

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: TOWARDS A NEW TYPOLOGY

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Abstract: Reviewing the literature on political participation and civic engagement, the article offers a critical examination of different conceptual frameworks. Drawing on previous definitions and operationalisations, a new typology for political participation and civic engagement is developed, highlighting the multidimensionality of both concepts. In particular, it makes a clear distinction between manifest “political participation” (including formal political behaviour as well as protest or extra-parliamentary political action) and less direct or “latent” forms of participation, conceptualized here as “civic engagement” and “social involvement”. The article argues that the notion of “latent” forms of participation is crucial to understand new forms of political behaviour and the prospects for political participation in different countries. Due to these innovations it contributes to a much-needed theoretical development within the literature on political participation and citizen engagement.

Key words: political participation; civic engagement; social involvement; modes of participation; manifest forms; latent forms

Introduction

Over the past decades, we have witnessed a growing academic interest in political participation in the established or “old” democracies. Much of this scholarly interest seems to be justified by a concern about declining levels of civic engagement, low electoral turnout, eroding public confidence in the institutions of representative democracy, and other signs of public weariness, scepticism, cynicism and lack of trust in politicians and political parties. In the post-industrial societies, we are told, citizens have become increasingly disengaged from the traditional channels of political participation (Skocpol, Fiorina 1999; Dalton 1998; 2006; Norris 1999).

Bowling Alone (Putnam 2000) is perhaps the most well known contribution to this debate, but similar concerned voices have resonated in a number of other democracies worldwide (cf. Kaase, Newton 1995; Norris 2002). At the same time, it has been argued that such fears are exaggerated—the development of “critical citizens” is not the same thing as the erosion of democracy, and the assumption of the decline and fall of civic engagement is, at best, premature (Norris 2002, 5-7; Stolle, Hooghe 2005; Berger 2009).

Still, even if not everybody agree that what we are observing is the decline and fall of civic engagement, the “Bowling Alone” debate has had a profound impact on the research field. This debate that has also alerted us to a few shortcomings in the literature on political participation and civic engagement. Focus here is not on the debate about declining levels of participation per se, but on the concepts used by scholars to capture changes in citizens’ participation and engagement in politics and society. More specifically, the aim of this paper is to enhance our understanding of different forms of civic engagement as well as political participation, by suggesting a new conceptual framework for analysing different forms of social engagement and political activities. In order to illustrate the need for such a framework, or more specifically, a new typology, we will start out by looking at two descriptions of current research on citizens’ engagement and participation. It should be noted that the idea is not to take stock of the rich body of post-war literature on participation and engagement. Rather, the idea is to demonstrate on the one hand the conceptual confusion surrounding the notion of “civic engagement” and “political participation”, and on the other hand, the tendency in the literature to focus on manifest activities and neglecting the “latent” forms of political participation.

Civic engagement and political participation

Somewhat provocatively, it has argued that “civic engagement” as a concept is ready for the dustbin. In recent, it has been used as a buzzword, to cover everything from voting in elections to giving money to charity, or from bowling in leagues to participate in political rallies and marches (Berger 2009, 335). Putnam has been identified as the one that popularised the concept, and for him, it was a matter of pointing out the importance of “social capital” for a vital democratic society. In a manner of speaking, his focus was more on “engagement” than on the “civic” or the “political”. When analysing citizens’ levels of engagement, Putnam covered just about everything from reading newspapers, political participation, social networks and interpersonal trust to associational involvement. All of this was labelled civic engagement and the point was very simplified that such civic engagement tended to correlate with a functioning democracy and market economy (Putnam 1993). In a few articles and a larger study, Putnam expanded his thesis, and argued that civic engagement was on the decline in the US. American democracy was supposedly eroding from the inside (Putnam 1995; 1997; 2000). This sparked a global debate about the future of the established democracies. But again, Putnam was somewhat unclear about what it was that was actually declining, since “civic engagement” was a bit of everything (Berger 2009).

What we have here is a typical example of conceptual stretching (Berger 2009, 336; Sartori 1970). If civic engagement is used by scholars to mean completely different things, it is basically a useless concept—it confuses more than it illuminates. If the crucial issue for the established democracies has to do with declining levels of “civic engagement”, as Putnam and others have argued (Pharr, Putnam 2000), then we certainly need to be more clear about what it is that is actually declining or what exactly it is that we so desperately need as much of as we can possibly get.

Other scholars too have noted the lack of consensus on what constitute civic engagement. Reviewing existing definitions of the term, Adler and Goggin (2005) conclude that there is

no single agreed-upon meaning of civic engagement. That does not mean that all definitions are broad and all-encompassing. As Adler and Goggin point out, there are a number of more confined definitions that restrict civic engagement to apply to very specific action, such as community service, collective action and even political involvement (Adler, Goggin 2005, 238-240).

