9
Political Participation
Emilie van Haute and Emilien Paulis

Chapter Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Define what political participation means and which forms it can take.
- Familiarize with the type of participation promoted by the different models of democracy.
- Understand the main instruments and procedures through which citizens can get involved in decision-making.
- Explain who participates when these instruments are implemented in practice and how the profile of participants differs across instruments.
- Discuss how, in theory and in practice, citizens' participation contributes to legitimizing models of democracy

Introduction

This chapter addresses the key concept of political participation. Political participation is the process through which citizens seek to influence politics and public policies, either directly or via the selection of political personnel. Examples of activities that can be undertaken include voting in elections or in a referendum, becoming a party member, volunteering for a civic association, donating money to a candidate or cause, contacting officials, petitioning, joining a demonstration, boycotting products for political or ethical reasons, or still discussing and sharing information with other people on certain political issues.

Political participation is often deemed crucial by scholars, such as Dahl (1989: 92): *"For a democratic society to exist it is necessary for a participatory society to exist."* Participation has been found having positive consequences on individuals who engage in politics by enhancing civic education, political knowledge, and political efficacy. Participation in politics is also crucial because it is the primary means by which citizens

influence government decisions and hold elected officials accountable. It ensures that the voices, interests, and needs of the public are represented in the policymaking process, fostering legitimacy of the political system. Additionally, participation strengthens democracy by encouraging civic engagement, enhancing the responsiveness of leaders, and promoting inclusive decision-making that reflects the diversity of society. Without active participation, political systems risk becoming disconnected from the citizens they serve, leading to apathy or resentment.

In this chapter, we first discuss what political participation means in general, and which forms it can take. We then connect political participation to the key instruments through which citizens can influence policy decisions in representative, direct, deliberative, or technocratic models of democracy. For each of these models, we look at (1) what political participation involves in this specific model, and (2) who participates, and how inclusive participation is in this model, contrasting expectations and empirical realities.

Political Participation: A Definition and Typology

The pioneers of the study of political participation defined it simply as electoral participation. Yet, scholars rapidly recognized that political participation does not only take place at election time. Reflecting this expansion, one of the classic definitions of political participation is provided by Verba and Nie who define it as "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (1972: 2). It means that participation is (1) an activity, that is (2) voluntary, (3) undertaken by private citizens, (4) oriented towards government, politics or the state. Barnes and Kaase (1979) added the nuance that these actions can be legal or not, which corresponds to a second expansion of the concept.

Theocaris and van Deth (2018) offer an updated typology consisting of 17 forms of participation that cluster into five modes, with voting and donating to charities not fitting in any of these five modes (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 A typology of political participation

Mode	Forms of political participation
	Donate money to a charitable organisation
	Vote in the last national election
Institutionalized participation	Contact a politician or elected official
	Attend a political meeting
	Donate money to political organisation
	Work for a party or a candidate

Digital participation	Comment on social media on political/social issues
	Encourage others to take action using social media
	Post or share links on social media
Protest	Sign a petition
	Work for a political action group
	Join a demonstration
Volunteering	Volunteer for a community project
	Volunteer in a charitable organisation
Consumerist participation	Boycott products for political/ethical reasons
	Buy products for political/ethical reasons

Source: Theocaris and van Deth (2019).

Political participation has faced major changes in the last decades. Institutionalized types of participation have transformed, with voting or membership of political organizations being in decline, while more direct or deliberative forms of participation are on the rise. Non-institutionalized and digital forms of participation are also expanding (Theocaris and van Deth 2019). These changes have challenged researchers with the problem of using either a restrictive view of participation, thus excluding some of these new modes of political action or stretching the concept to the point of covering almost every human behaviour that can claim a political connotation. Theocharis and Van Deth (2019) take a few examples of political consumerism (buycotting or boycotting), or hashtags on social media that reflect a position on a specific issue. These actions are harder to classify because they concern non-political activities undertaken by individuals for political purposes.

This evolution shows that participation forms can be associated with different views on what democracy is or should be – i.e., models of democracy. The model of representative democracy is associated with the most common mechanism through which citizens can influence politics: voting in elections to select their political representatives who will make decisions on their behalf. Yet, the decline of participation in elections over the last decades has been frequently interpreted as a sign that citizens aspire to alternative models of democracy, calling for broader democratic reforms (Zittel and Fuchs, 2007). Participatory democrats argue that citizens want to, and therefore should, be given a larger say on political decisions outside elections (Pateman, 2012) – for example, via alternative instruments like referendums or deliberative mini-publics. Stealth democracy theories have instead argued that people do not desire greater participation and are content with minimal involvement (Webb, 2013; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). These theories argue that citizens prefer to leave decision-making to trusted elites and only engage when corruption in representative democracy becomes excessive.

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), using survey and focus group data from the USA, propose the "stealth democracy" thesis, which   states that people reluctantly participate, mainly through elections, to correct imbalances in governance but ultimately favour a well-functioning representative system that required little direct involvement from them. This leaves room for a technocratic model of democracy where independent experts could make decisions at the expense of citizens or elected politicians (Caramani, 2020b). In this chapter, we focus on the main forms of participation that are embedded in democratic institutions, and we do not discuss non-institutionalized or illegal forms of participation.

Representative Democracy: Participation Through Elections

Representative democracy refers to a modem of democracy that rests on delegation. Voters give political representatives a mandate to make decisions on their behalf. From this perspective, political participation primarily equates to electoral participation. Outside elections, citizens are expected to leave political issues to their representatives, and they are not expected to get involved beyond the electoral cycle.

