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Multidisciplinary perspectives

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To all those who made it possible to realise the research reported in this volume, especially the young people, women, ethnic minorities and migrants whose voices should be heard.

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INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND MACRO CONTEXTUAL DETERMINANTS

Kateřina Vráblíková and Ondřej Císař[1]

Introduction

The macro-context, traditionally understood by the comparative politics literature as the nation state, obviously has an effect on individual political participation. The available studies have shown dramatic cross-country differences in how active citizens of various states are in politics; explanations of participation across these countries can differ, too. Until lately the lesson taken from these observations has been that social phenomena must be studied in their particular contexts, which in practice meant controlling for the country context in various ways. For instance, studies have analysed individual political participation separately in particular countries or geographical regions, such as the old Western democracies and the newer democracies of Central-Eastern Europe, or South America.

However, this 'context sensitivity' recognises the role of the macro-context only to a limited extent. As argued by the classical comparative social science literature decades ago, the macro-context should be seen as a research puzzle in itself, not just as an inconvenient element inserting error into the quasi-universalist laws governing human behaviour. The macro-context should be approached theoretically as a relevant explanation of its elements and the processes taking place within it. Specifically, even the macro-context of national states is characterised by attributes that systematically influence individual political participation and the processes that affect it within these contexts (see the chapter by Brunton-Smith and Barrett in this volume). Hence the crucial research question is obvious: What are the relevant characteristics of the macro-context, and how do they affect individual-level political participation?

Only recently has this question begun to be asked and more systematically examined by the literature on political participation. This holds especially for political participation beyond voting. While macro-contextual research on voter

turnout has been a more or less well-established stream of research, only lately has the macro-contextual perspective on individual non-electoral political participation both in terms of theories and their empirical testing triggered much political participation research. The goal of this chapter is to review the available literature on the macro-contextual determinants of individual political participation, particularly non-electoral participation. Before doing that, we will first discuss the classical agenda of political participation theories, which have emphasised the individual predispositions of potential participants, and have also studied the 'meso-level' predictors such as mobilisation and social networks. Then we identify the three main categories of macro-contextual determinants of individual political participation heretofore recognised by the available studies: political institutions, socio-economic conditions and political culture. We first discuss the direct effect of these characteristics on individual political participation. Second, we focus on interaction effects, that is on the conditioning effect of contextual characteristics on the individual-level predictors of political participation. We conclude the review by identifying potential gaps and challenges in the available literature, formulating potential avenues for future research.

Theories of political participation

Micro-level theories

Political science research on political participation has been widely dominated by micro-level approaches which emphasise individual predispositions as determinants of political participation. In the first place, the most attention has been paid to individuals' socio-economic status, mainly due to the very influential research of Verba, Schlozman, Brady and Nie (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba *et al*. 1978; Verba *et al*. 1995; Schlozman *et al*. 2012). The main finding of this stream of research was that political participation is unequally distributed among citizens and skewed towards those who are privileged. The explanation of why higher socio-economic status (SES) leads to more political participation is that SES is most of the time interrelated with the individual resources that are necessary for participation in politics. Individual resources, such as time, skills and money, help overcome the costs of participation, and hence participation is easier for people who individually possess them. In addition to SES, the role of individual civic orientations and attitudes has been researched. Various studies have shown that people who are more interested in politics feel a civic duty to participate, have higher levels of social trust, have higher political efficacy and are more likely to participate in politics (Dalton 2008; Norris 2002; Armingeon 2007).

The micro-level approach favouring personal characteristics – SES and civic orientations – as the crucial determinants of individual political participation has several consequences for our understanding of participation and the policy decisions that are made. Firstly, putting the main emphasis on individual resources and motivations fails to explain the timing and geography of individual political participation

(Leighley 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003). Although the micro-level approach can tell us what type of people usually tend to participate, predispositions can hardly answer when and where people participate. Political participation fluctuates dramatically over time and place; for instance, people sign petitions and contact politicians only on some occasions and at some locations. However, SES and most of the civic orientations which affect political participation are more or less stable characteristics which do not change that quickly and are unable to account for this cross-context fluctuation.

Secondly, this approach underestimates the social character of political participation (Knoke 1990; Leighley 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003). The micro-level approach sees individuals as isolated units and implies that political participation is performed spontaneously by atomised individuals. However, people do not make their participatory choices in a vacuum but are sensitive to a number of influences coming from their socio-political surroundings. A number of researchers have argued that even seemingly individual types of political participation, such as voting, are still heavily social (Knoke 1990). Even in the case of activities that should be the most individualised and hence least dependent on individuals' social surroundings, such as boycotting and contacting public officials, comparative studies show that fewer than one-third describe their performance of these activities as exclusively the result of their own initiative without any help from others (Kaase 1990).

