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Comparing political participation profiles in four Western European countries

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Abstract. Most studies of political participation have either focused on specific political behaviours or combined several behaviours into additive scales of institutional versus non-institutional participation. Through a multi-group latent class analysis of participation in 15 different political actions, conducted among citizens from four Western European countries, we identified five empirically grounded participant types that differ in their political engagement, socio-demographic characteristics and political attitudes: ‘voter specialists’, ‘expressive voters’, ‘online participants’, ‘all-round activists’ and ‘inactives’. While the same participant types were identified in all four countries, the proportion of citizens assigned to each type varies across countries. Our results challenge the claim that some citizens specialize in protest politics at the expense of electoral politics. Furthermore, our typological approach challenges previous findings on the individual characteristics associated with political (in)action.

Keywords: political participation; political disengagement; voting; protesting; latent class analysis

Introduction

The health and quality of democracy depend on the input provided by citizens through various political actions such as voting, demonstrating or signing a petition. Many political scientists have expressed concerns about widespread political disengagement in established democracies, pointing to increasingly low levels of voter turnout and party membership (Blais & Rubenson, 2013; Hooghe & Kern, 2017; Van Biezen et al., 2012; Whiteley, 2011). Others claim that it is not the degree of political engagement that has changed but rather its nature. For example, some citizens are said to be replacing electorally oriented institutional political actions, such as voting or contacting a politician, with societally oriented elite-challenging political actions, such as boycotting or demonstrating (Bolzendahl & Coffé, 2013; Dalton, 2008; Inglehart & Catterberg, 2002; Norris, 1999).

However, most scholars have studied political participation by focusing on specific political actions or by combining several actions into separate additive scales of institutional versus non-institutional participation (Bernhagen & Marsh, 2007; Bolzendahl & Coffé, 2013; Hooghe & Marien, 2013; Marien et al., 2010; Martin, 2012; Stolle & Hooghe, 2011; Teorell et al., 2007). This ‘action-centred’ approach prevents us from identifying different participant types among citizens, some of whom may employ specific kinds of political action while others may combine a variety of both institutional and non-institutional actions. Building on the emerging trend of using latent class analysis (LCA) to study political attitudes and behaviours (Alvarez et al., 2017, 2021; Jeroense & Spierings, 2023; Johann et al., 2020; Keating & Melis, 2017; Oser, 2017, 2021; Oser et al., 2013, 2014), we employed multi-group LCA to identify different participant types among citizens from four Western European countries with varying political systems: The United Kingdom, The

Netherlands, Switzerland and Germany. Our survey not only included a more comprehensive list of political participation measures than found in most cross-country surveys (e.g., with measures of online activism, pocketbook activism, political consumerism, civic engagement and direct democracy) but also distinguished between actions aimed at influencing movement versus party politics.

Through this more holistic and inductive approach, we identified five participant types that differ in their political engagement, socio-demographic characteristics and political attitudes: voter specialists, expressive voters, online participants, all-round activists and inactives. While the same participant types were identified in all four countries, the proportion of citizens assigned to each type varies across countries. Our results challenge previous assumptions about political participation. First, we do not find evidence of citizens specializing in non-institutional actions at the expense of institutional ones, contrary to some studies employing LCA – see ‘expressive outsiders’ in Jeroense and Spierings (2023), ‘non-institutional specialists’ in Oser (2021) and ‘agitators’ in Alvarez et al. (2021). Second, political disengagement (which characterizes only 16 per cent of citizens) does not stem from disillusionment or disenchantment with politics. Third, the vast majority of voters (i.e., voter specialists) possess fewer skills and resources than the average citizen, contrary to what the literature tells us (Smets & van Ham, 2013). Finally, while the toolkit of actions available to citizens is expanding, only a very small percentage of citizens participate beyond voting, boycotts, petitions and sharing their views on social media, which is in line with the findings of recent studies employing LCA (Alvarez et al., 2021; Jeroense & Spierings, 2023; Oser, 2021; Oser et al., 2014).

Previous research on typologies of political participation

In the past, research on political participation was conducted separately by political scientists who focused on voting and sociologists who focused on protesting (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). Nowadays, many surveys include at least a few measures of political participation, enabling scholars to compare participation in different electoral and non-electoral forms. However, even when a broader list of actions is considered, these actions are often grouped into binary constructs, separating ‘institutionalized’ from ‘non-institutionalized’ political actions (Oser, 2021). Whereas institutionalized actions are electorally oriented (e.g., voting, campaigning, contacting a politician, working for a political party), non-institutionalized actions are not directly related to the electoral process or the functioning of political institutions (e.g., demonstrations, strikes, petitions, boycotts) (Barnes & Kaase, 1979, p. 84). However, there are several limitations to the dominant approach of grouping political actions into these predefined modes.

First, the literature on participatory repertoires has emphasized that citizens may choose to *combine* institutionalized and non-institutionalized actions in different ways (McAdam et al., 2003). For example, Harris and Gillion (2010) conceptualize participation as a toolbox from which individuals select a combination of tools while discarding others. Whereas participatory ‘modes’ refer to combinations of political actions sharing similar characteristics, participatory ‘repertoires’ refer to the way in which citizens pick and choose different political actions based on their own assessments (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). Indeed, several studies demonstrated a positive relationship between institutionalized and non-institutionalized actions, suggesting that (at least some) citizens perceive them as complementary rather than alternative ways of influencing

politics (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Galais, 2014; Norris et al., 2005; Rüdiger, 2010; Stolle et al., 2005; Teorell et al., 2007).

Second, previous research often fails to distinguish between different kinds of non-institutionalized participation, some of which may be more ‘unconventional’ than others (Jeroense & Spierings, 2023). There are also emerging forms of non-institutionalized participation, which might not fit so neatly into existing classifications. This was emphasized by Van Deth (2014) who developed a taxonomy of participation distinguishing between (1) activities in the sphere of government or politics; (2) activities targeted at the sphere of government or politics; (3) activities aimed at solving collective or community problems; and (4) activities that are not political but may be used to express political aims and intentions. Building on this, several studies have empirically tested whether newer forms of participation are related to or independent from more commonplace political actions using scaling techniques. For example, some studies have shown that civic engagement (van Ingen & van der Meer, 2016), political consumerism (Steenvoorden, 2018; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018) and online activism (Oser et al., 2013; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018; Theocharis et al., 2021) constitute distinctive modes of participation. By contrast, studies employing LCA, have shown that online participation is not a distinctive channel of participation but rather an extension of offline political engagement, that is, there are no persons specializing in online political actions (Keating & Melis, 2017; Oser et al., 2014).

Finally, previous research has mostly pursued an ‘action-centred’ approach by investigating how different political actions are related to each other among the overall population. However, the literature on participatory repertoires has suggested that such an approach is potentially misleading as combinations of actions may exist for some groups of citizens but not for others (Harris & Gillion, 2010). By adopting a more ‘person-centred’ approach, we might identify different ‘participant types’ with distinct patterns of political engagement (Oser, 2017).

In recent years, some scholars have turned our attention towards identifying *empirically grounded* participant types, based on citizens’ past participation in several political actions (Alvarez et al., 2017, 2021; Jeroense & Spierings, 2023; Johann et al., 2020; Keating & Melis, 2017; Oser, 2017, 2021; Oser et al., 2013, 2014). We build on these studies in several ways. First, by covering a broader list of political actions including voting, online participation, direct democracy and inaction. Second, by comparing participant types across multiple countries with different political systems, while simultaneously considering measurement invariance, which was only done in two previous studies (Alvarez et al., 2021; Jeroense & Spierings, 2023). Third, by comparing participant types in terms of social capital, relative deprivation and post-materialist value orientations, in addition to skills and resources and attitudes towards politics. And, finally, by capturing participation prior to the conventional ‘last 12 months’ threshold, which might underestimate the diversity of profiles.