Electoral participation is often considered one of the most inclusive forms of political participation because it generally provides an equal opportunity for all eligible citizens to engage in the democratic process by voting. When discussing electoral participation, one must distinguish between voting age population (VAP), eligible voters, and registered voters. The voting age population in a given country includes all individuals who are of legal voting age, regardless of whether they are actually registered to vote or meet other eligibility requirements. It represents the broadest possible group of potential voters. For example, in many countries, the VAP includes everyone aged 18 and older. It includes citizens as well as non-citizens, and those who may be ineligible to vote due to legal restrictions (e.g., incarcerated individuals or those who have been disenfranchised). It also includes people who are eligible to vote but have not registered. For instance, in the international Brussels region, the voting age population amounted to 909,932 in 2024, out of which 310,800 are non-nationals who are not eligible to vote (34.2 per cent), except at the local elections and the European elections for European nationals (if they register). Eligible voters are individuals who meet the legal requirements necessary to vote in an election. Under universal suffrage, these legal requirements typically include citizenship, age, residency, or not being deprived of their civil and political rights (e.g., due to incarceration, conviction, or mental incapacity). In some instances, these legal requirements exclude significant segments of the voting age population. For instance, in the US in 2022, an estimated 4.4 million Americans were barred from voting due to felony convictions, representing 2 per cent of the voting age population (Uggen et al., 2022). Lastly, some countries require eligible voters to register to vote.

Electoral participation, also referred to as turnout, is then the proportion of voters who turn out to vote, out of the number of eligible voters, or registered voters if the country requires such registration. Therefore, it hides the exclusion of non-registered eligible voters, and/or citizens who are not eligible to vote.

Several factors limit the inclusiveness of electoral participation for certain groups, up to the point that scholars have referred to the existence of a hidden census. Regardless of the political system, some individual-level characteristics are negatively associated with voting. Three models have been developed at the individual level to explain variations in electoral participation. The first is the resource model, which focuses on the impact of personal resources such as socioeconomic status and education. Early scholars of electoral participation highlighted how citizens with lower levels of resources have a lower probability of turning out and voting (Milbrath, 1965; Verba and Nie, 1972). The second is the social psychological model, which emphasizes the role of political attitudes: political interest, political trust, and sense of political efficacy, but also social norms such as the sense of civic duty increase the probability of turning out and voting (Leighley, 1995). Psychological traits would favour (extraversion or dominance) or deter (alienation or cynicism) turnout (Klandermans, 1984). Lastly, the rational choice model highlights the individual's motivations for engagement, suggesting that people participate when they perceive the personal benefits of doing so outweigh the costs (Downs, 1957). These personal benefits can be material, solidarity/social, or purposive/ideological incentives (Whiteley, 1995).

Together, these models provide a comprehensive framework for understanding why individuals turn out to vote or not:

> one helpful way to understand the three factors is to invert the usual question and ask instead why people do not become political activists. Three answers come to mind: because they can't; because they don't want to; or because nobody asked. In other words, people may be inactive because they lack resources, because they lack psychological engagement with politics, or because they are outside the recruitment networks that bring people into politics. (Brady et al., 1995: 269)

Brady and colleagues stress the importance of individual characteristics, but they also point to the fact that individual characteristics alone are insufficient to explain the variations in turnout across countries. Mobilizing agencies and interpersonal networks can stimulate electoral participation. For instance, media or political parties can organize get-out-the-vote campaigns. Campbell (2013) has shown that an individual's decision to participate in elections is a by-product of the form and content of their social networks. Finally, macro-level studies have partly looked at the political opportunity structure of electoral participation. These studies focus on cultural, structural, and institutional explanations shaping the structures of opportunities for civic engagement (Norris, 2002; Blais,

2005). For instance, electoral rules matter for turnout (day of the vote, organization of polling stations, etc.). The composition of the electorate matters as well. Studies have shown that high levels of emigrant voters lead to lower turnout levels because emigrants do not mobilize in the same way as nationals still residing on the national territory (see Chapter 12 on ethnic minorities and migration). Box 9.1 applies these models to explain turnout in the 2020 US presidential elections.

Box 9.1

Explaining the Higher Turnout in the 2020 US Presidential Election

The 2020 US presidential election that opposed the Trump–Pence ticket to the Biden–Harris ticket, saw the highest voter turnout in over a century. Approximately 159 million Americans cast their ballots, representing about 66.8 per cent of the eligible voting population.

The Pew Research Center (2023) has identified several factors contributing to this high level of participation:

- Age, education, race and ethnicity, and income remain powerful explanations of individual turnout. Voters were much older, on average, than non-voters. Turnout also differed by race and ethnicity. Voters were White, non-Hispanic adults compared to non-voters among which Black, Hispanic and Asian Americans are overrepresented. There are also large educational and income differences between voters and non-voters, with lower levels of resources being overrepresented among non-voters.
- Yet young voters, specifically those between the age of 18 and 29, were more engaged than in previous elections. An estimated 50 per cent of eligible young voters participated.
- Underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities also turned out in larger proportions. The election of Kamala Harris as the first female, first Black, and first South Asian Vice President motivated many voters from underrepresented communities to participate in the process.
- Voter mobilization played a role in activating these segments of the electorate. Both major parties – Democrats and Republicans – invested heavily in grassroots and (digital) media campaigns.

