

Chapter 10

THE EFFECTS OF NON-ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION ON VOTING IN EUROPE

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1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to document and assess available evidence on the effects of public, social and political but non-electoral participation – specifically, jury service, religious life, trade union membership and sporting associational life – on motivating and assisting electoral participation. The chapter focuses on identifying ways of engaging citizens with elections that can effectively increase electoral participation for voters of various class or education backgrounds.

The REDEM project did not pursue empirical research on the topic of this chapter (or more generally). Thus, the chapter aims to summarize and synthesize existing empirical research and highlight its normative significance. At the same time, it identifies gaps in empirical research in light of the normative significance of social mechanisms enhancing electoral participation. Identifying these gaps contributes to a research agenda in empirical political science that helps test the feasibility of normative democratic theories which hold that widespread (and relatively equally distributed) electoral participation is crucial to realizing the value(s) of democracy. The findings presented in this chapter may also serve to inspire institutional design – beyond the design of electoral institutions – in European democracies to take into consideration whether and how a given institution of social, political participation may also help enhance electoral participation.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. Section 2 lays out the methodological approach to the review this chapter undertakes. Section 3 reconstructs the so-called “participation hypothesis,” an empirical hypothesis concerning the effects of participation in various domains of life on political participation, and explains the normative significance of this hypothesis in democratic theory. Sections 4-7 then review and evaluate the empirical literature which attempts to test different versions of the participation hypothesis, examining the effects of active social participation in various domains of social life – jury service, church life, trade unions and sports – on political participation. Section 8 concludes.

2. APPROACH

This chapter provides a survey of the literature relevant to the participation hypothesis in political theory and empirical political science. The thematic focus of the chapter is specifically on how *non-electoral institutions and practices* can shape *electoral participation*. While extensive research has been done on how electoral institutions themselves can shape electoral participation – see, e.g., the vast literature on liquid democracy (Blum and Zuber, 2016) – as well as on how participation does (not) enhance public engagement more broadly (e.g., Michels, 2019), this chapter does not aim to survey research on these neighbouring themes. Instead, it focuses on the effects of participation in social, political and civil institutions further removed from the institutions of electoral politics on electoral participation.

The relevant empirical literature is somewhat scarce and scattered. As the REDEM project did not pursue empirical research, the chapter can only identify the gaps in empirical research that would be worth addressing in future research, from the perspective of normative political theory. This chapter does not undertake to fill these gaps, which requires new empirical research.

The empirical research surveyed in this chapter comes from different contexts. On the one hand, the effects of social participation in some domains of life on political participation is relatively well-documented, at least within certain geographical regions. For instance, the effects of jury service or church life on political participation are fairly well explored, whereas the effects of participation in other domains, such as other aspects of cultural life or entertainment activities, as well as their causal pathways, remain largely unexplored. This chapter focuses on participation in those domains of social life in which the effects of participation on political participation are already well-researched. This evidence-driven focus is necessarily selective.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that a lot of the relevant research available for review – for example, most of the studies on jury participation – has been conducted in North America. Generally, research on the topic of this chapter has been less extensively conducted in Europe. Our chapter highlights the size and significance of this gap in research on European politics. While empirical findings related to a North American context may be a good starting point for normative theory and institutional design in Europe, it is far from clear that findings about the effects of an institutional arrangement can be transferred from the North American context to the European context. Thus, the findings of this chapter must be read with some caution and confirmed where necessary to hold in a European context too.

The findings of this chapter complement the findings of the REDEM project in other chapters of this volume. (Albertsen and Lever, 2023) offers a comparative overview of opportunities for citizen participation in the organisation and monitoring of elections in Europe. Both (Albertsen and Lever, 2023) as well as the present chapter focus on participatory activities beyond or around the act of voting, with a general interest in ways of engaging citizens the political process. (Mráz and Lever, 2023b) presents a voter-centred perspective on electoral democracy, including ethical considerations for and against voting reconstructed from that perspective. While the present chapter assumes – as much of the empirical political science literature implicitly does – that more electoral participation is *pro tanto* better than less, (Mráz and Lever, 2023b) shows that there may be perfectly good and sometimes highly

partisan reasons for voters to abstain, as well as for institutional regimes that allow voters to abstain (i.e., by not making voting compulsory). One of the limitations of the empirical research reviewed in this chapter is precisely that it tacitly treats participation as an unconditional and non-partisan, consensual good. Thus, it provides little information on the partisan effects of various social determinants of electoral participation, and fails to distinguish between effects on valuable vs. non-valuable forms of abstention, from the voter's perspective.¹ Hence, read together, the present chapter and (Mráz and Lever, 2023b) highlight important avenues of future, more nuanced empirical research on the participation effects of social institutions and practices.