Who are the participant types?

Some classical works have hinted at potential participant types. For example, Milbrath (1965) divided individuals into three categories based on their degree of political engagement: gladiators, spectators and apathetics. Verba and Nie (1972) grouped individuals into six categories depending on their engagement in electorally oriented political actions only: inactives, voting specialists, communalists, parochial participants, campaigners and complete activists. Finally, Barnes and Kaase (1979) developed the first typology of participant types based on the interaction of

institutionalized and non-institutionalized participation: conformists are exclusively engaged in electorally oriented actions; protestors are exclusively engaged in non-institutionalized actions; reformists complement electorally oriented actions with some *lawful* non-institutionalized actions such as boycotts and petitions; activists participate by all possible means; and inactives refrain from any kind of action (Barnes & Kaase, 1979, pp. 137–201).

Three participant types were consistently identified in more recent studies investigating empirically grounded patterns of political engagement in Argentina (Alvarez et al., 2017), The Netherlands (Jeroense & Spierings, 2023), Germany (Johann et al., 2020), the United States (Oser, 2017; 2021; Oser et al., 2014) and several Latin American countries (Alvarez et al., 2021). One group of citizens are ‘all-round activists’ who are highly engaged in a broad range of institutionalized and non-institutionalized actions. Indeed, some scholars have argued that emerging forms of political participation mostly benefit citizens who are already active via conventional channels (Kern et al., 2015; Marien et al., 2010). Another group of citizens are ‘voter specialists’ exclusively engaged in elections. One theoretical explanation for this group is that some citizens hold duty-based conceptions of citizenship whereby voting, unlike other political actions, is perceived as a moral obligation rather than a form of expression (Dalton, 2008). Finally, a third group of citizens is ‘inactives’ who refrain from any kind of political action. Indeed, there is no shortage of literature arguing that citizens are increasingly alienated and disengaged from politics (Hay, 2007).

There is strong theoretical justification for a fourth group of ‘non-institutional specialists’ who are exclusively engaged outside the electoral arena. For example, the transformational school of thought argued that younger generations have turned towards newer, more expressive forms of political action, at the expense of electorally oriented behaviours which they perceive as ineffective (Bolzendahl & Coffé, 2013; Copeland, 2014; Dalton, 2008). Studies from the United States (Oser, 2021), The Netherlands (Jeroense & Spierings, 2023) and Latin America (Alvarez et al., 2021) identified such a participant type, respectively, labelled ‘non-institutional specialists’, ‘expressive outsiders’ and ‘agitators.’ By contrast, other studies from Germany (Johann et al., 2020), the United States (Oser et al., 2014) and the United Kingdom (Keating & Melis, 2017) did not provide evidence of non-institutional specialists. It is worth noting, however, that Keating and Melis (2017) only studied online political actions and Oser and colleagues (2014) removed non-voters from their sample.

A fifth group, which does not have a strong theoretical basis, but resembles Barnes and Kaase’s (1979) ‘reformist’ type, emerged from two studies employing LCA. Oser’s (2017) study in the United States and Jeroense and Spierings’ (2023) study in The Netherlands both identified a participant type, respectively, labelled ‘high-voting engaged’ and ‘expressive voters’, which complements voting in elections, with voting in referenda, contacting a politician, boycotting and using social media. While this participant type seeks to express its views beyond elections, it refrains from more demanding or confrontational actions such as demonstrating or campaigning (unlike the all-around activist). We, therefore, expect to identify an ‘expressive voter’ participant type.

In sum, the studies outlined above provide strong theoretical or empirical evidence for the following participant types:

- all-round activists,
- voter specialists,

- inactives,
- non-institutional specialists and
- expressive voters.

Comparing the profiles of the different participant types

A plethora of studies have tested theories explaining why some people participate in politics while others do not or why some people participate through non-institutionalized versus institutionalized channels. However, these theories have rarely been extended to a comparison of the socio-demographic and attitudinal profiles of empirically grounded and mutually exclusive participant types. In the following paragraphs, we outline several theories that connect participation to an individual's (a) skills and resources, (b) motivations, and (c) values and beliefs. These theories lead us to different expectations for the profiles of the all-round activist, voter specialist, inactive, non-institutional specialist and expressive voter participant types.

The first set of theories emphasizes the importance of skills and resources for participation. Verba and Nie (1972) demonstrated in their seminal work that socio-economic status indicators such as education are positively related to political participation. In the 1990s, the *resource model* was supplemented by the *civic voluntarism model*, according to which membership of civic associations forges collective identities, encourages the development of civic skills and exposes members to opportunities for political engagement (Brady et al., 1995). Building on this, Putnam (2000) argued that social trust, which is fostered by associational belonging, encourages political participation because trustful citizens expect others will join them in achieving common goals. Based on these theories, political participation is driven by higher levels of education, greater involvement in civic associations and, as a consequence, strengthened interpersonal trust.

Previous research demonstrated that education, organizational membership and social trust are positively related to all kinds of participation, including turnout (Smets & van Ham, 2013). However, citizens who are active beyond the electoral arena need to be knowledgeable about a greater number of issues. Indeed, non-institutionalized forms of participation tend to strengthen inequalities based on education, as these forms require greater cognitive abilities than institutionalized ones (Marien et al., 2010). We, therefore, expect that while education increases the probability of belonging to all participant types excluding the inactives, the effect should be stronger for expressive voters, non-institutional specialists and all-round activists.

Associational membership increases the probability of recruitment, which is essential to participation in collective political actions, such as demonstrations, occupations and strikes (Schussman & Soule, 2005). Furthermore, social trust reduces the perceived costs and increases the perceived benefits of participating in politics. This effect matters even more for protest participation, which tends to be characterized by greater uncertainty than electoral participation (Benson & Rochon, 2004). We, therefore, expect that while associational membership and social trust are positively related to membership of all participant types, excluding the inactives, these effects should be stronger for non-institutional specialists and all-round activists engaged in more collective and more demanding political actions.

The second set of theories emphasizes the importance of economic and political motivations for participation. According to *relative deprivation theory*, citizens observing a gap between their own socio-economic position and the position of those at the top levels of society are frustrated with politics and therefore determined to change the status quo (Gurr, 1970). On the one hand, *political*

disaffection theory argues that participation in direct, elite-challenging ways of influencing politics is a consequence of increasing distrust in representative institutions and their inability to defend voters' interests. On the other hand, *new politics theory* claims that it is a function of higher levels of political interest and political efficacy among citizens in affluent democracies (Dalton et al., 2001). More recent studies suggest that it is the combination of being politically dissatisfied and politically engaged which drives direct citizen participation (Rojon & Pilet, 2021). Based on these theories, higher levels of political participation are driven by concerns about one's financial situation, distrust in representative institutions, political interest and confidence in one's ability to influence politics.

We expect that citizens who are very dissatisfied, either with their economic situation or with representative institutions, will take one of two routes. Either they will choose the 'exit' option due to loss of faith in the political system, therefore being associated with the inactive participant type (Hooghe et al., 2011). Or they may seek to challenge the status quo through alternative channels, therefore being associated with the non-institutional specialist participant type (Kern et al., 2015). By contrast, we expect that citizens who are satisfied with their economic situation or with representative institutions will restrict themselves to voting in elections, as they see no reason to challenge a system from which they benefit (Schussman & Soule, 2005). Supporting these claims, previous research has shown that individuals with higher levels of political trust are more likely to engage through institutional channels, while those with lower levels of political trust are more likely to engage through non-institutional channels (Hooghe & Marien, 2013). Building on this, we can assume that citizens who participate electorally but also seek to express themselves through other non-institutionalized actions, that is, expressive voters and all-round activists, are somewhat dissatisfied with the system, but to a lesser extent than the non-institutional specialists or inactives, who refrain from institutionalized actions.

