

Non-electoral Political Participation, Mobilization and Political Opportunity Structure in Western Democracies

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Abstract

The contextual theory of political participation in non-electoral politics developed in this paper supposes that more open political opportunity structure of a respective state increases both, the individual non-electoral participation and mobilization into this participation, since the decentralized political institutions send a message that more access points to influence politics are available and expectations of success can be higher. Specifically, three dimensions of the state decentralization are expected to have this effect: territorial decentralization, horizontal decentralization implying separation of power among main state institutions, and the number of political parties. These expectations are tested against the data from the International Social Survey Programme 2004 in 22 Western democracies using multilevel modeling. Findings show support for this theory: the “core” state institutions – territorial and horizontal decentralization – indeed increase non-electoral participation and the effect of mobilization on this participation. On the contrary, the higher number of political parties does not work as open opportunity structure and contrary to the theory actually dampen both, non-electoral participation and the effect of mobilization on it.

Introduction

Why do people participate in politics? Researchers usually study three groups of factors: 1) individual resources, which have been prioritized in political participation research (Verba and Nie 1972, Brady et al. 1995), 2) civic orientations and attitudes that individuals hold towards themselves and the political system, and 3) mobilization that is studied for instance as canvassing by political elites or social interactions such as membership in civil society groups (Dalton 2008, Leighley 1990, 1996, Norris 2002, Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, Verba et al. 1995). However, this classical framework is unable to explain differences in participation across countries and the role of external circumstances should be taken into account. Even though it has been widely elaborated in the case of voting (Jackman and Miller 1995, Blais 2000), more developed theorizing and empirical evidence about processes standing behind the cross-national differences also in other political participation activities is still rather missing. The purpose of this article is to conceptualize further social movement theory of political opportunity structure (Kriesi et al. 1995) for the purposes of the cross-national explanation of the individual level participation in non-electoral politics and show empirical evidence how this theory performs.

This paper expects the open political opportunity structure of a respective state to increase non-electoral political participation of individuals on one hand and their mobilization into participation by social and political actors on the other hand by offering more access points to influence politics and increasing chances to be successful. Such incentives, availability of access and chances, are signaled by more decentralized state institutions where power is not concentrated and decision making is dispersed. Three dimension of the state decentralization are supposed to have this effect: two “general structure parameters” – territorial decentralization and separation of power among horizontal state institutions – and the number of political parties. Specifically, I theorize that people living in countries

characterized by open political opportunity structure, i.e. territorially and horizontally decentralized with higher number of political parties, such as Switzerland, will be more likely to participate in non-electoral politics and be more likely to be mobilized into it. On the contrary, if people live in a country displaying closed political opportunities, such as horizontally and territorially centralized Portugal with fewer political parties, they will be less likely to participate and less likely to be mobilized.

To test this theory the 2004 International Social Survey Programme dataset focused on citizenship is used as a source of individual level data. This dataset is supplemented with data on indicators operating at the level of individual countries. To test contextual theory relying on the opportunity structure factors together with individual level variables, multilevel models are run with the dataset including 28 462 respondents in 22 Western democratic countries.

Political opportunity structure

Although the political science literature has long ago acknowledged that political participation and its causal processes are dependent on the wider environment of national politics (Campbell et al. 1964; Martin and Van Deth 2007; Leighley 1996; Lijphart 1999; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Teorell, Torcal and Montero 2007; Verba, Nie and Kim 1987), the actual research on the sources of cross-national difference particularly in non-electoral political participation remains rather underdeveloped. Macro-level theories of voting that rely in their explanation mostly on the characteristics of elections (Powell 1986, Jackman 1987, Jackman and Miller 1995, Blais 2000, Norris 2002, Dalton and Anderson 2011) can be used just for addressing voting behavior and not for explanation of other political participation activities that are not directly related to elections.

Cross-national difference in non-electoral political participation has started to be addressed only lately. Focusing on protest across advanced industrial and developing

countries, Dalton, Sicle and Weldon (2009) showed the positive effect of the level of the political and economic development. Other studies test Lijphart's consociational theory suggesting higher participation in more consensual regimes and show mixed results (van der Meer, van Deth and Scheepers 2009; Weldon and Dalton 2010). This paper considers a different theoretical perspective taken from the social movement literature that sees political opportunity structure as a prominent account of popular activism (Tilly 1995, Meyer 2004, Kriesi 2005, Koopmans 1999, also Dalton, Sicle and Weldon 2009, for criticism see Gamson and Meyer 1996, Goodwin and Jasper 1999). Although originally developed for protest, research has shown that the political opportunity structure theory works also for conventional types of action (Kriesi et al. 1995, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

The concept of the political opportunity structure represents various characteristics of the external environment, mostly formal and informal design of the state, that shape incentives of both individual participants and mobilizing actors, such as social movements, for political activism by influencing their costs of political action (Tarrow 1998: 76-78). So called open political opportunity structure decreases the costs of action and the popular activism is higher, whereas in closed opportunities it is much more costly to be active in politics hence it is not done that much. There are two main mechanisms that make political action of individuals and political groups easier in open political opportunities: *availability* of options for action which means access and *chances/risks* that are attached to the realization of favorable outcome (Koopmans 1999: 96, Koopmans and Kriesi 1995: 41). According to this theory, individual people and social and political groups will get engaged in politics more when access channels to influence politics are available and when they can anticipate higher chances to be successful with their political demands. If channels to influence politics are not easily available and chances to be successful are low, the costs for action excessively increase and impede political activism.

