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## **Democratic Ideals and Levels of Political Participation: The Role of Political and Social Conceptualizations of Democracy**

### **Abstract**

Concerns about democratic legitimacy in contemporary democracies bring new urgency to understanding how citizens’ attitudes and ideals affect their political activity. In this article we analyze the relationship between citizens’ democratic ideals and political behaviour in the European Social Survey’s 2012 uniquely extensive questions on these topics in 29 countries. Using latent class analysis, we identify two groups of citizens who emphasize different citizenship concepts as discussed by T.H. Marshall, namely a political rights and a social rights conception. The multilevel regression analyses indicate that those who emphasize social rights have relatively high levels of non-institutionalized political participation, but are less involved in institutionalized participation. In contrast, those who emphasize political rights are more active in all forms of participation. We conclude by discussing the implications of the findings that, even in an era of economic austerity, those who emphasize social rights are not the most politically active.

**Keywords:** Political behaviour; democratic ideals; political and social citizenship; T.H. Marshall; European Social Survey; latent class analysis

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A vibrant debate is underway regarding how citizens' assessment of their country's democratic functioning has an impact on their political behaviour. A variety of studies indicate that protest and non-institutionalized political participation are on the rise, particularly in the wake of the economic downturn that began in 2008, and subsequent austerity measures (Grasso & Giugni, 2016). Dissatisfaction with democratic functioning along with the rise of populist sentiment have gained attention as important factors for understanding these recent trends. Although this literature covers diverse aspects of democratic dissatisfaction, it tends to share the theoretical presumption that citizens in contemporary democracies have rather similar conceptions of what an ideal democracy would look like. Yet, whether citizens do indeed share similar democratic ideals—and how these ideals may be related to their political behaviour—has not yet been tested empirically. Considering the protest wave following politics of austerity, one might assume that citizens who stress social dimensions of democracy, such as fairness and economic quality, will be more likely to participate than citizens who define politics mostly in strictly political and procedural terms.

The implications of this debate are of paramount importance in light of the evidence that electoral participation has declined in recent years (Amnå & Ekman 2014; Dassonneville & Hooghe 2018; Hooghe & Kern 2017; McDonald 2010), while some forms of non-electoral participation are on the rise (Dalton 2015; van Deth et al. 2007; Theocharis & van Deth 2018). Research on the determinants of these different types of participation has reached new insights regarding associations with conceptions of desirable behaviours of 'good' citizens (Bolzendahl & Coffé 2013; Dalton 2008; Marien et al. 2010). Little is known, however, about the relationship between citizens' conceptions of what is important

in a well-functioning democracy and their patterns of political behaviour, nor about the precise mechanism connecting ideals and participation behaviour. Concerns about democratic legitimacy in contemporary democracies have brought new urgency to investigating the long-standing question of how citizens' attitudes and ideals shape their political activity (Levi et al. 2009; Magalhães 2014).

This study aims to advance research on this topic by investigating whether citizens' conceptions of democracy affect their political behaviour. More precisely, we test whether citizens who hold distinct conceptions of democratic ideals also have distinctive corresponding patterns of political participation. Given the recent concern about social policy and inequality in Europe, it might be expected that citizens who place an emphasis on the social responsibility of democracy would be more likely to protest against the politics of austerity that has been pursued in recent years in numerous European countries. An emphasis on social rights should thus be associated with a higher propensity to take part in non-institutionalized forms of political participation.

We contribute to the ongoing debate by analyzing the relationship between citizens' democratic ideals and political behaviour in the European Social Survey's 2012 uniquely extensive battery of questions on citizens' conceptions of ideal democracy in 29 countries (n=54,673). Using latent class analysis, we identify two groups of citizens who emphasize distinct citizenship concepts as already discussed in the seminal work of T.H. Marshall (1950), namely a political rights conception of democracy, versus a social rights conception. The identification of these distinctive democratic ideals challenges the prevailing approach which often assumes that citizens on average have the same conception of what a democracy should look like.

In multilevel regression analyses, the findings indicate that the political rights group is highly active in *all* types of political behaviour, while the social rights group is less active overall. This finding means that those who place a high priority on social rights are less active in raising their voice toward the political system. While this group emphasizes protection from inequality and poverty as important for the functioning of democracy, apparently this normative ideal does not lead to more political participation, even in the context of the economic downturn that began in 2008, and the subsequent austerity measures in European countries. We discuss the implications of these findings that even in an era of economic austerity, those who emphasize social rights are not the most politically active, and therefore might not get their voice heard in the political decision-making process.

### **What Affects Political Behaviour?**

One of the most studied topics in political science is the question of what affects political behaviour, including studies of resources, motivation and recruitment networks (Verba et al. 1995; Schlozman et al. 2012), personality traits (Hibbing et al. 2013; Mondak & Halperin 2008), contextual factors such as income inequality and institutional structures (Hooghe & Oser 2016; Lister 2007), and most recently, online communication and engagement (Cantijoch et al. 2016; Keating & Melis 2017). Amidst this wealth of research on factors that affect political behaviour, empirical studies are surprisingly silent on the relationship between democratic ideals and political behaviour—a fundamental subject of theoretical inquiry in political science, dating back all the way to Aristotle’s writings on political community.

Recent empirical research on the topic of how citizens' conceptions of democracy might affect how they engage with the political system focuses primarily on the effect of citizens' dissatisfaction with democracy, with 'grievance theory' predicting that this dissatisfaction motivates political engagement (Kriesi et al. 2012; Tarrow 1994; Webb 2013), while 'critical citizens' theory' predicts political inaction or a focus on non-institutionalized activity (Dahlberg et al. 2015; Klingemann 1999; Norris 1999). These approaches are based on the idea that actors are likely to show behaviour that is congruent with the values they themselves consider to be salient. Although the main claims of these two theories stand in opposition in terms of their prediction of political behaviour, it is noteworthy that both depart from a shared assumption that citizens on average have similar conceptions of what an ideal democracy should look like.