Polarization and electoral competition are also a motivation to turnout: the 2020 presidential election was a competitive race for high-stakes elections. The campaign was focused on polarizing issues.

Direct Democracy: Participation through Referendums and Citizens' Initiatives

By providing direct influence on political decisions, one promise of direct democracy instruments is that they will generate more political participation. We usually distinguish referendums, which take place when a governing body decides to call for a popular vote on a particular issue, from citizens' initiatives, where a certain number of citizens call political authorities to vote on a specific measure. The argument behind the use of these mechanisms rests on the idea that direct experience with effective decision-making unmediated by political parties would be an educative experience for citizens, leading to an increased interest in politics and higher engagement. Yet, practices have often struggled to meet this expectation, facing challenges related to the quantity and quality of participation, the representation of minorities, their relationship to other protest forms of participation, or even polarization.

First, existing research shows inconclusive, contradictory results regarding a spillover effect (Dvorak et al., 2017). Turnout in referendums varies from one case to another. It can be both lower or higher than in general elections, and it can increase or decrease turnout in the next elections. It depends on the issues at stake and their saliency. In short, there is an agreement that certain campaigns (especially when competitive) and issues (controversial or burning) can lead to higher voter mobilization and cause short-term and election-specific effects. Nevertheless, it is less clear that referendums generate a long-term increase in turnout by educating voters and increasing their interest in political matters. Research on the Swiss case, a country where direct democracy is used as an essential and common part of the political process, shows that frequent referendum voting is associated with voters' fatigue and a decreased probability of turnout in local and national elections (Blais, 2014).

Moreover, research on direct democracy has shown that participants in referendums display similar profiles to participants in elections and that the same biases based on resources apply. Social groups that participate less in electoral politics are also less likely to turn out in referendums. This is the case for citizens with lower levels of income, education, and socioeconomic status, which generally translates into lower interest in politics and lower participation in referendums (Fatke, 2015; Krämling et al., 2023). Given this bias in resources, the increase in political legitimacy expected from direct democracy is often questioned. If referendum participation replicates the inequalities of electoral participation, strengthening direct democracy might not remedy the lack of legitimacy of representative democracy. Yet, some research suggests that this lack of mobilization of citizens with lower levels of resources can sometimes be balanced when policy issues specifically relevant to these voters are at stake or when referendums are held along with first-order elections (Valimsky et al., 2024). Still, other studies suggest that the availability of extensive direct democracy procedures in a country may not spill over but instead backfire on the participation of citizens, particularly those with low

socio-economic status (Kern and Hooghe, 2018). A high degree of direct democracy seems to create institutional complexity, leading to participatory fatigue among this specific stratum of the population. As a result, they refrain from using these additional direct mechanisms while also abstaining from participation in elections or other channels outside the representative system, such as petitions, demonstrations, or boycotts. Besides, beyond turnout in referendums, participatory inequalities may contribute to polarizing divisions in the preferences expressed through these alternative instruments. For example, Box 9.2 examines the role of poverty, place, and individual characteristics in determining the vote in the Brexit referendum.

Box 9.2

The Role of Poverty, Place, and Individual Characteristics in Participating in the Brexit Referendum

The Brexit referendum has affected the collective imaginary on direct democracy far beyond the borders of the UK. It received extensive attention in the academic community and the media. Analyses generally emphasize the role of poverty, place, and individual characteristics as drivers of the Leave vote. It provides the picture of a country that was divided along economic, educational, and social lines.

Crossing different types of data, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation developed a substantial study of the driving factors of the vote in the Brexit referendum. The key findings that the report raises are the following:

- The poorest households, with incomes of less than £20,000 per year, were much more likely to support leaving the EU than the wealthiest households, as were the unemployed, people in low-skilled and manual occupations, people who felt that their financial situation had worsened, and those with no qualifications.
- Groups vulnerable to poverty were more likely to support Brexit. Age, income, and education mattered, though it is educational inequality that was the strongest driver.

Support for Brexit varied not only between individuals but also between areas. Areas in Britain that had been 'left behind' by rapid economic change and felt cut adrift from the mainstream consensus were the most likely to support Brexit. Voters from these areas faced a 'double whammy'. While their lack of qualifications put them at a significant disadvantage in the modern economy, they were also further marginalized in society by the lack of opportunities in their low-skilled communities.

Direct democracy instruments have also been discussed for their capacity to include majority and minority groups (Junejo, 2016; Morel and Qvortrup, 2018). Citizens' initiatives are often presented as possible instruments for minorities, since minority groups

can introduce new proposals or call for an initiative on new legislative proposals. This provides minority groups with opportunities to put issues on the agenda. Yet referendums are based on the majority rule, which implies that minority rights or interests can be threatened. To address this concern about the rights of minorities, referendum votes sometimes require qualified or double majority checks (Moeckli, 2018).

Several studies have also reflected on the implications of referendums for other forms of political participation. For example, Kern (2017) showed how the organization of a local referendum triggered protest actions from citizens opposed to the results. With Hooghe, she also showed that the presence of direct democracy mechanisms can increase the willingness to vote, but may also deter non-institutionalized participation, especially among people socioeconomically disadvantaged (Kern and Hooghe, 2018). In the context of the Brexit referendum, scholars have investigated the protest mobilization of the losing side (Fagan and van Kessel, 2023). They have also looked at the radicalization of protest behaviours in the aftermath, both among the Leavers and Remainers (Mason et al., 2022). Research has shown that referendums constitute key moments that also affect citizens' propensity to be active online be it during the referendum campaign (in terms of mobilization, information search, or dissemination), or once the results are known (Hänska and Bauchowitz, 2017; Bossetta et al., 2018; Brändle et al., 2021; Udris and Eisenegger, 2023).

