How Context Matters? Mobilization, Political Opportunity Structures, and Nonelectoral Political Participation in Old and New Democracies

Katerina Vráblíková

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How Context Matters? Mobilization, Political Opportunity Structures, and Nonelectoral Political Participation in Old and New Democracies

Kateřina Vráblíková[1]

Abstract

Scholars have long argued that political participation is determined by institutional context. Within the voter turnout literature, the impact of various institutional structures has been demonstrated in numerous studies. Curiously, a similar context-driven research agenda exploring the correlates of nonelectoral participation (NEP) has not received the same attention. This study addresses this lacuna by testing a political opportunity structure (POS) model of citizen activism across 24 old and new democracies using International Social Survey Programme 2004: Citizenship (ISSP 2004) data. Using a multilevel modeling approach, this study tests a competition versus consensus conception of how decentralized institutions determine NEP. This research demonstrates that states with more competitive veto points operating through systems of horizontal and territorial decentralization increase individual NEP. In addition, it interacts with social mobilization networks to promote greater citizen activism: Institutional context counts only when citizens are mobilized.

[1]University of Mannheim, Germany

Corresponding Author:
Kateřina Vráblíková, University of Mannheim, A 5, 68159 Mannheim, Germany.
Email: kvrablik@mail.uni-mannheim.de

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Dramatic differences exist in nonelectoral participation (NEP) across democratic countries. The classical explanatory framework relying on individual resources, civic attitudes, and mobilization (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995) cannot exclusively account for this difference. Country-specific external circumstances are especially relevant for NEP because people participate in nonelectoral politics only in specific situations. Although there has been considerable research on the sources of cross-national variation in voter turnout, the influence of political context on other forms of political participation remains uncharted. The main question addressed in this study is "How does context influence individual nonelectoral political participation in old and new democracies?"

To answer this question, this article will draw on two streams of scholarship: the comparative institutions literature and political opportunity structure (POS) theory developed by scholars studying social movements. The basic argument presented in this study is that in addition to resources, motivations, and mobilization, institutional opportunities also facilitate individual participation in nonelectoral politics. Specifically, this article will show that decentralization of state institutions on the basis of the principle of checks and balances enhances individual NEP by offering more access points to influence politics and increasing the opportunities for citizens to have an impact on decision making. In addition, POS also plays a second role through increasing the mobilizing effect of social networks on NEP.

To test this institutional context theory with individual-level predictors, multilevel regression models were estimated on International Social Survey Programme 2004: Citizenship (ISSP 2004; ISSP Research Group, 2012) data from 31,560 individuals living in 24 old and new democracies. These individual-level data were supplemented with appropriate country-level indicators that will be described later. In contrast to the expectations evident in the classical comparative institutions and social movement literatures, this study will show that different types of institutional decentralization have contrasting effects on NEP. Only political decentralization involving divided responsibility and more checks and balances yields an open opportunity structure that increases the incentives for NEP. In addition to directly promoting NEP, open opportunity structures also increase citizen mobilization and hence indirectly enhance greater mass activism.

National Political Context and Nonelectoral Political Participation

Students of cross-national political participation have paid most attention to voter turnout (Blais, 2006; Jackman, 1987; Jackman & Miller, 1995; Karp & Banducci, 2008; Norris, 2002; Powell, 1986). Although voting is still a primary tool of citizens' democratic participation, other nonelectoral political activities have also become important. Participation in nonelectoral political activities has grown dramatically in recent decades and protesting has become a "normal" conventional activity similar to the panoply of other nonelectoral activities such as signing petitions (Dalton, 2008; Norris, 2002).

Within the extensive literature on citizen participation in democratic politics, context-based explanations of cross-country differences in participatory activities other than voting are rather underdeveloped. With the exception of Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978), who examine the contextual effect of cleavage structure, most research on NEP study the impact of general features of political institutions. Two recent articles reveal that NEP increases when there is a higher level of democratic development (Dalton, van Sicle, & Weldon, 2009; Marien, Hooghe, & Quintelier, 2010). Other studies have examined Lijphart's theory of consociationalism and have found contrary to expectations that a culture of inclusion, consensus, and efficacy created by consociational systems does not increase NEP (T. W. G. van der Meer, van Deth, & Scheepers, 2009; Weldon & Dalton, 2010). Specifically, they find that consensualism in Lijphart's executive-party dimension attenuates NEP. This stream of research concludes that NEP is qualitatively different from voting and calls for further research that would "begin to explore the potential causal forces at play" (Marien et al., 2010; Weldon & Dalton, 2010, p. 16).

While Lijphart's work and other scholarship on comparative institutions theorize about the consequences for voting, this literature is rather unclear about the nature of institutional effects when it comes to other forms of political participation (Norris, 2008; Powell, 2000). To facilitate greater understanding of how institutional context shapes citizen's decisions to undertake NEP, the theoretical framework presented in this article builds on two literatures: (a) study of comparative institutions and (b) social movement research. On this basis, this article reformulates and tests a concept: open versus closed POS to explain how context shapes NEP (Koopmans, 1999; Kriesi, 2004; Meyer, 2004; Tarrow, 1998; Tilly, 1995; for criticism, see Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Goodwin & Jasper, 1999). POS is conceptualized mostly as formal and informal features of the state and politics that shape individual incentives for increased activism beyond elections (Tarrow, 1998). Citizen activism is expected to increase if the opportunities for participation in public affairs are

open. Conversely, if citizens believe the opportunities for influencing public decisions as closed, this will decrease activism.