The empirical evidence for the assumption that citizens have similar democratic ideals, however, is rather thin. Most often research relies on standard questions about the way democracy functions in the country of the respondent (Ariely 2015). Some country-specific research has indicated, however, that different democratic concepts can be identified among citizens (Schedler & Sarsfeld 2007). The assumption that citizens' concepts of democracy are the same across nations clearly requires further investigation. This question, furthermore, has become more salient given the increasing challenges to the legitimacy of European political systems since the economic crisis that began in 2008 (Cordero & Simón 2016; Streeck & Schäfer 2013). In various European countries, citizens have taken to the streets to protest against austerity politics (Morlino & Quaranta 2016; Quaranta 2016), and populist challenger parties have systematically increased their vote share in recent elections (Bermeo & Bartels 2014; Hooghe & Oser 2015; Kern, Marien &

Hooghe 2015; Peterson, Wahlström & Magnus 2015; Rüdig & Karyotis; Sloam 2014). One plausible conclusion from these trends is that policies to alleviate social and economic hardship are considered important elements of citizens' conception of ideal democracy, at least for a specific portion of the population. This conclusion would imply that differences in democratic ideals can help us to explain patterns of political participation.

### **How Can Democratic Ideals Can Affect Political Behaviour? Theory and Hypotheses**

In democratic theory, the seminal essay on citizenship concepts by T.H. Marshall (1950) has played an important role in the debate about the rights that are considered central for full democratic citizenship. In this essay, he reviewed the historical evolution of three kinds of rights: civil rights that are the basic building blocks of individual freedom; political rights, which include the rights of citizens to participate in order to exercise political power; and finally social rights, which include the right to basic economic welfare and security. In this three-step evolution, the final step of social rights in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is understood as a main contribution to theories of citizenship and democracy (Lister 2005; Møller & Skaaning 2010).

While Marshall considered these three types of citizenship rights as stages in modern welfare states' social and political development, an additional important perspective is the degree to which the mass public in contemporary democracies embrace any or all of these citizenship rights as democratic ideals. Although the basic civil rights Marshall discussed (such as property rights) are generally taken for granted in contemporary democracies it remains an open question to what degree the other two types of citizenship rights (political rights and social rights) are fully implemented in democratic countries. This lack of a full

implementation means that empirical research is particularly important for investigating the degree to which the mass public embraces the social and/or political rights concept as central to their conception of an ideal democracy and how these democratic ideals have an effect on citizens' political engagement. Yet, empirical studies of these citizenship concepts have been scarce (Bulmer & Reese 1996; Hooghe & Oser, forthcoming). As Ariely (2011) notes, extant research tends to focus on just one set of citizenship rights, even though Marshall's theory emphasizes that all three of these rights should be ensured in a holistic manner (Lister 2005; Revi 2014). Because of his particular focus on the social rights concept, an important innovation in Marshall's framework was that ensuring social rights is not merely a matter of ideological preference, but must be considered as central in achieving basic rights for citizens in modern democracies (Connell 2012).

Building on Marshall's theoretical framework, we focus on the two types of citizenship rights that are most salient for current political debates, namely the 'political rights' and 'social rights' conceptions as democratic ideals. We are particularly interested in how citizens who embrace these difference democratic ideals will be politically engaged in the period following the economic downturn of 2008 and the subsequent implementation of austerity measures. Building on recent literature that shows that democratic attitudes and norms such as civic duty can affect traditional political behaviour such as voting (Galais & Blais 2016), we aim to test whether distinctive democratic ideals may motivate specific types of political participation. By building on the assumption that normative ideals indeed influence behaviour, we can connect the more empirically oriented literature on political participation with the broader theoretical and normative literature on ideal concepts of democracy.

A first straightforward expectation is that citizens who hold both of these types of democratic ideals regarding what they believe to be important for democracy will be politically engaged – particularly in comparison to citizens who do not have any strongly expressed democratic ideal. The underlying mechanism is that we assume that actors act upon the interiorized norms that they consider as most salient. This mechanism motivates our first hypothesis:

H1: Citizens who express clearly defined ‘political rights’ or ‘social rights’ ideals will be more politically engaged in all activities (institutionalized or non-institutionalized political activities) in comparison to those who lack a strongly felt democratic ideal.

In addition, an important theoretical issue is the comparison of the ‘political rights’ and ‘social rights’ ideals in terms of their relative engagement in different types of political behaviour. Maintaining our focus on citizen responses to the recent economic downturn and its aftermath, the literature would suggest that these groups will behave differently in terms of the political activity they direct toward established institutions in comparison to their non-institutionalized political behaviour. More specifically, we expect that citizens who place particular emphasis on classic political rights, such as free and fair elections, will be particularly active in institutionalized political behaviour due to their inherent attention to political institutions and procedures. In contrast, in line with the recent literature on protest events following the economic downturn, we would expect that those who place particular emphasis on the importance of social rights, such as protection from poverty, will direct their attention to a more diverse set of actors who respond to social



rights concerns and have an effect on economic and social policy. Therefore, the mechanism behind this expectation is that those motivated by social rights concerns will direct their political voice to actors such as trade unions, social movements, and civic associations, and will therefore be particularly active in non-institutionalized political behaviour. These expectations lead us to formulate the following two hypotheses:

H2: Citizens who hold a ‘political rights’ democratic ideal will have higher levels of institutionalized political behaviour than citizens holding a ‘social rights’ democratic ideal.

H3: Citizens who hold a ‘social rights’ democratic ideal will have higher levels of non-institutionalized political behaviour than citizens holding a ‘political rights’ democratic ideal.

### **Data and Methods: Democratic Ideals as Determinants of Political Behaviour**

Empirical measures of the quality of democracy routinely tend to focus on expert evaluations and institutional measures (Coppedge et al. 2016). When individuals are called upon to express their conceptions of democracy, some studies suggest that similar concepts are evident across diverse countries (Dalton et al. 2007), but other studies are more skeptical of this claim (Canache et al. 2001). Despite the challenge of comprehensively measuring democratic ideals, a growing body of studies have investigated different aspects of democratic concepts in individual countries (Bengtsson & Christensen 2016; Schedler & Sarsfield 2007) or specific regions (Canache 2012; Doorenspleet 2012).

In this study we heed Doorenspleet's (2015) rallying cry to ask 'where are the people?' when assessing democratic concepts cross-nationally by using an actor-centered approach. This approach is made possible by the European Social Survey's 2012 wave (ESS 2012) which included a uniquely extensive module to investigate how Europeans view contemporary democracy (Ferrín & Kriesi 2016). Standardized in-person interviews were conducted between 2012 and 2013 among representative survey samples in 29 European countries. The special one-time module on democratic ideals asked respondents to rate the importance of various aspects of democracy.

The democratic ideals battery allows us to test Marshall's ideas as it includes both political rights-related items such as conducting free and fair elections, as well as social rights-related items such as protecting citizens against poverty. Although public opinion research has extensively studied general preferences on social rights related topics (Reeskens & van Oorschot 2013), the ESS 2012 module on democratic views is unique in investigating these items as part of a respondent's comprehensive conception of ideal democracy. The question was phrased as 'democracy in general', in order to avoid that respondents would interpret this as a question about the specific functioning of their own political system.