3. THE PARTICIPATION HYPOTHESIS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

European democracies have faced declining electoral participation rates over the last decades (see, e.g., Flickinger and Studlar, 1992; Siaroff, 2009; Kern et al., 2015).² While there may be good moral and other practical reasons for electoral abstention, declining electoral turnout rates are typically seen as troubling rather than neutral social facts. Republican theories of democracy regard low participation rates as an inherent threat to the preservation of freedom in society (Pettit, 2012). Yet other theories of democracy and representation, based on different normative grounds, can also imply that low participation rates distort democratic representation (Lijphart, 1997), reduce accountability (cf. Pettit, 2008), perpetuate inequalities or have otherwise objectionable outcomes (Lijphart, 1997), or, regardless of outcomes, fail to realize important democratic values (Birch, 2009). It is this crisis of democratic participation which has raised the interest of policymakers and scholars in the causes and potential remedies of low electoral participation.

The causes of low electoral participation rates are many; and presumably, so are their remedies. However, one particular remedy (or rather, set of remedies) that has gained salience over the past decades is the focus of the present chapter. This solution proposes to address the ills of low electoral participation with *other forms of public, social or political participation*, relying on a significant empirical assumption. This assumption, referred to as the “participation hypothesis” – to use the phrase of Finkel (1985) and Freie (1997) – is the dual hypothesis that (i) there is a correlation between different forms of public, social or political participation, and that (ii) increasing various forms of non-electoral public, social or political participation, at least in certain circumstances, results in increased electoral participation as well.³ Notably, a mere correlation between these forms of participation which is reducible to third (common) causes would not support the hypothesis. This is because scholars interested in the participation hypothesis typically wish to know how participation could be increased – and for that purpose, they need to learn about causal relations, and see other forms of participation as potential means to achieving the aim of increasing electoral participation.

¹ On valuable forms of non-participation, see also MacKenzie and Moore, 2020.

² Most up-to-date data are available in the International IDEA Institute's Voter Turnout Database, at <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout>.

³ The participation hypothesis may also be formulated in more general versions, e.g., by focusing on the effects on broadly political (rather than specifically electoral) participation. The focus of this chapter (see Section 2 above) motivates the narrower formulation.

Interest in the participation hypothesis is not entirely new. Political theorists such as Carole Pateman already referred to the *participation effect* decades ago (Pateman 2000 [1970]) – back then, entertaining it as a hypothesis without any empirical backing. Indeed, Pateman (1989) and Jane Mansbridge (1999) expressed scepticism as to the possibility of empirically testing the hypothesis. Nonetheless, the past two decades have seen an increase in empirical studies which have been designed to test the participation hypothesis and which have, in some cases and contexts, partly succeeded in doing so.

Testing the participation hypothesis can offer important guidance about the different avenues through which electoral participation may be increased, and thus also about who is in a good position to help increase electoral participation. In other words, testing the hypothesis can also shed light on who can bear the responsibility for pursuing these avenues of mobilization. Increasing some of the potentially relevant forms of participation, such as jury participation in discharging the judicial functions of the state, can be a matter of political choice. Increasing some other relevant forms of participation, such as trade union membership and activism, may be highly dependent on (but not entirely determined by) public policy (cf. O’Neill and White, 2018 focusing on the “associational structure” of democracies – specifically, the role of trade unions). And increasing yet other forms of participation, for example, in church life or campaign participation (Freie, 1997), is mostly a matter of bottom-up, social organization or top-down but non-political social organization.⁴ It matters hugely which of these forms of non-electoral participation, if any, the participation hypothesis applies to.

The more forms of non-electoral participation that facilitate electoral participation, the wider is the set of remedies for low electoral participation rates. And the more non-politically organized and less politics-dependent forms of participation the thesis applies to, the more tools civil society has to remedy low electoral participation rates – without having to construct a developed political will to pursue this aim. This is significant as lower electoral participation rates are often favourable to the interests of current political elites. When this is the case, it is not reasonable to expect the presence or even emergence of political will, at least in the short run, to take steps to increase electoral participation. Instead, in order to realize the values of higher electoral participation, it will be necessary to privilege avenues of electoral mobilization that can be pursued by other, motivated actors.