The definitions that limit civic engagement to mean community service stress voluntary work in the local community, as something close to a *duty* for all citizens. Definitions of civic engagement as collective action assumes that such engagement most often comes in the form of collaboration or joint action to improve conditions in the civil sphere. Other definitions emphasise the political aspect of “civic”, and consequently equalise civic engagement with “activities that are not only collective but that are specifically political (i.e., that involve government action)” (Adler, Goggin 2005, 238).

Others have chosen to conceptualise civic engagement in more expansive ways, to include a number of activities, like Putnam. Adler and Goggin (2005) point out that Putnam (2000) in fact avoids any explicit definition of civic engagement. Rather—as Berger (2009) also have noted—all sorts of informal social activities alongside associational involvement and political participation are included in Putnam’s analysis of what foster “social capital”. Also, Adler and Goggin (2005) point to Michael Della Carpini as someone who defines civic engagement to include activities ranging from voluntary work and organisational involvement to electoral participation. Adler and Goggin thus demonstrate the wide variety of activities that are actually included in different notions of “civic engagement” in the literature.

The two writers ask us to think about the term as a continuum, spanning from the *private* sphere to the formal or *public* sphere. The former covers *individual* action like helping one’s neighbours or simply discussing politics with one’s friends. The latter encompasses *collective* action, like activity within a party, an organisation or interest group. Adler and Goggin also propose their own definition of civic engagement; it has basically to do with “how an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future” (Adler, Goggin 2005, 241).

We certainly like to applaud Adler and Goggin’s attempt to conceptualise civic engagement and bring order in the rich flora of definitions of the term. However, we also feel that Berger (2009) has a point when criticising such broad definitions. It is hard not to agree that a term covering everything from helping a neighbour to voting in elections or running for public office in fact entails conceptual stretching.

Let us proceed by contrasting the image depicted by Berger (2009) and Adler and Goggin (2005) with another description of a field of research, focusing more narrowly on “political participation”.

Political science research on citizens’ engagement in politics has conventionally focused on *electoral* participation (cf. Brady 1999; van Deth 2001). For a long time, voting was perceived as the primary way for a citizen to make his or her voice heard in the political system, and voting turnout has been described as the most commonly used measure of citizen participation in the US. When post-war American political scientists thought about political participation, they quite simply thought about acts intentionally aimed at influencing governmental decisions (Verba, Nie 1972; Easton 1953, 134). A frequently cited definition

by Verba and his associates, from the 1970s, testifies to the focus on the election of political leaders and the approval of their policies:

By political participation we refer to those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take (Verba, Nie, Kim 1978, 1).

Other often-cited definitions from the same era are quite similar: political participation was understood as “actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and politics” or as “all voluntary activities by individual citizens intended to influence either directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political system” (Milbrath, Goel 1977, 2; Kaase, Marsch 1979, 42).

At the same time, Verba and others admitted that all allocations of values in society are not determined by *political* elites alone—also, private and civil society actors could fill this function. Still, most political scientists at the time were not really interested in civic engagement in wider sense or in how citizens acted in relation to social elites outside of the political domain; rather, it was a matter of pointing out that citizens could *also*, in addition to voting, participate in politics *in-between* elections (Verba, Nie, Kim 1978, 47).

This way of thinking about political participation at least implicitly opened up for analyses of activities that included not only voting behaviour, but also e.g. demonstrations, strikes, boycotts and other forms of protest behaviour. This line of thought was also quite early on followed by Barnes and Kaase in their seminal work on *Political Action* (Barnes, Kaase et al. 1979; Kaase, Marsh 1979; cf. Verba, Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1995; Montero, Westholm, van Deth 2007, 434). Consequently, actions directed against all political, societal, media or economic actors (or elites) could be analysed as “political participation” (Teorell et al. 2007, 335-336; Norris 2002, 193).

More recent definitions of political participation have thus tended to be wider in scope. Brady for example defines political participation as “action by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes” (Brady 1999, 737; cf. Teorell et al. 2007, 336). Brady (1999) emphasises that we should think about political participation, firstly, as manifest and observable actions or activities that people voluntarily take part in. Secondly, “people” means ordinary citizens, not political elites or civil servants. Thirdly, the concept refers to deliberate attempts to influence the people in power, to make a difference. To be interested in politics and societal issues, or even to discuss politics frequently is not enough, Brady tells us. Political participation refers to attempts to influence *others*—any powerful actors, groups or business enterprises in society—and their decisions that concern societal issues. Brady thus offers us a wider definition of political participation. At the same time, one could argue that Brady too tends to place more weight on actions directed at *political* elites than on actions directed at other elites. This has in fact been a typical feature of the research field; even if scholars have suggested ever broader definitions of political participation, focus has remained on a more confined set of citizen activities. To give but one example, Parry et al. (1992) define political participation as “action by citizens which is aimed at influencing decisions which are, in most cases, ultimately taken by public representatives and officials” (Parry et al. 1992, 16; cf. Brady 1999, 738).

