

This thesis has been written as a study assignment under the supervision of an Utrecht University teacher. Ethical permission has been granted for this thesis project by the ethics board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Utrecht University, and the thesis has been assessed by two university teachers. However, the thesis has not undergone a thorough peer-review process so conclusions and findings should be read as such.

Testing the Mediation Effect of Political Efficacy on the relationship between Political Participation and Electoral Participation.

Social Challenges, Policies and Interventions

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Abstract:

This study explores voting behaviour by examining the intricate relationships between alternative political participation, electoral participation, and the role of political efficacy. This paper looks at the voting turnout of the last national elections in Germany. Through quantitative (logistic) regression analysis with German data from the European Social Survey, it investigates how political participation and electoral participation interact and whether political efficacy serves as a mediating variable. The findings reveal that while political efficacy does play a role, its mediation effect is not as strong as the direct effect of alternative political participation on electoral participation. Consequently, political efficacy is not identified as the primary mechanism linking political participation to electoral participation, suggesting that other factors may be more influential in this dynamic.

Europe has witnessed a concerning decline in voter turnout of national elections, decreasing from 80%-90% in 1950 to 60%-70% in 2010 (Solijonov, 2016, p.25) . This trend poses a significant threat to the foundational principles of democracy, where political participation is essential for ensuring that governments reflect the will of the people. The decreasing electoral participation means that fewer citizens are exercising their right to influence the selection of leaders and the political direction of their countries. Consequently, as fewer people vote, the resulting government becomes less representative of the entire populace. This erosion of voter engagement undermines the principle of proportionality in democratic theory, where the diversity of voter preferences should be mirrored in the composition of elected bodies (Bochsler et al., 2024). The decreasing voter turnout indicates a growing disconnect between the electorate and their government, leading to a democratic deficit where the true spectrum of public opinion is no longer accurately reflected.

Alternative ways of political participation can be a tool for incorporating alternative or new issues into politics to contribute to a more representative democracy (Norris, 2002). In recent years, protesting as a form of political participation has become ever more popular (Vráblíková, 2013). The “number of mass protests globally has increased by 11.5% per year, on average, since 2009” (The Economist, 2020). Moreover, it is considered a ‘normal’ form of participation, which was not always the case (DiGrazia, 2014). An example of how protesting can compensate to create a more representative democracy is that while voting is often skewed towards the majority, protesting is often a way for the minority to voice themselves (Kaulingfreks, 2016). So, alternative forms of political participation may be developing into a new form of activism that is separate from electoral participation to contribute to a representative democracy.

Furthermore, political participation of any kind can increase the voting turnout, as protesters are more likely to vote than non-protesters for example (Finkel, 1985; Lewis-Beck

& Lockerbie, 1989). Therefore political participation can help address political issues as well as contribute to higher voting turnouts which support our democracies (Norris, 2002).

Participation in society can increase participation in elections, because it increases social networks for example people whereby people are more involved, less lonely, more connected or more informed (Mutz, 2002).

The Role of Political Efficacy

Another factor influencing likeliness to vote is political efficacy, which is “the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process” (Prats & Meunier, 2021). With higher levels of political efficacy, citizens also feel voting is purposeful and that a vote can achieve political influence also known as “external political efficacy” (Da Costa et al., 2023). It has been proven that political efficacy is the key to voting participation (Gastil & Xenos, 2010; Clarke & Acock, 1987).

When political efficacy is seen as the link between participation and voting, it is also closely linked to encouraging democratic citizenship. The attitude of political efficacy and political participation are closely linked to the overarching theme of citizenship in society (Banks, 2017). Westheimer & Kahne (2004) shows that youth learns that citizenship exists outside of conventional political participation and is more about values to “help each other”. This value is largely increased by what is called “civic efficacy” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Can political efficacy have the same increasing effect for democratic citizenship?

