West European Politics
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fwep20

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Published online: 05 Jun 2008.

To cite this article: Hanspeter Kriesi (2008) Political Mobilisation, Political Participation and the Power of the Vote, West European Politics, 31:1-2, 147-168, DOI: 10.1080/01402380701834762

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402380701834762

West European Politics,
Vol. 31, Nos. 1–2, 147 – 168, January–March 2008

Political Mobilisation, Political Participation and the Power of the Vote

HANSPETER KRIESI

This article proposes a framework to recast our thinking about political participation. The approach adopted insists on the role of collective actors and their agents – the political elites – in the democratic process and, by implication, in determining the amount and forms of individual political participation. The proposed framework builds on a simple model of representative government and introduces some major changes in the political context which have become ever more conspicuous in the course of the last 30 years, and which are substantially modifying the conditions for conventional (electoral) and unconventional political participation. Prominent among these changes are the increasing role of the media in politics, and the decline of party control over the voters. These changes tend to enhance both electoral and non-electoral forms of participation. Another set of contemporary institutional changes reduces the electoral accountability of political decision-makers, with expected consequences that are more ambiguous for both electoral and non-electoral participation.

At the time when *West European Politics* was launched 30 years ago, a set of landmark studies was published that put the field of political participation on a new foundation. First, the 'Political Action' study by Barnes, Kaase and their co-authors (1979) extended the notion of political participation to include not only 'conventional' electoral or related forms of participation, but also 'unconventional' forms, i.e. different varieties of political protest. Since this path-breaking study, it has become common knowledge that unconventional, non-electoral forms of political participation have been on the rise in Western Europe.

The 'Political Action' study was a comparative analysis of political participation in five nations, but it had an individualistic bias and did not pay much attention to the political context of the different nations. It was another landmark study published by Verba, Nie and Kim in 1978 which explicitly took the mobilisation context into account. Verba and Nie (1972)

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ISSN 0140-2382 Print/1743-9655 Online © 2008 Taylor & Francis
DOI: 10.1080/01402380701834762

had already studied the relationship between individual resources and political participation in the US, where they had found that political participation in various (conventional) forms increases considerably with individual resources. Applying the same model to a seven-country comparison, they were puzzled by the wide cross-national variation in the relationship between individual resources and political participation. In the search for a solution to this puzzle, they discovered the strength of institutions and group-level processes. Institutions, they found, can dominate political participation in two ways: they can dominate participation negatively by controlling and limiting access to channels of activity or positively by mobilising citizens. In countries like Austria and Japan, they identified some explicit basis for the mobilisation of lower status citizens to counteract the implicit bias built into a participatory system at the individual level. Negative institutional effects were pointed out by an influential contemporaneous theoretical piece by Offe and Wiesenthal (1979): according to the logic of collective action, they reasoned, the individually privileged also benefit at the level of group processes, since there are typically few of them, while the individually disadvantaged also suffer from the constraints imposed on large groups by the logic of collective action.

While these two studies have been very influential in the field of political participation, a third set of key studies from the days when *WEP* was first published has received much less attention from the specialists in political participation, although these works made a major contribution to the study of political protest. The reason is that these analyses were written in the field of social movement studies. They focused on the mobilisation of group resources (Gamson 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1977) and put these processes into their political context (Tilly *et al*. 1975; Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982). The crucial shortcoming of the classical model of social movements that these contributions put into sharp relief was not its individualistic bias, but its neglect of political mechanisms linking structural strain and individual reactions to such strain. Since the publication of this set of studies, the field of social movements has been dominated by what has come to be known as the 'political process approach', which accords prime importance to the organisational structure of aggrieved groups, their cognitive beliefs and frames, and the 'political opportunity structures' available to them (McAdam *et al*. 1996).

In spite of these developments 30 years ago, the study of political participation and social movement research have continued to lead somewhat separate lives, and, contrary to the social movement studies, the analysis of political participation, and especially that of electoral participation, continued to suffer from an individualistic bias. Mark Franklin (2004), whose important book analyses voter turnout in established democracies since 1945, starts out by criticising this bias in the current state of the art. Even the so-called mobilisation model (Rosenstone

and Hansen 1993; Verba *et al*. 1995), he argues, focused on the individual and did not take into account the context of the election. Franklin distinguishes between institutional (electoral systems, policy consequences of elections), temporal or campaign-related (electoral competitiveness, size and nature of the stakes) and social (embeddedness in social networks) context elements and updates the calculus of voting on the basis of the kinds of information provided by the different types of contexts. In a similar vein, I propose a framework to recast our thinking about political participation, which focuses on what Franklin called the institutional and temporal or campaign-related aspects of the context of elections, and which makes an attempt to connect the study of electoral participation to the extended notion of political participation introduced by Barnes, Kaase *et al*. (1979) and by the social movement studies. This framework builds on a simple model of representative government and introduces some major changes that have modified its context over the last 30 years to set new conditions for conventional (electoral) and unconventional political participation.