Drawing on Verba and Nie as well as Brady, Teorell et al. have more recently developed what is perhaps the most comprehensive definition of political participation to date, encompassing actions or activities by ordinary citizens that in some way are directed toward influencing political outcomes in society. In line with this, Teorell et al. have introduced a wider typology than found in previous research (Teorell 2007, 336-337).

Verba and Nie used four dimensions of participation in their often-cited typology: *voting*; *campaign activity* (including membership in or work for political parties and organisations as well as donating money to such parties or groups); *contacting* public officials; and *cooperative* or *communal activities* (basically understood by Verba and associates as all forms of engagement that focused on issues in the local community) (Verba, Nie 1972, 56-63).

Teorell et al. (2007) suggest a more extensive typology, encompassing five dimensions. *Electoral participation* is the first of these. *Consumer participation* covers donating money to charity, boycotting and political consumption, as well as signing petitions. In a manner of speaking, it taps the role of citizens as critical consumers. The third dimension is *party activity*: to be a member of, active within, do voluntary work for or donating money to a political party. *Protest activity* is the fourth dimension, which covers acts like taking part in demonstrations, strikes and other protest activities. Contacting organisations, politicians or civil servants constitute the fifth dimension, *contact activity*.

Latent forms of political participation

The strength of the typology suggested by Teorell et al. is the explicit focus on manifest political participation in a more narrow sense—i.e. activities intended to influence actual political outcomes by targeting relevant political or societal elites (cf. Brady 1999). At the same time, the typology is wide enough to cover a lot more than just participation in elections. Moreover, the typology is based on previous studies that have demonstrated empirically that different forms of participation seem to be related: citizens involved in one mode or dimension of political behaviour tend to be involved in other forms of political behaviour within the same dimension, but not necessarily involved in political activities in other dimensions. For example, citizens involved in *illegal* demonstrations *also* tend to get involved in legal demonstrations, but not necessarily in conventional party activity.

However, we would nevertheless like to argue that the typology suggested by Teorell et al. is not optimal. For one thing, it is not obvious that all “protest behaviour” could be tapped with measures like participation in demonstrations, strikes and illegal political action. Certain forms of voting—e.g. blank voting—could be described as a protest as well. Or, for that matter, non-voting, the signing of petitions and political consumption. In the typology suggested by Teorell et al., the two latter forms of participation are called “consumer participation”, a label that may in fact obscure the protest character of the specific action.

More importantly, the typology does not take into account *latent* forms of political participation, the kind of engagement that may be regarded “pre-political” or on “stand-by”. This notion of latency is based on the simple observation that citizens actually do a lot of things that may not be directly *or* unequivocally classified as “political participation”, but at the same time could be of great significance for future political activities of a more

conventional type. If we are interested in declining levels of political participation, we must not overlook such *potentially* political forms of engagement. People of all ages and from all walks of life engage socially in a number of ways, formally outside of the political domain, but nevertheless in ways that may have political consequences.

Even the relatively extensive typology developed by Teorell et al. ultimately fails to take such “pre-political” actions or activities into account. What do we miss, employing such a theoretical framework? A bit pointedly, only the rest of the iceberg. A lot of citizen engagement in the contemporary democracies seems to be formally non-political or semi-political on the surface, that is, activities not directly aimed at influencing the people in power, but nevertheless activities that entail involvement in society and current affairs. People in general discuss politics, consume political news in papers and on TV or on the Internet, or talk about societal issues. People are aware of global problems, like environmental issues and the poverty or HIV situation in different parts of the world. People have political knowledge and skills, and hold informed opinions about politics. Some people write to editors in local papers, debating local community affairs. Others express their opinions on-line.

Moreover, people with such attention to societal affairs take more active part in society as well, in different ways. People donate money, to support the building of schools or clean water delivery systems in developing countries, or to support research on cancer and heart diseases. People of all ages recycle. People organise car pools to get to work in an environmental friendly way.

All of this is excluded from the typology suggested by Teorell et al. Although this is perfectly reasonable, we still feel that it is a shortcoming, since all these things may be important for us to accurately analyse and understand the conditions for political participation in different countries. What is more, if we are interested in *explaining* different forms of engagement in political affairs among different groups in society, e.g. youth, women, or immigrants, we certainly cannot afford to overlook these aspects of “pre-political” orientations and activities.