More generally, the participation hypothesis, if true, provides support for the view that a strong *civil society* is either necessary for democracy or at least strongly supportive of a democratic polity (see, e.g., Habermas, 1996, 2006; Lafont, 2019; Putnam, 2001; Verba et al., 1995). This view may also be intimately linked to a pluralistic model of democracy, which sees the essence of democracy in the interactions between various associational groups such as trade unions, industrial interests, churches, political parties, and so forth (see, e.g., Dahl, 1978). However, other non-elitist models of democracy may also recognize the significance of a strong civil society for democracy.⁵

⁴ For an overview of the diversity of phenomena covered by the respective labels “political participation” and “civic engagement”, see Ekman and Amnå, 2012.

⁵ See (Mráz and Lever 2023a) on models of democracy and their significance from a voter-centred perspective.

4. JURIES AND THE PARTICIPATION HYPOTHESIS

Jury trials have been a paradigmatic form of judicial decision-making in the Anglo-American world and also beyond the Anglo-American world, such as in France (Lever et al., 2021). Some of the normative philosophical literature on juries celebrates jury trials as potentially epistemically superior (less biased, more accurate) forms of judicial decision-making compared to judge-made decisions, or as judicial procedures that are more justifiable to defendants or the public (see, e.g., Brooks, 2004). However, from as early as the 19th century, juries have also been praised – notably, by Alexis de Tocqueville (2000 [1835]) and J. S. Mill (1861) – as valuable forms of citizen participation. As such, juries may be intrinsically valuable: they constitute special opportunities for jurors to be partners in the exercise of public power (Amar, 1995; Lever, 2016; Lever, 2022; Chakravarti, 2019). While this line of research is closer to the concerns of the participation hypothesis, it mostly focuses on the non-instrumental democratic values of jury participation. This chapter, in contrast, focuses on the instrumental value of jury participation – for the jurors and for democracy more generally. This instrumental value consists in increasing the future electoral participation of jurors in some circumstances.⁶

The participation hypothesis has been empirically tested and confirmed, although primarily in the US context, with regard to the link between jury participation and electoral participation.⁷ Earlier small-sample quantitative research generated reasonable hope that the hypothesis could withstand empirical scrutiny (Gastil et al., 2002). Later qualitative research showed through interviews that jurors sometimes see a connection between the deliberative nature of jury duty and the act of voting, although voting itself is not deliberative and the secret ballot means that it takes place in ways that cannot be seen by, or discursively challenged, by others. The connection between jury service and voting comes from the fact that jurors sometimes (but not invariably) see both as ways of fulfilling civic, not just personal, responsibilities to others (Gastil et al., 2008: 354–355).⁸

Later quantitative research using regression analysis confirmed and added further nuance to the findings of Gastil et al. (2002) on a national – US-wide – sample (Gastil et al., 2008: 359–360). The results pointed to “a pervasive and enduring effect of criminal jury deliberation on electoral engagement” (ibid.: 359), particularly for those who were not regular or frequent voters before entering jury service. Those who were already regular or frequent voters by that time were not shown to be affected by jury service in their electoral engagement. Somewhat unexpectedly, though, jurors were affected even if their deliberations failed to lead to a verdict. The behavioural effect was significant for jurors in hung (criminal) juries as well – which suggests that it may have been the experience of

⁶ There may also be further instrumental values associated with jury participation: for instance, some argue that increased civic engaged with the criminal justice system can result in the progressive reform of punishment practices (see Dzur, 2012). However, such instrumental benefits are not of the kind that the participation hypothesis assumes jury service to generate.

⁷ The application of the hypothesis to the judicial context has attracted attention in Japan as well, although not exactly with regard to a jury system but a lay assessor system (Anderson and Nolan, 2004).

⁸ These findings are based on *ex post* self-reporting, which carries significant methodological limitations. Note that the findings do not concern the motivation for increased voting activity but rather the link voters see between jury participation and voting—which may or may not have to do much with their own motivation, and hence of the causal link between these two participatory activities.

meaningful deliberation that generated the participation enhancing effect, rather than the experience of convicting or acquitting a defendant.

The mechanism through which jury service increased voting was examined in a further quantitative study. This study examined the subjective experience of jurors and concluded that “those whose jury experience was relatively engaging and better than expected became more likely to vote in the future relative to those who had a less satisfactory experience” (ibid.: 363). Further, the study found that the relatively strong effect on electoral participation of sitting on a jury in criminal trials (rather than civil trials) may also be due to the more positive subjective experience of the former trial type (ibid.: 363). Jurors may find civil trials less emotionally engaging; less accessible and at the same time more frivolous; and the challenges of deliberation in civil trials less inspiring (ibid.: 356–357, 363).

