The Effectiveness of Different Forms of Political Participation
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Abstract

In an era marked by concerns about democratic legitimacy, the question of whether citizens' political actions are effective in achieving intended outcomes is of utmost importance. Although a core idea in democratic theory is that democratic governance should be responsive to the will of the people, most empirical research on this topic has focused on the *opinion*-representation connection, with less focus on the *participation*-representation connection. This chapter reviews three key areas of research that inform this topic, namely the categorizations used to distinguish between different *forms of participation*, including institutionalized and non-institutionalized participation; recent empirical studies that investigate the *participation-representation* connection; and the main attitudinal measure related to effectiveness of *political efficacy*. The concluding section includes a brief analysis of cross-national data on these topics from the European Social Survey with a focus on providing insights into the challenges and opportunities for advancing future research.

Keywords: effectiveness; political participation; political efficacy; institutionalized participation; non-institutionalized participation; representation

1. Introduction

Concerns about democratic legitimacy have recently come to the forefront of public and political discourse, raising the question of whether citizens' political actions can achieve intended outcomes. Two opposing trends documented in recent research are especially notable: stagnating or decreasing electoral-oriented participation (Blais and Rubenson 2013; Scarrow et al. 2017) and increasing participation beyond the electoral realm (Dalton 2015; Gibson and Catijoch 2013; Grasso 2016; Theocharis and van Deth 2018; Vráblíková 2016). While the prevalence and sociodemographic correlates of different forms of participation are among the most-studied topics in political science (e.g., Marien et al. 2010; Oser 2017; Oser et al. 2013; Schlozman et al. 2018; Schradie 2018), there is less research on the effectiveness of these forms of participation.

A core idea in democratic theory is that democratic governance should be responsive to the will of the people (Dahl 1961; Mill [1861] 1962; Pitkin 1967). Indeed, the importance of a democracy's responsiveness to public preferences was articulated in stark terms in Key's (1961: 7) statement that "[u]nless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy, all the talk about democracy is nonsense." Determining whether a given democratic government meets Key's expectation that mass views shape policy requires answering two critical questions: how precisely the will of the people is expressed, and how decisionmakers respond to messages on those mass views. Most empirical research on this topic has focused on the connection between public opinion and representation, and this large body of research has firmly established that public opinion is relevant to governance in advanced democracies (Canes-Wrone 2015; Miller and Stokes 1963; Soroka and Wlezien 2010).

In contrast to the extensive literature on the connection between *opinion* and representation, fewer studies have focused on the connection between *political participation* and

representation, and the empirical findings are mixed. The political act of voting has been the focus of most research on the connection between political behavior and representation, as summarized in Powell's (2004: 92) classic model of the "Chain of Responsiveness". A variety of empirical analyses based on U.S. and cross-national data have found a connection between voting and representation (Dassonneville et al. 2021; Griffin and Newman 2005; Hooghe et al. 2019; Peters and Ensink 2015). Although recent research has challenged the generalizable claim that elections and voting are mechanisms that have a causal effect of producing responsive government (Achen and Bartels 2016), an analysis focusing on issue voting shows clear responsiveness to voters' issue preferences (Guntermann and Persson, in press). While evidence indicates that both representatives and citizens consider voting to be the most effective form of political participation (Hooghe and Marien 2014), researchers have suggested that a potential causal mechanism that underlies the link between voting and responsiveness may be that individuals who vote are also more likely to participate in additional ways, and that these extra-electoral actions influence decision-makers (Bartels 2009; Griffin and Newman 2005; Schlozman et al. 2012: 117-146).

A related shift in research on the effectiveness of political participation is a move toward focusing on political activities beyond voting. Research on the phenomenon of non-electoral participation as the focus of inquiry is not new, as it was launched by the pioneering work of Verba and Nie (1972) and Barnes and Kaase (1979). Literature on this topic has grown in recent years, focusing primarily on the socio-demographic and attitudinal factors associated with different forms of participation (Dalton 2017; Grasso and Giugni 2019; Oser et al. 2014; Oser, in press). Yet, leading scholars on topics related to the effectiveness of participation have noted a surprising lack of systematic research tracing the linkages between different forms of non-

electoral participation with representational outcomes (Bartels 2009: 168; Campbell 2012: 347; Norris 2007: 644; Schlozman 2002: 461; van Deth 2020; Verba 2003: 666; Verba and Nie 1972: 2).

A representative critique of the lack of rigorous empirical research on the effectiveness of different forms of political participation was articulated by Bartels (2009: 168): "For the most part, scholars of participation have treated actual patterns of governmental responsiveness as someone else's problem." The relative dearth of empirical analysis by participation scholars on its effectiveness is not due to an oversight about the importance of the topic, as evident in the opening pages of Verba and Nie's (1972: 2) classic study of *Participation in America.* After discussing a series of important questions about participation, they noted: "And perhaps most important of all (and most difficult to answer), What are the consequences of citizen participation?". Yet the empirical and analytical challenges inherent in assessing this type of causal relationship were seemingly insurmountable at the time of Verba and Nie's (1972) study. Three decades later, Verba (2003: 666) reaffirmed both the importance and difficulty of exploring this topic, emphasizing the challenge of measuring whether political participation leads to the "ultimate payoff" of "getting results". Yet a series of recent studies have begun to fill this gap in the literature by implementing research designs that examine the impact of a variety of political behaviors on political outcomes, including cultural effects, ideological representation, and policy change (Amenta and Polletta 2019; De Bruycker and Rasmussen, in press; Esaiasson and Narud 2013; Gillion and Soule 2018; Giugni and Grasso 2019; Leighley and Oser 2018; Rasmussen et al., in press).