Previous literature of predictors of participation

Political efficacy plays an important role in the typology of citizenship by Banks (2017). Banks (2017) explains lack of efficacy as a characteristic of “failed citizenship” which occurs when individuals who live in a nation-state feel disconnected from its values

and structurally excluded from the nation. Even when a nation-state recognizes an individual and their value to society, categorised as “recognized citizenship” there is no guarantee that they will indeed participate in society. Only when a citizen takes part in society on a level as simple as voting is it considered a “participatory citizenship” (Banks, 2017). Lastly, “transformative citizenship” includes civic action that may break current laws to promote social justice for example the Rosa Parks Montgomery Bus Boycott. From failed to transformative citizenship, political efficacy and political participation are key. Failed citizenship is caused by a lack of opportunities and structural inclusion creating a lack of political efficacy. But transformative citizenship is fuelled by political efficacy leading to political participation including voting.

Therefore, investigating the importance of efficacy is related to the concept of citizenship. When efficacy is high, so is the feeling of inclusion in society and the likelihood of voting contributing to a higher level of citizenship in the typology of Banks (2017). If through participation, citizenship is increased, this only highlights the importance of creating more representation in government to encourage political efficacy and more participation contributing to “transformative citizenship” to better democracy as a whole. Is efficacy the key aspect for creating democratic citizenship?

According to Brady et al. (1995), participation in politics is determined by the range of resources a person possesses. These include time, skills and money. These three ‘possessions’ depend on many things such as a person's job, education and political knowledge. This information is used to predict participation in political activity. The mechanism to predict participation in this case is a positive feedback loop where any access to a resource that offers insight and opportunity to participate in politics, will foster more opportunities and resources to participate in future.

The participation of different social groups can be almost entirely explained by differences in resources (DiGrazia, 2014). Social groups with less resources are less likely to participate in voting, and therefore also less represented in the government. This differentiation in resources accentuates the inequalities that already exist in society.

Finkel (1985), contributes to the idea of a positive feedback loop, describing a circular causal process where “the more the individual citizen participates, the better he is able to do so” (Finkel, 1985 p.893). The study finds that these effects are reciprocal: increased political participation enhances political efficacy, while higher political efficacy encourages further participation.

Contextualising research

Due to differentiation in democratic systems, there is an importance to look at specific contexts when it comes to researching the relationship between participation, voting and political efficacy to be able to make specific claims (Vráblíková, 2013; Koopmans, 2004). In other words, context matters because different resources have different consequences in different institutional systems. For example income, education, migration status and age affect the turnout level of a population (Brady et al., 1995). In different national contexts, a large wealth gap may create hindrances for voting, with a smaller wealth gap, income may play a smaller role in predicting participation. Not everyone is given equal access to resources to facilitate voting participation, which changes depending on national context.

The highest rates of protesting in Europe as of May 2024 has been in Germany with more than a million participants and ongoing (*Global Protest Tracker*, n.d.). Therefore, this paper focuses on the German context. This mediation effect has not been researched before in the German context.

Scientific relevance:

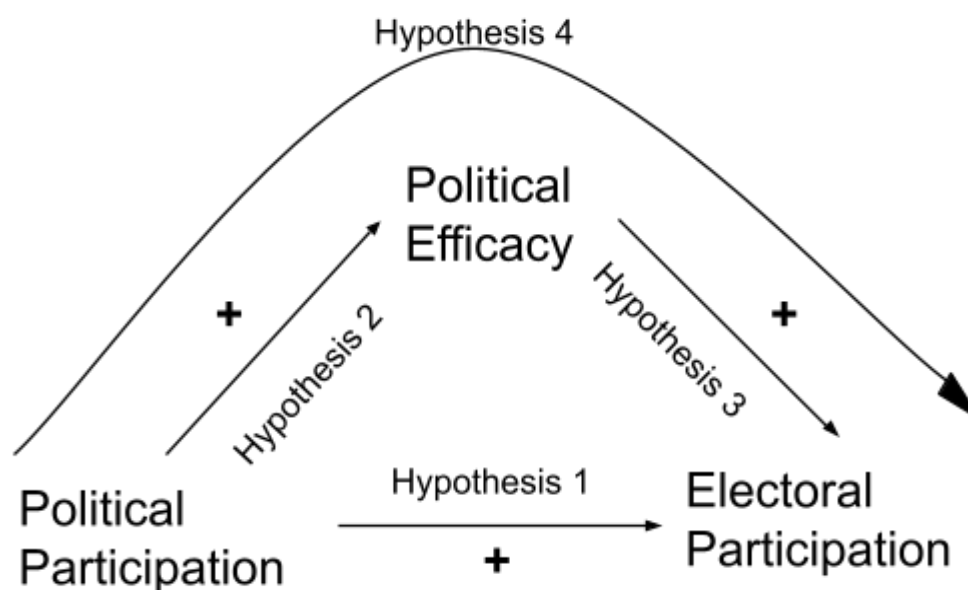
Gastil & Xenos, (2010) state that it is necessary to further investigate the attitudes that sustain engaged citizenship in democracy. By understanding what has more effect on voting, we can discover what has a better effect on encouraging engaged citizenship.

