that develop the role of class and its relationship with privilege in people's own lives, without making reference to capital, are rare. This indicates that class, privilege, and capital are intimately related in people's minds such that they tend to mention them in conjunction with each other. However, one interviewee, another UKIP activist who talks about their working-class background, illustrates the intrinsic importance of class when they talk about going to their first party conference. There, they found themselves 'surrounded by these ex-Tory toffs and everything, and I just thought to myself, "what on earth am I doing here?"' This indicates the power of class to make people feel comfortable or uncomfortable in social settings. Simply by feeling less privileged than, or different from, other people in a given setting, someone can feel like they don't belong.

Class is also often related to geography, as when people talk about growing up in a middle-class or working-class area. They often expound upon how particular areas or their ability to move between them are features of privilege in their own lives. A low-participation member of the public in the North East of England explains that they have moved around a lot for their work but begins by noting that they grew up 'in the east end of Glasgow, right? It was rough as hell.' At the other end of the spectrum, a Science Museum volunteer talks about how lucky they are to have lived overseas but also feels

quite privileged to have grown up and to have lived in Chelsea all my life. It's quite a privileged area. It's quite select. We don't have a lot of problems with burglaries and muggings, things like that. You do pay a very high price economically for it but ... It was always very clean and quite quiet, but it always attracted artistic people, painters and sculptors, a lot, and actors and actresses, they were always around this area.

Both of the above people indicate that they have been fortunate to be mobile, and this is a prominent feature of the link between geography and privilege in people's own lives. A Labour Party activist is clear that 'I think it's a privilege to be able to come to Britain and study. I think that's a privilege.' Similarly, the Amnesty International volunteer who moved to Britain as a refugee feels that they 'have been extremely lucky to be here in the first place'. They also note that their family was privileged in the context of the country that they fled, simply because they 'had the means to get out'. Building on this, they recount an experience in their childhood that illustrates how privileged they feel to have been able to move to Britain:

I still remember this to this day – was going into school, first day at school in England, and being handed a notepad and pen. I was like, do I, so, then, I returned that back at the end of the day. The teacher was like, no, you put this in your folder.

The folder had my name on it and everything, and gave it to me, and was like, 'this is yours now'. I was like, 'what?' Mind blown. Like, totally blown. For that whole day I was just, like, so excited that I had all this stuff. All this stationery and stuff.

Many people also talk about the privilege of mobility in passing, and a Housing Justice volunteer mentions being lucky to have 'opportunities to take part in things, to travel', whilst an Enrych volunteer, who is also a migrant, views themselves as 'privileged in terms that I've experienced, you know, certain things that others maybe won't because I've moved around and I've lived in different places.' This view of mobility as a privilege is not universal, and a low-participation member of the public in London rejects the link between the two whilst asserting the importance of meritocracy. In doing so, they illustrate the opposition between individual and structural explanations for people's own status that we saw in the survey data:

I've done a lot of travelling, I've lived in other countries, and, yes, you always get the people going, 'Oh wow, you're so lucky you've lived in Japan', blah, blah, blah, and I think, well, I've worked hard at university, university's come and done a presentation about having a job in Japan, I've followed it through, done the interview, you know, so I've kind of got it on my own merit.

The geographical components of privilege also illustrate that people sometimes think of privilege in their own lives as relative, as they do in relation to privilege in society. For example, a Shelter volunteer talks about travelling to poor parts of the world prior to and during their degree: 'when I saw the amount of suffering that other people suffered and the amount that I suffered, I felt, well, I'm fortunate'. Within the United Kingdom, a Conservative MP notes that 'I was privileged in the sense that I grew up in a really poor area with really poor parents, but I was better off than a lot of other people', whilst a low-participation member of the public in London comments that 'I don't come from a great background, but compared to other people it's not bad.' A Housing Justice volunteer develops this point extensively when talking about growing up in the North West of England, where they were 'regarded as some, sort of, minor royalty because I've got a silly surname' and had '*Guardian*-reading, whatever, liberal parents and my dad was off travelling the world and doing things and earning a reasonable salary'. They distinguish this from their current life in London, where in their 'social circles and work and all the rest of it, now I would be much more towards the bottom'. Beyond geographical and social context, the volunteer also recognises that the relative nature of privilege means that it depends on one's stage in life. They note that there is a 'ratchet effect' such that 'the people I think are privileged now are people who own property in London', but 'if you interviewed me in ten years' time and I own property in London, I think it would be people with somewhere in New York and somewhere in the south of France'. Thus, for at least some people, what constitutes privilege depends in part on what your reference point is. This is also

reflected in the near-universal conception of politicians as more privileged than the public that we observe in the next section, and in how much people talk about the gap between those two groups, which we will cover further in the [next chapter](#).

A relative understanding of privilege in one's own life, however, sits alongside features that are seen as beneficial in and of themselves, regardless of one's reference point. Family is a crucial example here and, whilst we saw some references to its role in privilege in society, comments stressing its importance in people's own lives are more common. An Enrych volunteer says that they are privileged 'to know that my family is healthy', a UKIP activist considers 'it a privilege that I'm happily married, my children are happy, and I live in a comfortable home', and a low-participation member of the public in Wales notes that 'I'm really lucky in that I've got three gorgeous children, four gorgeous grandchildren, and a whole family that's close together.' Some people talk about the family difficulties that they faced in their childhoods, such as a member of the public in London who was brought up by a single parent and 'used to have to go to a different council property for two years, and then a different one and a different one, lived in a hotel, and that's the instability – it's very hard to cope with'. Similarly, a focus group participant explains that they and their siblings had a 'horrible childhood' and were driven by the feeling that 'we didn't want to be our parents basically – we just wanted to be, out, so, we didn't wanna live the life we were livin' as kids, cos we were very very poor, very very poor'.

In the above quotes, we can see that family has intrinsic value and that it transmits privilege, often materially through things such as housing and money. This is also reflected in the comments of people who had more positive childhood experiences, such as the low-participation member of the public in Scotland who considers themselves 'lucky to have been born into a middle-class family in the UK, and the support that brings'. Similarly, a Liberal Democrat MP talks about having 'very supportive parents' when they grew up, and a Tate volunteer notes that having two loving parents 'gives you a lot of inner strength to handle anything that happens to you'. Others stress the importance of being taught to think by their parents, such as a Campaign for the Protection of Rural England volunteer who mentions being 'lucky to have had a model of being inquisitive', and an Amnesty International volunteer who talks about how 'there was always a culture of educating yourself and a thirst for knowledge in my family, which I guess is a privilege of sorts'. This highlights people's perceptions of the material and educational advantages that their families have transmitted, which constitute a facet of privilege in their own lives. Thus, many people are quite attuned to the advantages and disadvantages that they have experienced in their own lives, even if they also attribute their current social position to individual attributes such as hard work and ambition. By contrast, there is little desire to credit those in the political world with such positive attributes, and, as we will see in the next section, politics is widely perceived as a highly privileged domain.

Perceptions of Privilege in Politics

The Privilege and Participation Survey asked respondents how privileged politicians and people involved in politics are, compared to themselves and society. Their answers are clear: to start with, almost everyone views politically active people as equally or more privileged than either themselves or society. [Figure 6.3](#) shows that a third of people (32.5 per cent) think that people who get involved in politics are about as privileged as themselves (panel D), but less than a quarter (22.8 per cent) think that this is the case when the comparison point is society (panel B). Almost three quarters of people (73.6 per cent) think that politically active people are at least a little more privileged than the average in society, and more than six in ten (63.6 per cent) think the same when comparing such people to themselves. Here we see that the perceived gap between politics and the public develops before we reach the upper echelons of the political class, and large majorities view people who get involved in the day-to-day activities of politics as distinctively privileged, both compared to the population and themselves.³

The figures are even more striking in relation to politicians, who around one in seven see as equally privileged to society (13.4 per cent, panel A) and themselves (14.8 per cent, panel C). More than eight in ten people think that politicians are at least a little more privileged than society (83.2 per cent) and themselves (82.4 per cent). Indicating the sense of distance, a third of people (33.4 per cent) think that politicians are much more privileged than themselves, and two thirds (65.7 per cent) think that politicians are more than a little more privileged than themselves. The equivalent figures when comparing politicians to society are three in ten (30.3 per cent) and more than six in ten (63.4 per cent). Again, almost no one views politicians as less privileged than the average in society or themselves. Thus, whilst it is clear that the perceived privilege gap between the public and politics begins at the grassroots, it unsurprisingly grows as we move up the hierarchy to consider the people who build a career in politics. We must bear in mind that people might have either earned or unearned privileged in mind when answering these questions, with the implication that the privilege gap stems either from becoming part of political structures or from social forces that prompt certain types of people to engage with and progress through politics. Either way, people see those who are politically active as distinctively privileged, and the degree to which they do so is the fourth and final component of perceptions of privilege.

³ There is a sizeable minority whose answers, taken together, indicate that they are more privileged than the average in society, for instance by saying that politicians are a little more privileged than themselves but a lot more privileged than society. This group is about a fifth of respondents when using politicians as the reference point but about a third when using politically active people as the reference point. Both of these groups are larger than the groups that implicitly indicate that they have lower privilege than the societal average. However, the largest group in both cases is made up of people who indicate that they are average in terms of their own privilege.

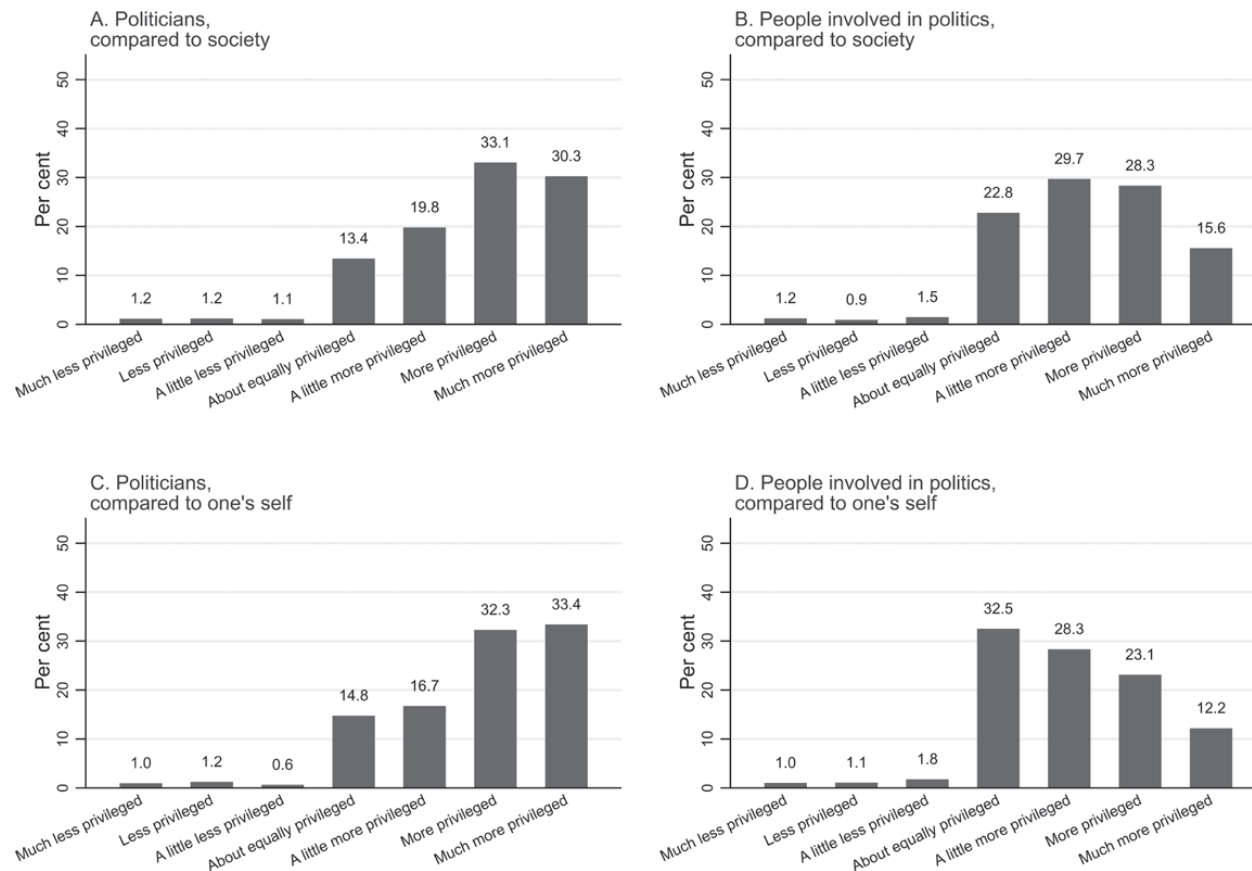


Figure 6.3 Privilege of those involved in politics

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,405

The perceived privilege of those in politics revealed by the Privilege and Participation Survey is also reflected in how people speak about politics and politicians. In the [next chapter](#) we will see that they easily draw links between politics and privilege, and often talk about politicians as privileged people. In this association between privilege and politics, the distinction between more and less explicitly political participation that we identified in [Chapter 4](#) is important. It is more explicitly political participation and particularly national-level politics conducted by elected representatives that people discuss in relation to privilege. This sustains politics as a distinct domain, inhabited by other people, and allows even those who are active in support of causes that they care about to distance themselves from politics and, perhaps, privilege. As a Labour MP puts it, people may be ‘passionate about social justice’ and ‘wanting to save the planet ... but they don’t see them as being political’. Similarly, a Conservative MP notes that their constituents say, ‘“I’m not interested at all in politics – I’m more interested in health or education.” They think politics is something separate and different.’ The interviews and focus groups identify some of the negative reasons that people may seek to avoid labelling the issues that they are interested in as explicitly political. First amongst these is the perception that people involved in such politics, and specifically politicians, are self-interested. This view is expressed a lot and is particularly prevalent amongst members of the public, both in interviews and focus groups. One low-participation member of the public in the North East of England wants politicians who are ‘altruistic’ and is concerned about the pay and expenses that they receive, as well as the ‘jollies’ that they go on, and says, ‘they’re all too busy looking after themselves. They’re not interested in what the, you know, the people who are in the country want.’ Similarly, a member of the public in the West Midlands thinks ‘a lot of them are just out for what they can get’ rather than being ‘bothered about the ordinary citizen’.

These sentiments are also expressed in the focus groups when people talk about politicians of both left and right meeting ‘in the middle ... where the money is – that’s what they want’, or ask about the commitment of politicians who ‘have second, third, and fourth jobs, and they’ve got money coming in from there’. One focus group participant thinks that such self-interest is more prevalent in the upper echelons of national politics, and argues that many backbenchers ‘do a good job ... well a lot of them, um ... it’s not for money is it, it, it’s altruism’. By contrast, a participant in another focus group gives an example of perceived self-interest in local politics when they talk about their councillors being: ‘whisked off to Geneva into a five-star hotel by this construction, um, company you know, got five, five-star meals, all that kind of thing, a whole weekend of like absolute luxury – suddenly this multimillion-pound development’s coming up in [the local area]’. Similarly, a low-participation member of the public in Scotland mentions that their local council was ‘forcing through’ repairs paid for by residents in which ‘the council workers were then receiving bonuses from building companies for this work’, but the

council merely stopped 'the system and then relaunched it under a new name'. In both of these cases, we see an additional negative feature of people's perceptions of politics that is associated with self-interest: dishonesty. A focus group participant talks about two senior politicians asserting that they had met a manifesto pledge: 'basically they just told lies, they stood there and told, and lied to the public', whilst a member of the public in the West Midlands thinks that politicians 'can be two-faced'. Another member of the public, in the North West of England, argues that 'you want honesty, first and foremost, in a politician. That's been over the years, politicians are tarnished with, not tarnished, associated with lies and deceit'.

MPs also recognise that they are viewed negatively and, specifically, as self-interested. One Conservative MP says that the public view politicians as 'a bunch of bloody scoundrels, quite frankly ... because of the fact that so many MPs are seen as to be in it for themselves'. One of their Conservative colleagues mentions stereotypes of politicians 'as being rather self-serving, potentially corrupt, um, and so forth', whilst another talks of the 'reputation that politicians have like "they're all in it for themselves"'. A Liberal Democrat MP despairs at the media portrayal of MPs as 'greedy bastards. We're all ripping off the public purse; we're all in it for what's in it for us'. Finally, a Conservative MP recounts a personal experience of encountering the view that they are self-interested, and expresses frustration at the difficulty of challenging it:

It does annoy me when I was recently in a village in my constituency, they say, 'Must be coming close to election time' ... and I said, 'What do you mean?' 'You're knocking my door', and I said, 'Well actually, there's another nine months to go, it's in the summer, and since I've been elected, I've done a surgery in that hall, across the road, three times a year', and I've never seen him. You can't win I'm afraid.

This quote also illustrates an important view amongst MPs in particular, and also some focus group participants, that some negative perceptions of politics are inaccurate. A Conservative MP argues that the perception that politicians are all 'white, male, and middle class' is 'not true any more' but that people continue to 'stereotype politicians'. Similarly, a focus group participant says of the view of privileged politicians that 'I'm not sure how much of that is stereotype and how much of it is actually real', whilst another participant in the same focus groups thinks that because people 'don't even know who they [politicians] are ... you're gonna still continue that perception that politicians are dusty old men in wigs and gowns'. A Conservative MP challenges the idea that MPs are socially homogeneous when they say, 'you've got, you know, people who are social workers, teachers and entrepreneurs, business, engineers. Some who, you know, studied PPE and, you know, worked as special advisors. There's a variety of people'. They also argue that perceptions of the homogeneity of politicians persist because 'there's a sort of opaqueness to how people progress in politics', which means that the public do not know how people with different backgrounds have become MPs. Other challenges

to the view of politicians as homogeneous focus not on their backgrounds but on the ideologies, as when a Liberal Democrat MP says, 'I think that is the phrase I detest most, "you are all the same". Oh for goodness sake, every political party is a coalition, let alone between parties.' Similarly, the Conservative MP who challenged their constituent about only being visible before an election says that 'one of the annoying things about party politics ... is the perception amongst the general public ... that all Conservatives think alike. Well, you know ... the most passionate arguments are often between colleagues, not between parties.'

The above Liberal Democrat MP also challenges negative views of politicians more generally, arguing 'that the vast majority [of MPs] are [involved] because they feel they have something they can contribute to either their local community or on the parliamentary stage'. Two focus group participants also have a positive perspective, saying that 'the majority [of MPs] work very hard and they do, do a good job', and that 'the ones that do engage with their ... constituency ... I think that they, that does work'. These comments are the exception to the generally negative view of politics as a distant domain of privilege, dishonesty, and self-interest that is revealed by the Privilege and Participation Survey as well as the interviews and focus groups. Such perceptions may constitute a barrier to participation in themselves, since people who view politics in a negative light may be demotivated to engage with it. It may also be the case that disengagement from politics, or at least more explicitly political participation, fuels negative views of politicians and politically active people. These views are likely to disincline people from future participation in politics, especially in more explicit forms, and may sustain the sense that the political system does not work for everyone.

Four Components of Perceptions of Privilege

In this chapter we have seen that people tend to prioritise either individual or structural explanations for status difference in society, with the latter group perceiving privilege to a greater degree than those in the former group. This is the first component of perceptions of privilege that we measure, and it is reflected to some extent in how people talk about the concept. When asked about privilege, people mention status, exclusivity, and class as key factors, as was the case in their discussion of economic and cultural capital. People also emphasise geography as a feature of privilege, sometimes as a shorthand for status, and link it to drivers of advantage such as education and cultural provision. Despite the clarity with which (some) people discuss these things, uncertainty is also an important feature of how they talk about privilege. This also relates to the common perception of privilege as a relative term, which is refracted through recognition of the material, educational, and political advantages that flow simply from living in Britain.

By contrast with status differences in society, people tend to explain their own status with reference to individual factors such as hard work and ambition rather than structural factors such as background and group-based inequality. This is the second component of perceptions of privilege, and the emphasis on individual rather than structural explanations means that people are less apt to perceive privilege in their own lives than they are in society. This rejection by some of the role of structural hierarchies in shaping their lives is also reflected in the surprisingly low proportion of people who identify with a class, which is the third component of perceptions of privilege. In a class-orientated society such as Britain, it is remarkable that half of people take the opportunity, if offered, to indicate that they do not feel part of a class. This is also reflected in the number of people who speak about themselves as 'average' or in the 'comfortable middle', which we saw in the previous chapter. Whilst some are willing to talk about the role of class and capital in their lives, many people do not wish to place themselves in a clearly labelled class. We also see that few people speak about gender as it relates to their own privilege, and only interviewees and focus group participants in ethnic minority groups talk about ethnicity in these terms. Many more people emphasise geography and mobility as facets of their own privilege. Often, however, geography is also linked to talk of privilege in relative terms, such that changing location alters one's social context and status. Perceiving privilege as relative is less common in talk of people's own lives than society at large, but, when deployed, it allows them to be both privileged and not privileged at the same time. Similarly, people's discussion of the privilege associated with family sometimes relates to structural advantages that can be passed on but at other times to the simple privilege of one's relatives being happy and healthy.

These tendencies in how people talk about their own privilege, their greater emphasis on individual explanations for their own status than for status in society at large, and their frequent lack of class identification indicate a hesitance to relate structural privilege to their own lives. Talk of privilege being relative, and the privilege of having a happy family, is accurate but also shifts focus away from the role of structural forces in giving advantages to some people and disadvantages to others. Some people do explicitly, and occasionally extensively, unpack their privilege. However, it is clear that people perceive privilege in their own lives to a lesser extent than they do in society and, especially, politics. Nevertheless, many people do understand and perceive privilege, even if not consistently, and they have multifaceted conceptions of it. Indeed, the complexity of their understanding may be part of the reason for their hesitance to apply the concept to themselves. If people see many different facets of privilege, then it is likely that some facets point towards being privileged whilst others do not. This might help us understand why so few people voluntarily identify with a class. Occupation, education, income, not to mention the features of capital that we considered in the last chapter, do

not always indicate the same class, so people may prefer to say they have none. Similarly, if people remember experiences from their childhood that point to a different class than their current position suggests, they may prefer not to label themselves as one class or another.

Despite the complexity of their perceptions of privilege in society and their own lives, people clearly view politicians as much more privileged than both themselves and society at large, which is the fourth and final component of perceptions of privilege. They see those who get involved in politics as socially distinctive and highly privileged regardless of whether they are asked about politicians specifically or politically active people more generally. A plurality of people thinks that the gap between politicians and the public emerges or is solidified after they enter politics, but a large minority think that politicians were out of touch before that. The former view suggests that political institutions create the divide between the public and people in politics, whilst the latter view sees the people who self-select into politics as distinctive.⁴ If we want to reduce the gap between the public and politicians, the former view suggests the need for reform of political institutions, whilst the latter suggests the need for wider changes that decouple the opportunity to enter politics from social advantage and disadvantage. Both views, however, are consistent with people perceiving a link between privilege and politics. Whether these perceptions, or their perceptions of privilege more widely, are related to their political participation remains to be seen. It is this question, and the question of whether stocks of capital are related to political participation, that the [next chapter](#) seeks to answer.

⁴ The analysis of when people think politicians lose touch with the public is available in online [Appendix B](#).

Politics as a Distinguished Activity

The Many Factors in Political Participation

In the previous four chapters, we have seen how political participation and barriers to it, stocks of capital, and perceptions of privilege and politics are viewed and spoken about by the British public. In this chapter we bring together these factors to investigate the relationships between capital, perceptions, and political participation. As such, the chapter empirically tests the theory outlined in the first three chapters of the book. Specifically, we test the expectation that people with greater stocks of economic, social, and cultural capital are more politically active than people with smaller stocks of capital. We also test the expectation that people who perceive privilege to a greater extent are more politically active than those who perceive privilege to a lesser extent. Issues of how these various factors are causally related are considered in the [next chapter](#) so, for now, we are interested in whether capital and perceptions of privilege relate to political participation. Because of the large number of variables in the Privilege and Participation Survey, as shown in the previous three chapters, the following quantitative analysis focuses on indices that summarise people's stocks of capital, their perceptions of privilege, and their political participation.¹ We also build on the qualitative analysis presented in the previous chapters by considering how capital, privilege, and political participation relate to each other in people's speech.

Throughout this chapter, the analysis of the survey data accounts for a host of other factors that may be related to political participation. These include age, gender, education, region of residence, social grade, and childhood class. Further, the survey analysis also takes into account the factors in the civic voluntarism model (Schlozman et al., 2020) and confirms that recruitment, civic skills, and political interest are related to multiple modes of political participation. Nevertheless, the relationships that we observe between capital, perceptions, and participation

¹ These indices are based on the process of factor analysis outlined in online [Appendix A](#).

persist when these other factors are taken into account. Those relationships are often modest in magnitude but, with some exceptions, they indicate that people with greater stocks of economic, social, and cultural capital are more involved in multiple modes of political participation. In the latter case, it is legitimate cultural capital that is positively related to participation, which suggests that at least some modes of political participation constitute distinguished activities. This idea is also reflected in the way that people talk about the links between privilege and politics. People rarely mention direct links between capital and political participation, but they talk a great deal about the unrepresentativeness of politicians, the gap between them and the public, and how privilege relates to both of these things. Indeed, elite politics is synonymous with politics more generally for many people, and this lends itself to drawing a link with privilege. Thus, the chapter illustrates how political participation is both perceptually and behaviourally linked to privilege.

Economic Capital and Political Participation

Starting with economic capital, we can suppose that it is easier for people with greater material resources at their disposal to get involved in politics. This might be because they can afford to pay people to do some of the things that other people have to do for themselves, such as domestic chores, or because they have the money to get to meetings or pay membership fees. In our analysis of the Privilege and Participation Survey data, we represent economic capital with an index that encompasses household income, benefits received, perceived ease of paying bills and debts, and housing status. The index runs from 0, representing the minimum economic capital for each component, to 1, representing the maximum economic capital.² Similarly, each type of political participation is represented by an index in which 0 indicates the minimum frequency of engaging with those types of activities, whilst 1 indicates the maximum frequency. The exceptions to this are donating, which is a scale representing the total donated in the last year, and voting, which is a dichotomous indicator of turning out at the last general election. We use these measures of political participation throughout this chapter. We can see from [Figure 7.1](#) that our summary index of economic capital is related to very few modes of political participation. As is the case throughout this chapter, the figure shows regression coefficients representing the relationship between economic capital and the six modes of political participation that we measure. The dots indicate the magnitude of the regression coefficients in five different regression models, and the lines extending from the sides of the dots represent the 95 per cent confidence intervals. The models sequentially introduce a range of other variables

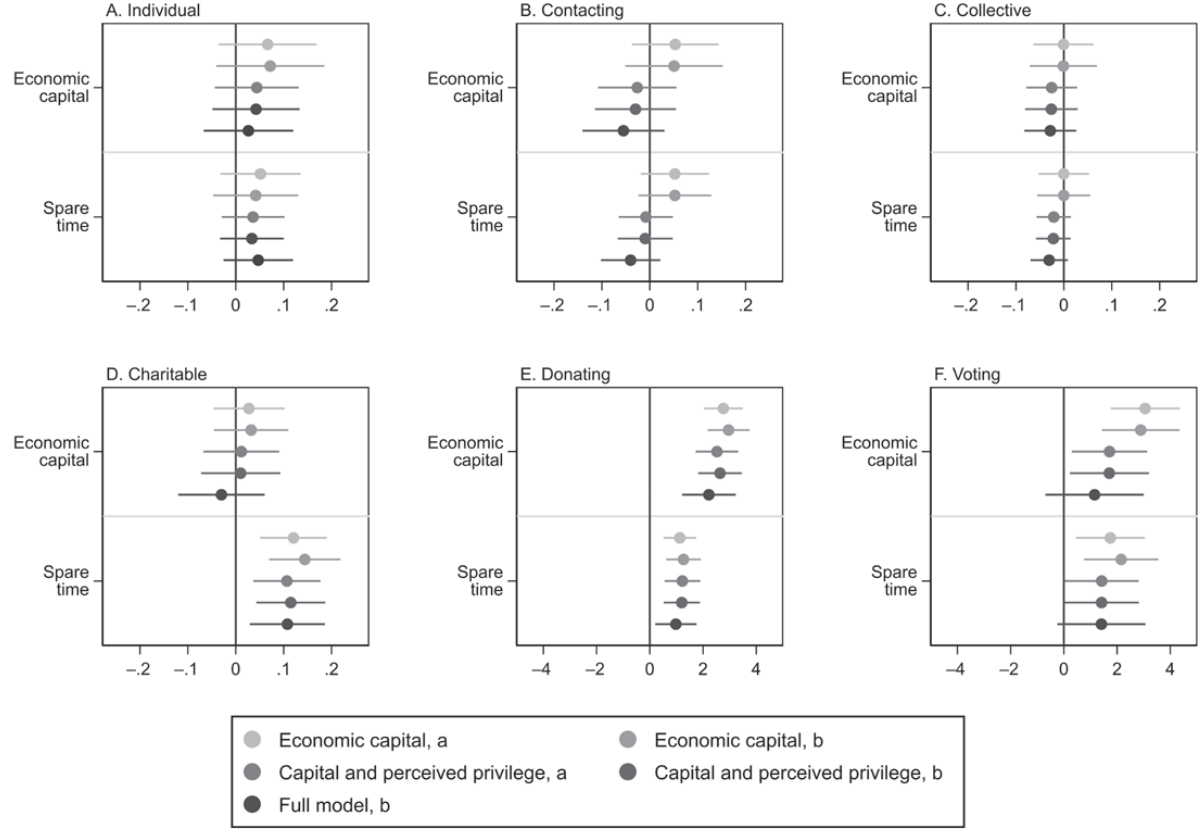
² The distributions of all of the indices used in this chapter are available in [Appendix C](#).

so that we can take them into account (i.e., control for them) when estimating the relationship between economic capital and political participation. As we can see, in many cases these other variables make little difference to the relationship. Indeed, regardless of the other variables that are included, we can see that economic capital is not statistically significantly related to individual (panel A), contacting (panel B), or collective (panel C) political participation, or to charity involvement (panel D). The lack of statistically significant relationships is reflected in the confidence interval lines crossing zero in each of the panels relating to those modes of participation.³

Focusing on the few statistically significant results, economic capital is related to how much people donate to the causes that they care about (panel E) regardless of the other variables that we include in the model. Indeed, a one-unit increase on the index representing economic capital is associated with a two-point rise on the scale measuring donating (in the full model, with all other variables included, $\text{coef.} = 2.220$, $\text{s.e.} = 0.512$, $p < 0.001$), which is equivalent to a move from donating less than £25 per year to donating between £50 and £100 per year. There are also signs that economic capital is positively related to voting, but this relationship is not statistically significant in the model in which we include all of the other variables. As such, we can only be confident that economic capital is related to the amount that people donate to the causes that they support. This is hardly a surprising relationship, but it is clear that people who have more economic resources are able to financially support the campaigns and organisations that they care about more generously.