Drawing from *new politics theory*, we expect that citizens who are politically interested and confident in their ability to influence politics will seek to participate in politics one way or another (Dalton et al., 2001). By contrast, those who are lacking in these motivations will refrain from any action, including voting. Previous research demonstrated that interest and efficacy are positively related to turnout, which is the bare minimum one can do to influence politics (Smets & van Ham, 2013). However, *new politics theory* also suggests that citizens who are active through multiple channels are even more interested and efficacious than those who stick to voting, otherwise they would not seek out additional means of expressing their views. We, therefore, expect that while political interest and efficacy increase the probability of belonging to all participant types except the inactives, these effects should be stronger for the expressive voter, non-institutional specialist and all-round activist types.

Finally, the third set of theories connects political participation to specific values and beliefs about politics and society. *Post-materialism theory* argues that the rise in non-institutional political actions in affluent democracies is underpinned by a post-materialist value shift (Inglehart & Catterberg, 2002). According to Inglehart (1997, pp. 211–213), post-materialist citizens are more inclined towards non-institutional channels because they are less accepting of hierarchical authority and share a more participatory vision of politics. They are also more supportive of issues such as environmental protection and LGBTQ rights, which are not exclusively directed towards government authorities. We, therefore, expect that post-materialist values increase the likelihood of belonging to participant types engaged outside the electoral arena, that is, the expressive voters, all-round activists and non-institutional specialists. However, this effect should be the strongest

Table 1. Expected profiles of the participant types

	All-round activists	Voter specialists	Inactives	Non- institutional specialists	Expressive voters
<i>Skills and resources</i>					
Education	++	+	-	++	++
Associational membership	++	+	-	++	+
Social trust	++	+	-	++	+
<i>Motivations</i>					
Political interest	++	+	-	++	++
Political efficacy	++	+	-	++	++
Economic fears	+	-	++	++	+
Distrust in institutions	+	-	++	++	+
<i>Values and beliefs</i>					
Environmental protection	+	-	-	++	+
Disobedience	+	-	-	++	+
Right-leaning views	-	+	+	-	-

Note: (+) moderate positive effect; (++) strong positive effect; (-) moderate negative effect; (--) strong negative effect

for non-institutional specialists, as people who avoid institutional channels altogether are probably more critical of authority. By contrast, post-materialist values should be negatively associated with the inactive or voter specialist types, the latter of whom are mobilized by a sense of duty (Blais & Achen, 2019).

Studies have also shown that political ideology matters for participation. Left-wing individuals, who are more strongly committed to social and political change, protest more than right-wing individuals, who prefer to channel their discontent through institutional actions (Hutter & Kriesi, 2013; Torcal et al., 2016; Van der Meer et al., 2009). We, therefore, expect that citizens with left-wing political orientations will participate in non-institutional ways, therefore being associated with the expressive voter, all-round activist and non-institutional specialist types. However, the effect might be the strongest for the non-institutional specialists, as the rejection of institutionalized channels signals a desire for a radically different system. By contrast, citizens with right-wing orientations will either stick to voting or refrain from any action, as they are less inclined towards changing the system.

Our expectations for the relationships between our three sets of predictors (skills and resources, motivations and values and beliefs) and each of the participant types are presented in Table 1.

Case selection and data

We conducted our study among citizens from four western European countries: the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. The political systems of these countries differ in several respects. Firstly, The Netherlands and Switzerland have proportional electoral systems, while Germany has a mixed majoritarian-proportional system, and the United Kingdom

has a full majoritarian system. Second, the United Kingdom and The Netherlands are unitary states, while Germany and Switzerland are federal states. Finally, in Switzerland, direct democratic instruments such as referendums and initiatives are frequently used at multiple levels of government, while in Germany they are frequently used in specific regions and in The Netherlands and the United Kingdom direct democracy is used more sparingly.¹ This country selection enables us to investigate whether similar participant types emerge across established democracies with different political systems, or whether some participant types are more specific to one or more countries.

The data were obtained from the Polpart survey (<http://www.polpart.org>), which was conducted among samples of 1000–1300 respondents per country between June and August 2017. Many large-scale surveys such as the European Social Survey, World Values Survey, International Social Survey Programme and Comparative Study of Electoral Systems restrict the number of political actions to five or six major forms of participation (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). The Polpart survey not only covers 15 different political actions (including online activism, pocketbook activism, civic engagement and direct democracy) but also distinguishes between actions aimed at influencing party versus movement politics, for example, working for a political party versus working for an interest group.

Respondents were recruited from online panels based on stratified sampling procedures that ensured similar distributions on age, sex, education and employment status across countries. Studies have shown that respondents recruited from online panels are relatively similar in terms of political attitudes and voting behaviour to those recruited by random probability sampling techniques (Huff & Tingley, 2015; Simmons & Bobo, 2015). Nonetheless, to address potential sampling bias we weighted our data to match the distributions on age, sex and education in the general population of each country, based on OECD data from the same year.

Variable measures

The participant types were identified based on citizens' participation in 15 different political actions, six of which are electorally oriented institutional actions (voting in elections or referenda; working for a political party; donating to a political party; contacting a politician; and commenting or posting about a political party on social media). Five political actions are common measures of non-institutional participation (petitions; boycotts; demonstrations; strikes; and occupations) while the remaining four might be considered forms of civic engagement (working for an interest group; donating to an interest group; commenting or posting about an interest group on social media; and participating in a neighbourhood committee). Respondents reported whether they had ever participated in each of the 15 actions, which we included as separate binary indicators of participation in our analyses.

In many studies, the measurement of political participation is often limited to the last 12 months to avoid that a single action portrays citizens as activists for their entire life (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018). However, our approach of searching for combinations of political actions identifies those having taken a broad range of actions as activists (i.e., our measurement captures all-round rather than consistent activism). Furthermore, restricting measurement to the last 12 months would underestimate the level of activism, as opportunities for engagement tend to come and go in tandem with major protest cycles and electoral campaigns (Tarrow, 2011). The descriptive statistics

provided in the online appendices indicate that focusing on the last 12 months would reduce the participation rate to less than 5 per cent for the majority of political actions in our study.

Three sets of independent variables/covariates were included in the latent class model to compare the profiles of different participant types. The first set of variables is derived from theories emphasizing the importance of skills and resources, such as *education*, *membership in civic associations* and *social trust*. The second set is derived from theories emphasizing economic and political motivations, such as *concerns about one's financial situation*, *distrust in representative institutions* (i.e., parliament, political parties and politicians),² *political interest* and *political efficacy* (or confidence in one's ability to influence politics). The third set is derived from theories that relate participation to specific values and beliefs such as post-materialist value orientations and *left-right-self-placement*. For lack of better measures, post-materialist values are captured with two items on perceiving *environmental protection* as a top priority for the government and *rejecting obedience* as a core lesson for children. These proxies reflect the claims that post-materialists are more strongly oriented towards other-regarding goals and more critical of authority (Inglehart & Catterberg, 2002).

Finally, gender and age are included as controls based on the literature. Several studies demonstrated that women and younger persons are more active in non-institutionalized political actions while men and older persons are more often involved in institutionalized actions (Copeland, 2014; Hooghe & Marien, 2013; Martin, 2012; Stolle & Hooghe, 2011). On the other hand, younger persons have had fewer opportunities to participate in politics and persons socialized during the 1960s and 1970s may have engaged in a broader range of actions than those socialized in more recent decades (Grasso et al., 2018). (See online Appendix I for further details on the measurement of the independent variables and online Appendix II for descriptive statistics of all political participation measures and independent variables by country.).