The Institutional Context of Electoral Participation: Representative Government

It is a truism that, under modern conditions, government 'by the people' must for the most part be indirect, representative government. Elections of the political decision-makers at regular intervals constitute the key institution of this form of government (Manin 1995: 18; Powell 2000: 3). Such elections are instruments of democracy to the degree that they give the people influence over policy-making, i.e. to the degree that their representatives are *accountable* and *responsive* to the preferences of the citizens, considered as political equals (Dahl 1971: 1).

Individual representatives are usually members of collective actors, who organise the process of representation on their behalf. More specifically, with the extension of the suffrage, representative democracy has become party democracy, which means that the citizens have come to vote above all for a party and its agents instead of voting for individual personalities such as local notables. Parties have become the key intermediaries between citizens and government decisions, but they did not remain the only ones. Interest associations representing more specific preferences among the citizens have come to complement them, as have all sorts of social movement actors who also specialise in the articulation of specific interests. That is, the process of representation has become organised, and the collective actors and their agents who have come to control this process have become the key figures in democratic systems. Accordingly, Schattschneider (1975 [1960]: 138) defined democracy as 'a competitive political system in which competing leaders and organisations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision-making process . . . Conflict, competition, organisation, leadership, and

responsibility are the ingredients of a working definition of democracy'. I shall call the individual agents of the collective actors who seek to control the democratic process 'the political elites'.

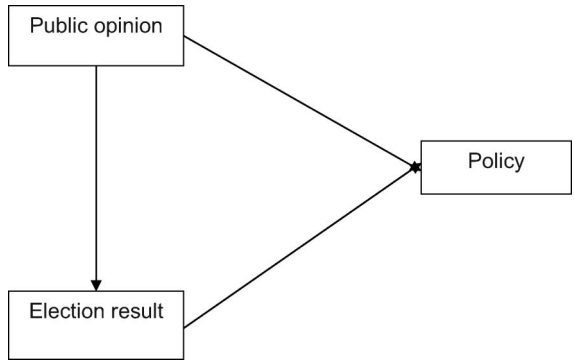
The citizens, in turn, constitute the mobilisation potential for the collective political actors who represent them in the political decision process. Each citizen individually controls a number of resources which may become available for a collective political actor. Mobilising these resources implies increasing the collective control over the individual resources; mobilisation is equivalent to the pooling of individual resources in the hands of a collective actor.[1] From the point of view of political mobilisation in a democratic regime, where elections constitute the decisive institution, the key resource of the citizen is his or her right to vote. In other words, mobilising in a democratic society, first of all, involves the mobilisation of electoral participation or the pooling of votes.

It is important to note that political mobilisation is not restricted to electoral campaigns, but takes place in between elections as well. Among other things, this has to do with the fact that, as Manin (1995) points out, it is the regular repetition of elections which constitutes the crucial mechanism allowing the voters in representative democracies to influence the decisions of those who govern. Based on this repetitive mechanism, the elected representatives are forced to take into account the retrospective (and, we should add, the prospective) judgement of the voters about the policies they have adopted. Repetition creates anticipatory pressure on elected representatives to take into consideration the preferences of the voters, which allows the voters to have an influence on their representatives on a daily basis. As Dick Morris (1999), a former political advisor to President Clinton, has observed, everyday is election day in the US today. In other words, voters do not make their choice of representatives between competing elites only once every so many years and then let their representatives govern, as suggested by Schumpeter's (1962 [1942]) 'realistic' theory of democracy, but they influence their representatives between elections, too. This means that, in the representative democracy, the elected officials have a strong incentive to adapt their decisions to the opinion of the mass public between elections.

This idea corresponds to Stimson *et al.*'s (1995) model of 'dynamic representation'. According to this model, at any given moment in time the elected politicians are highly responsive to the general mood in the population. According to this model, public opinion has a direct and an indirect effect on policy decisions (Figure 1): on the one hand, it influences policy decisions indirectly, by having an impact on the election outcome, which, in turn, leads to modifications in the policy decisions; on the other hand, it influences the policy decisions of the political authorities directly via their rational anticipations during a legislative period between elections.

In the model of 'dynamic representation', public opinion constitutes an exogenous factor. This implies, of course, a highly restricted view of what