In the current study, we build upon prior work that investigates various aspects of these ideals (Hooghe et al. 2017; Oser & Hooghe 2018) to make a subsequent connection between democratic ideals and political behaviour. This module of the ESS also includes standard and well-established questions on a variety of political acts that have been included in the ESS and similar surveys, and we analyze these political behaviors using a

standard conceptual and empirical distinction in the literature between institutionalized and non-institutionalized political behaviour (Barnes & Kaase 1979; Marien et al. 2010).

A clear observation from the descriptive statistics of these democratic ideals is that all of the indicators are rated as highly important by respondents (Table 1). The highest rated item is clearly the rule of law ('The courts treat everyone the same') with a mean score of 9.23. Of particular interest to the present study is that classic items of social rights are clearly considered important aspects of democracy, with protection against poverty ranking fourth most important (mean=8.74) and reducing inequality ranked eighth (mean=8.26). These mean scores indicate that European citizens view social rights as important aspects of an ideal democracy, along with other elements that have received more extensive attention as fundamental aspects of democracy, such as free media (ranked 10<sup>th</sup>). On average, social rights clearly are important to Europeans' conception of ideal democracy, and are by no means considered to be outside the realm of democratic politics.

[Table 1 about here]

While these mean scores show little variance in the average importance of these items for survey respondents as a whole, in order to assess citizens' comprehensive democratic ideals it is necessary to employ an actor-centered analytical technique. To assess whether Marshall's citizenship concepts are salient in public opinion, it is particularly important to identify discrete groups of citizens who give a high score to some indicators while simultaneously giving a low score on other items in the same battery. This kind of typological construct can be identified through the use of latent class analysis (LCA),

which identifies separate groups of respondents who share similar response patterns on a battery of indicators (Magidson & Vermunt 2004; McCutcheon 1987). Finite mixture models such as LCA are widely used in the social and health sciences in what has been described as a ‘person-oriented approach’ (Collins & Lanza 2010, 8). LCA identifies distinct subgroups of respondents that share similar response patterns on a series of items, just like standard variants of cluster analysis (Hagenaars & McCutcheon 2002). A main advantage of LCA in comparison to traditional cluster analysis, however, is that the probabilistic estimation method used in LCA yields objective goodness of fit statistics that provide reliable indicators for assessing the optimal number of latent classes to fit the data (Raftery 1995; Vermunt & Magidson 2002). We therefore rely on this technique to identify distinctive conceptions of ideal democracy.

## **Results**

### *1. Democratic ideals (independent variable)*

The goodness-of-fit statistics generated by the LCA of the democratic ideals battery indicate that optimal fit to the data is provided by a five-class model. As documented in the appendix, this five-class solution is cross-culturally equivalent so it can be used for comparative analyses.

Among the five latent classes depicted in Figure 1, it is clear that three of these groups attribute similar levels of importance to all surveyed aspects of democratic ideals, namely the ‘high ideals’ (24% of the research population), ‘medium ideals’ (30%) and the ‘low ideals’ (10%) groups. The interpretation of the uniform scores across all items for these three groups is not clear cut, since this uniformity may suggest a lack of clear preferences,

or the existence of generalized priorities. For the purpose of next-step analyses, these groups pose interpretive challenges, as the similar scores on a large battery of items may be the result of an attempt to measure a complex concept among respondents who do not have a coherent attitude, as well as social desirability biases. These findings clearly indicate, however, that almost two-thirds (64%) of those surveyed in the ESS 2012 consider all democratic ideals indicators to be of a similar level of importance (high, medium or low), and therefore they do not place special emphasis on any particular set of elements of democracy. As such, these groups do not provide evidence regarding the distinction Marshall introduced between political and social rights.

In contrast, two groups depicted in Figure 1 emphasize the importance of certain aspects of democracy over others, which is evident in the crossing connective lines that mark the ‘social’ and ‘political’ ideals groups. The group labeled ‘social ideals’ (20%) emphasizes the importance of social rights elements, such as reducing income level differences and protecting citizens against poverty. Alternatively, the ‘political ideals’ group (16%) emphasizes Marshall’s classic political rights such as media’s freedom to criticize the government and the free and fair conduct of elections.

[Figure 1 about here]

As noted, the measurement equivalence tests indicate that these groups can be validly compared across societies, and Table 2 depicts the prevalence of these groups across the countries included in the ESS 2012. When we compare the distribution of citizens who adhere to these distinctive ideals we find marked differences between countries, indicating sufficient variance to test whether these distinctive democratic ideals may have an impact on citizens’ political behaviour.

[Table 2 about here]

## *2. Political participation (dependent variable)*

Building on the political participation literature, we draw on data that cover institutionalized and non-institutionalized acts of political participation (Copeland 2014; Oser 2017; Quaranta 2013; Sloam 2016; Stolle & Hooghe 2011; Vráblíková 2014). In the European Social Survey in 2012, the questionnaire asks whether respondents participated in various forms of participation in the last 12 months. The political acts surveyed, listed in Table 3, include electoral-oriented activities such as working in a political party, as well as non-institutionalized activities such as boycotting products for political reasons.

The mean values in Table 3 show that the prevalence of participation in these political activities ranges from the most prevalent act of signing a petition (.19) to the least prevalent act of working in a political party or action group (.04). As is customary for these kinds of participation indicators the correlation matrix indicates that the items are not particularly highly correlated, ranging from a high correlation of .33 (between signed petition and boycott) to a low of 0.10 (party work and boycott).

[Table 3 about here]

The rotated factor analysis results documented in Table 3 suggest a separate factor for institutionalized participation (party work, contact a politician, and organizational work) versus a non-institutionalized participation index (signed a petition, boycotted a

product, and demonstrated). The only item that does not clearly load on a single factor, wearing a badge or sticker, is excluded from the participation indices.

Analysis of the bivariate relationship between the democratic ideals and the three participation measures suggests significant differences between groups (overall participation,  $F=331.57$ ,  $p<0.000$ ; institutionalized participation,  $F=171.95$ ,  $p<0.000$ ; non-institutionalized participation,  $F=314.93$ ,  $p<0.000$ ). Table 4 displays mean values for participation measures by democratic ideals groups, and the results show that the political rights group consistently scores highest on participation levels of all kinds. Even in these bivariate relationships, however, the results suggest that the participation levels of the social rights group vary depending on what kind of participation is measured. For non-institutionalized participation the social rights group has fairly high participation levels, but for institutionalized participation, the social rights group has a low score that is lower than the overall mean for all respondents. The following section investigates these relationships further in a series of multilevel logistic regressions with the inclusion of appropriate individual-level and country-level controls.