Furthermore, according to DiGrazia (2014), recent literature has a lack of differentiation between different types of political participation leading to differing conclusions and making generalizability difficult. Considering the importance of electoral participation, this study singles out voting participation from other forms of participation.

Lastly, political efficacy is interrelated to political participation, but is it the main mechanism between alternative political participation and electoral participation? Hence, this study investigates the partial mediation effect political efficacy has on the relationship between political participation and voting behaviour.

To investigate the relationship between political participation, electoral participation and political efficacy, this paper investigates a mediation effect as such:

Diagram 1:



Leading to the Research Question: How does political participation influence electoral participation, partially mediated by political efficacy?

Hypotheses and expectations

Hypothesis 1:

Higher levels of political participation increase the likelihood of electoral participation.

Hypothesis 2

Higher levels of political participation increases political efficacy.

Hypothesis 3:

Higher levels of political efficacy increase the likelihood of electoral participation.

Hypothesis 4:

The effects of political participation on likelihood of voting is mediated by political efficacy.

Further Explanations to Expectations

Political efficacy

The concept of political efficacy is twofold, there is internal and external efficacy. Internal efficacy refers to the feeling that you are confident in your ability to participate in politics. External efficacy refers to the feeling that you are confident that your participation will have an impact (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Hence, with high internal political efficacy people have all the resources to vote, yet might not feel that voting would have an influence and are therefore less inclined to do so regardless of their internal efficacy. When referencing political efficacy this paper is referring to “external political efficacy”.

Attitudes-drive-behaviour theory -

Attitude-drives-behaviour predicts that an attitude will lead to a behaviour, based on how favourable the attitude is towards the behaviour (Bosnjak et al., 2020). This theory is under the umbrella of Theory of Planned Behaviour. Other concepts influencing behavior based on Attitude-drives-behaviour theory are “perception of behavioural control” referring to how much a person believes they are able to make a decision individually, and “subjective norms”, referring to how socially acceptable a person thinks their behaviour will be perceived (Bosnjak et al., 2020).

Political efficacy is a type of attitude that people can have towards electoral participation and therefore falls under that category “attitude” in the attitude-drives-behaviour theory (Clarke & Acock, 1987). Therefore attitude-drives-behaviour can explain the effect that political efficacy has on electoral participation. Political efficacy is by definition a positive attitude towards voting as it indicates a feeling that voting is purposeful. High amounts of political efficacy simultaneously increases “perceived control” of the behaviour of voting, because if voting is perceived as a useful action a citizen can take. Lastly, political efficacy also positively influences “subjective norms”, because people are more likely to lie about not voting to get praise from fellow citizens (Harbaugh, 1996). Hence, this theory relates the effect of hypothesis 3, explaining the effect of political efficacy on electoral participation.

Attitudes and behaviours are reciprocal (Bem, 1967) Meaning that if attitudes and behaviours are reciprocal, the behaviour of political participation can lead to the attitude of political efficacy. This is further supported by Finkel (1985), stating that political participation increases external efficacy by changing the attitudes people have about politics. Therefore, hypothesis 2 referring to the positive effect that political participation has on political efficacy, can be explained by behaviour that changes attitudes. The

attitude-drives-behaviours theory states that the object that a person directs their behaviour toward, in this case electoral participation, is also what that person is likely to change their attitude towards (Bem, 1967).