Drawing on Sidney Tarrow's (1996, p. 45) "state-centered perspective" toward political opportunities and more particularly on work associated with Hans Kriesi and his colleagues (Kriesi, 2004; Kriesi, Koopmans, & Duyvendak, 1995), this study will develop the idea that a more open POS characterized by power decentralization has a key impact on citizen activism. In a seminal study of new social movements in four West European democracies, Kriesi et al. (1995) showed that the open opportunities of Switzerland's decentralized institutional design increased the overall number of individuals participating in all types of participatory events regardless of whether they were conventional or unconventional in nature. In contrast, the centralized political system of France exhibits the lowest number of participation in all forms of nonelectoral political activities (Koopmans & Kriesi, 1995).

In addition to the view that individuals will participate more in nonelectoral politics when there are greater (more open) opportunities, this study contends that the level of citizen mobilization for NEP will also be determined indirectly by the type of POS present. In this respect, social movement theory argues that the level of NEP is primarily determined by the mobilizing activities of key actors who are keenly interested in public affairs (Kriesi et al., 1995; Meyer, 2004; Walgrave & Rucht, 2010). With more open opportunities in more decentralized countries, social networks in which individuals are involved will be employed more for mobilization of individual participants because each of these political actors is motivated to use POS to their advantage (Meyer, 2004; Walgrave & Rucht, 2010).

In the following section, the POS indicators will be presented along with their hypothesized effects on NEP. Thereafter, there will be a more detailed explanation of how POS moderates the effect of social network mobilization on NEP.

POS and NEP

Decentralized state institutions are seen to be more open to NEP because higher numbers of veto players, which characterize power-dispersed systems of governance, signal to citizens that they have (a) more options and access points for influencing politics, and individuals have (b) a higher chance of being successful if they decide to participate (Koopmans & Kriesi, 1995; also Koopmans, 1999). Here it is assumed that citizens believe that they have access to decision making for communicating their demands. Power-dispersed institutions ensure a higher number of access points thanks to the greater number of independent power centers. In other words, multiple layers

of decision making provide potential citizen activists with more arenas for participating in political battles. In contrast, if political decision making is centralized, then the number of channels through which citizens can influence politics is limited because fewer participatory options are available.

At the same time, the fractionalization of political power increases the motivation to participate because the chances for influencing politics in a decisive way are higher. Thanks to the higher numbers of veto players in power-dispersed polities, these systems are believed to be relatively weak states: they have slower, less decisive, and less effective policy making and policy implementation (Koopmans & Kriesi, 1995; Lijphart, 1999; Norris, 2008; Tsebelis, 1995). Significant policy changes in the status quo are in general less likely in multiple veto players systems and this has the important implication that NEP activities are less likely to result in revolutionary shifts (Tsebelis, 1995). However, this weakness does give outsiders a chance to have an impact at least when it comes to everyday politics. Because of the multiplication of power centers, there is a greater chance that at least one player within such a complex power structure will react positively to citizens activists' demands. Conversely, in centralized political systems, participants are much less likely to have their voice heard. Centralized states are often decisive and strong enough to implement their own policies, including significant changes. Moreover, they are not constrained to listen to any of the voices of "outsiders" such as nonelectoral participants (Koopmans & Kriesi, 1995; p. 42; Kriesi, 2004).

As a result, individual activists relying on NEP cannot expect to bring about significant and long-lasting changes in centralized and decentralized systems: Centralized states will refuse to contemplate change from outside most of the time, and decentralized polities do not have the capacity to enforce extensive policy change. However, the multiple veto player system do at least give motivated citizens the option to have some input into the policy-making process. Such considerations motivate NEP because in systems with lots of checks and balances political battles are never definitely won or lost. The probability of loss is higher when the goal of participation has been achieved, because political decisions can be reversed and activists may not be motivated to participate for the same issue on subsequent occasions.

In contrast to most of the literature that links power-dispersed systems with inclusiveness and consensus (Lijphart, 1999; Norris, 2008; Powell, 2000; T. W. G. van der Meer et al., 2009; Weldon & Dalton, 2010), the perspective developed in this study highlights the role of checks and balances in decentralized systems (Crepaz & Moser, 2004; Goodin, 1996; Henisz, 2000,

2002; Tsebelis, 1995, 1999). For decentralization to be considered an important determinant of NEP, political power must be dispersed among multiple independent power sources that act as mutual monitors. As each political institution represents different constituencies or agendas, they compete to secure the best possible outcome vis-à-vis their own priorities (Crepaz & Moser, 2004; Gerring, Thucker, & Moreno, 2009). Hence, the main effect of decentralized institutions is not the creation of cooperation and consensus among political elites but conflict or competition among political actors. It is political competition that provides the incentives for citizens to become engaged in nonelectoral politics.

According to Kriesi et al. (1995), there are three dimensions of national institutional decentralization that attract individuals to NEP: territorial decentralization, horizontal separation of power among national institutions, and separation of power within these institutions (see also Kitschelt, 1986; Walgrave & Rucht, 2010). The first two dimensions are considered to be the most important "general structure parameters" (Koopmans & Kriesi, 1995, p. 25). The institutional dispersion of responsibilities and power among local, regional, and national authorities combined with independent state institutions such as the legislature, president, and judiciary increases the number of access points for participation. Moreover, horizontal decentralization puts "checks and balances on political leaders" and regional authorities can also veto national governments and vice versa (Norris, 2008, pp. 156, 162). As a result, decision making is less decisive and slower, and participants can hope to be successful with their demands. On the basis of these insights, the following pair of hypotheses expresses the expected relationships between type of decentralization and NEP:

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): The relationship between territorial decentralization and individual-level NEP will be positive.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): The relationship between horizontal decentralization and individual-level NEP will be positive.

The third dimension of POS that should, according to the social movement literature, increase citizen activism is the number of parliamentary parties. From this perspective, number of legislative parties reflects degree of "separation" within horizontal institutions (Koopmans & Kriesi, 1995; Kriesi, 2004; Walgrave & Rucht, 2010). This line of thinking adheres to Kitschelt's (1986) view that the "number of political parties, factions, and groups that effectively articulate different demands in electoral politics influences openness" (p. 63). On this basis, we may formulate a third hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1c (H1c): The relationship between number of parliamentary parties and individual-level NEP will be positive.