Finally, it is worth noting that by reducing complex political questions to a simplistic dichotomy (yes/no), referendums are often criticized for introducing voting biases and interpretation challenges, leading some to call for multi-option alternatives (Wagenaar, 2019). Some scholars also warn that using verbal response options, as was the case with Brexit's 'Remain vs. Leave', may exacerbate framing effects and thus increase voting biases. This simplification in referendums is also recognized as a factor that further polarizes the electorate on already divisive issues, potentially undermining their democratic promise. Additionally, referendums can sometimes be leveraged by populist parties to amplify political divisions for partisan gain (Gherghina and Pilet, 2021a).

Deliberative Democracy: Quality Over Quantity Participation

The deliberative model of democracy conveys a very specific view of political participation. This view rests on a set of principles, which generally guide the functioning of 'deliberative mini-publics' (DMPs), the main policymaking instrument inspired by deliberative democracy. First, participation is equated to deliberation about policy issues. This requires that participants in a deliberative process become well informed about the policy issue at hand through evidence-based information (mostly provided by experts). Second, participation requires time and resources to consider the strengths and weaknesses of various policy options to reach a public judgement or agreement about 'what we could do' – i.e., policy recommendations. Third, participation

must occur in an environment that is professionally facilitated and where discussions are moderated, to warrant equality among participants. Fourth, DMPs involve a commitment by decision-makers to consider and act on the policy recommendations, or at least to state publicly why they have or have not done so. The underlying assumption is that, when citizens are given the time, resources, and support to learn and deliberate about policy issues, they can engage in complex debates and collectively make considered judgements.

Given these principles, DMPs promote participation in small numbers. However, these small numbers should be chosen based on a random selection of lay citizens – for instance, by sending an invitation to a large number of citizens randomly chosen from the population register (civic lottery) and selecting participants via a stratified quota to ensure the representativeness of the DMP on different criteria, usually sociodemographics (Paulis et al., 2020). In doing so, DMPs would counter the problem of self-selection in public participation processes, which tend to attract specific sociodemographic groups and struggle to include diverse profiles. This method would reduce the influence of elites and organized interests, and ensure that the large number of people not taking part in the process can still identify with the outcome thanks to the involvement of people belonging to their social group.

The advocates of deliberative democracy consider this to be a superior form of political participation. DMPs would act as "schools of democracy" for participants who would in the process boost their political skills and social trust, as well as their civic engagement in the long run (Boulianne, 2019). Participation in deliberative processes would also benefit the wider public and political system and improve democratic legitimacy by affecting the input (who participates: more inclusivity and diversity), throughput (how to participate: more transparent, equal, and pondered way of participating), and output (why participating – i.e., more influence on public policies).

Following a "deliberative wave" (OECD, 2020) in response to the crisis of trust in representative institutions, DMPs have flourished at all levels of governance in contemporary democracies, from Citizens' Juries to Planning Cells, Consensus Conferences, Deliberative Polls, and, more recently, Citizens' Assemblies (Elstub and Escobar, 2019; Paulis et al., 2020). Empirical research has started to emerge on who participates in DMPs.

An important finding is that only a minority of citizens respond positively to the invitation to participate. To illustrate this, we can look at the response rate to citizens' assemblies on climate (CCAs) recently implemented in Austria, Denmark, Germany, France, Luxemburg, and the UK. In Germany, 4.2 per cent of enlisted citizens responded positively to the initial invitation to the German Climate Assembly and 5.8 per cent in the UK. In some other instances, like Luxembourg, Austria, or Denmark, this information was not transparent, which is detrimental to the legitimacy of the process. In the case of the French climate assembly, the organizers reached 30 per cent by putting a lot of resources into the recruiting process. Several works have investigated the reasons why citizens decline to participate in DMPs (Jacquet, 2017; Miscoiu and Gherghina, 2021; Sultanishvili, 2023). The most substantial reason is the perception that DMPs lack a significant impact

in terms of political output. As a time-consuming form of participation, another aspect is the potential clash with private life, despite incentives generally offered by the organizers. Moreover, citizens turn away when the process is poorly designed, does not meet citizens' demands, or appears somehow manipulated by political authorities. Still, it also connects with how citizens conceive their own roles, abilities, and capacities in politics: citizens feeling less skilled, competent, or even politically alienated, are less willing to accept an invitation to participate in a DMP.

Citizens volunteering to participate generally match a profile with a high level of participatory predispositions (Fournier et al., 2011; Jacquet, 2017). Deliberative exercises consistently fail to attract particular groups of people. DMP organizers compare their pool of volunteers to the general population and try to compensate on certain criteria – generally, age, gender, education, or region of residence, while this can extend to marital status, family status, employment, occupation, or race (Paulis et al., 2020). The theoretical ideal of pure random sampling to counter self-selection problems therefore meets the reality of the difficulty of recruiting beyond the "usual suspects" of political participation. Further, self-selection bias happens at each step of the recruitment process, from volunteering to showing up and attending all the meetings. Research on DMP participants has largely documented a frequent overrepresentation of men, of citizens with higher levels of education, as well as the underrepresentation of young people. Although some DMPs reach better levels of gender equity or age group representation, equal representation based on education remains the greatest challenge. To illustrate this, Table 9.1 compares the educational background of participants in five citizens' assemblies on climate (CCAs) that took place recently in Europe. It systematically compares the three education groups in terms of the proportion of participants recruited into the assembly (columns 'CCA'), the proportion of the population in the same category (columns 'Pop.'), and the differences between these figures (columns 'delta Δ'). These calculations show that, despite rising education levels in contemporary democracies, education remains a significant source of participatory inequalities, even in deliberative processes that aim to be sociodemographically representative. Highly educated citizens (Level IV) are systematically overrepresented in the five climate assemblies.