If this original social movement theory holds also in the specific case of individual level non-electoral participation, we should see two main implications. First, people should participate more in non-electoral political activities, such as taking part in demonstrations or contacting politicians, in countries that are characterized by more open political opportunity structure. Technically speaking, the direct effect of the political opportunity structure on participation of individuals is expected. A person living in a country characterized by open political opportunity structure should be more active in non-electoral political participation than if she lived in a country displaying closed opportunities since she has more channels to influence politics available and can anticipate success of her political activity.

Second, in countries characterized by more open political opportunities people should be also more likely to be mobilized into non-electoral political participation than in countries displaying closed opportunities. Mobilization is usually studied as the effect of social interaction within social groups or recruitment by political elites on political participation. So far, researchers have mostly regarded this factor as stable or have not theorized about why its effect differs across contexts (but see Rosenstone and Hansen 2003). The theory developed in this paper suggests that mobilization into political action varies among countries according to the political opportunity structure of the respective state since mobilizing actors such as social movements, media and others responsible for recruitment of individuals mobilize them into participation according to what political opportunity structure they face. The mechanism why this happens is the same as in the case of direct effect of political opportunity structure on individual non-electoral participation. If social movements, NGOs or other actors have at disposal numerous ways how to influence politics and also can expect to be successful, which happens in open political opportunity structure, they will mobilize people more in non-electoral political participation. On the other hand, if social and political actors see little

prospects to be successful and have less access to influence politics, i.e. costs of action increase as it is in closed political opportunity settings, they mobilize individuals less.

To determine specific dimensions of political opportunity structure that are responsible for cross-national difference in non-electoral political participation and the effect of mobilization on it this study relies on the so called state-centered (Tarrow 1996: 45) perspective on political opportunities that is focused on the core state institutions and/or national political culture (Giugni 2002, Kitschelt 1986, Kriesi et al. 1995, Osa and Corduneanu-Huci 2003). Specifically, it draws on Kriesi and his colleagues' analysis of collective actions of new social movements in four western democracies (1995, also Kriesi et al. 1992). They show that the openness of opportunities understood as institutional decentralization of decision making increase the overall number of individuals participating in all types of social movements events (conventional and unconventional).¹ The following text will first specify the effect of the individual political opportunity structure factors on non-electoral political participation. Then it will explain in more detail how it should influence the effect of mobilization on non-electoral political participation.

Political Opportunity Structure and Non-Electoral Political Participation

The institutional design of the state is definitely the most important political opportunity structure affecting the political activism and mobilizing strategies of political actors (Tilly 1995, Meyer 2004, Kriesi 2004). The actual effect of the state institutions lies in the level of

¹ Kriesi and his colleagues' comparative study (1995, 1992) include also informal/cultural dimension of political opportunity structure that is called prevailing strategies and means informal strategies employed by political elites "when they are dealing with challengers" (Koopmans and Kriesi 1995: 33). Although there is some agreement that cultural political opportunity structure should also matter (e.g. Gamson and Mayer 1996, Koopmans and Statham 1999, Kriesi et al. 1995, Benford and Snow 2000), it is not clear how exactly to conceptualize and measure it. This paper will focus only on the institutional side of political opportunities that is still supposed to be the most important one.

centralization/dispersion of political authority determining the above mentioned mechanisms – availability of channels or access points for participation and expected success of the result. The decentralization of political systems is reflected mainly by their “general structural parameters” – separation of powers (horizontal decentralization) and territorial decentralization (Koopmans and Kriesi 1995: 28). Institutionally ensured dispersion of responsibilities and power among local, regional and national authorities on one hand and among a number of independent state institutions such as chambers of parliament, president and courts on the other hand, extends, from the perspective of challengers of the political system, the supply of access points through which their demands can be communicated. At the same time, the level of horizontal and territorial decentralization of the state has implications for decision making and effectiveness of the policy decisions implementation that affects the chances for challengers’ success. Since power-dispersed polities have lower capacity to act, political battles are never definitely won or lost here and challengers keep some possibility to change the policy they do not like (Koopmans and Kriesi 1995, Kriesi 2004). Hence the horizontally and territorially decentralized polities such as Denmark or Switzerland display political opportunity settings that are generally open for non-electoral participation in politics.

H1: The more territorially decentralized a state, the higher level of non-electoral political participation will be.

H2: The more horizontally decentralized a state, the higher the level of non-electoral political participation will be.

Mainly Kitschelt (1986) ascribes the same effect also to the number of political parties and generally to the character of electoral arena that is related to the multi party systems such as proportional electoral system (also Kriesi 2004, Koopmans and Kriesi 1995, Meyer 2007: 15-20). He argues that “the number of political parties, fractions, and groups that effectively

articulate different demands in electoral politics influences openness” (Kitschelt 1986: 63) and this way encourages the activity of social movements and increase political activism. From this perspective the political parties and their fractions indicate power dispersion within state institutions (in this case parliament) and are seen as independent access points providing citizens with more channels to influence politics and increasing chances for success (Koopmans and Kriesi 1995).