All three hypotheses are observationally equivalent in the sense that each predicts positive effects and all are congruent with the theory of consociationalism and the classical POS theory. However, within this study, it is argued that decentralization increases individual NEP thanks to higher number of veto players in a political system (H1a and H1b). The key difference is that H1c proposes a causal mechanism based on inclusiveness and cooperation rather than competition. If the competitive veto player mechanism theorized by this study is correct, H1c should not be supported by the analysis. The reason is that more parliamentary parties will not ensure that autonomous power centers will provide an effective system of checks and balances (Crepaz & Moser, 2004; Goodin, 1996). Crepaz and Moser (2004) explain that the need to form coalition governments, which is typical for multiparty systems, results in more interdependence among parties. Consequently, coalition governments produce shared responsibility rather than a system of checks and balances. Although multiparty systems have multiple actors, they interact together within one institution and create a collective agency where responsibility for success or failure is fused in the national legislature rather than divided across different institutions of political representation (Crepaz & Moser, 2004; Goodin, 1996). Only so-called "competitive veto players" where "institutions themselves represent separate agencies with mutual veto powers that compete against each other," such as federalism or bicameralism, produce the veto player mechanism (Crepaz & Moser, 2004, p. 266).

In summary, only decentralization implying divided rather than shared responsibility is expected to operate as an open opportunity structure for NEP. On the basis of this logic, a higher number of political parties does not necessarily imply a higher number of access points and consequently does not increase prospects of success for citizen activists who wish to influence public policy.

Moreover, existing studies have actually shown that electoral and party system decentralization has a negative effect on some nonelectoral types of participation, which is actually the opposite of what is predicted by social movement and consociational theory (T. W. G. van der Meer et al., 2009; Weldon & Dalton, 2010; for protesting, see Özler, 2008). By including the number of parliamentary parties into the analyses, this study will be able to test whether the mechanism linking institutional context and NEP is political competition working through a decentralized system of checks and balances or is the product of decentralization per se including the power-sharing mechanism.

POS and Mobilizing Networks

The classical social movement literature theorizes that more open political opportunities primarily increase the mobilizing and recruiting activity of social movements and other mobilizing actors (Kriesi et al., 1995; Meyer, 2004; Tarrow, 1998; Walgrave & Rucht, 2010). If mobilizing actors perceive that the prevailing POS is more open because there are more access points to decision making and thus prospects exercising influence; these actors will be more motivated to mobilize citizens to engage in NEP.

The key reason why more open opportunities increase individual NEP, from a classical social movement perspective, stems from increased citizen mobilization by generic social groups rather than citizens being directly motivated by the incentive structures present in decentralized political systems. From this perspective, social networks and groups, voluntary associations, parties, politicians, and media play a crucial role for NEP (Brady, Scholzman, & Verba, 1999; Diani & McAdam, 2003; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; Knoke, 1990; Leighley, 1996; McAdam, 1988; Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003; Uhlaner, 1989).

The central insight here is that most citizens are not political experts capable of discriminating between an open or closed POS. In situations where political knowledge is not ubiquitous, the mobilizing activities of social groups serve as a bridge linking political context and individual behavior (Kriesi et al., 1995; Walgrave & Rucht, 2010). A key implication is that increased mobilization is a process that acts in concert with a POS. Citizen mobilization and POS are not substitutes or alternative channels in promoting greater NEP.

Mobilization is a complex process that includes a number of strategies, from spreading awareness about the reasons for activism, to an explicitly articulated request for participation that can be communicated directly by politicians and activists, or through the social networks individuals are embedded in (Brady et al., 1999; Jasper & Paulsen, 1995; Oegema & Klandermans, 1994; Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003). Unfortunately, comparative surveys do not include questions covering the wider range of strategies through which individuals can be mobilized into NEP. For this reason, this study will examine one facet of political mobilization through social networks. In this study, the term *social network* refers to membership of voluntary groups and political discussions: Both activities are considered to be important channels for political mobilization (Knoke, 1990; Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998; Leighley, 1990; McClurg, 2003; Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003; Verba et al., 1995). Generally, citizens embedded in social networks are more likely to obtain political information and receive requests

for participation: factors that decrease the costs of participation. Also for mobilizing actors, it is easier to recruit people involved in social networks because they are more available and easily targetable.

Specifically, voluntary organizations are considered to be a prominent environment in which individuals can be mobilized (Teorell, 2003; Verba et al., 1995). Members of organizations can get an appeal for participation from the organizations themselves, from their comembers, or from somewhere else. Although some authors such as Verba et al. (1995) and Putnam (2000) use socialization explanations to explain why organizational membership matters for participation in terms of the production of civic skills and/or specific norms, many other scholars stress the importance of membership in voluntary organizations for increasing the probability of recruitment (Leighley, 1996; Shussman & Soule, 2005; Teorell, 2003).

Similarly, informal networks where there is political discussion also facilitate political mobilization. Researchers have shown that it is the political content of this type of informal interaction that increases participation (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992; Knoke, 1990; Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998; Leighley, 1990; McClurg, 2003). Political discussions are important because they provide accessible information on political issues, cues about participatory options, and stimuli for participation. In this situation, citizens develop political knowledge and are exposed to the social pressure of participatory norms.

