STUDYING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:
TOWARDS A THEORY OF EVERYTHING?

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of the study of political participation in the last fifty years reflects the crucial significance of citizens’ involvement for democratic decision-making. Starting with a strong focus on voting and electoral participation in the 1940s and 1950s, by now the repertoire of gaining influence includes such activities as casting a vote, visiting the burgomaster, signing petitions, donating money, or fighting with the police. Since the scope of government activities and responsibilities has been expanded too in the last few decades, the domain of political participation grew considerable. The combined increase in both the repertoire and the domain of political participation implies that these activities affect virtually all aspects of social life in advanced societies. In other words, the study of political participation has become the study of everything. Two strategies are presented to deal with this situation: the a priori exclusion of specific areas (family, schools, workplace), and the use of more substantive and problem-oriented research perspective.

1. Pericles’ Verdict

Virtually every study of political participation starts with the allegation that political participation and democracy are inseparable. “Any book about political participation is also a book about democracy” (Parry et al. 1992: 3), “... the notion of political participation is at the center of the concept of the democratic state” (Kaase and Marsh 1979: 28), and “Where few take part in decisions there is little democracy; the more participation there is in decisions, the more democracy there is” (Verba and Nie 1972: 1). Dahrendorf relies on an other definition of democracy – “... the institutional arrangement that regulates sociopolitical conflicts peacefully and permits the removal of governments without violence” (2000: 311) – but is self-evident that for him too, citizens’ participation plays the crucial role to carry out the characteristic democratic functions mentioned. The idea that citizens’ involvement is a necessary condition for democratic decision-making has been stressed ever since Pericles delivered his famous
funeral speech in the winter of 431-430 b.C. According to Pericles, the unique character of democracy lies in the special role of citizens:

“An Athenian citizen does not neglect the state because he takes care of his own household; and even those of us who are engaged in business have a fair idea of politics. We alone regard a man who takes no interest in public affairs, not as a harmless, but as a useless character; and if few of us are originators, we are all sound judges of policy.”

Each citizen concentrating on his or her own household and business only, is a ‘useless character’. More recently – but basically relying on a similar logic – Benjamin Barber (1984 and 1995) argued strongly for a much more ‘participatory’ democracy, as an alternative for liberal ‘thin democracy’ or ‘politics as zookeeping’, where ‘pervasive privatism’ dominates life based on the ominous idea that “the conscious political pursuit of public goods by private actors (firms no less than individuals) is destructive of private rights and values” (Barber 1984: 253). Instead, a ‘strong democracy’ is needed, which “requires unmediated selfgovernment by an engaged citizenry” (ibid. 261), and which is characterised by the fact that it is “the politics of amateurs, where every man is compelled to encounter every other man without the intermediary of expertise” (ibid. 152). In this view, engagement in politics is not to be considered a specific type of activity – it as integral part of social life and essential for every individual.

Even if we are not willing to go as far as Barber to regard direct and active involvement of citizens in modern societies as the unique symptom of some ‘strong’ democracy, the echo of Pericles’ verdict still can be heard. Democracy is not worth its name if it does not refer to government by the people; hence democracy cannot function without some minimum level of political involvement. A lack of political involvement is considered destructive for democracy and debates are focussed on the degree of involvement – not on the necessity of participation. Or to put it even stronger and to reverse the argument: “The thing called ‘apathy’ is democracy’s version of original sin” (Minoque 1999: 8).

The rapid expansion of the study of political participation in the last fifty years reflects this crucial significance of citizens’ involvement for democratic decision-making. Starting with a strong focus on voting and electoral participation in the 1940s and 1950s, by now the repertoire of gaining influence includes such activities as signing petitions, blocking traffic, donating money, or fighting with the police. Since the scope of government activities and responsibilities has been expanded too in the last few decades, the domain of political

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1 This quotation from Thucydides’ account is taken from Sabine and Thorson (1973: 28). Notice that this line of reasoning “presents a view of democratic citizenship that prizes reciprocal mutual exchange between city and citizens and not […] the selfless devotion of the individual citizens to the good of the city” (Monoson 1993: 254).