[Table 4 about here]

### *3. Multilevel regression analyses*

In order to assess whether the democratic ideals identified in the LCA are related to political participation patterns, we conduct a series of multivariate analyses. As the data are hierarchically structured with individual respondents nested in countries, multi-level regression is the appropriate technique for conducting the multivariate analyses (Gelman and Hill 2007). In line with our theoretical expectations, we focus mainly on the difference

between the 'political rights' and the 'social rights' group. Our first set of analyses includes all five democratic ideals groups that were identified in the LCA with the 'medium ideal' as the reference group.<sup>1</sup> We then proceed to conduct parallel analyses that compare only the 'political rights' and 'social rights' groups to test whether a significant difference can be discerned in the political behaviour of those who hold these two different democratic ideals.

In the regression analyses we analyze binary dependent variables, coded 1 for respondents who participated in any of the political acts included in the scale, and 0 for respondents who did not. This coding allows the consistent, valid use of these items across all models as dependent variables in multilevel logit regression analyses (Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal 2012). As the dependent variable of political participation additive indices is a count outcome, a negative binomial regression model is an ideal approach when the data allow.<sup>2</sup> However, since the sum scales of the political participation items are highly skewed with a large standard deviation, the negative binomial regression models successfully converge only when all five democratic ideals groups are included, but do not converge when we proceed to test the comparison of only the social rights and political rights groups. We therefore include parallel tables in the appendix for all findings for which the negative binomial regression results can be obtained, and these findings show that the analyses using a negative binomial specification are substantively indistinguishable from the multilevel logistic regression models.

Individual-level controls include those commonly used in the study of participation, including socio-demographic variables of age, sex, education, and income, and attitudinal measures of left-right ideological placement and satisfaction with democracy (Marien,



Hooghe & Quintelier 2010; Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995). Country-level controls include democratic stability, as measured by the Polity IV dataset (Marshall, Gurr & Jaggers 2013). The Gini index is used as a measure of inequality based on income survey data from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS 2015) that is available for 21 countries in the present study.<sup>3</sup> The measure of Good Governance is based on World Bank data. GDP per capita is also included as a control variable, since we expect participation levels to be higher in more affluent societies. Finally, a control for (post-)authoritarian country context is included.<sup>4</sup> In the first regression analysis (Table 5) we introduce each of these country-level variables one by one due to data limits of multicollinearity and the limited number of country-level observations. We then present the findings of a model that includes a linear combination of the country-level variables to create an overall country-level composite variable (Model VII). As the results of all of these models are substantively indistinguishable in all regression analyses for this study, in subsequent regressions analyses reported in the article we present findings based on models that include only the more parsimonious composite variable (see appendix for descriptive statistics and additional coding information).

The first test uses the overall political participation measure as a dependent variable (Table 5) and the findings show that both the social rights and political rights groups are more active than the 'medium' reference group. The group with low ideals seems least inclined to take part in political participation, while the high ideals group is active but with lower scores than the political rights group. In comparison to the bivariate relationships presented above, the fully specified regression models indicate that a social rights democratic ideal has a positive impact on political participation, but that the effect is

relatively small. The individual level and country level findings for additional control variables generally confirm prior findings in the field. It is noteworthy that even when country-level controls are included in the model, all of the relevant controls have significant effects in the expected directions, but the controls do not eliminate the continued importance of the various democratic ideals for predicting overall participation.

In relation to our hypotheses, these findings lend support to our first hypothesis (H1) by showing that citizens who express a clearly defined ‘political rights’ or ‘social rights’ ideals are indeed more politically engaged in all activities in comparison to the groups that lack a strongly felt democratic ideal. Those who have a clear conception of their democratic ideal are also more engaged in various forms of political behaviour.

We proceed from these findings on overall participation (Table 5) to focus on institutionalized and non-institutionalized participation as distinct dependent variables (Figure 2). While the regression findings from Table 5 have shown that the social ideals group has a relatively high level of overall political participation in comparison to the reference group, the predicted values documented in Figure 2 shows that the social rights group engages differently in institutionalized versus non-institutionalized activities (see appendix for full regression tables output for logistic and negative binomial specifications). The findings in Figure 2 show that the social rights group is not particularly active in institutionalized acts of participation, although it is relatively active in non-institutionalized forms of participation.

Moreover, the predicted values plots show a substantively sizeable effect of democratic ideals on political participation patterns in comparison to standard individual level and country controls. For the political rights ideal, the only variable that has a larger

effect on either type of political participation is the highest level of education, which is well documented as having among the most consistent, sizeable effects on political engagement in decades of political science research (Verba 2003; Persson 2015). While the social rights ideal's effect on institutionalized participation is marginally significant and substantively small, its effect size for non-institutionalized participation exceeds the effect size of standard control variables of age, sex and left-right political orientation.

To summarize the findings: while the political rights group is active in both types of participation, the social rights group specializes in non-institutionalized participation while scoring lower on institutionalized forms of political participation.

[Figure 2 about here]

The findings thus far compare the political participation patterns of the social and the political rights groups with those of all other democratic ideals groups. Following our interest to determine whether there are significant differences between the social rights and the political rights group, we proceed to narrow the analytical focus to these two groups only. We follow the same order, first comparing scores for political participation in general, followed by the analysis for institutionalized and non-institutionalized participation. Controlling for the same battery of individual-level and country-level determinants of political participation, we find that those who adhere to a political rights democratic vision are significantly more active than the social rights group. The full regression tables for these findings are documented in the appendix, and Figure 3 presents in a concise manner the predicted values of the multi-level logistic regression for the social rights and political rights ideals on the different measures of political participation.

[Figure 3 about here]

Figure 3 shows that for all measures of political participation, we observe a significant and similar gap between the political rights and the social rights group. In relation to our hypotheses, these findings support the hypothesis that citizens who hold a political rights democratic ideal will be more politically active in institutionalized participation in comparison to those who hold a social rights ideal (H2). However, these findings do not support our final hypothesis that those who hold a social rights ideal will be more politically active in non-institutionalized participation in comparison to the political rights group (H3). Apparently, the citizens that are inherently motivated by a concern about poverty and inequality do not convert this concern into forms of political action, even if we apply a very broad definition of various forms of participation. The predicted values plotted in the figure show that the gap between the political rights and social rights group in relation to their political behaviour is meaningful in size, even after taking into account a large battery of control variables. The results are clear: the group that focuses on political rights is the most active one, no matter the specific form of participation being investigated. Even in times of economic crisis, a concern about social rights does not seem to be the most powerful driving force for political engagement.