Based on this logic, organizational membership and political discussion are used in this study as proxies that increase the likelihood of being mobilized into NEP. Political actors are expected to "activate the recruitment networks" more intensively in a more open POS (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987, p. 520; Kriesi et al., 1995; Meyer, 2004; Walgrave & Rucht, 2010). It is argued that in more open systems, social networks will communicate more mobilizing messages in the form of political cues or explicit requests for participation. As a result, individual involvement in social networks will lead to more NEP in systems with more veto players.[1] The classical social movement literature predicts that there will be a positive moderating effect of all of the three dimensions of POS examined and social networks on observed NEP. These three interaction effects may be formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): There will be a positive relationship between degree of territorial decentralization and mobilization through social networks on NEP.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): There will be a positive relationship between degree of horizontal decentralization and mobilization through social networks on NEP.

Hypothesis 2c (H2c): There will be a positive relationship between number of parliamentary parties and mobilization through social networks on NEP.

However, as noted earlier, this study argues that only one form of decentralization yielding a higher number of veto players (i.e., horizontal and territorial) will foster greater NEP through a more POS. Therefore, only more territorially and horizontally decentralized settings (H2a and H2b) will create the necessary incentives for mobilizing actors to undertake mobilization and recruitment through social networks. In contrast, larger numbers of parliamentary parties do not increase the number of veto players in a system, and hence, mobilizing actors cannot perceive they have greater levels of access and higher chances of impact. In summary, if the theorized mechanism of why POS matters is correct, only the first two hypotheses should be supported by the analysis.

Data and Method

Nonelectoral Political Participation

Political participation can be defined, according to Teorell, Torcal, and Montero (2007) and Rosenstone and Hansen (2003), as every action by ordinary citizens is directed toward influencing some political outcomes, namely, the distribution of social goods and norms. The analysis reported in this study only includes forms of NEP for which there are clear theoretical expectations regarding the potential impact of a POS. From this reason, two items in the ISSP 2004 battery of political participation items, (a) boycotting or deliberately buying certain products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons and (b) joining an Internet political forum or discussion group, were excluded from the analysis.[2] In addition, electoral participation is not examined in this article because it is qualitatively different from all other forms of political participation due to such things as the unique context effects associated with voting (Verba et al., 1995). The six NEP items used in this study are presented in Table 1. They were recoded as follows: If an individual participated in the specified activity during the past year is coded 1, otherwise 0.

Influential studies of political participation such as Verba et al. (1978) contend that involvement in public affairs is a latent continuous variable(s) that may be constructed from a set of observed indicators of individual activities. The results of a principal components analysis (PCA) using tetrachoric interitem correlations (as the data are nominal level) are reported in Table 1. This analysis extracted a single factor because it is assumed that there is only a

Table 1. Factor Analysis of Nonelectoral Political Participation.

Indicators of NEP	Factor loading
Signing a petition	0.69
Taking part in a demonstration	0.72
Attending a political meeting or rally	0.84
Contacting a political or a civil servant to express one's views	0.80
Donating money or raising funds for a social or political activity	0.66
Contacting or appearing in the media to express one's views	0.77
% variance	0.56
Eigenvalue	3.36
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy	0.77

Source: ISSP Research Group (2012).

NEP = nonelectoral participation. Note that the estimates are factor loadings from a principal components analysis on the tetrachoric interitem correlations.

single latent dimension underpinning NEP. As the PCA results confirm that the ISSP 2004 items form a single latent dimension of participation, the six items reported in Table 1 were used to create a summated rating scale. This is the NEP scale (range = 0-1) that is used as a dependent variable in all subsequent analyses.[3] Country averages for the NEP variable are shown in Appendix A and descriptive statistics for all individual-level variables are given in Appendix B. It should be noted that country-level effects (intraclass correlation coefficient) account for 9.1% of the variance observed in NEP at the individual level suggesting that a multilevel modeling strategy is appropriate.

Territorial Decentralization

In this analysis, territorial decentralization should reflect the vertical separation of decision making that signals the greater number of access points at the vertical levels of the state and the chance for activists' success. The classical distinction between federal and unitary states is very rough for these purposes, and does not clearly indicate the territorial decentralization of power centers. This is because there is a wide variation in the actual powers wielded by local political authorities vis-à-vis national government in federal and unitary states (Norris, 2008). This study uses a fiscal decentralization indicator developed by Schneider (2003; also Norris, 2008), which is based on World Bank data. This factor more precisely indicates what is meant by territorial decentralization in this study. When local and regional authorities distribute more money, it means that they have more decision-making power. Fiscal

decentralization is measured as factor scores of the share of subnational expenditures and revenues gained from a confirmatory factor analysis of three decentralization dimensions (Schneider, 2003). The values are standardized and range from 0 to 1. Detailed information on the construction of this measure is available in Schneider (2003). The data on territorial decentralization come from Democracy Time-series Data database (see Norris, 2008) and are presented in Appendix A.[4]

Horizontal Decentralization

The indicator of horizontal decentralization should ideally capture actual power dispersion at the horizontal level among states' main institutions. In this study, a measure of power separation that was explicitly constructed to identify the number of veto players at the horizontal level of a state is used. Formal and effective separation of powers within political systems is measured using indicators taken from the Political Constraint Index (POLCON) Dataset database developed by Henisz (2002; see Appendix A). This measure is constructed from (a) the number of independent veto points in a political system, including the executive and (bicameral) legislature; (b) the political affiliation of specific actors holding positions in these institutions; and (c) the degree of institutional fragmentation (see Henisz, 2002, for details).

The Number of Parliamentary Parties

The number of political parties in a parliament should reflect decentralization within horizontal state institutions. This article adopts a commonly used strategy and measures multipartism or decentralization within party politics using the Effective Number of Parties index by Laakso and Taagepera (1979). This indicator counts parties according to their importance, measured as the proportion of seats in the parliament. The data for 2003 were obtained from Gallagher and Mitchell (2008) and are presented in Appendix A.