Method of analysis

Instead of solely investigating how different political actions are related to each other, as is typically done in the literature, we employed LCA to identify discrete groups or 'classes' of respondents sharing similar patterns of response across multiple indicators (Goodman, 2002). In our case, the classes correspond to the participant types while the indicators correspond to the 15 political actions from which these types are derived. As a data-driven approach to studying political participation, LCA provides a better representation of reality than classifications based on the researcher's assumptions (Alvarez et al., 2017).

In this paper, we use a three-step multi-group LCA (see visual representation in Figure 1), which is most suitable for a cross-national comparative research design (Kankaraš et al., 2018):

- In the first step, we build a Latent Class (LC) model which describes the associations between political actions and participant types, often referred to as the measurement model. The first step focuses on determining the number of classes (or participant types) specified in the model as well as testing and accounting for measurement invariance. Considering measurement invariance allows us to establish whether the latent classes identified have largely the same meaning in all countries and thus verify that cross-country comparisons are possible. It also enables us to account for any (minor) differences in the measurements across countries in the model specification (Alvarez et al., 2021).

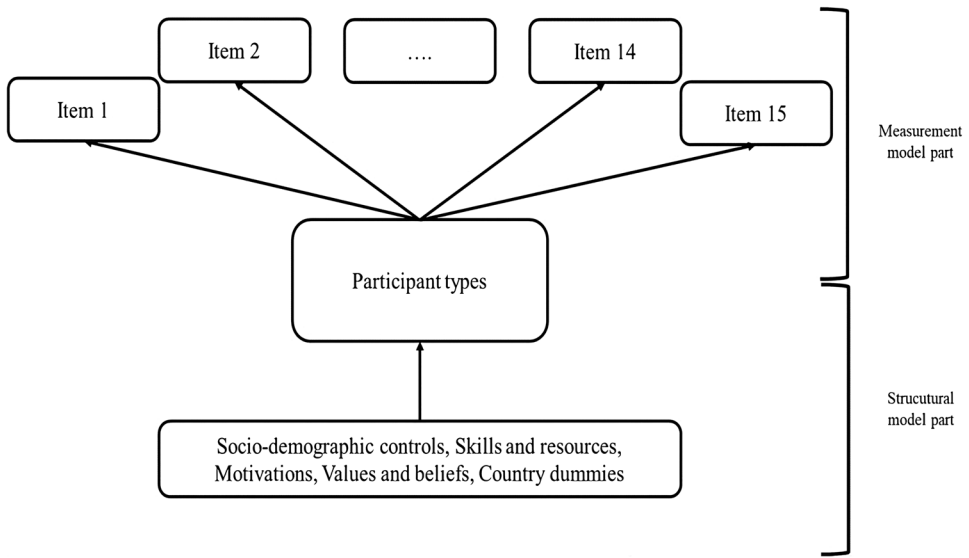


Figure 1. Path diagram of the modelling approach.

- Once the model is estimated, in the second step, the respondents are assigned to classes based on their posterior class membership probabilities.³ We use proportional assignment, in which each respondent is assigned to each class with weights that are equal to the posterior membership probability of that class.
- Then, in the third step, the effects of the independent variables on belonging to a specific participant type (the outcome variable) are investigated using a multinomial (MNL) logistic regression model. This model is often referred to as the structural model. To account for the fact that the distributions of the participant types are likely to differ by country (i.e., certain participant types might be more prevalent in some countries and less common or almost non-existent in other countries), we included country dummies as covariates in the model as well.

While the three-step approach is an attractive method, which allows us to separate the estimation of the measurement part from that of the structural part of the analysis, it was shown by Bolck and colleagues (2004) to underestimate the relationships between external variables and class membership (as it does not take into account the classification error when assigning observations to classes). Therefore, the use of this approach requires the application of a correction procedure. In our analysis, we used the correction method proposed by Vermunt (2010), as it is the preferred approach when the external variables used in step three are covariates predicting class membership.

Data cleaning and preparation were done in Stata (version 17.0, StataCorp LLC., College Station, TX, USA) while all steps of the three-step LCA, that is, fitting the LCA model, saving class membership probabilities, and running the MNL logistic regression with class membership as the outcome and correcting for assignment uncertainty, were carried out in LatentGold (version 6.0, Statistical Innovations, Belmont MA, USA).

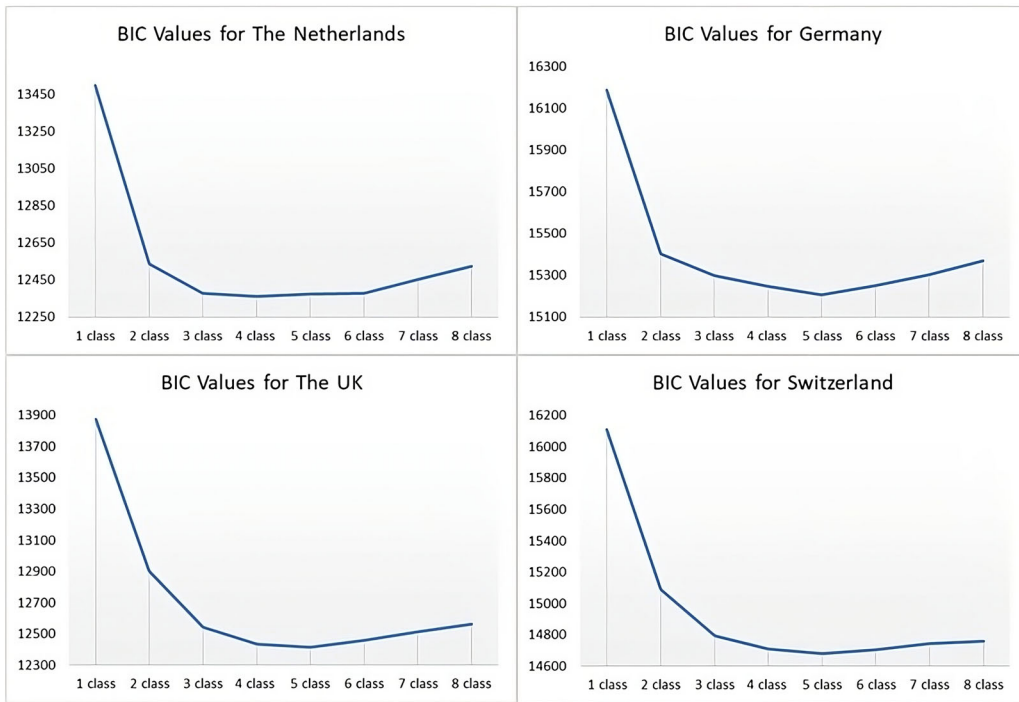


Figure 2. BIC values for country-specific LC models with 1–8 classes. BIC, Bayesian information criterion. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Results

The first step of our analysis is to determine the best fitting specification for the measurement part, that is, the LC model. Following Kankaraš and colleagues (2018), we started by fitting separate LC models for each country. As this was a data-driven approach, we considered several models per country with the number of classes ranging from 1 to 8. The final selection of the models was based on goodness-of-fit criteria, that is, the Bayesian information criterion (BIC), while also taking into account substantive considerations, that is, the interpretability and size of the obtained classes (Weller et al., 2020). While lower BIC scores indicate better model-fit, a common approach is to plot the BIC values as a function of the number of classes considered and identify where the curve flattens (see Figure 2).