Thirdly, the focus on predispositions also has important normative and policy implications. Taking this perspective seriously, political participation would seem to originate from the non-political world. Rosenstone and Hansen have complained that micro-theories of political participation 'do not have much to say about politics' (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003: 3). Following the micro-level approach, individual political participation is not primarily related to what is going on in politics: it is not a response to actual political quarrels, not related to political parties or social movements and not affected by the design of institutions. On the contrary, political participation originates from who the people are. If participation is primarily a matter of social stratification and civic orientation, then the possibilities for effective short-term policy change are very limited. For instance, if we wanted to increase political participation, we would have to change people's individual resources and civic motivations, which are, however, difficult to manipulate.

A number of policy programmes drawing on the micro-level perspective are being implemented. These policy strategies include citizens' civic education programmmes that try to increase public political and civic involvement by promoting civic skills, political awareness and civic values to individual citizens. The difficulty of these policy programmes in bringing about large-scale change is that because they are trying to manipulate rather stable characteristics, such as resources and civic orientations, they require long-term influences. Simultaneously, since their effect is attached to the education of every single individual, the potential range of effect of these usually small-scale projects focused on a few local communities is questionable.

Meso-level theories

Although the greatest attention has been paid to the micro-level explanations, particularly to the SES model, this does not mean that the political participation literature has entirely disregarded meso-level socio-political influences on participation. Here, attention has been focused on the effect of people's connections to their acquaintances, social groups and discussion networks, and recruitment by politicians and activists. However, this type of determinant, especially when tested on participatory activities other than voting, has been researched to a much lesser extent by the political science literature, or these influences have been interpreted through the perspective of micro-level explanations (for a review, see Abramson and Claggett 2001). For instance, although the study by Verba and colleagues specifies mobilisation as the third important component determining political participation, they still devote most of their attention to SES and individual resources (Verba *et al.* 1995). Also, when analysing recruitment they use very severe restrictions that make it very unlikely that they will find the effect of mobilisation, or do not study it at all as an independent variable of participation (Verba *et al.* 1995; Brady *et al.* 1999).

When studying membership in voluntary associations and groups, these authors also specify the mechanism of its influence through individual predispositions. For Verba and his colleagues, voluntary associations affect individual political participation by producing individual resources, particularly civic skills (Verba *et al.* 1995). Similarly, Putnam's social capital theory (2000) expects social networks among individuals established within these organisations to mainly affect civic orientation, specifically to produce trust and reciprocity, which subsequently leads to higher participation in politics. Hence, according to this perspective, the primary reason why the social surroundings of voluntary groups matter for political participation is the change in micro-predisposition (resources and civic orientations) and not the effects of recruitment, information flow or politics in general.

There is an important stream of the political participation literature and especially social movement literature which sees political participation primarily as a social activity heavily dependent on mobilisation and the informational aspect of individuals' socio-political surroundings. These authors point out that political participation must be organised, and emphasise mobilisation by politicians, activists, media, voluntary groups and personal discussion networks through the explicit recruitment of individuals or the transmission of politically relevant information (Abramson and Claggett 2001; Diani and McAdam 2003; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Knoke 1990; Leighley 1996; McAdam 1988; McAdam *et al.* 1996; McAdam 1986; Norris 2002; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Shussman and Soule 2005; Teorell 2003; Uhlaner 1989; Verba *et al.* 1978; Verba *et al.* 1995; Wielhouwer and Lockerbie 1994).

Although this type of literature has been growing recently, especially on the effects of discussion networks (Mutz 2002, 2006; McClurg 2003, 2006), most mobilisation research into political participation deals with voting. Mobilisation and recruitment, which should be even more important for other types of participation,

are not studied to any degree (Abramson and Claggett 2001). Clear evidence of this situation is the lack of indicators falling below the meso-level of explanation in standard political participation surveys. None of the most important comparative survey programmes focusing on political participation ask questions about recruitment into political participation other than voting.

Macro-level theories

Beyond one's immediate social surroundings, i.e. people's social networks and their recruitment by political elites, there is also a much wider macro-context that shapes incentives for political participation. This macro-context, such as political institutions and national culture, provides an arena in which the political participation and mobilising activity of social networks and political elites takes place. With the exception of voting, which has been well researched from this point of view (Dalton and Anderson 2011; Geys 2006; Powell 1986; Jackman 1987; Jackman and Miller 1995; Karp and Banducci 2008; Norris 2002; Blais 2006; Blais and Dobrzynska 1998), the role of the macro-context for other types of individual political participation has been seriously overlooked until recently (but see Verba *et al.* 1978; Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

This is not to say that comparative research on political participation does not exist – rather the opposite. However, most of the comparative studies have not taken the macro-context seriously as a research puzzle in itself. The vast majority of comparative studies instead control for the effect of national context, and test the micro- and meso-theories across contexts without trying to see how and why national context affects participation (Armingeon 2007; Teorell *et al.* 2007; Marien *et al.* 2010; Dalton 2008). Even the comparative political participation study by Verba *et al.* (1978), which has gone farthest from the main body of studies in this regard and theorised about the effect of political institutions and socio-economic cleavages on inequality in political participation, was not constructed to study the macro-context. On the contrary, the main purpose was to show that the 'individual-level law' of socio-economic resources holds across various types of national context. For this reason, the authors selected 'the maximum difference research design', which 'is strong if one is seeking for uniformities across nations.' For them 'cross-national heterogeneity … is essentially an unspecified heterogeneity' (Verba *et al.* 1978: 24).