Figure 7.1 also shows the coefficients for spare time, which we include for reference because it has previously been proposed as a factor relating to political activity (Schlozman et al., 2020) and because it is commonly identified by interviewees and focus group participants as a barrier to participation. It is represented by an index running from 0, which indicates having no spare time each day, to 1, which indicates having one's whole day free. Spare time is split out from the index representing economic capital because it is conceptually distinct from the income and wealth components of economic capital. Nevertheless, we can think of it as linked to economic capital and it is positively related to the index, meaning that people with more income and wealth also tend to have more spare time. This might help explain the positive relationship that we observe between spare time and donating (panel E), which is a little more surprising than the above relationship between economic capital and donating. It seems that, independently of the other components of economic capital, people who have more spare time are also more generous with their donations to the campaigns and organisations that they support. This relationship is of a smaller magnitude, but moving from one end

³ Statistical significance is also shown in the regression tables available in [Appendix D](#).



Note: a = all available cases; b = cases with complete data

Figure 7.1 Coefficient plots: political participation on economic capital

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,092–1,219

of the spare time scale to the other (equivalent to moving from zero hours to 24 hours of spare time per day) is associated with moving almost one point up the six-point donating scale (in the full model, $\text{coef.} = 0.979$, $\text{s.e.} = 0.397$, $p < 0.05$). We cannot be sure of the basis for this relationship, but one possibility is that people with more spare time can pay more attention to the causes that they care about, for instance by reading requests for donations, and perhaps have time to support more causes, which leads them to donate more money even when taking into account their income and wealth.

More explicably, we also see that spare time is positively related to charitable participation, which encompasses frequency and amount of time spent volunteering as well as the number of different ways that people support charities. Thus, the mode of participation that most obviously entails giving up time is the one in which having spare time is most clearly related to involvement. Specifically, moving from one end to the other of the spare time scale is associated with a 10 per cent increase ($\text{coef.} = 0.108$, $\text{s.e.} = 0.039$, $p < 0.01$) on the charitable participation index (which also runs from zero to one). This is equivalent to supporting a charity in one more way (e.g., by becoming a registered member), volunteering with one category more frequency (e.g., multiple times a week rather than once a week), or giving two categories more time when volunteering (e.g., a whole day rather than one or two hours). Given that these shifts are associated with moving between the most extreme possible amounts of spare time, the magnitude of the relationship is quite small in practice. However, it is clear that when people have more spare time on their hands, they often give at least a small section of it over to charitable activities.

Of equal note to the positive relationship between economic capital and donating, and between spare time and charitable activities, is the absence of relationships with the other modes of political participation. Corroborating previous research (Schlozman et al., 2020), and with the benefit of variables representing a host of other factors, we see that economic capital is only related to the mode of participation for which it has the most clear and obvious implications: donating. Similarly, we might think of having spare time as a prerequisite for a range of modes of participation, but we see that it is also only related to two modes of participation: donating and charitable participation. The absence of such relationships is understandable for individual participation, which involves relatively low-cost activities such as signing petitions and wearing badges, and also for contacting participation, which is now remarkably quick and easy to undertake via the internet. We can extend this observation to voting as well, which has itself been described as a low-cost mode of participation (Aldrich, 1993). However, it is notable that spare time also has no relationship with collective participation, which involves time-intensive activities such as organising or attending meetings and going to protests. The lack of a negative relationship in each of these cases also

indicates that we cannot apply the adage that if you want something done, then you should ask a busy person to do it. Instead, with the exception of the positive relationships that we observe, it is the case that the people who participate in most modes of politics have a variety of different amounts of economic capital and free time. Thus, although we have no evidence of a negative effect of economic capital on political participation, we have only limited evidence in support of Hypothesis 1, outlined in [Chapter 2](#). Economic capital is not positively related to political participation in general, as the hypothesis suggests, but to donating in particular.

Despite the rarity of relationships in the survey data, we saw in [Chapter 4](#) that people do identify lack of economic capital as a barrier to participation in their survey responses. They also link economic capital to privilege when they talk about the concepts. However, interviewees and focus group participants rarely draw a direct link between economic capital and political participation in their discussions. One Liberal Democrat MP does identify a specific case in which financial struggles drove a constituent to get in touch: ‘we had a lady in tears, sheer desperation, because the amount of money that’s coming into the household is less than the money that’s going out. And we’re not talking about somebody whose living an extravagant lifestyle. We’re talking about somebody who is barely existing.’ The gap between politicians and the public that we consider later in this chapter also sometimes takes on an economic form. A Conservative MP asks, ‘what chance on earth have any of us [MPs] to connect with somebody on 80 pound a week who’s seeing [their] shopping basket get more and more expensive, and having their benefits frozen?’ Mirroring this, a focus group participant stresses that MPs argue that ‘cos it’s relatively, a low wage isn’t it [the MP’s salary], and they need extra income to support their lives – that’s their argument isn’t it? It is, to us that’s a lot of money.’ Whilst these comments do not directly link economic capital to political participation, they do show that the former is sometimes salient in the perceptions of politics that, as we will see, are related to political participation.

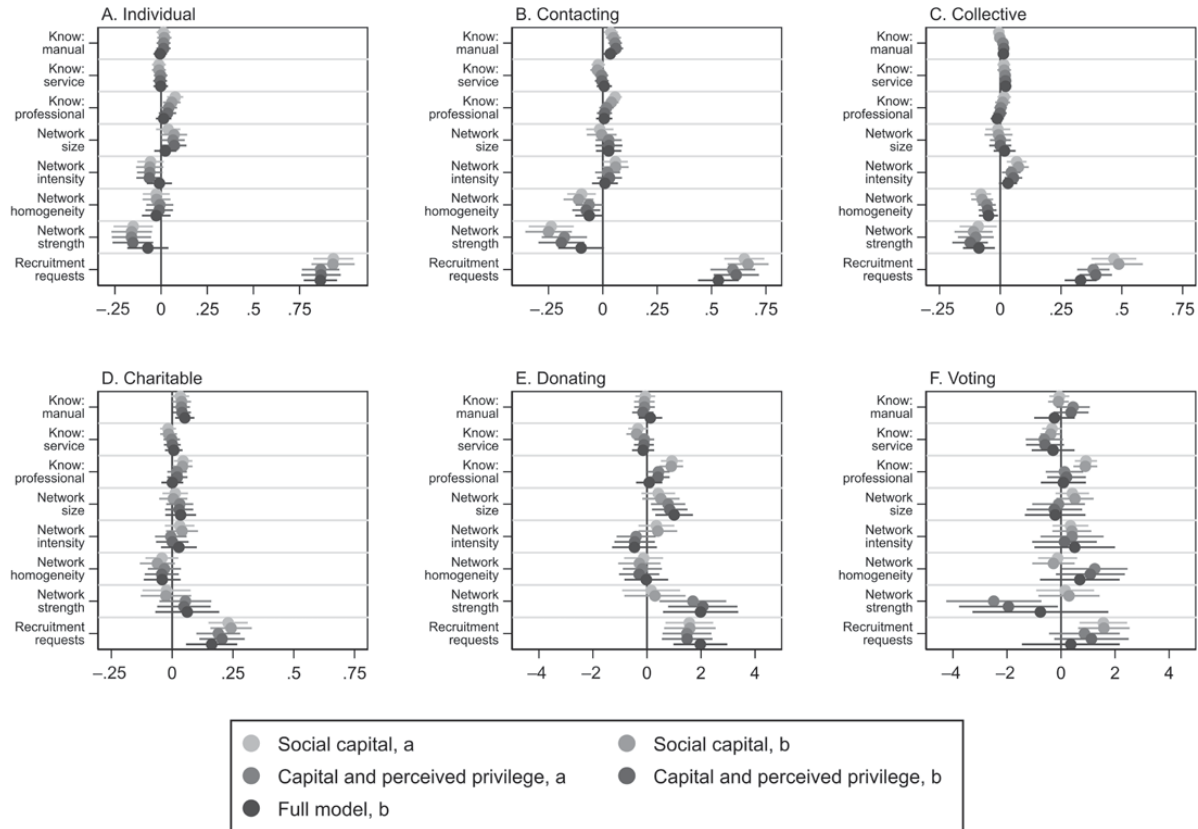
Social Capital and Political Participation

Whereas economic capital was captured by a single index, social capital has seven indices representing its different elements. Specifically, we measure whether people have acquaintances with three distinct occupational statuses, as well as how large, active, homogeneous, and strong their social networks are. In all but one case, these indices run from 0, representing the minimum social capital, to 1, representing the maximum. Thus, a value of 1 on each scale represents, respectively, knowing someone in every occupational category listed, having the largest network possible, interacting with all the groups in one’s network with high frequency, and having received multiple forms of help from different groups in one’s network.

The exception to this is the homogeneity of one's network, in which a value of 1 indicates only having friends with the same sex, ethnicity, and religion as oneself. This indicates holding less social capital than someone with a more heterogeneous social group and a lower value on the index. To measure political participation, we use the same indices as we did in the last section.

Figure 7.2 plots the coefficients for the relationships between social capital and political participation, and we see that almost none of the elements of social capital are related to individual, contacting, collective, or charitable participation. Focusing on the statistically significant results, knowing manual workers is positively related to contacting political participation (panel B), but the magnitude of the relationship is very small. Moving from knowing no one in any kind of manual occupations to knowing someone in all three kinds of manual occupations asked about is related to a 3 per cent increase (coef. = 0.034, s.e. = 0.017, $p < 0.05$) on the index representing frequency of contacting activities. This is equivalent to less than a half-category increase in the frequency of doing a single contacting act. Small though its magnitude is, this relationship persists when we control for a wide range of other factors, so it seems that there is something about inhabiting a social milieu including occupations such as plumbers, postal workers, and bus drivers that relates to a slightly higher frequency of writing to politicians or the media about issues that matter to you. We might speculate that being part of networks with manual occupations that have arguably seen a decline in their status over recent decades (Gidron and Hall, 2017) is associated with encountering more problems that one might want to contact politicians and the media about.

Turning to collective participation (panel C), we see a small negative relationship with both homogeneity and strength of social networks. In the former case, moving from a social network in which none of your friends have the same sex, ethnicity, and religion as you to one in which all of them do is associated with a 5 per cent decrease (coef. = -0.048, s.e. = 0.020, $p < 0.05$) on the index representing frequency of collective political participation. This is akin to doing one collective activity with one category less frequency, for instance by attending a public meeting once a year rather than every six months. This may indicate that people who have more heterogeneous networks are more exposed to information or cues about different causes that prompt them to get involved in collective participation. Alternatively, it could be the case that collective participation such as protesting and organising local meetings introduces those who are involved to a less homogeneous set of people, some of whom become their friends. Given that both things were asked about in the same survey, we cannot tell whether one's network precedes one's collective participation, vice versa, or if they are mutually reinforcing. Nevertheless, we can say that people with networks including friends who differ from them in some important demographic ways are apt to engage in collective participation more frequently.



Note: a = all available cases; b = cases with complete data

Figure 7.2 Coefficient plots: political participation on social capital

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,092–1,340

This is also the case for people with weaker social networks, as measured by the help that they receive from friends, family, and colleagues. Moving from someone who has received no help asked about to someone who has received all of the types of help from their networks is associated with 9 per cent decrease (coef. = -0.088 , s.e. = 0.034 , $p < 0.01$) on the index of collective participation. The magnitude of this effect is about twice as large as the one that we observed in relation to network homogeneity, and we can be more confident about the causal direction. The kinds of help that the survey asked about, relating to things like buying a house, looking for work, and childcare, tend to be associated with well-established relationships and major life events, and these are likely to precede people's collective activities in the last few years. Thus, it seems that people who have weaker social networks get involved in collective participation to a greater extent, perhaps because they have less of a safety net available to them and feel the need to push for political change.

We also see an impact of network strength on donating (panel E) but in the opposite direction and with a larger magnitude. Compared to a person who has received none of the types of help asked about, a person who has received all of them is around two points higher on the six-point donating scale, which is a sizeable difference (coef. = 1.98 , s.e. = 0.71 , $p < 0.01$). At the lower end of the scale, this is the difference between donating less than £25 per year and donating between £50 and £100. At the higher end of the scale, it equates to moving from donating between £100 and £250 to donating more than £500 per year. Thus, independent of its implications for economic capital, which we account for in the model, the strength of social networks is clearly important for people's donating activity. This might be because stronger social networks deliver a sense of support and security that enables people to be more generous when donating to causes that they support. It could also be the case that such networks have well-established reciprocal norms of support, adding extra weight to the requests that people send each other. In other words, people who know that they can rely on their friends, family, and colleagues for help might feel a stronger sense of the need to respond positively when those same people ask them to donate to causes that matter to them.

The importance of social capital for donating is also seen in relation to the size of social networks, which has a large positive effect. Moving from a person who has no friends who they are in touch with daily, weekly, or monthly to a person who has at least ten friends who they contact with those frequencies is associated with a one-point increase on the donating scale (coef. = 1.01 , s.e. = 0.36 , $p < 0.05$). Given that the full model takes into account the requests for participation that people receive, the mechanism here is not simply that those with more friends receive more requests to donate. It might be the case, however, that being part of a larger social network is associated with receiving a wider range of requests to

donate or with being more likely to encounter or discuss topics that prompt one to want to support a cause. It might also be the case that sustaining sizeable social networks indicates a kind of active disposition, or a sense of social obligation, that also prompts one to be more likely to donate. Alternatively, it is possible that causality flows in the other direction, and that donating implies greater involvement in supporting causes more generally, which in turn could lead to having larger networks of friends that one is in touch with.

All of the above effects pale by comparison, however, with the impact of how often people are asked to get involved. The index measuring recruitment runs from 0, indicating never receiving requests to participate from any groups, to 1, indicating receiving such requests from all the groups asked about with the maximum possible frequency. We include this measure in the models for reference because recruitment has previously been shown to relate to political participation (Schlozman et al., 2020). Indeed, in every kind of participation except voting, the coefficient for recruitment dwarfs those for the other facets of social capital. Compared to a person who never receives requests to participate, a person who receives at least monthly requests from every group that was asked about is 86 per cent higher (coef. = 0.863, s.e. = 0.046, $p < 0.001$) on the zero-to-one scale representing frequency of individual participation (panel A). For contacting participation (panel B) the figure is 53 per cent (coef. = 0.532, s.e. = 0.048, $p < 0.001$), for collective participation (panel C) it is 33 per cent (coef. = 0.331, s.e. = 0.034, $p < 0.001$), and for charitable participation (panel D) it is 16 per cent (coef. = 0.163, s.e. = 0.054, $p < 0.01$). Finally, for donating (panel E), which is measured with the original six-point variable scale rather than an index, moving from receiving no requests to receiving them frequently from all groups is associated with a two-point increase in the amount donated in a year (coef. = 1.974, s.e. = 0.508, $p < 0.001$). Across all of these modes of participation, the smallest effect of recruitment is an increase of one sixth of the full length of the scale measuring charitable participation. This is equivalent to supporting a charity in two more ways (e.g., by donating and taking on an unpaid position of responsibility) or giving three categories more time when volunteering (e.g., by volunteering for a whole day rather than less than an hour). The largest-magnitude relationship, with individual participation, is equivalent to moving from never doing each of the individual acts (petitions and online activity, boycotting products or companies, and urging others to act) to doing them all every two or three months. These effects are based on the difference between people who never get asked to participate and people who asked the maximum amount measured, so the effects of an individual recruitment request are more modest. Nevertheless, bearing in mind that these effects are observed when taking into account a wide range of other factors in participation, we can confidently say that greater recruitment is associated with greater participation.

There is also a note of caution regarding the causal direction of the relationship between recruitment and participation. Whilst it is likely to be the case that being asked prompts participation, it is also plausible that participating prompts more requests. Often, the people who have already participated in political action, whether it is signing a petition, writing to an MP, or joining a protest, are low-hanging fruit for future recruitment. They are more likely to be known to the people who organise political activities, or to be on lists of past participants, and they have already demonstrated their willingness to participate. Political organisers who engage in ‘rational prospecting’ (Schlozman et al., 2020, pp. 138–139) are more likely to target existing participants who are easy to identify and more likely to respond positively. As such, we could be observing recruitment prompting participation, participation prompting recruitment, or a mutually reinforcing cycle in which recruitment leads to participation, which leads to more recruitment. Whatever its causal direction, it is by far the largest-magnitude relationship that we observe between any variable and political participation, and its positive form is as expected.

The positive effects of network size and strength on donating are also in the expected form, since they indicate that people with higher levels of social capital are more involved in politics. This is also the case with the observation that people with less homogeneous social networks tend to engage in collective participation more frequently. The only relationship that breaks this trend is the negative effect of network strength on collective participation, which indicates that people without the reassurance of past help from friends and family are more likely to undertake the most demanding form of political participation, which is to say collective political activities. This is the one case in which people with less social capital are more active. Overall, we observe that people who are asked are more likely to participate, and that network size and strength can also drive participation. However, as was the case with economic capital, we also see that most of the elements of social capital that we measure are consistently unrelated to political participation. Thus, we have limited evidence in support of Hypothesis 2, outlined in [Chapter 2](#). It is clear that some elements of social capital, and recruitment in particular, are positively related to some forms of political participation, but this is far from being the general tendency that the hypothesis posits. In this light, the proponents of the civic voluntarism model (Schlozman et al., 2020) were, arguably, right to focus on the recruitment rather than other components of social capital.

Recruitment, however, features rarely in interviewees’ and focus group participants’ discussions of the factors that relate to political participation. Of the few comments regarding this relationship, the most extensive is made by the Housing Justice volunteer, who is an active organiser and therefore familiar with the importance of recruitment. They explain the importance of church congregations and other associations as forums for recruitment to participate in voluntary activities:

I go to church every week, sing in the choir, I'm involved in other things around that. And it's very hard I think for some people to access opportunities to volunteer unless you're part of an organisation that exists for another purpose. So, it's easy to bolt on, you know, to say 150 people, you've all turned up to church this morning – it's very nice to see you. If ten of you would give one hour to do this, we could do something really great. That's a much easier conversation than trying to find ten individual people to give an hour, to do something or whatever it is. So, I think the membership of an institution I think is really important.

More broadly, direct links between social capital and participation are rarely drawn by interviewees and focus group participants. Beyond recruitment, a couple of people do focus on the idea of knowing the right people as an aid to getting involved in politics. One focus group participant talks about the 'connections' that the elites within the Labour and Conservative parties have, which facilitate their transition from studying PPE at Oxbridge to roles as special advisors in politics. The importance of such networks in entering the upper echelons of national politics is also talked about extensively by a Labour MP:

networks are vital, um, and some people build them and some people are born into them ... I mean I think that there, there are kind of metropolitan networks, and then there's the rest of the country, um, and that's quite a significant factor I think in politics, across parties, that um, you know, if you are used to going to, maybe wealth figures a bit here, but if you're used to going to the meetings and seminars and think tank events that are held routinely in London but rarely anywhere else, um, you get known and get to know people, and that can be an enormous help when, um, parliamentary seats fall vacant, and I that, that applies across, across parties – it's more difficult if it's what you aspire to do, um, to kind of get noticed outside of London.

In this quote we see evidence of the importance of economic capital with the mention of wealth, of social capital with the mention of networks, and of cultural capital with references to the kinds of events. Thus, it is clear that some people have a highly developed account of the role of all three forms of capital in elite-level political participation, but the identification of those links is the exception rather than the rule.

Cultural Capital and Political Participation

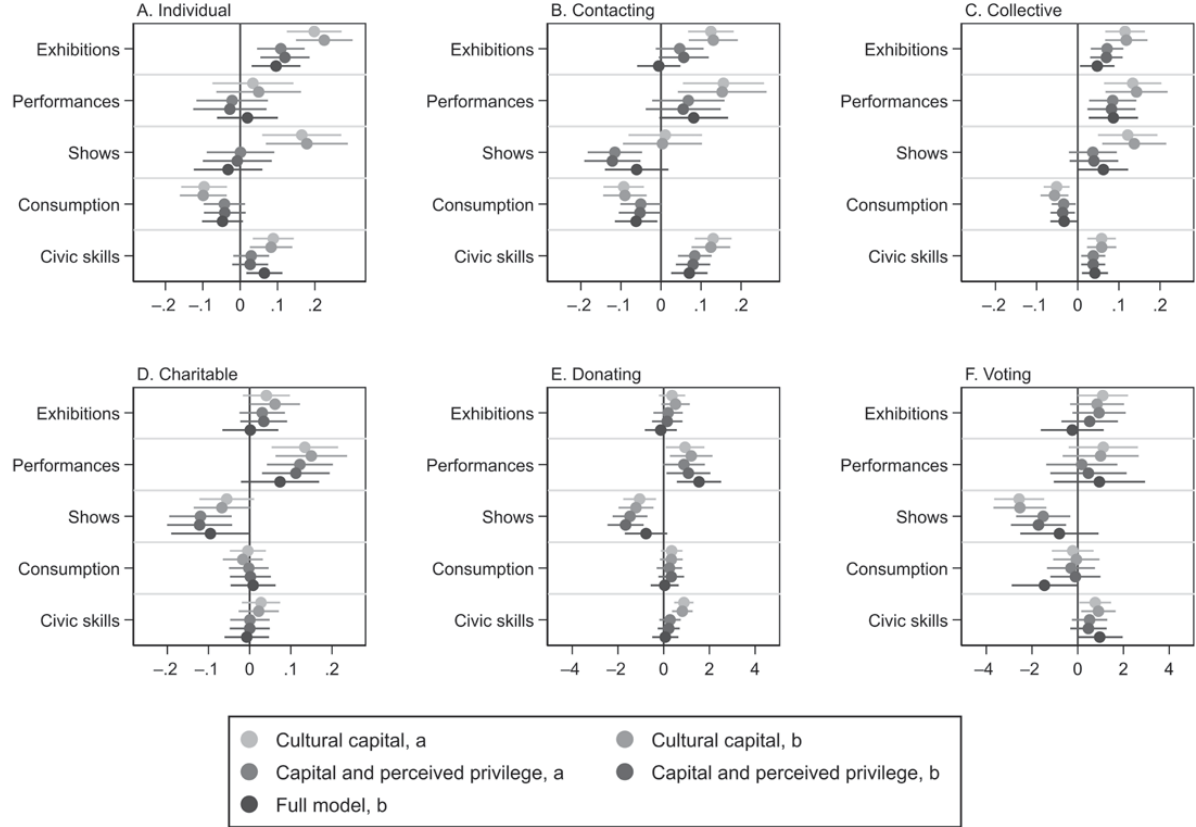
As with social capital, informal cultural capital is measured with multiple indices. Specifically, we have four indices indicating attendance at exhibition venues such as galleries and museums, performances such as classical music and ballet, entertainment-orientated shows such as stand-up comedy and live (non-classical) music, and engagement in consumption-orientated activities such as shopping for pleasure and eating out. We can think of the first two indices as representing

legitimate cultural capital, the third as representing niche cultural capital, and the fourth as representing popular cultural capital. In each case, the indices run from 0, indicating never engaging in any of the related activities, to 1, indicating engaging in all of them with the maximum possible frequency. Again, the different types of political participation are captured by the same measures as in the previous two sections.

As with economic and social capital, we see mixed effects of these indices representing informal cultural capital on different modes of political participation. However, as [Figure 7.3](#) shows, there is a tendency for legitimate cultural capital to be positively related to participation, which we can observe in relation to the individual (panel A), collective (panel C), and donating (panel E) modes. In the first of those cases, moving from never attending exhibitions at museums, galleries, and historic buildings to attending them all a couple of times a month or more is associated with a 10 per cent increase (in the full model, $\text{coef.} = 0.096$, $\text{s.e.} = 0.033$, $p < 0.01$) on the index measuring the frequency of individual participation. This is greater than a one-category increase in one of the individual activities, for instance urging others to act once every two or three months rather than every six months. Moving from never attending exhibitions to attending them with the maximum possible frequency is also associated with a 5 per cent increase ($\text{coef.} = 0.047$, $\text{s.e.} = 0.021$, $p < 0.05$) in the frequency of collective participation. This increase is equivalent to increasing the frequency of one collective activity by one category, for instance by attending a public meeting every six months rather than annually.

Continuing this tendency for legitimate cultural capital to be positively related to participation, we see a positive relationship between attendance at performances and participation in collective activities. Specifically, moving from never attending performances of classical music and opera, theatre, or ballet to attending them all at least a couple of times a month is associated with a 9 per cent increase ($\text{coef.} = 0.086$, $\text{s.e.} = 0.031$, $p < 0.01$) in the frequency of collective participation. This equates to increasing one collective activity by almost two categories, for instance by protesting every two or three months rather than annually, or to increasing two collective activities by one category of frequency each. We also see a larger-magnitude positive relationship between attendance at such performances and the amount donated annually. Moving from one end of the index measuring frequency of performance attendance to the other is associated with a 1.5-point increase ($\text{coef.} = 1.546$, $\text{s.e.} = 0.494$, $p < 0.01$) on the six-category scale measuring donating. This amounts to a shift in donating from, for example, giving less than £25 to giving somewhere between £25 and £100 per year to the causes that one supports.

As anticipated, these results show that legitimate cultural capital is positively related to multiple modes of political participation even when we account for a



Note: a = all available cases; b = cases with complete data

Figure 7.3 Coefficient plots: participation on cultural activities

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,092–1,379

range of other factors. Thus, we have some evidence in support of Hypothesis 3, outlined in [Chapter 2](#). Although informal cultural capital is not related to political participation across the board, it is clearly the case that multiple kinds of informal cultural capital are positively related to multiple kinds of political participation. In the case of collective participation, in which one must work with other people intensively, it is plausible that the relationship is a manifestation of Bourdieu's (1984) idea that cultural capital qualifies people to engage in certain social contexts. In other words, it may be easier and more comfortable to organise politically with people who have similar cultural reference points to one another. This means that if political spaces are disproportionately populated by people who hold legitimate cultural capital, then such capital makes it easier to engage with those people and to participate. Similarly, although individual participation does not require engagement with social spaces, the knowledge and learning that can come from exhibition attendance may give people a sense of their qualification to take individual actions in relation to the causes that they care about. It is also possible that attending exhibitions raises awareness about a range of political issues in the world, some of which might prompt people to take action. Finally, in the relationship between performance attendance and donating, we see support for the image of people who enjoy legitimate culture also being generous benefactors of campaigns and organisations. We can easily imagine a scenario in which a couple attending the Royal Opera House encounter some old school friends who talk about a charity or campaign that they have just started supporting, prompting the couple to become supporters themselves. This scenario requires not only the social connections but also the cultural context in which the encounter can take place and in which all the parties have shared reference points that enable them to relate easily to each other.