However, from a different perspective we could doubt that higher number of political parties has increasing effect on the availability of the independent access points and prospects for success. Although it is true that in these systems the power is not concentrated in hands of a few political actors, its dispersion into a number of them does not have to necessarily mean existence of institutionally and effectively autonomous power centers that could act independently one another. Higher number of parties actually results in more interdependence among them since they have to form coalition governments. Moreover, Weldon and Dalton (2010) have shown even a negative effect of the number of political parties on some of the non-electoral types of participation, which is actually reverse effect than expected by the social movement theory (in the case of aggregate protest see Özler 2008). Based on this, it is not sure that the number of political parties should function as a political opportunity structure. However, drawing on a number of studies of social movements, the political opportunity structure literature is fairly confident about this factor as an indicator of political opportunity structure (Kitschelt 1986, Koopmans and Kriesi 1995, also Kriesi 2004, Meyer 2007: 15-20), so this analysis will test following hypothesis.

H3: The higher number of political parties, the higher the level of non-electoral political participation will be.

Political Opportunity Structure and Mobilization

If the theory developed in this article is right, the individual indicators of political opportunity structure of the respective state should influence also the effect of mobilization on this participation. In other words, individuals should be more likely to be mobilized into non-electoral participation in countries characterized by more open opportunities, i.e. institutionally decentralized, because political actors that mobilize individuals into political participation, such as social movements and political parties, adopt their mobilizing pursuit according to what access points and prospects for success the country opportunities offer.

Mobilization is understood here in a wide sense as “the process by which candidates, parties, activists, and groups induce other people to participate” (Rosenstone and Hansen 2002: 25). It can have a form of both explicit recruitment for participation such as canvassing on the streets by political activists or through social networks such as political discussion with friends, and unintentional mobilization by training individuals’ civic skills and contributing to participatory attitudes, such as membership in social groups (Brady et al. 1999, Huckfeldt 2001, Knoke 1990, Leighley 1996, Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, Pollock 1982, Putnam 2000, Verba et al. 1995). Similarly to other studies, owing to the research design of individual surveys the mobilization is not examined at the level of mobilizing actors (but see Leighley 1996) but studied at the level of non/participants in the form of self-reported recruitment and social interaction. The level of mobilization in each country is indicated by the association between two indicators of mobilization – political discussion and membership in social groups – and non-electoral political participation. The expected role of political opportunity structure in influencing this relationship is as follows: If a particular indicator of political opportunity increases directly participation in non-electoral politics, we expect this individual indicator to contribute also to mobilization into participation – i.e. increase the association

between non-electoral participation and the two mobilization indicators (political discussion and membership in social groups).

H4: The more decentralized institutional design (territorial and horizontal decentralization, more political parties) the stronger effect of mobilization variables (discussion, membership) on non-electoral participation.

DATA AND METHODS

The analysis uses the data from the 2004 International social survey programme focused on citizenship (ISSP) in 22 western democracies including European old and new democracies, United states and Canada that include 28 462 individuals. The list of countries is displayed in the appendix. The ISSP 2004 dataset was selected mainly because it covers the widest range of political participation activities going beyond just protest and at the same time includes the most complete list of Western democracies.

Dependent variables

Generally, political participation can be defined according to Teorell et al. (2007: 336) and Rosenstone and Hansen (2003: 4) as every action of ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes: distribution of social goods and norms. This paper focuses on political participation except of voting. The reason why voting is not included is that it is inherently different from all of the other types of political activities (Verba et al. 1995: 23-24), e.g. one can perform voting only when elections take place, and compared to other non-electoral political activities, it is determined by different contextual factors which are related mainly to the character of elections (Blais 2000, Jackman and Miller 1995, Norris 2002, Weldon and Dalton 2010).

The analysis will use three dependent variables. The first one is the overall index of non-electoral political participation that counts together eight political activities² undertaken in the previous 12 months, i.e. all of the political participation items covered by ISSP 2004 except of voting, and is standardized to values from 0 to 1. The overall index is used because Koopmans and Kriesi (1995) theorized and showed the effect of the political opportunity structure on the overall number of participants in all of the social movements' events including conventional and unconventional strategies (for similar strategy see Brady et al. 1999).

Because the political participation literature sees political participation in contrast as multi-dimensional concept including specific modes of activities, the exploratory principal component analysis (PCA) was performed on the total sample of countries. It showed two components (loadings on the first and the second component from the Direct Oblimin solution are in brackets): 1) Voice based political action including rally (0,58; -0,18), contact politician (0,61; -0,14), contact media (0,71; 0,07), internet political forum (0,64; 0,14) and demonstration (0,34; -0,29).³ 2) Consumer politics including signing petition (0,02; -0,69),

² The activities included: Signing a petition, boycotting or deliberately buying certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons, taking part in a demonstration, attending a political meeting or rally, contacting a political or a civil servant to express one's views, donating money or raising funds for a social or political activity, contacting or appearing in the media to express one's views, joining an internet political forum or discussion group.

³ The factor includes activities usually falling under the two separate modes: contacting and protest (Teorell et al. 2007). It is called voice based political action according to political participation typology created by Teorell and his colleagues (2007: 341-342) who draw on Hirschman's distinction between voice and exit activities. The most important thing, that these two "voice" modes have in common, is that the demand communicated by the individual activities includes specific information going beyond sole "yes/no" choice (for more see Teorell et al. 2007).

boycotting products (-0,10; -0,79) and donation (0,07; -0,62).⁴ The presented analysis is not primarily interested in the differences among the over-all index and the other two indexes. The two other indexes reflecting specific types of participation are used mainly because it is more consistent with traditional approach of political participation literature to handle political participation as multi-dimensional concept. At the individual level of the total sample the overall participation index significantly correlates with the voice based political action index, $r=0,80$ and consumerism index, $r=0,87$. The two types of non-electoral participation are also significantly correlated, $r = 0,40$.