This lack of primarily macro-contextual analyses of political participation beyond voting comes as a surprise, because this very puzzle has been an essential focus of comparative politics since its very beginning (Przeworski and Teune 1970; Lazarsfeld and Melzel 1965; Almond and Verba 1963). Przeworski and Teune (1970: 7) explicitly acknowledge that 'identification of the social system in which a given phenomenon occurs is a part of its explanation'. Similarly, Almond and Verba (1963) point out that micropolitics (individual behaviour) can be explained by macropolitics (characteristics of political systems). Lazarsfeld and Melzel (1965) describe the same idea when referring to members and their collectives.

The main point emphasised by this literature is that individuals are embedded in different types of contexts that affect both their individual activities and the attitudes and processes that lead to these attitudes and activities. When studying these contexts, comparative social science research should go beyond the simple determination of these various contexts. Specifically, identifying that political participation is higher in the US and that SES plays a bigger role in the US than in Germany is not enough to study context effectively. In order to perform effective comparative analysis and study context seriously, researchers should move 'from cases to variables' (Przeworski and Teune 1970) and examine what contextual characteristics make the US and Germany different (see also Chapter 11 by Brunton-Smith and Barrett in this volume).

Compared to the political science literature dealing with the individual determinants of political participation, the social movement literature has, since the 1970s, been working intensively on the macro-structural theory of political opportunity structure (POS), which is understood to be one of the most crucial determinants of the mobilisation of social movements (Eisinger 1973; Tilly 1995; Meyer 2004; Kriesi 2004; Tarrow 1998; Kriesi *et al.* 1995). The POS is conceptualised as the various characteristics of the external environment, mostly the formal and informal aspects of state institutions and elite politics, that shape people's incentives for activism (Tarrow 1998: 76–8). However, until lately this theory has not been used for the macro-level explanation of individual-level political participation. It has been used to explain variations over time in the mobilisation of particular social movements (McAdam 1999; Meyer and Minkoff 2008), or in qualitative small-N studies comparing protest across a limited number of countries (Kriesi *at al.* 1995; Kitschelt 1986).

Only very recently have researchers started to study the macro-context of citizens' political behaviour beyond voting as the main research problem and in a more systematic way. The recent boom in these studies is to a large extent possible thanks to the availability of a large quantity of comparative survey data and new statistical techniques. Recently a large number of comparative surveys focused on political participation and related concepts have been made available, such as the World Value Survey, the European Social Survey, the International Social Survey Programme and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, which make possible systematic statistical large-N analyses of individual political participation across time and space. Also, a suitable statistical technique in the form of multilevel or hierarchical modelling (Gelman and Hill 2007; Hox 2010), which is able to effectively analyse the interplay between micro- and macro-determinants of individual political participation, has only recently became available and popular among a wider group of political participation researchers (for more see Chapter 11 by Brunton-Smith and Barrett in this volume and Brunton-Smith 2011). The following text will summarise this more or less new stream of literature, review the most important findings on how the characteristics of the macro-context affect individual political participation and explain the mechanisms through which they influence it. Since macro-contextual determinants of voter turnout have been well

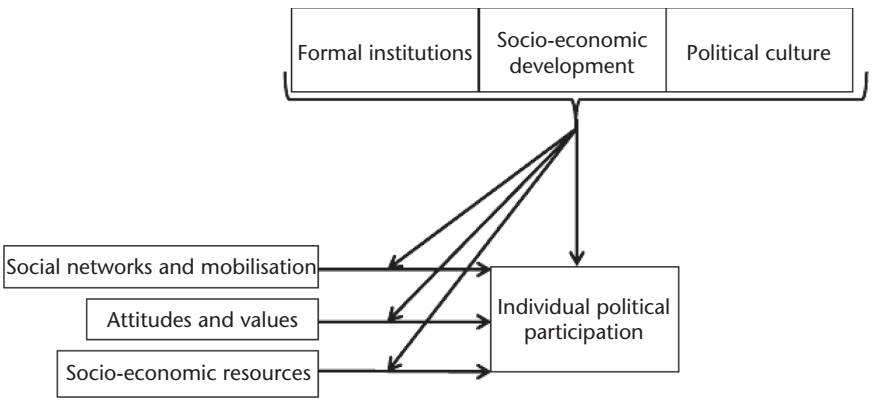

FIGURE 2.1 Direct and indirect macro-contextual effects on individual political participation

studied, the text will primarily focus on reviewing the more recent literature on forms of political participation other than voting.