The value of particular types of cultural capital is also illustrated by the negative relationship between popular cultural capital, embodied in consumption-based activities, and both contacting participation (panel B) and voting (panel E). In the former case, moving from never engaging in consumption-based activities to doing them all at least a couple of times a month is associated with a 6 per cent decrease (coef. = -0.062 , s.e. = 0.027 , $p < 0.05$) on the index of frequency of contacting participation. This is akin to an almost full-category decrease in the frequency of doing one of the contacting acts, for instance writing to an MP once a year rather than every six months. For voting, compared to people who never do any of the consumption-based activities, people who do all of them with the highest frequency have four times lower odds of having voted in the last election (odds ratio = 0.233 , coef. = -1.455 , s.e. = 0.730 , $p < 0.05$). Whilst people with greater stocks of legitimate cultural capital have higher levels of individual, collective, and donating participation, those with greater stocks of popular cultural capital have

lower levels of contacting participation and voting.⁴ The effects of legitimate cultural capital were anticipated, but the effect of popular cultural capital is more surprising. We might expect that having any sort of cultural capital would help one to engage in social spaces, including political ones, by providing at least some shared cultural reference points. However, it seems that doing things like shopping for pleasure, eating out, and going to pubs, bars, and cafés are not cultural activities that particularly qualify one to participate in collective political spaces nor to undertake the basic democratic act of voting. Thus, the concomitant of people with more legitimate cultural capital being disproportionately engaged in participation is that people with more popular cultural capital are also disproportionately disengaged from it. This is actually a stronger effect than the one posited by Hypothesis 4, outlined in [Chapter 2](#), which only anticipated a weaker positive effect of popular rather than legitimate cultural capital on political participation. In fact, it is the case that engagement with popular cultural activities is not less supportive of political participation but actually disinclines people from undertaking some types of political activity. This suggests that some forms of political participation may be antithetical to popular cultural activities.⁵

We also see that people's civic skills are positively related to individual (panel A), contacting (panel B), and collective (panel C) participation. The index capturing civic skills runs from 0, indicating that no such skills are (or were) used in a person's job, to 1, indicating that they use all those skills at work with the maximum possible frequency. Again, this measure is included for reference because

⁴ An additional set of models including a measure of cultural omnivorousness (the number of cultural activities engaged in at least once a year) was also estimated. Omnivorousness has a statistically significant positive effect on individual acts and donating. Its inclusion in the models also renders the negative effects of consumption-based cultural activities on individual acts statistically significant, and likewise elevates the negative effects of entertainment-orientated show attendance on donating to statistical significance. The inclusion of omnivorousness does not substantively alter the effects of the other components of cultural capital on contacting or charitable activities, or on voting. However, it does remove the statistical significance of the positive effects of exhibition attendance on individual and collective activities, the positive effects of entertainment-orientated show attendance on collective activities, and the positive effect of legitimate performance attendance on donating. The measure of omnivorousness is highly correlated (though not collinear) with the indices representing types of cultural capital, and especially with the exhibition and legitimate performance attendance indices ($r = 0.705$ and $r = 0.674$, respectively). This suggests that the omnivorousness measure captures, in part, the tendency to engage in legitimate cultural activities in addition to more widespread popular cultural activities. As the hypotheses in [Chapter 2](#) indicate, the focus of the book is on whether particular types of capital, and informal cultural capital in particular, are related to various types of political activity, so this chapter focuses on the results of the models excluding the omnivorousness measure. The results including omnivorousness are available in online [Appendix B](#).

⁵ Cultural tastes were also included in the regression models that produced these results. However, such tastes are unrelated to almost every form of political participation, except that preferences for learning on holiday and for blockbuster films are both negatively related to collective participation. These results are presented in full in [Appendix D](#).

civic skills have previously been identified as relevant to political participation (Schlozman et al., 2020), and can also be viewed as cultural capital. We see that moving from never using civic skills at work to using all four of them at least daily is associated with a 7 per cent increase (coef. = 0.065, s.e. = 0.025, $p < 0.01$) on the individual participation index. This equates to a one-category increase in the frequency with which someone undertakes one of the individual activities, for instance if they sign a petition every six months rather than once a year. For contacting participation there is a similar 7 per cent increase (coef. = 0.071, s.e. = 0.023, $p < 0.01$), but for collective participation it is a smaller 4 per cent increase (coef. = 0.042, s.e. = 0.016, $p < 0.01$). Because more political acts are included in the collective participation scale, both of these effects are equivalent to doing one political activity with one category greater frequency, for instance by writing a letter to an MP or attending a public meeting every two or three months rather than every six months. These relationships show that people whose jobs entail doing things like writing formal letters and emails, chairing meetings, and giving presentations are able to put those skills to use in relation to the causes that matter to them politically. Thus, as with recruitment, we have evidence that the proponents of the civic voluntarism model were right to suggest that civic skills equip people to participate in politics.

The effects of cultural capital persist when we control for a host of other factors that have implications for their political participation. Included amongst these other factors is education, which is to say institutionalised or formal cultural capital. The importance of education is reflected in the fact that it is one of the standard variables included in models of political behaviour. This importance has multiple bases, not least of which is that formal qualifications have implications for people's careers, incomes, where they live, and who they know. Education is also sometimes used as an indicator of cognitive sophistication, though it is debated whether it reflects underlying dispositions or abilities, or imbues people with the knowledge and skills to engage with a range of tasks and assessments. Clearly, however, it is the case that education exposes people to knowledge and ideas as well as shaping individuals' social networks. In the case of university, it can also be the case that education provides an important context in which people are exposed to specifically political debates and campaigns.

Education is also the key element of cultural capital that features in people's discussions of the factors related to political participation. Often these comments focus on the links between private education and elite politics, and highlight the connection between cultural and social capital, for instance when a UKIP activist talks about privilege as 'old school ties' and goes on to mention Parliament being 'dominated by Eton and Oxbridge because it's people getting their jobs for their chums rather than jobs because they had ability'. The intrinsic importance of cultural capital for participating in elite political contexts is also emphasised by a

Labour MP who talks about ‘posh young boys and girls who, um, are immediately confident in this environment because they know how to, know how to operate, and that’s, um, I guess, cultural capital that they’ve acquired from their public schools’. However, a Conservative MP disputes the role that private education plays in politics: ‘I don’t think it really matters about their educational background at all. I’m sure that once people have been looked at for ministerial office or joining the government, I can’t imagine for one second anybody looks at where they went to school – they look at their relevant ability.’

Beyond private education, university attendance is often highlighted by MPs as a feature of a gap between themselves and the public. One Liberal Democrat MP contrasts ‘less advantaged’ people with the ‘over-proportion of people [in Parliament] from university backgrounds’, and a Conservative MP emphasises ‘how many of us have been to universities ... I don’t think we often appreciate the extent of the advantage given to us when we compare ourselves to the people we often represent.’ University education is also one of the few features of cultural capital that volunteers and activists link directly to their activities, as when a Prisoners’ Advice Service volunteer talks about their law degree as part of what led them to their voluntary role. Similarly, an ActionAid volunteer mentions that their interest in development was sparked in part by studying postcolonial Africa at university, and a British Museum volunteer draws a direct link between their role and their education: ‘when I started volunteering here, I’d started doing my classics degree’. Thus, in as far as people link cultural capital to political participation, private and university education are dominant features of their accounts.

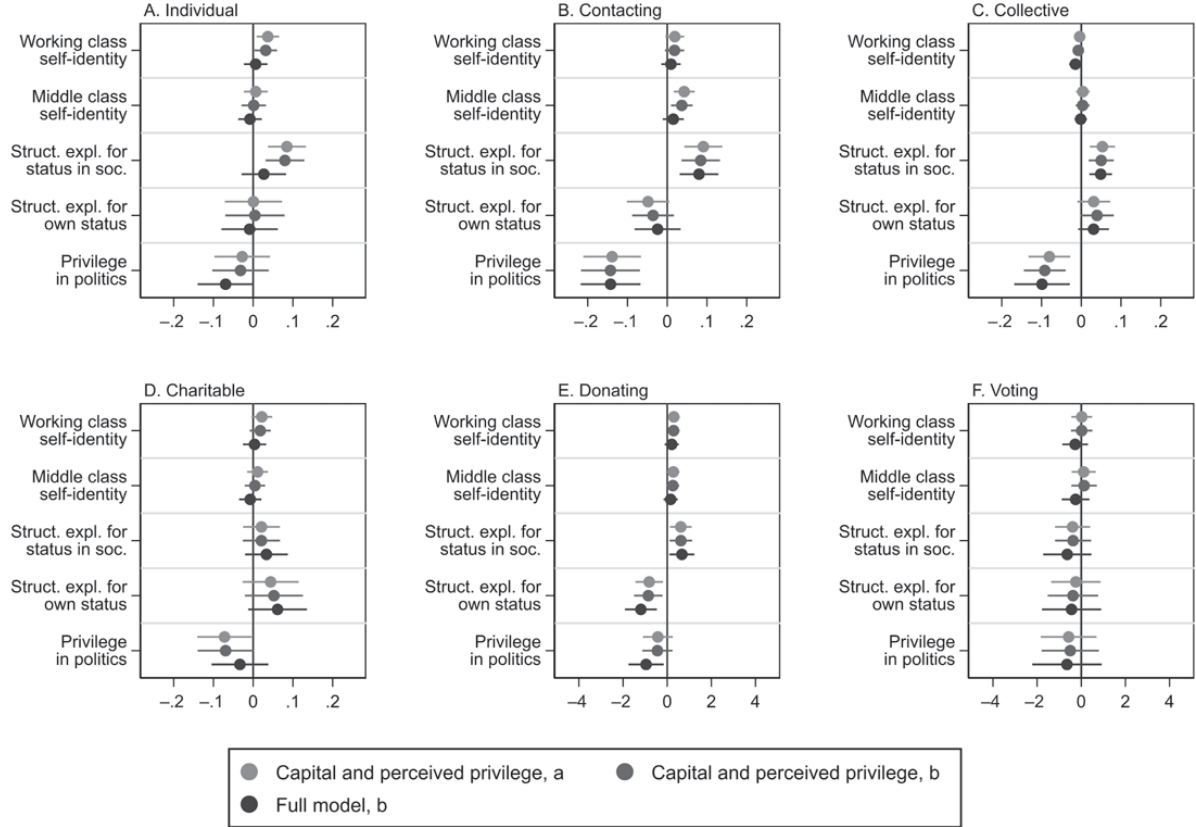
There is also one non-institutionalised component of cultural capital that is linked directly to politics: language. People’s hesitance to use language as an indicator of privilege, which we saw in [Chapter 5](#), does not extend to its role in politics. This is clear when a member of the public with low levels of participation says that ‘I don’t particularly like the [politicians] who are all posh and sound like they’ve walked straight out of Eton.’ This reflects the role of language in alienating people from politics, and this point is made explicit by the focus group participant who says that ‘language is a huge barrier – I, I find it really difficult, like I watch Prime Minister’s Question Time and Google words, phrases because I just can’t keep up’. Similarly, a Labour MP says of Parliament that ‘you have to speak in a certain way; you have to use certain terms’, and another low-participation member of the public in London talks about the need for elected representatives who speak like the public: ‘There are some people who talk in a different way, but if you actually understand what they’re saying they’re actually very intelligent. They’re saying just what anyone else is saying without acronyms, they’re just being more blunt and they’re actually in layman’s terms making a much clearer point.’ Here, we see an implicit association between different ways of speaking and different levels of intelligence, though the speaker challenges it. That the association exists, however,

reflects Bourdieu's view of informal cultural capital acting as a qualification to participate in certain contexts. Thus, although people rarely talk about the links between informal cultural capital and political participation, there are hints of the relationships that we observed in the survey data.

Perceptions and Political Participation

So far, we have seen that stocks of capital, which embody and reproduce privilege, are related to a range of modes of political participation. These relationships do not tell the whole story, though, and people have a range of perceptions of privilege and politics that may also relate to their political participation. Starting with perceptions of privilege, we represent self-perceived status with two dichotomous variables indicating working-class or middle-class self-identification, which are compared against declaring no class identity. The other three components of perceptions of privilege are represented by indices that run from 0 to 1. In the case of perceiving privilege in society and one's own life, the maximum value on the indices indicates giving the highest ranking to structural explanations for status and the lowest ranking to individual explanations, whilst the lowest value on the indices represents the opposite ranking of explanations. For perception of privilege in politics, the highest value indicates perceiving politicians and those involved in politics as much more privileged than society and oneself, whilst the lowest value indicates perceiving them as much less privileged. Once again, we use the same measures of political participation that were used in the previous sections.

Figure 7.4 shows that we observe relationships between perceptions of privilege and political participation, but they are limited to certain modes of participation. None of the four components of perceptions of privilege are related to charitable participation (panel D), voting (panel F), or, once we take a range of other variables into account, individual participation (panel A). However, structural explanations for inequality in society are positively related to contacting participation (panel B), collective participation (panel C), and donating (panel E), whilst perception of privilege in politics is negatively related to all three. Moving from a person who ranks hard work and ambition as the most important reasons for inequality in society, and background and group marginalisation as the least important reasons, to a person with the opposite ranking is associated with an 8 per cent increase (coef. = 0.080, s.e. = 0.025, $p < 0.01$) in frequency of contacting participation. This is equivalent to doing one type of contacting with one category higher frequency, for instance writing to an MP once every six months rather than annually. There is a very similar relationship for collective participation, with the effect also being akin to a one-category increase in the frequency of doing one collective activity (coef. = 0.049, s.e. = 0.015, $p < 0.001$), for instance attending a



Note: a = all available cases; b = cases with complete data

Figure 7.4 Coefficient plots: political participation on perceptions of privilege

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,092–1,405

public meeting every two or three months rather than every six months.⁶ Thus, people who perceive the drivers of status inequality to be primarily structural rather than individual are more active in modes of participation that require interaction with others.

Turning to donating, swapping the ranking of explanations for inequality in society to emphasise the importance of structural rather than individual factors is associated with a two thirds of a point increase on the six-point scale representing annual donations (coef. = 0.665, s.e. = 0.288, $p < 0.05$). At the same time, donating is the only mode of participation for which we observe a significant relationship with explanations for one's own status. Moving from ranking hard work and ambition as the most important of those explanations, and downplaying background and group marginalisation, to the opposite ranking is associated with a greater than one point decrease in annual donating (coef. = -1.193, s.e. = 0.368, $p < 0.01$).⁷ At the lower end of the scale, this is equivalent to a move from donating between £25 and £50 per year to less than £25 or, at the other end of the scale, to moving from donating more than £500 per year to between £250 and £500. This relationship is in the opposite direction than anticipated, with people who emphasise structural explanations for their own status donating less than those who emphasise individual explanations. Finally, we also observe a negative relationship between donating and perception of privilege in politics (coef. = -0.956, s.e. = 0.407, $p < 0.05$). Compared to someone who thinks that politicians and people who are involved in politics are much less privileged than themselves and people in society (and very few people hold such beliefs), someone who perceives those groups to be much more privileged donates one category less per year. This is roughly equivalent in magnitude to the effect outlined for explanations for own status, but in the opposite direction.

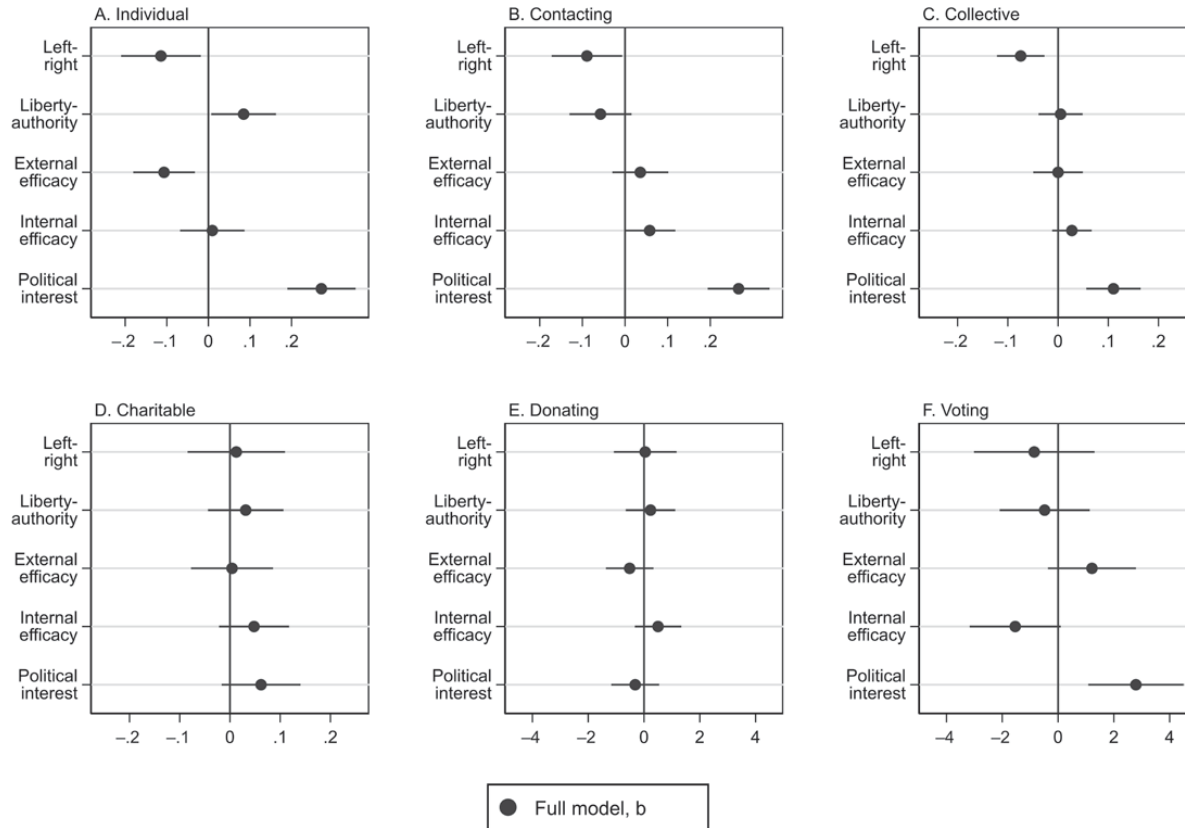
The negative effects of perceiving privilege in politics extend from donating to both contacting and collective modes, and they are the largest-magnitude relationships that we observe between a component of perceptions of privilege and participation. In relation to contacting, thinking that politicians and politically involved people are much more, rather than much less, privileged than oneself and people in society is associated with a 14 per cent decline (coef. = -0.143, s.e. = 0.038, $p < 0.001$) in frequency of contacting activities. This is equivalent to decreasing the frequency of one act by two categories, for instance by meeting

⁶ This effect is equivalent to the one for contacting, but the coefficient is smaller because there is a greater number of collective acts included in the index than is the case for contacting. This means that we can also think of it as a smaller effect because people have more collective activities to choose from in the survey, so increasing their frequency of doing one of them is a less sizeable increase in activity within the context of more potential activities.

⁷ The coefficient is negative because high values on the variable measuring explanations for own status are associated with structural explanations, whilst low values are associated with individual explanations.

an elected representative annually rather than every two or three months, or to decreasing the frequency of two acts by one category each. For collective participation, moving from the lowest to the highest value of perception of privilege in politics is associated with a smaller 10 per cent decrease (coef. = -0.099 , s.e. = 0.036 , $p < 0.01$) in frequency. This change is also equivalent to doing one collective activity with two categories lower frequency or two activities with one category lower frequency. For instance, it could be the difference between both displaying campaign materials and organising a meeting once a year rather than every six months. Collectively, these results offer some support for the hypotheses outlined in [Chapter 3](#). Hypothesis 6, that there is a positive effect of perceiving privilege in one's own life on political participation, is not supported. In fact, counter to this expectation, it is the case that such perceptions are negatively related to donating. There is also no evidence supporting Hypothesis 7, and we see no relationships between either working-class or middle-class self-identification and any types of political participation. However, we do have evidence that perception of privilege in society is positively related to multiple types of political participation, as Hypothesis 5 posits. We have similar evidence that perception of privilege in politics is negatively related to multiple types of political participation, as suggested by Hypothesis 8.

Moving beyond perceptions of privilege, [Figure 7.5](#) shows that political interest is positively related to the individual (panel A), contacting (panel B), collective (panel C), and voting modes of participation. Political interest is represented by an index that captures whether someone sees politics as for them, describes themselves as a political person, expresses an interest in politics, discusses it frequently, and has a high self-perceived knowledge of politics. The index runs from 0, indicating the minimum political interest on all of the component variables, to 1, indicating the maximum interest on each of them. Once again, this measure is included for reference because psychological engagement with politics has previously been shown to matter for political participation (Schlozman et al., 2020). Moving from a person who does not think that politics is for them or that they are a political person, and who declares no interest in, discussion of, or knowledge of politics, to a person who expresses the highest values on all of those measures is associated with a 27 per cent increase on the index measuring individual participation (coef. = 0.272 , s.e. = 0.041 , $p < 0.001$). This is akin to doing two individual acts with two categories greater frequency, for instance by boycotting and urging others to act every two or three months rather than once a year. The figure is also 27 per cent for contacting participation (coef. = 0.266 , s.e. = 0.037 , $p < 0.001$), whilst for collective participation it is 11 per cent (coef. = 0.110 , s.e. = 0.028 , $p < 0.001$). In the former case this is again equivalent to doing two contacting acts with two categories greater frequency, whilst in the latter case it is equivalent to doing three collective acts with one category greater frequency. Turning to voting,



Note: a = all available cases; b = cases with complete data

Figure 7.5 Coefficient plots: political participation on political engagement

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,092

moving from the low to the high end of the political interest index is associated with having 16 times higher odds of voting in the last general election (odds ratio = 16.305, coef. = 2.791, s.e. = 0.871, $p < 0.01$). This is one of the few variables that we find is associated with voting in the full model. Again, the relationships that we observe may well be mutually reinforcing, but it is clear that people who describe themselves as highly interested in politics also tend to be more involved in a range of modes of political participation.

People also often talk about lack of interest as a barrier to political participation, as we saw in [Chapter 4](#). They additionally talk extensively and in a variety of ways about links between privilege and politics. We can see this in the links they draw between age, gender, class, and politics, which are so commonplace that they are treated as commonplace ideas by some people. A Housing Justice volunteer speaks about ‘the whole thing about politicians being stuffy old white middle-aged men’ and the need to ‘do something about defeating that thing, and get people to say why they’re not like that and they like politics’. An SNP MP also describes how ‘for a lot of people, a lot of people you speak to at their doorsteps, politics is men in suits shouting at one another, and that’s just something they don’t relate to at all’. A Conservative MP recognises that ‘the perception would still be that you have to be white, male, and middle class’ but goes on to challenge its accuracy and suggest that white, middle-class men are now ‘positively discriminated against’. One of their Conservative colleagues also argues that ‘the parties are working very hard’ to recruit historically under-represented groups into politics but signals their opposition to the use of quotas to do so. Another Conservative MP is more assertive in their position: ‘where you’ve had an all-women shortlist, for example, then clearly there has been some rigging of the process, which I detest. I don’t think that should be ever right.’ This position clearly recognises and rejects a narrative that men are privileged in their access to politics.

By contrast, some people who do perceive the continued privilege of men in elite politics highlight other areas in which women are particularly active. For example, volunteers for both the British Museum and Amnesty International talk about how their fellow volunteers are disproportionately female. Similarly, as we saw in [Chapter 4](#), an SNP MP talks about the important role of female community organisers who would not view their activities as political. These examples illustrate the perception that it is particularly elite politics in which women are under-represented. Besides characterising the gendered nature of the political elite, the portrayals of politicians as ‘white, male, and middle class’ also demonstrate the ease with which people perceive the relevance of multiple forms of advantage, suggesting the applicability of an intersectional account of privilege. Indeed, the relevance of ethnicity to privilege, and to politics, is almost always mentioned alongside gender and class. In most cases these references are made by MPs, and are done so in passing, with more attention paid to the importance of the other

two demographic cleavages. Although such links are only made cursorily by MPs, it is clear that ethnic cleavages are alive and politically salient in at least some people's minds. Nevertheless, the fact that these cleavages are only mentioned in passing means that the marginalisation experienced by people in ethnic minorities, which we covered in the previous chapter, may be particularly politically isolating.

By contrast, the recognition of the relationship between class and politics is reflected in comments from a range of interviewees and focus group participants who emphasise the privilege of politicians. One focus group participant notes that 'there's very few what you'd call working-class politicians, and it's the working-class politicians who actually know, who understand the ordinary people', whilst another feels 'like politics is really class entrenched. You think House of Lords; you think dusty old white Tories ... who probably don't even know how much a pint of milk costs.' A few Conservative MPs challenge this view with reference to specific working-class and non-privately educated MPs. For instance, one talks about how David Cameron was the first privately educated Conservative Prime Minister since Alec Douglas-Home, and argues that 'people would think of the Conservatives as being the sort of upper class, if you like, or whatever, when actually it isn't necessarily true by any means at all'. However, many other MPs stress the extent to which Parliament is unrepresentative of the country in terms of class. Another Conservative MP notes that the number of privately educated MPs is 'quite shocking' compared to the average in society and says that 'far too many members of this house are unaware of how privileged they are'. A Liberal Democrat MP expresses 'sadness [that] we have less working-class people, what I would call manual workers, in politics', whilst a Labour MP, as we saw earlier in this chapter, notes the confidence of privately educated 'posh young boys and girls' who enter politics.

Throughout these comments on the relationships between gender, ethnicity, class, and politics, we see indications of the view that politicians are unrepresentative of the public. This is a common perception and often draws a direct link from privilege to politics. Sometimes the perception is linked to capital, for instance when a focus group member says that 'a good 90 per cent of [politicians] are all, are all, sort of, well-to-do families or, you know, they're all, like I call em snobs, posh people'. Complementing this reference to economic capital, a low-participation member of the public in London highlights the importance of institutionalised cultural capital when they wonder whether politics can be made more representative, 'because I just look at the background and it is all, sort of, from Eton and private schools, so I think you have to start from the bottom up'. Similarly, but in relation to higher education, a member of the public in Scotland talks about being annoyed by professional politicians, 'the ones who have done PPE ... at Oxford or Cambridge, and that's the basis for their life, effectively – they should be automatically barred from being a politician if they do that, as far as I'm concerned'.

Sometimes the unrepresentativeness of politicians is explicitly linked to their incapacity to understand the daily lives of members of the public, as when an Evangelical Alliance volunteer talks about how people with privileged backgrounds, who 'never really had to worry too much about where their next meal is coming from or where their, you know, next job is coming from', are more likely to end up in public life. A low-participation member of the public in London also says that politicians 'seem quite elitist, and they've mostly been to public school and the rest of it, and I think then that makes it harder for regular people to relate to it quite so much, or fully believe that our causes are really genuinely being fought for'. This view is also expressed by politicians, and a Labour MP talks about the importance of people being able to identify with their elected representatives, 'and, if they've got nothing in common with them, if they don't identify with them, I think that just reinforces the view that [politics is] not for them'. An SNP MP highlights that, in their constituency, they have 'areas of multiple deprivation where life is incredibly hard for a lot of people and they're already struggling very, very hard. Folk over there [in Westminster] just don't seem to get that at all'. This view is shared by a low-participation member of the public in the North West of England who talks about the importance of knowing hardship: 'They [politicians] don't come from that background; they don't come from that lifestyle. For them to even know or understand what their actions can do to other people's lives.'

Perceiving politicians as unrepresentative leads a low-participation member of the public in Scotland to say that 'I don't think any politicians have represented me, ever, from my life, when I was able to vote, from 18 to now'. This view reflects the perception that there is a gap between the public and politicians, which is commonly expressed in the refrain that politicians are 'out of touch' with the public. Politicians themselves are acutely aware of this gap, both as it exists in reality and people's perceptions, and they talk about the reasons for it extensively. Two Conservative MPs attribute it partly to the fact that MPs often spend time debating issues that have little bearing on most people in Britain's day-to-day lives. By contrast, an SNP MP attributes some blame to the 'attitude amongst some MPs that you got elected and then you went away for five years'. They go on to say that 'there was a tendency amongst some MPs to hide away from the voters as well. They'd have their office in a business centre or somewhere obscure'. For one Labour MP, this gap leads to 'a meta narrative. There's a general expectation that politics is somehow out of touch, and that in itself drives various forms of behaviour, and it drives various forms of decisions about what choices can be made.'

The physical accessibility of MPs, and the topics that they discuss, also feature in accounts of their detachment given by volunteers and members of the public. One focus group participant talks about how most MPs 'do have a constituency home', but another responds that 'they don't live there do they? They're not part of the community, lots of them'. This sense of remoteness is also felt by a

low-participation member of the public in the South of England who mentions that 'at the last general election, nobody knocked on my door, but when I came home from work there'd be a card just pushed through the letterbox'. A member of the public in the West Midlands also argues that the 'only opinions [MPs] get is in these surgeries, are just one or two who are regular, and who agree with their view. They don't seek out the general public's opinion.' Most pessimistically, a focus group participant asserts that 'it doesn't really matter what our opinion is because [politicians] don't, they don't listen and don't care'. Comments like these, which stress the need for more physical or communicative links between politicians and the public, sit alongside a rich seam of comments that focus on the social distinctiveness of politicians. In these comments we again see the link that people draw between privilege and politics, sometimes explicitly.

A Housing Justice volunteer highlights the 'degree of privilege amongst our rulers', whilst a focus group participant distinguishes 'people on the street, normal people' from politicians who have 'not led their life as an ordinary person'. Extending the latter point, a low-participation member of the public in North West England recognises the hard work and long hours that politicians do but distinguishes them from someone who does '50 hours in a week on minimum wage, not to see your kids, and then all the amenities that you're supposed to have around you are not there because they're being shut down left, right, and centre'. The desire for politicians to have shared experiences with the public is linked to their 'backgrounds and their general upbringings', as shown by another member of the public in the North West of England, who asks 'when have we had anybody who has just come up, normal? Gone to a normal school, normal primary school, normal school, normal university, nothing private and things, you know?' Most succinctly, a focus group participant expresses scepticism that the privilege-based gap between the public and politicians can be overcome: 'I don't think we're ever gonna find an MP that's gonna come from workin' for Asda, stackin' shelves.'