Independent variables

Territorial decentralization: The territorial decentralization should in this analysis reflect vertical separation of decision-making that signals the number of access points at the vertical levels of the state and chance for activists' success. A common way to measure territorial decentralization is to distinguished between federal and unitary states. However, as some authors have shown (e.g. Norris 2008), these two categories do not indicate the actual level of territorial decentralization of power centers, since within them dramatic differences exist in the power that the local political authorities actually have. Hence more sophisticated measures of territorial decentralization are needed. This study utilizes fiscal decentralization indicator which was developed by Schneider (2003, also Norris 2008). The fiscal decentralization is measured as factor scores of the share of subnational expenditures and revenues gained from confirmatory factor analysis of three decentralization dimensions (Schneider 2003: 36). The values are standardized to range from 0 to 1. This measure best meets the purpose of what is meant by territorial decentralization here, since it measures actual power the local and

⁴ Individual activities loading on this factor correspond exactly to the political participation type shown by Teorell and his colleagues (2007). Taken from the perspective of their typology, this type falls together with voting into exit based activities (Teorell et al. 2007).

regional authorities have compared to the national level. When local and regional authorities distribute more money, it means that more decision-making is in their competency. The correlation of this factor with the means of the three non-electoral participation indicators at the country level is significant, strong and linear (overall non-electoral participation $r= 0,72$, voice based political action = $0,58$, consumerism = $0,71$). The data come from Democracy Time-series Data database (see Norris 2008).

Horizontal decentralization: The indicator of horizontal decentralization/separation of powers should capture actual power-sharing at the horizontal level of states' main institutions. This concept is usually classified into three types of systems: parliamentarism, presidentialism and semipresidentialism. However, as in the case of the federalism-unitary state typology, this classification has been criticized for not being able to detect the actual separation of power among individual state bodies (e.g. Norris 2008, Elgie 1996, Tsebelis 1995). Moreover, there is not much variation among democratic countries using this simple three-category classification. This article uses more detailed measure of power separation that is able to capture the number of more or less independent power centers at the horizontal level of a state. It uses a Political Constraint indicator developed by Henisz (2000) that measures both formal and effective separation of powers within a political system. It is construed by the number of independent veto points in the system and measures also the effective power of these points that is dependent on the actual political affiliation of specific actors in these positions (Henisz 2000: 5). The correlation of horizontal decentralization and participation variables on the country level is slightly above the significance level, however fairly strong: for overall non-electoral participation $r=0,40$, for voice based political action index $r = 0,36$ and for consumerism, $r = 0,39$. The data come from the POLCON Database (see Henisz 2002).

Number of political parties: Compared to the horizontal separation/separation of powers that reflect the dispersion of power among horizontal state institutions, the number of political parties should reflect the separation within these powers, i.e. within horizontal state institutions. The number of political parties is considered to be a crucial variable measuring the separation within powers that influence social movements mobilization (Kitshelt 1986, Kriesi et al. 1995: 29). Specifically, the effective number of parliamentary parties is used (van Deth and Elf 2001, Weldon and Dalton 2010, in relation to social movements, see Özler 2008). The correlations of this factor and political participation indexes on the country level are not significant but fairly strong, for overall non-electoral participation index, $r=-0,24$, for voice based political action index $r = -0,32$ and for consumerism index, $r = -0,19$. The data come from Gallagher and Mitchell (2008).

Mobilization: To indicate mobilization the analysis uses two indicators available in the ISSP citizenship dataset: membership in social/political groups and political discussion. Generally, both indicators measure “indirect” mobilization that captures the strategic mobilization of political actors through interpersonal networks (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003). As already stated, mobilization is understood in a wide sense including both intentional, i.e. explicit recruitment based on mechanism of availability of individuals to be asked to participate, and unintentional mobilization, that highlights the “school of democracy” mechanism when people are socialized to have pro-participatory values and/or learn specific skills and get resources this way (Pollock 1982, Leighley 1996, Brady et al. 1995, Putnam 2000, Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, Teorell 2003).

Membership in social/political groups is often used indicator of mobilization (Leighley 1996, Norris 2002, Teorell 2003). Members of social/political groups are more available for political elites to be mobilized thanks to social networks they are engaged in within the specific group. Also when being a member of any of the groups people construe specific

values and can learn particular skills that afterwards make their political participation easier (Leighley 1996, Verba et al. 1995). The specific indicator used here is the additive index ranging from 0 to 4 that counts a four values scale measuring activity in group (active member, inactive member, former member and not member) for five types of groups (trade unions, church groups, sports and cultural groups, political party or group, and others). PCA performed on the total sample showed that the individual variables create one component (trade unions = 0,59, church groups = 0,54, sports and cultural groups = 0,69, political party or group = 0,51, other groups = 0,71).

The second indicator of mobilization used is political discussion index. Research has shown that social interaction in political discussion with other people works as a mean of mobilization into political participation (Huckfeldt 2001, Knoke 1990, Leighley 1990, McClurg 2003) provided the discussion is held with people of similar or same political views (Mutz 2002a).⁵ Specifically, the additive index counting two variables – the frequency of political discussion with others and attempting to convince others of one’s political opinion – was calculated and standardized to values from 0 to 4. PCA performed on the total sample showed that the individual variables create one component (discussion with others = 0,89, convincing others of one’s political opinion = 0,89). The two indexes of mobilization are significantly correlated ($r= 0,30$).