FIGURE 1
THE MODEL OF DYNAMIC REPRESENTATION



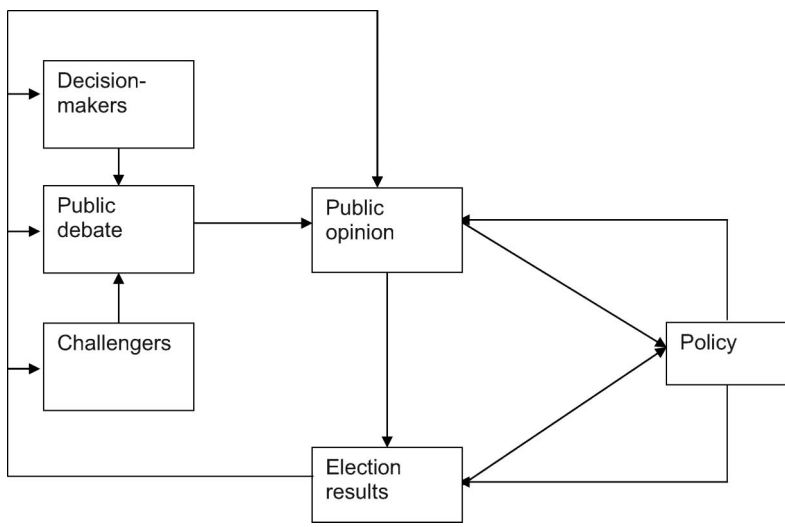
political mobilisation in a democracy is all about. In fact, in democratic systems the key issue for political actors is precisely to shape public opinion – on specific issues (and not with respect to the general mood, as suggested by Stimson's model). Public opinion is the product of the debate in the public sphere – a communication system involving a wide range of political actors. The public debate, its inclusiveness and its deliberative quality are essential for the quality of a democratic decision. This is Schattschneider's (1975 [1960]) view of democratic politics, for whom the expansion of conflict constitutes the essence of democracy. For Schattschneider, conflict is contagious and the larger the attentive public for a given conflict, the more democratic is the struggle in question.

Schattschneider's view corresponds to that of the agenda-setting approach (see Baumgartner and Jones 2002; Burstein 1998, 1999; Jones 1994). This approach distinguishes itself from traditional approaches to democratic representation by the fact that it does not focus on the representation of preferences, but on the information processing of citizens and decision-making authorities. It starts from the assumption that information is not a scarce good, but that the scarce factor is given by the attention to particular information. At any given moment, the attention of the public and the decision-makers can only be focused on a limited number of political problems. Both sides, however, are very sensitive with regard to new information. Viewed from the perspective of the agenda-setting approach, such information is always ambivalent, which is why the selection, presentation and interpretation of information by the media and the political elites plays a key role. There is always room for 'framing' of political problems. The processing of information, in other words, provides the baseline for the attention management of both the citizen-voters and the political elites.

Decision-makers are only one type of political actor involved in the struggle for the attention of the public. Any collective political actor may participate in this struggle – insiders (including government agencies, opposition parties and interest associations) as well as social movement actors challenging the decision-makers from the outside of the political system. Moreover, individual citizens may get involved as well – actors such as experts, writers of letters to the editor, or political entrepreneurs. Finally, the media become key political actors on their own, who are able to influence political decision-making processes by their presentation and selection activities, and, in rare instances, even as mobilising agents (Figure 2).

The extended model of dynamic representation implies, of course, that the political supply by the elite is crucial for the democratic process. Accordingly, the vote basically appears as a reaction of the citizens with regard to the terms proposed by the elite. This applies not only for representative forms of democracy, but, as I have tried to show (Kriesi 2005), for direct democratic procedures such as they exist in Switzerland as well. Given the crucial importance of the political supply, the key question with regard to the substantive orientation of the vote is to what extent it 'is largely not a genuine but a manufactured will', as Schumpeter (1942 [1962]) suggested in one of his devastating formulas a long time ago. The answer to this question largely depends on the quality of the debate in the public sphere, which, in turn, is a function of its inclusiveness, its openness to a

FIGURE 2
THE EXTENDED MODEL OF DYNAMIC REPRESENTATION



range of ideas and a range of styles of expression, as well as of its outcome (see Ferree *et al*. 2002: 205–31).

Implications for Electoral Participation

With regard to electoral participation, the modified and extended model of dynamic representation means that electoral participation essentially depends on the supply by the political elites. In other words, it essentially depends on the expansion of the scope of conflict by the political elite's mobilisation effort. The more intense the mobilisation effort by the elite, the larger the attentive public, the greater the potential electoral impact on the politicians, and the greater the electoral participation of the citizen public. As a corollary, the model implies that consensus makes for depoliticised, elitist politics. Citizens are not interested in political debates, where all participants agree. Thus, the ideological convergence of the mainstream parties to a centrist political position and their unresponsiveness to new political ideas (as in the Swiss all-party government, a case discussed in detail by Franklin 2004), the 'permissive consensus' at the level of European Union politics, and governments composed of technocrats all tend to reduce the scope of conflict, and, by implication, electoral participation.

In line with this approach, Franklin (1993) found 'electoral salience' to be the most potent factor for electoral turnout. A comparison of the turnout in European elections with that in the national elections of the European Union's member states confirms the importance of electoral salience (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996): in the 'secondary' European elections turnout is much lower than in corresponding national elections. In his more recent study, Franklin (2004: ch. 5) found that electoral competitiveness and long-term governmental responsiveness go a long way to explain turnout in 22 countries over the 1945–99 period. Both Franklin (2004) and Wattenberg (2002) confirm that voters vote when elections matter, and the recent falling turnout at national elections can to a large extent be explained by the fact that the elections involved are seen to count for less, particularly among the younger voters who then develop a habit of not voting. Whether elections matter, in turn, is to a large extent determined by elite mobilisation (electoral competitiveness), although it also depends on aspects of the institutional setting (such as government responsiveness or the electoral system). In a similar vein, I have been able to show (Kriesi 2005), that the citizens' participation in Swiss direct-democratic elections is largely a function of the intensity of the campaign preceding the vote, i.e. of the elite's mobilisation effort.