The results of the analyses, provided in Table 2 and online Appendix III, suggest that a five-class solution fits the data best for Switzerland, Germany and the United Kingdom, while a four-class solution is a better fit for The Netherlands. After comparing the conditional response probabilities (or the probabilities of participating in each of the 15 political actions conditioned on class membership) provided in online Appendix III, we concluded that the resulting participant types are similar across the four countries. Therefore, the overall cross-country sample should have (around) five classes, which is in line with the number of participant types we expected to find. Even if a four-class solution is a better fit for The Netherlands, multigroup LCA would accommodate this by assigning a proportion of (near to) ‘0’ to the fifth class in this country (Kankaraš et al., 2018).

Table 2. BIC values for country-specific LC models with 1–8 classes

Classes	NL	DE	UK	CH
1	13,497.2	16,187.8	13,874.1	16,112.4
2	12,537.9	15,404.3	12,903.4	15,087.6
3	12,377.4	15,299.5	12,543.6	14,793.8
4	12,360.8	15,246.8	12,432.8	14,708.5
5	12,373.6	15,207.1	12,416.6	14,680.8
6	12,377.2	15,250.9	12,456.4	14,703.4
7	12,454.5	15,302.4	12,514.6	14,741.6
8	12,525.2	15,371.1	12,560.7	14,757.1

Note: Values in bold correspond to the lowest BIC level per country.

Abbreviations: BIC, Bayesian information criterion; CH, Switzerland; DE, Germany; NL, The Netherlands; UK, United Kingdom.

Table 3. BIC values for the LC model with varying degrees of homogeneity

Model	Number of classes	BIC
Fully homogenous	5	54,905.1
Partially homogenous	5	54,238.6
Fully heterogenous	5	55,116.7
Fully homogenous	6	54,696.1
Partially homogenous	6	54,206.6
Fully homogenous	7	54,513.1
Partially homogenous	7	54,205.6

Note: Values in bold correspond to the lowest BIC level per number of classes. Abbreviation: BIC, Bayesian information criterion.

Next, we fitted several five-class multi-group models with varying levels of homogeneity to the pooled data. This was done to test for measurement invariance across countries, thereby ensuring that we are comparing the same participant types across the four countries. The level of measurement invariance present in the data is indicated by the degree of homogeneity in the model with the best fit. That is, the more homogeneous the best-fitting model is, the more equivalent the data are and the less measurement variance there is (Kankaraš et al., 2018).

As shown in Table 3, we fitted three five-class models with the following degrees of homogeneity: (i) a homogenous model, wherein only the class membership probabilities (i.e., the structural probabilities) differ by country; (ii) a partially homogenous model, wherein the response probabilities partially differ by country (only the intercept parameters depend on country); (iii) a fully heterogenous model, wherein the response probabilities fully differ by country (both the slope and intercept parameters depend on country). For further details regarding the model specifications, see Kankaraš and colleagues (2018). As shown in Table 3, the partially homogenous model fits the data best.

We also double-checked whether a six- and seven-class solution fits the data better. As can be seen from the second part of Table 3, in both cases a partially homogenous model fits the data

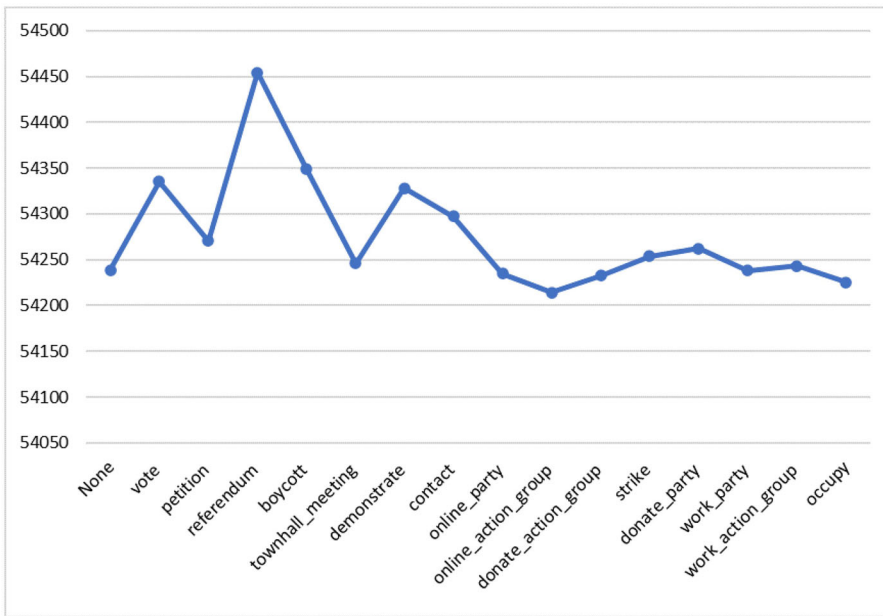


Figure 3. BIC values for partially homogenous models (on the item level). The figure provides the BIC values of 16 different model specifications. The first model assumes partial measurement variance for all items (i.e., intercepts depend on country), while the latter 15 assume measurement invariance for one of the items at a time. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

better than a fully homogenous one. Furthermore, the improvement in the BIC of the partially homogenous six- or seven-class model, compared to the five-class model is marginal. Therefore, we conclude that the measurement invariance issue cannot be resolved by adding additional classes, and we retain the five-class, partially homogenous solution for our analysis.⁴

While the fact that the partially homogenous model fits the data better than the fully homogenous one indicates some level of measurement invariance, it is likely to be the case that some items exhibit measurement invariance while others do not. Therefore, we performed an item-level analysis to check the invariance of each of the 15 political actions separately. In doing this, we fitted 15 partially homogenous models, wherein each of the model specifications assumed that the intercept did not differ by country (i.e., there was measurement invariance) for one item at a time. As can be seen in Figure 3, the goodness-of-fit of the models is significantly worse when measurement invariance is (incorrectly) assumed for voting, referenda, boycotts, demonstrating and contacting. This implies that the measurements of the remaining 10 items and their relationships to the participant types do not vary across countries. Therefore, the final model specification used in our analysis assumes partial homogeneity for the five aforementioned items, while maintaining full homogeneity for the remaining 10 items.

Having selected a measurement model that allows us to compare the same participant types across countries, we now turn to examining their participatory characteristics. Figure 4 plots the likelihood of participating in all 15 political actions for each of the five participant types (based on the conditional probabilities in online Appendix IV). To facilitate the characterization of participant types, we only consider conditional probabilities over 0.30 (meaning at least a 30 per cent chance of having participated) as evidence of engagement.

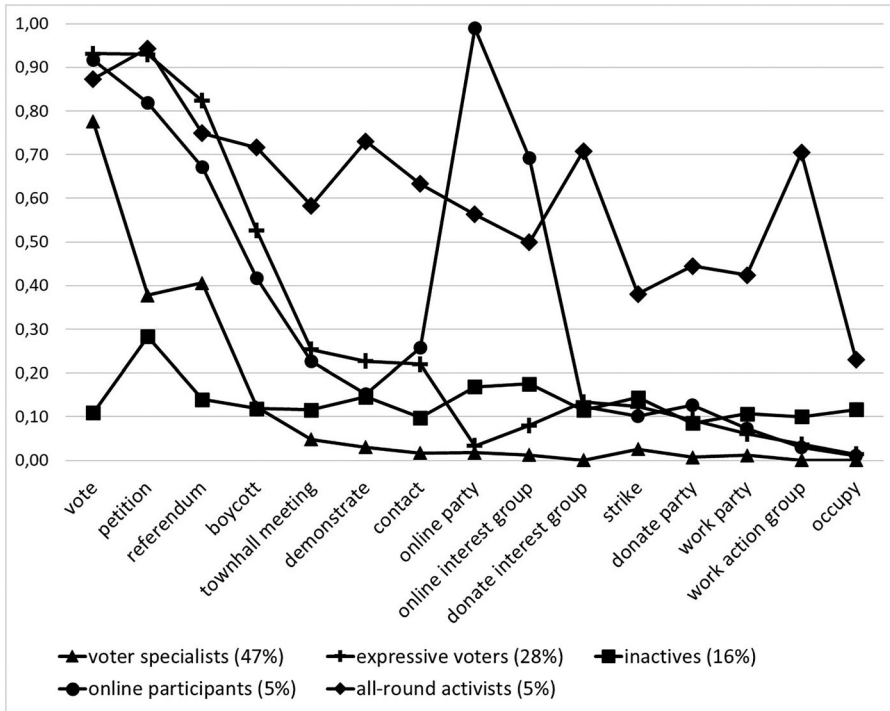


Figure 4. Conditional response probabilities of the latent classes ($N = 5109$).