Methods

The theoretical model of political participation, which includes several levels of explanation, requires a multi-level design. At the same time there is also empirical reason for this strategy,

⁵ The assumption that political discussion will be consensual and hence have positive effect on participation can be generally assumed since Mutz (2002b: 115) has shown that at maximum only one fifth of Americans get engaged in cross-cutting political discussion. The vast majority of people experience just this facilitative type of agreeing political discussion.

since some of the political participation variance is caused by the national level factors. The Intra-class Correlation Coefficient displaying a proportion of variance in the over-all political participation index accounting for country membership (Kreft and Leeuw 2006), is 12 percent for the overall non-electoral participation index, 4 percent for the voice based political action index and 16 percent for the consumerism index. Simply said, it clearly shows that the national level explanation of political participation cannot be overlooked since it is responsible for some of the variation in the individual level of non-electoral participation. Hence multilevel modeling will be used in this paper. The multilevel approach expects that there are hierarchical effects influencing first level phenomenon (see Hox 2002, Kreft and Leeuw 2006). Multilevel modeling using software HLM6 is employed.

Specifically in this study, the outcome, mobilization indicators and traditional factors influencing political participation as controls are analyzed at the individual level of respondents (first level). At the same time the individuals are nested in countries that are characterized by above specified political opportunity structure factors, which are expected to influence political participation of individuals, and country controls (second level). The first group of hypotheses predicting the effect of the political opportunity structure on individual non-electoral participation is analyzed as a direct second level variables effect on the three individual level indexes of participation. The second group of hypotheses expects the political opportunity indicators, which will show the direct effect on participation, to have impact on the effect of mobilization indicators on participation indicators. Technically speaking, it is studied as a cross-level interaction effect of political opportunity indicators together with mobilizing indicators on the three indexes of participation.

RESULTS: A MULTILEVEL EXPLANATION OF NON-ELECTORAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND MOBILIZATION

Political opportunity structure of the respective state is hypothesized to influence non-electoral political participation in two ways. First, more open political opportunity state structure is expected to increase participation of individuals in non-electoral politics. Second, the open political opportunity should also intensify mobilization into participation, i.e. increase the effect of mobilization variables on non-electoral political participation. The analysis will be divided into two parts, each analyzing one way of the influence.

Direct effect of political opportunity structure on non-electoral participation

Table 1 displays the results of the multi-level linear regression model testing direct effect of the above specified indicators of political opportunity structure together with contextual and individual level controls on the three indexes of non-electoral political participation.⁶ As shown at the first two rows of the Table 1, the territorial and horizontal decentralization significantly increase all of the three indexes of participation. Only one coefficient – the effect of horizontal decentralization on the voice based political action index – is not significant, however it has the expected direction. Generally these results support our political opportunity structure theory hypothesizing that countries with more decentralized “core” institutional settings, which formally offer various channels to influence politics and signal higher chance for successful participation, facilitate citizens’ non-electoral participation. Taking both indicators together, an average man (in the sense of age, education, and political interest)

⁶ The over-dispersed Poisson hierarchical model was also fitted and gave similar results. Also using factor scores to indicate the two modes of non-voting participation (direct political action and consumerism) was checked and performed similarly. The presentation of the linear hierarchical model is preferred here because the interpretation of the cross-level interaction effects is much less complicated.

living in a country, where the two indicators of political opportunity structure display the most open value, scores 0,56 on the overall participation index. On the contrary, if the same person faces the most closed opportunities, i.e. territorially centralized state with power concentrated in hands of a few institutions at the horizontal level, he scores 0,41 on this index. In other words, the design of the core state institutions makes a difference of 0,16 points at the overall participation index that ranges from 0 to 1.

The third row of the Table 1 shows the effect of the number of political parties. It has significant negative effect on the two of participation indexes – the overall participation and voice based political action. In the case of consumerism it is also negative but lacks statistical significance. Although this factor is not as strong as the “core” state institutions, all else on average value, living in a country with the highest number of political parties compared to that one with the lowest number makes a decreases of 0,07 points at the overall participation scale. These results disapprove the well established expectations of the social movement literature that predicts positive relation suggesting higher political activism in countries with higher number of political parties (Kitshelt 1986, Koopmans and Kriesi 1995, Kriesi 2004). Controlling for other dimensions of political opportunity structure, the power dispersion in electoral politics does not work as an open opportunity facilitating individual participation by offering both a higher number of access points into the political process and prospects of being successful.

What more, the number of political parties has actually a dampening effect on the individual non-electoral participation as already shown by Weldon and Dalton (2010, in the case of protest Özler 2008). The reasons why this happens is not clear cut. We can speculate that the reason in play is the general character of better representation in multiparty systems (Lijphart 1999, see Özler 2008 for similar argument). In multiparty system, people can feel that their interests are already advocated in parliamentary politics by many parties so that they

do not have to proceed to action. On the contrary, systems with only two main political parties represent limited range of positions towards individual policies and issues in parliamentary arena and hence individuals have a higher chance their particular demand will not be represented.

The above presented findings hold even if control variables at both, country and individual, level are included into the analyses. At the country level the displayed analyses control for the economic development (measured as a country GPD per capita (PPP) in 2004), which has positive effect on non-electoral participation. Since the economic development is collinear ($r > 0,8$) with other country level control – democratic history (measured either as years of democracy or dummy for communist history), it was not included in the same model. However, when the analyses were performed with either of the two democratic history indicators, the results were the same as they are with the economic development control displayed here.