Since political participation is directing its efforts always towards institutions, the government and electoral participation, the attitude towards the government changes, namely people believe that the government is more responsive (Craig, 1979). In other words, external political efficacy is increased because the behaviour of political participation increases the perception that the government is responsive. Therefore voting feels more meaningful and electoral participation is increased through the mediation effect of political efficacy.

The overarching theory of the mediation effect is therefore the attitude-drives-behaviour theory. Based on this, the mediation effect is driven by behaviour which leads to attitude in the form of political efficacy, further increasing the chance of voting.

Resource Model

As mentioned, political participation offers resources that facilitate voting. For example, education is a predictor of voting participation, as it is an important resource of understanding information and understanding the value of voting (Brady et al., 1995). Political participation offers an environment for learning and educating yourself on political matters, contributing to education influencing voting turnout.

Piven and Cloward (1979), state that alternative forms of political participation outside of voting are more common for individuals with less resources to use. Electoral and institutional participation takes more resources to participate in (Piven and Cloward, 1979). Hence, alternative forms of political participation outside of electoral participation can be used as stepping stones where political participation can lead to electoral participation.

Interdisciplinarity

Political sciences are by definition interdisciplinary in order to gain understanding of complex social problems. Therefore the theories discussed are based on different disciplines. Attitudes-drive-behaviour theory from the field of social psychology is relevant to this topic since political participation such as protesting is a group activity where social aspects are of importance. Resource theory brings into play some economics as well as social sciences by understanding that inequalities in resources lead to different outcomes. Lastly, concepts such as citizenship and representativeness are needed to understand complex relationships in society through the lens of political sciences.

Methodology

To answer the research question a quantitative analysis was conducted. Data was taken from European Social Survey (ESS) Round 10.

Population and Sample

The ESS survey is conducted every 2 years and the results are publicly available through the data portal of ESS. The survey population includes residents within private households in varying European countries from the age of 15 to 90 years of age. This paper uses data from “[Round 10 - edition 3.1](#)”, published on 02.11.23 collected between 05-10-2021 to 04-01-2022. The data was collected using “self completion, self administered” either using a “web based questionnaire” or a “paper questionnaire” (European Social Survey Research Infrastructure, 2023).

Altering the data set:

All participants under 18 were deleted from the data since they are not eligible to vote and therefore not relevant for this study. Since the context of this study is Germany, only the German data population was used. “Not eligible to vote” was added to “System Missing”. This enabled the data set to remain complete while not polluting the data set.

Operationalization

Mediation Variable: Political Efficacy

In round 10, ESS labelled items B2-B5 as “political efficacy”. All variables are measured on a Likert scale from “1=not at all” to “5=a great deal”. As previously executed by (Prats & Meunier, 2021), these variables are aggregated to create one continuous variable.

The items used in this paper were:

B2: “How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does”,

B3: “How able do you think you are to take an active role in a group involved with political issues”,

B4: “And how much would you say that the political system in [country] allows people like you to have an influence on politics” and

B5: “And how confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?”

Independent Variable: Political Participation

ESS states that all of the following variables are intended to measure political participation (Ferrín, 2018). These variables were used in previous papers to help form a political participation variable (De Zúñiga et al., 2017; Koc, 2021). The item “Donated to or participated in a political party or pressure group last 12 months” is new to Round 10 and has

not yet been used in this context but is included in the ESS categorization of political participation.

The new variable was computed by aggregating seven variables about participation:

1. Contacted politician or government official last 12 months
2. Donated to or participated in political party or pressure group last 12 months
3. Worn or displayed campaign badge/sticker last 12 months
4. Signed petition last 12 months
5. Taken part in public demonstration last 12 months
6. Boycotted certain products last 12 months
7. Posted or shared anything about politics online last 12 months

All variables about participation were binary, meaning the participant either participated (“yes”= value 1) or did not participate (“no”= value 2). All variables were aggregated to create a continuous variable. Since 7 variables were aggregated, “political participation” variable ranged from 7 (meaning having answered “yes” to all questions) to 14 (meaning having answered “no” to all questions). The variable was re-coded to 0-7 where “0” means having participated in nothing and “7” means having participated in everything.

