

Citizen Participation in Political Activities: Does Policy Distance from the Government Matter?

CAJS Seminar
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Political participation

- Democracy works only if citizens take part in the political process
 - political participation = ‘those activities by private citizens that... aim at influencing the government, either by affecting the choice of government personnel or by affecting the choices made by government personnel’ (Verba and Nie 1972)
- Representative democracy vs. direct democracy
 - citizens exert influence on government composition or in various stages of decision making process

political participation

Different categories of activities

- how far does one go? (Marsh and Kaase 1979)
- Voting
- Conventional means
 - contacting politician/government official
 - persuading others to vote for given party/candidate
 - taking part in campaign activities
 - working with others on shared political concerns
- Unconventional means
 - joining protests/demonstrations

Who participates?

- Participation depends on 1) resources, 2) incentives (Teorell 2006; Verba, Schlozman, Brady 1995)
 - socio-economic endowment (Nie, Powell, Prewitt 1969; Verba, Nie, Kim 1978)
 - interactions with other people (Giles and Dantico 1982; Huckfeldt 1979; Kenny 1992)
 - mobilization by political parties (Gerber and Green 2000; Karp et al. 2008; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993)
 - Also affected by institutional rules at macro level (Blais and Carty 1990; Karp and Banducci 2008; Powell 2000)

Participation & ideology

- Different value priorities between conservatives and progressives
 - order, following rules (Adorno et al. 1950; Carney et al. 2008; Fromm 1964; Tomkims 1963)
 - social inequality (Alesina, Di Tella, MacCulloch 2004; Jost et al. 2003; Listhaug and Aalberg 1999)
- So progressives more likely to participate? (Norris et al. 2005; van Meer et al. 2009)
 - Or is the relationship curvilinear? (Opp et al. 1995)

Participation & ideology

- Participation related not just to your own ideological position, but also how far you are from your government's position (Claassen 2007)
 - 'the larger the perceived ideological distance between a citizen and his or her government, the more likely that citizen participates politically' (van der Meer et al. 2007)
 - people have little incentive to spend extra time and effort making demands to the government if the government is already promising or implementing their preferred policies

Participation & winner/loser status

- Electoral losers less confident in government, less positive about how democracy works than winners (Anderson and Tverdova 2001; Cho and Bratton 2006; Moehler 2009)
- So losers more likely to participate to articulate demands for changing the *status quo*?

Hypotheses

- ideological orientation: citizens with leftist orientations are more likely to participate in conventional and especially unconventional activities due to their desire to alter the *status quo*
- ideological extremism: citizens who place themselves toward ideological extremes participate more through conventional and unconventional means due to stronger commitment to their beliefs
- ideological proximity: citizens located closer to the ideological position of their government participate less since their preferred policies are more likely to be promised or implemented already

Hypotheses

- winner/loser status: citizens who are electoral winners participate less in orthodox and especially heterodox activities than losers since the government is more likely to translate their preferences into policy
- winner/loser status x ideological proximity: for both previous electoral winners and losers, the closer their ideological position is to that of the government, the less likely they would participate

Data

- Data source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), 2nd module
 - contains questions on vote in previous election, participation in various political activities
 - covers two dozen democracies
- 2 dependent variables for categories of participation: voting and other activities

Data

Independent variables

- Individual level
 - **ideological self-placement**
 - **ideological distance from government**
 - **previous winner/loser status**
 - demographics
 - democratic value
 - efficacy
 - government performance
 - party identification
- Country level
 - new democracy
 - quality of institutions
 - presidential or parliamentary system
 - average GDP growth
 - mean district magnitude
 - checks & balance
 - ideological polarization

Data

- Percentage of survey respondents by # of activities they participated in
 - 0: 57.06%
 - 1: 22.38%
 - 2: 11.03%
 - >2: 9.53%

 - N = 46404

Empirical results: voting

- Respondents with extreme ideological orientations more likely to vote than moderates
- Being close to government increases turnout among previous winners, but substantial effect is small

Empirical results: other activities

- Respondents with extreme ideological orientations (especially on the left) participate more than moderates
- Being closer to government reduces participation among previous losers; not significant for previous winners

Conclusion

- Ideological distance between citizens and their government has an impact on participation
 - longer distance → greater likelihood of participation
 - mediated by previous electoral winner/loser status
 - this effect is more notable for activities that require more time & effort than voting
- Regarding citizens' ideological orientations, radicals participate more than moderates

Thank you very much for your attention!

Questions & comments welcome