A main focus of research on the effectiveness of all forms of participation has been the topic of participatory inequalities, as "inequalities in activity are likely to be associated with

inequalities in democratic responsiveness" (Verba et al. 1995:14). The tension between two core democratic ideals shapes research on these topics: equality of representation versus responsiveness to the expressed will of the people. The theory-based tension between these democratic ideals of equality and responsiveness is relevant for all forms of participation, and this tension is particularly acute in relation to participation beyond the electoral arena. While the individual-level impact of voting is limited by the principle of "one person, one vote," individuals can engage in multiple forms of non-voting participation frequently, and empirical research has generally shown that those with socio-demographical advantages are particularly active in participation beyond the electoral arena (Grasso 2018; Schlozman et al. 2018). Indeed, scholars have analogized the potential for individuals' simultaneous engagement in multiple types of political acts to generate participatory inequality as raising the voice of motivated activists (Verba et al. 1995), or alternatively, as providing politically active individuals with additional tools in their toolbox (Harris and Gillion 2010). The remainder of this chapter builds on this introduction to further examine state-of-the-art scholarship on the effectiveness of the "voice" and "tools" of different forms of participation.

2. State of the art of the literature: The effectiveness of different forms of participation

An important starting point for investigating the effectiveness of various forms of participation is clarifying key terms. Empirically measuring the "effectiveness" of forms of political participation entails analyzing the connection between a specific form of participation and two main types of outcomes: representational outcomes and individual attitudes. This section first reviews the different *types of participation* discussed in the literature, including various categorizations over time. Second, recent research is reviewed that investigates how different forms of participation affect representational outcomes in studies of the *participation-*

representation connection. Finally, this section concludes by discussing the primary attitudinal measure related to effectiveness, namely *political efficacy*. The discussion focuses on highlighting theoretical and empirical contributions, which lays the foundation for the consideration of opportunities for future research in Section 3.

The categorization of different forms of participation

Defining theory-based categories of political participation, and systematically investigating the distinctive correlates of these categories, remains an ongoing theoretical and empirical challenge in scholarship on political participation. Beyond the classic electoral-oriented political act of voting, which has generally stagnated or declined in recent decades, comprehensive studies of political behavior have often identified two broad categories of political behavior (Albacete 2014; Brady 1999: 767; Grasso and Giugni 2019; Quaranta 2016; Vráblíková 2014, 2016). Institutionalized participation—also described as "electoral-oriented," "traditional," or "conventional"— encompasses party membership, and some studies also include electoral-adjacent activities, such as contacting public officials. Non-institutionalized participation—also described as "extra-electoral," "extra-institutionalized," or "unconventional"—is most clearly identified as elite-challenging activities such as protesting against institutions or individuals in power, and some studies also include activities that have emerged more recently, such as political consumerism and online activism. Recent research on the emergence and increased prevalence of online political participation often broadly characterizes these activities as non-institutionalized, while noting that specific online actions (e.g., contacting politicians online) may be electoral-oriented in nature (Anduiza et al. 2012; Gibson and Cantijoch 2013; Theocharis 2015; Vaccari 2013).

In addition to this dichotomous (institutionalized/non-institutionalized) categorization, several prominent studies have proposed and tested more fine-grained distinctions (e.g., Teorell et al. 2007; van Deth 2014; Verba et al. 1978). For example, Verba et al. (1978) identified four main modes of participation: voting, campaign activity, communal activity and particularized contacts. Teorell et al. (2007) proposed five modes including voting, party activity, consumer participation, contacting, and protest activity. Van Deth (2014) developed a four-part conceptual typology that includes political participation that occurs in the political sphere, targets the political sphere, targets community issues, and is non-political but politically motivated. Subsequent studies have validated the main principles of van Deth's (2014) four-part typology, with one study based on data from Germany suggesting an additional type is necessary to account for digitally networked participation (Theocharis and van Deth 2018), while another contemporaneous study based on data from Denmark finds no distinctive type is needed for online activities (Ohme et al. 2018). As noted in Hooghe's (2014) discussion of the difficulty of pinpointing a moving target, typologies of participation will likely continue to shift over time and across contexts along with inevitable changes in political participants' intended outcomes.

The participation-representation connection

One of the most prominent theoretical frameworks for investigating the effectiveness of political participation from the perspective of the participation-representation connection is Powell's (2004: 92) "Chain of Responsiveness", which focuses on the act of voting to draw links between four stages of democratic responsiveness: (Stage 1) Citizen preferences → (Stage 2) Citizens' voting behavior → (Stage 3) Selecting policymakers → (Stage 4) Public policies and outcomes. Powell's model represents the state of the art of scholarship on this topic, summarizing the extant

research on voting as the key political act that induces policy responsiveness, while also setting a broader research agenda that continues to produce new insights into electoral-oriented participation and responsiveness (e.g., Powell 2018; Rasmussen et al. 2019).

When the political behavior under investigation in the chain of responsiveness is not voting, but rather non-electoral forms of participation, Verba and Nie's (1972) observation of the difficulty of examining whether political participation yields responsiveness is even more salient, as the causal mechanisms that provide directional linkages between Stage 1 (Citizens' Preferences) and Stage 4 (Public Policies and Outcomes) are less clearly defined. Prior research has shown that the role of the media becomes even more prominent in conveying the will of the people as expressed in non-electoral participation to decision-makers (e.g., Walgrave and Vliegenthart 2012). Yet, there are no clearly identified parallels to the arrows in Powell's (2004) model for voting that serve as clear, consistent causal links that connect non-institutionalized participation to policy outcomes. Thus, compared to research on voting, research on the linkages between non-electoral participation and representational outcomes has more variance in research designs' focus on the type of participation investigated, the mechanisms by which this participation may have an impact, and the type of representational outcomes that different forms of participation aim to achieve.