What type of macro-context affects individual participation?

Recognising that macro-context matters is only the first step. The necessary follow-up question is what characteristics of the macro-context are, and why and how they matter for political participation. Generally, the available studies on the macro-contextual determinants of individual political participation have focused on three main types of contextual determinants: formal political institutions, economic development and political culture. Figure 2.1 summarises the findings – both direct and conditioning effects – available in the literature. The macro-context can affect political participation directly, which is displayed by the direct arrow from the macro-context to individual political participation. In addition to that, the macro-context can also affect the processes within particular contexts, i.e. it conditions the effect of the lower-level determinants of individual participation. Available studies have explored how various characteristics of the macro-level context interplay with the effects of the above-mentioned explanations of micro- (SES and attitudes and values) and meso-level factors (networks and mobilisation).

Direct effects of the macro-context

Formal political institutions

The micro-oriented research on political participation has tended to emphasise the similarities among individual types of political participation while using more or less the same micro-predictors, and points out the 'conventionalisation/normalisation' of

protest, which is nowadays similar to other types of political participation activities (Dalton 2008; Norris 2002; Verba *et al.* 1995). However, when taking the macro-contextual perspective, electoral and non-electoral political participation is viewed as qualitatively different phenomena. This probably holds the truest in the case of macro-institutional determinants. For instance, while elections are held once every four years and are explicitly regulated by electoral laws, different macro-level mechanisms probably correspond to protest and contacting officials, which tend to take place between elections (Weldon and Dalton 2011: 16; Marien *et al.* 2010). Political institutions have been widely studied as the main source of cross-national variation in voter turnout (Dalton and Anderson 2011; Powell 1986; Jackman 1987; Jackman and Miller 1995; Karp and Banducci 2008; Norris 2002; Blais 2006; Blais and Dobrzynska 1998). The effect of institutional context on non-electoral participation has been researched to a much lesser extent (Dalton *et al.* 2009; van der Meer *et al.* 2009; van der Meer 2011; Weldon and Dalton 2010; Christensen 2011).

When theorising about the mechanism of how formal political institutions shape individual political participation, studies mostly rely on rational choice theory. The formal political institutions of the nation state should shape incentives for non-participation, affecting individuals' costs and benefits of participation. In the case of voting, authors usually expect that the macro-level context shapes individual incentives to take part in elections by determining electoral costs, the character of electoral choices offered and the chances of having an impact (Norris 2002; Dalton and Anderson 2011). In the case of electoral costs, the explanation is straightforward: when electoral costs are reduced, casting a ballot should be easier. The electoral choices play a role for voter turnout in several ways. A higher number of options should motivate people to vote because they have a greater chance of finding a party close to their views. The choices must also be distinguishable from one another and predictable in order to motivate individuals to vote. Also, situations that increase the chances of one vote having an impact should increase electoral participation (Dalton and Anderson 2011).

Similarly, the social movement literature has relied on rational choice theory in identifying the mechanism by which institutional political opportunities affect protest and non-electoral participation in general. They expect that people participate more when two mechanisms operate simultaneously: (1) when people's chances to have an impact are increased; and (2) hen people have a higher number of access points for influencing politics (Koopmans and Kriesi 1995: 38–40; also Koopmans 1999: 97; for individual non-electoral participation, see Vráblíková 2014).

What institutions specifically affect political participation? Voter turnout research has mostly dealt with the characteristics of electoral and party systems. Among the factors that reduce the costs of casting a ballot, studies have found that automatic registration, holding the elections on weekends and voting by mail can increase voter turnout (Jackman 1987; Jackman and Miller 1995; Norris 2002; Blais 2006).

Many studies have found that a proportional electoral system increases voter turnout (Powell 1986; Jackman 1987; Karp and Banducci 2008). The exact

theoretical mechanism of how it affects voters' incentives is not clear (Blais 2006; Dalton and Anderson 2011). Some explanations relate this effect to the higher number of political parties typical of proportional electoral systems. However, research has brought mixed results regarding the effect of multi-partyism (Geys 2006; Karp and Banducci 2008). For example, Jackman (1987) finds a negative effect for a higher effective number of parliamentary parties on aggregate voter turnout; he explains this by observing that voters do not decide the actual composition of the government. Others find a positive effect. Lijphart (1999) explains it in terms of the inclusiveness of the consensual and cooperative culture produced by institutional decentralisation in general. Other authors suggest that a higher number of parties inspires citizens to vote because they have more options from which to choose and the options offered better fit their needs, or because parties will be more active in the mobilisation of individuals (Geys 2006; Karp and Banducci 2008, 2011; Blais 2006). Analysing individual voting in a multilevel study, Karp and Banducci (2008) show that a proportional electoral system increases voter turnout because these systems better represent minorities, produce stronger party preferences and increase political efficacy, while a greater number of parties in the government, though common in proportional electoral system, decreases voter turnout by undermining efficacy due to the lower accountability and responsiveness of political elites.