Intensive campaigns contribute both to the citizens' motivation and to their capacity to participate in the vote. They provide an incentive to participate by raising the stakes and they provide more information about the issues at stake. In addition, intensive campaigns increase the social pressure on the citizens: their personal environment urges them to vote in

order to defend the common cause. Intensive campaigns also contribute to more normative and expressive motivations by reminding citizens of their duty to participate and providing them with occasions to reaffirm their identity as 'citizens', as 'partisans' of a good cause, or as 'patriots' (Pizzorno 1986: 353–4). Finally, intensive campaigns are also likely to contribute to the entertainment value of the vote. Just as taking sides for the 'home' team increases the thrill of a soccer match, taking sides by actively participating in the vote increases the thrill of finding out about its outcome.

The Increasing Role of the Media and the Decline of Party Control

So far, the reasoning presumed the continued existence of party democracy. But, according to the thesis defended by Manin (1995: 247–303), party democracy is on the decline and we witness a profound transformation of democratic systems of government today due to the greatly increased importance of the media-centred public sphere for democratic politics. According to Manin, after the classical parliamentarianism of the nineteenth century and the party democracy which was established at the beginning of the twentieth century, representative government currently takes the form of an audience democracy. The characteristics of this new form of government include the omnipresence of public opinion and the transfer of the political debate from the smoke-filled backrooms of parliamentary committees and the central offices of parties and associations to the public sphere. This leads to the transformation of both parties and political communication with important implications for the mobilisation of the vote. It also opens up new opportunities for the mobilisation of the public beyond electoral forms of participation.

Let us first look at the transformation of parties and political communication. On the one hand, party researchers have pointed to the rise of the 'catch-all party' (Kirchheimer 1966), the 'electoral professional party' (Panebianco 1988) or the 'cartel party' (Katz and Mair 1995). Central to each of these models is, among other aspects, the claim that the power of party leaders relative to that of members has been enhanced. On the other hand, media researchers noted that political communication is no longer party-centred but focused on the media, and they observed the increasing independence of the mass media from political parties (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Swanson and Mancini 1996). In the past, the European media systems had been closer to the world of politics than the North Atlantic systems but, under the impact of secularisation and commercialisation, they are shifting away from it and towards the world of commerce. Part of the parties' loss of control over the voters can be attributed to their loss of control over the media.

Commercial media create powerful new techniques of representation and audience creation. Two of the most important of these techniques are personalisation and the tendency to privilege the point of view of the

'ordinary citizen'. By highlighting the role of personalities, the media enhance the focus on party leaders and chief executives – a focus that is further reinforced by two additional structural changes in contemporary politics: the internationalisation of politics, which shifts power to the heads of governments, some of their ministers and key advisers, and the need for coordination of the institutional fragments of the state, which leads to the concentration of power in the hands of the core executive. This trend is not only observed in presidential systems, but also in parliamentary ones. Mény and Surel (2000: 111) speak of a growing 'de-parlamentarisation', i.e. a progressive erosion of the ties which linked the party and its leader in European democracies; Poguntke and Webb (2005) refer to this trend as the 'presidentialisation of politics in democratic societies' and they and their co-authors assemble strong evidence in support of a shift of power from organisational party power to individual power of chief executives and party leaders.

The increasing focus on the party leaders and chief executives, together with the tendency of the media to privilege the point of view of the ordinary citizen, gives rise to a relationship between voters and government that is unmediated by parties, i.e. to 'populist' forms of mobilisation within the channel of electoral participation (Mair 2002). Populism implies the mobilisation by charismatic personal leadership. Personalised leadership is a natural corollary of populism's reaction against politics-as-usual (Canovan 1999: 6). Accordingly, Mény and Surel (2000: 124) arrive at the conclusion that never before has charisma had as important a role as it has today, not only in politics, but also in economics and religion. At first sight, this trend reminds us of Max Weber's (1992: 44–9) vision of a 'plebiscitary democracy'. However, in Max Weber's view, which built on his observation of democratic politics in the early 1920s, the party leader was something of a 'plebiscitary dictator', because he was able to mobilise the masses by using the party apparatus (the 'party machine', including the foot soldiers of the regular party members). The contemporary party leader, by contrast, is able to mobilise the masses largely without the party apparatus, i.e. we are witnessing what Peter Mair has called the rise of a 'partyless democracy'.

The populist tendencies are rather likely to enhance the power of the vote: since the leaders and chief executives are no longer shielded by their parties, they directly depend on the voters' support for the implementation of their policies. By implication, other things being equal, the current populist tendencies can be expected to reinforce the stakes of elections, and, by implication, electoral participation.

Some other things tend to reinforce the effect of the populist tendencies. In party democracy, the vote was to a large extent not the result of an individual choice, but the expression of the voters belonging to a social category and of their corresponding social identity. The vote was under control of the party organisations and it was brought out by the party militants who canvassed their community. The loyalty of the voters reduced

both party competition and the value of the vote for collective actors other than parties. By contrast, in the ideal-typical audience democracy, not only a much larger part of political action becomes public action, but a much larger part of public action escapes the control of the political organisations originally designed to mobilise the citizens as voters – the political parties (Kitschelt 2000). By increasing the role of the public sphere and by reducing the control over the vote by the political parties, the audience democracy increases the incentives for all kinds of political actors to directly appeal to the public and to mobilise it in order to influence the political process between elections.