An important line of research on the participation-representation connection entails case studies in the social movement literature that use process-tracing and historical institutional methods (e.g., Ganz 2000, 2009; McAdam 2017; Shoshan 2018; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). While this body of research has identified a number of cases in which specific forms of participation seem to be effective at achieving the goals of participants, a common critique of this work is that researchers often investigate salient and successful cases (Amenta et al. 2018).

This "selection on the dependent variable" (i.e., effectiveness) raises concerns about the generalizability of the findings (Burstein 2014; Campbell 2012; McAdam and Schaffer Boudet 2012). Prominent scholars in the field such as Marco Giugni (2009) have proposed that movements do not generally matter much, but they can have an impact if they have allies within the institutional arena and/or favorable public opinion, and this argument is supported by recent research of Han, McKenna and Oyakawa (2021). A related area of research contributes to knowledge about how social movements may have an impact by tracing how leaders build memberships, strategic capacity, and narratives about political change that influence social and political outcomes (Ganz and McKenna 2018; Han et al. 2011; Meyer 2021; Skocpol et al. 2000; Skocpol and Oser 2004).

Despite recognition of the limited capacity of social movements to achieve their intended outcomes, Amenta et al. (2018: 454) identified main factors hypothesized to increase movement impact, including the amount, forms, and strategy of mobilization, and a variety of conditions under which movements are more or less consequential. However, Amenta and his colleagues (2010: 295, 2018: 453) conclude that data barriers are too high for social movement research to systematically address global questions about which movements have been effective politically, cross-nationally, and over time with regard to various social and policy issues. Yet systematic conclusions have been offered in relation to maximalist campaigns (i.e. overthrowing a government) by Chenoweth (2020) regarding conditions for movement success, namely that the mobilization of a certain threshold of a population (3.5%) engaged in nonviolent protest consistently yields regime change (see also Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Chenoweth and Belgioioso 2019). An additional important shift in research on these topics is noted in McAdam and Tarrow's (2010) discussion of research on the connection between social movements and

election studies. While few earlier studies bridged the social movements literature and the electoral studies literature, scholars have begun to advance research designs that deeply examine both areas of contention (e.g., Gillion 2020; Schlozman 2015; Wasow 2020).

Informed by social movement studies, an important line of recent research on the effectiveness of political participation combines individual-level political participation measures with data on a variety of representational outcomes in the United States and cross-nationally. The shared approach of these studies is to systematically link these two types of data (individual-level participation and representational outcomes) in order to identify the nature of the connection between participation and representation. The two main representational outcome measures in this body of research include assessments of the similarity of ideology and policy preferences between citizens and leaders, as well as representation of citizens' preferences in actual policy outcome measures, such as budgetary expenditures and policy implementation. Combining data on political participation with these two measures of representational outcomes allows researchers to empirically investigate whether and how different forms of participation are associated with *congruence* (i.e., preference similarity) between citizens and representatives, and to assess the *responsiveness* of governmental actors to the policy preferences of those who are politically active in various ways (Wlezien 2004, 2017; Wlezien and Soroka 2016).

For example, in U.S.-focused research, Gillion's (2012) study showed the impact of minority protest between 1961 and 1991 on congressional roll call votes; and Leighley and Oser (2018) showed that participation beyond voting enhanced congruence in 2012 on the highly partisan and salient policy issue of health care reform. Examples of recent cross-national findings on this topic include Htun and Weldon's (2012) conclusion that women's mobilization in autonomous social movements has impacted policies aimed at combatting violence against

women in 70 countries over four decades; Hooghe and Oser's (2016) assessment that trade union membership has a positive effect on social expenditure in OECD countries between 1980 and 2010; and Rasmussen and Reher's (2019) demonstration that civil society engagement has strengthened the relationship between public opinion and public policy across 20 policy issues in 30 European countries. These studies represent a growing body of literature that integrates individual-level data on political participation with various measures of representational outcomes to advance knowledge about whether, when and how different forms of participation may effectively achieve intended outcomes (Ansolabehere and Kuriwaki, in press; Esaiasson and Wlezien 2017; Wasow 2020).

Political efficacy

A final key question for assessing the effectiveness of different forms of participation relates to the attitudes of political participants, and particularly the key political attitude of political efficacy. Early research investigated this topic in relation to voting, such as Fiorina's (1976) classic examination of whether voting decisions are motivated by voters' *instrumental* intentions to achieve specific policy-related outcomes, or their *expressive* intentions to state their views. Subsequent research on participation beyond the electoral arena indicates that a primary motivation is instrumental interest in policy change (e.g., Giugni 2007), though more recent research on extra-institutionalized and creative participation suggests that expressive intentions may have gained importance in recent years (e.g., Theocharis and de Moor, in press). Taken together, this research indicates that individuals participate politically not only to express their views, but also to achieve instrumental outcomes.

Recent data on the effectiveness of mass protest campaigns clarifies the importance of understanding not only levels of distinctive types of participation and related political outcomes, but also the importance of assessing whether participants feel that they are efficacious in achieving their desired outcomes. Data on the prevalence and success rates of violent versus non-violent mass campaigns since the 1930s indicate that nonviolent protest has become much more common in recent years (Chenoweth 2020: 71), but success rates have fluctuated over time, with a relative decline in the success rates of both nonviolent and violent maximalist campaigns since the early 2000s (Chenoweth 2020: 75). Chenoweth offers a number of explanations for why protest may have increased, including the possibility that more people see protest as a legitimate and successful method; as well as the possibilities that people have new motivations and tools to resist due to authoritarian governments and new information technology. This research clarifies that in order to understand long-term trends in participation and representation, it is important to also assess citizens' attitudinal assessment of whether they can influence the political process.