Prevalent though the perception of a gap between politicians and the public is, there are those who challenge it. Often it is MPs who do so, even whilst also acknowledging or expressing the view. The same SNP MP who criticises some MPs for rarely visiting their constituencies and having their offices in inaccessible locations also argues that 'politicians are a lot more accessible now than they were before. Things like Facebook and Twitter have changed that hugely'. This comment is echoed by a low-participation member of the public in the South of England who argues that, whereas politicians used to be 'very shadowy figures when I was a child ... who you never heard about, never knew anything about', social media now means that 'every little thing about them is criticised, looked into, and dragging out things that happened in the past'. A Conservative MP highlights the impact of technology when comparing the act of contacting an MP in the past with now:

in the old days if you wanted to write to your MP you had to find a pen that worked, and find a piece of paper and sit down and handwrite a letter, or type it, then you had to go find an envelope and put your letter in, then you had to get a stamp and you had to walk to the postbox ... Nowadays, done. And, if you haven't got a reply when you wake up in the morning, 'I emailed you yesterday and you've not replied'. MPs are accessible, the political process is accessible, and I don't think anybody, who is interested in the political process, would actually find it very difficult to get involved, because of the modern means of communication, which means that it's not that difficult. My constituents don't find it very hard to find me.

More succinctly, a Conservative MP who recognises the difficulty of well-paid politicians connecting with local constituents who rely on benefits is also annoyed 'when people say [MPs are] out of touch. They're probably the least out of touch workers in the United Kingdom in many ways.'

The view that politicians are simultaneously practically accessible and socially distant speaks of the nuanced view that some people have on the nature of MPs' detachment from the public. In some cases, this leads people to unpack and challenge the view that politicians are particularly privileged. A Royal British Legion volunteer who sees politics as open to anyone identifies the detachment of MPs as emerging after they enter politics:

the only problem I see is when people do get to that level, people like Diane Abbott, all of a sudden they cross the, they jump ship. They're not the working-class individual any more, and the same with Prescott, what is it, six jags, and so on and so forth, ten jags, whatever they used to call him, and people do jump ship.

Here we see references to class and material indicators of privilege being explicitly linked to the gap between politicians and the public but, at the same time, a challenge to the view that politicians are particularly privileged people before they enter politics. Some people also argue that enough is being done to ensure that politics is open to everyone, but that change is necessarily slow. A Conservative MP argues that their party has had an 'element of success' in diversifying their candidates, 'but you can't just do it tomorrow. And, you know, I think the selection of candidates now, they're making a real effort to do that, that's really all I think you can do.' This view is endorsed by a focus group participant who says that the Conservative Party's efforts to recruit people from disadvantaged backgrounds have 'got a long way to go, but they're trying at least – there are people trying to get it there'. Perhaps the most assertive challenge to the view that there is a problematic privilege-based gap between politicians and the public comes from a Conservative MP who questions whether such a gap is a problem: 'There are lots of my colleagues who didn't go to public schools, and as time moves on, the prevalence of public school-educated politicians will get less and less ... but if it didn't, it wouldn't particularly matter – what matters is outcomes.' This is a minority view, as, indeed, are challenges to the view that there is a gap between MPs and

the public, and that it is related to privilege. Thus, there is a prevailing perception that politicians are unrepresentative and detached from the public, and often that they are a particularly privileged group. Indeed, those who challenge these views implicitly recognise the prevalence of the perception that people who participate in elite-level politics are socially distinctive.

Politics as a Distinguished Activity

The evidence presented in this chapter paints a complex picture of the relationships between capital, perceptions of privilege, and political participation in Britain. It is not the case that all elements of the three forms of capital, nor of perceptions of privilege, are related to all of the modes of participation that we examine. Instead, some components of capital are related to some modes of participation, often but not always in ways that are easily explicable. Economic capital is positively related to donating, whilst spare time is positively related to charitable activities, and both of these relationships are as expected. Similarly, whilst it was not specifically expected, the positive relationship between free time and donating conforms to the general expectation that resources enable participation. Also in line with our expectations are the positive relationships between legitimate cultural capital and individual, collective, and donating modes of participation. Beyond our expectations, we observe that people who favour consumption-based activities are less apt to undertake contacting activities and to vote. Thus, we have evidence that stocks of popular cultural capital distinguish those who engage less in conventional modes of participation, whilst stocks of economic and legitimate cultural capital distinguish those who engage more in collective and donating modes. At the same time, people's perceptions of privilege are also linked to their participation. As expected, perception of privilege in society is positively related to contacting, collective, and donating modes of participation, whilst perception of privilege in politics is negatively related to each of them. This suggests that perceiving privilege in society may motivate people to challenge privilege politically. However, providing a counterbalance to this, where they perceive politics as a particularly privileged domain, they seem to be put off participating.

We also observe a number of unexpected relationships, and the absence of many relationships, that temper our conclusions about the privileged nature of political participation in Britain. Few elements of social capital are related to participation, with the only expected relationship being the greater collective participation of those with less homogeneous friendship groups. Further, counter to our expectations, strength of social networks is negatively related to collective participation. As noted, it may be that people who are less able to rely on their social networks for help are driven to organise with others to seek political change that can

address the problems that they face. Similarly, we also observe an unexpected negative relationship between perceiving privilege in one's own life and donating, which indicates that people who feel they have earned their statuses through individual effort are more financially generous when supporting causes. Whilst we can offer explanations for these unexpected relationships, they do not support the general claim that greater capital and perception of privilege are linked to higher levels of participation. Similarly, the absence of relationships also limits support for that claim. Few of the factors that we focus on are related to the individual, contacting, charitable, or voting modes of participation, indicating that the people who engage in them are not especially distinguished by their stocks of capital or their perceptions of privilege. This is corroborated by the scarcity of comments in the interviews and focus groups that draw links between capital and political participation, which indicates that people do not generally perceive political participation to require such resources.

By contrast with this mixed evidence, we see quite consistent evidence of the continued relevance of the civic voluntarism model. Receiving requests to get involved is positively related to individual, contacting, collective, charitable, and donating participation, and sometimes dramatically so. Civic skills are also positively related to the individual, contacting, and collective modes of participation, whilst political interest is positively related to all three of those modes as well as voting. Thus, as when the civic voluntarism model was first tested, having relevant skills and resources, being psychologically engaged with politics, and being asked to get involved are all associated with higher levels of participation. We can think of these factors as being politically relevant elements of capital. The nature and quantity of recruitment requests are related to the types and number of people that one knows, which is to say one's social capital. Similarly, civic skills are related to education, or formal cultural capital, and political interest is a manifestation of one's cultural tastes and pastimes. Whilst they may be types of capital, the relationships that these highly politically relevant factors have with participation are somewhat unsurprising. What is more surprising is that otherwise politically unrelated elements of capital and perceptions are relevant to political activities. Indeed, we can say with confidence that previously unmeasured elements of legitimate cultural capital and perceptions of privilege are part of what distinguishes people who are politically active from those who are not.

We can also say with confidence that, whilst they rarely speak of the link from capital to political participation, people perceive a clear gap between themselves and national-level politics in Britain. Many also relate that gap, and the unrepresentativeness of politicians, to the idea of privilege, and are comfortable speaking extensively about the privilege of politicians. This reflects the fact that, for many people, national-level party politics is synonymous with politics in general. Indeed, as we saw in [Chapter 4](#), there is a common distinction between more

explicit and less explicit forms of political participation that reflects the difference between national and grassroots politics. Many people are content to focus on the former when thinking of politics, and they often perceive a gap between it and themselves. Sometimes that gap is spoken about in practical terms relating to how accessible politicians are, but it is also talked about in terms of privilege. In their comments, people often focus on class, and sometimes on the economic and cultural capital that relate to it, but they also recognise the roles of gender and ethnicity, even if only in passing. Of course, there is nuance in how people talk about the privilege-based gap between the public and politicians, and some, often politicians themselves, challenge the idea of such a gap. Nevertheless, it is clear that many people perceive the social distinctiveness of politicians and consider this an important part of the disconnect between them and the public.

Overall, we have evidence of a robust relationship between some elements of capital and multiple modes of participation. At the same time, we see that perceptions of privilege in society and politics are also related to some modes of participation, and that people deploy common narratives of a privilege-based divide between the public and politics. In line with the arguments developed in [Chapters 2 and 3](#), we can interpret this as a causal process in which people's backgrounds shape the capital that they accumulate and their perceptions of society, their place in it, and politics. Their stocks of capital and perceptions of privilege then go on to inhibit or facilitate political participation. In particular, economic and legitimate cultural capital facilitate participation in a number of political activities, whilst perception of privilege in society also does so. By contrast, perception of privilege in politics, unsurprisingly, inhibits participation in a number of political activities. In line with the idea of the funnel of causality (Campbell et al., 1964, pp. 24–29; Lewis-Beck et al., 2011) and the propositions of the civic voluntarism model (Schlozman et al., 2020), the effects of capital and perceptions of privilege mediate the effects of important background characteristics such as age, gender, and class on political participation. However, we cannot be confident in these causal propositions, given the data that we have. Specifically, we cannot be sure whether capital and perceptions of privilege influence participation, are influenced by it, or are mutually reinforcing with it. Although this conundrum is difficult to solve, it is to causal questions such as these that the [next chapter](#) turns. Before that, it suffices to conclude, first, that at least some modes of political participation are activities that are economically or culturally distinguished, or both. Second, we can also conclude that those who participate in politics are more apt to perceive the role of privilege in society but, by contrast, to emphasise the privilege of those involved in politics to a lesser extent. Thus, both structural and perceived privilege shape political participation in Great Britain.

Is Participation a Consequence or a Component of Privilege?

A Causal Conundrum

Identifying the factors that shape and drive, or in other words cause, people's political behaviour is a remarkably challenging undertaking. There are numerous instances in which the factors that we think cause a particular behaviour are actually consequences of it. And there are many other instances in which factors might appear closely related to behaviour but, in fact, there are other factors that are causing both of them to be related to each other. Two of the factors that we saw are strongly related to political participation in the last chapter, interest and recruitment, illustrate these problems well (Brady et al., 1995). It is possible that being very interested in politics enables people to get involved in political activities. In this account, political interest causes political participation. Alternatively, it could be that people who have been introduced to political activities, for instance by their parents, then develop an interest in politics because it is the norm in the participatory contexts that they frequent. In other words, it might be that political participation causes political interest. Further, there is a third possibility stemming from the role of parents: people who pass on political interest to their children are also more likely to introduce them to political activities. In other words, it might not be that political participation is a consequence or a cause of political interest, but that the two are imbued in people as a package stemming from the same socialisation processes.

Similar issues relate to recruitment and political participation (Brady et al., 1995). Being asked to participate might prompt political activities. Alternatively, since political participation signals willingness to undertake such activities and introduces people to networks in which further political activity is often sought, it might prompt the receipt of more recruitment requests. Finally, the same socialisation processes that cause people to be politically active may also introduce them

into the social network in which political recruitment is prevalent. In this case, neither thing causes the other; they just go together because they are caused by the same preceding factors. This same ambiguity of causality extends to many of the relationships that we focused on in the preceding chapter.

A particular conundrum for us is whether capital and perceptions of privilege cause political participation or are the consequence of the same preceding factors. This chapter sheds some light on that question, whilst recognising that it cannot be conclusively answered with the data at hand. Starting with a focus on capital rather than perceptions, we can probably dismiss one possible causal relationship for at least some forms of capital. It is unlikely that political participation causes differences in the levels of economic capital that people hold, or in their general interest in attending legitimate cultural performances, exhibitions, entertainment-orientated shows, or consumption-based cultural venues. Participating in politics might introduce one to new people who, eventually, influence one's career choices or become friends and offer financial support, but this is likely to be a rare and slow sequence of events. Similarly, whilst political activity might expose people to cues to view particular performances, exhibitions, or shows, it is unlikely to shape the underlying disposition to engage in those activities to a greater or lesser extent. Still, we cannot eliminate the possibility that these processes are at play and shaping the relationships between economic and cultural capital on one hand and political participation on the other. Further, in line with the processes outlined above, it is possible that factors such as political interest and recruitment, as well as civic skills, are consequences of political participation rather than vice versa. This observation also extends to social capital since it may be the case that political participation introduces people to new acquaintances and thus alters the status, size, intensity, diversity, and strength of their social networks.

In this chapter we focus on testing the possibility that people's backgrounds affect their stocks of capital, including the factors identified by the civic voluntarism model, and that their stocks of capital are then part of what shapes their political participation. This causal process is in line with the propositions of the civic voluntarism model. It suggests that capital is a component of privilege that stems from background characteristics and goes on to cause political participation. We test this causal process because it contrasts with Bourdieu's approach, which proposes that capital and political participation are both manifestations of social position. In his view, capital and political participation are both components of privilege rather than one causing the other. Instead, this chapter draws on both approaches together. It uses components of the social world identified by Bourdieu, in the form of economic, social, and cultural capital, but tests whether they plausibly fit into the causal processes outlined by the civic voluntarism model.

These causal processes are equally murky in relation to perceptions of privilege. It is possible that people's background characteristics and levels of capital

shape their perceptions of privilege, which then go on to shape their political participation. In this view, perceptions of privilege sit between capital and political participation in the funnel of causality that runs from the wide array of distant influences on behaviour to the immediate and most closely related drivers (Campbell et al., 1964). It is also possible that background characteristics shape both stocks of capital and perceptions of privilege together, though not necessarily uniformly, and then capital and perceptions influence political participation. In this account, capital is seen not to be causally prior to perceptions but to stem from the same background characteristics, and both are viewed as drivers of political participation. There is a final possibility in which perceptions of privilege are an indirect cause of political participation. In this case, they reflect wider ideological dispositions and beliefs about the world, which can influence important life decisions and result in different distributions of both capital and political activities. This would mean that perceptions of privilege are part of what causes differences in both capital and political participation.

In contrast with both of the above accounts, perceptions of privilege might be a consequence of the other factors that we are interested in. It could be that capital shapes political participation, which then shapes people's perceptions of privilege. In this account, perceptions are a consequence rather than a cause of political activity. Finally, in line with Bourdieu's approach outlined above, it may be that none of these factors cause each other but are all manifestations of social position. So, the socialisation processes that shape people may deliver packages of preferences, beliefs, and behaviours that link different stocks of capital with perceptions of privilege and political activity. Given the difficulty of disentangling all these possible causal processes, this chapter focuses on testing the plausibility of one causal account. Specifically, it examines whether perceptions of privilege mediate the relationship between background characteristics and political participation. As with the examination of the role of capital, this is an exercise in assessing whether our data is consistent with a particular causal proposition. However, because the data were gathered at the same time, we cannot rule out alternative causal explanations, and this will be discussed further in the chapter's conclusion.

The chapter tests the possibility that capital and perceptions of privilege mediate the relationships between background characteristics and political participation using a technique called causal mediation analysis (CMA) (Imai et al., 2010). The focus of this approach is on mediator variables, which we think of as being shaped by causally prior variables and then going on to shape causally subsequent outcome variables. The approach first tests whether a mediator variable is affected by preceding variables by regressing it on to them. Next, the outcome variable is regressed on to the mediator and the variables that precede it. Comparing the two sets of results from these analyses allows us to identify the direct effect of each variable in the models on the outcome variable, as well as to estimate the extent to

which the mediator intervenes in the relationship between the preceding variables and the outcome variable. In our case, we use CMA to observe whether various forms of capital mediate the relationships between age, gender, and class on one hand and different types of political participation on the other. We then move on to examine whether perceptions of privilege intervene in the relationships between those background characteristics and different types of participation. In these analyses, we see persistent mediating effects of recruitment, civic skills, and political interest, which corroborates their strong effects in the previous chapter. As such, we round out this chapter by investigating whether stocks of capital and perceptions of privilege mediate the relationships between background characteristics and recruitment, civic skills, and political interest.¹ We do not draw on the interview and focus group data in this chapter because people seldom make reference to causal processes specifically. That is to say although people are clear about the links between privilege and politics, as we saw in the previous chapter, they seldom unpack or critique the nature of that relationship. Perhaps reflecting the complexity and opaqueness of those causal relationships, the results of our causal mediation models reveal that few of the processes that we test are consistent with the survey data.

The Mediating Role of Capital?

As noted above, we first test the proposition that capital mediates the relationships between background characteristics and political participation. The background characteristics that we focus on are age, gender, and class.² We focus on childhood class because, like age and gender, we can be confident that it causally precedes both stocks of capital and political participation. The models used to test these possible causal processes draw on the statistically significant results that we observed in the previous chapter. We also use the same measures of each concept that we did in the last chapter.³ We focus on the results from the causal mediation models in which three conditions are met: more than 5 per cent of the relationship between background characteristics and political participation is mediated by capital; the percentage mediated is statistically significant; and each of the relationships in the mediation are statistically significant. We also include the control variables that were identified as important in the statistical analysis underpinning the last chapter, which enables us to identify mediation effects that exist when

¹ The full results of the CMA are available in online [Appendix C](#).

² We do not consider ethnicity because, as outlined in [Appendix A](#), the survey data is particularly unrepresentative in this regard.

³ The distributions of these indices are available in [Appendix C](#). The process of factor analysis underpinning these indices is outlined in online [Appendix A](#).

taking into account the influence of other factors on the mediators and the different modes of political participation.⁴ We take these steps in order to increase our confidence that the mediation effects that we identify are meaningful and not reflections of other relationships. As we will see, this caution means that we can only be confident in a very small number of the more than 90 different mediation effects of capital that were tested.

Starting with age, [Figure 8.1](#) shows that 9 per cent of the positive effect of age on contacting participation is mediated by civic skills, whilst a further 29 per cent of the relationship is mediated by political interest. In other words, part of

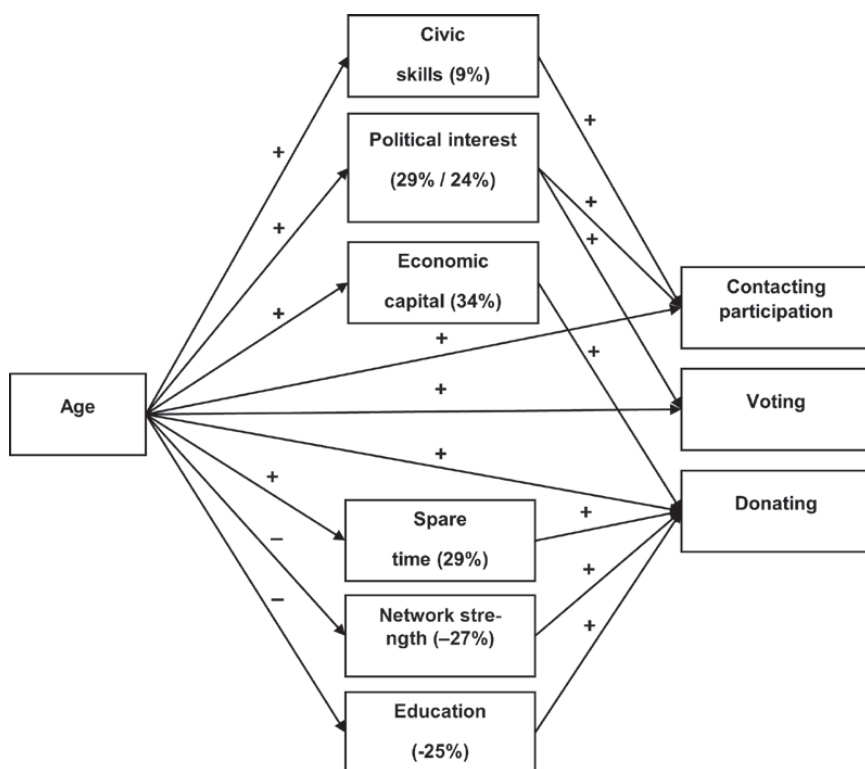


Figure 8.1 Mediation effects: political participation on age, via capital

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, $n = 1,129-1,244$

⁴ The factors included in the mediation models are economic capital, spare time, homogeneity of networks, strength of networks, recruitment requests, exhibition attendance, legitimate performance attendance, entertainment-orientated show attendance, consumption-orientated activities, civic skills, left-right ideological position, political interest, perception of privilege in society, perception of privilege in one's own life, perception of privilege in politics, age, gender, childhood class, and education level.

the reason that older people participate in contacting activities to a greater extent than younger people is because they have accumulated more of the relevant civic skills and are more interested in politics. Economic capital is key for donating, as we saw in the previous chapter, and mediates 34 per cent of the positive effect of age. Spare time is also important in accounting for older people's greater levels of donating, mediating 23 per cent of the relationship. Thus, the free time available to older people may allow them to identify more causes that they wish to support, whilst their greater economic capital enables more or higher value donations. Additionally, both education and the strength of social networks mediate a negative percentage (–25 per cent and –27 per cent, respectively) of the relationship between age and donating. These negative relationships might seem unusual, but they reflect the fact that both education and strength of networks have positive relationships with donating but older people have lower levels of education and weaker social networks. Despite this, older people donate more than younger people, so their lower levels of education and weaker social networks tend to undermine their otherwise greater degree of largesse when donating. Finally, political interest mediates 24 per cent of the positive relationship between age and voting, suggesting that a notable part of the reason why older people turn out at a higher rate than younger people is their greater interest in politics.

The paucity of mediation effects extends to the picture relating to gender and engagement in political activities. [Figure 8.2](#) shows that 36 per cent of the positive effect of being female on individual participation is mediated by women's higher receipt of recruitment requests. At the same time, women's lower tendency to attend exhibitions and the positive relationship that such cultural capital has with individual participation means that it negatively mediates (–11 per cent) their higher tendency to engage in individual political activities. In contrast with individual participation, women are less likely to participate in contacting activities, and 50 per cent of this negative effect is accounted for by their lower levels of political interest, whilst a further 15 per cent is mediated by their lower levels of civic skills. Finally, women engage in charitable participation to a higher degree than men, and this relationship is negatively mediated (–10 per cent) by spare time. This indicates that women are dedicating more time and energy to supporting the charities that they care about than men despite having less spare time to do so. This may be, in part, because of the higher receipt of recruitment requests, which positively mediates 11 per cent of their higher levels of charitable participation.

Turning to the effect of childhood class on political participation, [Figure 8.3](#) again shows a small number of statistically significant mediation effects. 24 per cent of the negative effect of growing up in a working-class household on individual participation is mediated by political interest. This suggests that, compared to middle-class families, working-class families tend to instil less interest in politics

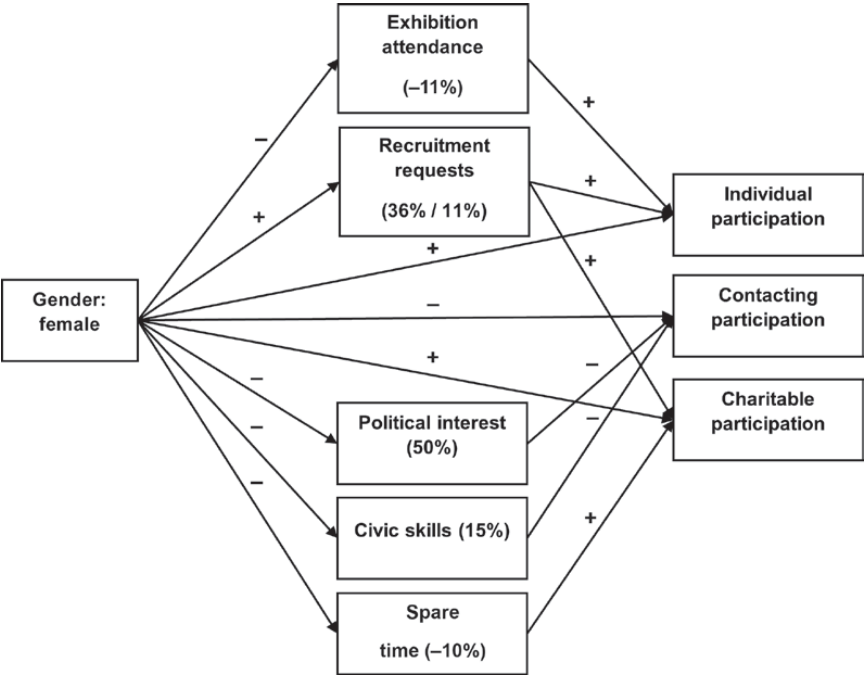


Figure 8.2 Mediation effects: political participation on gender, via capital
Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,129–1,244

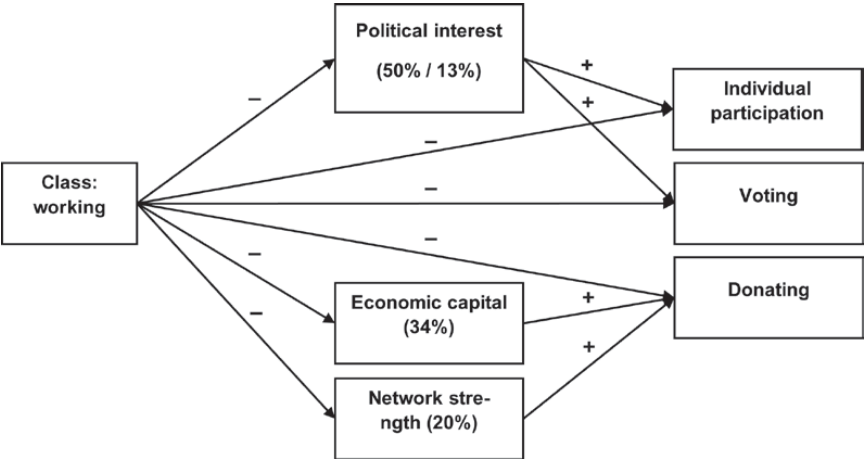


Figure 8.3 Mediation effects: political participation on childhood class, via capital
Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,129–1,244

in their children, which in turn translates into lower levels of individual participation in later life. Similarly, the negative effect of growing up in a working-class family on donating is heavily mediated (34 per cent) by economic capital. People with working-class backgrounds also tend to report receiving less help from their social networks, and this mediates 20 per cent of the negative effect of such a background on donating. Together, these effects indicate that people who grow up in working-class households tend to be poorer and less able to rely on strong social networks than their middle-class counterparts, and this underpins their tendency to donate less to the causes that they support. Finally, the negative effect of working-class background on political interest also mediates (13 per cent) the negative effect of such a background on tendency to vote. Again, this indicates the importance of the level of interest in politics that is instilled in childhood for subsequent political participation.

Two key continuities can be observed across the mediation results relating to age, gender, and class. First, amongst all of the models tested, there is only a small number of clear cases of mediation and, second, almost none of them relate to informal cultural capital. The first of those observations is more explicable in relation to gender than age or class, given the minimal differences in political participation between women and men that are observed in the Privilege and Participation Survey data,⁵ and which reflects other evidence of a reduced gender gap in participation (Burns et al., 2018). The paucity of results in relation to gender is also explained by the small number of sizeable differences in stocks of capital between men and women, which are also observed in the survey data. Given the rarity of such differences, there are few political activities that gender has an impact on and, therefore, few relationships in which capital can act as a mediator. At the same time, there are few differences between the genders in terms of the capital that they hold so, even where there are differences in their levels of political participation, it is unlikely that capital plays a part in explaining those differences.

By contrast with the results relating to gender, the lack of mediation effects observed in relation to age and class are less explicable. Levels of political participation and stocks of capital vary notably between different age groups and between people who grew up in different classes.⁶ However, some of the effects of age and all of the effects of class cease to be statistically significant when we take into account a host of other factors relating to political participation in the models presented in [Chapter 7](#). The presence of age and class differences in political participation that are reduced or do not persist when we take other factors into

⁵ The results of this analysis, and the analysis relating to stocks of capital, can be found in online [Appendix B](#).

⁶ Again, the results of these analyses can be found in online [Appendix B](#).

account is suggestive of mediation by at least some of those factors, which makes it all the more surprising that we observe so few such effects here. The possible explanation for this lack of results differs between age and class. In the case of age, many of the mediation models show significant relationships between age and capital, and between capital and political participation, but the models have too much uncertainty around their estimates of the mediation effects for us to be confident that they exist. So, the lack of results is a consequence, in part, of our threshold for reporting mediation results. By contrast, the lack of results relating to childhood class stem from the fact that it often has no statistically significant relationship with capital when we take other factors into account. Thus, it is not that the classes that people grow up in have no implications for their subsequent political participation, nor that stocks of capital have no implications for such participation, but that childhood class has no apparent implications for many types of capital after we account for other factors.

Turning to our second observation, we see that very few of the mediation effects that we observe relate to informal cultural capital. The exception to this is the mediation of the effect of gender on individual participation by exhibition attendance. Otherwise, the story of the 14 other mediation effects that we observe is clearly that the factors identified by the civic voluntarism model remain important, and in a way that is consistent with the causal processes that the model posits. Specifically, civic skills mediate the effects of age and gender on contacting participation, spare time mediates the effects of age on donating and of gender on charitable participation, whilst recruitment mediates the effect of gender on both individual and charitable participation. Further, political interest has the most extensive mediation effects, intervening between age and both contacting participation and voting, between gender and individual participation, and between class and both individual participation and voting.

Despite not observing mediation effects in relation to informal cultural capital, it may still be related to political participation. Indeed, as we saw in the last chapter, even when we control for a wide array of other factors, stocks of various types of capital are related to political participation. As outlined at the outset of this chapter, there are numerous possible causal relationships between these factors that we cannot conclusively assess with the data at hand. One possibility is that stocks of economic, social, and informal cultural capital causally precede the kinds of highly politically relevant factors that the mediation models affirm are closely related to political participation. It may be that having more economic resources, knowing particular kinds of people or more people and having stronger connections to them, or holding stocks of legitimate cultural capital play a part in shaping the civic skills that one has, how likely one is to receive recruitment requests, and how strong one's political interest is. We explore this possibility

further below, but first we turn to briefly consider the mediating role of perceptions of privilege.