The study by Barnes, Kaase *et al*. (1979) mainly attributed the expansion of the citizens' action repertoire to changing values in Western societies. Changing values, however, only provide the structural potential for the mobilisation by collective political actors. The changing role of the media and the declining control over the voters by the political parties provide the political opportunities for the mobilisation of this potential by a wide range of collective political actors, in particular for those actors, such as social movement organisations, who do not have regular access to the parliamentary or administrative decision-making arenas.

The direct mobilisation of the public by challengers gives rise to unconventional forms of political participation. Based on individual-level data about participation in modes of political action beyond voting, Topf (1995: 78) 'unequivocally' confirmed the thesis of a participatory revolution. In several countries, such as Britain, Norway, and Sweden, he found that 'well over two-thirds of their electorates are now participants in some mode or other of what, but recently, was labelled unconventional activity'. Studies of protest events by social movement scholars also show that – especially under the impact of the mobilisation by the so-called 'new social movements' – the number of protest events has considerably increased since the late 1960s in countries such as Switzerland (Kriesi *et al*. 1981), Germany (Rucht 1998, 2003) or the Netherlands (Koopmans 1996). As far as the number of participants is concerned, the results of these studies are, however, somewhat less clear-cut: in the German case, for example, in terms of protest participation, the 1950s surprisingly exceeded the mobilisation of the 1960s and 1970s (but not of the early 1980s and 1990s). The 1950s were dominated by relatively few but large protests, whereas the opposite holds for the later periods under study (Rucht 1998: 52). Koopmans (1996), who complements his longitudinal analysis of the Netherlands with a cross-sectional comparison of six Western European countries, concludes that the rise of the new social movements is as much reflected in the growth of conventional as in the growth of unconventional participation. Surveying the whole of the twentieth century, he suggests that the balance between the two forms of participation even seems to have shifted from unconventional to conventional participation.

What seems to have happened is that in the process of modernisation the new social movements have professionalised and institutionalised, the membership in the new associations that sprung from them has increased tremendously, and their repertoire of action has become more moderate (Koopmans 1996; Kriesi 1996). Accordingly, by the early 2000s non-electoral political participation in Western Europe most likely takes the form of donating money (i.e. 'check-book' activism), signing petitions, or of 'deliberately buying certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons' (Teorell *et al.* 2007: 340). Social movement scholars summarise these trends by the term of the 'movement society' (Meyer and Tarrow 1998) – a term which serves to suggest that political protest has become an integral part of modern life; that protest behaviour is employed with greater frequency, by more diverse constituencies, and is used to represent a wider range of claims than ever before; and that professionalisation and institutionalisation may be changing the social movement into an instrument of conventional politics. As protest becomes a part of everyday politics, we assist at the 'normalization of the unconventional' (Fuchs 1991). At the same time, social movement organisations become rather like interest groups. Paradoxically, as unconventional forms of participation become increasingly accepted and political systems become more open to unconventional forms of mobilisation, these forms are likely to become more moderate and less prominent.

Finally, it is important to note that, ultimately, the effectiveness of mobilising the public in non-electoral forms of political participation tends to depend on the potential impact of the vote as well. In line with the extended model of dynamic representation, collective political actors such as social movements who resort to non-electoral forms of political mobilisation make an attempt to influence elected decision-makers indirectly, by attracting the attention of the public and increasing the public pressure on them. If the pressure is strong enough, elected representatives respond, because they anticipate the reaction of the citizen public at the next elections.

The Decreasing Electoral Accountability of Political Decision-makers

There are a number of contemporary institutional changes that reduce the electoral accountability of political decision-makers, i.e. which reduce the power of the vote, and, by implication, electoral participation. Policy-making takes place in policy subsystems which lack visibility and formal codification, and enjoy increasing autonomy. In combination with the increasing complexity of policy-making, these governance arrangements tend, as Papadopoulos (2002) has observed, to impede accountability regardless of whether or not incumbents behave responsively. Second, collectively binding decisions are to a growing extent also taken by courts or independent regulatory authorities such as central banks or regulatory

boards. Judicialisation and delegation are both aspects of a continuing expansion of what Mény (2002) has called the 'constitutionalist element of democracy', inherited from the liberal approach to government, at the detriment of its popular element. All these tendencies limit the obligations of the incumbents to report on their acts and the possibilities of the voters to respond with electoral sanctions.

Third, collectively binding decisions are also made by supranational or international bodies composed of members who have either not been elected or who are at best indirectly legitimated by elections. The vote is territorially bound. Most importantly, voting power is bound to the nation-state and its subunits. As a voter, the citizen is 'locked in' (Bartolini 2005). Back in the 1960s, Schattschneider had considered the regional limitation of conflict in the US and compared it to the expansion of conflict to the national level. Such a nationalisation of conflict reinforced the power of the vote and was, as is well known, of crucial importance for the success of the civil rights movement (e.g. McAdam 1982): with the expansion of the racial conflict to the national level, the civil rights movement benefited crucially from the voting power of the black population outside of the South.