Besides, citizens more knowledgeable about or interested in the topic also self-select to participate, leaving those with minimal knowledge excluded from the DMP. This concern is particularly relevant for recruitment for climate change deliberations. Climate sceptics may be reluctant to participate in processes in which they are asked about policy recommendations about climate. Nevertheless, they constitute a segment of the population that needs to be represented if DMPs aim to support more legitimate decisions. Like Table 9.1, Table 9.2 compares the participants in climate assemblies to the national population. The differences clearly support the existence of this pro-climate opinion bias. Although this question of attitudinal diversity was not really considered in Austria, France, Germany, or Luxembourg, in the UK, the organizers tried to mitigate this

concern by using climate attitudes as a selection criterion. However, it did not prevent the overrepresentation of Green Party voters among participants (Elstub et al., 2021). Similar opinion biases have also been found in deliberation on migration, where DMP participants opposed to immigration policies were under-represented (Karjalainen and Rapeli, 2015).

Table 9.2 Education background of participants in CCAs

	AU			LU			FR			UK			GE		
	CCA (%)	Pop. (%)	Δ	CCA (%)	Pop. (%)	Δ	CCA (%)	Pop. (%)	Δ	CCA (%)	Pop. (%)	Δ	CCA (%)	Pop. (%)	Δ
Level I	26	25	+1	35	37	−2	48	59	−11	37	37	=	4	8	+3
Level II–III	57	60	-3	24	24	=	18	15	+3	32	36	−4	47	59	−12
Level IV	17	15	**+2**	41	39	**+2**	34	26	**+8**	31	27	**+4**	50	34	**+16**

Note: OECD (2024), "Adult education level" (indicator), https://doi.org/10.1787/36bce3fe-en. Level I: below upper-secondary; Level II–II: upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary; Level IV: tertiary education.

Table 9.3 Attitudes towards the climate of participants in CCA

	AU			LU			UK			GE			FR		
	CCA	Pop	Δ	CCA	Pop	Δ	CCA	Pop	Δ	CCA	Pop	Δ	CCA	Pop	Δ
(very) worried about the development of the climate	96	76	+20	n.d	n.d	n.d	88	79	+9	81	56	+25	n.d	n.d	n.d
Agreed humans are responsible for climate change	67	37	+20	93	77	+16	n.d	n.d	n.d	n.d	n.d	n.d	79	47	+32

Finally, scholars have also focused on attitudes towards politics like political interest, efficacy or knowledge, and classic predictors of political engagement. The results show that DMP participants do not represent the broader public on these variables, with participants being more interested, efficacious, and knowledgeable about politics (Fournier et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2015; Paulis et al., 2024). To illustrate this, Figure 9.1 compares the level of political interest between the members of different CCAs and the population. It shows a higher level of political interest among the participants compared to the rest of the population, probably translating the education bias. However, this is not a bias that has been at the centre of the focus of DMP organizers (Paulis et al., 2020); albeit, it raises concerns about the capacity of DMPs to offer inclusive and representative channels of participation.
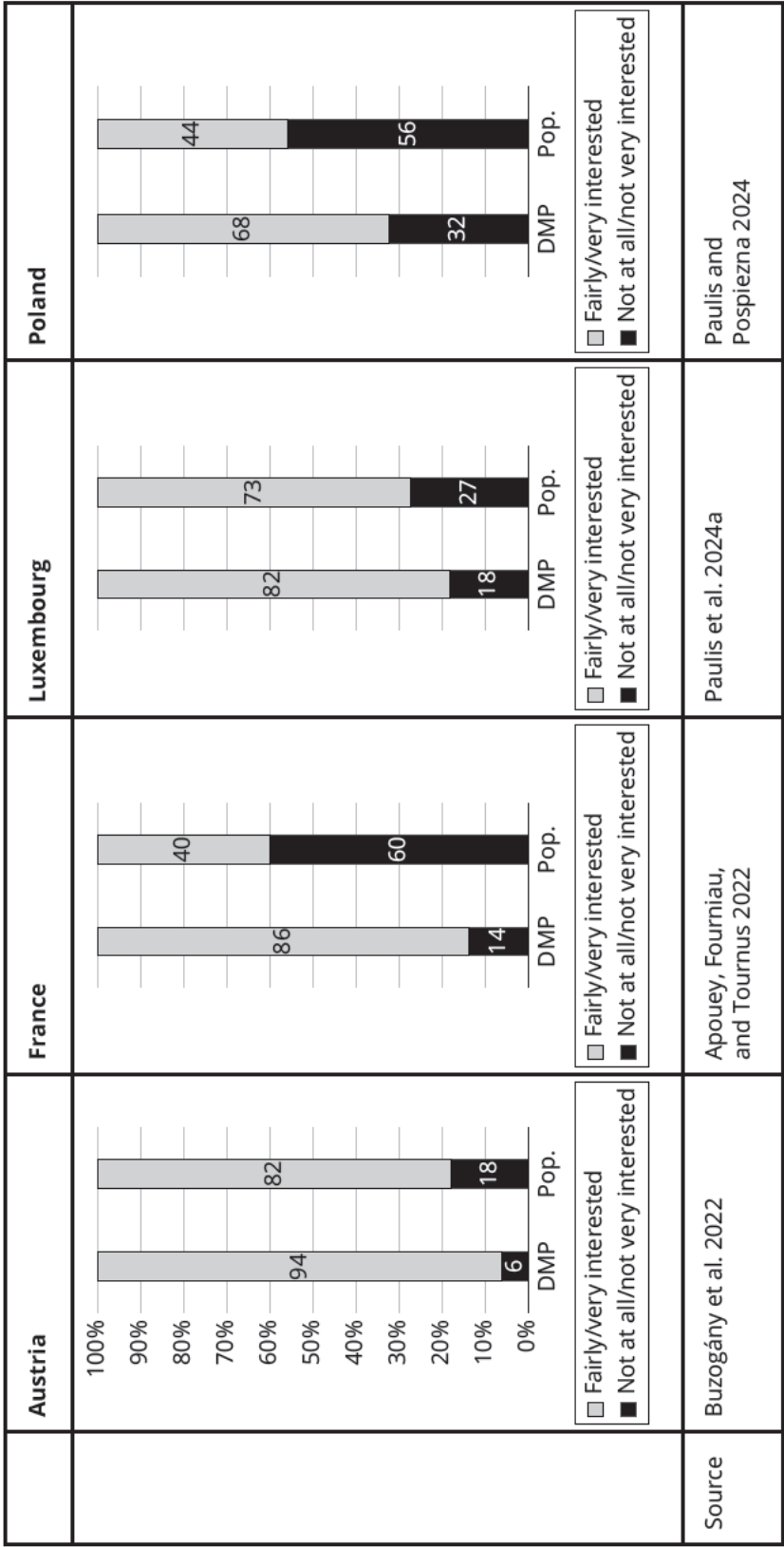
Figure 9.1 Political interest of participants in CCAs