The Mediating Role of Perceptions of Privilege?

Whilst the mediation effects relating to stocks of capital are sparse, they are almost non-existent in relation to perceptions of privilege. As [Figure 8.4](#) shows, only in relation to the effect of age do any perceptions of privilege have statistically significant mediating effects larger than 5 per cent in which both of the relationships in the mediation are also statistically significant. Perception of privilege in society, in the shape of structural explanations for status difference, negatively mediates (–9 per cent) the positive relationship between age and contacting participation. This is because older people tend to place less emphasis on such explanations, and those explanations are positively related to contacting participation, but older people nonetheless participate in contacting activities more frequently than younger people. Thus, they are more active contactors despite tending to explain social inequalities in ways that mitigate against political participation. Second, perception of privilege in society negatively mediates (–8 per cent) the positive relationship between age and donating. Thus, older people donate more to the causes that they support despite holding views of society that tend to be associated with less political activity.

These mediation effects stand alone, however, because age, gender, and childhood class tend not to be statistically significantly related to perceptions of privilege when other factors are taken into account. Thus, it is not that perceptions of privilege are unrelated to political participation; we saw that they are in [Chapter 7](#), and these relationships are also observed in the mediation models. However, it seems that there are more important factors than age, gender, and childhood class in shaping perceptions of privilege. In the case of perception of privilege in

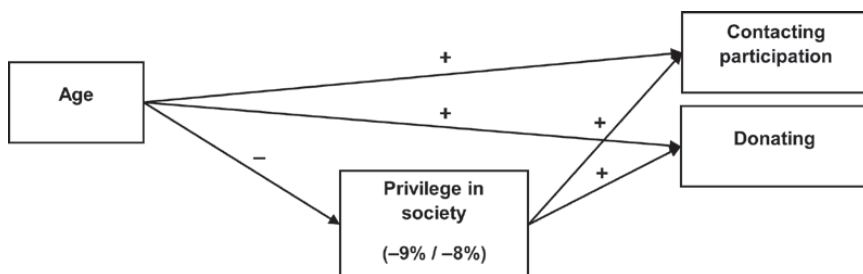


Figure 8.4 Mediation effects: political participation on age, via perceptions of privilege

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, $n = 1,129\text{--}1,244$

society, the mediation models indicate that homogeneity and strength of social networks are negatively related to structural explanations for status difference. Right-wing economic ideology, which is included in the models as a control, is also strongly negatively related to perception of privilege in society. This indicates the importance of ideology, and that perceptions of privilege are shaped by, or a manifestation of, such beliefs. In the case of perception of own privilege, people who frequently receive recruitment requests are more apt to attribute their own status to structural explanations, suggesting that integration into political networks mitigates against holding individual explanations for one's own status. By contrast, civic skills and right-wing economic ideology are negatively related to structural explanations for own status. In the former case, civic skills may drive or reflect a sense of one's own competence, which could contribute to the belief that one's social position is the result of individual rather than structural factors. In the latter case, it is again clear that perception of privilege is either shaped by or a reflection of people's ideological beliefs. Finally, perception of privilege in politics is negatively related to both legitimate performance and entertainment-orientated show attendance, and especially to right-wing economic ideology. Across these relationships we see consistent relationships between economic ideology and perceptions of privilege, suggesting that the latter is a feature or reflection of the ideological positions that people hold. The importance of these relationships means that any relationships between background characteristics and perceptions of privilege are not statistically significant. This results in such perceptions tending not to mediate the relationships between those characteristics and political participation. Overall, then, we have little evidence of the mediating role of either capital or perceptions of privilege in the relationship between background characteristics and political participation. This may be because of the strength of the effects of factors such as political interest, recruitment, and civic skills. We can think of those factors as particularly politically relevant forms of capital, and the next section tests whether they mediate the relationships between stocks of capital and political participation.

Politically Relevant Capital

In both the [previous chapter](#) and this chapter, we have seen the continued importance of many of the factors in participation identified by the civic voluntarism model. These were included in the regression models and mediation models as controls, but the strength and consistency of the results highlight the need to further investigate their role. In particular, we observed relationships between a range of types of participation and civic skills, requests to participate, and political interest. These relationships illustrate the roles that resources, recruitment, and engagement play in facilitating participation, and we can view these factors as

particularly politically relevant types of social and cultural capital. The recruitment requests that one receives may be shaped by one's social networks and constitute part of social capital. Similarly, both civic skills and political interest reflect one's cultural tastes and pastimes, and constitute elements of informal cultural capital. The idea that they are particularly politically relevant types of capital suggests the possibility that they are more causally proximate to political participation, which is to say further along the funnel of causality (Campbell et al., 1964), than other types of capital. By the time someone has the particular skills needed to participate, is part of networks that recruit them to do so, and has an interest in politics, it is clear that they are more likely to end up participating.

There are clear ways in which each of the three forms of capital might shape the politically relevant types of capital that people hold. Being rich in economic capital can make one a more attractive recruit, not least with regards to donating. It can also buy the time to hone civic skills, and might motivate a greater interest in politics due to larger economic stakes in political outcomes. At the same time, being embedded in a larger, more active, more diverse, and stronger social network could expose one to more people who discuss politics. This might prompt or sustain interest in the topic, as well as more requests to get involved in political activities. We might also expect the status of one's networks, for instance in the form of how many professionals one knows, to affect the ease with which one can develop and accumulate civic skills. Finally, being rich in legitimate cultural capital, as with economic capital, might make one a more attractive recruit to political causes by signalling qualification to engage in such activities. Such cultural capital can also contribute to the ease with which one exercises civic skills, for instance by providing relevant cultural reference points. Similarly, those cultural reference points can make sustaining an interest in politics easier, whilst engagement with legitimate culture might also expose people to more, and more diverse, political ideas and issues.

To test the possibility that background characteristics work through stocks of capital to shape politically relevant capital, we consider a further series of causal mediation models with recruitment requests, civic skills, and political interest as the dependent variables.⁷ The models treat age, gender, and childhood class as the independent variables and test the possibility that stocks of economic, social, and informal cultural capital mediate the relationships between background characteristics and the three types of politically relevant capital.⁸ Figure 8.5 shows that

⁷ Ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regressions with recruitment requests, political interest, and civic skills treated as the dependent variables were used to identify the types of capital that might act as mediators.

⁸ The possibility that perceptions of privilege are also shaped by background characteristics, via stocks of capital, was also tested but with no results that passed the thresholds for reporting that were outlined earlier in the chapter. Further, perceptions of privilege were not tested as mediators between background characteristics and recruitment requests, political interest, and civic skills because of the particular ambiguity of causal processes involving perceptions.

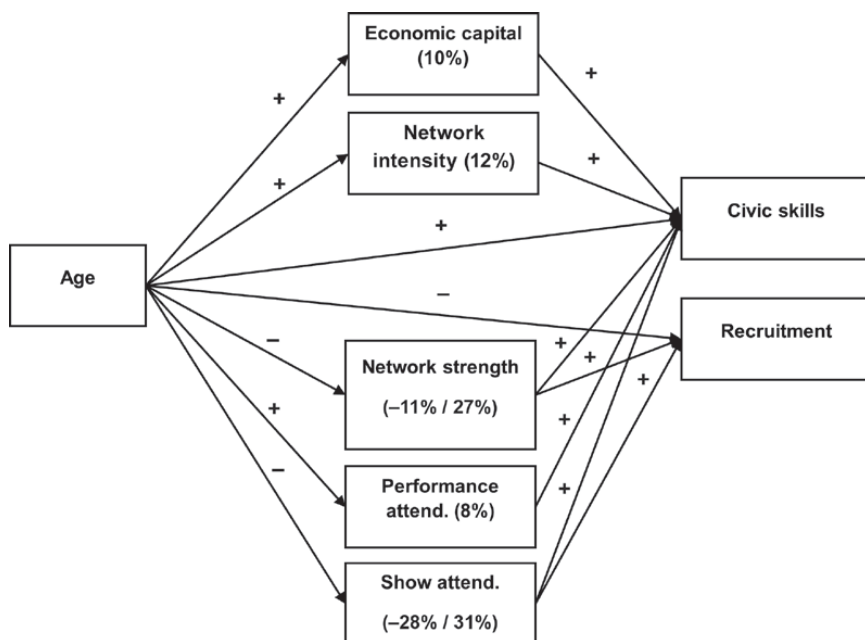


Figure 8.5 Mediation effects: civic skills and recruitment on age, via capital
Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,129–1,244

both the strength of people's social networks and their entertainment-based show attendance mediate the negative relationship between age and frequency of receiving recruitment requests. The weaker social networks of older people account for at least 27 per cent of their lower receipt of recruitment requests. Similarly, older people's lower attendance at entertainment-based shows accounts for at least 31 per cent of their lower levels of recruitment to political activities.⁹ Thus, they tend to receive fewer requests to participate in significant part because their social networks have weaker norms of helping each other and because they are not immersed in the (youth-orientated) entertainment-based cultural environments that seem to act as venues for at least some types of political recruitment.

Turning to civic skills, at least 10 per cent of the positive effect of age is mediated by economic capital. Older people tend to have more economic resources, and this buys them the capacity to exercise their civic skills more frequently.¹⁰ By contrast, they tend to have weaker social networks, which mitigates against

⁹ The point estimates for the size of the mediation effects exceed 100 per cent when combined, so the lower confidence intervals around the estimates are reported in this section.

¹⁰ There are, however, particular problems with causal interpretation here since the jobs that people have shape both their economic capital and civic skills.

their higher use of civic skills (mediation effect of at least –11 per cent), though this effect is offset by the positive mediation (12 per cent) associated with the greater intensity of their networks. Similarly, older people's lower engagement with entertainment-based shows has a negative mediation effect (at least –28 per cent) on civic skills, though this is partially offset by the positive mediation effect (at least 8 per cent) of their more frequent attendance at legitimate performances. Thus, their greater stocks of economic capital and, perhaps, the ideas and issues that they encounter during their more frequent trips to the theatre and opera seem to facilitate or prompt greater use of civic skills. By contrast, the fact that they are less able to draw on help from their social networks, and are less engaged in (youth-orientated) cultural spaces that may deliver politically salient information or prompts, tends to mitigate against the use of civic skills.

Turning to gender, we do not see any mediation effects in relation to recruitment, but [Figure 8.6](#) shows two effects relating to civic skills. Women's greater propensity to attend legitimate cultural performances mitigates against (–9 per cent) their otherwise lower levels of civic skills. At the same time, their lower frequency of attending entertainment-orientated shows is part of the explanation (10 per cent) for their lower frequency of exercising civic skills. Thus, women's cultural preferences, and perhaps the ideas and issues that they encounter frequently as a consequence, contribute to and mitigate against their lower use of civic skills. Similarly, women's lower frequency of exhibition attendance is part of the explanation (8 per cent) for their lower political interest. These mediation effects of cultural capital relating to gender, and of economic, social, and cultural

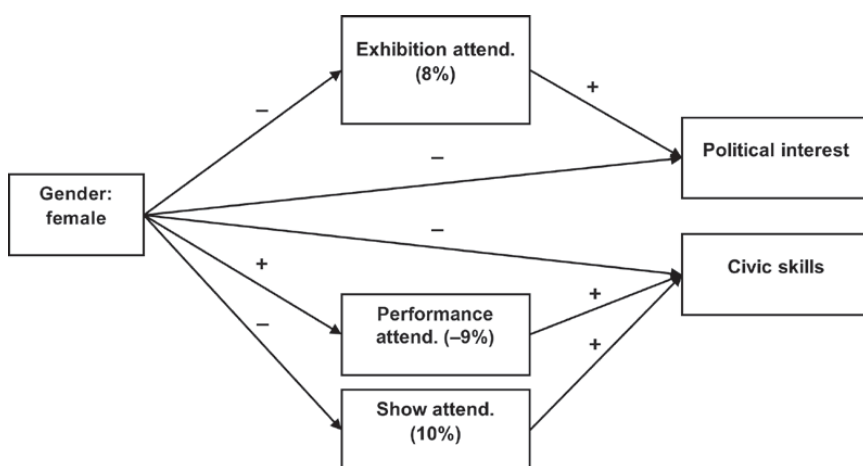


Figure 8.6 Mediation effects: political interest and civic skills on gender, via capital

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, $n = 1,129-1,244$

capital relating to age, stand in contrast to the lack of mediating effects relating to childhood class. This absence of effects stems largely from the imprecision of the results, which have very wide confidence intervals around them. Thus, we cannot be confident that economic, social, and informal cultural capital mediate the relationships between childhood class and politically relevant capital.

A Conundrum Unanswered

The [previous chapter](#) showed us that stocks of capital and perceptions of privilege are related to some modes of political participation, even when we take a host of other factors into account. By contrast, this chapter has shown that we can rarely be confident that capital and perceptions mediate the impact of background characteristics on political activities. The paucity of such mediation effects is particularly clear in relation to informal cultural capital. Whereas exhibition attendance was shown to be positively related to both individual and collective participation in the previous chapter, we can only be confident that it mediates the relationship between gender (but not age or childhood class) and individual participation. Similarly, the positive relationships between legitimate performance attendance and both collective participation and donating do not translate into mediating effects relating to background characteristics. This also applies to the positive relationship between entertainment-based show attendance and collective participation, and the negative relationship between consumption-based cultural activities and contacting participation. The rarity of observing mediation effects also extends to perceptions of privilege. We saw in the [previous chapter](#) that perceptions of privilege in both society and politics are related to contacting participation, collective participation, and donating. However, only perception of privilege in society has any mediating effect, and then only between age and contacting participation and donating.

However, some elements of capital do display more consistent mediating effects. These are consistently the factors identified by the civic voluntarism model, which we can think of as politically relevant types of capital. Validating the causal argument of the civic voluntarism model, the positive relationship between economic capital and donating mediates the effects of both age and class on the latter, and the same is true of social network strength. Similarly, the relationships between spare time and both donating and charitable participation mediate the effects of age on the former and gender on the latter. Turning to civic skills, their positive relationship with contacting participation mediates the effects of both age and gender. Thus, the continued importance of resources for political participation is underlined by the results of both the last chapter and this one. Similarly, the civic voluntarism model's emphasis on the importance of political interest and

recruitment is also supported by the evidence presented in both chapters. Political interest mediates the relationships between age and both contacting participation and voting, between gender and contacting participation, and between class and both individual participation and voting. At the same time, the positive relationship between recruitment and both individual and charitable participation mediates the effects of gender on those types of activity. Here, we again see that key elements of the civic voluntarism model are not only related to political participation but also in ways that are consistent with the causal propositions of the model.

What do we make of these results? In the case of the lack of mediating effects relating to informal cultural capital, the evidence in this chapter is inconsistent with the proposed causal process in which the effects of age, gender, and class on political participation run partly through people's cultural tastes and activities. In short, informal cultural capital does not seem to fulfil the same mediating role as the factors identified by the civic voluntarism model. It is simply correlated with political participation, perhaps in line with Bourdieu's claim that it is part of the same package of tastes and interests as politics itself. By contrast, we find evidence consistent with the proposition that resources, engagement, and recruitment mediate the effects of age, gender, and class on political participation. However, these results do not rule out the other causal accounts considered at the outset of this chapter. For example, political participation might mediate the relationship between background characteristics and resources, engagement, and recruitment. If people are politically active for other reasons, such as being brought up by parents who introduced them to political activities, then they are likely to end up with more extensive civic skills, a stronger interest in politics, and higher numbers of requests to participate. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive with the causal processes tested in this chapter, and the factors we consider may have reciprocal relationships with participation. In other words, it is plausible that civic skills, interest in politics, and recruitment requests prompt political participation, which itself builds civic skills, sparks political interest, and drives recruitment requests.

Clearly, the kinds of causal questions that this chapter addresses are difficult to answer. One solution to this might be to gather longitudinal data in which the same people are asked about their stocks of capital and their political participation at multiple points in their lives. This would allow us to observe whether the capital held at one point predicts political participation at a later point. However, this approach would not provide conclusive answers to our causal questions. This is because it would always be possible that political participation at an earlier, unmeasured, time shaped the elements of capital that seem to drive participation at a later time. This possibility even applies to cases that seem reasonably clear-cut, such as the impact of education on perceptions of privilege (Kam and Palmer, 2008; Willeck and Mendelberg, 2022). It is certainly plausible to claim that

education is a key component of socialisation that takes place relatively early in people's lives and therefore should shape and predict their subsequent perceptions of privilege. However, people's explanations for inequality in society and their own statuses may be intimately related to motivations, perceptions of abilities, and beliefs about the importance of things like hard work. These perceptions and beliefs may shape how people engage with educational contexts, whether they prioritise academic goals, and the decisions they make about how far to proceed with education. Unless we measure such perceptions and beliefs from a very early age, which is generally not possible, we cannot be sure that they do not shape educational experiences and outcomes.

The causal questions we are dealing with also cannot be easily addressed by experimental techniques. This is because it is difficult to meaningfully alter stocks of capital at random. We might, at great expense or effort, be able to allocate people significant economic capital, introduce them to new people who alter the nature of their social networks, or prompt them to engage in particular cultural activities. We could then observe the effects of these random interventions on their subsequent political participation. However, even if such costly and time-consuming interventions were possible, they would only represent a weak approximation of the stocks of capital that people develop over their lives and that are intimately related to their sense of who they are. Similar difficulties relate to the politically relevant types of capital identified by the civic voluntarism model. We might be able to randomly train some people in how to use civic skills in order to observe the impact of those skills on subsequent political participation. However, this would be quite distinct from the experience of developing such skills organically over the course of one's life. Similarly, we might be able to alter people's political interest in the short term by exposing them to particular prompts, but this is unlikely to replicate the long-term processes that instil an underlying interest in politics. Finally, whilst we could certainly randomly allocate requests to participate in politics, receipt of those requests would be quite a distinct experience from receiving requests from friends and family, or even acquaintances or organisations that one is familiar with.

Similar constraints also apply to experimentally testing the effects of perceptions of privilege on participation. We can expose people to prompts that might alter their emphases on different explanations for inequality in society and their own status, their perceived status, and the extent to which they view politics as a domain of privilege. However, it is difficult to shape longer-term perceptions or people's underlying views, to which they might return after the experimental intervention. None of this is to say that such experiments would not be worth running, or that they would not produce interesting results, but we should be aware of their limitations. In particular, we would need to be careful when reading across from the causal processes that they identify to the wider, and probably messier,

causal processes at play in people's lives. As such, for now at least, the answer to the causal questions that are the focus of this chapter remains: we do not know. We could construct a story of certainty here, for instance by concluding that the consistency of the evidence presented above with a particular causal process allows us to rule out other causal explanations. Similarly, we could simplify the models included in the CMA in an effort to identify clearer and more consistent causal paths. However, to do so would be to disregard the plausible alternative causal explanations and to overlook the complex nature of the social world, in which there are lots of factors at play in shaping people's views and behaviours.

Conclusion and Solutions

Capital, Perceptions of Privilege, and Political Participation

Over the preceding chapters, we have drawn together a range of concepts in an attempt to offer a fuller understanding of privilege and its relationship with political participation. First, we have situated capital within the holistic concept of privilege, allowing it to be related to multiple background characteristics rather than just class. We have also seen that economic, social, and cultural capital are not only mechanisms that reproduce privilege but also resources that can enable political participation. Within cultural capital, we have adopted Pierre Bourdieu's distinction between formal and informal capital, focusing on the latter, as well as his distinction between legitimate and popular cultural capital. In particular, we have seen the potential status of informal cultural capital, amongst other forms of capital, as both a resource and a signal of qualification to participate in political contexts. Indeed, we expected that stocks of capital would generally be positively related to participation in a range of political activities. This holistic account of the forms of capital as components of privilege, and a focus on the relevance of informal cultural capital, has been largely absent from previous accounts of political participation in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Also absent from these accounts has been a conceptualisation of how privilege might be perceived.

To address the previous lack of consideration of perceptions of privilege, we have introduced four components of the concept. We begin with people's explanations for status differences, which indicate the extent to which they perceive the role of structural forces in shaping inequality in society at large. But people can attribute their own status to different causes from the statuses of others, and their explanations for the former indicate the extent to which they perceive privilege in their own lives. Relatedly, we need to know how people perceive their statuses, which we do with reference to their class identities. Finally, given the possible relevance of privilege to politics, we have included perception of the relative privilege

of political participants and politicians as the fourth component of perceptions of privilege. The complexity of the drivers of perceptions, which can be based on different cues from both the past and the present, means that perceptions of privilege are distinct from actual social position. In a similar vein, and by contrast with the simple proposition that capital facilitates political participation, the implications of perceptions of privilege for participation are mixed. Given its opposition to system-justifying beliefs, we expected perception of privilege in society to positively relate to participation and for this effect to trump the more ambiguous impact of perception of privilege in one's own life. We also expected the burden of low self-perceived status, and perceiving the privilege of those in politics, to mitigate against participation. As we have seen, the evidence in support of these propositions, and those relating to capital, is mixed.

The empirical chapters offer an in-depth investigation of the distribution of capital and perceptions of privilege as well as their relationships with different modes of political participation. To do so, they draw on extensive survey data and detailed interview and focus group data to reveal not only how the concepts are related but also how people think and speak about them. The results paint a complex picture of people's understandings of capital, privilege, and politics, and of the factors that relate to participation. In the first instance, we observe a common distinction between more and less explicit kinds of politics. Members of the public are generally content to focus on national-level legislating and party activities as politics. Volunteers, activists, and MPs distinguish between such 'capital P Politics' and the 'small p politics' of community organising, which is often not seen to be political by those who do it. This leaves open the question of precisely where we draw the boundary between 'political' and 'non-political' participation and, indeed, what constitutes politics itself.

To some extent, this distinction between more and less explicitly political participation maps on to a distinction between more and less intensive modes that we observe in the Privilege and Participation Survey. That distinction is manifested in our observation of previously identified individual, contacting, and collective modes of participation (Pattie et al., 2004), which become more explicitly political as we move from the first to the last mode. In addition, we observe a charitable mode of participation that is not explicitly political, and we see that donating and voting are distinct types of participation from other modes. Within each mode of participation, we see a decline in the number of people who are involved as the intensity of involvement increases, but we also observe that moderate levels of participation in some modes are widespread. Thus, although not necessarily amongst their daily activities, political participation is a normal feature of many people's lives.

For those who are less apt to get involved in politics, the barriers to participation identified in the Privilege and Participation Survey indicate a role for both

capital and perceptions. Specifically, the emphasis on lack of time and money as barriers indicates the role of economic capital, whilst the identification of lack of confidence and the idea that politics is 'not for me' suggest that both cultural capital and perceptions may influence participatory decisions. The importance of cultural capital is also reflected in the idea that lack of knowledge is a barrier to participation, which is emphasised in the interviews and focus groups. Indeed, lack of knowledge and lack of interest, or having other priorities, are identified as the key individual constraints on participation. These constraints are complemented by a second barrier to participation: disincentives that centre on the negative functioning of politics. The political system is widely viewed as inaccessible, hierarchical, unresponsive and slow to change, promoting deference, and offering little reward for participation. These views are reflected in the third barrier to participation identified in the interviews and focus groups: the image of politics as ineffectual or irrelevant. This focus on the negative regard in which politics is held demonstrates the role that perceptions can play in inhibiting participation.

As with political participation, we also observe that moderate stocks of capital are widespread. In terms of economic capital, most people are getting by or comfortable, though with a sizeable minority who are struggling. Turning to social capital, people tend to have acquaintances with a range of occupational statuses but to know people in some kinds of occupations more than others, and to have homogeneous networks in terms of gender, ethnicity, and religion. They also spend more time on sustaining their close friendships than their wider networks and, perhaps as a consequence, tend to receive help from those who they have the closest relationships with. By contrast with economic and social capital, we see greater distinction between kinds of informal cultural capital. There are clearly popular types of cultural capital such as eating out and shopping for pleasure, as well as legitimate types such as attending ballet or opera performances. Engagement with the former is much more widespread and frequent than engagement with the latter, but there are also cultural activities that transgress this divide. For instance, exhibition attendance is often viewed as an enriching way to spend one's time, and therefore could be considered legitimate in a Bourdieusian sense, but it is also quite popular. By contrast, entertainment-based activities such as clubbing and watching stand-up comedy are not valorised in the same way but are still rather niche pastimes. At the same time, there is a common understanding of capital as an asset that is apparent in the interviews and focus groups. This is particularly clear when people talk about housing, work, and money as components of economic capital, as well as in their identification of the roles of social networks and associations in shaping people's lives. When talking about cultural capital, people focus on education, especially in its private and university forms, but also speak of the importance of language and, occasionally, cultural pastimes. All of these components of cultural capital

are commonly understood to be related to privilege. Thus, although their focus is constrained to particular types, when asked about privilege, many people respond by referring to capital.

Beyond capital, people talk about status, exclusivity, and class as related to privilege, all of which are things that we would conventionally associate with the concept. They also consider the implications of geography and the ability to be mobile, and sometimes link these things to variations in educational and cultural provision. However, people are also often uncertain of their understanding of privilege, perhaps reflecting the concept's complex and multifaceted nature. That complexity is also manifested in the common understanding of privilege as relative. People often emphasise that whether one is privileged depends on one's comparison point. This is clear in the perceptions of privilege that are measured in the Privilege and Participation Survey, and people are more likely to perceive the role of structural forces in shaping status differences in society than in their own status. This hesitance to relate privilege to their own lives is also reflected in people's desire to place themselves in the 'comfortable middle' and in the surprising rarity with which they report a class identity. Even in class-conscious Britain, half of people take the opportunity, if offered, to say that they do not identify with a class. By contrast, they almost universally indicate that people involved in politics, whether activists or politicians, are more privileged than themselves and society at large. This neatly illustrates the importance of a relative understanding of privilege. When thinking about people involved in politics, almost no one considers themselves to be more privileged than the reference point. The perception of politicians as highly privileged indicates a gap between them and the public, and people differ over when they think that gap develops. Almost half attribute the disconnection to the influence of the political system, but more than a third believe that it stems from differences preceding politicians' entry into politics. The former group's view implies the need for efforts to change the political system so that it does not promote politicians' detachment from the public, whilst the latter group's view suggests the need for measures to address inequality in society more broadly. In either case, it is clear that having such a gap between the electorate and those who represent them, including based on privilege, is perceived negatively by the public.

The Relationship between Privilege and Participation

The theoretical and descriptive chapters provided the foundation for the analysis in the final two chapters of the book. They offer an overview of prevailing (causal) accounts of different kinds of political participation, conceptualise stocks of capital as a mechanism of structural privilege, and argue for the additional importance of perceptions of privilege. This underpins a detailed investigation of the effects of

economic, social, and cultural capital, as well as perceived privilege, on a range of modes of participation. The results of this investigation show, unsurprisingly, that economic capital is positively related to donating, but that it is not related to any other modes of participation. The many elements of social capital that we measure in the Privilege and Participation Survey are seldom related to participation, except that people with more homogeneous and stronger social networks participate less in collective activities, whilst those with stronger social networks donate more. Despite being largely overlooked in the past, informal cultural capital is related to a number of modes of participation. Legitimate cultural capital is often positively related to political participation, and this is the case with exhibition attendance and both individual and collective activities. Similarly, attendance at performances such as ballet and opera is positively related to collective and donating activities. Counter to our expectations, popular cultural capital in the form of consumption-based activities is negatively related to collective activities and voting. Beyond the role of capital, we also find that previously overlooked perceptions of privilege are related to some modes of participation, and in quite consistent ways. Specifically, perception of the role of privilege in shaping status differences in society is positively related to contacting, collective, and donating modes of participation, whilst perception of privilege in politics is negatively related to each of those modes.

Alongside the relationships that we observe, we also see that many forms of capital and elements of perceptions of privilege are unrelated to a range of modes of participation. This reflects the fact that we are dealing with the complexities of a social world in which numerous different factors relate to different types of behaviour. Indeed, when we examine the causal nature of these relationships, albeit in a limited fashion due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, we also find rather limited effects of capital and perceptions of privilege on political participation. Economic capital and network strength mediate the positive effects of age and childhood class on donating, whilst exhibition attendance mediates the positive effect of being female on individual activities. Perception of privilege in society also mediates the positive relationship between age and both contacting activities and donating. Extending these results, we examine the mediating effects of stocks of capital on highly politically relevant forms of capital. This reveals that economic capital, social network intensity and strength, and both legitimate performance and entertainment-based show attendance mediate the positive effect of age on civic skills, whilst network strength and show attendance mediate its negative effect on recruitment. We also find that exhibition attendance mediates the negative effect of being female on political interest, whilst performance and show attendance both mediate its negative effect on civic skills.

The results of the causal analysis indicate two things. First, given the number of results that relate to the effects of age and gender, they illustrate the importance

of moving beyond a focus on class alone in our analysis of capital, perceptions, politics, and how those things relate to each other. This affirms and extends the findings of Bennett et al. (2009), who showed that stocks of capital are related to background characteristics other than class. Second, as with the results of our regression analyses, the mediation models indicate the ongoing importance of many elements of the civic voluntarism model for political participation. This is despite the fact that those variables were included in the models as controls rather than central components of our analysis. The regression results show that spare time matters for charitable participation and donating, recruitment is positively related to all modes of participation except voting, civic skills support contacting and collective participation, and political interest is positively related to individual, contacting, and collective activities, as well as voting. Further, the mediation analysis provides evidence that many of these relationships are consistent with the causal propositions of the civic voluntarism model. In other words, recruitment, civic skills, and political interest mediate many of the relationships between background characteristics and participation. At the same time, those results indicate that few elements of capital or perceptions of privilege have such a mediating role, whilst the regression results show that they are not uniformly related to political participation.