By contrast, the transnational expansion of conflict is constrained by the fact that voting power is limited to the nation-state. It is of course true that, in the particular case of the multi-level systems of governance of the EU, citizens have the right to vote in European elections, and that they also have an indirect impact on the supranational decision-makers via their national executives. However, as already pointed out, European elections are 'secondary elections' which are not really about representation at the European level (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996), nor are national electoral contests about the content or direction of EU policy (Mair 2000). European mainstream politicians have effectively organised EU issues out of the national political contests. As Follesdal and Hix (2005) argue, there is no electoral contest about the leadership at the European level or the basic direction of the EU policy agenda. In fact, as decision-making authority shifts to the EU level, there is an increasing lack of political accountability in the multi-level system of governance, which implies the devaluation of the individual citizen's voting resources.

The Mobilisation of Voice to Overcome the Declining Power of the Vote

The weakening of the value of the vote for the individual citizen and the declining power of the vote in democratic decision-making at the aggregate level have ambiguous implications for electoral participation. On the one hand, these trends reinforce the populist tendencies already described above. Populism is the indication of a democratic malaise that political actors and citizens would do well to take seriously (Mény and Surel 2002: 21). In this case, however, we are dealing with populism not in the sense of 'partyless politics', but in the sense of 'protest politics' (for the distinction of the two

types of populism, see Mair 2002). Populist collective actors attempt to 'bring the voters back in', i.e. they mobilise the voters in the electoral channel in the name of the redemptive face of democracy. As is observed by Mény and Surel (2002: 11f.), the common denominator of populist movements puts an emphasis on the fundamental role of the people, claims that the people have been betrayed by those in charge, i.e. the elites are accused of abusing their position of power, and that the primacy of the people has to be restored. Populism is, as Taggart (2002: 67) has pointed out, hostile to representative politics and pleads for a more direct linkage of masses to elites. Ironically, however, populism expresses itself in the electoral channel of representative politics and in the way they mobilise, as already observed, populists often rely on charismatic leadership or at least on centralised political structures.

But it would be a mistake to view this populist challenge simply in terms of protest politics. As we have argued on the basis of a comparison of the transformation of six Western European party systems (Kriesi *et al*. 2006), the new populist parties of the radical right (or their functional equivalents of transformed mainstream parties) have become the driving force of this transformation by giving voice to the various groups of losers of the current processes of 'denationalisation' or 'globalisation'. They articulate the resistance against the opening up of the national borders mostly, but not exclusively, in terms of resistance against European integration or resistance against immigrants. As van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) have observed, European integration constitutes a political potential waiting out there to be mobilised by some political entrepreneur. If the mainstream parties in most countries have so far tried to shut out the issue from the national political contests, it has been taken up by more peripheral challengers. In Switzerland and the UK it has already become a key issue for mainstream parties and for the national political contest. In these two countries, the question of national sovereignty, which includes the question of national voting rights, is at the origin of widespread Euroscepticism (Kriesi 2007). Similarly, the French referendum on the EU Constitution in spring 2005 'was first and foremost a retrospective vote on the process of European integration itself, and the unilateral termination by a majority of voters of the ''social welfare and economic growth'' confidence pact that they had made with their national political elites on the occasion of the Maastricht Treaty referendum in 1992' (Ivaldi 2006: 49).

The French and Dutch referendums on the EU Constitution illustrate an additional point: the availability of direct-democratic institutions to vote on key issues reinforces the power of the vote and, accordingly, political participation in terms of voting. Thus, the participation rate in the French referendum on the European Constitution was 69.3 per cent, very similar to that of the 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty (69.7 per cent), just below that of the first round of the 2002 presidential election (71.6 per cent), but much higher than turnout in the June 2004 European election in France

(42.8 per cent, in sharp decline since the first European ballot in 1979 where turnout reached 60.7 per cent) (Ivaldi 2006). Except for Ireland, the participation in referendums on European integration has been much higher than participation in the closest elections to the European parliament in all the countries where such referendums have been held.[2]

On the other hand, the citizens who perceive the declining value of the vote individually tend to take the exit option. To the extent that citizens exit from elections, the redemptive face of democracy is weakened. As Canovan (1999: 11) notes, elections are 'rituals of democratic renewal, and unless that ritual is taken seriously by a substantial proportion of voters and politicians, democratic institutions are weakened'. To the extent that citizens no longer participate in elections, the legitimacy of democratic decisions is reduced. The potential impact of citizens increasingly exiting from the electoral channel is compounded by the fact that the vote is tied to citizenship. The contemporary international migration leads to an increasing share of the local residents in any nation-state who do not have the right to vote.