– Table 1 –

Political opportunity structure and mobilization

The above presented results tell us in what political opportunity settings the individuals are more active in non electoral politics. In addition to it, we hypothesized that open opportunities should also increase the mobilization activity of political actors, hence individuals should be more likely to be mobilized into participation in countries characterized by more open opportunities. Drawing on findings presented above, this result should be found specifically in the case of territorial and horizontal decentralization since they, consistently with our theory, already displayed positive direct effect on non-electoral participation.

To examine the role that political opportunities play for mobilization into non-electoral participation, the analysis first included the mobilization indicators – political

discussion and membership in social/political groups – and explored whether their effect on the three indexes of participation varies across countries. These tests of random slopes of both of the mobilization indicators were significant for all of the three participation indexes, which means that the effect of mobilization on participation in non-electoral politics is stronger in some countries than in others. The second step is to test whether the political opportunity structure indicators are responsible for this variation in mobilization of across countries.

Table 2 brings the results on the cross-level interaction effects of mobilization and political opportunity structure indicators on the three indexes of non-electoral participation. For all of the three dependent variables we can see the same pattern: the interaction effects of the two mobilization indicators and the two core dimensions of political opportunity structure – territorial and horizontal decentralization – have significant and positive coefficients.⁷ Figure 1 in appendix shows an example of the cross-level interaction effect graphically. We can see that, in this particular case, political discussion contributes to political participation more in a group of horizontally decentralized countries than in countries with closed political opportunities in this dimension. These findings are consistent with our theory that expected the effect of mobilization on non-electoral participation to be stronger in more open political opportunities. In other words, individuals are more likely to be mobilized into non-electoral participation when they live in a country characterized by more open “core” opportunities (i.e. territorially and horizontally decentralized) than it would be in the country more centralized in these two dimensions. The reason why this happens is, as hypothesized in the theory part of the paper, that social/political actors have more access points to politics available and can anticipate to be successful in more open opportunities and hence mobilize individuals into participation more under these conditions.

⁷ Only the interaction effect of membership and horizontal decentralization on voice based political action is not statistically significant, however has expected positive direction.

As well as in the case the direct effects displayed at the Table 1, the interaction effects including number of political parties are negative in the Table 2, which is in contrast to the expectations of social movement scholars. Figure 2 in appendix shows an example of the cross-level interaction effect of the number of political parties and membership in social/political groups on the overall non-electoral participation graphically. We can see that being a member of social/political group leads to higher participation in non-electoral politics in countries with less political parties instead of multiple party system. These results go against the social movement theory that expects the mobilizing actors to use social networks, such as membership in political/social groups or political discussion, for recruiting individuals into participation more in countries characterized by higher number of political parties. However, this finding is in line with results we have already shown in the case of the direct effect of the number of political parties. The number of political parties does not work as the political opportunity structure neither for individual non-electoral participation, nor for mobilization into this participation. We can again speculate that wider representation assured by political parties in multi party systems, which means that numerous specific issues and demands are already channeled to political system by electoral politics, limits the operation space for other mobilizing actors and non-electoral politics in general.

–Table 2 –

DISCUSSION

Scholars have for a long time considered social and political circumstances as important for political participation, complaining that “the reigning theories of participation... do not have much to say about politics” (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003: 3). However, only lately research has started to study sources of the cross-national differences in political participation beyond

voting. This article develops original social movement theory of political opportunity structure for purposes of explaining the individual level political participation in non-electoral politics. It argues that more open political opportunity structure of a respective state increases both, the individual non-electoral participation and mobilization into this participation, since the decentralized political institutions send a message that more access points to influence politics are available and expectations of success can be higher.

Testing this theory, I found that higher decentralization of “general structural parameters” of the state institutions – territorial decentralization and dispersion of powers among horizontal state institutions – indeed work as expected by the theory. Individuals participate more in non-electoral politics and are also more likely to be mobilize into it in more territorially and horizontally decentralized countries. Reversely to expectations of social movement theory, the third dimension of the state political opportunity structure, higher number of political parties, decreases non-electoral participation as well as the effect of mobilization on it. Obviously, the number of political parties does not function for participation in non-electoral politics as political opportunity structure.

The results are rather robust. To check the potential limitations of the low number of countries at the second level of analysis and specificity of a particular cross-national survey, the analysis was replicated with a bigger dataset combining the ISSP 2004 data utilized in this paper with the European Social Survey data from 2002 including also United States from 2005. The three-level hierarchical linear model brought the same results for the direct effect of political opportunity structure determinants as presented here. It was not possible to check for the cross-level interaction effect of mobilization since the individual surveys do not have the same measures of mobilization.

The presented findings can have important implications not only for political participation and the social movement research but also for the study of political institutions

and democratic politics in general. First, the findings show that, at least in relation to non-electoral participation and mobilization, not every type of the state decentralization is the same. However, the literature still tends to handle all types of decentralization as one kind of institutional design, calling it consociational or power-sharing institutions (Lijphart 1999, Norris 2008, from the perspective of the political opportunity structure literature also Kriesi et al. 1995).⁸ In contrast, results of this study show that individual types of decentralization should not be collapsed in one category since they are rather as apples and oranges.