The closest thing to the notion of “latent participation” we find in the works of Schudson (1996; 1999) and his notion of “monitorial citizens”. Schudson’s optimistic claim is that citizens today are not uninterested or uninformed about politics, or lack political efficacy; they just take a deliberate anticipative stand in which they seek out information about politics and stay interested. And (only) when they feel that it is really imperative, they will intervene or act politically. They thus avoid conventional channels of political participation; but it is not correct to say that they are not politically involved; they are, as “monitorial citizens”. This notion is close to various ideas about “post-modern” orientations among citizens today (cf. Hooghe, Dejaeghere 2007, 250-251; Inglehart 1990; 1997).

As we have demonstrated so far, “civic engagement” has arguably become something of a catch-all concept in recent years, less than ideal for precise empirical analyses of the conditions for citizens’ involvement in society. Furthermore, the literature on “political participation” stands out as too narrow in scope, in some respects. Important aspects of citizens’ political (or pre-political) engagement are systematically overlooked, using the standard definitions of political participation. Here, the idea is thus to enhance our understanding of the much-debated declining levels of political engagement, low electoral turnout, and eroding public confidence in the institutions of representative democracy,

by constructing a new typology of citizens' political *and* "pre-political" behaviour (here conceptualised as "civic engagement" and "social involvement").

Developing a new typology

To begin with, the typology we suggest discriminates between *latent* and *manifest* forms of political participation. Also, we want to make a point out of discriminating between individual and collective forms of engagement and participation (thus constructing a matrix), in order to highlight distinct forms of political behaviour (Table 1).

Liberal democracy is based on the notion of *individual* political rights and liberties, but at the same time on the idea of political *representation*, through different collectives, most notably of course the political parties. Parties represent different segments of society and articulate the interests of different groups or collectives. Making a distinction between individual and collective forms of political behaviour makes sense from another angle as well. The sociological debate has for at least two decades focused on value changes among citizens in postmodern or late modern society. Here we find the idea of collective identities (e.g. social class, nationality, or party identification) slowly being replaced by various individual identities. This transformation is sometimes being used to account for different forms of political behaviour—in late modernity, citizens have allegedly become increasingly disengaged from the traditional channels of political participation, and "life politics" has become more important (e.g. Inglehart 1977; 1990; 1997; Inglehart, Welzel 2005). People chose for themselves when and how to get involved politically, and parties or other intermediate institutions are not seldom considered inappropriate (cf. Giddens 1991; Beck 1992). This is ultimately a question for empirical testing, and the point here is just to explain why we find this distinction (individual/collective forms) relevant for our typology.

Manifest political participation

Turning next to manifest political behaviour, the idea is to emphasise that what we refer to as actual "political participation" is quite simply all actions directed towards influencing governmental decisions and political outcomes. It is goal oriented or *rational*, if you will. It is observable and can be measured straightforwardly. It has to do with the wishes of ordinary citizens to influence politics and political outcomes in society, or the decisions that affect public affairs

Within the framework of a representative democracy, this is what we in our typology refer to as *formal* political participation. Citizens vote in the general elections, in order to support some parties or candidates, or to make sure others will not gain too much influence. People take part in referenda for similar reasons. To some, it may be a deliberate political act to abstain from voting in an election or a referendum, as a protest against the political order or the incumbents. Or, they may cast a blank vote in an election to demonstrate political dissatisfaction.

Other types of formal political participation, on the individual level, cover what other scholars have referred to as "contact activities". Citizens may write to politicians or civil servants, in order to try to influence the political agenda or political outcomes. Also,

individuals may run for office themselves, in local or national government. As for “formal” collective forms of political behaviour, the typical example would be *membership*: in a political party, a trade union, or any organisation with a distinct political agenda, e.g. human rights advocacy groups, peace organisation, or environmental groups.

However, political participation need not relate directly to the formal political institutional framework of a country (the parliamentary sphere) or to the conventional actors within that framework (political parties, political actors, trade unions and organisations). In order to influence the political agenda or the political outcomes, citizens may engage in extra-parliamentary activities and manifestations, sometimes referred to as protest behaviour or “unconventional” political participation. Here however, we have deliberately avoided the notion of “unconventional” participation, since such forms of what was once considered protest behaviour—like signing petitions or taking part in demonstrations and strikes—are not really unconventional any more. Instead, we simply talk about *extra-parliamentary forms of political participation*, and make a special point out of distinguishing between legal and illegal forms of extra-parliamentary activism.