In addition to electoral laws and party system characteristics, Lijphart (1999) also expects the general institutional design of the political system to affect people's willingness to cast a ballot. According to Lijphart, consensual democracies characterised by institutional decentralisation, such as horizontal and territorial power-dispersion, corporate interest mediation and multi-partyism, support higher voter turnout and participation in general, by increasing the inclusiveness of these consensual and cooperational settings. Recent studies testing this theory on individual voting in a multilevel setting do not find support for any of the indicators measuring Lijhpart's two dimensions of consociationalism (van der Meer *et al.* 2009; Weldon and Dalton 2010). In contrast to the expectations, neither institutional decentralisation in the executive parties dimension nor in the federal–unitary dimension affects individual electoral participation.

In the case of non-electoral political participation, researchers have not researched electoral laws; instead, drawing on the political opportunity structure literature from social movements or the literature on comparative institutions, most have focused on the general institutional design of the state. Drawing on political opportunity structure theory, Dalton and his colleagues (2009) show that the level of democratic development measured as Rule of Law by the World Bank has a linear positive effect on individual protest. However, when Welzel and Deutsch (2012) retest this theory using a different measure of Voice and Accountability from the Freedom House and control for emancipative culture and socio-economic development, they find no effect of opportunities on individual protest. Christensen (2011) operationalises political opportunities as various types of institutional decentralisation, and expects it to increase political participation within the system, such

as contacting officials or party membership, and decrease protest. The findings are rather mixed: some indicators of institutional decentralisation dampen individual non-electoral participation, some increase it and others do not show any effect, thus not following the expected different pattern between participation within and outside the system.

Van der Meer and colleagues (2009) and Weldon and Dalton (2010) also study institutional decentralisation, and explicitly aim at testing Lijphart's theory of consociationalism. They expect that a culture of inclusion, consensus and efficacy created by consociational systems should also increase non-electoral participation. In line with Lijphart and his predictions for electoral participation, this expectation relies on the voice mechanism, which expects decentralised systems to increase inclusiveness. Van der Meer and others (van der Meer *et al.* 2009; van der Meer 2011) also theorise a negative effect, because the opposite of consensual institutions – majoritarian institutions – increase accountability, which should motivate higher levels of non-electoral participation. The findings of the two studies do not consistently fit Lijphart's expectations. While consensualism measured by the executive-party dimension weakens most non-electoral political activities, the second federal-unitary dimension shows no effect or positive influence.

Drawing on a reconceptualised political opportunity structure theory, Vráblíková (2012, 2014) argues that only some types of institutional decentralisation increase non-electoral participation, and that the mechanisms by which they do so are not inclusiveness, cooperation and consensus as expected by Lijphart. She distinguishes between power-sharing and power-separation types of decentralisation and shows that only the latter enhances non-electoral participation. The reason is that power-separation, such as territorial and horizontal decentralisation, implies a competitive setting with a higher number of veto players in the political system, which provides participants with better access to the system and greater chances of being successful. In contrast, the power-sharing type of institutional decentralisation, such as multi-partyism or corporate interest representation, does not increase non-electoral participation. Although they are inclusive and hence provide access, these settings lack the element of competitive checks and balances that increases participants' chances of being successful.

Socio-economic conditions

Macro-contextual studies of individual political participation have also examined the effect of socio-economic development. There are several theories that explain the effect of socio-economic well-being on participation. In general, all of the theories more or less explicitly suggest two main mechanisms through which socio-economic macro-contextual determinants affect individual participation. First, macro socio-economic conditions contribute to the development of individual resources, which are more stable predispositions for participation by individual citizens. For instance, potential participants themselves are more educated or have more time and capacity to devote to politics when socialised in a more socio-economically

developed context. Secondly, socio-economic macro-conditions also develop the societal resources for participation. They shape the immediate but external surroundings of individuals, such as the development of civil society and communication technologies.

The effect of socio-economic macro-conditions on individual electoral participation is usually studied from the standpoint of more or less explicitly formulated modernisation theory (Norris 2002; Blais 2006). As Norris summarises, processes such as mass education, urbanisation, the development of mass communication technologies, secularisation, urbanisation and the development of mobilising organisations such as political parties or trade unions should increase voter turnout. The reason is that these processes lead to a higher politicisation of individual citizens, who are therefore more politically informed and engaged (Blais 2006). This theory sees socio-economic conditions from the long-term developmental perspective, and is best suited to explain long-term variation in participation (Norris 2002).

