

## Participation in context

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# 8.

## Valorization addendum

## 8.1 VALORIZATION ADDENDUM

This project was partly financed by Statistics Netherlands, the Dutch National Statistical Institute. For the duration of this project, I have held a joint position as PhD-candidate at Maastricht University and as statistical researcher at Statistics Netherlands. During the course of this PhD-project, various efforts have been made to disseminate results and knowledge related to the thesis to a diverse range of actors within and beyond academia. These efforts have been instigated under the auspices of Maastricht University as well as Statistics Netherlands. In the following sections I will first outline the societal relevance of this thesis and second highlight some of the activities and products delivered throughout this collaborative effort between Maastricht University and Statistics Netherlands.

### *8.1.1 Societal relevance*

The PhD-thesis 'Participation in context: contextual and individual determinants of political participation in Europe and the Netherlands' investigates the interplay between individual-level attributes (properties of individuals) and the characteristics of the contexts in which conventional and unconventional political participation takes place in Europe and the Netherlands. European democracies rely heavily on actively participating citizens that voice their political concerns and hold their political authorities accountable through various means. Studying to what extent people participate in politics and to what extent this changes over time and across different contexts is of major concern in assessing the quality and stability of democracy.

Several authors argue that electorates lose faith in political institutions and that Western democracies suffer from 'disenchantment' with politics (Eder, Mochmann & Quandt, 2015; Norris, 2011). Such declines in citizen engagement in political decision making processes are seen as disruptions of the social cohesion of societies. High levels of social cohesion in a society are seen as indicative of (and interrelated with) the quality of democracy (e.g. Keele, 2007; Knack, 2002; Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993). Vice versa, declining political participation is deemed emblematic for deteriorating social cohesion (Putnam, 2000, 2002). Assumed declines in social cohesion are also reason for concern for institution such as the World Bank (Ritzen, Easterly & Woolcock, 2000) the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Coté & Healy, 2001) and the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2010). The European Commission explicitly mentions fostering social cohesion as one of its key policy priorities in the period 2010-2020 (European Commission, 2010).

The assumed decline in political engagement in specific and social cohesion in general would threaten the health and stability of European democracies. If the citizenry abstains from participating in politics this would drain the lifeblood out of democracy. Moreover, if only specific subgroups in societies participate actively and others abstain,

the influence on political decision-making processes could be unequally distributed among different subgroups. This might result in policy preferences being predisposed towards privileged strata in societies, which is contrary to the equalitarian principles of European democracies (Verba, 2003).

Despite growing concerns of declining civic involvement, this thesis demonstrates that political participation is not in decline. Levels of political participation are rather stable in Europe in recent decades. If political participation is taken as a yardstick to measure engagement, this thesis demonstrates that, although certain modes of participation are rare, the citizenry is not becoming increasingly disengaged from politics.

Although there is no widespread decline in political participation, the results reveal that participation in politics is unequally distributed between subgroups in Europe and the Netherlands. Those in higher socio-economic strata (especially the higher educated) are more likely to vote and more likely to participate in other conventional actions. This also holds for unconventional modes of politics where these traditional patterns of unequal participation between higher and lower educated are reproduced. The analyses reveal that in more prosperous countries these inequalities in unconventional political participation are amplified. These results indicate that there are inequalities in the extent to which different subgroups have influence on the political decision making process, which is at odds with the egalitarian principles of democracy. This thesis is thus relevant because it analyses the extent to which people connect to the state through various modes of political participation and to what extent this differs across contexts and over time, which is indicative for the health and stability of European democracies.

## 8.2 DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS: ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTS

I have disseminated the results of the thesis to an academic audience by presenting at various international conferences and by publishing parts of this thesis in academic publications. The results of this thesis and other interlinked products have also been made available to non-academic audiences mainly through activities at Statistics Netherlands. The target audience for these publications range from policy makers and experts in the field of measuring social cohesion to the general (Dutch) public.

Data used in this thesis, the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies 2010 and 2012, were collected throughout the course of this project at Statistics Netherlands. I have been closely involved in the collection of the survey data and the dissemination of the datasets for the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies in 2010 and 2012. The micro data from these surveys (DPES 2010; 2012) as well as technical documentation on survey response and weighting procedures have been made publicly available (Linszen & Van den Brakel, 2014). These datasets have been used by academic (e.g. Van Elsas, 2014) as well as non-academic audiences to study democratic legitimacy (Thomassen, Van Ham, & Andeweg, 2014) trends in public opinion, attitudes towards democracy, political insti-

tutions, political issues, and politics in the Netherlands (e.g. Den Ridder & Dekker, 2015; Schmeets, 2015; Schmeets, 2010; Van Dijk, 2015). Additionally, the results of the DPES have been made freely available in Statistics Netherlands' 'Statline' database.

Next to these datasets and statistics several publications aimed at policymakers were realised throughout the course of writing this thesis. Several book chapters focusing on comparative analyses of political participation and political trust in Europe (Linszen & Schmeets, 2010; 2011) and public opinion towards the European Union (Aarts, Linszen & Schmeets, 2011) have been published. In addition to these book chapters, aimed at policymakers and specialists, several contributions to the Statistics Netherlands' weblog as well as press reports aimed at the general public were released. These include contributions on social and political trust in the Netherlands and Europe (Kloosterman, Linszen & Schmeets, 2010; Schmeets & Linszen, 2012), the Dutch electorates' opinion on salient political issues (Van den Brakel & Linszen, 2013), as well as press releases focusing on satisfaction with democracy among the Dutch electorate (CBS, 2013b).

Besides these products and activities directly linked to data collection and dissemination of the results of (predominantly) the Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys, I have also contributed to debates on the measurement of social cohesion, particularly within the setting of the European Framework for Measuring Progress (Eframe). The Eframe-project aims to build a framework for the debate over the measurement of well-being and the progress of societies among a wide range of stakeholders (national statistical institutes, European and international institutions, policy makers, researchers, and civil society). Within the Eframe-project, I have been closely involved in the organisation of an expert meeting on social capital. The objective of the expert meeting was to activate debate and promote closer interaction between researchers in the field of social capital, particularly in national statistical institutes, academia and NGO's. The proceedings of this expert meeting were disseminated within the wider Eframe network and published as an edited issue (see: Schmeets & Linszen, 2013).

In sum, by collaborating with Statistics Netherlands I was able to be closely involved in the collection of the data used in this thesis, to disseminate the results to a variety of academic and non-academic audiences, and to contribute to ongoing debates on policy-relevant measurements of quality of life in general and social cohesion in particular.