The participation effect of jury membership is not necessarily randomly distributed across the population. Stone and Malkopoulou (2021: p. 12, footnote 16) assume that the elderly and less educated are overrepresented in juries. Yet this finding – coherent with the common perception that professional, wealthy and better educated are more motivated and able to shirk jury duty – may not be generalized even if it turns out to be accurate for the USA. For instance, in England and Wales, this does not seem to be the case. Research shows that it is the unemployed as opposed to the fully employed who are least likely to serve (Thomas et al., 2007). (They may be selected, but then they are granted exemptions to be able to find work.) These nuances matter considerably as they determine whether the participation effect induced by a particular institution aggravates or ameliorates inequalities of political participation at the same time.⁹ Unequal political participation in the Euro-American context typically means that people with a lower socio-economic status are less likely to participate in the political process more broadly, and to vote, more specifically (see, e.g., Lijphart, 1997).¹⁰

5. CHURCHES AND THE PARTICIPATION HYPOTHESIS

While the antidemocratic effects of religion on politics have a long, infamous history, the positive effects of religion on democratic politics, and especially voting, have only been relatively recently addressed in research. The effect of church participation and religious sentiments on political participation has been one of the focal points of political socialization studies at least since the early 1990s (see Legee and Kellstedt, 2016 [1993]; Peterson, 1992). While some of these studies inquire more generally about the effects of participation in this domain on civic engagement (e.g., Beyerlein and Hipp, 2006; Loveland et al., 2005; McKenzie, 2001; Putnam et al., 2012; Smidt, 1999; and even much earlier, Tomeh, 1973), others (also) focus specifically on effects on electoral participation (e.g., Cassel, 1999; Gerber et al., 2016; Wilcox and Sigelman, 2001). The literature overall suggests that religion and church life continue to have significant and complex effects on political – including electoral

⁹ Note a further complication: the composition of juries does not only influence the equality of participation but also on the equality of protection afforded to defendants in criminal cases. While some policies increasing equality of participation may also increase equality of protection, there is no a priori reason to assume this is always so, and hence trade-offs may be necessary in the design of jury selection and trials (cf. Lever, 2017; Poama, 2013).

¹⁰ See also report D3.1, which analyses the relationship between various conceptions and models of democracy, on the one hand, and the value of participation within the given conception or model, on the other. See esp. Section 3.

- participation. While some aspects of this effect were overstated in early research (e.g., Verba et al., 1995), religion continues to play a significant role in promoting electoral participation despite the growing secularization of Western societies (Ikenberry et al., 2004).

A body of more nuanced research has recently emerged which explores the complex pathways of religious and church influence on political participation. The specific effect of participation in church life and the consequent civic skills development on political - more narrowly, electoral - participation, emphasized in early research (Verba et al., 1995), remain contested. Efforts to get further precision on the nature, causes and extent of that effect, as well as recent attempts to broaden the study of this effect to consider the varieties of Christianity as well as non-Christian religions present a more complex picture. The effects of both faith and participation in church life have been examined. In general, both have been found to have a positive effect on civic engagement (e.g., Smidt, 1999). On the one hand, religious faith - more specifically, the belief that humans can further a divine plan - in itself has been found to correlate with higher levels of political participation, across denominations, in the US context (Glazier, 2015; cf. Driskell et al., 2008).¹¹ On the other hand, linking church life rather than merely religious faith to political participation, studies found that in the US context, a decrease in church attendance correlated with a decrease in voter turnout (Gerber et al., 2016). A study using data which cover 65% of the global population has found that membership in religious organizations, rather than faith in general, contributes to higher levels of political participation (Omelicheva and Ahmed, 2018; cf. Aghazadeh and Mahmoudoghli, 2017, for local findings on the significance of religiousness for political participation in Iran). Another study has confirmed the causal effect of church attendance on electoral turnout in Poland (Kurek and Falkowski, 2022).