## **Discussion**

In this study we have taken advantage of new data on the relationship between citizens' conceptions of ideal democracy and their patterns of political participation. A number of studies on the protest reaction to austerity measures in Europe conjure images of masses of concerned citizens taking to the street to express their democratic ideals through political action (Rüdiger & Karyotis 2014). The findings reported in the present study, however, indicate that the political participation of citizens who care deeply about social citizenship

rights is muted in comparison to those who give priority to political rights. Contrary to our expectations, therefore, an adherence to a social concept of democracy does not seem to be a strong mobilizing tool. This finding might help us to explain why, in contrast to some expectations, concern about inequality and austerity politics has not led to enduring forms of protest or other forms of participation in Europe. Part of the answer to this question might lie in the fact that the social rights group simply is not highly active in all forms of political participation. Indeed, our findings show that concern about social rights is not the main driving force for political engagement.

Three main findings from the research advance the current understanding of the relationship between political attitudes and political behaviour. First, even though Europeans express very high average levels of support for a wide variety of elements of democracy, a person-centered approach shows that distinct concepts of democracy can be identified among contemporary Europeans. We find a plurality that considers all elements of democracy to be of similar levels of importance, but we also find those who place particular emphasis on a social or political rights conception of democracy as introduced in the work of T.H. Marshall. Second, it is clear that these concepts of democracy are predictive of distinctly different patterns of political behaviour, even when controlling for a variety of individual and country-level determinants that have been widely studied in the literature. The findings show that our interest in citizens' democratic ideals has implications beyond the realm of normative theory, as these democratic ideals clearly have real life consequences for the way citizens interact with their political system. Finally, the findings show that the two most distinctive democratic ideals of political rights and social rights have different effects on political participation. While those who emphasize political rights

are highly engaged in all kinds of political activities, the findings show that the social rights supporters tend to be less active. Although the social rights group adheres to a democratic ideal that holds political institutions responsible for ensuring lower levels of inequality, apparently they are less inclined to participate to put pressure on the political decision-makers in order to advance this ideal.

The current analysis does not allow us to explain why we find this relation between an emphasis on social rights and lower levels of political participation. As it has been noted that governments' responsiveness to citizens' electoral participation often declines in a period of austerity (Streeck and Schafer 2013), the results raise the question of the direction of causality in the relationship between democratic ideals and political behaviour. Since the current study is based on a cross-sectional survey fielded in 2012 that included a uniquely comprehensive battery of questions on democratic ideals, the requisite longitudinal data do not exist to determine the direction of the causal mechanism. We also have to take into account the possibility that the causal effect might flow in the direction from participation to attitudes, as experiences with political participation can also have an effect on citizens' attitudes and expectations.

This unresolved question of causal mechanisms poses something of a challenge for the broader debate on democratic legitimacy. On the one hand it is clear that rising levels of inequality might have an effect on the way citizens view their political system. The social rights concept essentially means that a substantial part of a country's population places emphasis on the importance of protecting its citizens against poverty and social exclusion. If the democratic system fails to provide this social and economic protection, it does not live up to normative standards, which should have a negative effect on democratic

legitimacy. Simultaneously, however, the findings of the current study show that the social rights democratic ideal is less easily translated into protest and political participation of all types.

In contrast, if the political rights group is not satisfied with the political system's ability to live up to their democratic ideal, (for example, the democratic character of the elections in their country), a likely outcome is that they will protest or participate in other forms of political behaviour to get their voice heard. For those who feel left out because their government does not protect them against the risk of poverty or inequality, this manner to express their concern is less likely. The findings of the present study raise a puzzle, since non-institutionalized participation is often considered to be a more challenging and resource-intensive form of behaviour. An important topic for future investigation is therefore whether citizens who highly value social citizenship rights and simultaneously refrain from institutionalized participation are doing so due to a lack of belief in the efficacy or legitimacy of the political system to realize their democratic ideals. What does remain clear, however, is that the mismatch between citizens' expectations on social rights, and the input the political system receives on this issue, might pose a structural problem for the legitimacy of democratic governance.

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Table 1. Mean scores on ‘democratic ideals’ battery in 29 European countries

<b>Description</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Mean</b>
1. The courts treat everyone the same	courts fair	9.23
2. The government explains its decisions to voters	govt expl.	8.89
3. National elections are free and fair	fair elec.	8.85
4. The government protects all citizens against poverty	poverty	8.74
5. The media provide citizens with reliable information to judge the govt.	media info.	8.73
6. Governing parties are punished in elections when they have done a bad job	party acc.	8.46
7. The rights of minority groups are protected	minority	8.27
8. The government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels	income eq.	8.26
9. Opposition parties are free to criticise the government	opposition	8.18
10. The media are free to criticise the government	free media	8.06
11. Different political parties offer clear alternatives to one another	party alter.	7.95

Notes: European Social Survey, 29 countries (n=48,805); ESS 2012 v2.3. Appropriate weights applied: population size weight ('pweight') and post-stratification weights that account for design weight as well as sampling error and non-response error ('pspwght', newly available in v2.3 of the ESS 2012 data). Prefatory survey question: ‘Using this card, please tell me how important you think it is for democracy in general that...’. Responses coded on a 0 to 10 scale where 0 indicates ‘not at all important’ and 10 indicates ‘extremely important’.