Mobilizing Networks

To indicate mobilization, the analysis uses two indicators available in the ISSP 2004 citizenship data set: membership of social/political groups and level of political discussion. As noted earlier, it is suggested that formal and informal networks are expected to increase the likelihood of political mobilization. A PCA performed on five items measuring group activity (trade unions, church groups, sports and cultural groups, political party or group, and others) measured on a four-value scale (active member, inactive member,

former member, and nonmember) resulted in a single component solution (trade unions = .59, church groups = .54, sports and cultural groups = .69, political party or group = .51, and other groups = .71). On the basis of these results, a summated rating scale was constructed and some summary statistics are reported in Appendix B. The second measure of mobilization used in this research is a political discussion index, which consists of two items: frequency of political discussion with others and attempting to convince others of one's political opinion. These two items are strongly correlated (r = .89) and were used to create a summated rating scale. Descriptive statistics are again shown in Appendix B.

Controls

At the individual level, this study includes a standard set of control variables related to political participation. Age is measured as a continuous variable. Education is indicated by years of schooling completed. Income is measured as family income and sex is coded as 1 for females. Political interest is measured on a four-value scale of interest in politics. External political efficacy is measured as index adding two variables indicating level of agreement with statements, "No influence what government does" and "Government does not care what I think." Internal political efficacy is measured as an additive index of two variables indicating level of agreement with statements, "I have good understanding of politics" and "Most people better informed than I am." Satisfaction with how democracy works is measured on a 10-point scale. Higher values indicate greater interest, efficacy, and satisfaction. Descriptive statistics for all control variables are shown in Appendix B.

At the country level, the set of control variables used reflects factors that have been shown in previous research to have an influence on NEP: economic development and democratic history. Level of economic development is measured as a country's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (purchasing power parity [PPP] US$) in 2003. The data were obtained from the International Monetary Fund. Democratic history is measured by a postcommunist country variable indicating if a state had experienced communism. Country-level controls are shown in Appendix A. Test statistics show that none of these variables are collinear and are appropriate for use in a regression model.

Data

The study of NEP in this research used data from the ISSP 2004 citizenship module. This data set has the widest range of NEP activities going beyond simple protesting. In particular, 24 democracies in North America, European

Union countries, Norway, Switzerland, Australia, and Israel that participated in ISSP 2004 were used because all of these countries have territorial decentralization measures: a central variable in this study.[5]

As the theory and data have multilevel structure, where individuals at the first level are nested in countries that represent the second level, hierarchical linear modeling was used (Gelman & Hill, 2006). H1a, H1b, and H1c were modeled as the direct effect of POS indicators on NEP at the individual level. To examine the moderating effect of political opportunities on the influence of mobilizing networks on NEP, the interaction effects of social networks indicators with POS factors are tested in H2a, H2b, and H2c.

To test whether the findings are robust and not the result of a few influential cases, several diagnostic analyses were performed. Following a strategy proposed by T. Van der Meer, Grotenhuis, and Pelzer (2010), countries that were above critical thresholds of Cook's *D* and dfbeta for the three POS indicators and had significant coefficients ($p \leq .05$) were included as dummy variables in the final models estimated. Analyses without country controls gave substantively the same results, only the strength of regression coefficients slightly differed.

To ensure that the results were not driven by just one participatory activity included in the NEP index, a set of multilevel logistic regressions of individual activities with the same predictors were also estimated. Although some of the parameters did not reach statistical significance, the three POS indicators exhibited the same substantive (positive or negative) effects as presented in Table 2. The only exception was a nonsignificant positive effect of the number of parties on participation at rally.

Results: POS, NEP, and Mobilization

The first two rows of Model 1 in Table 2 show that territorial and horizontal decentralization has a significantly positive effect on NEP. These results support the POS theory, which argues that countries with more decentralized institutional settings that offer more channels to influence politics and higher chance to have impact promote NEP (H1a and H1b). Taking both indicators together, an average individual (in the sense of age, education, income, and male) living in a country where the two POS indicators exhibit most openness yields a score of .20 on the NEP index. In contrast, if the same person resided in a relatively closed system with a territorially centralized state where power is concentrated in the hands of a few institutions at the horizontal level that person would score .06 on the NEP index. In other words, moving from the most centralized to most decentralized setting in these two (territorial and horizontal) dimensions of POS yields a difference of .07 for

Table 2. Nonelectoral Political Participation and Mobilization.

Explanatory variables	Model 1	Model 2
POS		
Territorial decentralization	.085*** (.025)	.080** (.035)
Horizontal decentralization	.264*** (.086)	.330*** (.124)
Number of political parties	−.010* (.005)	−.015** (.008)
Interaction of mobilization with POS		
Membership		.088**** (.005)
Membership × Territorial decentralization		.054** (.025)
Membership × Horizontal decentralization		.163* (.095)
Membership × Number of political parties		−.006 (.093)
Political discussion		.030**** (.003)
Discussion × Territorial decentralization		.044*** (.014)
Discussion × Horizontal decentralization		.192**** (.051)
Discussion × Number of political parties		−.006** (.003)
Control variables country level		
GDP per capita (PPP)	.001 (.001)	−.001** (.001)
Postcommunist country	−.035** (.017)	−.050** (.021)
Finland	−.048** (.021)	−.070*** (.026)
Control variables individual level		
Income	.001 (.001)	−.001 (.001)
Gender	−.017**** (.002)	.021**** (.002)
Age	−.001**** (.001)	−.001**** (.001)
Years of schooling	.004**** (.001)	.003**** (.001)
Political interest	.044**** (.002)	.020**** (.002)
External political efficacy	.013**** (.001)	.007**** (.001)
Internal political efficacy	.023**** (.002)	.012**** (.002)
Satisfaction with democracy	−.003**** (.001)	−.003**** (.001)
Constant	.124**** (.006)	.117**** (.006)
Random effects parameters		
Individual	.0284	.0247
Country	.0003	.0008
Membership		.0005
Political discussion		.0001
Explained individual-level variation	.05	.17
Explained country-level variation	.86	.72
Total explained variation	.12	.21
χ^2	2,873.65	1,242.47
n	24/22,790	24/21,194

POS = political opportunity structure; GDP = gross domestic product; PPP = purchasing power parity; NEP = nonelectoral participation. Note that the dependent variable is NEP scale. See text and Table 1 for details. The multilevel regression coefficients are restricted maximum likelihood estimates. Unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors are in parentheses. The continuous factors are entered into the analysis as grand-centered. Family income is centered on country means. Finland as a significant influential case is controlled.