2 Even from these very brief quotations, the Rousseauen background of Barbers work is evident. See Behr (1999) for an extensive discussion of the relationships between different conceptualisations of democracy and conceptualisations of political participation.
participation grew considerable. The combined increase in both the repertoire and the domain of political participation implies that these activities affect virtually all aspects of social life in advanced societies. In other words: the study of political participation has become the study of everything. This development is less driven by the need for some unified theory of political participation than by political and societal changes that has broaden the repertoire of activities and the public domain. In this paper a brief overview of the development of the study of political participation is presented focussing on two constituting dimensions of this expansion: repertoire and domain.

2. Expanding the Repertoire

Political participation can be loosely defined as citizens’ activities aimed at influencing political decisions. Yet already this vague demarcation will raise opposition from democratic theorists working in the Aristotelian tradition stressing the developmental and self-fulfilment character of participation. Political activities can be defended on the basis of their intrinsic value and the necessity for the mental well being of human beings on the one hand, and on the requirement to articulate interests and opinions in a decision-making process that aims to take those expressions into account on the other hand. Despite strong attempts to revitalize the first line of reasoning since the late 1960s, most empirically oriented approaches emphasise instrumental functions of participation and mention expressive functions only.

A virtually endless list of definitions of political participation have been presented and discussed. To mention only a few of the most widely used conceptualisation, political participation is defined as:

“... those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics” (Milbrath and Goel 1977: 2).

“... 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” (Verba and Nie 1972: 2).

”... all voluntary activities by individual citizens intended to influence either directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political system” (Kaase and Marsh 1979: 42).

“... action by citizens which is aimed at influencing decisions which are, in most cases, ultimately taken by public representatives and officials” (Parry et al. 1992: 16).

3 Although Lincoln’s famous last words of his Gettysburg Address (“... government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth”) refer to “this nation, under God”, it is clear that a democratic political system was meant.

4 In a very useful treatise on these distinctions Scaff (1975) used the terms “interaction” and “participation” to distinguish between the two main variants mentioned.
“... affords citizens in a democracy an opportunity to communicate information to
government officials about their concerns and preferences and to put pressure on them
to respond” (Verba et al. 1995: 37).

“... any dimensions of activity that are either designed directly to influence government
agencies and the policy process, or indirectly to impact civil society, or which attempt
to alter systematic patterns of social behavior” (Norris 2001: 16).

Although emphasising distinct aspects differently, the common understanding of
political participation is evident from these quotations. First, political participation refers to
people in their role as citizens and not, say, as politicians or civil servants. Second, political
participation is understood as an activity (‘action’) – simply watching television or claiming to
be curious about politics does not constitute participation. Third, the activities of citizens we
define as political participation should be voluntary and not ordered by the ruling class or
obliger under some law or rule. Finally, political participation concerns government and politics
in a broad sense of these words (‘political system’) and is neither restricted to specific phases
(such as parliamentary decision making, or the ‘input’ side of the political system), nor to
specific levels or areas (such as national elections or contacts with officials). Several other
common characteristics has been proposed and discussed, but these four features of political
participation seem to be undisputed.

The study of political participation in the last fifty years is the study of an continuously
expanding number of specific forms of political participation (cf. Brady 1998). Obviously, this
development reflects the growing relevance of government and politics for citizens in modern
societies as well as a continuing blurring of the distinction between political and non-political
activities; that is, between the private and public spheres. The study of political participation
reflects these social developments and can be easily traced with the publication of a few
landmark studies in political participation. Starting with the seminal voting studies of the 1940s
and 1950s political participation was mainly restricted to casting a vote and campaign activities
(Lazarsfeld et al. 1948; Berelson 1952). By the early 1960s political participation was broadly
understood as activities concerned with traditional conceptualisations of politics as campaigning
by politicians and parties, and with well-accepted contacts between citizens and public officials
(Lane 1959; Campbell et al. 1960). These forms of activities later became known as
‘conventional’ modes of participation. The late 1960s and early 1970s show remarkable
extensions of the concept political participation in two directions. The conventional modes of
political participation were expanded due to the growing relevance of community groups and