Table 2. Democratic ideals, distribution of citizens across countries into five ideals

	Social	Political	High	Medium	Low	Total n
Albania	31.59	7.31	46.48	13.49	1.13	1,149
Belgium	18.47	15.69	12.75	39.95	13.13	1,835
Bulgaria	20.42	18.53	39.29	17.76	4.01	2,072
Switzerland	19.66	21.85	12.66	38.97	6.86	1,414
Cyprus	18.05	13.71	40.93	25.58	1.74	1,036
Czech Republic	18.93	17.68	18.11	28.47	16.81	1,844
Germany	20.63	28.84	16.76	29.35	4.42	2,899
Denmark	16.43	31.66	16.82	32.29	2.80	1,570
Estonia	16.96	14.73	28.16	29.36	10.80	2,241
Spain	29.71	6.80	32.05	25.42	6.02	1,794
Finland	19.41	16.86	11.74	42.61	9.38	2,112
France	19.57	14.15	18.38	38.36	9.55	1,937
United Kingdom	20.84	12.43	20.21	34.52	12.00	2,083
Hungary	15.53	11.64	37.91	21.70	13.22	1,899
Ireland	15.36	11.65	22.03	34.64	16.32	2,506
Israel	19.96	16.34	23.23	34.64	5.83	2,350
Iceland	14.86	29.16	24.48	27.92	3.58	727
Italy	29.62	11.37	25.90	29.07	4.04	915
Lithuania	17.31	10.98	21.92	31.61	18.19	1,930
Netherlands	12.85	18.34	10.36	44.43	14.02	1,805
Norway	17.62	27.19	17.81	33.79	3.59	1,589
Poland	26.82	17.02	26.82	25.48	3.86	1,786
Portugal	17.92	4.01	30.82	25.13	22.12	2,093
Russian Federation	21.32	12.75	27.21	23.65	15.08	2,275
Sweden	13.53	31.17	25.14	26.72	3.44	1,774
Slovenia	33.96	11.18	21.84	28.12	4.90	1,163
Slovakia	15.49	12.23	16.16	35.52	20.59	1,782
Ukraine	22.26	10.88	32.13	27.12	7.62	1,995
Kosovo	21.93	6.35	37.95	23.24	10.53	1,149
TOTAL	19.82	15.98	24.04	30.36	9.80	51,724

Source: ESS 2012. Notes: Entries are latent class analysis findings for percentage distribution of population in each country among the five latent classes. Row = 100 % in every country.



Table 3. Political participation acts, dimensionality

Political act	Mean	Factor 1 Institutionalized	Factor 2 Non-institutionalized
Worked in a political party or action group	0.036	<b>0.786</b>	0.000
Contacted a politician, government or local official	0.108	<b>0.671</b>	0.125
Worked in another organization or association	0.124	<b>0.538</b>	0.335
Signed a petition	0.194	0.183	<b>0.744</b>
Boycotted certain products	0.151	-0.027	<b>0.758</b>
Taken part in a lawful public demonstration	0.079	0.225	<b>0.534</b>
Work or displayed a campaign badge/sticker	0.066	0.497	0.372

Source: European Social Survey 2012 (n=52,606). Factor analysis results based on exploratory principle components factor analysis with a varimax rotation. Substantively similar results obtain with a promax rotation. Eigenvalues for the rotated factors are 1.69 for Factor 1, and 1.68 for Factor 2.

Table 4. Participation levels of democratic ideals groups

	<i>Overall participation</i>		<i>Institutionalized participation</i>		<i>Non-institutionalized participation</i>	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
Political rights group	0.534	0.499	0.316	0.465	0.427	0.495
Social rights group	0.386	0.487	0.206	0.405	0.300	0.458
High ideals group	0.385	0.487	0.216	0.412	0.303	0.458
Medium ideals group	0.378	0.485	0.217	0.412	0.276	0.447
Low ideals group	0.227	0.419	0.133	0.339	0.151	0.358
All respondents	0.380	0.485	0.216	0.411	0.289	0.454

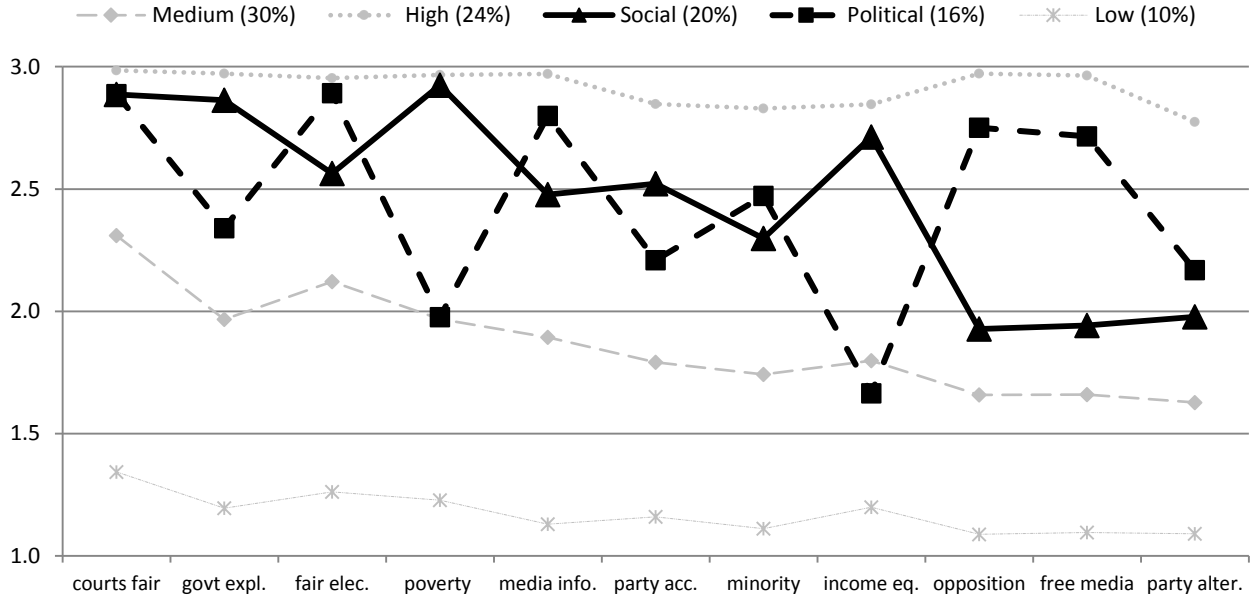
Source: ESS 2012 (n=54,520).