The reason is that, at least from the perspective of challengers of political system, who react to political opportunities, they are based on different logics. What seems to be decisive for non-electoral participation and mobilization is not power concentration or dispersion per se, but rather a specific type of decentralization meaning a number of autonomous power centers in which the decision making can happen independently. Thanks it, these isles of power can even possibly concur each other and be in a conflict. Obviously, in this type of decentralization the mechanism at play is the checks and balances principle that increases incentives of individuals and political groups to get involved in politics. On the contrary, the power dispersion in the sense of multiple political parties is based on different logic and hence produces different effect. Power-sharing among numerous political parties brings decrease in their independence to function as autonomous centers of decision making since they have to constitute coalitions and find consensus in their policy making (Lijphart 1999). Contrary to the possibly conflicting checks and balances logic that offers political opportunities for participation, this type of decentralization implies consensual policy making at the level of

⁸ Even though Lijphart (1999) has shown two-dimensional character of democratic institutions, his actual work tend to put aside this distinction.

political parties, that does not signal for political challengers higher number of independent access points and higher prospects for success.⁹

Second, although this paper was focused primarily on testing political opportunity structure theory, the analysis has obviously, raised a new question: Why does decentralized character of party politics, which was supposed to increase non-electoral participation and mobilization, actually dampen it? Moreover, when it, at the same time, contributes to many other qualities of democracy? As already theorized, the reason can be paradoxically another democratic virtue – representation. Since multiparty systems increase representation, individuals could feel represented enough without need to get involved in non-electoral political action supposing that someone else with other means, i.e. political parties in parliamentary politics, already advocates their demands. Actually, Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer (2010) show that proportional electoral system, closely related to higher number of parties, increases individual interest in politics, which could support this speculation. Also since the high number of political parties usurp wide range of issues into their parliamentary arena, political and social agents other than political parties find much less space in which they can operate and mobilize individuals because numerous political parties have already taken their job. From the perspective of democratic theory, these results could support notion that individual democratic virtues can be partly exclusive. The number of political parties obviously contributes to one – representation, but decreases the other one – non-electoral participation and mobilization.

To sum up, the literature on political participation has tended to blame mainly individual citizens for their lack of non-electoral political participation or pointed at the weakness of civil society and low mobilization of political actors. This research shows that

⁹ It is actually what Lijhart calls joint-responsibility and divided-responsibility (Lijphart 1996: 5), however does not develop further in his work very much.

not everything is under the control of individuals or social/political groups and that external environment, in which they are to participate, shapes their possibilities for action. Specifically, in order to participate, individuals and social/political groups need open political opportunities. Hence, Brady and his colleagues' answers to a question "Why don't people participate? – Because they can't, don't want, and nobody asked.", labeling classical political participation theory summarized in the introduction, should be supplemented also with "don't have opportunities".

Tables and Figures

Table 1: Multilevel model of non-electoral political participation: direct effect of political opportunity structure

	Overall non-electoral participation	Voice based political action	Consumerism
Political Opportunity Structure			
Territorial decentralization	,090** (.028)	,027 (.024)	,195** (.073)
Horizontal decentralization	,291*** (.078)	,168** (.063)	,497** (.205)
Number of political parties	-,013*** (.004)	-,011*** (.004)	-,018 (.011)
Control Variables			
GDP (PPP)	,001** (.001)	,001 (.001)	,001** (.001)
Political interest	,049*** (.001)	,040*** (.001)	,065*** (.002)
Woman	,012*** (.002)	-,008*** (.002)	,046*** (.003)
Age	-,001*** (.001)	-,001*** (.001)	-,001*** (.001)
Years of schooling	,007*** (.001)	,004*** (.001)	,013*** (.001)
Constant	,104*** (.005)	,056*** (.004)	,183*** (.012)
Variance Level			
σ^2_e individual	,02090	,01737	,06575
σ^2_{u0} country	,00044***	,00028***	,00305***
Explained variation 1 st level	15%	11%	9%
Explained variation 2 nd level	86 %	64 %	77%
N	22/25015	22/24967	22/24984

Restricted maximum likelihood estimates, standard errors in parentheses.

*** significant at $p < 0,01$, ** significant at $p < 0,05$, * significant at $p < 0,1$

The continuous factors were introduced into the analysis as grand-centered.

Table 2: Multilevel model of non-electoral political participation: cross-level effect of political opportunity structure and mobilization

	Overall non-electoral participation	Voice based political action	Consumerism
Cross level interaction effects of political opportunities and mobilization			
Political discussion*Territorial decentralization	,046*** (.013)	,031*** (.010)	,069*** (.020)
Membership*Territorial decentralization	,055** (.020)	,040* (.023)	,082*** (.024)
Political discussion*Horizontal decentralization	,153*** (.039)	,120*** (.031)	,208*** (.061)
Membership*Horizontal decentralization	,124* (.063)	,110 (.066)	,148* (.078)
Political discussion*Number of parties	-,006** (.002)	-,005*** (.002)	-,007** (.003)
Membership*Number of parties	-,008** (.004)	-,003 (.004)	-,017*** (.005)
Political Opportunity Structure			
Territorial Decentralization	,057 (.033)	,021 (.031)	,183** (.072)
Horizontal decentralization	,294*** (.0,98)	,212** (.091)	,582** (.208)
Number of political parties	-,020*** (.005)	-,015** (.005)	-,030** (.012)
Mobilization			
Membership in social groups	,069*** (.004)	,050*** (.004)	,099*** (.005)
Political discussion	,029*** (.003)	,021*** (.002)	,044*** (.004)
Control Variables			
GDP (PPP)	-,001 (.001)	-,001** (.001)	,001 (.001)
Variance Level			
σ^2_e individual	,01856	,01590	,06040
σ^2_{u0} country	,00075***	,00067***	,00334***
σ^2_u membership	,00028***	,00033***	,00031***
σ^2_u political discussion	,00011***	,00007***	,00025***
Explained variation random slope membership	77%	50%	83%
Expl. var. random slope political discussion	77%	76%	75%
N	22/25015	22/24967	22/24984

Restricted maximum likelihood estimates, standard errors in parentheses

*** significant at $p < 0,01$, ** significant at $p < 0,05$, * significant at $p < 0,1$

The continuous factors were introduced into the analysis as grand-centered. The individual level controls are the same as at the Table 1 but are not displayed here.