Legal forms of extra-parliamentary activities include participation in demonstrations, strikes and other manifest forms of protest actions. Also, under this heading we place membership in (or activity within) groups or parties that deliberately stand outside of the parliamentary sphere, like network-based social movements or political actions groups of various kinds.

Such forms of political participation include involvement in e.g. women’s rights groups, animal protection organisations, or the global justice movement. Such expressions of political interest and channels for political participation seem to fit young people particularly well; it is not organised in a conventional (or hierarchical) way, like a political party, nor is it just about supporting a good cause. Extra-parliamentary activity within network-based groups provides its members or supporters with a sense of “doing something”, an opportunity to personally take a stand and make a difference. For many people, the manifest political activities becomes concentrated to particular and not seldom spectacular events, like the *European Social Forum* (ESF) meetings or counter-demonstrations at G8 meetings or EU top meetings.

Also, on the *individual* level, extra-parliamentary activism could come in the form of signing or collecting petitions, handing out political leaflets, or boycotting/“boycotting”. Certain brands and products are bought—or refuted—for ideological, ethical or environmental reasons. This is also a way for ordinary citizens to directly influence the people in power (not necessarily politicians), and thus a rational form of manifest political action. In an emerging political science literature, such behaviour is referred to as “political consumption” (Stolle, Hooghe, Micheletti 2005).

Some forms of extra-parliamentary political activities are unlawful, like participating in illegal demonstrations or violent protests bordering on riots. For example, in Europe, the autonomous radical left has since the 1970s been something of a standing feature in some major cities, like Berlin, Paris and Copenhagen. Other forms of illegal political action encompass animal liberation groups that set animals free or attack stores selling furs or laboratories where animal testing is conducted. Anti-sexist attacks on porn shops by militant feminist groups would also fit this category, alongside all sorts of civil disobedience activities.

Civic engagement

So far, we have covered the manifest forms of “actual” political participation in our typology: formal types such as voting or being a member of a political party, as well as more protest oriented or “new” forms of political participation, like taking part in demonstrations, engaging in extra-parliamentary political protests, or boycotting and political consumption. It should be noted that we are in fact very close to Teorell et al. and Brady (above) in our way of thinking about what activities constitute political participation, even if we employ a somewhat different conceptual strategy. What Teorell and associates refer to as “electoral participation”, “contact activity” and “party activity” are all included under our heading *formal political participation*, and what they call “consumer participation” and “protest activity” are covered by our label *extra-parliamentary activism* (in Table 2).

However, as noted above, is not enough to analyse the different modes of manifest political activities. If we want to understand the conditions for participation in different countries, we must not overlook the *latent* forms of political behaviour. People engage in society in a number of ways that do not formally relate to the political (parliamentary) domain—or in ways that are clearly not any sort of political protest—but that nevertheless could be seen as “pre-political”. In our typology, we want to cover these expressions of societal engagement as well.

It should be noted at this stage that we do not necessarily think about the different concepts as part of a *model*, with an underlying causality. Manifest “political participation” does not necessarily presuppose active “civic engagement” (cf. Table 1). It could very well be the case that different forms of societal or civic engagement would be strongly correlated with more specific political activities, but that is ultimately a question for empirical testing. Here, we are primarily interested in mapping the totality of different *types* of political and civil participation, as a way of order our thinking in terms of the different types of phenomena we can empirically study. Moreover, it could very well also be the case that civic engagement is a necessary but not in itself sufficient condition for political participation—other individual or institutional political opportunity structures may be needed as well for actual political action. Here, we are in fact close to Berger’s way of thinking:

Must citizens be politically engaged all the time or only episodically? Perhaps liberal democracies can flourish with relatively low levels of political engagement if they also feature continuously high levels of [non-political] engagement—which can be channelled into political engagement should the circumstances warrant—and political institutions able to process that episodic engagement and respond satisfactorily (Berger 2009, 345).

Civic engagement conventionally refers to activities by ordinary citizens that are intended to influence circumstances in society that is of relevance to others, outside the own family and circle of close friends (Adler, Goggin 2005, 241). In our typology (Table 1 and 2), the concept refers specifically to such individual or collective *actions* noted above (cf. Zukin et al. 2006). People engage in society in a number of different ways: they discuss politics, follow political issues, write to editors, donate money, and recycle for environmental reasons. People do voluntary work to help others. People get organised to solve local problems or to improve conditions for certain groups in society.