There are several explanations for the turnout effect of church participation. One is simple social pressure (Gerber et al., 2008; McKenzie, 2004). Recruitment to politics by a coreligionist seems to be a particularly effective way to recruit church members to politics (Djupe and Grant, 2001). Another explanation more relevant to the participation hypothesis is that church participation cultivates civic skills (Djupe and Gilbert, 2006; Verba et al., 1995). The latter explanation has been challenged in Djupe and Grant, 2001, and also found unsustainable in a European study involving 17 countries, albeit focusing on the causes of the participation effect of civil associations more broadly (Van Der Meer and Van Ingen, 2009). Further, churches also contribute to political participation by organizing or hosting political meetings, which was particularly significant in the US context for the civil rights movement and African-American voters (Harris, 2001; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Morris, 1986; Wuthnow, 1991). Next, the participation effect is more pronounced in churches whose members can perceive political expectations of their church with clarity (Brown and Brown, 2003; Djupe and Grant, 2001; Wilcox and Sigelman, 2001). Strangely enough, though, direct encouragement to vote has only been found to have an effect on *non*-electoral participation in the UK, such as participating in demonstrations (Sobolewska et al., 2015). Some of the participation effects can also be explained by the secular resources that members bring to

¹¹ Note, however, that not all religious faiths involve a belief in a divine plan, let alone one that humans can further, or even a belief in a deity. This in itself should make us aware that some of the findings in the literature do not and cannot hold robustly across a wide range of religions but are specific to a subset of religious faiths. For some philosophical approaches to defining religion for the purposes of philosophical and political analysis, see, for instance, Crane, 2017; Laborde, 2017.

the church (Djupe and Grant, 2001). Church attendance can also develop psychological resources necessary for political participation (Calhoun-Brown, 1996), an effect particularly important for African American voters in the US context (Chong and Rogers, 2005).

The strength of the participation effect varies among different churches (Gimpel et al., 2003). This is as it should be expected. It is not church membership *per se* which induces the participation effect, but the various causes figuring in the explanations reviewed above. Some of these causes are present in some churches, but absent from other churches. Djupe and Grant found that some of the differences are also related to whether a given religious tradition tends to prefer religious over political activity (Djupe and Grant, 2001), and these differences may explain the relatively lower political involvement levels of African-American Protestants and Caucasian Evangelicals in the US (*ibid.*; cf. Beyerlein and Hipp, 2006; Campbell, 2004). By contrast, it has been found that high participation levels among Mainline Protestants are mostly explained by the level of secular resources they bring to church (*ibid.*). Earlier, it was hypothesized that due to different effects on civic skills development, church affiliations would have different participation effects for Protestant Caucasian and Catholic Hispanic populations in the US (Verba et al., 1995). Later, however, it was found that the civic associational role of churches matters considerably more for political participation than skills development, explaining the minor difference in participation effect between these populations (Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001).

While research on religion, church membership and political participation abounds in the US context, much less research has been conducted on related topics in a European context, as well as on the participation effect related to non-Christian religious minorities. The relevant empirical research on these contexts and populations is relatively sparse and highly fragmented. A study has confirmed the participation effect in the UK context for Muslim and Sikh voters, but not Hindu voters - which the authors explain by the lack of the latter religion's political salience - and only for non-electoral participation such as being active in a political voluntary organisation, donating money to a political cause, attending a demonstration, signing a petition, or boycotting or buying a product on political grounds (Sobolewska et al., 2015). Also in the UK, in contrast to the US (see Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; Jamal, 2005), mosque attendance has *not* been found to have an effect on electoral participation (Sobolewska and McAndrew, 2015). However, the effect of Catholic religious observance more broadly, and Catholic church attendance more narrowly, on electoral participation has been confirmed in Poland (Kurek and Falkowski, 2022). This may partly be due to the special historic role of the Catholic church in communist and post-communist Poland (Kostelka, 2017). The highly specific nature of these findings raises considerable doubt about the extent to which it is possible to provide readily generalizable findings on the participation effects of church membership or attendance.

Some more recent studies suggest that the effects of religious attendance on political participation have been overstated. Those who have started to actively participate in politics continue to do so despite changes in their church attendance habits. Nevertheless, the effect of generating political participation, including electoral participation in the long run, through civic activities can still be observed (Ammann, 2015). In an Australian study, however, not even this broader effect could be confirmed for immigrants (Jiang, 2017), although a European study had found that the institutions of the receiving society play a mediating role,

influencing the role of religion - both Christian and Muslim - on migrants' political participation (Eggert and Giugni, 2011).