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5 Among those other aspects are: the (il)legal status of activities, the question whether or not the actions
have been successful or recognised by political ‘gate keepers’; the elite-directed or elite-challenging
nature of activities, various motivations of citizens involved, or a distinction between collective and
individual actions. See Brady (1998) for an extensive overview of political participation studies.
6 See Wielhouwer and Lockerbie (1994) for a more recent discussion of ‘contacting’ as a useful mode of
political participation.
direct contacts between citizens, public officials, and politicians (Verba and Nie 1972). Societal developments in the era mentioned, however, made clear that political participation is not restricted to broadly accepted forms or ‘proper’ activities. Protest and rejection are clear expressions of citizens’ interests and opinions and therefore cannot and should not be excluded from the domain of political participation (Barnes, Kaase et al. 1979). These last forms of participation have been labelled as ‘unconventional’ modes of participation because they were not in line with societal norms in the early 1970s. ‘New social movements’ such as women’s or pacifist organisations belong to this category too. The most recent expansion of political participation took place in the 1990s. The disappearing borderline between political and non-political spheres of modern society and the revival of Tocquevillean and communitarian approaches lead to an expansion of political participation with ‘civil’ activities such as volunteering and social engagement (Putnam 2000; Norris 2001; see also Thränhardt and Hunger 2000). The result of this stepwise expansion is that the domain of political participation grew from the not-so-simple-act-of voting (Dalton and Wattenberg 1993) in the 1940s to almost every conceivable form of non-private activity imaginable by the end of the century. The path of this expansion is broadly summarised in Figure 1.

The expansion of the repertoire of the modes of political participation can also be illustrated in a similar way by looking at the actual items presented in several important empirical studies. These distinct modes are listed in Table 1, starting with voting as the universal form of political participation for every citizen in democratic societies. Almost from the beginning, participation has been conceptualised broader as all activities directly connected to elections and political parties. Lane (1959) already considered fundraising, group activities, contacting officials, and writing letters as important forms of political participation, and this approach has been expanded by Verba and Nie (1972) in their seminal study. In this way, the single form of voting was expanded easily into six modes of political participation in Lane’s study, and then to ten modes in the work of Verba and Nie. An evident extension took place in the early 1970 with the inclusion of unconventional modes of political participation as proposed by the authors of the Political Action-I study. This extension has been reached by starting with a

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7 These modes of political participation are hard to define. In a recent discussion of the question “what’s new in new social movements” Diani rejects specific issues, opinions of sympathisers, stakes of conflicts, tactics or organisational forms as unique characteristics of these movements. Instead, the structural/network features are stressed (Diani 2000: 339).

8 Contrary to the labelling of the early work as ‘voting studies’, a much broader concept of participation was used based on the basis of the widespread idea that: “Active citizenship begins, but it does not end, with the mere poking of a ballot into a box at the polls” (Brooks 1933: 575).

9 Notice that Table 1 contains only broad identifications of the items used in different studies and that most studies contain much more diverse phrases than quoted here.
number of items that are quite similar to the items used by Verba and Nie, and then adding ten new modes of unconventional activities. In this way, about twenty different modes of action are used to represent the concept political participation. In a large British study by Parry and his collaborators in the 1990s these items are rearranged and the set is enlarged with several items explicitly referring to contacts with civil servants, councillors, mass media etc. With a total of somewhat more than twenty different modes of participation this study presents a very nice overview and summary of the societal developments in political participation in the four decades after the Second World War. A massive expansion took place in the early 1990s when the arguments were presented that many forms of social engagement and membership in a number of organisations should be considered as political participation. Until that moment participation in ‘voluntary associations’ or ‘social participation’ had been conceptualised as analytically and empirically distinct from political participation (cf. van Deth 1997a). In their study of American engagement and volunteering Verba and his collaborators added to their list of about twelve modes of participation not less than 22 modes of ‘involvement in organisations’, expanding the repertoire of political participation to more than 40 different modes! One of the most recent projects in this area is the ESF-Network on ‘Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy’ (CID) that designed a common core questionnaire to be used in a number of countries. Although this project does not treat involvement in voluntary associations a priori as political participation, the complete list of activities that might fit under this label consists of more than 50 modes. Even if we classify the items used in different studies in a very loose and rough way, Table 1 shows that we end up with a list of about 70 activities that have been considered as forms of political participation in one or more studies. The participation repertoire, then, has been expanded enormously in the last few decades.