Several studies have shown that various indicators of socio-economic development increase voter turnout (Blais 2006; Norris 2002). However, the trend is not linear and a ceiling effect is observed. The influence is strongest when less socio-economically developed societies are transforming into industrial ones. Here socio-economic conditions strongly boost voter turnout. However, when a certain point of socio-economic development is reached, the effect of socio-economic development on voter turnout decreases and disappears. In post-industrial countries we no longer find an effect of socio-economic conditions on voter turnout (Norris 2002; Blais and Dobrzynska 1998).

Socio-economic development is also positively related to non-electoral participation. There are a number of explanations available as to why this happens. Inglehart's modernisation theory identifies the effect with the change of values and culture resulting from the shift from industrial to post-industrial society (Inglehart 1990, 1997). The experience of existential security, autonomy in decision-making, the development of cognitive skills and creativity, and the diversification of interpersonal interactions in post-industrial societies should lead to a cultural value change by which more people have post-materialist/self-expressive values which correspond to more new forms of participation that are a post-materialist alternative to the passive activities associated with elite-led hierarchical organisations such as voting and party membership.

Dalton *et al.*'s study (2009) of the effect of socio-economic development on individual protest sees socio-economic development through the lens of resource mobilisation theory taken from social movement literature (McCarthy and Zald 1977). This approach focuses on mobilising organisations, such as social movements, voluntary groups and NGOs, which recruit individuals into protest. Socio-economic development should lead to a higher number of these actors, that is to a more developed civil society sector, and increase the resources available to them for mobilising individuals into protest participation, such as a skilled public interested in politics, communication technologies and independent media.

Although closely related, the two perspectives are slightly different. While the classical modernisation theory emphasises the development of post-materialist values and culture across national populations, the resource mobilisation theory of economic development stresses the role of intermediary actors and their capacity to mobilise individuals without reference to the value component present in classical modernisation theory. Contextual studies of non-electoral participation have not yet examined the mechanism of socio-economic development in greater depth to disentangle the two, and mostly use these modernisation-related indicators as control variables.

Political culture

While formal political institutions and socio-economic conditions have been well-researched in contextual studies of voter turnout and received some attention in analyses focused on other participatory activities, the contextual role of political culture on all types of individual participation has been heavily understudied. In fact, there are very few studies that have systematically examined the effect of national culture on individual political behaviour.

What is macro-political culture and how can it be expected to affect individual political participation? In general, the topic of political culture has received much attention in political science, and there are a number of available theories examining its effect on individual participation, such as theories of civic culture, social capital and post-materialism (Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam 1995, 2000; Inglehart 1990, 1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). The crucial point here is that political culture is a macro-contextual phenomenon characterising societies and political systems. Hence, although the measures used to indicate political culture are constructed as the aggregation of individual-level attitudes representing the countries' populations, they indicate a societal-level phenomenon which should be conceptually different from individual attitudes. In doing this, contextual studies of individual participation follow the classic conceptualisation of political culture as a 'particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of the nation' (Almond and Verba 1963: 14–15). This is also related to the political culture's mechanism of influence. The political culture perspective implies that if political culture is to matter, then it should, in addition to affecting individual participation through individual attitudes, also (and more importantly) affect individual participation beyond the effect of individual predispositions.

Although contextual determinants of voting have been studied for decades, almost all of the studies analyse institutions and economic development. Only a few studies have looked at how national social capital affects voter turnout. Relying on bivariate relationships of aggregated data, Putnam (2000) shows that the decline over time in US voter turnout follows the decline of social capital. In contrast, van Deth's (2002) cross-country bivariate analysis of aggregate voter turnout does not find support for social capital theory. In a multilevel analysis of individual electoral participation, Whiteley *et al.* (2009) find a negative effect of aggregate social trust

on individual voting, and no effect of aggregate group membership. A multilevel analysis by van Deth and Vráblíková (2013) shows the positive effect of an aggregated composite measure of social capital on individual voting. As they put it: 'The general availability of a dense and active civil society offers easy access to trustful relationships and all kinds of networks, lowering the opportunity costs for engagement and compliant behaviour for all citizens in this society' (van Deth and Vráblíková 2013: 8).

The contextual effect of social capital has also been studied in the case of other participatory activities. An analysis of aggregated protest by Benson and Rochon (2004) shows a positive effect of social trust. The multilevel analysis of Whiteley and his colleagues (2009) finds a positive effect of both aggregated social trust and group membership on individual non-electoral participation. However, they do not explain the mechanism by which the contextual effect works in greater detail, and treat the country-level social capital as the contextual parallel to the individual-level theory. Controlling for rival cultural explanations of self-expressive culture and economic and political development, Vráblíková (2012) finds no effect for the aggregated composite measure of social capital on individual non-electoral participation. She links social capital to the previously mentioned power-sharing institutions, explaining that both of these characteristics produce a mechanism of consensus and cooperation which, in contrast to competition and contestation, does not increase non-electoral participation.