	Austria	France	Luxembourg	Poland
Source	Buzogány et al. 2022	Apouey, Fourniau, and Tournus 2022	Paulis et al. 2024a	Paulis and Pospiezna 2024

The extent to which DMPs need to attain representativeness on sociodemographic characteristics of their participants is debated (Fournier et al., 2011). First, despite biases, DMP participants are far more representative of the general population than legislative assemblies – at least all the groups are represented and have preferences that are more congruent with the general population than elected politicians. Second, demographic diversity is often thought of as ensuring also attitudinal diversity. Yet in many cases, this logic is flawed, as demographic variables do not always predict attitudinal differences related to the topic of deliberation, which implies that more demographically representative DMPs on education would probably not result in very different outcomes. Finally, perfect demographic representation may not be in line with the principle of inclusion, as it would replicate power dynamics and minority statuses found in the population. Hence, some scholars and DMP practitioners have promoted the over-sampling of certain groups that are usually not represented in the policymaking process to ensure their voices are considered, especially if they are impacted by the topic of the deliberation. For example, the Climate Citizens' Assembly in Luxembourg recruited non-nationals residing in the country who have no voting rights in national elections (47 per cent of residents in the country), as well as cross-border workers, to be included among participants. In the French Climate Assembly, two women in precarious economic situations were recruited via civil society associations.

More broadly, deliberative procedures aim to enhance the chances for minorities to be heard and considered in political decisions. Given that all participants are usually granted the necessary amount of time and goodwill to develop their arguments, consensual rather than majority-based decisions emerge. In doing so, it can be expected that claims of minority groups will be included in the final decision. Empirical findings about the capacity of citizens' deliberation to promote the inclusion and participation of minority groups remain nonetheless contrasted and highly context-dependent (see, e.g., Gherghina et al., 2021a, 2021b). Yet this argument is put forward by deliberative scholars who champion deliberation for societies that are highly divided into ethnocultural lines, to pacify conflict and find common ground, to foster consociative dynamics and interaction across majority and minority groups, and hence mutual understanding and acceptance (Ugarriza and Caluwaerts, 2014; Steiner and Jaramillo, 2019).

Box 9.3 provides a case study of deliberative democracy, focusing on Ireland's Convention on the Constitution. Ireland is recognized as one of the first countries to institutionalize citizens' assemblies in its political system and represents perhaps the most advanced example of how multiple participatory instruments can be combined to enhance democratic functioning by giving citizens a greater role in policymaking. In the Irish case, the proposals made by the mini-public can, in a second step, be submitted to the broader public through a referendum, whose outcome guides elected representatives on whether to follow certain policy recommendations emerging from the deliberative process.

Box 9.3

The Convention on the Constitution in Ireland (2013–14)

Ireland's Citizens' Assembly is well established today. It was first implemented for the Convention on the Constitution, which ran from 2013 to 2014. The Convention gathered 66 randomly selected citizens, 33 elected representatives from both the House of the Oireachtas and the Northern Ireland Assembly, and an independent chair. Eight topics were put out for the consideration of the participants, and two issues were selected by participants themselves.