Combined, the exclusion of the non-citizens and the exit of the disappointed or alienated citizens implies that, for relatively small minorities of highly motivated citizens, the value of the vote may, in fact, increase. They may use their voice and take advantage of the participatory opportunities provided by the exit of the many. Such minorities may be, as Fiorina (1999) fears, extreme voices who have less reason to moderate their commitments than in the past. In other words, paradoxically, as more of the citizens get disillusioned and increasing numbers of residents do not have the right to vote, the redemptive promise for power can be realised by small groups of people who believe in the continued power of the vote.

As far as non-electoral, unconventional forms of participation are concerned, the consequences of the weakening power of the vote are also ambiguous. On the one hand, collective political actors react to the weakening of the power of the vote by choosing to mobilise citizens in non-electoral forms to voice their concern. In other words, in addition to the 'pull' of the opportunities provided by the new media-centred forms of political communication, the 'push' of the declining power of the vote provides an incentive for collective actors to resort to the mobilisation of unconventional forms of participation. Piven and Cloward (1977) have noted the inverse relationship between the power of the vote and more radical forms of political protest a long time ago. As they observed, 'ordinarily, defiance is first expressed in the voting booth simply because, whether defiant or not, people have been socialised within a political culture that defines voting as the mechanism through which political change can and should properly occur' (Piven and Cloward 1977: 15). Accordingly, one of the first signs of popular discontent is sharp shifts in the voting patterns. Citizens only have recourse to more radical action forms when their vote has no impact.

The inverse relationship between voting and more unconventional forms of political mobilisation is illustrated by two studies of the action repertoires of social movements in Western Europe. In a comparative analysis of new social movements in four Western European countries (France, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland), we have been able to demonstrate that the availability of direct democratic instruments has led to a very high aggregate level of mobilisation and a very moderate action repertoire of the social movement sector in Switzerland (Kriesi *et al*. 1995). In other words, the Swiss citizens put pressure on government mainly through direct-democratic campaigns, petitioning, and to some extent moderate unconventional forms like demonstrations. By contrast, the strong, exclusive French state, which provides little access to citizens beyond elections, is associated with protest characteristics diametrically opposed to those of the Swiss movements – the overall level of mobilisation is lower, but participation is heavily concentrated in rather radical unconventional forms. The importance of the availability and the institutional structuring of the voting resource for determining the actions of challengers is further illustrated by the analysis of the claims-making by migrants in five Western European countries (the four already mentioned, plus the UK) (Koopmans *et al*. 2005: 136f.). As this study shows, migrants face particularly unfavourable political conditions for the expression of their demands in Switzerland – the very same country that accords particularly favourable conditions to its own citizens. Accordingly, migrants' claims-making in Switzerland turns out to be characterised by a greater degree of radicalism than in the other four countries.

By mobilising in more radical forms of protest, collective political actors may not only attempt to mobilise public opinion in order to generate a response from policy-makers, as is suggested by the extended model of dynamic representation. In the less favourable circumstances of closed political systems they may also try to force political concessions from political elites by creating a crisis through massive use of disruption (Keeler 1993). A crisis can create a sense of urgency predicated on the assumption that already serious problems will be exacerbated by inaction. In addition, a crisis can create a sense of genuine fear predicated on the assumption that inaction may endanger lives and property or even result in a revolution or coup d'état. When either of these mechanisms comes into play, the government may feel propelled to adopt reform measures, and the opposition may be too intimidated to resist or may even feel compelled to lend reluctant support to the government. As Keeler (1993: 442) observes, this dynamic explains why 'some of the most radical innovations within democratic systems have been unanimously approved by the legislature'. Such reforms may, however, be turned back when the sense of crisis recedes. Examples of radical reforms introduced under great pressure by disruptive political action include the adoption of the New Deal (Jenkins and Brents 1989) and the civil rights reforms in the US (Haines 1989) as well as May 1968 and the *Loi d'Orientation* in France (Tarrow 1993).

But unconventional political participation is not only enhanced by the weakening of the vote. There is also a sort of 'exit option' for non-electoral, unconventional forms of political participation – an option that implies a shift with respect to the targets of the mobilisation effort away from political authorities. The weakening of the power of the vote is likely to incite collective political actors to shift the targets of their mobilisation efforts from political authorities to other types of actors. Alternative possibilities include litigation in courts and the mobilisation of consumer or investor power. Both of these alternatives have the advantage that, in contrast to electoral and the staple of unconventional forms of participation, they are not territorially bound. As consumers, investors, or legal litigators, citizens are less and less tied to the national boundaries and have ever more exit possibilities. As the national boundaries open up, we may, therefore, expect the collective political actors to increasingly mobilise individual resources which are less territorially bound than the vote.

As far as litigation in courts is concerned, Kolb (2007: 86) points out that courts can act in the face of public opposition because they are free from electoral accountability:

> In contrast to the normal policy making process, access to and influence in the court system is not dependent on connections or social and economic position, but on the strength of legal arguments.

In addition, judicial decisions can have important extra-judicial effects – such as creating publicity or increasing the bargaining power of social movements. Relying on courts for imposing reforms is, however, severely limited by the bounded nature of constitutional rights and by the fact that the judiciary is appointed by the other branches of government. Kolb argues that, in the case of the anti-nuclear movement, the bounded nature of rights dramatically curtailed the impact of its litigation in France, while the movement obtained temporary successes in German courts, which contributed to the slowing down of the construction process of nuclear power plants.

