

engagement is a good thing, or at least that it does no harm. I do—at least when attention focuses on civic engagement in the political realm. There are plenty of political scientists, politicians, and journalists who believe that American democracy worked better when the only participation expected of citizens was that they vote early and often. Today, when citizens have far more opportunities to determine the choice of candidates and policies, small and unrepresentative slices of the population disproportionately avail themselves of those opportunities. Too often the consequence is “clowns to the left and jokers to the right”—a politics that seems distant from the views of ordinary people. When future research attempts to relate civic engagement to welfare measures, it should bear in mind that the relationship between political engagement and social welfare may well be U-shaped, with societies better off with either “a little” or “a lot” than with “some.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Appendix 11A: Why Are Extremists Disproportionately Represented in Politics?**

Social scientists often puzzle over things that normal people consider to be self-evident. Here is another example: why are people with extreme views disproportionately likely to be represented in politics? I begin with the more general question: why does *anyone* participate?

#### *Why Participate?*

The tradition I represent customarily views actions as instrumentally motivated. Thus, investing time, effort, or money in politics is like any other investment; you do it if the expected benefit exceeds the cost. The more individuals value the benefit—a smoke-free society, for example—the more likely they are to participate. The more costly is participation—transportation to the site of an antismoking demonstration, for example—the less likely they are to participate. Of course, the expected benefit must also incorporate the likelihood that the individual's participation determines whether the benefit occurs. So, the basic calculus of participation takes the following form:

$$(1) \quad E(P) = p(B) - c,$$

56. Verba and Nie (1972, chap. 18).