As the literature has tended to presume that political participants are motivated primarily by instrumental intentions, the key attitudinal measure in the study of the effectiveness of political participation has been political efficacy, dating back to Campbell et al.'s (1954) study of how voters make decisions. Contemporary research continues to cite Campbell et al.'s (1954: 187) classic definition of political efficacy: "the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process". By the 1990s, this line of research had witnessed an important theoretical advance when scholars noted the distinction between internal and external political efficacy. This distinction was crystallized in Niemi et al.'s (1991: 84-85) definitions of *internal efficacy*, meaning "beliefs about one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics," and *external efficacy*, meaning "beliefs about the

responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens' demands". The most

commonly cited studies on political efficacy have focused on the United States and analyze the

measures from the American National Election Studies (ANES), including its time series data on

political efficacy.

To illustrate trends in political efficacy, Figure 1 presents key indicators from the ANES

data between 1952 and 2016. Figure 1a plots the indicator most often interpreted as measuring

internal efficacy, and an index of *external efficacy* is plotted in Figure 1b. Average scores on

both types of efficacy have decreased since 1952 when the questions were first asked, but the

decline in the measure of external efficacy is notably steeper. The conventional wisdom is that

political efficacy has declined in advanced democracies in general, though recent studies have

noted that adequately investigating this topic entails significant theoretical and methodological

complexity (e.g., Chamberlain 2012; Esaiasson et al. 2015).

[Figure 1 about here]

Theoretical framework for researching the effectiveness of non-institutionalized participation

Building on this review of the state of the art of the literature of three key topics of the study of

the effectiveness of political participation (types of participation, the participation-representation

connection, and political efficacy), it is clear that an updated theoretical framework is needed

regarding the chain of responsiveness when the type of political act under consideration is non-

institutionalized participation. To consider how citizens' non-institutionalized participation may

integrate with the discrete stages and linkages of democratic responsiveness, Figure 2 adapts

Powell's (2004: 92) linear model of the "Chain of Responsiveness" to include non-voting

participation. The conceptual model in Figure 2 notes that non-institutionalized participation

(Stage 2a), along with citizens' voting behavior (Stage 2), may augment the links between citizens' preferences (Stage 1) and the selection of policymakers and government formation (Stage 3). This linkage would occur if citizens' non-institutionalized participation acts primarily as a communication mechanism, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, whereby citizens' activity beyond the electoral arena impacts different aspects of government formation and stability. However, this expected positive linkage from non-electoral participation (Stage 2a) to selecting policy makers (Stage 3) is represented as a dashed line, as the precise causal mechanism of this linkage is less clear in comparison to the expected strong causal effect of voting behavior. The communication theory would predict a clearer direct positive linkage from citizens' non-electoral behavior to public policies and outcomes (Stage 4).

Literature on protest and political efficacy, however, clarifies that in contrast to a communication mechanism, an alternate mechanism may explain the relation between non-electoral participation and governing outcomes: grievance theory predicts that citizens' non-institutionalized participation is an expression of anti-system protest (Klandermans et al. 2008; Kurer et al. 2019). This means that government formation and public policies (Stages 3 and 4) may motivate anti-system protest of citizens who oppose governing policies, and therefore the preferences of non-institutionalized participators would differ meaningfully from governing policy positions. An important area of future research is therefore to gather data and specify research designs that allow researchers to clearly identify the causal arrows that link non-electoral participation to different stages of this chain of responsiveness.

3. New data, challenges, and opportunities

This section begins with a brief presentation of recent empirical data on over-time trends in

political participation and political efficacy from the European Social Survey that highlights both

challenges and opportunities for advancing future scholarship on the broad topic of the

effectiveness of political participation.[1] The ESS, which researchers consider one of the highest

quality cross-national social surveys (Kohler 2008), has been conducted every two years since

2002, and the resulting data are useful for understanding contemporary trends. The analysis in

this section is based on the ESS cumulative file available from 2002 (Round 1) through 2016

(Round 8) (European Social Survey 2018a; 2018b) for all 15 countries that are included in every

year of the ESS time series (Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary,

Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland).

Regarding different forms of participation, trends in Figure 3 show the importance of

continuing to investigate the effectiveness not only of voting, but also a whole range of forms of

political participation. The question regarding voting asks: "Some people don't vote nowadays

for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year]?"

The prefatory question to the battery of non-voting participation indicators reads as follows:

"There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent things from

going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?..." Consistent with

prior literature (Marien et al. 2010; Oser and Hooghe 2018), the dimensional analysis of the

participation indicators according to principal component analysis and Cronbach's alpha,

confirms a distinction between institutionalized actions (contact, party work, and organization

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[1] The data cleaning and coding to produce these figures used standard procedures of applying
necessary weights, addressing missing values, recoding higher values to indicate higher efficacy
levels, and adapting a consistent scale (0 to 1).

work) and non-institutionalized actions (petition, demonstration, and boycott) with only one ESS

participation indicator not clearly aligning with either dimension (displaying a badge or sticker).

The ESS data on participation trends presented in Figure 3 are consistent with those documented

in the literature. With regard to voting, the ESS data indicate that the level of voter turnout

remained stable from 2002 through 2016.[2] With regard to participation beyond voting, both

institutionalized actions and non-institutionalized actions have increased in recent years. As

discussed in relation to the conceptual model in Figure 2, this increase in non-voting activity may

be the result of a *communication* mechanism due to individuals' intentional choice to use these

forms of participation to influence decision-makers. Alternatively, this increase in non-voting

participation may be the result of a *grievance* mechanism, due to individuals becoming frustrated

with the political system, in a manner akin to blowing off steam with no expectation of

influencing representational outcomes.