In Table 1, we place all such activities under the heading *civil participation*, which we also think of here as *latent political participation*. To be very clear, the civil actions we refer to are of course manifest (observable) behaviour as well, but “latent” in relation to specific *political* parliamentary and extra-parliamentary actions. Again, this reflects our wish to cover not only activities intended to influence actual political outcomes by targeting relevant political or societal elites, but activities and forms of engagement that could very well be of great relevance for e.g. future manifest political action, even if “pre-political” or “potentially political” rather than directly political as such. Of course, to cover such actions also gives us

Table 1. Latent and manifest political participation

Civil participation (latent political participation)		Manifest political participation		
Involvement (attention)	Civic engagement (action)	Formal political participation	Activism (extra-parliamentary participation)	
			Legal	Illegal
Individual forms				
Personal interest in politics and societal issues Attentiveness to political issues	Activities based on personal interest in and attention to politics and societal issues	Electoral participation and contact activities	Extra- parliamentary forms of participation: to make once voice heard or to make a difference by individual means (e.g. signing petitions, political consumption)	Politically motivated unlawful acts on an individual basis
Collective forms				
A sense of belonging to a group or a collective with a distinct political profile or agenda Life-style related politics (e.g. identity, clothes, music, food, values)	Voluntary work to improve conditions in the local community, for charity, or to help others (outside the own family and circle of friends)	Organized political participation: membership in conventional political parties, trade unions and organizations	Loosely organized forms or network- based political participation: new social movements, demonstrations, strikes, and protests	Illegal and violent activities and protests: demonstrations, riots, squatting buildings, damaging property, confrontations with the police or political opponents

a more nuanced picture of the total engagement/participation situation in a given country at a given point in time, and consequently, we become better equipped to analyse supposed crises of democracy and participation.

Also, the distinction is made to point out that there are limits to what we would refer to as political participation. Not everything fits this category. Recycling, for example, even if done for environmental reasons, is not “political participation” in our typology, since the action is not directly aimed at any specific actor (like a boycott, for example). Rather, recycling for environmental reasons could be seen as an act of civic engagement in our typology.

Involvement and interest in politics

We have so far covered political action or participation (like electoral participation and protest activities), aimed at influencing the political agenda or political outcomes, as well as civic engagement, which in our typology is being conceptualised as “latent” (or pre-political) participation. In many ways, this distinction encompasses the central idea of the typology. The very notion of *latent forms of political participation* constitutes a theoretical innovation and thus contributes to the literature on citizens’ involvement in politics and the wider debate on the conditions for democracy in a new millennium.

In addition, the idea with this typology is to counteract the conceptual confusion that may be found in current research on civic engagement and declining levels of political participation. As already noted, in previous studies, definitions of one thing (e.g. non-political forms of civic engagement like associational involvement) have tended to overlap with actual political participation (like membership in political parties or voting in elections). For analytical reasons, we thus need a more sophisticated theoretical framework.

Table 1 includes another aspect as well, namely *attention* to—and *interest* in—political and societal issues. This category encompasses the feeling or awareness of being a member of society, to be a part of a political context. In our typology, we refer to this as *social involvement*. Involvement may be seen as something that (theoretically) precedes both “civic” and “political” activities. While civic engagement and political participation refer to specific actions, involvement refers to *attentiveness* to social and political issues (Martín, van Deth 2007, 303-304).

Is this dimension really needed in the typology? One could, like Berger (2009) argue that the very notion of “engagement” include a *combination* of *attentiveness* and *action*. Here, however, we have included “social involvement” as a specific category in our full typology (Table 2), for two reasons. For one thing, in this way we relate more closely to the literature on political participation; it has recently been argued that “involvement” should be understood as a distinct dimension of democratic participation. Citizens may be more or less “involved” in society, i.e. be curious or interested in political and societal affairs. Without such a basic curiosity, citizens would not pay attention to political and civic affairs, learn about the political process, or formulate opinions (van Deth, Montero, Westholm 2007; cf. Martín, van Deth 2007, 303).

Also, “involvement” should be analytically distinguished from “civic engagement” since we are dealing with two distinctly different empirical phenomena. Employing the strategy suggested by Martín and van Deth, we may measure “involvement” by two standard

survey items: the respondents' interest in politics and societal affairs, and the respondents' perception of politics being important. Civic engagement on the other hand is measured by self-reported *activities* within the civil society sphere (Martín, van Deth 2007, 312).

To be consistent, in the full typology of political participation (Table 2), we have included examples of societal involvement on the collective level. This could be people who, because of their interest in and attention to politics chose more "political" lifestyles. This political component may be a part of the own identity, and in Table 2 we illustrate with examples like belonging to a political "scene", like a left-wing anarcho-punk community, a right-wing skinhead gang or having a circle of friends who are into veganism. In addition to such colourful examples, collective forms of "involvement" may quite simply be about identifying with a particular party or an ideology.