Table 5. Explaining overall political participation

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V	Model VI	Model VII
<i>Individual-level variables</i>							
<b>Democratic ideals</b> (ref: Medium ideals)							
Low ideals	-0.573*** (0.041)	-0.418*** (0.043)	-0.467*** (0.046)	-0.419*** (0.043)	-0.419*** (0.043)	-0.419*** (0.043)	-0.418*** (0.043)
High ideals	0.190*** (0.028)	0.327*** (0.031)	0.290*** (0.034)	0.330*** (0.031)	0.330*** (0.031)	0.330*** (0.031)	0.328*** (0.031)
Political rights	0.445*** (0.030)	0.454*** (0.033)	0.504*** (0.035)	0.455*** (0.033)	0.455*** (0.033)	0.455*** (0.033)	0.454*** (0.033)
Social rights	0.179*** (0.029)	0.202*** (0.031)	0.209*** (0.034)	0.204*** (0.031)	0.204*** (0.031)	0.204*** (0.031)	0.203*** (0.031)
<b>Age</b>	-0.001* (0.001)	-0.001* (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001* (0.001)	-0.001* (0.001)	-0.001* (0.001)	-0.001* (0.001)
<b>Sex</b> (1=female)	-0.101*** (0.020)	-0.072** (0.022)	0.005 (0.024)	-0.075*** (0.022)	-0.075*** (0.022)	-0.075*** (0.022)	-0.072** (0.022)
<b>Education</b> (ref: Low)							
Medium	0.245*** (0.027)	0.449*** (0.030)	0.410*** (0.033)	0.445*** (0.030)	0.444*** (0.030)	0.444*** (0.030)	0.448*** (0.030)
High	0.686*** (0.027)	1.016*** (0.031)	0.970*** (0.033)	1.012*** (0.030)	1.012*** (0.030)	1.011*** (0.030)	1.016*** (0.031)
<b>Left-right</b>	-0.057*** (0.004)	-0.030*** (0.005)	-0.042*** (0.005)	-0.030*** (0.005)	-0.030*** (0.005)	-0.030*** (0.005)	-0.030*** (0.005)
<b>Income feeling</b> (ref: very difficult)							
Difficult	0.233*** (0.043)	0.115* (0.047)	0.077 (0.058)	0.110* (0.047)	0.110* (0.047)	0.110* (0.047)	0.115* (0.047)
Coping	0.580*** (0.040)	0.172*** (0.045)	0.138** (0.054)	0.167*** (0.044)	0.167*** (0.044)	0.168*** (0.044)	0.171*** (0.045)
Living comfortably	1.024*** (0.043)	0.307*** (0.049)	0.265*** (0.057)	0.299*** (0.048)	0.298*** (0.048)	0.300*** (0.048)	0.306*** (0.049)
<b>Satisfaction democracy</b>	0.055*** (0.004)	-0.021*** (0.005)	-0.022*** (0.006)	-0.021*** (0.005)	-0.021*** (0.005)	-0.021*** (0.005)	-0.021*** (0.005)
<i>Country-level variables</i>							
<b>Established democracy</b>		0.017*** (0.003)					
<b>Gini</b>			-10.090* (4.036)				
<b>Good governance</b> (index)				0.028*** (0.006)			
<b>GDP/cap</b> (1000 USD)					0.048*** (0.009)		
<b>(Post-)authoritarian</b>						-1.255*** (0.231)	
<b>Country-level composite variable</b>							0.334*** (0.056)
Constant	-1.226*** (0.060)	-1.803*** (0.204)	2.380* (1.182)	-3.057*** (0.511)	-2.424*** (0.318)	-0.295 (0.173)	-0.975*** (0.121)
Random intercept		0.342*** (0.093)	0.519** (0.162)	0.463*** (0.123)	0.393*** (0.105)	0.381*** (0.101)	0.292*** (0.079)
Observations	43739	43081	34769	43739	43739	43739	43081

Notes: ESS 2012 in 29 countries. Multi-level logistic regression. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

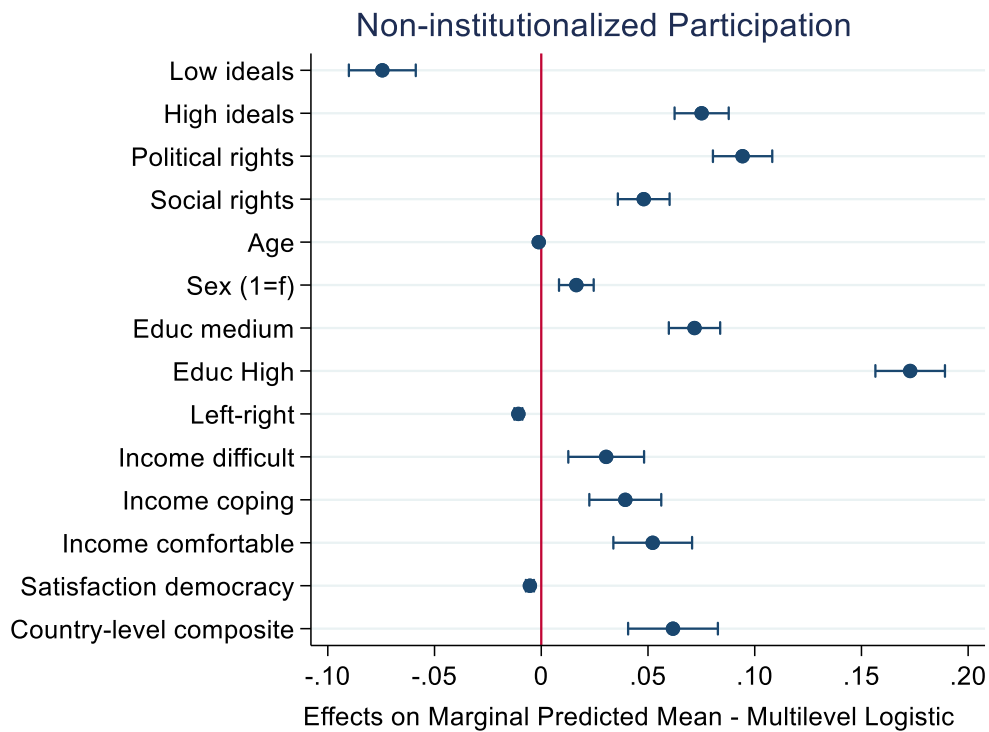
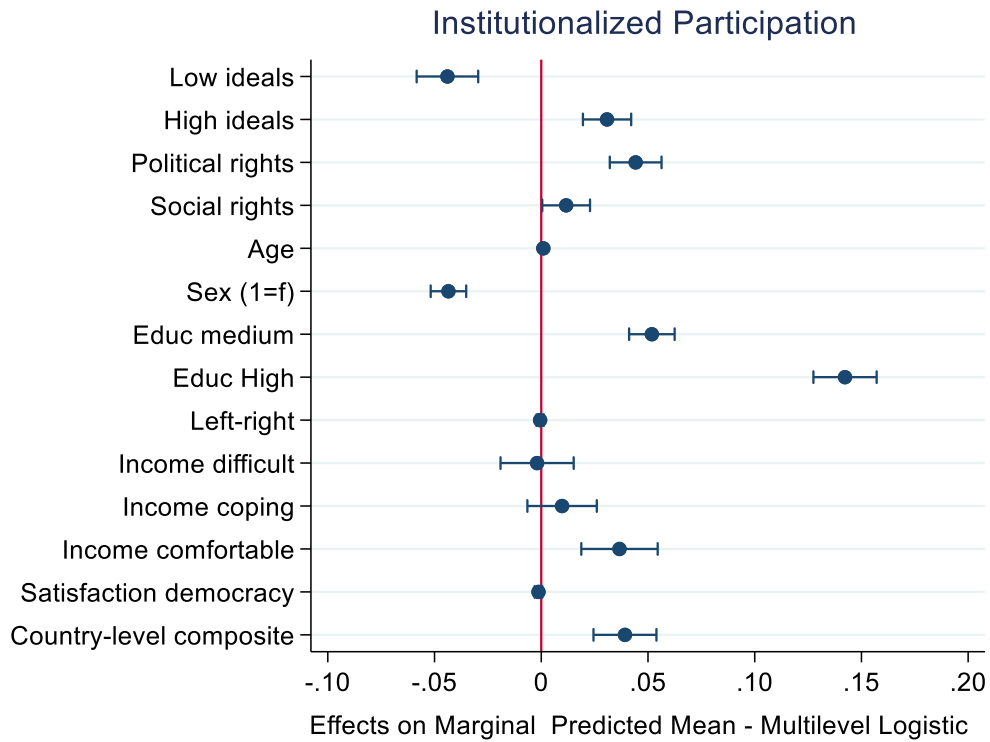
Figure 1. Democratic ideals held by five groups of citizens