What do we make of these somewhat mixed results? First, we can describe some modes of political participation as culturally distinguished activities. Those who engage in such modes of participation tend to hold higher stocks of legitimate cultural capital than the population at large. Second, the propositions of the civic voluntarism model are still relevant to political participation, despite the temporal and geographical distance of the research underpinning this book from the model's original proposal. Here, we might be put in mind of Edward Albee's words: 'Sometimes a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly' (2005, p. 7). In other words, this book established grounds to suppose that stocks of capital and perceptions of privilege matter for political participation. It also undertook the first comprehensive and systematic assessment of how those structural and perceptual components of privilege relate to political activities. The results of that analysis indicate some relationships but also affirm the importance of factors that we already know are related to political participation. This illustrates a third conclusion that we can reach: we should not only undertake and report the results of research that affirms our expectations. If we have an interesting or important question, or a proposition that is theoretically plausible, then it is worth investigating in order to add to our knowledge. Indeed, the results reported in this book do show that capital and perceptions of privilege play a role in political participation, but they also add to the evidence that recruitment, civic skills, and political interest matter.

Our results also illustrate the complexity of the social world. It is the case *both* that elements of the civic voluntarism model matter for political participation *and* that elements of capital and perceptions of privilege matter for political participation. These results are robust to the inclusion of a large number of controls in our models, which allows us to identify the effects of the factors that we are interested in when taking into account a range of other factors that plausibly matter for our outcomes. Illustrating the importance of doing this, the results of the regression models show that the coefficients relating to the factors we are interested in reduce in magnitude each time we introduce more controls. This increases our confidence in the results that we observe in the full models, which include a wide array of other variables. It does not, however, eliminate the possibility that factors unrelated to participation in our models actually matter for it in reality. Some of those factors may work through the factors that our models show to be important, and the mediation models only test a small number of such causal propositions. Indeed, the data at hand does not allow us to draw solid conclusions about how the various factors that we are interested in are causally related, and these are remarkably difficult processes to examine even with longitudinal or experimental data. Thus, an array of causal questions about the relationships between capital, perceptions of privilege, and political participation remain open. Nevertheless, even when taking into account a host of other relevant factors, we can still describe some modes of political participation as distinguished activities.

Complementing the relationships between some elements of privilege and political participation, and the clear evidence that politicians and the politically active are perceived as privileged, the gap between politics and the public is often spoken of in terms of privilege. It is clear that people perceive politicians in particular as a highly privileged group, both in terms of the benefits of their roles and their backgrounds. This evidence that politics is perceived as a domain of privilege is also complemented by the barriers to participation that people identify, many of which relate to privilege. The lack of time and, especially, the lack of money that are identified as barriers by non-participants are clearly related to the economic component of privilege. At the same time, lack of confidence and the sense that politics is 'not for me' are manifestations of the cultural component of privilege, reflecting Bourdieu's identification of the need for a sense of qualification to participate. This is reflected in the lack of knowledge and the lack of interest that are spoken about as the personal constraints on participation. Less related to privilege, but nonetheless important, are the systemic disincentives and negative images of politics that act as barriers to participation. However, these clearly show that politics is commonly viewed in a negative light, and that people are conscious that the problems with the political system *and* the perceived problems with the political system act to undermine engagement with it.

There are also links between the barriers to participation that people identify and the factors related to participation that emerge from the analysis of the Privilege and Participation Survey. Time and money are, indeed, shown to be important for charitable activities and donating. Still, their impact is constrained to these two modes despite the fact that people talk about them as barriers to participation more generally. Further, whilst the survey does not measure self-confidence, it does show that legitimate cultural activities that can act as signifiers of qualification to participate are relevant for individual and collective activities, and donating. Political interest, which includes the sense that politics is ‘for you’, is also related to individual, contacting, and collective activities, as well as voting. Political interest is a key element of the engagement component of the civic voluntarism model. The civic skills identified by that model are also shown to be important for individual, contacting, and collective activities, in line with the identification of a lack of knowledge as a barrier to participation. In other words, knowing things like how to address a formal email, and how to speak in favour of or against something, facilitate activities like writing to elected representatives and attending local meetings. However, the final component of the civic voluntarism model that is shown to be key for participation, recruitment, is seldom mentioned as a barrier. Despite being related to every mode of participation except voting, people rarely talk about not being asked to get involved as a reason why some people engage in other activities whilst others do not. This shows that, despite significant overlaps, the factors that relate to participation are not always the factors at the forefront of people’s minds, whilst the factors that they speak about are not necessarily as relevant as their emphasis would suggest. Further, as we will see in the next section, the solutions to inequality in participation that people identify do not always address the barriers that they speak about, nor the factors related to participation that we identified in the survey data. Nevertheless, they certainly suggest a route forward for making participation in politics less unequal.

Overcoming Barriers to Participation

Alongside their discussion of privilege, politics, and barriers to participation, interviewees and focus group participants were asked what could be done to enable disengaged people to get involved in politics. There is a remarkable degree of commonality in the most popular answers offered by MPs, volunteers and activists, and low-participation members of the public. The solutions they identify are numerous and range from providing more accessible information online, via social media, and on television to challenging negative images of politics, changing political party processes, promoting honesty in politics, and offering local or Westminster-based political work experience. However, the most common

solution identified is outreach activities by political institutions. The need for more citizenship education is also emphasised, and, finally, people often talk about the need for politics to be opened up in one way or another. Together, these suggestions address barriers to participation such as lack of knowledge and confidence, a sense that politics is not 'for you', and to a lesser extent lack of time. They also clearly address some of the systemic disincentives to participate that people speak about, as well as the negative images of politics that they identify.

The first component of outreach that interviewees and focus group participants emphasise focuses on the local activities of elected representatives, especially MPs. Indeed, it is often MPs who talk about this solution. Echoing a Conservative MP who notes that their constituents can find them reading the paper in local cafés, another MP from the same party outlines the many ways that they try to make themselves accessible:

I do public meetings on a regular basis, I do street surgeries, which is basically telling an area that I'm coming in to knock on doors if they have an issue, stick a poster on the window, I'll knock on their door, I do unsolicited knocking on doors throughout the period I'm elected, not just at election time.

Similarly, an SNP MP talks about contacting local organisations, visiting schools, and the importance of 'having a shop front as well so I can put things in that window and say ... "Have you got a problem? You can come here."' For another Conservative MP, it is a matter of consistency that representatives should be available in the community if they say that they will be, and they propose that 'MPs should be at least 50 per cent constituency-based and maybe 30 per cent Westminster and 20 per cent private time, something like that.' This sentiment is also expressed by a low-participation member of the public in the West Midlands, who thinks that MPs 'should be made to be in their constituency far more ... you know, actually meeting people, meeting the general public.' Another member of the public, in the North West of England, endorses the kinds of outreach activities outlined above when they stress that MPs should hold their constituency events at different times and places. A focus group participant highlights the need for local outreach activities in the form of newsletters, but stresses that they should be non-partisan and inform people of 'what's happenin' in your area, regardless of party politics, regardless of what, who, who did it'. Here, we see that people care not only about when and where outreach activities take place but also what topics they cover and how.

Beyond the general observation that political institutions and politicians 'necessarily need to go to them [the public] rather than them come to you,' as a focus group participant puts it, people emphasise the need for outreach to address the sense that politics is inefficacious. The low-participation member of the public from the North West of England stresses that elected representatives should make more effort to find out the issues that matter to people in their area: 'is anything stopping them from a new ballot to ask what are people's concerns, you

know? So ballot, just the simple questions with multiple choice. Out of five, what is your biggest concern?' This suggestion is reflected in the activities of one of the Conservative MPs who outlined their outreach activities above, who also notes that they have been 'sending MP surveys out' since they were elected. Building on this, a member of the public in the North East of England argues not only that representatives should engage with and listen to people in their area but also that 'if you're not managing to do it [a commitment you were elected on], you go back to your constituents and explain to them what's happening.' Their goal with this suggestion is not only to ensure that more electoral promises are met but also to improve understanding of the reasons when they are not. This would be a way to improve the perceived efficacy of the political system, the importance of which is also emphasised by party activists. A Plaid Cymru activist talks about the need to persuade people that they can 'make a difference', whilst a Labour activist explains that if they were trying to mobilise a politically disengaged person, 'I could refer to women's rights, gay rights, I don't know, like, previous Labour governments' policies, like halving child poverty and minimal wage, tax credits, child credits, the NHS, they were all as a result of people campaigning and getting involved with politics.' Thus, efforts need to be made by those who inhabit the political system to meet the public on their own turf, listen to them, and both explain and demonstrate how political participation can be efficacious.

Beyond giving examples of political change that has been achieved, and ensuring that elected representatives are accessible and responsive, the apparent ineffectiveness of the political system can also be addressed by explaining how it works. This can be seen clearly in the comments of a Labour MP who suggests 'using Parliament outreach service and getting, you know, schools involved ... and people actually understanding that to get things done, we need to work together and concentrate on what the, kind of, common areas or solutions are.' Here, we see a role for non-partisan political engagement and education organisations in informing the public about the political system and enabling people to organise around the issues that matter to them. The reference to schools also hints at a need for citizenship education. This is also reflected in the suggestions of a focus group participant who talks about how educational contexts can be used to break down barriers between politicians and the public. They make reference to a video that they saw in which there was

a classroom of six-, seven-year-old kids, and their teacher asked them to draw pictures of scientists, so they drew all the bow ties and the white jackets and the thick glasses, and then they invited a bunch of scientists to come in, and obviously scientists are normal people, they dress normally, and they said 'right, now draw what you think a scientist is', and they drew a normal-looking person ... and it was just that instant switch of perception so if, if politicians could make themselves a bit more visible to the public and not be behind closed doors, and be a bit more sort of out there.

Such activities aim to break down the divide between politicians and the public in a way that is also called for by the low-participation member of the public in the North West of England who we encountered above. Reflecting a Conservative MP's view that there is a need for more explanation of routes into political careers, they suggest that politicians should 'tell the public how they got into [politics], why they got into it. People need to see them as ordinary people. They need to see them as people.' This not only demystifies political careers but also humanises politicians. It also, as noted above, suggests a role for systematic citizenship education that extends beyond outreach activities.

The need for both outreach activities and citizenship education is emphasised by a Conservative MP who describes a local authority-organised event that took place when they reached voting age, at which there were information stalls and an example of a voting booth for first-time voters to use. This civic education event aimed at young people was mentioned at the same time as the need to provide more citizenship education in schools, which is the focus of numerous comments by interviewees and focus group participants. In their simplest form, these comments highlight the lack of, or need for, citizenship education. A low-participation member of the public in the South of England notes that 'I don't think they did when my daughter was at school, even touch on politics at all.' Similarly, a member of the public in London wonders whether politics can be 'a standard part of the curriculum? So, you have politics, English, maths, science.' More assertively, a participant in a focus group talks about the lack of 'respect for citizenship' in the curriculum, whilst two participants in another focus group discuss the need for more such provision. The first notes that 'PCH, PSHE, or whatever it is, citizenship now, um, you get about four weeks, like a lesson a week, so you get like one term on it and that's about it'. Later, the second person advocates that

[if] we kind of introduced politics and how government works to kids when they're younger than 16 so they, they're sort of more geared up for it so when they do reach 16 they do know, and I think perhaps if that step was put in place then I'd agree that 16-year-olds should get the vote because they'd be more politically aware by that age.

In the above quote, we see the view that citizenship education should be geared towards equipping people to participate in electoral politics, which is also reflected in the comments of a member of the public in London who notes that 'you don't get taught anything about politics at school, and then all of a sudden you're 18 and you're expected to vote.' For some, a lack of knowledge of politics and how to participate can create barriers to engagement that are difficult to overcome. A Plaid Cymru activist notes that people who feel under-equipped to vote when they first become eligible 'can go all through their life, they never vote, they never change'. Similarly, a Labour MP argues that voter registration drives are important, 'but they're not going to have any [effect] if people don't understand their basis

into the system'. In this view, citizenship education constitutes an intervention at a key juncture in people's lives, with implications for how they interact with politics subsequently. We can also see this in the observation by an SNP MP that people in their local area did not go to the grand, historic local authority building, despite it being open to the public, because they 'just didn't think it was for them, didn't think it was something that they could do, that they were able to do'. Thus, people need to be aware that political institutions are open to them in order for that openness to serve its purpose. Nevertheless, the openness of political institutions is important in itself, and is the third prominent solution to political disengagement that people speak about.

Many interviewees and focus group participants highlight the positive impact of technology on opening up politics, or at least its potential to do so. MPs talk, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, about how much more accessible they are because of social media and websites that facilitate contact with them. Many people identify a need for more widely available non-partisan information about how the political system works, and what is happening within it. They suggest that this could be provided via current affairs programmes and documentaries on television, social media, or websites. Some people call for trustworthy online sources of information about the specifics of what is going on in politics, for instance to enable the tracking of the progress of bills in Parliament. The fact that such information is already available via the Parliament website suggests the need to raise its profile or ensure that it is linked to other commonly used sources of information. It also points back towards the need for citizenship education, so that people are aware of the sources of information that already exist.

Beyond the provision of accessible information, some people make more radical proposals for changes to the openness of the political system. This is epitomised by the comments of a focus group participant who outlines their ideal political system, which would have non-partisan MPs and 'open public forums within, within your area where you could actually, you know the, your MP's agenda would be driven by what people there want'. Later in the same focus group, two other participants discuss a system for selecting non-partisan MPs using an independent vetting panel or at random from the electoral register, 'like the jury service'. These proposals address the sense of the inefficacy of the political system, and the perceived gap between the public and politicians. As a participant in another focus group puts it, there needs to be less of a sense that MPs are 'telling us what they think rather than hearing the feedback, and I think they need to learn to hear, they need to hear some feedback, cos they don't live like how the majority of people ... live'. The importance of the link between the public and their representatives, and the risk of it not being apparent, is also emphasised by a low-participation member of the public in the West Midlands who argues that MPs have 'got to be more open. Got to be more open, definitely. And show that they can change, and they're

not in it all for themselves.' Here, again, we see the importance of challenging perceptions of politics as inefficacious.

Overall, the solutions suggested by interviewees and focus group participants address some of the barriers to participation that have been identified directly and others indirectly. It is clear that outreach activities and citizenship education can tackle lack of knowledge, the sense that politics is 'not for me', and even lack of confidence. They are also likely to equip people with the kinds of civic skills that we have seen are important for some modes of participation. Outreach activities also bring politics to where people already are and, in making it more convenient, address lack of time as a (perceived) barrier to participation. They can also act as a form of recruitment, albeit not in the same way as the requests from friends and relatives that are most likely to prompt participation. We might also expect outreach activities and citizenship to spark interest in politics, or at least equip people with understanding that can support such interest. In furnishing people with knowledge and understanding, they might also reduce the association between legitimate cultural capital and some modes of participation. This, in turn, would start to challenge the off-putting perception that politics is done by privileged people.

Outreach activities and citizenship education can also address the negative images of politics that were identified as a key barrier to participation. By demystifying the functioning of the political system and those who populate it, and bringing politics to where people are, they can challenge views of politics as inefficacious. Outreach activities by elected representatives in particular can directly challenge the inaccessible, hierarchical, and unresponsive nature of the political system. This is also true of efforts to open up the political system through information provision and, perhaps, more dramatic reform of how representatives are elected and expected to interact with their constituents. Such efforts can demonstrate the link between politicians and their constituents, challenging the commonly perceived gap between them. What is remarkable, however, is that there is already such a degree of commonality in the solutions offered by MPs, activists and volunteers, and low-participation members of the public. Outreach activities and citizenship education in particular appear to be widely supported and practical ways to make politics more accessible.

If this all seems like a very rosy prospect, there are clearly also reasons to limit our optimism. To have a significant impact, outreach activities are likely to need to be more widespread whilst also more targeted on disengaged people. This implies a considerable increase in the funding available for such activities, both as they are conducted by elected representatives and outreach organisations. Implementing extensive citizenship education within the national curriculum is also likely to be costly, not least because of the need to train more teachers in the subject, as well having implications for the time available to other subjects. It may also be the case

that the content of any citizenship curriculum would prove politically controversial. Reflecting this, despite some suggestions emerging from the interviews and focus groups, reforms to the functioning of the political system are mentioned more infrequently and have less in common between them. To the extent that such reforms are needed to make politics more accessible, they appear to be less widely supported and more open to political disagreement. This raises the question of whether the more widely supported solutions are merely 'tinkering around the edges' of a political system that requires a more dramatic overhaul.

If participatory inequality has its roots in wider inequality, as some of the evidence that we have seen in this book indicates, then the effectiveness of the solutions identified above is likely to be limited. They cannot address the fact that people with greater economic capital can donate more to the causes that they support. They are also likely to go only some way to addressing the fact that legitimate cultural capital appears to act as a qualification to engage in some modes of political participation. If the people who do politics talk in a particular way, and have distinguished pastimes and tastes, this sustains a gap between them and people who are less politically involved. Indeed, the perception that politically active people and, especially, politicians are highly privileged is widespread. Outreach and education alone are unlikely to undermine this perception if it remains the case that those involved in politics are, in fact, more privileged than the population at large. Thus, if we care about politics being open to all, as we should in a democracy, there are two courses of action for us to pursue. First, the implementation and funding of more widespread political outreach activities and citizenship education, as well the continued opening up of the political system through information provision. Second, broader efforts to reduce inequality in society in order to challenge the roots of political inequality. Together, these actions can go some way to equipping people with civic skills, prompting political interest, and facilitating recruitment, all of which remain so crucial for participation. At the same time, they can move us towards the goal of ensuring that politics is not disproportionately, nor is perceived to be, the preserve of those with privilege.

Appendix A: Privilege and Participation Survey Representativeness

Age	Sample		<i>2011 Census</i>
	Unweighted	Weighted	
15–19	0.28%	0.86%	7.60%
20–24	3.13%	11.04%	8.23%
25–29	5.34%	5.54%	8.26%
30–34	8.68%	8.95%	7.94%
35–39	10.18%	10.81%	7.97%
40–44	6.98%	6.22%	8.85%
45–49	7.71%	6.83%	8.92%
50–54	10.68%	9.35%	7.89%
55–59	12.81%	11.80%	6.94%
60–64	11.46%	9.59%	7.30%
65–69	13.45%	10.90%	5.89%
70–74	6.05%	5.34%	4.71%
75–79	2.35%	2.07%	3.88%
80–84	0.64%	0.49%	2.90%
85–89	0.21%	0.21%	1.77%
90 and older	0.00%	0.00%	0.94%

Table A.1 Age distribution of survey sample

Sex	Sample		<i>2011 Census</i>
	Unweighted	Weighted	
Male	48.68%	48.50%	49.14%
Female	51.32%	51.50%	50.86%

Table A.2 Gender distribution of survey sample

Ethnic group	Sample		2011 Census
	Unweighted	Weighted	
White British	90.18%	89.34%	81.46%
Other White	3.91%	3.98%	5.37%
White and Black Caribbean	0.21%	0.20%	0.70%
White and Black African	0.21%	0.24%	0.27%
White and Asian	0.21%	0.49%	0.56%
Other Mixed	0.28%	0.23%	0.50%
Indian	1.07%	1.26%	2.36%
Pakistani	0.28%	0.60%	1.91%
Bangladeshi	0.07%	0.11%	0.73%
Other Asian	0.21%	0.16%	1.40%
Caribbean	0.50%	0.57%	0.98%
African	0.57%	0.56%	1.66%
Other Black	0.00%	0.00%	0.46%
Chinese	0.50%	0.38%	0.70%
Arab	0.00%	0.00%	0.39%
Any other ethnic group	0.64%	0.61%	0.55%
Refused	1.14%	1.27%	0.00%

Table A.3 Ethnic distribution of survey sample

Region	Sample		2011 Census
	Unweighted	Weighted	
North East	4.27%	4.16%	4.22%
North West	11.39%	11.14%	11.48%
Yorkshire and the Humber	8.68%	9.30%	8.60%
East Midlands	6.05%	6.78%	7.38%
West Midlands	9.32%	9.62%	9.12%
East of England	9.89%	9.81%	9.54%
London	12.31%	12.82%	13.35%
South East	13.95%	13.69%	14.08%
South West	9.61%	8.98%	8.62%
Wales	5.27%	5.00%	4.98%
Scotland	9.25%	8.70%	8.62%

Table A.4 Regional distribution of survey sample

Qualification	Sample		2011 Census	2011 Census category
	Unweighted	Weighted		
No formal qualifications	5.62%	5.60%	23.33%	No qualifications: no formal qualifications.
Youth training certificate/skillseekers	0.43%	0.49%	N/A	N/A
Recognised trade apprenticeship completed	1.57%	1.91%	3.26%	Apprenticeships
Clerical and commercial	2.21%	2.09%	N/A	N/A
City & Guilds certificate	4.70%	5.07%	29.20%	Level 1: 1–4 GCSEs or equivalent qualifications; and Level 2: 5 GCSEs or equivalent qualifications
CSE grades 2–5	1.57%	1.59%		
CSE grade 1, GCE O level, GCSE, School Certificate	12.74%	12.94%		
Scottish Ordinary/Lower Certificate	0.78%	0.88%		
City & Guilds certificate – advanced	2.56%	2.80%	12.07%	Level 3: 2 or more A levels or equivalent qualifications
ONC	1.28%	1.03%		
GCE A level or Higher Certificate	12.88%	15.23%		
Scottish Higher Certificate	1.28%	1.05%		
Nursing qualification (e.g., SEN, SRN, SCM, RGN)	1.28%	0.97%	27.01%	Level 4 or above: Bachelor's degree or equivalent, and higher qualifications
Teaching qualification (not degree)	3.49%	2.76%		
University diploma	3.70%	3.80%		
University or CNA first degree (e.g., BA, B.Sc, B.Ed)	21.14%	21.05%		
University or CNA higher degree (e.g., M.Sc, Ph.D)	7.83%	6.74%		
Other technical, professional, or higher qualification	12.74%	11.41%	5.13%	Other qualifications including foreign qualifications
Don't know	0.71%	0.79%	N/A	N/A
Prefer not to say	1.49%	1.81%	N/A	N/A

Table A.5 Educational distribution of survey sample

Party	Sample		<i>2010 general election</i>
	Unweighted	Weighted	
Did not vote	13.95%	16.14%	34.70%
Conservative Party	34.19%	32.04%	24.09%
Labour Party	24.18%	24.25%	19.37%
Liberal Democrats	21.21%	21.22%	15.39%
Scottish National Party	0.95%	1.76%	1.11%
Plaid Cymru	0.22%	0.16%	0.37%
British National Party	0.15%	0.14%	1.27%
Green Party	1.57%	1.57%	0.64%
United Kingdom Independence Party	1.97%	1.82%	2.07%
Some other party	1.00%	0.91%	0.99%

Table A.6 2010 general election vote distribution in survey sample, including non-voters

Party	Sample		<i>2010 general election</i>
	Unweighted	Weighted	
Conservative Party	39.73%	38.21%	36.89%
Labour Party	28.10%	28.91%	29.66%
Liberal Democrats	25.30%	25.30%	23.56%
Scottish National Party	1.10%	2.10%	1.69%
Plaid Cymru	0.25%	0.19%	0.57%
British National Party	0.17%	0.16%	1.95%
Green Party	1.87%	1.87%	0.98%
United Kingdom Independence Party	2.29%	2.18%	3.17%
Some other party	1.19%	1.08%	1.52%

Table A.7 2010 general election vote distribution in survey sample, excluding non-voters

Appendix B: Interview and Focus Group Details

Characteristic	Distribution
Gender	4 Women, 5 Men
Ethnicity	8 White British, 1 British Asian
Age	4 in 30s, 1 in 40s, 1 in 50s, 2 in 60s, 1 in 70s
Job	1 air steward, 1 customer advisor, 1 civil servant, 1 data analyst, 1 kitchen installer, 1 market trader, 1 police call handler, 1 retired, 1 stay-at-home parent
Region	2 London, 1 North East, 2 North West, 1 Scotland, 1 South of England, 1 West Midlands, 1 Wales
Average interview length	60 minutes
Period interviews conducted	September 2015–April 2016

Table B.1 Member of public interviewee characteristics

Characteristic	Distribution
Gender	10 Women, 8 Men
Ethnicity	13 White British, 2 Other White, 2 Black British, 1 British Asian
Age	9 in 20s, 1 in 30s, 4 in 50s, 4 in 60s
Organisation	1 ActionAid, 1 Amnesty International, 1 British Museum, 1 Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, 1 Enrych, 1 Evangelical Alliance, 2 Housing Justice, 1 Labour Party, 1 Plaid Cymru, 1 Prisoners' Advice Service, 1 Royal British Legion, 1 Science Museum, 1 Shelter, 1 Tate, 2 United Kingdom Independence Party, 1 William Wilberforce Trust
Region	12 London, 1 South of England, 4 East of England, 1 Wales
Average interview length	57 minutes
Period interviews conducted	October 2013–October 2015

Table B.2 Volunteer and activist interviewee characteristics

Characteristic	Distribution
Gender	5 women, 9 men
Ethnicity	13 White British, 1 Ethnic Minority
Age	2 in 30s, 3 in 40s, 4 in 50s, 3 in 60s, 2 in 70s
Party	7 Conservative, 4 Labour, 2 Liberal Democrat, 1 SNP
Constituency region	3 East of England, 3 London, 1 North West, 1 Scotland, 2 West Midlands, 3 Wales, 1 Yorkshire
Year first elected	1 in 1987, 2 in 1992, 2 in 1997, 1 in 2001, 6 in 2010, 2 in 2015
Average length	40 minutes
Period interviews conducted	June 2012–January 2016

Table B.3 MP interviewee characteristics

Location	Preceding event	Characteristics of participants
London	Open event with multiple performances and panels	5 Women, 2 Men; 3 Black British, 4 White British; 2 teenage, 4 in 20s, 1 in 30s
London	Film screening	3 Women, 1 Man; 2 White British, 2 Other White; 1 in 30s, 1 in 40s, 1 in 50s, 1 in 60s
Manchester	Parliamentary Outreach presentation and discussion	3 Women, 2 Men; 1 British Asian, 4 White British; 1 in 30s, 3 in 40s, 1 in 70s
London	Music performance and panel discussion	1 Woman, 2 Men; 1 British Asian, 1 White British, 1 Other White; 2 in 40s, 1 in 50s