*$p \leq .1$. **$p \leq .05$. ***$p \leq .01$. ****$p \leq .001$.

territorial decentralization and .08 points for horizontal decentralization on the NEP index that ranges from 0 to 1. These results support the expectations expressed in H1a and H1b.

The third row of Table 2 shows the impact for effective number of parliamentary parties. The coefficient for number of parties does not have a significant positive influence on NEP thereby allowing H1c to be rejected. This result supports the view proposed in this study regarding the importance of decentralization for NEP. This analysis shows that neither consensus nor cooperation stemming from the decentralization of party politics promotes NEP. However, the presence of a greater number of veto players indicating the presence of more autonomous power centers in the decision-making process does have an important independent effect on promoting NEP.

In fact effective number of political parties appears to have a significant negative impact on NEP. A comparison of countries with the lowest and highest effective numbers of parliamentary parties reveals a decrease in NEP by .04 points. These findings are in line with previous research examining Lijphart's executive-party dimension, multipartism, and so on. (T. W. G. van der Meer et al., 2009; Weldon & Dalton, 2010). We can speculate that the factor at work could, paradoxically, be the higher representation produced by multiparty systems, because a broader spectrum of political preferences is represented by a higher number of political parties (Karp & Banducci, 2008; Lijphart, 1999; Powell, 2000; see Özler, 2008, for a similar argument). In a multiparty system, people may feel that their interests are already well represented in national legislatures and so are not motivated to undertake more NEP.[6]

Level of economic development was found to have a significant positive effect implying that citizens from richer countries have greater levels of NEP. The postcommunist indicator also showed significant effects. Additional analyses revealed that Finland is a statistically influential case.[7] Overall, Model 1 explains 86% of the 9.1% of the variance in NEP due to country-level effects.

The theory presented in this article suggests that being involved in mobilizing networks results in more NEP in countries with more open opportunities (H2a, H2b, and H2c). Model 2 in Table 2 shows the results of the cross-level interactions of the two mobilization indicators—group membership and political discussion—with the POS indicators when modeling NEP. Consistent with H2a and H2b, the interaction effects for territorial and horizontal decentralization have significant positive coefficients. In general, these results show that the effect of social networks on NEP is significantly stronger in countries displaying more open opportunities along these two dimensions than in centralized states. These results fit with points made earlier, where it was argued that political actors tend to make greater use of formal and informal social links when mobilizing citizens in decentralized settings.

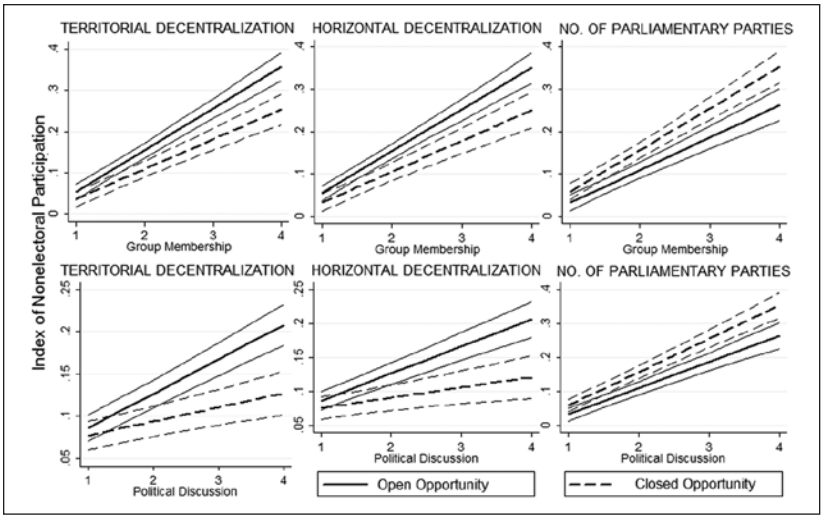

Figure 1. The effect of social networks in open/closed political opportunity structure.

Note that the lines surrounding the continuous dark (open opportunity) and dotted dark (closed opportunity) lines indicate 90% confidence intervals.

The interaction effect of number of parliamentary parties and the two mobilization indicators is negative, suggesting that more parties decrease the mobilizing power of social networks. This contradicts the positive expectations expressed in H2c. This result is consistent with the negative direct effect evident in Model 1 and supports the view that the logic of checks and balances promotes NEP. This negative coefficient may be explained in terms of the wider representation afforded by multiparty systems: where numerous specific issues and demands are channeled into the political system through the electoral process and increased party mobilization (Karp & Banducci, 2008). This limits the scope for other channels of citizen mobilization and NEP in general. In this situation, there is much less incentive to mobilize citizens and consequently social networks have limited impact.

Figure 1 represents these results graphically.[8] Countries were categorized into two equal groups representing open and closed POSs across the territorial, horizontal, and number of parties' dimensions. Consistent with the previous results, the slope for the line representing countries with more open POS along the territorial and horizontal dimensions has a steeper positive slope than the line for more closed political systems. These results confirm the expectations expressed in H2a and H2b.

However, the difference in effect between belonging to an open or closed POS group of countries is only statistically different (using a 90% confidence) for citizens who are more involved in social networks. For individuals with little or no social networks, there is little evidence that living in either group of countries makes a difference in observed NEP.[9] This finding is in line with POS theory. People with little or no social networks are less likely to be mobilized, and hence, less likely to be influenced by institutional incentives because the signals sent out by institutions are not "translated" for them by political elites and activists.