The largest participant type, constituting 47 per cent of the overall sample, is very likely to have voted in a general election (78 per cent) and somewhat likely to have voted in a referendum (41 per cent). By contrast, they have an almost 0 per cent chance of having taken any other political action, except signing a petition (which is also the trigger to a popular referendum in Switzerland). This participant type comes closest to our expectations for the ‘voter specialists’, who mostly restrict themselves to casting a ballot.

The second largest participant type, constituting 28 per cent of the overall sample, is very likely to have voted in a general election (92 per cent) or referendum (82 per cent) but also likely to have signed a petition (93 per cent) and boycotted a product for political or ethical reasons (53 per cent). By contrast, they have a much lower chance of having taken any other political action. This participant type comes closest to our expectations for the ‘expressive voters’, who complement voting in elections with voting in referenda and a few non-institutional actions, namely petitions and boycotts. The expressive voters refrain from more demanding or more confrontational political actions such as working for a political party or joining a demonstration, and stick to individual, non-institutional actions that have become increasingly conventional for citizens in established democracies (Copeland, 2014).

Sixteen per cent of respondents were assigned to a participant type which is very unlikely to have engaged in any of the 15 political actions and therefore comes closest to our expectations for the ‘inactives’.

One of the smallest participant types, constituting 5 per cent of the overall sample, is similar to the expressive voters with the exception that they are also very likely to have commented or posted

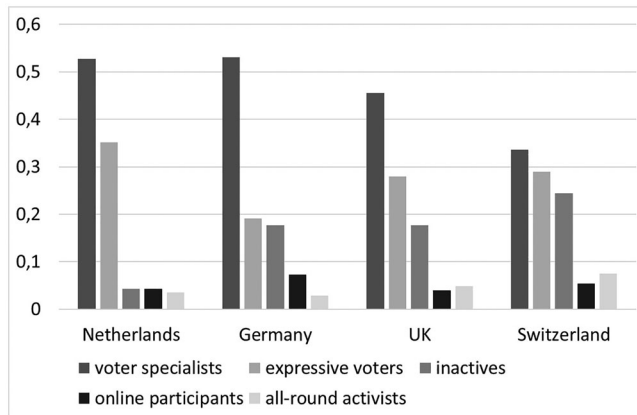


Figure 5. Posterior class membership probabilities by country.

about a political party (99 per cent) or interest group (69 per cent) on social media. Although we did not formulate expectations for this participant type, we refer to them as ‘online participants’ because they are much more likely to have participated online than the other participant types (even if they are also engaged in voting and other low-cost actions).

Finally, another one of the smallest participant types, also constituting 5 per cent of the overall sample, is very likely to have engaged in almost all political actions, with the exception of joining a strike or occupying public space. This participant type, therefore, corresponds to our expectations for the ‘all-round activists’, who combine participation in a broad range of actions.

Our results confirm the all-round activist, inactive, expressive voter and voter specialist participant types, but provide no evidence of non-institutional specialists exclusively engaged in elite-challenging behaviours. Instead, we find evidence of an online participant type which complements voting and a few non-institutional actions with relatively high levels of social media engagement related to political parties and interest groups. The latter finding confirms previous research suggesting that online participation is not a replacement for institutional channels but something that a small number of citizens do in addition to offline participation (Keating & Melis, 2017; Oser et al., 2014).

In the second step, respondents are assigned to classes based on their posterior class membership probabilities, which enables us to compare the socio-demographic and attitudinal profiles of the participant types. We begin by comparing the posterior class membership probabilities for each country separately (see Figure 5). Although our model selection ensured that we are comparing the same participant types across countries, some participant types may be more or less prevalent in certain countries.

The most striking country difference is that only a very small proportion of inactive citizens is located in The Netherlands, which would support our earlier finding that a four-class solution is a better fit for this country. The Netherlands has a very open electoral system, which ensures that a greater number of citizens are represented in elections, potentially explaining why there are fewer citizens who remain inactive and more citizens who vote but do not feel the need to express themselves further, that is, voter specialists (Krouwel & Lucardie, 2008). Furthermore, the openness of the Dutch electoral system allows for a greater number of issues to be articulated,

which may prompt voters to express themselves beyond elections, potentially explaining why the proportion of expressive voters is much higher in this country than in other countries.

We also note that the proportion of all-round activists is greater in Switzerland, where the direct democratic culture has been shown to foster other forms of citizen participation (Ladner & Fiechter, 2012). Paradoxically, however, there are also considerably more inactives in Switzerland, which might be related to the complexity of Swiss electoral institutions and a tradition of power-sharing between major parties, which contributes to the perception that elections have no effect on government formation (Blais, 2014). Switzerland's direct democracy might also explain why there are fewer voter specialists in this country, as scholars have argued that referenda and initiatives have a dampening effect on electoral turnout because people perceive elections as less important (Altman, 2013). The proportion of voter specialists is also lower in the United Kingdom (than in The Netherlands or Germany), where the winner-takes-all electoral system may affect the perceived effectiveness of voting.

Finally, the proportion of online participants is slightly higher in Germany. Indeed, recent studies have shown that Facebook political communities and their community gains are much higher in Germany than in many other EU member states including The Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Koc-Michalska & Lilleker, 2019). However, political candidates have also played an active role in mobilizing citizens through social media in The Netherlands (Vergeer & Hermans, 2013). Furthermore, the proportion of expressive voters, who complement electoral participation with petitions, boycotts and referenda, is slightly smaller in Germany than in other countries, which is potentially explained by the fact that not all German *länder* allow for referenda. While we have offered tentative explanations for the country differences observed, future research might test potential explanations more systematically with a greater sample of countries.

Finally, we compare the socio-demographic and attitudinal profiles of the five classes, by regressing respondents' probabilities of being assigned to each participant type on their skills and resources, motivations and values and beliefs. Table 4 shows the MNL regression estimates of class belonging with effect coding parameters, meaning that each participant type is compared to the entire set of participant types rather than the reference group (see online Appendix V for regression estimates with dummy coding parameters, whereby each participant type is compared to the voter specialists).

Starting with the voter specialists, for whom we expected smaller positive effects of skills, resources and political interest than for other participant types, as voting is a less demanding and more habitual behaviour. Contrary to expectations the results demonstrate that voter specialists are lower educated, less active in civic associations, less interested in politics and less confident in their ability to influence politics than the average. Also contrary to expectations, voter specialists do not appear to be less dissatisfied with representative institutions or their economic situations. However, they are not more dissatisfied either, which would explain why they do not seek to participate beyond voting in elections. While we do not find that voter specialists care less about the environment, we do find that they are more respectful of authority (i.e., less disobedient), in line with the hypothesis that voter specialists are not post-materialists. The results also show that voter specialists are more likely to identify as right-wing, supporting the claim that right-leaning citizens refrain from political actions that would contribute to greater social and political change.