Table B.4 Details of focus groups and participants

Appendix C: Index Variable Distributions

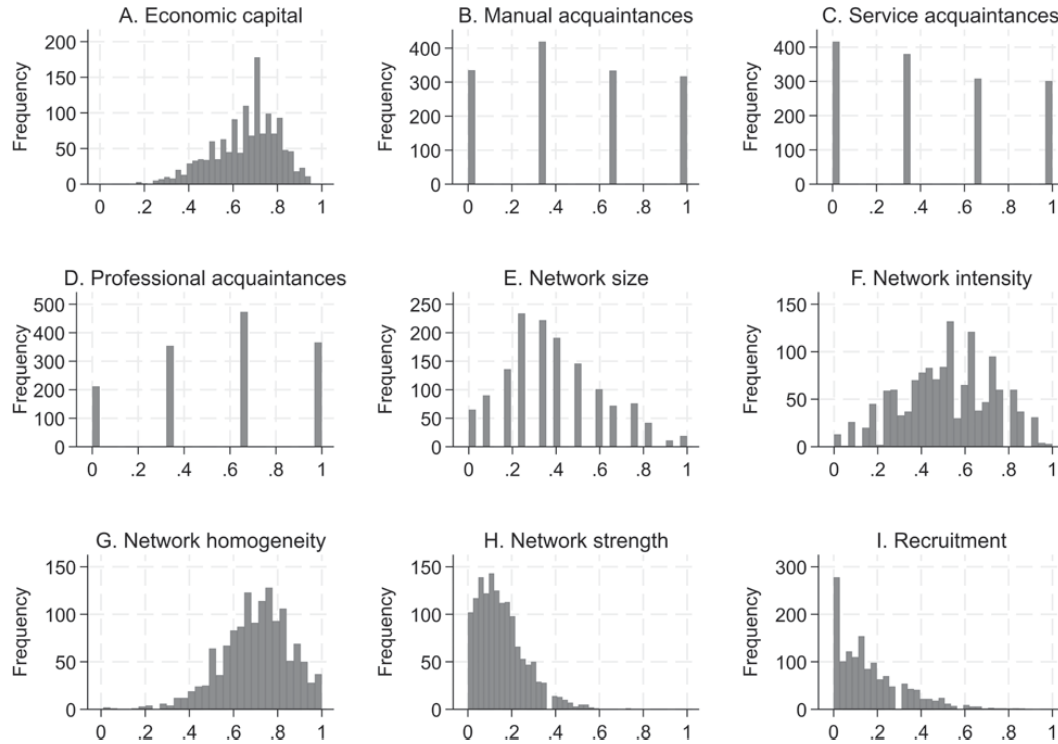


Figure C.1 Distributions of economic and social capital indices

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, n = 1,372–1,405

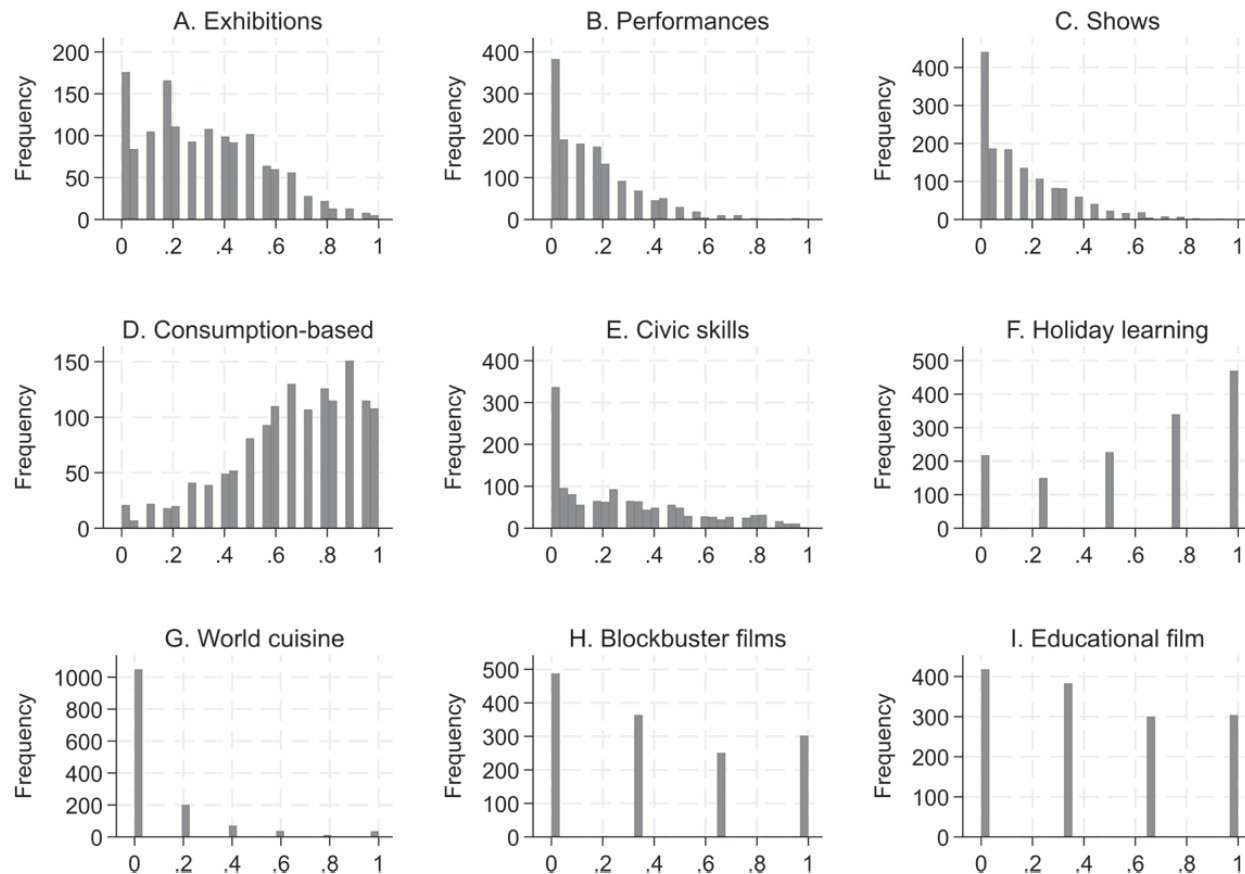


Figure C.2 Distributions of cultural capital indices

Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, $n = 1,379\text{--}1,405$

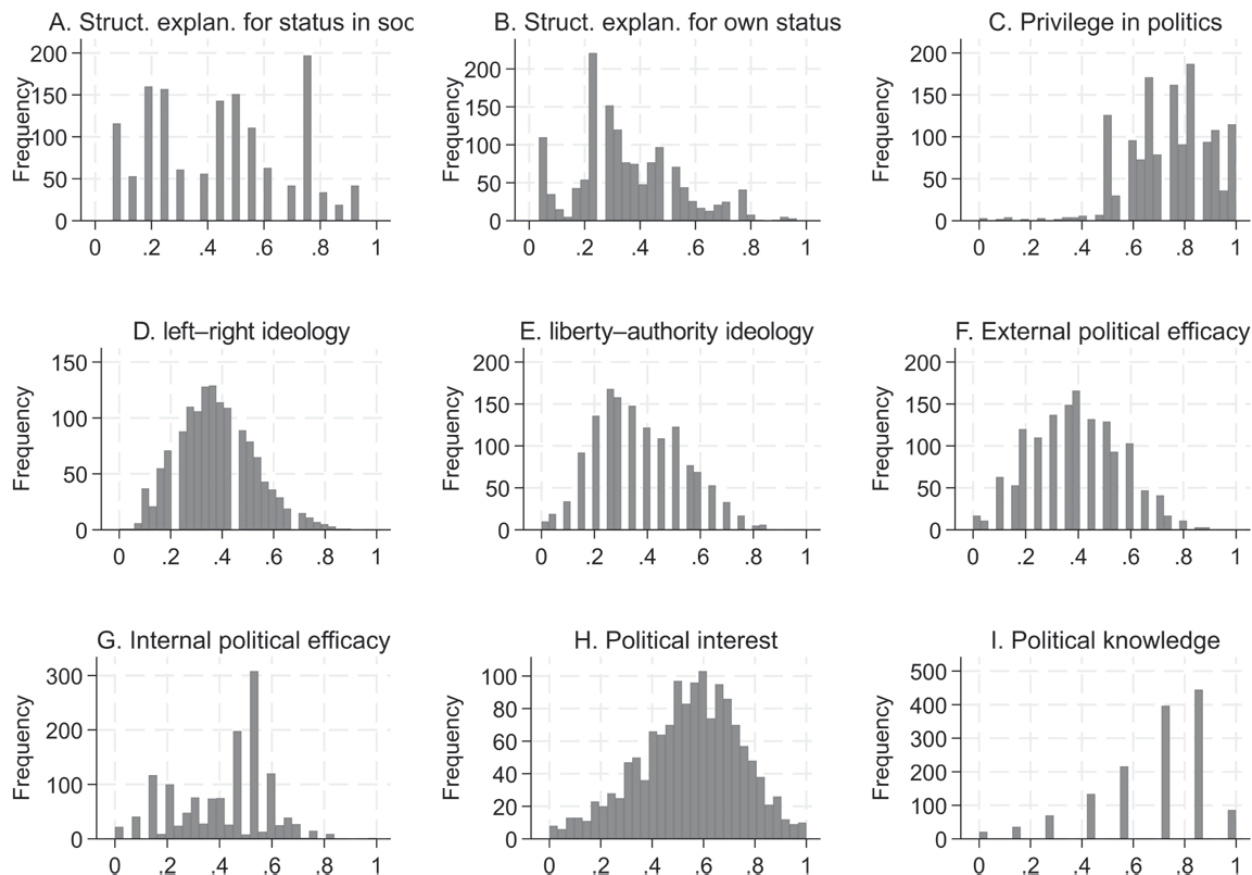


Figure C.3 Distributions of perceptions of privilege and political engagement indices
Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, $n = 1,379-1,405$

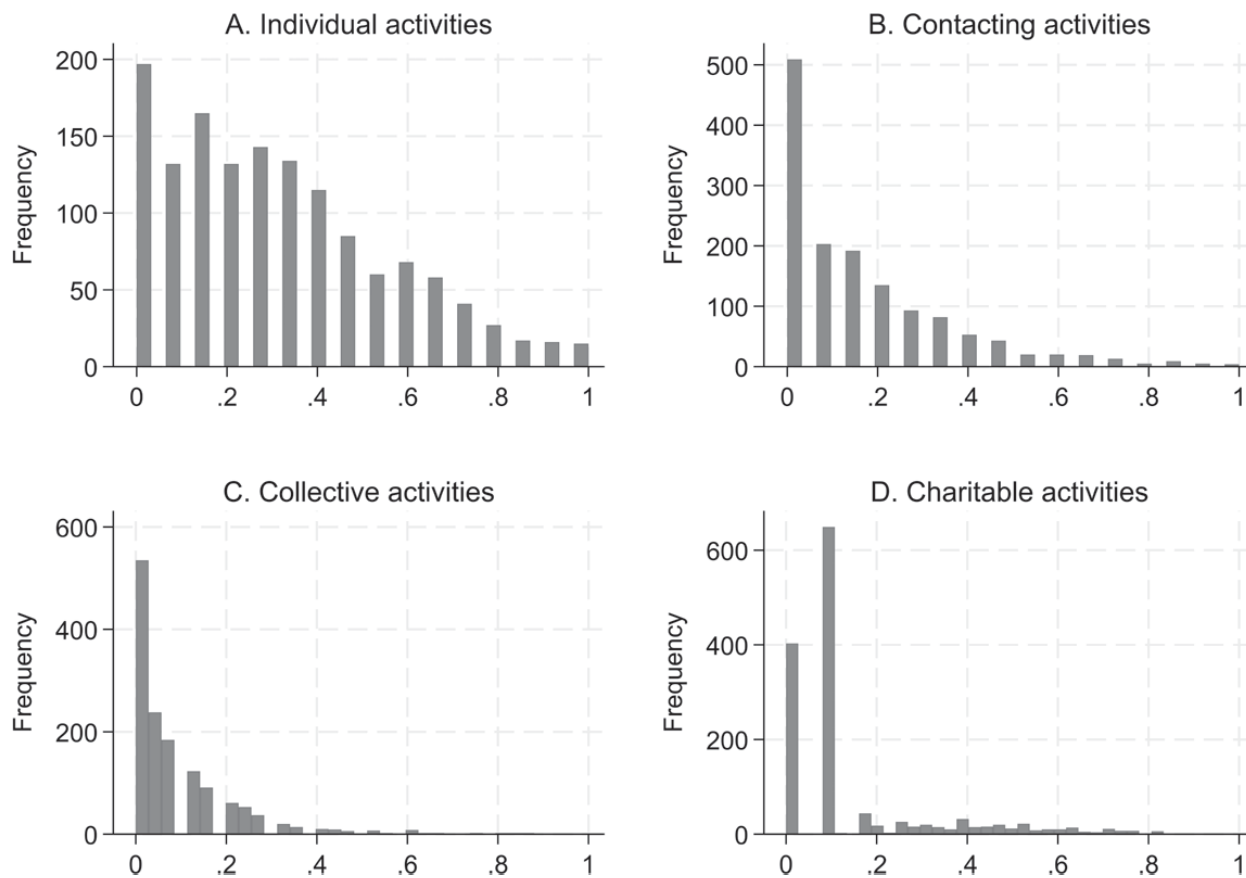


Figure C.4 Distributions of political participation indices
Produced using Privilege and Participation Survey data, $n = 1,405$

Appendix D: Regression Results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	cultural capital	cultural capital	social capital	social capital	economic capital	economic capital	perc. of priv.	perc. of priv.	cap. and perc. of priv.	cap. and perc. of priv.	cap. perc. and controls	controls only
VARIABLES	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	complete cases	complete cases
Exhibition-based activities	0.198***	0.225***							0.109***	0.120***	0.0961**	
	(0.0373)	(0.0385)							(0.0325)	(0.0335)	(0.0332)	
Performance-based activities	0.0341	0.0497							-0.0214	-0.0275	0.0195	
	(0.0552)	(0.0578)							(0.0488)	(0.0500)	(0.0415)	
Show-based activities	0.165**	0.179**							0.000977	-0.00772	-0.0323	
	(0.0539)	(0.0558)							(0.0460)	(0.0470)	(0.0468)	
Consumption-based activities	-0.0965**	-0.0988**							-0.0422	-0.0412	-0.0472	
	(0.0312)	(0.0320)							(0.0283)	(0.0285)	(0.0278)	
Travel-based activities	0.0320	0.0194							0.0285	0.0280	0.0124	
	(0.0232)	(0.0250)							(0.0194)	(0.0199)	(0.0188)	

Table D.1 OLS regression models for individual activities dependent variable

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
World cuisine tastes	0.0106	0.00725							-0.00887	-0.0141	-0.0460	
	(0.0370)	(0.0394)							(0.0287)	(0.0296)	(0.0284)	
Blockbuster film tastes	-0.0232	-0.0167							0.0105	0.00935	0.00976	
	(0.0198)	(0.0201)							(0.0159)	(0.0166)	(0.0169)	
Educational film tastes	0.0717***	0.0607**							0.0259	0.0250	0.0110	
	(0.0203)	(0.0207)							(0.0159)	(0.0165)	(0.0161)	
Work-based civic skills	0.0886**	0.0829**							0.0295	0.0268	0.0649**	
	(0.0279)	(0.0289)							(0.0244)	(0.0245)	(0.0246)	
Know manual workers			0.0129	0.0176					0.0135	0.0136	-0.00497	
			(0.0191)	(0.0198)					(0.0190)	(0.0196)	(0.0185)	
Know service workers			-0.0119	-0.0119					-0.00272	-0.00522	-0.00214	
			(0.0188)	(0.0189)					(0.0187)	(0.0190)	(0.0198)	
Know professionals			0.0761***	0.0580*					0.0416	0.0346	0.0137	
			(0.0224)	(0.0244)					(0.0230)	(0.0242)	(0.0215)	
Size of network			0.0382	0.0702					0.0645*	0.0714*	0.0231	
			(0.0334)	(0.0362)					(0.0323)	(0.0336)	(0.0305)	
Intensity of network			-0.0572	-0.0614					-0.0615	-0.0638	-0.00926	

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
			(0.0366)	(0.0375)					(0.0351)	(0.0357)	(0.0348)	
Homogeneity of network			-0.0260	-0.0243					-0.00673	-0.0104	-0.0261	
			(0.0371)	(0.0385)					(0.0373)	(0.0381)	(0.0396)	
Strength of network			-0.151**	-0.159**					-0.160**	-0.153**	-0.0714	
			(0.0543)	(0.0560)					(0.0541)	(0.0560)	(0.0568)	
Political act recruitment			0.933***	0.931***					0.864***	0.866***	0.863***	
			(0.0552)	(0.0594)					(0.0517)	(0.0542)	(0.0460)	
Economic capital					0.0666	0.0719			0.0440	0.0424	0.0264	
					(0.0521)	(0.0575)			(0.0447)	(0.0464)	(0.0476)	
Spare time					0.0517	0.0417			0.0361	0.0337	0.0469	
					(0.0427)	(0.0453)			(0.0333)	(0.0339)	(0.0370)	
Self-perceived class = 1, Working							0.0288	0.0267	0.0369*	0.0316*	0.00632	
							(0.0182)	(0.0189)	(0.0143)	(0.0145)	(0.0151)	
Self-perceived class = 2, Middle							0.0526**	0.0486*	0.00660	0.00138	-0.00801	
							(0.0182)	(0.0194)	(0.0152)	(0.0157)	(0.0151)	

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Party identity = 4, SNP											-0.0119	
											(0.0410)	
Party identity = 5, Green											0.0180	
											(0.0324)	
Party identity = 6, UKIP											0.0282	
											(0.0318)	
Party identity = 7, Other											0.0921*	
											(0.0407)	
Left-right position											-0.114*	
											(0.0488)	
Liberty-authority position											0.0847*	
											(0.0397)	

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
											(0.0248)	(0.0326)
Parental NS-SEC = 4, Small employer											-0.00708	0.0882*
											(0.0277)	(0.0360)
Parental NS-SEC = 5, Intermediate											0.00878	0.121***
											(0.0266)	(0.0336)
Parental NS-SEC = 6, Low. man. or prof.											0.000785	0.0841**
											(0.0228)	(0.0295)
Parental NS-SEC = 7, Higher prof.											0.0404	0.128***
											(0.0261)	(0.0350)
Parental NS-SEC = 8, Large employer											-0.0141	0.0322
											(0.0302)	(0.0426)
Region lived = 2, North West											-0.00258	0.0634

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
											(0.0334)	(0.0437)
Region lived = 3, Yorkshire and the Humber											0.00600	0.0465
											(0.0339)	(0.0444)
Region lived = 4, East Midlands											-0.0520	-0.0225
											(0.0359)	(0.0481)
Region lived = 5, West Midlands											0.00219	0.0439
											(0.0354)	(0.0427)
Region lived = 6, East of England											-0.0202	0.0321
											(0.0341)	(0.0431)
Region lived = 7, London											-0.0291	0.0738
											(0.0353)	(0.0432)
Region lived = 8, South East											-0.0394	0.00396
											(0.0330)	(0.0402)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Region lived = 9, South West											0.00755	0.0686
											(0.0352)	(0.0452)
Region lived = 10, Wales											0.0209	0.109*
											(0.0408)	(0.0512)
Region lived = 11, Scotland											-0.0309	0.0545
											(0.0353)	(0.0405)
Social grade = 2, B											0.0128	0.0414
											(0.0188)	(0.0253)
Social grade = 3, C1											0.0235	0.00125
											(0.0188)	(0.0247)
Social grade = 4, C2											0.0198	0.00549
											(0.0218)	(0.0279)
Social grade = 5, D											0.0433	0.00371
											(0.0282)	(0.0368)

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Social grade = 6, E											0.0170	0.0217
											(0.0270)	(0.0356)
Education level = 1, Below GCSE											0.0242	0.0526
											(0.0263)	(0.0376)
Education level = 2, GCSE or equivalent											0.0348	0.0599
											(0.0254)	(0.0371)
Education level = 3, A level or equivalent											0.0475	0.0943*
											(0.0278)	(0.0400)
Education level = 4, Non-degree prof. quals											0.0255	0.123***
											(0.0261)	(0.0363)
Education level = 5, Degree											-0.00678	0.120**
											(0.0278)	(0.0376)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Education level = 6, Higher degree											-0.0363	0.150***
											(0.0344)	(0.0441)
Constant	0.213***	0.218***	0.161***	0.162***	0.258***	0.264***	0.289***	0.301***	0.0630	0.0779	0.0605	0.109
	(0.0235)	(0.0245)	(0.0322)	(0.0343)	(0.0351)	(0.0384)	(0.0457)	(0.0439)	(0.0555)	(0.0570)	(0.0789)	(0.0606)
Observations	1,379	1,219	1,340	1,219	1,372	1,219	1,405	1,219	1,287	1,219	1,094	1,094
R-squared	0.126	0.137	0.422	0.432	0.003	0.003	0.049	0.045	0.458	0.460	0.554	0.074

Unstandardised coefficients

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	cultural capital	cultural capital	social capital	social capital	economic capital	economic capital	perc. of priv.	perc. of priv.	cap. and perc. of priv.	cap. and perc. of priv.	cap. perc. and controls	controls only
VARIABLES	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	complete cases	complete cases
Exhibition-based activities	0.125***	0.131***							0.0468	0.0569	−0.00546	
	(0.0290)	(0.0311)							(0.0304)	(0.0317)	(0.0275)	
Performance-based activities	0.156**	0.153**							0.0683	0.0555	0.0818	
	(0.0516)	(0.0564)							(0.0461)	(0.0477)	(0.0438)	
Show-based activities	0.0108	0.00373							−0.115***	−0.121***	−0.0607	
	(0.0468)	(0.0503)							(0.0346)	(0.0357)	(0.0404)	
Consumption-based activities	−0.0929***	−0.0900**							−0.0504	−0.0523	−0.0620*	
	(0.0257)	(0.0277)							(0.0259)	(0.0270)	(0.0271)	
Travel-based activities	−0.00122	−0.00872							−0.00363	−0.00243	−0.0140	

Table D.2 OLS regression models for contacting activities dependent variable

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	(0.0198)	(0.0218)							(0.0158)	(0.0165)	(0.0165)	
World cuisine tastes	-0.0111	-0.00257							-0.0204	-0.0196	-0.0301	
	(0.0304)	(0.0317)							(0.0270)	(0.0280)	(0.0239)	
Blockbuster film tastes	-0.0516***	-0.0563**							-0.0355**	-0.0361*	-0.0294	
	(0.0156)	(0.0171)							(0.0136)	(0.0142)	(0.0152)	
Educational film tastes	0.0126	0.0124							-0.0102	-0.00976	-0.0163	
	(0.0163)	(0.0176)							(0.0136)	(0.0142)	(0.0132)	
Work-based civic skills	0.130***	0.125***							0.0844***	0.0800***	0.0709**	
	(0.0234)	(0.0245)							(0.0214)	(0.0219)	(0.0232)	
Know manual workers			0.0369*	0.0493**					0.0567***	0.0605***	0.0344*	
			(0.0166)	(0.0175)					(0.0160)	(0.0166)	(0.0167)	
Know service workers			-0.0207	-0.0247					-0.00568	-0.00460	0.00662	
			(0.0157)	(0.0167)					(0.0157)	(0.0161)	(0.0178)	
Know professionals			0.0563***	0.0392*					0.0169	0.00757	0.00646	
			(0.0159)	(0.0170)					(0.0168)	(0.0176)	(0.0189)	
Size of network			-0.0139	-0.00515					0.0269	0.0281	0.0272	

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
			(0.0319)	(0.0348)					(0.0307)	(0.0316)	(0.0297)	
Intensity of network			0.0580*	0.0587					0.0221	0.0309	0.00992	
			(0.0291)	(0.0306)					(0.0294)	(0.0291)	(0.0304)	
Homogeneity of network			-0.0976**	-0.111**					-0.0630*	-0.0760*	-0.0625	
			(0.0335)	(0.0352)					(0.0318)	(0.0327)	(0.0328)	
Strength of network			-0.237***	-0.249***					-0.177***	-0.190***	-0.0995	
			(0.0527)	(0.0543)					(0.0530)	(0.0538)	(0.0535)	
Political act recruitment			0.651***	0.668***					0.598***	0.614***	0.532***	
			(0.0469)	(0.0481)					(0.0525)	(0.0531)	(0.0476)	
Economic capital					0.0531	0.0506			-0.0262	-0.0298	-0.0550	
					(0.0461)	(0.0519)			(0.0416)	(0.0431)	(0.0436)	
Spare time					0.0522	0.0523			-0.00827	-0.00960	-0.0401	
					(0.0363)	(0.0387)			(0.0288)	(0.0293)	(0.0316)	
Self-perceived class = 1, Working							0.0149	0.0144	0.0191	0.0184	0.00946	
							(0.0147)	(0.0163)	(0.0121)	(0.0123)	(0.0124)	

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Self-perceived class = 2, Middle							0.0652***	0.0646***	0.0427**	0.0367**	0.0152	
							(0.0160)	(0.0172)	(0.0135)	(0.0139)	(0.0135)	
Structural explanations for status in society							0.169***	0.153***	0.0909***	0.0842***	0.0801**	
							(0.0314)	(0.0321)	(0.0244)	(0.0247)	(0.0247)	
Structural explanations for own status							-0.0207	-0.0178	-0.0483	-0.0356	-0.0242	
							(0.0348)	(0.0392)	(0.0270)	(0.0267)	(0.0294)	
Privilege in politics							-0.248***	-0.225***	-0.139***	-0.143***	-0.143***	
							(0.0569)	(0.0469)	(0.0370)	(0.0377)	(0.0383)	
Party identity = 1, Labour											-0.00958	
											(0.0180)	
Party identity = 2, Conservative											0.0150	
											(0.0177)	

(continued)

[illegible]

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Liberty- authority position											-0.0576	
											(0.0371)	
External political efficacy											0.0359	
											(0.0335)	
Internal political efficacy											0.0579	
											(0.0307)	
Political interest											0.266***	
											(0.0370)	
Political knowledge											-0.0259	
											(0.0280)	
Age											0.0814*	0.125***
											(0.0328)	(0.0368)
Gender = 2, Female											-0.0139	-0.0305*
											(0.0116)	(0.0138)

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Parental NS-SEC = 2, Semi-routine											−0.00391	0.0480
											(0.0228)	(0.0344)
Parental NS- SEC = 3, Low. super. or tech.											0.0115	0.0435
											(0.0225)	(0.0314)
Parental NS- SEC = 4, Small employer											−0.0300	0.0348
											(0.0241)	(0.0311)
Parental NS-SEC = 5, Intermediate											−0.0320	0.0402
											(0.0227)	(0.0305)
Parental NS- SEC = 6, Low. man. or prof.											−0.00867	0.0424
											(0.0195)	(0.0293)
Parental NS-SEC = 7, Higher prof.											−0.00582	0.0544
											(0.0242)	(0.0320)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Parental NS- SEC = 8, Large employer											-0.0186	0.00155
											(0.0275)	(0.0367)
Region lived = 2, North West											-0.0506	-0.00424
											(0.0352)	(0.0399)
Region lived = 3, Yorkshire and the Humber											-0.00528	0.0116
											(0.0353)	(0.0382)
Region lived = 4, East Midlands											-0.0497	-0.0331
											(0.0370)	(0.0390)
Region lived = 5, West Midlands											0.00142	0.0210
											(0.0372)	(0.0388)
Region lived = 6, East of England											-0.0382	-0.00265
											(0.0362)	(0.0362)

(continued)

[illegible]

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
											(0.0169)	(0.0203)
Social grade = 4, C2											0.0115	0.0160
											(0.0187)	(0.0270)
Social grade = 5, D											0.0206	0.00224
											(0.0224)	(0.0259)
Social grade = 6, E											0.0191	0.0390
											(0.0237)	(0.0272)
Education level = 1, Below GCSE											0.0246	0.0413
											(0.0239)	(0.0280)
Education level = 2, GCSE or equivalent											0.0313	0.0350
											(0.0249)	(0.0271)
Education level=3, Alevel or equivalent											0.0339	0.0503
											(0.0247)	(0.0278)

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Education level = 4, Non-degree prof. quals											0.0270	0.0776**
											(0.0235)	(0.0267)
Education level = 5, Degree											0.0529*	0.121***
											(0.0251)	(0.0268)
Education level = 6, Higher degree											0.0525	0.169***
											(0.0313)	(0.0363)
Constant	0.142***	0.152***	0.0883**	0.102**	0.118***	0.125***	0.255***	0.250***	0.185***	0.201***	0.108	-0.00831
	(0.0208)	(0.0229)	(0.0319)	(0.0338)	(0.0322)	(0.0361)	(0.0396)	(0.0353)	(0.0553)	(0.0569)	(0.0674)	(0.0498)
Observations	1,379	1,219	1,340	1,219	1,372	1,219	1,405	1,219	1,287	1,219	1,094	1,094
R-squared	0.129	0.126	0.333	0.345	0.004	0.004	0.083	0.070	0.398	0.403	0.474	0.087

Unstandardised coefficients

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	cultural capital	cultural capital	social capital	social capital	economic capital	economic capital	perc. of priv.	perc. of priv.	cap. and perc. of priv.	cap. and perc. of priv.	cap. perc. and controls	controls only
VARIABLES	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	complete cases	complete cases
Exhibition-based activities	0.115***	0.118***							0.0712***	0.0696***	0.0474*	
	(0.0245)	(0.0262)							(0.0202)	(0.0201)	(0.0213)	
Performance-based activities	0.134***	0.143***							0.0850**	0.0820**	0.0866**	
	(0.0355)	(0.0385)							(0.0292)	(0.0297)	(0.0305)	
Show-based activities	0.121***	0.137***							0.0368	0.0394	0.0623*	
	(0.0368)	(0.0396)							(0.0296)	(0.0301)	(0.0307)	
Consumption-based activities	-0.0513**	-0.0565**							-0.0341*	-0.0366*	-0.0330	
	(0.0160)	(0.0172)							(0.0149)	(0.0151)	(0.0170)	
Travel-based activities	-0.0327*	-0.0395*							-0.0245*	-0.0273*	-0.0291*	
	(0.0151)	(0.0166)							(0.0124)	(0.0126)	(0.0117)	
World cuisine tastes	-0.0212	-0.0222							-0.0344*	-0.0336*	-0.0350*	

Table D.3 OLS regression models for collective activities dependent variable

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	(0.0201)	(0.0216)							(0.0158)	(0.0157)	(0.0154)	
Blockbuster film tastes	−0.0425***	−0.0399***							−0.0283***	−0.0237**	−0.0191*	
	(0.0103)	(0.0107)							(0.00839)	(0.00834)	(0.00971)	
Educational film tastes	0.0306**	0.0303**							0.0135	0.0169	0.0144	
	(0.0106)	(0.0115)							(0.00925)	(0.00935)	(0.00854)	
Work-based civic skills	0.0580**	0.0582**							0.0378*	0.0376*	0.0418**	
	(0.0176)	(0.0181)							(0.0149)	(0.0148)	(0.0162)	
Know manual workers			−0.00563	−0.00206					0.0112	0.0142	0.0131	
			(0.00998)	(0.0106)					(0.00984)	(0.0103)	(0.00966)	
Know service workers			0.0149	0.0162					0.0202	0.0217	0.0220	
			(0.0132)	(0.0144)					(0.0118)	(0.0122)	(0.0124)	
Know professionals			0.0161	0.00975					0.00165	−0.000909	−0.0125	
			(0.0140)	(0.0156)					(0.0132)	(0.0140)	(0.0135)	
Size of network			−0.00979	−0.00715					0.000545	3.41e−05	0.0178	
			(0.0260)	(0.0292)					(0.0220)	(0.0231)	(0.0229)	
Intensity of network			0.0675**	0.0749***					0.0452*	0.0541**	0.0319	