Figure 1: Varied effect of political discussion on overall non-electoral political Participation index in 2 groups of countries by horizontal decentralization

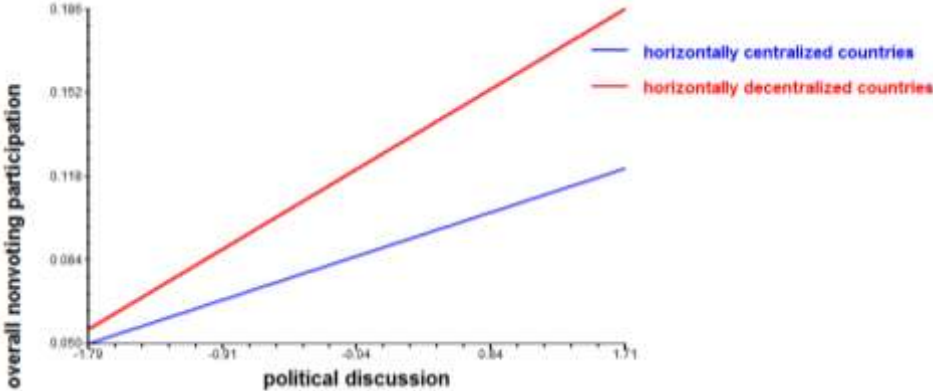
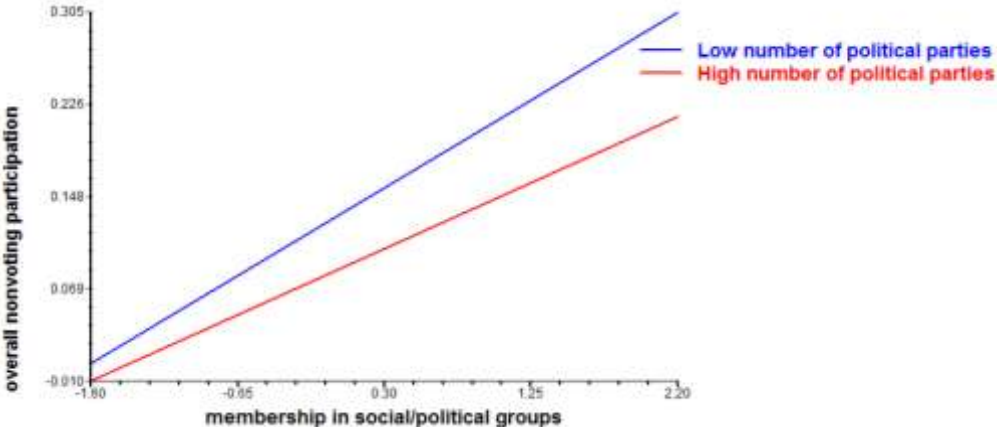


Figure 2: Varied effect of membership in social/political groups on overall non-electoral political participation in 2 groups of countries by number of political parties



APPENDIX

	Over-all non-electoral participation index	Voice based political action index	Consumerism index	Territorial Decentralization (fiscal)	Horizontal Decentralization (Polity constraints)	Number of political parties (effective number)
Austria	0,18	0,60	0,53	0,60	0,53	2,88
Bulgaria	0,03	0,25	0,44	0,25	0,44	7,03
Canada	0,19	0,96	0,44	0,96	0,44	3,03
Czech Republic	0,04	0,43	0,39	0,43	0,39	3,67
Denmark	0,15	0,71	0,52	0,71	0,52	4,48
Finland	0,11	0,61	0,54	0,61	0,54	4,93
France	0,17	0,29	0,54	0,29	0,54	2,26
Germany	0,15	0,66	0,43	0,66	0,43	3,38
Hungary	0,03	0,34	0,36	0,34	0,36	2,21
Ireland	0,11	0,40	0,47	0,40	0,47	3,38
Latvia	0,05	0,43	0,54	0,43	0,54	5,02
Netherlands	0,15	0,45	0,65	0,45	0,65	4,74
Norway	0,16	0,48	0,55	0,48	0,55	5,35
Poland	0,03	0,38	0,46	0,38	0,46	3,60
Portugal	0,06	0,23	0,41	0,23	0,41	2,50
Slovakia	0,07	0,16	0,56	0,16	0,56	6,12
Slovenia	0,06	0,22	0,54	0,22	0,54	4,90
Spain	0,12	0,50	0,51	0,50	0,51	2,53
Sweden	0,16	0,58	0,51	0,58	0,51	4,23
Switzerland	0,19	0,80	0,61	0,80	0,61	5,01
United Kingdom	0,11	0,37	0,36	0,37	0,36	2,17
United States	0,20	0,80	0,41	0,80	0,41	2,00

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