[Figure 3 about here]

Proceeding to trends in political efficacy, Table 1 contains the full set of political

efficacy questions asked in the ESS from 2002 through 2016. The mean values for these

indicators over time for all countries that participated in Rounds 1 through 8 of the ESS are

presented in Figure 4. As with the participation indicators, these mean measures are intended to

provide summary trend information on the available survey data in the ESS without controlling

for covariates. The first four rounds of the ESS (2002-2008) included two questions about topics

often associated with *internal efficacy*, namely the ease of "making up one's mind" and how

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[2] Even when analyses use high-quality survey data from the ESS, estimates of turnout levels are higher than actual voting rates. The literature indicates this is likely due to the well-documented tendency of respondents to over-report their voting records (due to social desirability bias), and because it is difficult to obtain a truly representative sample of the population.

often "politics seems complicated." In the literature, the former is consistently interpreted as measuring internal efficacy, while the latter is generally interpreted as falling between internal and external efficacy (e.g., Niemi et al. 1991). Figure 4a shows the trend lines for responses to these two questions from 2002-2008, which indicate little fluctuation during this period.

[Figure 4 about here]

Regarding *external* efficacy, Figure 4b shows the trend lines for a new set of political efficacy questions fielded by the ESS in Rounds 7 and 8 (fielded in 2014 and 2016). These questions were designed to introduce new questions to the survey regarding system responsiveness (external efficacy), to complement the ESS's existing efficacy questions' focus on subjective competence (internal efficacy).[3] Figure 4c homes in on the 2016 data by showing the average scores for all indicators for each country. The mean scores on this scale, which ranges from 0 to 1, indicate meaningful cross-national variance, with the lowest mean efficacy levels around 0.2, and those with the highest mean levels around 0.4. Given the changes in ESS measures over time, the most reliable and commonly used data source for European social and political issues cannot give insights into long-term trends. However, cross-national variation in these efficacy measures can be analyzed along with additional measures in future research to assess whether political participants in various contexts have levels of efficacy that align with the "communication" versus "grievance" mechanisms.

This brief summary of survey data about political participation and political efficacy in countries surveyed in every available round of the ESS cumulative data highlights just one of the

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[3]ESS Round 8 Question Design Template of new political efficacy items, last accessed September 23, 2020: https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/methodology/core_ess_questionnaire/ESS8_political_efficacy_final_template.pdf

many challenges facing researchers who investigate topics related to the effectiveness of political participation outside of the United States. The lack of consistent political efficacy measures in the ESS cumulative data is mirrored in many high-quality cross-national surveys around the globe, and stands in contrast to the more consistent cross-national time series data that are available for other important attitudinal concepts, such as political trust—though a few high-quality longitudinal surveys do include consistent measures of political efficacy over time (e.g., the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems and the International Social Survey Programme). Research projects such as the Survey Data Recycling (SDR) project have already produced data harmonization measures for a variety of socio-demographic and attitudinal indicators (Słomczyński et al. 2016; Słomczyński and Tomescu-Dubrow 2018; Tomescu-Dubrow and Słomczyński 2016). Although these efforts have not yet included political efficacy indicators, publications from the SDR project provide a road map for how to conduct this sort of harmonization, and show why doing so is important.

4. Conclusion

This brief sketch of recent data on political participation and political efficacy sheds light on the challenges involved in advancing research on these topics, and on opportunities to meet these challenges. As noted, researchers have traditionally used two primary research designs to assess the effectiveness of different forms of political participation: case studies of social movements, and analysis of observational survey-based research. Recent advances in both data availability and methodological techniques have created opportunities to employ a variety of research designs to investigate multiple aspects of the effectiveness of participation. Innovative research designs include the analysis patterns of social media topics of citizens and politicians (Barbera et

al. 2019), contentious episode analysis (Bojar and Kriesi 2021), longitudinal panel studies on activists' attitudes and behaviors (Henderson and Han, in press), multi-methods research on referendums (Werner et al. 2020; Werner 2020), field experiments of effective organization practices (Baldassari and Abascal 2017; Han 2016), experimental investigation of the effectiveness of different types of protests (Shuman et al. 2020), lab experiments (Bol 2019), survey experiments (Sniderman 2018), online experiments (Shmargad and Klar 2019), and research on elite decision-making (Sheffer et al. 2018; Wouters and Walgrave 2017). Combining these approaches with more traditional qualitative and observational research designs can produce results that offer insights about the causal mechanisms that link participation, political efficacy, and political outcomes.

Increased investment in multi-year and collaborative projects and research institutes in recent years has better equipped researchers to conduct innovative and mixed-methods investigations that identify new descriptive and causal evidence on these topics, such as Rasmussen's project on advocacy in digital democracy (ERC 2019); Kriesi's project on political conflict in Europe following the Great Recession (Kriesi 2013); Klandermans' project on how citizens try to influence politics (Klandermans 2020); Walgrave's study of the information processing of political actors (ERC 2020); the Center for Social Media and Politics' (2020) examination of the impact of social media; the MIT Governance Lab's (2020) investigation of these topics with a regional focus on Asia and Africa; and the Agora Institute and the P3 lab led by Han (e.g., Han et al. 2021).

The urgent need to invest in research on the effectiveness of political participation is clear in light of multiple contemporary crises of democratic legitimacy. Contemporary global headlines featured a number of major governing crises, including the continued global spread of

the COVID-19 pandemic despite governing attempts to curb it, and vigorous public protests in the U.S. and worldwide (Gose and Skocpol 2019). Despite these challenges we are also witnessing a golden age of research on these topics, with scholars continuing to develop tools to investigate the consequences of political participation, a task that Verba and Nie (1972) presciently described as the most difficult yet most important topic in the field. Recent research identifies multiple urgent concerns related to contemporary democratic functioning, including phenomena of representational inequality (Lupu and Warner, in press-a, in press-b; Rosset and Stecker 2019; Schakel, in press), populism (Gidron and Hall 2020), and democratic erosion (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). These trends highlight the importance of continuing to invest in research on whether, when, and how political participation is effective in achieving intended outcomes. The scientific advances described in this chapter provide a roadmap for fulfilling the imperative to continue to break new ground on this topic.