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
			(0.0207)	(0.0215)					(0.0194)	(0.0184)	(0.0190)	
Homogeneity of network			−0.0797***	−0.0742**					−0.0550**	−0.0520**	−0.0484*	
			(0.0214)	(0.0229)					(0.0186)	(0.0186)	(0.0202)	
Strength of network			−0.0906*	−0.110**					−0.100**	−0.124***	−0.0875**	
			(0.0388)	(0.0401)					(0.0375)	(0.0372)	(0.0335)	
Political act recruitment			0.467***	0.487***					0.383***	0.393***	0.331***	
			(0.0470)	(0.0502)					(0.0339)	(0.0340)	(0.0336)	
Economic capital					−0.000765	−0.000997			−0.0254	−0.0261	−0.0283	
					(0.0320)	(0.0356)			(0.0270)	(0.0279)	(0.0276)	
Spare time					−0.000230	−0.000214			−0.0211	−0.0219	−0.0307	
					(0.0270)	(0.0283)			(0.0183)	(0.0184)	(0.0198)	
Self-perceived class = 1, Working							−0.00618	−0.00977	−0.00400	−0.00745	−0.0148	
							(0.00899)	(0.00947)	(0.00747)	(0.00725)	(0.00801)	
Self-perceived class = 2, Middle							0.0196	0.0216	0.00409	0.00349	−0.00148	

(continued)

[illegible]

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Party identity = 4, SNP											-0.0201	
											(0.0220)	
Party identity = 5, Green											-0.00372	
											(0.0243)	
Party identity = 6, UKIP											0.0146	
											(0.0196)	
Party identity = 7, Other											0.0167	
											(0.0205)	
Left-right position											-0.0744**	
											(0.0241)	
Liberty-authority position											0.00507	
											(0.0224)	

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
External political efficacy											-2.87e-05	
											(0.0252)	
Internal political efficacy											0.0275	
											(0.0201)	
Political interest											0.110***	
											(0.0276)	
Political knowledge											-0.0114	
											(0.0171)	
Age											0.00854	-0.000679
											(0.0219)	(0.0241)
Gender = 2, Female											0.0133	0.00463
											(0.00787)	(0.00896)
Parental NS-SEC = 2, Semi-routine											-0.0128	0.0148
											(0.0130)	(0.0181)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Parental NS-SEC = 3, Low. super. or tech.											-0.00663	0.0166
											(0.0120)	(0.0177)
Parental NS-SEC = 4, Small employer											-0.0259*	0.00979
											(0.0127)	(0.0180)
Parental NS-SEC = 5, Intermediate											-0.0104	0.0309
											(0.0129)	(0.0185)
Parental NS-SEC = 6, Low. man. or prof.											-0.00995	0.0214
											(0.0106)	(0.0162)
Parental NS-SEC = 7, Higher prof.											-0.00130	0.0415*
											(0.0137)	(0.0181)
Parental NS-SEC = 8, Large employer											-0.0168	-0.00200
											(0.0136)	(0.0190)

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Region lived = 2, North West											0.0281	0.0569
											(0.0196)	(0.0306)
Region lived = 3, Yorkshire and the Humber											0.00703	0.0171
											(0.0185)	(0.0201)
Region lived = 4, East Midlands											-0.00571	-0.00278
											(0.0190)	(0.0198)
Region lived = 5, West Midlands											0.00702	0.0128
											(0.0184)	(0.0195)
Region lived = 6, East of England											0.00208	0.0169
											(0.0178)	(0.0184)
Region lived = 7, London											0.00480	0.0530*
											(0.0196)	(0.0228)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Region lived = 8, South East											0.00432	0.0186
											(0.0174)	(0.0184)
Region lived = 9, South West											0.0156	0.0359
											(0.0182)	(0.0198)
Region lived = 10, Wales											0.00401	0.0364
											(0.0213)	(0.0246)
Region lived = 11, Scotland											0.0105	0.0370*
											(0.0184)	(0.0183)
Social grade = 2, B											0.00160	0.0133
											(0.00959)	(0.0117)
Social grade = 3, C1											0.0212*	0.0186
											(0.00989)	(0.0134)
Social grade = 4, C2											0.00500	-0.00308

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
											(0.0106)	(0.0122)
Social grade = 5, D											0.0203	0.00132
											(0.0130)	(0.0158)
Social grade = 6, E											0.0108	0.0195
											(0.0144)	(0.0153)
Education level = 1, Below GCSE											0.00948	0.0206
											(0.0119)	(0.0162)
Education level = 2, GCSE or equivalent											0.0146	0.0225
											(0.0127)	(0.0155)
Education level = 3, A level or equivalent											-0.00565	0.0152
											(0.0134)	(0.0178)
Education level = 4, Non-degree prof. quals											0.0205	0.0582***
											(0.0127)	(0.0158)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Education level = 5, Degree											0.00254	0.0536**
											(0.0136)	(0.0167)
Education level = 6, Higher degree											0.000159	0.0732***
											(0.0170)	(0.0194)
Constant	0.0619***	0.0654***	0.0387*	0.0318	0.0952***	0.0983***	0.168***	0.157***	0.0828**	0.0864**	0.0543	−0.00304
	(0.0106)	(0.0115)	(0.0194)	(0.0209)	(0.0206)	(0.0227)	(0.0366)	(0.0342)	(0.0284)	(0.0286)	(0.0497)	(0.0285)
Observations	1,379	1,219	1,340	1,219	1,372	1,219	1,405	1,219	1,287	1,219	1,094	1,094
R-squared	0.226	0.238	0.392	0.408	0.000	0.000	0.103	0.095	0.474	0.493	0.500	0.069

Unstandardised coefficients

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	cultural capital	cultural capital	social capital	social capital	economic capital	economic capital	perc. of priv.	perc. of priv.	cap. and perc. of priv.	cap. and perc. of priv.	cap. perc. and controls	controls only
VARIABLES	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	complete cases	complete cases
Exhibition-based activities	0.0407	0.0617*							0.0306	0.0343	0.00172	
	(0.0291)	(0.0309)							(0.0282)	(0.0290)	(0.0347)	
Performance-based activities	0.134**	0.150***							0.122**	0.112**	0.0739	
	(0.0412)	(0.0443)							(0.0408)	(0.0419)	(0.0484)	
Show-based activities	-0.0556	-0.0674							-0.119**	-0.122**	-0.0953	
	(0.0339)	(0.0349)							(0.0386)	(0.0402)	(0.0486)	
Consumption-based activities	-0.00440	-0.0166							-0.00199	0.00191	0.00854	
	(0.0224)	(0.0248)							(0.0246)	(0.0253)	(0.0278)	
Travel-based activities	-0.00232	-0.0106							-0.0139	-0.0116	-0.00564	
	(0.0178)	(0.0196)							(0.0184)	(0.0191)	(0.0190)	

Table D.4 OLS linear regression models for charitable activities dependent variable

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
World cuisine tastes	0.00384	0.00111							0.0113	0.00554	−0.0114	
	(0.0262)	(0.0289)							(0.0248)	(0.0250)	(0.0294)	
Blockbuster film tastes	−0.0238	−0.0225							−0.0154	−0.0173	−0.00248	
	(0.0138)	(0.0147)							(0.0138)	(0.0143)	(0.0159)	
Educational film tastes	0.0320	0.0393*							0.0112	0.0163	0.000851	
	(0.0163)	(0.0175)							(0.0163)	(0.0167)	(0.0182)	
Work-based civic skills	0.0276	0.0219							0.000584	0.000234	−0.00701	
	(0.0237)	(0.0249)							(0.0244)	(0.0248)	(0.0275)	
Know manual workers			0.0333	0.0387					0.0381*	0.0404*	0.0520**	
			(0.0187)	(0.0198)					(0.0180)	(0.0186)	(0.0201)	
Know service workers			−0.0167	−0.0148					−0.00177	0.000773	0.00680	
			(0.0167)	(0.0176)					(0.0171)	(0.0175)	(0.0184)	
Know professionals			0.0450*	0.0425*					0.0202	0.0212	0.000683	
			(0.0194)	(0.0211)					(0.0205)	(0.0214)	(0.0228)	
Size of network			0.0126	0.00488					0.0311	0.0288	0.0351	

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
			(0.0268)	(0.0294)					(0.0282)	(0.0294)	(0.0321)	
Intensity of network			0.0308	0.0406					−0.00554	0.000693	0.0279	
			(0.0310)	(0.0334)					(0.0331)	(0.0341)	(0.0376)	
Homogeneity of network			−0.0420	−0.0607					−0.0318	−0.0427	−0.0410	
			(0.0345)	(0.0368)					(0.0347)	(0.0357)	(0.0387)	
Strength of network			−0.0229	−0.0255					0.0545	0.0485	0.0622	
			(0.0504)	(0.0528)					(0.0543)	(0.0560)	(0.0669)	
Political act recruitment			0.230***	0.242***					0.190***	0.205***	0.163**	
			(0.0411)	(0.0434)					(0.0459)	(0.0475)	(0.0537)	
Economic capital					0.0276	0.0322			0.0117	0.0103	−0.0299	
					(0.0380)	(0.0396)			(0.0403)	(0.0421)	(0.0460)	
Spare time					0.121***	0.144***			0.107**	0.115**	0.108**	
					(0.0353)	(0.0379)			(0.0358)	(0.0367)	(0.0399)	
Self-perceived class = 1, Working							0.0175	0.0170	0.0218	0.0178	0.00350	
							(0.0135)	(0.0147)	(0.0132)	(0.0136)	(0.0148)	

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Self-perceived class = 2, Middle							0.0312*	0.0236	0.0111	0.00443	-0.00742	
							(0.0130)	(0.0140)	(0.0133)	(0.0131)	(0.0144)	
Structural explanations for status in society							0.0292	0.0296	0.0208	0.0207	0.0334	
							(0.0225)	(0.0244)	(0.0236)	(0.0239)	(0.0274)	
Structural explanations for own status							0.0460	0.0612	0.0439	0.0522	0.0614	
							(0.0338)	(0.0382)	(0.0359)	(0.0371)	(0.0377)	
Privilege in politics							-0.0901**	-0.110**	-0.0720*	-0.0693	-0.0332	
							(0.0311)	(0.0346)	(0.0348)	(0.0359)	(0.0364)	
Party identity = 1, Labour											0.00689	
											(0.0180)	
Party identity = 2, Conservative											0.00676	
											(0.0183)	

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Liberty– authority position											0.0314	
											(0.0383)	
External political efficacy											0.00417	
											(0.0416)	
Internal political efficacy											0.0480	
											(0.0355)	
Political interest											0.0620	
											(0.0400)	
Political knowledge											0.0279	
											(0.0289)	
Age											0.0352	0.0917**
											(0.0448)	(0.0332)
Gender = 2, Female											0.0446***	0.0371**
											(0.0128)	(0.0122)

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Parental NS-SEC = 2, Semi-routine											-0.0152	-0.0250
											(0.0268)	(0.0287)
Parental NS- SEC = 3, Low. super. or tech.											-0.0111	-0.00303
											(0.0250)	(0.0267)
Parental NS- SEC = 4, Small employer											-0.000121	0.0226
											(0.0272)	(0.0284)
Parental NS-SEC = 5, Intermediate											-0.00154	0.0260
											(0.0278)	(0.0323)
Parental NS- SEC = 6, Low. man. or prof.											-0.0273	-0.00729
											(0.0216)	(0.0241)
Parental NS-SEC = 7, Higher prof.											-0.00823	0.00963
											(0.0259)	(0.0281)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Parental NS- SEC = 8, Large employer											-0.0534	-0.0453
											(0.0285)	(0.0291)
Region lived = 2, North West											-0.0102	0.00491
											(0.0325)	(0.0344)
Region lived = 3, Yorkshire and the Humber											0.00661	0.0190
											(0.0324)	(0.0341)
Region lived = 4, East Midlands											0.000867	0.0143
											(0.0350)	(0.0396)
Region lived = 5, West Midlands											-0.0280	-0.00709
											(0.0323)	(0.0347)
Region lived = 6, East of England											-0.0145	0.00276
											(0.0316)	(0.0336)

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Region lived = 7, London											0.0174	0.0485
											(0.0356)	(0.0369)
Region lived = 8, South East											0.0215	0.0351
											(0.0323)	(0.0347)
Region lived = 9, South West											-0.00747	0.0200
											(0.0339)	(0.0358)
Region lived = 10, Wales											0.000658	0.0372
											(0.0346)	(0.0391)
Region lived = 11, Scotland											0.0105	0.0413
											(0.0362)	(0.0404)
Social grade = 2, B											0.00253	0.0113
											(0.0196)	(0.0195)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Social grade = 3, C1											0.00485	0.00760
											(0.0187)	(0.0186)
Social grade = 4, C2											-0.0256	-0.0116
											(0.0226)	(0.0230)
Social grade = 5, D											-0.0225	-0.0126
											(0.0260)	(0.0246)
Social grade = 6, E											-0.00701	0.00864
											(0.0260)	(0.0255)
Education level = 1, Below GCSE											0.0700**	0.0901***
											(0.0234)	(0.0246)
Education level = 2, GCSE or equivalent											0.0363	0.0571*
											(0.0226)	(0.0227)
Education level = 3, A level or equivalent											0.0575*	0.0828***

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
											(0.0245)	(0.0242)
Education level = 4, Non-degree prof. quals											0.0627**	0.102***
											(0.0239)	(0.0232)
Education level = 5, Degree											0.0598*	0.104***
											(0.0269)	(0.0268)
Education level = 6, Higher degree											0.0820*	0.143***
											(0.0345)	(0.0344)
Constant	0.107***	0.116***	0.0768**	0.0871**	0.100***	0.0984***	0.162***	0.179***	0.0794	0.0742	−0.104	−0.0280
	(0.0168)	(0.0190)	(0.0259)	(0.0280)	(0.0256)	(0.0269)	(0.0278)	(0.0308)	(0.0488)	(0.0499)	(0.0791)	(0.0520)
Observations	1,379	1,219	1,340	1,219	1,372	1,219	1,405	1,219	1,287	1,219	1,094	1,094
R-squared	0.040	0.051	0.076	0.085	0.014	0.020	0.015	0.018	0.119	0.131	0.179	0.063

Unstandardised coefficients

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	cultural capital	cultural capital	social capital	social capital	economic capital	economic capital	perc. of priv.	perc. of priv.	cap. and perc. of priv.	cap. and perc. of priv.	cap. perc. and controls	controls only
VARIABLES	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	complete cases	complete cases
Exhibition-based activities	0.365	0.518							0.192	0.154	−0.125	
	(0.292)	(0.316)							(0.326)	(0.340)	(0.357)	
Performance-based activities	0.933*	1.205*							0.884	1.082*	1.546**	
	(0.431)	(0.474)							(0.468)	(0.489)	(0.494)	
Show-based activities	−1.052**	−1.211**							−1.473***	−1.665***	−0.770	
	(0.365)	(0.390)							(0.387)	(0.403)	(0.474)	
Consumption-based activities	0.349	0.332							0.249	0.332	0.0447	
	(0.241)	(0.253)							(0.284)	(0.286)	(0.312)	
Travel-based activities	0.584***	0.459*							0.287	0.213	0.0639	
	(0.176)	(0.188)							(0.196)	(0.199)	(0.214)	
World cuisine tastes	0.0811	0.138							0.105	0.184	0.0881	

Table D.5 Ordered logit regression models for donating dependent variable

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	(0.245)	(0.280)							(0.254)	(0.260)	(0.300)	
Blockbuster film tastes	−0.301*	−0.240							−0.190	−0.206	−0.168	
	(0.145)	(0.150)							(0.155)	(0.161)	(0.188)	
Educational film tastes	0.429**	0.368*							0.214	0.238	0.169	
	(0.157)	(0.170)							(0.164)	(0.168)	(0.178)	
Work-based civic skills	0.884***	0.817***							0.277	0.221	0.0682	
	(0.215)	(0.229)							(0.238)	(0.245)	(0.292)	
Know manual workers			−0.0627	−0.0963					−0.0908	−0.152	0.126	
			(0.187)	(0.195)					(0.196)	(0.202)	(0.223)	
Know service workers			−0.336	−0.385*					−0.101	−0.113	−0.144	
			(0.185)	(0.193)					(0.186)	(0.187)	(0.208)	
Know professionals			0.922***	0.899***					0.424*	0.406	0.0826	
			(0.209)	(0.225)					(0.212)	(0.220)	(0.247)	
Size of network			0.418	0.516					0.780*	0.840*	1.005**	
			(0.318)	(0.352)					(0.324)	(0.336)	(0.356)	

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Intensity of network			0.348	0.400					-0.403	-0.457	-0.463	
			(0.338)	(0.367)					(0.370)	(0.382)	(0.423)	
Homogeneity of network			-0.126	-0.281					-0.170	-0.291	-0.0249	
			(0.368)	(0.400)					(0.369)	(0.380)	(0.413)	
Strength of network			0.154	0.296					1.698**	2.067**	1.984**	
			(0.546)	(0.577)					(0.630)	(0.655)	(0.710)	
Political act recruitment			1.566***	1.585**					1.479**	1.487**	1.974***	
			(0.450)	(0.486)					(0.461)	(0.477)	(0.508)	
Economic capital					2.764***	2.959***			2.523***	2.640***	2.220***	
					(0.373)	(0.401)			(0.409)	(0.416)	(0.512)	
Spare time					1.129***	1.267***			1.224***	1.202***	0.979*	
					(0.311)	(0.332)			(0.341)	(0.345)	(0.397)	
Self-perceived class = 1, Working							0.139	0.159	0.299*	0.288*	0.205	
							(0.124)	(0.131)	(0.137)	(0.140)	(0.165)	
Self-perceived class = 2, Middle							0.522***	0.566***	0.275	0.255	0.155	

(continued)

[illegible]

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Party identity = 4, SNP											-0.135	
											(0.682)	
Party identity = 5, Green											0.538	
											(0.400)	
Party identity = 6, UKIP											0.00355	
											(0.352)	
Party identity = 7, Other											0.0476	
											(0.635)	
Left-right position											0.0433	
											(0.573)	
Liberty-authority position											0.234	
											(0.453)	
External political efficacy											-0.514	

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
											(0.436)	
Internal political efficacy											0.503	
											(0.424)	
Political interest											−0.315	
											(0.438)	
Political knowledge											0.127	
											(0.349)	
Age											0.897*	1.315***
											(0.437)	(0.304)
Gender = 2, Female											0.0538	−0.0406
											(0.141)	(0.120)
Parental NS-SEC = 2, Semi-routine											0.204	0.0768
											(0.326)	(0.301)
Parental NS-SEC = 3, Low. super. or tech.											0.199	0.320
											(0.301)	(0.286)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Parental NS-SEC = 4, Small employer											0.260	0.468
											(0.327)	(0.313)
Parental NS-SEC = 5, Intermediate											0.0282	0.437
											(0.315)	(0.298)
Parental NS-SEC = 6, Low. man. or prof.											0.135	0.394
											(0.280)	(0.267)
Parental NS-SEC = 7, Higher prof.											0.257	0.458
											(0.315)	(0.298)
Parental NS-SEC = 8, Large employer											-0.0199	0.291
											(0.394)	(0.390)
Region lived = 2, North West											-0.449	-0.373
											(0.358)	(0.343)

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Region lived = 3, Yorkshire and the Humber											0.0992	0.185
											(0.336)	(0.317)
Region lived = 4, East Midlands											-0.183	-0.193
											(0.379)	(0.355)
Region lived = 5, West Midlands											-0.141	0.00952
											(0.376)	(0.361)
Region lived = 6, East of England											-0.221	-0.114
											(0.346)	(0.329)
Region lived = 7, London											0.191	0.485
											(0.360)	(0.333)
Region lived = 8, South East											-0.103	0.0145
											(0.328)	(0.321)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Region lived = 9, South West											-0.239	-0.179
											(0.357)	(0.340)
Region lived = 10, Wales											0.214	0.537
											(0.369)	(0.379)
Region lived = 11, Scotland											-0.0270	-0.116
											(0.387)	(0.361)
Social grade = 2, B											0.243	0.216
											(0.223)	(0.218)
Social grade = 3, C1											-0.0793	-0.253
											(0.222)	(0.208)
Social grade = 4, C2											0.00373	-0.194
											(0.251)	(0.232)
Social grade = 5, D											0.333	-0.0862
											(0.297)	(0.269)

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Education level = 6, Higher degree											0.485	1.342***
											(0.433)	(0.401)
/cut1	0.399*	0.235	0.321	0.138	1.380***	1.408***	-1.038**	-1.180***	2.001***	1.876***	2.032*	0.593
	(0.186)	(0.199)	(0.316)	(0.342)	(0.254)	(0.273)	(0.319)	(0.317)	(0.502)	(0.522)	(0.919)	(0.569)
/cut2	1.200***	1.058***	1.110***	0.949**	2.186***	2.212***	-0.254	-0.387	2.845***	2.751***	2.973**	1.440*
	(0.189)	(0.202)	(0.317)	(0.343)	(0.253)	(0.271)	(0.322)	(0.321)	(0.504)	(0.523)	(0.922)	(0.570)
/cut3	1.844***	1.714***	1.739***	1.591***	2.792***	2.855***	0.346	0.234	3.532***	3.459***	3.717***	2.101***
	(0.195)	(0.207)	(0.322)	(0.348)	(0.250)	(0.267)	(0.322)	(0.318)	(0.508)	(0.528)	(0.926)	(0.569)
/cut4	2.424***	2.306***	2.311***	2.170***	3.368***	3.442***	0.891**	0.792*	4.170***	4.100***	4.401***	2.716***
	(0.203)	(0.214)	(0.328)	(0.355)	(0.256)	(0.274)	(0.321)	(0.314)	(0.514)	(0.534)	(0.933)	(0.571)
/cut5	3.573***	3.479***	3.441***	3.329***	4.489***	4.607***	1.979***	1.922***	5.384***	5.345***	5.709***	3.914***
	(0.228)	(0.239)	(0.346)	(0.373)	(0.278)	(0.294)	(0.342)	(0.328)	(0.538)	(0.558)	(0.952)	(0.578)
/cut6	4.445***	4.341***	4.313***	4.189***	5.317***	5.470***	2.793***	2.770***	6.300***	6.249***	6.666***	4.806***
	(0.262)	(0.278)	(0.369)	(0.397)	(0.308)	(0.318)	(0.379)	(0.349)	(0.557)	(0.579)	(0.968)	(0.589)
Observations	1,378	1,219	1,340	1,219	1,371	1,219	1,404	1,219	1,287	1,219	1,094	1,094

Unstandardised coefficients

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	cultural capital	cultural capital	social capital	social capital	economic capital	economic capital	perc. of priv.	perc. of priv.	cap. and perc. of priv.	cap. and perc. of priv.	cap. perc. and controls	controls only
VARIABLES	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	all cases	complete cases	complete cases	complete cases
Exhibition-based activities	1.095	0.843							0.933	0.522	−0.240	
	(0.564)	(0.603)							(0.595)	(0.630)	(0.701)	
Performance-based activities	1.119	1.001							0.176	0.469	0.947	
	(0.771)	(0.848)							(0.793)	(0.851)	(1.020)	
Show-based activities	−2.565***	−2.530***							−1.512*	−1.716**	−0.804	
	(0.558)	(0.589)							(0.604)	(0.616)	(0.874)	
Consumption-based activities	−0.220	−0.0608							−0.295	−0.101	−1.455*	
	(0.466)	(0.517)							(0.535)	(0.558)	(0.730)	
Travel-based activities	0.350	0.425							0.198	0.258	0.185	
	(0.292)	(0.309)							(0.296)	(0.306)	(0.385)	
World cuisine tastes	−0.455	−0.358							−0.0882	−0.0732	0.283	

Table D.6 Logit regression models for voting dependent variable

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	(0.401)	(0.444)							(0.445)	(0.458)	(0.602)	
Blockbuster film tastes	0.0187	-0.0237							0.169	0.0646	0.0795	
	(0.250)	(0.270)							(0.274)	(0.288)	(0.313)	
Educational film tastes	-0.152	-0.311							-0.285	-0.311	-0.312	
	(0.256)	(0.271)							(0.260)	(0.273)	(0.341)	
Work-based civic skills	0.764*	0.905*							0.519	0.469	0.961	
	(0.355)	(0.383)							(0.394)	(0.407)	(0.512)	
Know manual workers			0.450	0.400					0.446	0.368	-0.245	
			(0.314)	(0.330)					(0.315)	(0.331)	(0.384)	
Know service workers			-0.731*	-0.898*					-0.618	-0.593	-0.295	
			(0.341)	(0.359)					(0.350)	(0.357)	(0.405)	
Know professionals			0.703*	0.695*					0.127	0.202	0.0856	
			(0.318)	(0.345)					(0.354)	(0.365)	(0.426)	
Size of network			-0.602	-0.615					-0.0905	-0.247	-0.218	
			(0.480)	(0.512)					(0.498)	(0.525)	(0.572)	
Intensity of network			1.312*	0.724					0.409	0.128	0.507	

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
			(0.552)	(0.585)					(0.595)	(0.610)	(0.761)	
Homogeneity of network			1.402*	1.115					1.247*	1.085	0.696	
			(0.664)	(0.744)					(0.620)	(0.652)	(0.751)	
Strength of network			-3.187***	-3.007***					-2.489**	-1.947*	-0.763	
			(0.820)	(0.834)					(0.898)	(0.933)	(1.283)	
Political act recruitment			0.897	0.970					0.866	1.127	0.362	
			(0.628)	(0.665)					(0.667)	(0.701)	(0.923)	
Economic capital					3.055***	2.887***			1.715*	1.709*	1.154	
					(0.658)	(0.745)			(0.723)	(0.758)	(0.940)	
Spare time					1.749**	2.153**			1.423*	1.418*	1.411	
					(0.660)	(0.715)			(0.707)	(0.714)	(0.846)	
Self-perceived class = 1, Working							-0.0290	-0.0649	0.0240	0.0192	-0.278	
							(0.222)	(0.242)	(0.240)	(0.246)	(0.297)	
Self-perceived class = 2, Middle							0.505	0.458	0.109	0.130	-0.257	
							(0.259)	(0.283)	(0.278)	(0.293)	(0.319)	
Structural explanations for status in society							-0.574	-0.728	-0.391	-0.372	-0.634	
							(0.407)	(0.456)	(0.406)	(0.417)	(0.556)	

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Structural explanations for own status							-0.650	-0.673	-0.246	-0.376	-0.441	
							(0.520)	(0.589)	(0.570)	(0.582)	(0.683)	
Privilege in politics							-0.448	-0.423	-0.572	-0.499	-0.648	
							(0.632)	(0.736)	(0.644)	(0.662)	(0.803)	
Party identity = 1, Labour											1.300***	
											(0.349)	
Party identity = 2, Conservative											1.715***	
											(0.358)	
Party identity = 3, Liberal Democrat											2.182***	
											(0.565)	
Party identity = 4, SNP											1.139	
											(1.109)	

(continued)

[illegible]

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
											(0.833)	
Political interest											2.791**	
											(0.871)	
Political knowledge											0.654	
											(0.583)	
Age											1.053	2.481***
											(0.833)	(0.602)
Gender = 2, Female											0.438	-0.0261
											(0.281)	(0.229)
Parental NS-SEC = 2, Semi-routine											-0.756	-0.508
											(0.589)	(0.481)
Parental NS-SEC = 3, Low. super. or tech.											0.125	0.269
											(0.607)	(0.499)
Parental NS-SEC = 4, Small employer											-0.331	0.0679
											(0.602)	(0.503)

(continued)

[illegible]

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
											(0.823)	(0.772)
Region lived = 5, West Midlands											-0.139	-0.0977
											(0.773)	(0.673)
Region lived = 6, East of England											-0.562	-0.317
											(0.728)	(0.681)
Region lived = 7, London											-0.329	-0.294
											(0.746)	(0.648)
Region lived = 8, South East											-0.625	-0.341
											(0.726)	(0.648)
Region lived = 9, South West											0.436	0.304
											(0.808)	(0.688)
Region lived = 10, Wales											-0.287	-0.139
											(0.805)	(0.715)
Region lived = 11, Scotland											-0.538	-0.0701
											(0.788)	(0.691)

(continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Social grade = 2, B											0.996*	1.050**
											(0.435)	(0.407)
Social grade = 3, C1											0.500	0.260
											(0.379)	(0.323)
Social grade = 4, C2											0.569	0.189
											(0.403)	(0.367)
Social grade = 5, D											0.721	0.436
											(0.526)	(0.464)
Social grade = 6, E											0.700	0.306
											(0.547)	(0.421)
Education level = 1, Below GCSE											-0.388	-0.370
											(0.661)	(0.620)
Education level = 2, GCSE or equivalent											-0.634	-0.693
											(0.638)	(0.604)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Education level = 3, A level or equivalent											–0.506	–0.520
											(0.653)	(0.630)
Education level = 4, Non-degree prof. quals											–0.930	–0.769
											(0.632)	(0.587)
Education level = 5, Degree											–0.744	–0.204
											(0.663)	(0.641)
Education level = 6, Higher degree											–1.839*	–1.255
											(0.735)	(0.641)
Constant	1.550***	1.582***	0.417	1.056	–0.480	–0.385	2.407***	2.556***	0.390	0.589	–0.00505	1.112
	(0.320)	(0.367)	(0.570)	(0.603)	(0.429)	(0.492)	(0.529)	(0.601)	(0.878)	(0.923)	(1.690)	(0.938)
Observations	1,343	1,195	1,305	1,195	1,339	1,195	1,369	1,195	1,254	1,195	1,071	1,071

Unstandardised coefficients

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

References

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