Dependent variable: Electoral Participation

The variable “Voted last national election” is a binary variable. Each case indicates a “yes” (=1) or a “no” (=2). The variable was re-coded into “yes” = 1 and “no” = 0 so that it is a clear dichotomous variable for logistic regression analysis.

Control variables:

By including control variables: “age (in years)”, “Household's total net income, all sources” and “highest level of education” internal validity was improved. These variables

have shown in the past to affect voting behaviour as well as political efficacy (Brady et al., 1995; Quintelier, 2007). “Education” is referring to the ‘highest’ level of education an individual completed, from “0” = not completed primary school to “5” = most academic secondary school diploma. “Household income” is continuous and “age” is nominal. Lastly, validity and reliability were taken into account in this study.

Table 1

Table 1 offers an overview of all variables used in the analyses.

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Vote	7488	.00	1.00	-	-
Political Participation	7938	.00	7.00	1.30	1.45
Political Efficacy	7905	1.0	5.0	2.422	.70
Household Income	6457	1	10	6.08	2.73
Highest Level of Education	7630	0	5	3.69	1.21
Age	7938	18	90	51.32	18.41

Statistical Analysis

The outcome variable “voting behaviour” is dichotomous. Logistic regression analysis was used to investigate relationships with a dichotomous dependent variable. Therefore hypothesis 1 and 3 must be investigated with logistic regression analysis as the dependent variable “voting behaviour”, referred to as electoral participation, is dichotomous. Using logistics means that to measure the effects on electoral participation, the results showed how the independent variable influences the *probability* of choosing either “vote” or “not vote”. Hence, hypotheses 1 and 3 were answered in terms of predicting the *likelihood* of electoral participation.

Both variables political participation and political efficacy, concerning hypothesis 2 are continuous. Therefore, a regression analysis was applied. It will show the correlation between the two variables.

To investigate the strength of the mediation effect (hypothesis 4), compared to the direct effect, the effect of political participation on political efficacy (hypothesis 2) was multiplied by the effect of political efficacy on electoral participation (hypothesis 3) and compared to the effect of political participation on electoral participation (hypothesis 1). The effect that was bigger was found to be a better predictor of electoral participation.

Results

The following section holds the results and interpretation of the SPSS analysis. The assumptions of multicollinearity, normality, homoscedasticity are met for both analyses. However the Linearity assumption is not met for logistic regression of hypothesis 1. This might lead to inaccurate results. The results will be carefully interpreted.

Table 2

Logistic regression analysis showing the effect of political participation on the likelihood of electoral participation.

	<i>Model 1</i>				<i>Model 2</i>			
	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Wald</i>
Constant	-1.120**	.288	.326	15.084	-1.300**	.291	.273	19.970
	*				*			
Age	.023***	.003	1.023	53.150	.026***	.003	1.026	65.384
Highest level of education	.386***	.051	1.471	57.014	.284***	.053	1.328	29.220
Household income	.238***	.021	1.269	130.466	.239***	.021	1.270	127.694
Political Participation					.384***	.052	1.467	54.419
R squared		.109				.136		
Nagelkerke								

Dependent: Electoral participation

****Significant at $p < 0.001$*

In model 1, control variables age, highest level of education and household income are entered in step one. All control variables are significant and positive. Meaning that a

higher score on any control variable increases the likelihood of electoral participation. Secondly, the odds ratio of all control variables are above 1, with the strongest predictor being level of education ($\text{Exp}(B)=1.471$). Meaning that a respondent with higher levels of education is 1.471 times more likely to have voted. Lastly, model 1 explains 10.9% of the total variance of electoral participation (R squared Nagelkerke). This indicates an overall weak relationship between the control variables and the dependent variable electoral participation in model 1.

In model 2, the predictor variable political participation is added. All variables in model 2 have a significant positive effect on electoral participation. Meaning that a higher score on any variable increases the likelihood of electoral participation. Secondly, the strongest predictor of reporting to have voted was political participation, reporting an odds ratio of 1.467 ($B=.384$, $S.E.=.052$). This means a respondent with high levels of political participation is 1.467 times more likely to vote. Lastly, model 2 explains 13.6% of the total variance of electoral participation (R squared Nagelkerke). This indicates an overall weak relationship between the independent and dependent variables in model 2. Hence, the positive significant effect political participation has on electoral participation is in support of hypothesis 1.