At the same time, this result suggests that a more open POS may have limited impact on reducing participatory inequalities. This article reveals that a more open POS strengthens NEP among those who are already mobilized by political elites. Less open systems with constrained opportunities have little effect on those who are not already mobilized. Attempts to increase NEP through institutional reform by increasing openness would have little impact on this isolated group because increased activism depends critically on mobilization.

Although NEP is an important complement to electoral activities, voting still remains the main tool of citizens' democratic participation. National institutions facilitating NEP should therefore not undermine voter turnout. Additional models not reported reveal that the impact of a POS on *electoral participation* depends critically on which controls are included in the model estimated. Importantly, the impact of the three POS variables (horizontal and territorial decentralization plus number of parties) on electoral and NEP never exhibit contrasting effects. The central point here is that institutional factors that promote NEP do not undermine voter turnout.

Conclusion

Scholars have long considered social and political context to be important determinants of political participation. Only recently has research been conducted on the sources of cross-national differences in political participation beyond voting. The present study draws on an original social movement theory of POS and presents an institutional explanation of NEP, and hence shows when context can count in promoting citizen activism.

In contrast to the classical comparative institutions and social movement literatures, this study has argued that it is not institutional decentralization per se that increases NEP. Only one type of institutional decentralization leading to a higher number of veto players and thus a more open POS motivates

increased NEP. The reason is that decentralized political systems, which are characterized by a high number of checks and balances, provide participants with a greater number of access points into the political system, and consequently increase the prospect of being successful in articulating demands.

In testing this theory, this study has shown that citizens' engagement in nonelectoral activities is greater in more territorially and horizontally decentralized countries. In contrast, decentralization based on power sharing and joint responsibility does not increase nonelectoral citizen activism. The same results were revealed for the mobilizing effect of group membership and political discussion: it increases with more open political opportunities. In other words, social networks mobilize more citizens to undertake NEP in countries with higher numbers of veto players. Consistent with the reformulated political opportunity theory, states with a higher number of political parties do not increase NEP through mobilizing social networks. This key result fits neatly with the social movement literature's prediction that POSs encourage political elites, activists, the media, social networks, and so on, to mobilize citizens to engage in NEP.

In fact, the number of political parties' variable has a negative direct and indirect influence on NEP. This implies that political decentralization through power sharing decreases NEP and the mobilizing effect of social networks. One might argue that the wider representation offered by political parties in multiparty systems through the articulation of a greater range of issue positions and higher party mobilization limits the scope for greater NEP. In general, more parties are not necessarily a bad thing for democracy if greater electoral choice increases citizens' satisfaction with how politics works.

The findings presented in the foregoing pages have important implications for nonelectoral political participation and social movement research, and the study of political institutions and democratic politics in general. Current scholarship tends to consider all types of decentralization as having equivalent effects on citizen politics through such concepts as consociationalism, power sharing, or proportionality (Lijphart, 1999; Norris, 2008; Powell, 2000). This study reveals that this assumption is questionable because each type of form of decentralization functions in a different way and this is evident in citizen's NEP and mobilization. In sum, this study highlights that more attention should be paid to the contrasting effects that different forms of decentralization can have on political participation and citizen representation (Crepaz & Moser, 2004; Goodin, 1996; Lijphart, 1999).

In conclusion, the literature on political participation has tended to blame individual citizens for their lack of nonelectoral political participation, or has pointed at the weakness of civil society and low mobilization among political actors. The present study shows that that the external environment in which

citizens participate shapes their possibilities for action. In particular, to participate, individuals and social/political groups need open political opportunities. Hence, the answer by Brady, Verba, and Scholzman's (1995) question "Why don't people participate?—because they can't, don't want to, and nobody asked," should be expanded to include the context of choice "because they don't have institutional opportunities" (p. 271). Institutional context can and does count for citizen participation in democratic politics.

Appendix A

NEP and Contextual Indicators by Country

Country	Index of NEP[a]	Territorial decentralization[b]	Horizontal decentralization (2003)[c]	Effective no. of parliamentary parties (2003)[d]	GDP per capita PPP US$ (2003)[e]	Postcommunist country
Australia	.16	.75	.51	2.49	30,856	0
Austria	.17	.60	.53	2.88	30,966	0
Bulgaria	.03	.25	.44	2.92	7,991	1
Canada	.18	.96	.44	2.54	31,843	0
Czech Republic	.04	.43	.39	3.67	17,303	1
Denmark	.15	.71	.52	4.48	30,305	0
Finland	.09	.61	.54	4.93	27,359	0
France	.17	.29	.54	2.26	28,098	0
Germany	.15	.66	.43	3.38	28,176	0
Hungary	.03	.34	.36	2.21	14,546	1
Ireland	.12	.40	.47	3.38	34,438	0
Israel	.11	.31	.60	6.17	21,437	0
Latvia	.18	.43	.54	5.02	10,262	1
Netherlands	.16	.45	.65	4.74	31,706	0
Norway	.16	.48	.55	5.35	42,721	0
Poland	.04	.38	.46	3.60	11,741	1
Portugal	.06	.23	.41	2.50	19,391	0
Slovakia	.08	.16	.56	6.12	13,576	1
Slovenia	.06	.22	.54	4.86	20,329	1
Spain	.14	.50	.51	2.48	25,161	0
Sweden	.15	.58	.51	4.23	29,625	0
Switzerland	.19	.80	.61	5.01	32,764	0
UK	.11	.37	.36	2.17	29,051	0
USA	.18	.80	.41	2.00	38,324	0
M	.12	.49	.50	3.73	25,332	0.29
SD	.06	.21	.08	1.31	9,190	0.46
Minimum	.03	.16	.36	2.00	7,991	0
Maximum	.19	.96	.65	6.17	42,721	1

NEP = nonelectoral participation; GDP = gross domestic product; PPP = purchasing power parity. Note there are 24 countries. The data come from the following sources:
a. ISSP Research Group (2012).
b. Democracy Time-series Data database.
c. Political Constraint Index (POLCON) Dataset database.
d. Gallagher and Mitchell (2008).
e. International Monetary Fund.