<Table 1 about here>

The continuous extension of the list of modes of political participation does not imply that we are dealing with a one-dimensional concept that simply absorbs each and every additional activity. The question about the dimensionality of the forms of political participation – or better: the question about the detection of some latent structure underlying the various items used – has been debated extensively and many different labels has been proposed for several dimensions uncovered. More important than the exact labelling of these dimensions, however, is the fact that these dimensional analyses broadly show similar results in many countries. After Milbrath (1965: 18) presented a ‘pyramid’ ranging from active to passive modes of political participation, Milbrath and Goel (1977: 20f), and Verba and Nie (1972: 44ff) based their distinction between four major modes of participation – “voting”, “campaign activity”, “communal activity”, and “particularized contacting” – on sophisticated empirical
analyses. Barnes and Kaase’s distinction between conventional and unconventional modes of political participation is also based on the application of sophisticated data reduction techniques to test the latent structure underlying their items (1979: 538-55). Parry et al. present as the result of the application of similar techniques six main types of political participation: “voting”, “party campaigning”, “collective action”, “contacting”, “direct action”, and “political violence” (1992: 50ff). Finally, Verba et al. categorise political participation in four main activities, broadly labelled as “voting”, “campaign”, “contact”, and “community” (1995: 72).

From these analyses it is clear that several major types, modes, or dimensions of participation can be discerned in many studies. First, voting is always a mode of political participation on its own; that is, no other activities are systematically related to casting a vote. Second, campaign activities constitute another distinct major type of political participation and the same applies, thirdly, to contacting officials or politicians. Protest activities (and New Social Movements) constitute a fourth major type. At this moment it is unclear to what extent activities in voluntary organisations establish of fifth type of political participation or that we are dealing with a further specification of one of the already existing major types. Until a few years ago, social participation was – as mentioned – treated as an analytically and empirically different type of activities that is clearly positively related to especially the more conventional types of political participation (van Deth 1997a).

From this concise overview it follows that the specific modes of political participation have been expanded continuously in the last few decades. The CID-questionnaire contains about 70 different variant of participation and the action repertoire of citizens in democratic societies seems to be unlimited. Voting still is the most popular activity selected, but several unconventional action like signing petitions are used by growing portions of the citizenry. Most of the 70 items, however, are selected by (tiny) minorities only. By now, the modes of political participation include virtually every type of activity with the exception of clearly private behaviour. So, the action repertoire as first aspect of the range of political participation shows an impressive expansion in the last fifty years. Only if the second aspect – the domain of political participation – is restricted, we can avoid the conclusion that studying political participation is, quite literally, the study of everything.

3. Expanding the Domain

Political participation is about participating in politics. If we have a clear idea about the nature and the defining aspects of politics as the object or as the arena for participation, we might obtain a useful demarcation between political and non-political activities. A general discussion

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10 See Sabucedo and Arce (1991) or van Deth (1997b: 294) for a brief overview of the results of
about the characteristic aspect of the concept politics, however, brings us even further away from a clearer understanding of political participation. Usually, politics is defined in terms of state and government activities or functions, and more abstract definitions – “the authoritative allocation of values” – hardly restricts the domain of activities (cf. Dahl 1970: 4-13). The most practical approach, then, seems to be to have a closer look at government or state activities, since political participation is loosely defined as citizens’ attempts to influence those activities.