Disengagement: active and passive forms of non-participation

Finally, a few remarks on the mirror image of political participation. There are, as we know, people who just do not care about politics, election or political parties. To make our full typology even more all-embracing, we have thus included one more heading in Table 2, covering the very opposite of engagement and participation, i.e. *non-participation*. In our typology, we make a simple analytical distinction between *passive* and *active* non-engagement (Table 2). The *passive* form of non-engagement would be found among citizens who perceive politics as not interesting. Citizens with this orientation do not feel any particular need to make their voices heard, and politics is simply left to others. They do not follow political and civic affairs, and typically hold no strong opinions about politics. The motives or the reasons behind this orientation could we leave for now—it could be contented as well as disillusionised citizens (cf. Norris 1999; Torcal, Montero 2003).

Another disengaged orientation is possible as well: *active* types of non-participation. By this category, we mean citizens who are not only uninterested in politics, but actually feel *disgusted* with political issues. Politicians are perceived as crooks. Political discussions are actively avoided, and voting is out of the question. This is basically an *anti-political* orientation, in contrast to the *apolitical* orientation described above. In the more extreme cases, such an anti-political stance could be combined with violent behaviour bordering on riots.

The full typology

In Table 2, the full typology is presented. For illustrative purposes, we have included a number of specific examples of orientations and actions that would be typical for each "type". The important thing, however, are not the actual contents in the boxes, but the headings, i.e. the categories/types. One could of course come up with a number of other examples that would fit each category, and some examples in Table 2 could perhaps be contested. The reader should bear in mind that what we want to achieve with this table, is to present a typology that could capture basically *all* types of political behaviour that we would consider to be of relevance when analysing civic engagement and political participation.

Table 2. Typology of different forms of disengagement, involvement, civic engagement and political participation

Non-participation (<i>disengagement</i>)			Civic participation (latent–political)		Political participation (manifest)		
	Active forms (antipolitical)	Passive forms (apolitical)	Social involvement (<i>attention</i>)	Civic engagement (<i>action</i>)	Formal political participation	Activism (extra -parliamentary political participation)	
						Legal/ extra - parliamentary protests or actions	Illegal protests or actions
Individual forms	Non -voting Actively avoiding reading newspapers or watching TV when it comes to political issues Avoid talking about politics Perceiving politics as disgusting Political disaffection	Non -voting Perceiving politics as uninteresting and unimportant Political passivity	Taking interest in politics and society Perceiving politics as important	Writing to an editor Giving money to charity Discussing politics and societal issues, with friends or on the Internet Reading newspapers and watching TV when it comes to political issues Recycling	Voting in elections and referenda Deliberate acts of non -voting or blank voting Contacting political representatives or civil servants Running for or holding public office Donating money to political parties or organizations	Boycotting · boycotting and political consumption Signing petitions Handing out political leaflets	Civil disobedience Politically motivated attacks on property
Collective forms	Deliberate non - political lifestyles, e.g. hedonism, consumerism In extreme cases: random acts of non - political violence (riots), reflecting frustration, alienation or social exclusion	"Non -reflected " non - political lifestyles	Belonging to a group with societal focus Identifying with a certain ideology and/or party Life -style related involvement: music, group identity, clothes, et cetera For example: -wing veganism, right Skinhead scene, or left -wing anarcho - punk scene	Volunteering in social work, e.g. to support women 's shelter or to help homeless people Charity work or faith - based community work Activity within community based organizations	Being a member of a political party, an organization, or a trade union Activity within a party, an organization or a trade union (voluntary work or attend meetings)	Involvement in new social movements or forums Demonstrating, participating in strikes, protests and other actions (e.g. street festivals with a distinct political agenda)	Civil disobedience actions Sabotaging or obstructing roads and railways Squatting buildings Participating in violent demonstrations or animal rights actions Violence confrontations with political opponents or the police

Concluding remarks

To conclude, the typology developed here has a number of advantages, compared to previous typologies or theoretical frameworks. It makes a clear distinction not only between concepts frequently used as synonyms, i.e. *civic engagement* and *political participation*, or any other combination like “political engagement” or “civic participation”. What is more, the typology takes into account the theoretically important distinction between *manifest* and *latent* forms of political participation. This distinction is crucial, if we want to understand new forms of political behaviour and the prospects for political participation in different countries. We would thus like to argue that the literature on political participation is in need of theoretical development. The fact that the typologies employed within this particular literature have tended to become more sophisticated over the years does not really reflect such a development (van Deth 2001). The expanded typologies are “indicator driven” rather than theory driven; as more indicators have become available, the models have simply expanded as a response (van Deth 2001, 6-8; Brady 1999; cf. Kaase, Marsh 1979; Jennings et al. 1990; Topf 1995; Teorell et al. 2007, 337). Another way of putting it would be to say that actual societal and political changes have alerted scholars to the need for covering increasingly more aspects of political participation (van Deth 2001); but a more elaborated theory is still missing. By introducing the notion of “latent” political participation, our modest goal is to vitalise such a theoretical debate.