Among the resources that are less territorially bound, consumer purchasing power is a prime candidate for future political mobilisation. Beck (2002: 28) maintains that consumer protests are transnational as such: 'The consumers' society is the real existing world society.' Consumption knows no borders. As Beck also notes, however, the effective mobilisation of consumers depends on some constraining conditions. First, the bite of consumer protest depends on the purchasing power of the public. Without money, consumers cannot have an impact. One might add that their money can only make a difference when consumers have an alternative on the market, i.e. monopolists are hardly vulnerable to consumer power. Second, consumers are notoriously difficult to organise. This means that their

mobilisation has to rely almost exclusively on the expansion of the attentive public via the media. So far, only relatively few corporate practices or policies – either positive or negative – have attracted significant public attention (Vogel 2005: 52). Finally, consumer power is also limited by considerations of costs: socially responsible products may be more expensive than their alternatives. This is certainly an important reason why there is a major gap between what consumers say they would do and their actual behaviour.

Capital is, of course, the quintessential mobile resource. At first sight, the mobilisation of citizens as investors does not seem like a very promising proposition. There is, however, a new type of collective political actor who attempts to do just that – socially responsible investment funds. These kinds of funds provide an efficient mechanism for investors to vote their values in the marketplace. In the US there are 200 social funds and in recent years the amount invested in them has grown substantially (Vogel 2005: 60). But the phenomenon of socially responsible investment is still of marginal importance. Remarkably few firms have been rewarded or punished by the financial markets for their social performance. Nonetheless, many firms act as if corporate social responsibility matters. For a few firms this appears to make business sense. It is a way for them to differentiate themselves from their competitors. A second category of firms are those that have been targeted by activists or who are concerned that they could be targeted, largely because of the visibility of their brands. As pointed out by Vogel (2005: 166), there are inherent limits for corporate social responsibility (CSR), however: if companies were to become more virtuous, the costs of CSR would become much more decisive. Most importantly, Vogel comes to the conclusion that CSR is not a substitute for effective government.

Conclusion

The approach to political participation adopted here insists on the role of collective actors and their agents – the political elites – in the democratic process. An updated version of competitive elitism, it makes an attempt to develop this theory by enriching it with insights from the theories of Schattschneider (1975) and Manin (1995), from agenda-setting theory, social movement research, and from empirical studies of the democratic process and alternative forms of mobilisation. At the core of this approach is the relationship between, on the one hand, the citizens with their equal right to vote in elections and their freedom to form an independent judgement about the representatives who govern in their name, and, on the other hand, the collective political actors and their agents who mobilise them in election campaigns as well as between elections in order to influence the decision-making process. From the point of view of the mobilising collective political actors and their agents, the citizens constitute various mobilising potentials which are supposed to react to their political supply

and which they attempt to control as much as possible. From the point of view of the citizens, their representatives constitute agents whom they expect to exert political influence in their name. With regard to electoral participation, this approach implies that turnout essentially depends on the expansion of the scope of conflict by the political elites' mobilisation effort. The more intense this effort, the larger the attentive public, the greater the potential electoral impact on the politicians, and the greater the electoral participation of the citizens. A great deal of empirical evidence supports this claim.

Since mobilisation-related contextual factors are crucial determinants of electoral participation, the changing conditions of political campaigning and mobilisation linked to the rise of the audience democracy have important implications for the mobilisation of both electoral and non-electoral participation. The tendency towards 'partyless' populist forms of mobilisation within the electoral channel and the decreasing loyalty of the voters to their parties are likely to enhance the power of the vote and, by implication, electoral participation. The new opportunities for influencing the political process between elections give rise to increasing participation in non-electoral forms. It is important to note, however, that, paradoxically, the 'normalization of the unconventional' may above all mean that unconventional participation becomes more moderate and, possibly, even less prominent. Moreover, it is also important to keep in mind that, except for highly disruptive forms of mobilisation, the effectiveness of mobilising such non-electoral forms of political participation tends to depend, indirectly, on the power of the vote as well.

While the trends related to audience democracy tend to provide a campaign-related context which is rather favourable to both electoral and non-electoral forms of participation, a set of institutional changes, which reduce the accountability of political decision-makers and weaken the power of the vote, is expected to have more ambiguous consequences for both electoral and non-electoral forms of political participation. As far as electoral participation is concerned, it is reinforced by populist tendencies to 'bring the voters back in', but weakened by various forms of exit. Paradoxically, the latter may provide opportunities for the voice of small, intensive minorities in the electoral channel. Concerning non-electoral participation, given the weakening of the vote, collective political actors are expected to increasingly mobilise citizens in such forms, but they may do so with regard to targets outside of the realm of politics.

Notes

1. This definition comes from Amitai Etzioni (1968) and is approvingly cited by Charles Tilly (1978: 69).
2. Source: C2D-Centre d'études et de documentation sur la démocratie directe, Université de Genève, for turnout in referendums on Europe, EurActiv.com for turnout in elections to the European parliament.

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