Table 3

Logistic regression analysis showing the effect of political efficacy on the likelihood of electoral participation

	<i>Model 1</i>				<i>Model 2</i>			
	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Wald</i>
Constant	-1.144**	.290	.319	15.56	-2.475**	.334	.084	55.031
	*				*			
Age	.023***	.003	1.023	53.706	.025***	.003	1.025	59.495
Highest level of education	.388***	.051	1.473	56.910	.243***	.054	1.275	19.927
Household income	.241***	.021	1.273	132.056	.223***	.022	1.250	106.425
Political Efficacy					.827***	.097	2.287	72.825
R squared		.111				.144		
Nagelkerke								

Dependent variable: Electoral participation

***Significant at $p < 0.001$

In model 1, control variables age, highest level of education and household income were entered in step one. All control variables are significant and positive. Meaning that a higher score on any control variable increases the likelihood of electoral participation. Secondly, the odds ratio of all control variables are above 1, with the strongest predictor being level of education ($\text{Exp}(B)=1.473$). Meaning that a respondent with higher levels of education is 1.473 times more likely to have voted. Lastly, model 1 explains 11.1% of the total variance of electoral participation (R squared Nagelkerke). This indicates an overall weak relationship between the control variables and the dependent variable electoral participation in model 1.

In model 2, the predictor variable political efficacy was added. All variables in model 2 have a significant positive effect on electoral participation. Meaning that a higher score on any variable increases the likelihood of electoral participation. Secondly, the strongest predictor of reporting to have voted was political efficacy, reporting an odds ratio of 2.287 ($B=.828$, $S.E.=.097$). This means a respondent with high levels of political efficacy is 2.287 times more likely to vote. Lastly, Model 2 explains 14.4% of the total variance in electoral participation (R squared Nagelkerke). This indicates an overall weak relationship between the independent and dependent variables in model 2. Hence, the positive significant effect of political efficacy has on electoral participation is in support of hypothesis 3.

Table 4*Regression analysis showing the effect of political participation on political efficacy*

	<i>Model 1</i>			<i>Model 2</i>		
	<i>B(unstandardized)</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Beta (standardized)</i>	<i>B(unstandardized)</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Beta (standardized)</i>
Constant	2.24***	0.034		1.985***	0.033	
Age	-.004***	0.00	-0.107	-0.002***	0.000	-0.056
Highest level of education	0.00	0.00	-0.107	0.000	0.000	-0.012
Household income	0.064***	0.003	0.250	0.057***	0.003	0.221
Political Participation				0.156***	0.006	0.321
R squared		0.082			0.181	

*Dependent = political efficacy*****Significant at $p < 0.001$*

In model 1, control variables age, highest level of education and household income were entered at step one. The unstandardized B values of age ($B = -.004$, $S.E. = 0.00$) and household income ($B = .064$, $S.E. = .003$) are significant in both models. This means that the control variables age and household income have a significant effect on predicting political efficacy. The negative B value of age indicates that higher age is correlated to less political efficacy. The positive value of household income indicates that higher levels of household income is correlated to more political efficacy. Lastly, model 1 explains 8.2% of total variance in political efficacy (R squared).

In model 2, the predictor variable political participation was added. Age, household income and political participation all have a significant effect on electoral participation. Again, age has a negative effect while household income has a positive effect. Political participation has the highest positive B value ($B=.156$, $S.E.=.006$). This indicates that higher levels of political participation correlates with higher levels of political efficacy. Lastly, model 2 explains 18.1% of total variance of political efficacy. Therefore political participation explains an additional ~10% of variance.

Level of education stands out as the only variable that is not significant, contradictory to expectations that education is correlated to higher levels of political efficacy. Nonetheless, the positive significant effect of political participation on political efficacy is in support of hypothesis 2.