Source: European Social Survey, 2012 (n=51,724).

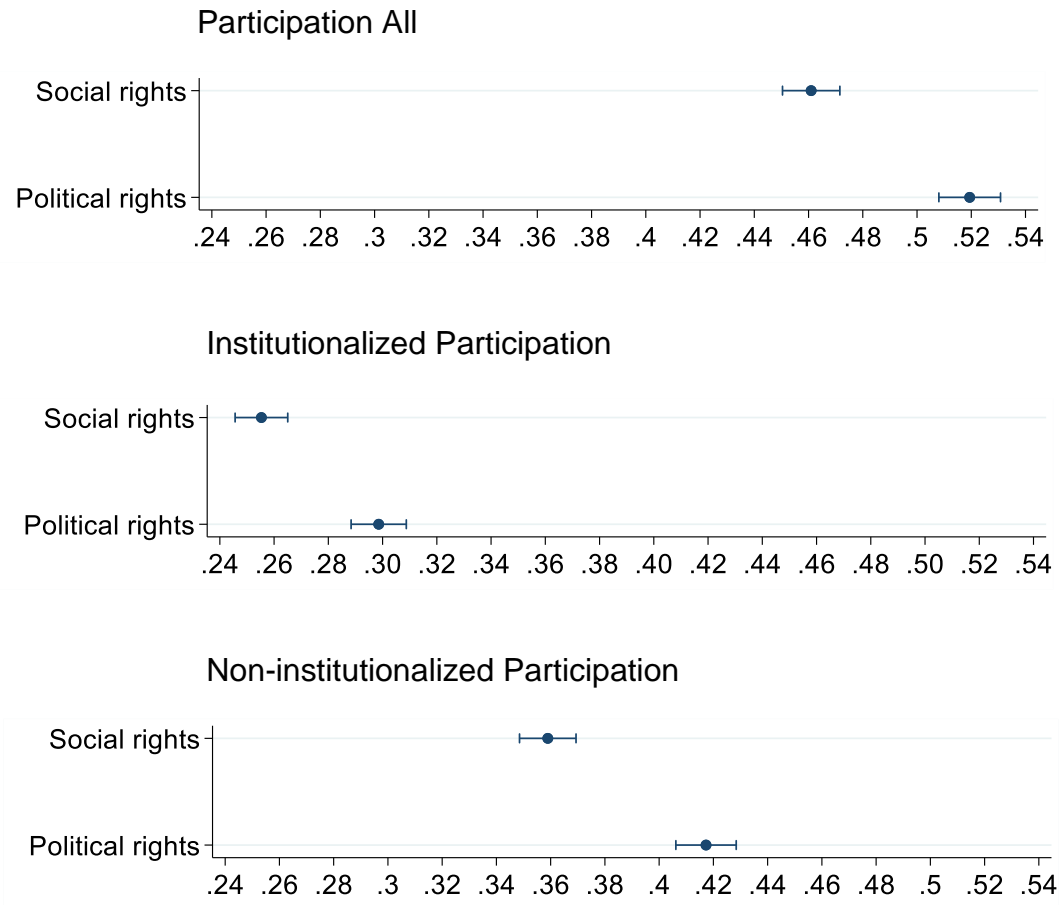
Notes: Latent class analysis conditional probabilities for optimal partial equivalence model that includes country covariate and applies design weights. Y-axis: conditional probabilities that the indicator is important for democracy. Findings based on 3-point coding of the original 11-category democratic ideal items: 0-7 recoded as 1; 8-9 recoded as 2; 10 recoded as 3. For documentation of alternate coding that yielded similar results see appendix Section III for discussion of model selection, measurement equivalence tests and robustness tests.

Figure 2. Institutionalized and non-institutionalized participation, predicted values



Note: see appendix for related regression tables for multilevel logistic specification, as well as negative binomial specification and marginal effects plots.

Figure 3. Social and political groups compared for all types of participation



Notes: x-axis measures the predicted values for the social and political democratic ideals groups on the different measures of political participation, based on regressions with the full battery of controls (see appendix for additional documentation).

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> As a robustness test to our findings, in an alternate formulation of the reference group we combined the three democratic ideals groups that make no distinction between the importance level of the democratic ideals indicators (the ‘low’, ‘medium’ and ‘high’ democratic ideals groups) into a single reference variable category. There are no substantive differences between the findings using this alternate reference group in comparison to those presented in the article.

<sup>2</sup> Although a viable alternative count model specification to the negative binomial is the Poisson model, a likelihood ratio test that compares the fit of these two regression models for our data shows a significant improvement of a negative binomial model compared to a Poisson model.

<sup>3</sup> The eight countries in the ESS 2012 that lack Gini coefficients in the LIS study are Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Iceland, Lithuania, Portugal, Ukraine and Kosovo.

<sup>4</sup> The countries in the data that qualify as ‘(post-)authoritarian’ include Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Spain, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Kosovo. We also ran all models with a ‘post-communist’ control, which excluded from the above list Spain and Portugal. As there were no significant differences in the use of these different country-level controls, we report on the authoritarian control only.