As already mentioned, one version of the modernisation theory stresses the role of post-materialist/self-expressive culture, especially for 'elite-challenging' types of political participation. This expectation has been supported by several studies. Both fully aggregate-level analyses and multilevel studies analysing individual non-electoral participation, found a positive effect for self-expressive/post-materialist/emancipative culture on protesting or other non-electoral activities (Benson and Rochon 2004; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel and Deutsch 2012; Vráblíková 2012). Multilevel analyses have also shown that self-expressive culture as a macro-contextual phenomenon has its effect beyond individual-level attitudes, i.e. it is the prevalence of these values in a given society that matters. Welzel and Deutsch (2012) explain that political culture works as a 'mental climate' because people are more exposed to these types of political participation, and the process of social contagion spreads it across all groups so that not only people individually possessing self-expressive values perform these activities.

Indirect conditioning effects of context

Macro-context shapes individual political participation not only directly, but also indirectly by affecting the influence of its micro- and meso-level determinants. From a different perspective, this means that the influence of the macro-context on individual citizens is not even, but affects different groups of citizens differently. For instance, education can have a stronger effect on individual participation in some contexts than in others, which means that the inequality among participants

is higher here. The question then asked by this type of analysis is: what contextual determinants are responsible for this cross-contextual variation in the effect of individual education on political participation? The available studies do not always provide well-specified theoretical expectations about interaction effects. Rather, they test a number of interactions in a more exploratory manner without a clear specification of what mechanisms are responsible for the observed findings.

The contextual effect on the relationship between SES and participation has already been examined by Verba *et al.* (1978). In their study of seven countries, they show that inequality in political participation is affected by the strength of mobilisation and cleavage structure of a particular country. Using the dichotomist measure of closed and open political systems, which combines a number of various types of institutional decentralisation, Christensen (2011) concludes that open systems tend to decrease inequality in individual non-electoral participation, and activate groups of citizens that are more politically passive in closed systems. In contrast, Dalton *et al.* (2009) and Marien *et al.* (2010) obtained the opposite results. More open opportunities (as indicated by the World Bank's Rule of Law indicator) and a higher level of democracy (as measured by the Freedom House Index) amplify the effect of education, indicating that participation is less equal in more democratic and politically open countries. Similarly, higher socio-economic development strengthens the effect of individual level resources (Dalton *et al.* 2009; Welzel and Deutsch 2012), which means that the socio-economic inequality in non-electoral participation is higher in wealthier countries.

Several studies have examined how the macro-level context affects the role of individual attitudes for individual-level political participation. Dalton *et al.* (2009) show that a more open political context, that is a higher score on the Rule of Law indicator, strengthens the effect of Left–Right attitudes and post-materialism on individual protest. Marien *et al.* (2010) show that a higher level of democracy increases the role of political interest for individual participation. Despite well-developed and strong theoretical expectations that consociational institutions should diminish the ideological polarisation of participants because ideological conflicts are less salient in these systems, van der Meer *et al.* (2009) do not find a significant conditioning effect of institutions and several measures of Left–Right attitudes on individual participation. However, some of the findings of Christensen (2011) suggest that institutional decentralisation decreases the effect of some pro-participatory attitudes. Only Dalton *et al.* (2009) look at how economic development conditions individual attitudes. They show that both Left vs. Right ideological orientation and post-materialism have a greater influence on individual protest in more economically developed countries.

Analysing the interplay between macro-level political culture and individual attitudes, Welzel and Deutsch (2012) show that emancipative culture strengthens the positive effect of individual emancipative values. They explain this effect in terms of the mechanism of social confirmation. People possessing emancipative values have more contacts in cultures with a high prevalence of these values, which should reinforce the impulse of personal values to take part. Similarly, Vráblíková

(2012) shows that self-expressive/emancipative culture amplifies the positive effect of a number of pro-participatory attitudes, such as political interest, political efficacy, social trust and norms of good citizenship. Her results also show that a national culture with a low prevalence of self-expressive/emancipative values deactivates the positive effect of pro-participatory attitudes on individual non-electoral participation.