6. TRADE UNIONS AND THE PARTICIPATION HYPOTHESIS

Trade unions, when strong, may be a significant force in shaping political (Becher and Stegmueller, 2021) and not merely economic life, even if post-WWII they have been less involved in direct political action (Dahl, 1978; Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Streeck and Hassel, 2003). However, trade unions may have multiple political roles. They can engage with politics directly as associations through legislative or executive lobbying or party ties, or even as campaign contributors (Taylor, 1989; Becher and Stegmueller, 2021). But they may also play a more indirect role in engaging their members (and potentially people beyond their membership) in political action and conveying to them information relevant to electoral participation. There is evidence that this latter explanatory route is more significant in explaining the correlation between strong trade unions and the better representation of workers in politics (Flavin, 2016). While trade unions and related participatory effects have been on the decline in the global North (see, e.g., Rosenfeld, 2014 and Stansbury and Summers, 2020 for the US; cf. Mosimann and Pontusson, 2017 for the European context), trade unions continue to be crucial spheres of political socialization and as such to have a role in democratization in Africa (Karreth, 2018; for a South-East Asian perspective, see Ford, 2014).

Evidence from the US suggests that trade unions, despite their significant decline, continue to have an impact on their members' policy preferences and on the level of sophistication of their views - at least concerning trade issues (Kim and Margalit, 2017). Further, recent evidence confirms the role of trade unions in informing their members concerning matters relevant to their electoral choice (Christiano, 2022: 422-424). Trade union members are better informed about candidate and party positions on political issues than their non-unionized co-workers (Macdonald, 2021).

Trade unions may also have an effect on electoral participation through direct mobilization (see, e.g., Zullo, 2004; cf. Rosenstone et al., 2003). More indirect positive effects on electoral participation have also been found in the US, mostly for less educated individuals (Kerrissey and Schofer, 2013), which may be a welcome finding, given that they are less likely to participate in elections otherwise (see, e.g., Verba et al., 1995). Minority electoral participation, more specifically the turnout of Hispanic voters in the US, has also been associated with trade union membership (Francia and Orr, 2014). A cross-country study including several European states - as different as Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden - confirmed the positive effect of trade unions on turnout, and even found a "spillover effect," meaning that the positive electoral turnout effect of the presence of strong trade unions is not limited to union members (Flavin and Radcliff, 2011).¹²

¹² The presence of strong trade unions may also trigger mobilization *against* unions. Yet Falvin and Radcliff (2011) describe the role of unions in contributing to the spillover effect as "equal opportunity mobilizers", i.e., the mobilization effects are observed within the population of lower socio-economic status and in favour of the political alternatives supported by unions (633-635).

However, for the participation hypothesis, the crucial question is whether an eligible voter's active involvement in trade union life also increases her probability to participate in elections. Direct mobilization is irrelevant for the participation hypothesis, as is the effect of unions on party positions, which may be one of the mechanisms, according to Benjamin Radcliff and Patricia Davis (2000), behind the positive turnout effect of unionization on workers. (In other words, if at least some parties better represent workers due to the political presence of unions, workers may be more likely to turn out and vote for them.) Somewhat closer but still not quite identical to the participation hypothesis are explanations which emphasize the role of political education and peer pressure experienced as a union member (Asher, 2001: 136). Central to the participation hypothesis are explanations of the turnout effect that emphasize voters' active participation in trade union life.¹³ Generally speaking, the participation effect of union membership has complex and contested explanations which include direct and indirect effects on electoral turnout. Some have even found that most of the turnout effect is not due to membership itself but to socioeconomic factors such as employment status or age that distinguish union members from non-members (Freeman, 2003), and which therefore cannot count in favour of the *participation hypothesis* itself. In other words, people who belong to some social groups - e.g., older persons - are more likely to be union members than others, and it is this belonging to this social group, rather than union membership itself, which results in the participation effect.

Some related studies focus on workplace participation instead of trade union participation. Thomas Christiano (2019: 956-658) argues in favour of more employee participation at the workplace based on some of the empirical findings related to the participation effects induced by trade unions. However, workplace participation need not be unionized. For example, workers' participation in the management of the firm may also produce desirable participation effects. While such worker participation has been proposed in political theory and philosophy for various reasons over the past decades (see, e.g., Anderson, 2017; Gerlsbeck and Herzog, 2020; Pateman, 2000), its effects on political and specifically electoral participation are yet to be explored after early promising findings (Elden, 1981).