Even a cursory look at the development of democratic societies in the last decades shows a remarkable extension of government activities and involvement, and for many people the distinction between political and non-political activities or areas completely disappeared. The abandonment of the traditional laissez-faire doctrine of rising industrial capitalism in many countries followed the traumatic experiences of the Great Depression of the 1930s and the post-war economic chaos in the late 1940s. Although the dissimilarities between different countries and distinct points in time have always been evident, the developments led to a considerable strengthening of the position of central government agencies in social-economic and cultural life. Obviously, the rise and rapid expansion of the welfare state should be mentioned here or, in more general terms, the growing interdependence of societal, political, and economic developments.

The relationship between political and economic processes is still a controversial topic, but there appears to be consensus on the consequences of these interferences (see Lane and Ersson, 1999: 336). As per capita real income increases, government will spend a higher proportion of national product than before (‘Wagner’s Law’) and the number of activities affected by government regulation, subsidizing, or taxation increases as well. The result is that democratic government in advanced industrial societies increasingly occupies a substantial part of the national product and is a party to such divergent aspects of social life as housing, education, transportation, social security, foreign trade, and health care. New governmental tasks have been added to old ones virtually without reducing traditional tasks. With each increase in government spending and with each expansion of government tasks, however, the number of interests who organize around government grows. As Alesina and Wacziarg remark: “... the more governments become redistributive machines, the more they generate direct conflicts between winners and losers, and the more difficult it becomes to reverse the trend of increasing redistribution” (2000: 163). Referring the similar phenomena Webber and Wildavsky indicated the consequences for participation more clearly: “Big government breeds big pressures. Each new program creates interests who organize around it. More people make demands on politicians. Decisions must be made to satisfy them and to cope with the consequences of prior politics” (1986: 493).

The average citizen, then, has been confronted with ever-growing government interventions in many areas, and with a continuing ‘fiscalisation’ of the problems he or she faces.
As a consequence of this process of * politicisation* of private, cultural and other spheres of life, the number of people exposed to political stimuli increases while, furthermore, the significance of political conflicts becomes more evident. In general terms, the politicisation thesis states that the level of political interest among citizens is a positive and monotonous function of the relevance of societal and political arrangements in a society (van Deth 1991; van Deth and Elff 2000). When about one-third up to one-half of the national product is linked to the public sector, you do not need strong arguments to participate in politics. The recursive relationships between income distribution, public transfers, and political participation are empirically corroborated (cf. Franzese 2000).

The expansion of the interrelationships between governmental and economical sectors of Western societies can be illustrated with some basic figures about the economic and budgetary development in the last few decades. The expansion of government involvement is indicated by the huge rise in government revenues and spending from average levels of about 27 and 26 percent of GDP in 1960 respectively, to more than 45 and almost 47 percent in all OECD countries in 1997. Total government spending in the EU reached about 50 percent of GDP by the end of the 1990s! (see Alesina and Wacziarg 2000: 159). Very large parts of the national products in Western countries indeed are directly linked to the public sector and these parts have been expanded rapidly in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Although the growth of government intervention is stabilised in many countries since the early 1990s, politics in terms of government intervention is difficult to avoid for average citizens.

A demarcation of the concept political participation on the basis of the domain of government activities is not very promising since the scope of government activities is very difficult to define. Moreover, the distinction between political and non-political activities is blurred in discussions about the domain and scope of politics too. This observation seems to be especially relevant for European societies. In contrast to Americans Europeans:

“... don not think of ‘government’. They think of the pensions office, the passport office, the post office, or whatever. The distinction between state and nonstate is probably lost on most of them, especially in an era when the railways are owned by the government in some European countries but not in others and when the Dutch post office, traditionally a state agency throughout Europe, has lately been privatized” (King 2000: 75).

The strong expansion of government activities as well the gradual disappearance of the borderline between political and non-political activities, suggest that an unambivalent definition of political participation cannot be based on a specification of the domain or area of these activities. Apparently the domain of politics lost its characteristic features in the process of expanding government intervention. Kuttner observed that “There is no escape from politics” (1997: 329) in modern societies. But if there is no escape from politics, there is also no evident distinction between political participation and other activities. In other words: if politics cannot
be delimited from other processes, every citizens’ activity can be labelled as political participation.