Nine reports were computed by the Convention and sent to the Irish government. In response, the government accepted six recommendations for constitutional change (marriage equality, reducing the voting age to 16, reducing the age threshold for candidacy for presidential elections, removing the offence of blasphemy from the constitution, enhancing the reference in the constitution to the office of Ceann Comhairle to give it more status, and including a reference to Oireachtas Committees in the Constitution).

Referendums were held on two of these issues in May 2015, on reducing the age threshold for candidacy in presidential elections and on marriage equality. The marriage equality referendum passed by a majority of 62.1 per cent.

This case study shows how various models of democracy (deliberative and direct) can be combined and offer different opportunities for citizens' involvement.

Source: https://citizensassembly.ie/previous-assemblies/2013-2014-convention-on-the-constitution

This section has highlighted the challenges of achieving representativeness while ensuring inclusiveness when participation is organized through a deliberative democracy framework and instruments. Yet these questions are essential. On one hand, similar types of recruitment biases are observed when looking at prospective DMP participation in opinion polls (Rojon and Pilet, 2021). This could mean that deliberative democracy and its current applications are not helping to overcome the traditional biases found in conventional forms of participation. Of course, it is important to keep in mind that deliberation is a demanding form of democratic engagement, which inevitably appeals more to individuals with higher verbal skills, confidence, and experience in argumentation. This highlights the concept of "deliberative inequality" put forward by ome scholars (Holdo and Öhrn Sagrelius, 2020; Summers *et al.*, 2022) H. On the other hand, recent studies have demonstrated that these recruitment biases have important implications for public opinion and the perceived legitimacy of DMPs in general (Paulis et al., 2024). Recruitment biases in favour of the "usual suspects" of participation send negative signals to those who have an initial positive view on such a form of participation, who then turn less acceptant of policy decisions made through it. In contrast, a more balanced and fair representation

of social and political groups tends to bring the participatory sceptics on board. In other words, if the aim is promoting more legitimacy of public decisions by making citizens participate via deliberative mini-publics, the selection of who joins needs to be carefully thought and monitored. Focusing on the question of recruitment and who participates (descriptive representation) also means reflecting on what will emerge from these processes in terms of policy outcomes (shifting to the issue of substantive representation). For instance, the overrepresentation of highly educated, politically interested, or verbally skilled citizens is problematic because they do not share the same policy preferences as those who lack these characteristics. This implies that policy recommendations can be biased, favouring certain groups in the population at the expense of others (Binnema and Michels, 2021 2021), which could, in turn, undermine their legitimacy among the wider public. Ultimately, addressing these challenges requires not only inclusive recruitment, but also facilitation strategies that ensure all opinions are heard.

Technocracy: The Absence of Participation

When discussing forms of government and models of democracy, technocracy can be defined as a "a form of power in which decisions over the allocation of values are made by experts or technical elites based on their knowledge" (Caramani, 2020a: 3). Technocracy refers to a model of decision-making based on technical expertise and competence regarding policy issues. It assumes also that non-partisan, politically independent experts are the best choice for making political decisions because they would not be involved in competition driven by power or ideological rivalries. They would also adopt a relatively neutral position regarding political conflicts. Experts would govern wisely based on science, rationality, and objective knowledge, thereby ensuring the efficient delivery of efficacious public policies (Costa Pinto et al., 2018; Bertsou and Caramani, 2022). Contrary to politicians who derive their legitimacy from elections and are thus accountable to voters, experts derive their legitimacy from their expertise (Caramani, 2017). It is therefore not surprising that technocracy as a model of governance is often linked to crises or conflicts. While technocrats and experts generally represent a minor phenomenon in representative democracies (McDonnell and Valbruzzi, 2014), technocracy was revived following the 2008 financial and economic crisis. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of non-elected, independent experts appointed in governments also remarkably increased (Vittori et al., 2023a).

In this conception of public governance, citizens remain in the background and their participation is supposed to be minimal. Because the model does not consider any mechanisms of accountability and rejects the principle of elections to select policy-makers, some scholars have argued that, in its extreme form, technocracy is authoritarian and violates some fundamental democratic principles (Caramani, 2017). Yet many citizens living in democratic systems and supporting democratic values endorse a broader ideal model where more power would be delegated to experts (Bengtsson and Christensen, 2016; Rapeli, 2016; Bertsou and Pastorella, 2017; Gherghina and Geissel, 2017; Heyne

and Costa Lobo, 2021). Non-partisan expertise is a quality that voters tend to reward when selecting candidates or evaluating ministers (Lavezzolo et al., 2022; Panel et al., 2024; Vittori et al., 2024b). It is a quality that they value at some stages in the decision-making process (Beiser-McGrath et al., 2022; Bertsou, 2022).

This support of technocracy as a model of democracy among some citizens, despite its limitations regarding citizen participation, connects to stealth-democracy theories (Webb, 2013; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002).

Yet not all citizens are stealth democrats, and not all citizens support technocracy. Studies investigating the profile of citizens supporting technocracy show that, first and foremost, technocracy is more appealing to citizens who lack interest in politics, feel less efficacious, and have a lower level of educational attainment (Bengtsson and Mattila, 2009; Coffé and Michels, 2014; Bertsou and Pastorella, 2017; Chiru and Enyedi, 2022; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002; Vittori and Paulis, 2024). Those citizens are attracted by technocracy because they are less motivated to participate in politics and elections, and are less attached to representation mechanisms. In this regard, while participation in the three other models was driven by higher levels of resources, technocracy would be the other side of the coin. Lower levels of resources drive citizens more towards technocracy where participation is kept minimal.