In examining how the effect of the meso-level predictors of non-electoral participation is conditioned by the macro-level context, available studies have looked at the determinants of a diversified effect of voluntary groups and associational membership and political discussion on individual participation. Dalton *et al*. (2009) show that group membership has a higher effect on individual protest in countries with more open opportunities (i.e. with a higher score on the Rule of Law indicator) and in more economically developed countries. However, when Welzel and Deutsch (2012) use the Freedom House Voice and Accountability index as the indicator of open opportunities, they find no conditioning effect of group membership on protest. Using the two groups of open and closed opportunities combining various types of institutional decentralisation, Christensen (2011) shows that voluntary groups in closed systems are more likely to function as schools of democracy because they produce more non-electoral participation than in open systems. In contrast Vráblíková shows the opposite effect, with higher openness of political systems as indicated by higher institutional power-separation (indicating more veto players in the political system) increasing the role of group membership and political discussion for individual non-electoral participation (Vráblíková 2012, 2014). She explains that mobilising actors tend to activate social links for the mobilisation of individuals more in these institutional settings because they have simultaneously higher access to the political system and higher chances to be successful with their demands. This interpretation also means that more open opportunities do not work as an alternative to mobilisation by groups and acquaintances; rather, they amplify the participatory gap between mobilised and non-mobilised citizens.

Discussion

The previous sections have reviewed the findings of the available studies of the macro-contextual determinants of individual political participation. What are the weaknesses, potential gaps and challenges that should be dealt with in future studies? We identify three areas in which we think valuable contributions are possible for this stream of research: (1) theories; (2) technical solutions; and (3) new topics and approaches.

The first comment is related to the role of theory in macro-contextual studies of individual participation. Although a decade ago the biggest problem in studying the macro context of individual political participation still seemed to be mainly technical because of the lack of statistical techniques that could effectively disentangle the multilevel character of this research puzzle, paradoxically the problem seems to be the exact opposite now. With the development of multilevel modelling and its

more-or-less easy application, researchers now have in their hands a very powerful statistical tool which allows them to model very complex tasks. However, this type of analysis is better suited for theory testing rather than for theory development. Without an effective and well-specified theory of how particular macro-contextual characteristics affect political participation and its determinants, one can easily end up with models that are too complex.

This problem crops up especially in the case of potential cross-level interactions. As we said before, most of the available studies tend to underestimate the role of theory when developing and testing particular cross-level hypotheses. Very few studies attempt to specify a theoretical mechanism of why and how a particular macro-contextual characteristic should condition the effect of a given individual-level predictor. More theoretical work could contribute by studying the direct effect of macro-context on political participation, particularly with regard to competing theories. The mechanism of how the contextual characteristics might influence individual level participation is not always precisely and clearly specified, which leaves room for very general theoretical interpretations, including at the end of the day almost every possible mechanism. Individual theories should be specified more precisely and in more detail to make it possible to disentangle potentially different mechanisms of how the macro context affects individual participation. For instance, the already identified difference between modernisation theory and resource mobilisation theory is worth further investigation.

One way to develop our theoretical thinking further would be through careful review of the results and discussions of existing studies. Increased communication across individual studies would also help to solve other issues related to the technical tasks of macro-contextual studies. The literature on non-electoral participation has not developed a standard portfolio of its predictors, which should be included in all analyses at least as controls. As it is, the available studies differ in which macro-contextual determinants they take into account in their models. Apart from the problem that some of these models are probably underspecified and do not provide reliable findings, another practical consequence is the difficultly of comparison across studies. Put bluntly, when a particular study reports that one macro-contextual characteristic is an important determinant of individual non-electoral participation, we cannot know whether this result is just a spurious correlation.

Another technical challenge for macro-contextual analyses is the relatively low number of countries that are usually used at the second level of the multilevel analysis. The problem is that when analysing a low number of cases, it is very likely that the findings result from a few highly influential cases rather than describing the general trend that holds for most countries (van der Meer *et al.* 2010). To avoid this, a number of tests for checking influential cases are available (van der Meer *et al.* 2010) and it should become a standard procedure in this type of analysis to perform these. More than half of the available studies do not check for influential cases.

As a third point, we want to outline several topics that have not been touched on by the macro-contextual literature. Most of the available studies have been limited to cross-sectional analyses of political participation among democracies.

This means that the role of time has not been explored for individual-level political participation. However, as shown mainly by the social movement literature, non-electoral participation varies heavily over time (Rucht 1998; McAdam 1999). Also, the context of non-democratic or semi-democratic regimes has not received much attention.

Another potential for new topics is that the notion of context need not be limited only to national countries, which are taken as the 'natural' units in the comparative social research and surveying industry. There are still unexplored puzzles and theories that better fit different levels of analyses. For instance, as already mentioned, not only the macro-context but also the meso-level context for individual non-electoral participation have yet to be studied more extensively. In this sense, a promising strategy may be found in complementing individual-level surveys with data on mobilising actors such as representatives of organisations and their members (Leighley 1996; Maloney and van Deth 2010) or the protestors and the mobilising actors organising demonstrations (Walgrave and Rucht 2010; van Stekelenburg *et al.* 2012).

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