We expected that expressive voters would have more skills, resources and motivation to participate in politics than voter specialists, but less of these attributes than the more active participant types. This is partially confirmed, as they appear to be higher educated and more

Table 4. Multinomial regression estimates of class belonging with effect-coding parameters (N = 5109)

	Voter specialists (47%)		Expressive voters (28%)		Inactive (16%)		Online participants (5%)		All-round activists (5%)	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Education	-0.16**	0.06	0.23***	0.06	-0.23**	0.08	-0.18	0.10	0.35*	0.14
Associational membership	-0.61***	0.05	-0.09*	0.04	0.17**	0.06	-0.10	0.08	0.62***	0.07
Social trust	-0.02	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.05	0.03	-0.05	0.03	-0.01	0.04
Political interest	-0.79***	0.06	0.16**	0.06	-0.78***	0.10	0.30***	0.09	1.11***	0.15
Political efficacy	-0.20***	0.05	0.03	0.04	-0.50***	0.07	0.38***	0.08	0.29**	0.09
Economic fears	-0.05	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.03	0.08	0.34**	0.11	-0.39**	0.14
Distrust in institutions	-0.05	0.05	0.07	0.05	-0.59***	0.08	0.13	0.09	0.44***	0.13
Environmental concern	-0.03	0.10	0.49***	0.09	-0.54***	0.15	-0.54**	0.18	0.62**	0.19
Disobedience	-0.22***	0.05	-0.18***	0.05	0.21**	0.07	-0.31***	0.07	0.50***	0.10
Left-right self-placement	0.14***	0.02	-0.02	0.02	0.20***	0.03	-0.01	0.04	-0.31***	0.05
Age	-0.01	0.03	0.16***	0.03	-0.41***	0.05	-0.22***	0.05	0.48***	0.09
Female	0.01	0.04	0.09*	0.04	-0.29***	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.14	0.09

Note: the sample is weighted to match distributions on age, sex and education in the general population and country dummies were included as covariates in the model. The number of respondents in the weighted sample (5109) is slightly larger than the number of respondents in the original dataset (4773).

interested in politics, but to a lesser extent than all-round activists (i.e., smaller positive effects of education and interest). Contrary to expectations, however, expressive voters are not confident in their abilities to influence politics, nor do they share any political or economic grievances (the effects of economic fears and political distrust are not significant), similar to the voter specialists. Furthermore, they appear to be less rather than more active in civic associations. The latter findings suggest that expressive voters refrain from more demanding or collective political actions either because they are not dissatisfied with the political system or because they are not part of any mobilizing networks.

We also expected smaller positive effects of post-materialist values and leftwing ideology on belonging to the expressive voters versus the more active participant types. These expectations are also partially confirmed; on the one hand, expressive voters support post-materialist goals such as environmental protection, on the other hand, they value obedience and do not describe themselves as leftwing. Finally, our controls show that expressive voters are also more likely to be women and older compared to the average, which is supported by studies claiming that women engage in private, individualized political actions such as boycotting more often than men (Copeland, 2014; Stolle et al., 2005). In conclusion, expressive voters appear to be higher educated, politically interested persons who seek to express themselves beyond voting through individual non-institutionalized actions but do not seek to challenge the system through more confrontational collective action.

In line with expectations, we find that inactive citizens are lacking the skills, resources and political motivations to participate in politics, as the results show that they are lower educated, less interested in politics and less confident in their abilities to influence politics than the average. Contrary to expectations, we find that inactive citizens are more active in civic associations, perhaps because being involved in such associations restricts one's availability (or motivation) to participate in politics. On the other hand, our measure of associational membership captures past participation in a range of civic associations, the most common of which are a sports club, church or professional organization.

While we hypothesized that economic and political grievances may lead to complete disengagement, the results show that inactive citizens are actually more confident in representative institutions than the average, suggesting instead that disengagement comes from a place of satisfaction (Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2016). We find mixed evidence for the role of post-materialist values: on the one hand, inactive citizens are less concerned about the environment; on the other hand, they are more critical of authority. Similarly, to voter specialists, inactive citizens are slightly more likely to identify as right-wing, confirming expectations that right-wingers are more likely to refrain from any action that would bring about social and political change (Van der Meer et al., 2009). With regard to the controls, inactive citizens are more likely to be men and younger compared to the average.

We did not formulate expectations for the online participants, who engage in politically motivated social media in addition to voting, signing petitions and boycotting. While they do not appear to have more skills or resources, online participants show stronger political motivations, such as being politically interested and confident in their abilities to influence politics. Online participants appear to be more 'materialist' than expressive voters, as they express greater concerns about their economic situation, are less concerned about the environment, and are less critical of authority. However, online participants cannot be associated with one side of the left-right ideological self-placement scale. Finally, this participant type is younger than the average.

The socio-demographic and attitudinal profile of the all-round activists fulfils almost all of our expectations. All-round activists are higher educated, more active in civic associations, more interested in politics and more confident in their ability to influence politics than the average. They are also more distrusting of representative institutions, which would explain why they seize every opportunity to influence politics. The finding that all-round activists are both politically engaged and dissatisfied aligns with recent work suggesting that it is the combination of skills and grievances that drive citizen participation (Rojon & Pilet, 2021). Contrary to expectations, however, all-round activists are less likely to express economic grievances, which makes sense if one considers that actions such as demonstrating or working for a political party demand considerable time and resources. The results confirm the role of post-materialist value orientations on both counts; all-round activists are more concerned about the environment and more critical of authority than the average. The results also show that all-round activists are more likely to identify as left-wing, supporting the claim that persons who are inclined towards social and political change will take more radical action (Torcal et al., 2016). Finally, while our controls demonstrate that all-round activists are older than the average, the posterior class membership probabilities in online Appendix VI show a curvilinear relationship whereby all-round activists are most likely to be found among both the youngest and the oldest age groups.

Conclusion

In the past, scholars sought to compare different types of political participation by combining specific political actions into separate additive scales of institutionalized versus non-institutionalized participation. However, this approach prevents us from identifying mutually exclusive participant types, some of whom may participate in a broad variety of political actions while others may specialize in a specific kind of political action. Building on a growing number of studies employing LCA to study political participation (Alvarez et al., 2017; 2021; Jeroense & Spierings, 2023; Johann et al., 2020; Keating & Melis, 2017; Oser, 2017; 2021; Oser et al., 2013, 2014), we identified five empirically grounded participant types across four Western European countries, based on a more comprehensive list of political actions.

Similarly to previous studies, we demonstrated that the greatest share of citizens (47 per cent) are ‘voter specialists’ exclusively engaged in elections and (to a lesser extent) referenda, while 16 per cent are ‘inactives’ refraining from any kind of political action, including voting, and only 5 per cent are ‘all-round activists’ combining participation in a broad variety of actions. Contrary to previous studies, we did not find evidence of participant types specializing only in non-institutional actions, civic engagement, online activism or direct democracy in any of the four countries. Instead, we found that around one-fourth of citizens are ‘expressive voters’ engaged in two non-institutional political actions in addition to voting, namely petitions and boycotts. Furthermore, an additional 5 per cent of citizens, whom we labelled ‘online participants’, differ only from the expressive voters in that they are much more likely to have commented or posted about a political party or interest group on social media.

Discussion

Contrary to much of the theory on political participation and to some previous studies employing LCA (Alvarez et al., 2017; 2021; Jeroense & Spierings, 2023; Oser, 2021), we did not identify

any participant types specializing in non-institutional actions or in ‘newer’ forms of participation. Expressive voters and online participants combine petitions, boycotts and social media engagement with actions that are directly aimed at influencing the functioning of political institutions, namely voting in elections and referenda. All-round activists participate in a broad variety of actions, both institutional and non-institutional, even when including measures that explicitly differentiate between actions aimed at influencing movement versus party politics. All in all, our findings challenge the ideas presented by the transformational school of thought that newer forms of participation are replacing more conventional, electorally oriented forms. While the participatory toolkit available to citizens in established democracies is expanding, newer additions are not being grabbed up by different citizens. Furthermore, scholars have warned that by focusing on conventional political behaviours, we run the risk of underestimating the political engagement of citizens in established democracies (Dalton, 2008). However, our results show that citizens engaged beyond voting in elections represent only 50 per cent of the population and those engaged beyond voting, petitions, boycotts and social media, constitute only 5 per cent of the population, even when counting all actions ever taken in one’s lifetime.