Preferences for experts in government have also been connected to a lack of trust in representative institutions and in politicians (Bertsou and Pastorella, 2017; Chiru and Enyedi, 2021; Lavezzolo et al., 2022). Support for technocracy is therefore driven by anti-politics (Bertsou and Caramani, 2022). In this regard, technocratic supporters share common features with those participating in deliberative and direct democracy instruments. Low levels of trust in representative institutions drive citizens to support (but not necessarily engage in) alternative models of democracy that limit the power of politicians. In the case of technocracy, the power is not transferred to citizens but to experts. Citizens who distrust the political system find in the expert-based form of government a heuristic shortcut through which decisions do not come from lengthy bargains among (conflictual) actors, such as parties and politicians, but from the straightforward application of the expertise of non-partisan experts. As the stealth democracy literature has highlighted (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002), experts might be particularly valued for their capacity to depoliticize the decision-making process and make it more "objective" and "non-partisan". Since stealth democrats do not want to be involved in politics (because they are not interested and they do not like it) and look at party politics with suspicion, they prefer to strip politicians away from power and delegate it to experts.

Beyond individual-level determinants, support for technocracy is also higher in countries where electoral democracy is weaker and where citizens have experience of authoritarianism and corruption.

Overall, technocracy appeals to apathetic citizens who would not see negatively the idea of not being politically engaged. This model of democracy implies a vision of politics that involves lower citizen participation, weak citizens' control over policy, and depoliticization of policymaking.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the main form of political participation across models of democracy. Table 9.3 summarizes the commonalities and differences in terms of participation across the four models of democracy. One commonality across all models is how unequal citizens are towards participation. The profile of participants reveals that certain citizens are more likely to engage in these institutionalized forms of politics. Citizens with higher levels of resources, especially socioeconomic status and educational background, are more likely to engage. Similarly, higher levels of political interest, trust, efficacy, or a higher sense of civic duty increase the likelihood to engage. Finally, individual incentives are also drivers of participation. Technocracy would be the other side of the coin: lower levels of resources, but also lower interest, trust, and efficacy, drive citizens more toward technocracy where participation is kept minimal.

Representative and direct democracy share massive levels of participation but differ in terms of citizens' influence on decision-making. Direct and deliberative democracy have citizens as central actors, but direct democracy corresponds to massive participation with a decision taken by a majority, while deliberation involves restricted participation and consensus with limited, indirect influence.

Table 9.3   Participation across the four models of democracy

	Representative democracy	Direct democracy	Deliberative democracy	Technocracy
Main actors	Politicians	Citizens	Citizens	Experts
Size of citizens' participation	Massive	Massive	Restrictive	Minimal
Profile of participants	More resources, attitudes, motivations	More resources, attitudes, motivations	More resources, attitudes, motivations	Fewer resources, attitudes, motivations
Citizens' influence on policy decisions	Indirect delegation: a large group of citizens (voters) selects political representatives who take policy decisions on their behalf	Direct majority rule: a large group of citizens take policy decisions	Consensus and indirect influence: a small group of citizens formulate policy recommendations that elected politicians decide to follow or not	Minimal: citizens are consulted if needed, but policy decisions are left to a small group of independent experts who decide based on evidence

Source: Created by the authors

By combining different models of democracy, institutions can offer citizens different tools and different channels to have a say. However, institutionalized participation tends to attract the same profile of participants. Can institutionalized participation reach its ideal of inclusiveness? Diversifying models of democracy have not necessarily re-enchanted citizens with politics. This may be the reason why non-institutionalized participation is on the rise: it partly attracts different types of participants (Marien et al., 2011).

End of Chapter Summary

This chapter has covered:

- What political participation means.
- What forms of political participation exist.
- Which instruments can be used to involve citizens in decision-making.
- Which profiles of citizens participate in the different decision-making instruments.
- How this profile changes or not across decision-making instruments.

More generally, it has covered:

- The size and profile of citizens participating in the four models of democracy (representative, direct, deliberative, and technocratic).
- The specificities of citizen participation in technocracy compared to the other three models of democracy (representative, direct, and deliberative)
- How participation in a deliberative process can be articulated with participation in a direct democracy referendum.

Key Terms

Deliberative mini-publics: are small groups of citizens selected by lot to reflect the diversity of the broader population who convene, receive expert information to guide their discussions, deliberate, and provide recommendations on policy issues.

Inclusiveness: in political participation refers to the extent to which all individuals, regardless of their individual characteristics, have equal opportunity to engage in political processes.

Institutionalized participation: refers to forms of political engagement that occur within established, formal structures and processes, and that are regulated by laws, providing citizens with predictable ways to influence decision-making.

Non-institutionalized participation: refers to forms of political engagement that occur outside formal structures and established processes. This can include activities such as protests, grassroots movements, community organizing, or social media campaigns, where citizens express their views and influence policy without going through official channels.

(Continued)

Political participation: is the process through which citizens seek to influence politics and public policies, either directly or via the selection of political personnel.

Referendum: is a direct vote in which citizens are asked to approve or reject a specific proposal (constitutional amendment, law, or policy issue). It allows voters to make decisions on important issues directly, bypassing the legislative process.

Turnout: refers to the proportion of eligible voters who participate in an election by casting their vote. It is typically expressed as a percentage of the total number of eligible or registered voters.