7. SPORTING ASSOCIATIONS AND THE PARTICIPATION HYPOTHESIS

Sports associations have been historically as well as recently important conveyors of political messages, and affiliation with or support for a certain sports association can also correlate with political preferences (see, e.g., Kaufman, 2007). Sporting associations also create senses of belonging and community; and they may offer significant networking opportunities to individuals. Through both certain forms of supporting sports (e.g., cheerleading, rooting) and especially playing sports, individuals may be involved in shared projects, acquire and use skills necessary for contributing to something seen as bigger than their individual lives, build trust, and acquire politically relevant information. For these reasons, it is worthwhile examining whether sporting associations also serve as sites of political education,¹⁴ and whether participation in them enhances political - more specifically, electoral -

¹³ Trade union members are not uniform in this regard either: some may be more willing than others to take part, e.g. in collective action such as strikes. (For a psychological explanation which predicts participation in collective action mostly, though not exclusively, based on group identification, see Kelly and Kelly, 1994.)

¹⁴ For example, participation in extracurricular activities in one's youth has been shown to predict greater political and civic involvement in (at least young) adulthood (Smith, 1999).

participation.¹⁵ The participation hypothesis may be especially plausible with regard to sporting associations which explicitly endorse some publicly oriented concern or political aim. Examples of such associations include the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, a state-supported paramilitary organization – an association with a long history of acting as a resistance movement against occupiers – or some sports associations participating in resistance movements in France under German occupation in WWII (Rathbone, 2022). Sports in general have become heavily politicized in a number of ways. Public commitment to political causes such as reducing poverty, anti-racism and anti-homophobia is increasingly seen as part and parcel of good sportsmanship in some regions of Europe (see, e.g., Alexander-Arnold, 2021; Hattenstone, 2021; Liew, 2021), whereas they are seen as the undue politicization of sports in others (AFP, 2021).

Sporting associations may be significant boosts to political integration and may enhance participation especially in poorer neighbourhoods. In such contexts, the lack of institutional and social infrastructure leave local residents without the knowledge, skills and motivation necessary for political – including electoral – participation (Dacombe, 2013). It is contested, though, whether in such deprived neighbourhoods, introducing sports associational life is in itself sufficient to induce civic participation effects (ibid.: 1273). Here again, concerns about the effects of promoting participation on political equality and inequality may arise. While sporting association membership may be suitable to increase political participation, it is possible that its participation effects are conditional on further background conditions, such as infrastructure and skills, that only less deprived neighbourhoods and populations enjoy.

In general, no clear effects of membership or participation in sports associations or activities on political participation or participation-relevant attitudes have been found. Some studies have suggested that sports activities and sports club membership may increase participation in other social activities, though not, it seems, in politics generally, or voting, more specifically. For example, some research has recently been conducted in a European context on the effects of membership in a sports club on social capital-related attitudes, i.e., attitudes associated with and necessary for the formation of social capital, such as trust, helpfulness, or sociable orientations (Burrmann et al., 2019). However, so far sports-membership seems to have limited effect on social capital-related attitudes. While the political participation effect of sports association membership or sports participation may be achieved in causal pathways other than through the nurturing of social capital-related attitudes, no evidence is available on such alternative causal pathways either. To take another example, in a Canadian context, while youth sports participation was found to be positively related to community activity involvement more broadly, the effects were found to be small, though lasting throughout the lifecycle (Perks, 2007). Research in Norway reached similar conclusions, finding that the effect of sports association membership – through social capital-building – on generalized trust and political commitment is weaker than that of membership in voluntary organizations more generally (Seippel, 2006; cf. Brown et al., 2014). More disappointingly, the more politically relevant the effect examined was, the weaker the effect of specifically

¹⁵ Historical memory often and understandably associates the link between sports and political mobilization with totalitarian regimes and their cult of health in 20th c. European history. However, political mobilization through sports was not only a concern of totalitarian regimes even historically, and not even necessarily a means of top-down mobilization. A notable counterexample is Nordau's speech at the Second Zionist Congress, where he advocated for a "Judaism of Muscles" (Kaufman, 2007: 554).

sports association membership was found to be (Seippel, 2006). It is unclear whether sports clubs potentially becoming more individualistic, if this is the case, is related to any of these somewhat disappointing findings.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has reviewed empirical literature on the participation hypothesis which examines whether active participation in other domains of public, social life has an effect on political participation – and more specifically, on electoral participation.

Firstly, while there is a relatively large empirical literature examining the effects of a variety of different social associations on civic and political participation, there is relatively little empirical research that focuses on electoral participation specifically. In fact, out of the domains reviewed, only jury service, church participation and trade union membership have been examined through this lens. Instead of a focus on the specific factors that might increase or decrease electoral turnout, much of the empirical literature is concerned with the determinants of broad phenomena such as levels of trust in institutions or fellow citizens, or with the effects that social association might have on different types of civic and political activities (such as demonstrations, boycotts) whose relevance to voting is unclear. This underlines the need for further empirical studies, especially on the effects of participation in sporting associations, and perhaps also in new domains such as entertainment and music culture, on electoral participation (cf., e.g., Jones, 2017; Perera, 2018).