Admittedly, in order to illustrate the different character of the activities in Table 2, we could just as well have included the actual *spheres* or *domains* in which the different activities belong. Adler and Goggin employ such a conceptual strategy in order to illustrate the wide variety of activities that makes up “civic engagement” in their analysis: some activities belong in the *private* domain; others in the *public* domain (Adler, Goggin 2005, 240). In our typology (Table 2), a more extensive set of domains could have been used. Manifest political participation refers to the *public* or the *political domain*, first and foremost. It is here you exercise your political rights that come with citizenship: you vote, you engage within a political party, or you run for office. Or, you choose to get your voice heard outside of the formal parliamentary domain, by e.g. attending demonstrations or joining a social movement. Or, you engage in more violent protests. At the same time, manifest political participation may also take place within the *market domain*. As critical consumers, we can make a potential impact by e.g. boycotts or signing petitions.

Civic participation, on the other hand, refers to activities within the *civil domain*. Associational involvement and voluntary work are typical examples of such actions that take place outside of the political domain. What we refer to here as social involvement, finally, is related to the *private domain*.

Here however, we have chosen not to explicitly include the different spheres or domains in Table 2. Rather, what we would like to stress is above all the need for incorporating the notion of “latent” participation into any theoretical framework that deals with political participation. The existence of such a latent dimension—citizens’ readiness or willingness to take action—has indeed been noted before, but since it has not been perceived as an *activity* in itself, it has simply been excluded from most definitions of political participation (Parry et al. 1992, 16; van Deth 2001, 11-12).

However, without the latency component, our analyses will ultimately become too confined. We will systematically overlook important aspects of political behaviour, and focus on changes (i.e. declining levels of participation) within the more limited political-parliamentary sphere. Accordingly, we will find low electoral turnout, eroding public confidence in the democratic institutions, scepticism, cynicism and lack of trust. At the same time, we will completely overlook a number of “pre-political” or “potentially political” activities that citizens may be involved in. More importantly, we will overlook the potential willingness to take action. The really interesting question is of course *if* and in *what ways* such “pre-political” or “stand-by” engagement can be channelled into manifest political participation. For example, are the current political institutions able to process such engagement into conventional political action, or are we in fact facing a paradox here: may we find vivid civic engagement or at least strong feelings of readiness and willingness to act in combination with declining levels of manifest political participation? Here lies the real challenge for future research.

Previous research has not really focused on this potential paradox. Rather, scholars have analysed the possible relation between different forms of activities *within* the same category, i.e. political participation. Teorell et al. have for example examined the possible trade-off between *conventional* and *unconventional* political participation, and concludes that there is in fact no trade-off (Teorell et al. 2007, 354). It would be more interesting to investigate a possible trade-off between civic engagement and more specifically *latent* participation (the willingness to take action should the circumstances warrant) and (*manifest*) political participation. This is of course a more demanding task, since it ideally would involve *longitudinal* rather than cross-sectional public opinion survey data (cf. Armington 2007). Still, this would provide us with the insights we need, and it would certainly shed new light on the “crises” debates of recent years. It may very well be the case that citizens today have become increasingly disengaged from the traditional channels of political participation. However, that does not mean that such “critical citizens” turn to unconventional political behaviour, like protest, political consumption or new social movements. It could mean though that increasing number of citizens turn away from the political sphere, into the private sphere. Here, a reservoir of participation could emerge. Citizens are still very much interested in politics, informed, skilled, and have political efficacy beliefs. But, for the time being, many of them chose not to take part in politics in a conventional sense. However, they are on “stand-by”; and if something would trigger them, they certainly would not have any problems getting their voices heard.

Is this actually the case? We do not know this yet, since the major cross-national public opinion surveys include very few if any relevant questions to accurately tap “latent” political participation. There are of course a large number of survey items tapping “civic engagement” activities, but what we really need—in addition to the political participation items—are items tapping civic engagement in combination with items tapping the *readiness* or *willingness* to take action, should the circumstances warrant such action.

It could also be the case that individuals during the course of their lives go in and out of different modes, when it comes to political participation. At some points in time, one would find e.g. a preference for political action; and at other points in time, one would find a period of intense civic engagement, followed later in life by conventional and episodic

electoral participation. Of course, to analyse such a life-long process of political participation would also require longitudinal data. Again, the more modest aim with this paper has been to suggest a typology that allows us to think about all these issues, without losing sight of the latent dimension when analysing, for example, the declining levels of manifest political participation.¹

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