4. The Study of Everything?

The concept political participation has lost its clear meaning due to social and political developments in many Western countries in the last decades. The repertoire of actions consists of a virtual endless list of modes of participation and the domain of government activities is difficult to distinguish from other activities. Even if we do not accept the extreme conclusions for each of the two dimension separately, it is clear that the space defined by these dimensions is enormous. If – for instance – an individual request for some home equipment by a disabled citizen is omitted form the list of modes of political participation, it has to be included in that list if the request is directed to a public office. In case we start with a clearly non-governmental domain like a private firm selling tropical wood, a blockade of a transport of this firm rapidly becomes ‘political’ if ecological groups try to attain public attention by mobilising citizens against this transport. The number of this kind of examples can be easily enlarged, and with each example the demarcation problems become more evident. What can be done?

A first strategy to handle the conceptual problems in this area is to define non-political activities instead of political participation. Several authors explicitly address this question. Verba and Nie (1972: 23) exclude form their understanding of political participation:

- ceremonial or support participation (because the are not aimed at influencing political decisions);
- attitudes;
- participation in schools, family, jobs, voluntary associations etc.;
- only “legal and legitimate” modes are considered, excluding most tactics of political protest.

The first two points simply re-enforce the depiction of political participation as voluntary activities; the last point has been dropped from most participation studies after the Political Action study was published in the late 1970s. This leaves us with the exclusion of activities in “schools, family, jobs, voluntary associations etc.” from the definition of political participation. In a similar way Parry et al. (1992: 16) explicitly indicated what they do not incorporate in their conceptualisation of political participation:

- behaviour not aimed at influencing public representatives (like going to an office to receive welfare benefits);
- participation in the workplace;
- show interest in politics;
- display attitudes to support the functioning of democracy;
- readiness or willingness to take action.
The last three points are attitudes towards politics and so they can be dismissed of the basis of the idea that participation refers to activities. The second point was also mentioned by Verba and Nie. The first point, however, brings us back to the old discussion about the motives and aims of certain activities: *is political participation only political participation if it concerns non-individual ("particularised") themes?* Attractive as this strategy might look at first sight, a moment reflection makes clear that this is a reformulation of the question about the domain of political activities only. This leaves us with the exclusion of activities in the workplace, schools, family, and voluntary associations as the most useful suggestions to restrict the meaning of the concept political participation. As indicated above, activities in voluntary associations are part of the Tocquevillian revival in the last decade and considered to be ‘political’ by many authors. This brings us to a definition of political participation as all citizens’ attempts to influence political decision-making that are not taking place in families, schools, or the workplace. In this way, the conclusion can be escaped that political participation has become everything.

A second strategy to avoid this last conclusion is to opt for a more substantive and problem oriented perspective and to leave the position of the individual citizen as the only possibility to study participation. If one is interested in, say, the consequences of taxation for social inequality or in the way automobile firms co-operate with EU-bureaucrats, one does not need to rely on a definition of political participation including everything. Redistributive politics and lobbying can be studied excellently by looking carefully at citizens’ activities and the impact they have in decision-making processes. Political participation *in these cases* is defined as citizen’s activities *in these processes*, and despite the fact that, in principle, participation can be everything, it is clear what is meant by the concept in these contexts. The obvious risks of this strategy has been clear ever since the heydays of the debates on non-decision making and agenda setting thirty years ago. Yet more substantive and problem oriented perspectives present an attractive way out of the trap of expanding the meaning of the concept of political participation all the time.