**Table 1.** Political efficacy measures over time, European Social Survey

Variable name	ESS rounds	Question	Categories
polcmpl	1,2,3,4	How often does politics seem so complicated that you can't really understand what is going on?	1 Never… 5 Frequently
poldcs	1,2,3,4	How difficult or easy do you find it to make your mind up about political issues?	1 Very difficult… 5 Very easy
psppsgv	7	How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?	0 Not at all… 10 Completely
psppsgva	8	How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?	1 Not at all… 5 A great deal
actrolg	7	How able do you think you are to take an active role in a group involved with political issues?	0 Not at all able… 10 Completely able
actrolga	8	How able do you think you are to take an active role in a group involved with political issues?	1 Not at all able… 5 Completely able
psppipl	7	And how much would you say that the political system in [country] allows people like you to have an influence on politics?	0 Not at all… 10 Completely
psppipla	8	And how much would you say that the political system in [country] allows people like you to have an influence on politics?	1 Not at all… 5 A great deal
cptppol	7	And using this card, how confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?	0 Not at all confident… 10 Completely confident
cptppola	8	And how confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?	1 Not at all confident… 5 Completely confident

Figure 1. Political efficacy trends in the United States, 1952 to 2016

**Figure 1a.** Politics is too complicated
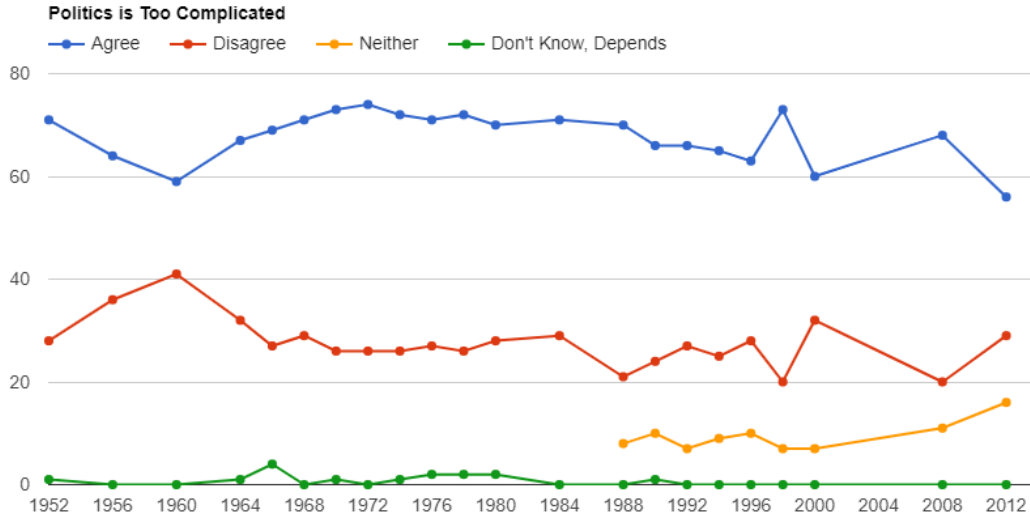
Figure 1b. External political efficacy index
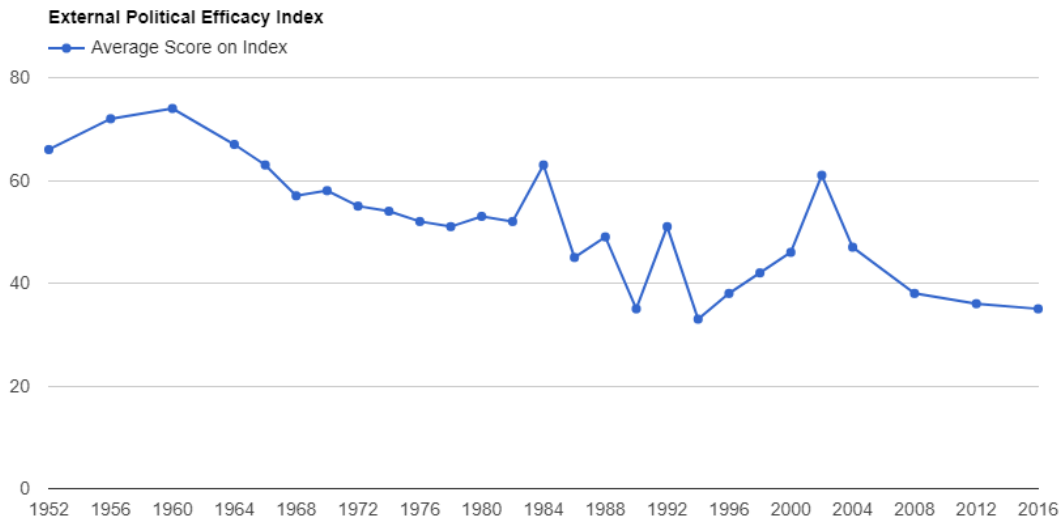
Source: American National Election Studies (2020), https://electionstudies.org/resources/anes-guide/, last accessed September 23, 2020.
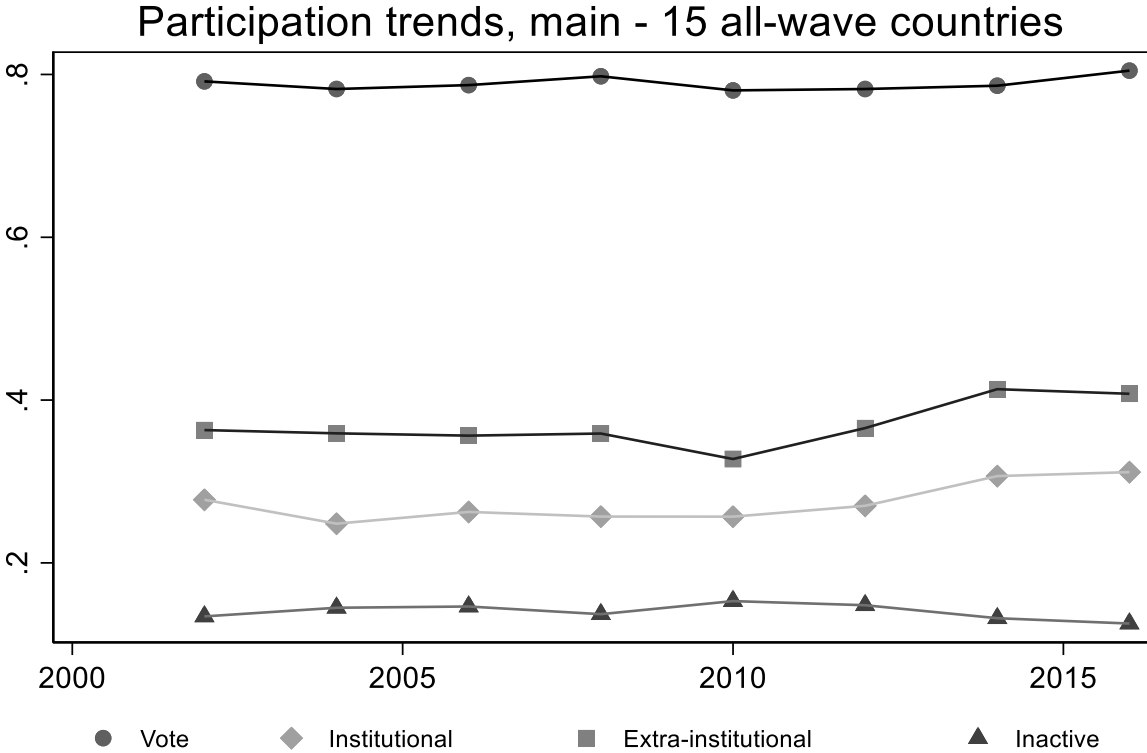
Notes: The text of the item plotted in *Figure 1a* is as follows: "Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on." The index in *Figure 1b* index is based on two questions: "People like me don't have any say about what the government does" and "I don't think public officials care much what people like me think."