Instead, our results suggest a continuum of participation ranging from less demanding individual political actions to more demanding collective political actions, with the voter specialists and all-round activists at the extremities. While the literature is overwhelmingly focused on comparing politically active and inactive citizens, we show that there are several sub-groups in between that remain under-theorized. For example, the expressive voters combine electoral participation with referenda, petitions and boycotts while refraining from contacting a politician, joining a demonstration or participating in a townhall meeting. A similar participant type was also identified in two other studies employing LCA to study political participation in The Netherlands (Jeroense & Spierings’, 2023) and the United States (Oser, 2017), which reinforces the relevance of this group for future research. We also identified an online participant type, who are slightly more engaged than the expressive voters in that they also share their political views online, but still refrain from the more demanding collective actions taken by all-round activists. The online participants confirm previous research suggesting that online actions are taken by a relatively small number of citizens who are also engaged offline (Keating & Melis, 2017; Oser et al., 2014).

Future research is needed to better understand who the expressive voters and online participants are and why they participate in some actions while refraining from others. We provide some answers to these questions by examining the covariates of class membership. Expressive voters appear to be older, higher educated and politically interested individuals who seek to express themselves on post-materialist issues, such as environmental protection, by engaging in a few (rather conventional) non-institutionalized actions, in addition to voting. However, expressive voters do not seek to challenge the status quo by engaging in more demanding collective actions, most likely because they lack the frustration with politics or the links to social networks that characterize all-round activists. Online participants demonstrate even stronger motivations to participate in politics than expressive voters, which might explain why they also express their views through social media. However, they appear to be more ‘materialist’ than post-materialist, in that they value obedience and worry more about their financial situation than about environmental protection. While these findings suggest that digitally networked channels attract slightly different individuals, further investigation into differences between the expressive voters, online participants and all-round activists is needed to gain a better understanding of who they are.

Previous research studied the characteristics of citizens who are either more or less engaged in a *specific* kind of political action, whether voting, demonstrating or (non)institutionalized participation more generally. However, our results show that a more holistic approach leads to somewhat different conclusions about the characteristics of those who participate. For example, research on the individual-level determinants of voter turnout demonstrated that voters are higher educated, politically interested, confident in their ability to influence politics and active in civic associations (Smets & Van Ham, 2013). By isolating those who are *exclusively* engaged in elections and referenda (i.e., voter specialists), our study shows, instead, that the vast majority of voters actually score lower on education, political interest, political efficacy and associational membership than the average citizen. Furthermore, we find that voter specialists do not express any political or economic grievances and are less critical of authority and more likely to identify as right wing. Hence, voter specialists appear to be relatively conservative individuals with less motivation to challenge the status-quo by engaging outside the electoral arena.

Isolating citizens who have never taken any kind of political action in the past, including voting, also leads to unexpected findings. For example, although they are less interested in politics and less confident in their ability to influence politics, inactive citizens are the only participant type expressing higher levels of trust in representative actors and institutions. Furthermore, our results show that politically inactive citizens are more active in civic associations, contrary to the civic voluntarism model. However, it is worth noting that our measure of associational membership captures past participation in a range of civic associations, the most common of which are a sports club, church or professional organization. All in all, these findings not only challenge the idea that disengagement stems from disillusionment and disenchantment with politics (Hooghe et al., 2011) but raise the question of whether disengagement is a problem for the functioning of democracy if inactive citizens are fairly confident in representative actors and institutions.

We now turn to discussing the limitations of our study. Whereas previous studies employing LCA restricted the measurement of political participation to actions taken in the last 12 months, our study extended the measurement to actions ‘ever taken’ by respondents. Focusing on the last 12 months underestimates participation, especially for actions that are tied to specific policy issues, electoral campaigns or political events, such as demonstrations, strikes, referenda, contacting or working for a political party or interest group (see online Appendix II). However, our approach also has its shortcomings, one of which is the recall bias associated with actions taken more than 12 months ago, although recall bias is also known to affect actions taken in the recent past, that is, within the last 2 years (van Elsas et al., 2016). Furthermore, the flip side of the coin is that the ‘ever taken’ approach might overestimate participation by including persons who have engaged in just one demonstration 30 or 40 years ago among the activists (Saunders, 2014). Nevertheless, the shares of all-round activists identified in our study are similar to those reported by other studies restricted to the last 12 months (Oser, 2021; Jeroense & Spierings, 2023) and the all-round activists in our sample also include persons below 30 (see online Appendix VI). Finally, the ‘ever taken’ approach might explain why we did not identify citizens engaged in protest politics at the expense of electoral politics, as citizens may have turned away from the latter in more recent years (Saunders, 2014). Future research employing LCA might address the shortcomings of each approach by including both recent and long-term measures of participation among the indicators. This might shed light on whether ‘consistent’ activists can be distinguished from ‘historic’ activists or whether some participant types have changed repertoires over time.

Finally, by employing multi-group LCA we ensured that the participant types were comparable across countries while demonstrating that some types are more prevalent in certain contexts. We provided tentative interpretations of country differences, for example, by attributing the smaller proportion of inactives and the larger shares of voter specialists and expressive voters in The Netherlands to its more open electoral system. Or by relating the smaller proportions of voter specialists in Switzerland to the availability of direct democracy and a tradition of power-sharing between major political parties. However, future studies with a greater number of countries might test potential explanations for country differences more systematically or investigate whether additional participant types emerge in newer democracies. Studies involving a greater number of countries might opt for conducting a multi-level LCA which would take into account the nested structure of the data by using a random effects model (rather than a multiple-group analysis as done in this study). As a rule of thumb, the multi-level LCA would require at least 20 countries (Park & Yu, 2018).

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Online Appendix

Additional supporting information may be found in the Online Appendix section at the end of the article:

Notes

1. Despite country differences in the usage of direct democratic instruments, all respondents from Switzerland and almost all respondents (around 97 per cent) in The Netherlands and The United Kingdom had the opportunity to vote in a referendum (all respondents in our sample were 18+ in 2017 and the last national referenda were held in the same year in Switzerland and in 2016 in The United Kingdom and The Netherlands). Around half of the 16 German *Länder* have not held a state-level referendum since 2000, which means that a more significant number of German respondents may not have had the opportunity to practice direct democracy. Nonetheless, around 30 per cent of Germans reported having voted in a referendum (see [online Appendix II](#)).
2. We do not include dissatisfaction with democracy as it is positively correlated with distrust in representative institutions ($p = 0.62$).
3. that is, the probabilities of being classified in a certain latent class c given a response pattern y for all indicators $Y - P(C = c | Y_j = y)$.
4. The entropy R -squared of our final model is 0.7 which is above the conventional 0.6 threshold, but not very high in absolute terms. This value indicates that the classes are not fully separate (i.e., entropy R -squared of 1.0) but that there is some overlap between them. However, our analysis also takes assignment uncertainty into account. Furthermore, while researchers are encouraged to examine and report entropy, they are cautioned against relying on this diagnostic statistic for determining the final class solution (Weller et al., 2020). It is worth noting that 64 per cent of respondents in our study were estimated to belong to a specific participant type with a probability of at least 0.8 and that the percentage of respondents with an assignment probability of at least 0.8 ranges between 59 and 71 per cent depending on the participant type.

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