5. **In Conclusion**

Modern technology seems to be a new incentive to broaden the scope of political participation and to blur the distinction between political and non-political activities and areas even further.\textsuperscript{11} This development has been rejected by proponents of radical interpretations of democratic theory. Benjamin Barber repeatedly stressed that participation can be learned by active citizens...
in order to develop “citizenship”. On these grounds, he rejects the use of “innovative technology” such as interactive television, because it could:

“... further privatise politics and replace deliberative debate in public with the unconsidered instant expression of private prejudices. Democracy calls not only for votes but for good reasons, not only for an opinion but for a rational argument on its behalf” (Barber 1995: 270).

Political participation based on modern technology does not seem to meet the requirements emphasised by democratic theorists like Barber. On the contrary: one might even argue that these technologies worsen the already fragmented processes of participation.

Sceptical arguments can be derived also from experiences with new technologies so far. The use of e-mail messages in attempts to influence politicians has become very popular in the last few years. In a recent publication on e-mail messages sent to members of the US-Congress in 2000 under the apocalypse title “Delete, Delete, Delete”, the International Herald Tribune observed:

“Call it too much of a good thing. Members of Congress are inundated with so many e-mail messages from constituents and others – 80 million messages last year alone – that lawmakers routinely ignore most of them [...] ‘Rather than enhancing democracy – as so many hoped – e-mail has heightened tensions and public disgruntlement with Congress’” (IHT, 3-19-2001).

The opportunities of new technologies have widen the scope and modes of participation once again. Until now, the results are not even a modest improvement of democratic decision-making as long as politicians ‘routinely ignore’ messages from citizens. Experience with ‘digital democracy’, however, show that voter turnout can be increased considerably (Solop 2000), but this refers to the most traditional and simple mode of political participation one can think of. To find a fruitful conceptualisation for political participation – avoiding the correct, but useless conclusion that participation can be everything – seems to be one of the most crucial challenges for the further development of democratic decision-making procedures in modern societies.
Figure 1: The Expansion of the Political Action Repertoire

1940
- Voting

1950
- Campaigning, contacting officials (conventional participation)

1960

1970
- Protest actions, social movements (unconventional participation)

1980

1990
- Social engagement, civic participation

2000

PARTICIPATION
Table 1: The Repertoire of Participation in Different Studies

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<td>Contacting solicitor or judicial body</td>
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<td>Damaging property</td>
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<td>Occupying buildings</td>
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<td>Painting slogans</td>
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<td>Rent strikes</td>
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<td>Illegal protest activities</td>
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<td>Deliberately bought certain products</td>
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<td>Sports club or outdoor activities</td>
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<td>Youth association</td>
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<td>Environmental organisation</td>
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<td>Ass. for animal rights/protection</td>
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<td>Peace organisation</td>
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<td>Humanitarian aid or human rights org.</td>
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(continued)
The activities listed here are summarised in catchwords only. See the studies mentioned or the relevant questionnaires for the full texts of the items used.

Common Core Questionnaire developed by the CID-Network on ‘Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy’ supported by the European Science Foundation (see for further information: [www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/cid](http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/cid)).

<table>
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<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Charity or social-welfare organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Association for patients, illnesses</td>
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<td>Association for disabled</td>
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<td>Pensioners’ or retired persons’ org.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lodge or service club</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trade Union</td>
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<td>Farmers’ organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business or employers’ organisation</td>
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<td>Investment club</td>
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<td>Professional organisation</td>
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<td>Consumer association</td>
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<td>Parents’ association</td>
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<td>Cultural, musical, dancing, theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Other hobby club/society”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Automobile organisation</td>
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<td>Residents’, housing or neighbourhood</td>
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<td>Immigrants’ organisation</td>
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<td>Religious or church organisation</td>
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<td>Women’s organisation</td>
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<td>War victims, veterans, ex-servicemen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-partisan political organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Other club or association”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abstained from voting out of protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Other activity”</td>
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</table>

| Use the internet in connection with any of these activities? | X |   |   |   |   |   |   |

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b Common Core Questionnaire developed by the CID-Network on ‘Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy’ supported by the European Science Foundation (see for further information: [www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/cid](http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/cid)).
References


Barnes, Samuel, Kaase, Max et al. (1979), Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies. London: Sage.