Figure 2. Chain of democratic responsiveness, including non-electoral participation
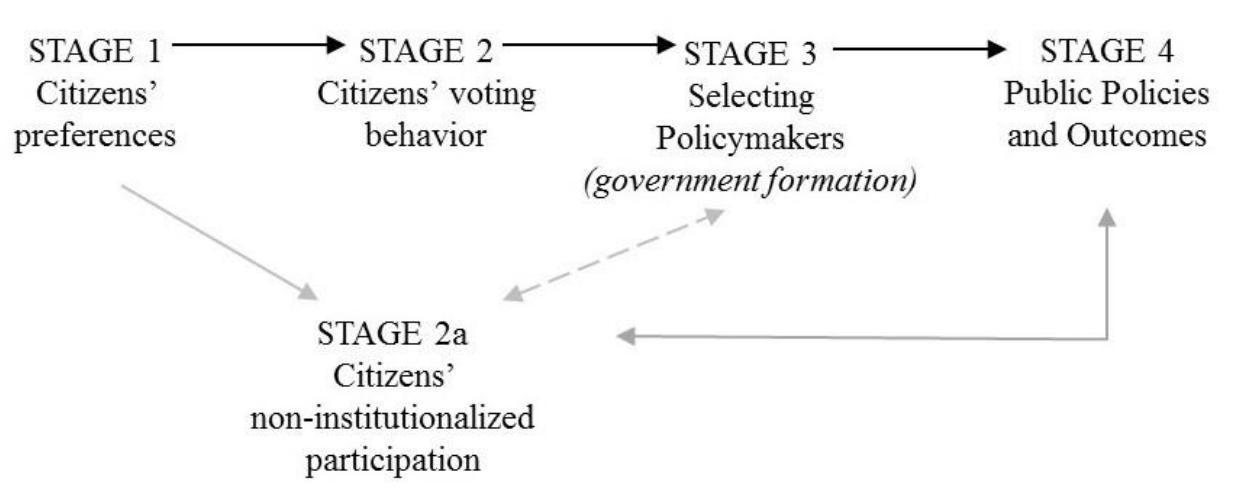
Notes: author's adaptation of Powell's (2004, p. 92) Chain of Democratic Responsiveness framework. Arrows in black represent Powell's model; arrows in grey represent author's adaptation of the model. I thank Ruth Dassonneville and Marc Hooghe for their input in developing this figure in the context of our collaborative research project on political participation and multiple policy issues (Oser et al. 2021).