Appendix B

Descriptive Statistics of Individual-Level Variables

Variable	*N*	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
NEP	31,309	0.12	0.18	0	1
Organization membership	28,984	1.82	0.63	1	4
Political discussion	30,873	2.32	0.82	1	4
Income	25,954	70,571	170,853	0	999,996
Gender	31,527	0.53	0.50	0	1
Age	31,233	47.65	17.19	15	97
Years of schooling	30,431	12.30	4.74	0	77
Political interest	31,109	2.46	0.85	1	4
External political efficacy	30,347	2.51	1.10	1	5
Internal political efficacy	29,091	3.30	0.86	1	5
Satisfaction with democracy	29,878	5.96	2.33	0	10

Source: ISSP Research Group (2012).
NEP = nonelectoral participation. Note that the dependent variable, NEP, is a summated rating scale rescaled 0 to 1.

Appendix C

Marginal Effects of Institutional Decentralization at Different Levels of Group Membership and Political Discussion

Marginal effect/variable	Group membership	Political discussion
Minimum		
Territorial decentralization	.038 (.037)	.025 (.031)
Horizontal decentralization	.210 (.128)	.086 (.105)
Number of political parties	−.011 (.008)	−.070 (.006)
Lower quartile		
Territorial decentralization	.060* (.035)	.047 (.032)
Horizontal decentralization	.275** (.121)	.182** (.108)
Number of political parties	−.013* (.007)	−.010 (.007)
Median		
Territorial decentralization	.082** (.036)	.091** (.037)
Horizontal decentralization	.341*** (.126)	.374*** (.131)
Number of political parties	−.016** (.008)	−.017** (.008)
Upper quartile		
Territorial decentralization	.103*** (.039)	.113*** (.041)
Horizontal decentralization	.406*** (.140)	.471*** (.148)
Number of political parties	−.018*** (.009)	−.020** (.009)

(continued)

Appendix. (continued)

Marginal effect/variable	Group membership	Political discussion
Maximum		
Territorial decentralization	.201*** (.072)	.157*** (.053)
Horizontal decentralization	.700*** (.268)	.663**** (.188)
Number of political parties	−.028* (.016)	−.026** (.011)

Note parameters are restricted maximum likelihood estimates. Standard errors are in parentheses.
*$p \leq .1$. **$p \leq .05$. ***$p \leq .01$. ****$p \leq .001$.

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Notes

1. However, this analysis of cross-sectional data is unable to identify the exact mechanism of how social networks increase nonelectoral participation (NEP) in a more open political opportunity structure (POS) due to observational equivalence. Increased mobilization or more effective recruitment may result in the NEP effects observed. Also, the models estimated cannot be used to infer to test the socialization explanation of why social networks matter for NEP.

2. When they are included, the analysis yields the same substantive results presented here.
3. NEP may be operationalized as a summated rating scale or as regression factor scores. The correlation between NEP summate rating scale and regression factor scores is very high ($r = .998$). As summated rating scales are more intuitively understandable, this was used as the dependent variable in the models estimated. If factor scores are used as the dependent variable, very similar results to those presented are obtained.
4. To check robustness, this indicator was substituted with the other two Schneider dimensions of territorial decentralization: administrative and political decentralization. Both of these dimensions yield the same results as the fiscal decentralization indicator used here. The interaction effects between territorial decentralization and social networks have positive parameters but are not statistically significant ($p \leq .05$).
5. This study also includes newer democracies in Central and Eastern Europe that are converging toward Western models through membership of the European Union. To capture any postcommunist effect, a dummy variable is included in all models estimated.
6. Multipartism and horizontal decentralization are strongly correlated ($r = .71$) and hence constitute a possible source of multicollinearity in any regression model estimated. In models that include both variables, the strength of the resulting parameters is greater than when both variables are modeled separately. In this situation, multipartism probably captures the "power-sharing" aspect of the horizontal decentralization indicator. Territorial and horizontal decentralization seem to be more or less independent dimensions of POS. They correlate rather weakly ($r = .02$), and inclusion of one of them into the model does not affect the coefficient of the other.
7. Dfbeta statistics show that this strong Finnish influence occurs primarily through the multipartism and postcommunist variables. With regard to multipartism, Finland fits with the theory proposed in this study because the Finnish dummy variable increases the strength of the multipartism coefficient. However, from a statistical point of view, the Finnish case is too influential. Nonetheless, when Finnish country effect is ignored, the results of the three POS indicators have similar parameter estimates to those reported.
8. This model includes what Kam and Franzese (2007) term "chain interactions" where the conditional effect of territorial decentralization on organizational membership is also conditioned by horizontal decentralization and number of parties. However, for the sake of clarity, only the results for the conditional effects of one POS factor keeping all others at their means are presented. A full analysis reveals very similar results. The patterns shown in Figure 1 hold at different levels for the other two POS indicators.
9. To further explore the effect of social networks on NEP in different institutional settings, the marginal effects of specific POS indicators on NEP at different levels of group membership and political discussion were estimated (Kam &

Franzese, 2007). The results showed that the effects of POS indicators are only significant for respondents with at least some involvement in social networks. The results are shown in Appendix C.

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Author Biography

Kateřina Vráblíková is a postdoc lecturer at the University of Mannheim and researcher at the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. She is carrying out research on political participation and social movements.