Secondly, there are significant gaps in the available literature concerning the social determinants of political participation in general and of voting in particular. Thus, even where positive effects of social association and activity on political participation have been found – as in jury service or trade union membership – there is little agreement on the causal pathways through which those effects emerge. Not only does this make it difficult to distinguish correlation from causation, but it is also difficult to distinguish direct from indirect effects and intermediate from final causes, i.e., social determinants, in the relevant causal chains, and their relative importance. The most detailed inquiry in this regard concerns the effects of jury participation. Overall, there is no evidence ruling out the co-existence of multiple possible social determinants of a participation effect. Some of these may have much stronger effects on electoral participation than others, and some of these social determinants may be less characteristic of one domain of participation than others. In such cases, being able to distinguish stronger and weaker causal paths to increased turnout would be desirable, and so would greater clarity on how cause and effect are related, given that some of these may not have been anticipated by social scientists or citizens themselves.

Moreover, the available literature on the contemporary effects of social association on political participation tend to be dominated by studies of North America, and of the United States in particular. It is far from obvious that its findings, such as they are, can be transferred to other contexts. In particular, the differences between North America and Europe since the Second World War, including the effects of the pre-1989 era on the former Eastern Bloc and the existence of prominent Communist and Christian Democratic political parties in Western Europe, only emphasise the size and significance of the gaps in our social scientific knowledge. In these circumstances, even the replication in Europe of research already

conducted in North America might significantly improve our understanding of the social determinants of political behaviour, and of voting in particular, in Europe.

The relative lack of literature focused on Europe, rather than North America, may reflect the fact that 'political science' is a relatively recent academic discipline in continental Europe, where the study of politics was usually pursued in the disciplinary context of law and sociology. The relative lack of Europe-focused literature on the non-electoral causes of electoral turnout is perhaps also explained by the fact that 'low turnout' is a relatively recent European phenomenon – electoral participation has often been quite high in Europe (even without compulsory voting); and non-electoral forms of civic and political participation are generally valued in their own right, or as exemplars of civic or regional pride, rather than for their consequences on voting particularly.

Thirdly, in most domains of social participation reviewed in this chapter, not only the causal pathways through which the participation effect emerges but also the strength of this effect is contested or less impressive than what the political theory literature originally envisaged. This should not lead us to underestimate the normative significance of the findings. It is illusory to seek a single remedy for the low and declining electoral participation rates of today's European democracies. Electoral participation may still be enhanced through the participation effects induced in non-political domains of civic life reviewed in this chapter. However, these beneficial results are likely to arise from the accretion of small changes across different aspects of social life, as opposed to being the noticeable consequence of one change in particular. As the institutions and practices reviewed here do not primarily aim to promote electoral participation, the participation effect should be regarded as their collateral benefit – and therefore as one factor amongst others that should be taken into account when people try deliberately to shape their political and social environment.

Finally, future empirical research should be attentive to three complications in the study of the effects of social participation on political, and especially electoral, participation. First: not all political mobilization is democratic in kind. Antidemocratic, even authoritarian, mobilization have been a feature of recent European politics, for example, political mobilization around anti-LGBTQI referendums). Thus, future research should also identify which social determinants of electoral participation are more prone to generate democratic v. antidemocratic kinds of participation. Second: not all participation is valuable from the voter's perspective. Abstention may well be a reasoned, principled choice of the voter in several situations. Accordingly, there is a need for empirical research into the social determinants of electoral participation which distinguishes these effects on valuable vs. nonvaluable forms of electoral participation as seen from the voter's perspective. Third: social conflict or antagonism may be as, if not more, significant for electoral participation than civic bonds or associational life. In fact, certain kinds of civic association may have a dual effect: mobilising members and opponents politically, even if the latter is unintended. Hence, while the political science literature we have examined tends to present increased electoral participation on the assumption that it can serve as a proxy for, and a contributor to, democratic legitimacy, it is as well to remember that democratic politics involve competition, not just cooperation. As such, higher political participation, whether induced by deliberate political mobilisation or by more diffuse associative paths, should not be confused with the absence of political and social antagonisms, or with an attachment to collective, rather than to sectional political goals. Thus, progress in identifying and evaluating the

electoral consequences of non-electoral forms of participation requires sensitivity to the complexities and ambivalences of democratic politics.

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