Figure 3. Participation trends of 15 European countries, 2002 through 2016

Participation trends, main - 15 all-wave countries

Legend: ● Vote   ◆ Institutional   ■ Extra-institutional   ▲ Inactive
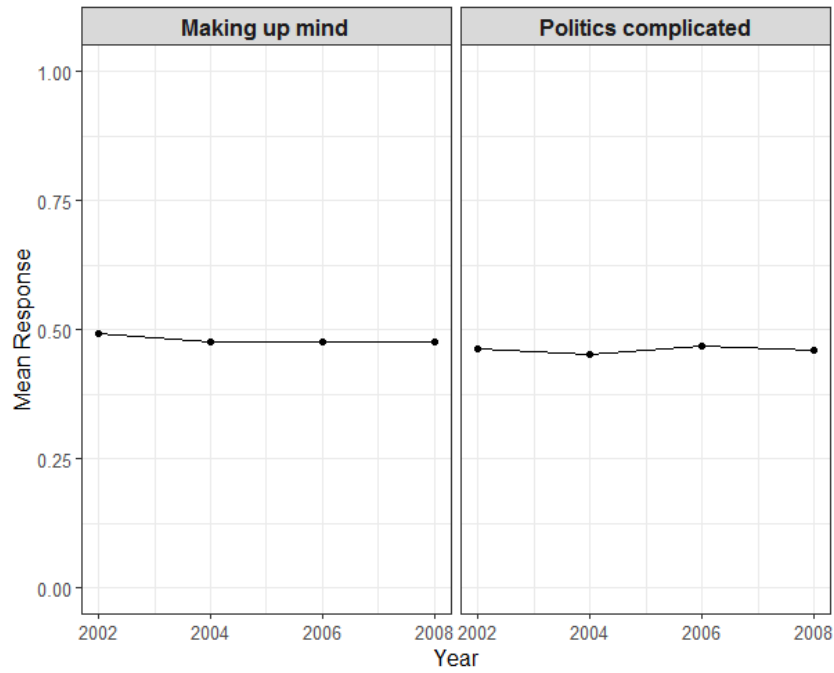
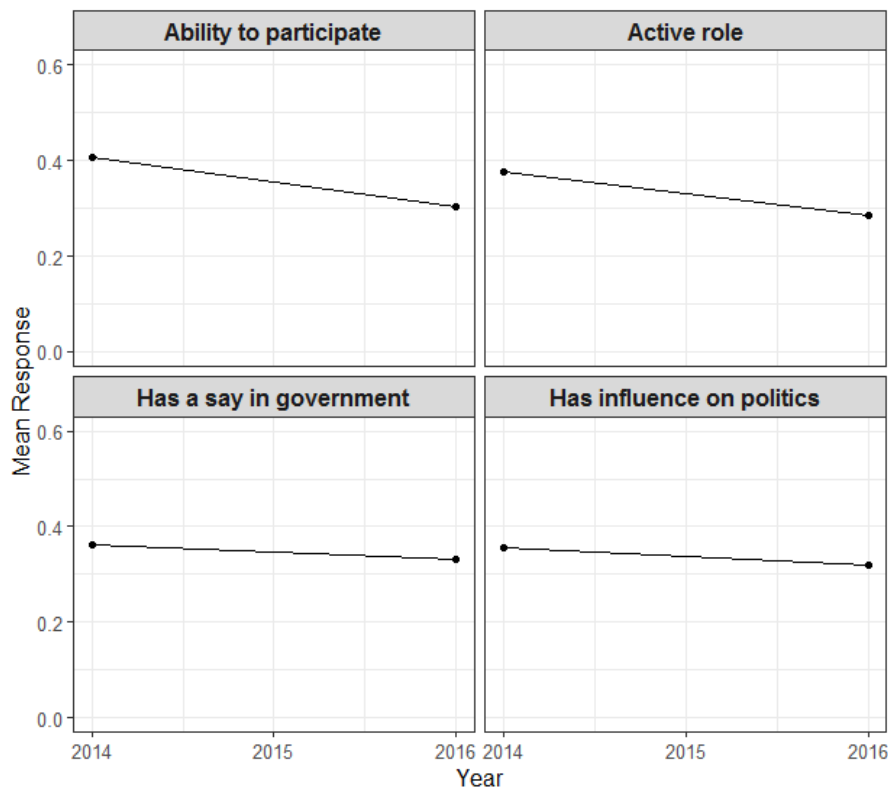Source: ESS cumulative file, Rounds 1 (2002) through 8 (2016).

Figure 4. ESS example indicators of political efficacy
See Table 1 for the full wording of efficacy questions for all ESS waves

Figure 4a. ESS 15-country mean, 2002-2008

Source: Author's analysis of ESS cumulative file.

Figure 4b. ESS, 15-country mean, 2014 and 2016

Figure 4c. Efficacy mean levels in 15 countries in 2016
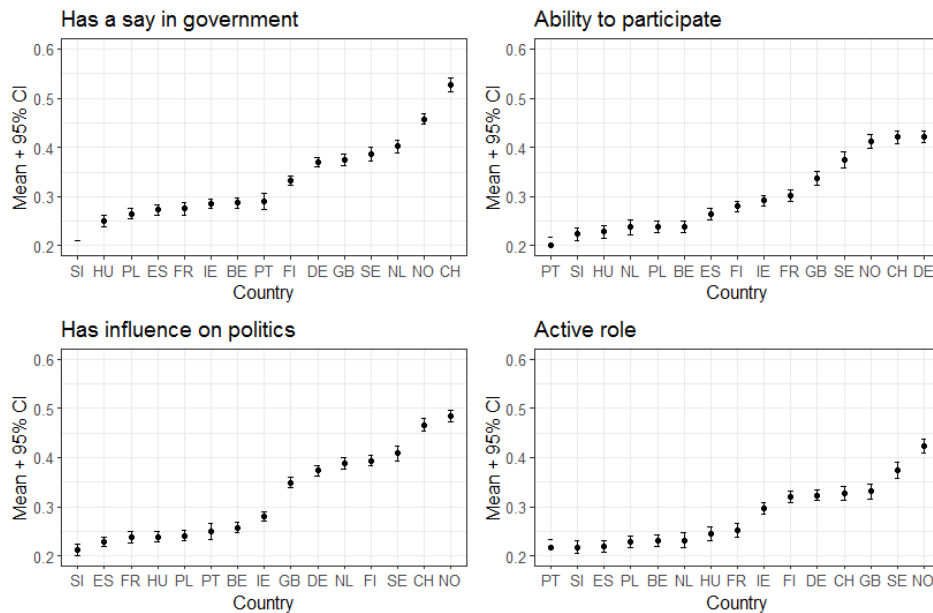
Source: Author's analysis of the ESS cumulative file. Country name abbreviations: Belgium (BE), Switzerland (CH), Germany (DE), Spain (ES), Finland (FI), France (FR), Great Britain (GB), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland, (PL), Portugal (PT), Sweden (SE), Slovenia (SI).

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