Testing for Mediation Effect of Hypothesis 4:

To investigate the mediation analysis the following equation was calculated using the standardised B values: (Beta value effect 2 \times Beta value of effect 3) and Beta value of the effect of political participation on electoral participation.

$$\text{Mediation effect} = .321 \times .827 = .265$$

Direct Effect 3 = 0.384

Direct effect > Mediation effect. Therefore the Beta for the direct effect is stronger than for the mediation effect. The mediation effect is present, yet the direct effect of political participation on electoral participation is a better predictor than the mediation effect of political efficacy.

Discussion

The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of the direct and mediation effects leading to electoral participation. The results section shows that all effects are positive and significant, confirming hypothesis 1, 2 and 3. The mediation effect was not found to have a stronger effect than the direct effect of political participation on electoral participation. It is important to note that the mediation effect is existent, since it is positive and significant, yet it is not stronger than the direct effect.

Based on this information, it is beneficial to encourage more political participation as well as political efficacy as the results show that this is correlated to higher participation in electoral participation. This will increase electoral participation through both the attitude of political efficacy as well as the direct effect.

Theoretical Context

The fact that the mediation effect is weaker than the direct effect tells us something about the role of political efficacy. Although it has been found to be a predictor of electoral participation, it is a weak mediator. In the Theory of Planned Behaviour, there are several predictors of behaviour, with attitude being mentioned as a predictor by (Clarke & Acock, 1987). Perhaps, it is more important to look more closely at other factors such as the

subjective normative values additionally, to create a larger framework that can take more aspects of Planned Behaviour into account.

The support for hypothesis 1, that political participation increases electoral participation, contributes to the Resource Theory. Hence, political participation can be seen as a resource and a stepping stone to electoral participation. It is important to keep in mind that this data set only included people who had the resources to participate in alternative legal and accepted forms of protest in the first place. Hence, this only indicates that it is a stepping stone for individuals with resources to participate in some form already. It cannot be generalised to a population, only to individuals who are actively participating already. With alternative forms of participation such as protesting becoming more common, it can still be assumed that more people will vote, as alternative participation such as protesting is still gaining popularity.

Political efficacy is closely linked to citizenship (Banks, 2017). The fact that the mediation effect failed to be stronger than the direct effect, might say something about the relationship between citizenship and political efficacy in the German context. This can be deduced because electoral participation is a large part of participatory citizenship, facilitated by political efficacy (Banks, 2017). If in this context political efficacy is not the facilitator of electoral participation, possibly other factors are more important concerning citizenship in Germany. Furthermore, electoral participation may be too small a part in citizenship to adequately explain the role of citizenship. Hence, political efficacy is not the main driver of engaged citizenship in Germany.

Unexpected results

The control variable “highest level of education”, had no effect on political efficacy. This was unexpected since education has been found to be a predictor of political efficacy

(Brady et al., 1995). This is because it is considered a resource to understanding how the government and the political system works, strengthening the idea that citizens have an influence on the government. Possibly education is not as relevant to political efficacy as was thought, and knowledge gained by protests is more valuable to create political efficacy than knowledge gained through educational diploma's.

Furthermore, the younger a person is the more political efficacy they have, which is unexpected. It would be expected that with a higher age, there is a higher level of education leading to political efficacy. Yet neither a higher level of education, nor age increase political efficacy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, political efficacy as well as political participation increase electoral participation. Furthermore, the mediation effect is present, yet it is not stronger than the direct effect between political participation and electoral participation. Hence, political participation is more important than political efficacy when it comes to promoting electoral participation.

Limitations

Statistically, the ESS data set has a large number of respondents. Although this is useful for the generalisation to the population, it also increases the chance of high significance levels and smaller effect levels. Furthermore, although there is a significant relationship, the regression models left much variation in the dependent variable unexplained. More independent variables need to be taken into consideration.

Attitudes and behavioural effects are reciprocal (Bem, 1967) , as well as participation and political efficacy (Finkel. 1985). Finding a correlation does not mean it is a causation and due to the reciprocal nature of the concepts, directionality can be questioned.

Policy Implications

Protesting as a form of participation can be limited and end in violence. Authorities can see protestors as a threat. Measures should be taken to decrease the polarisation between protestors and authorities, since according to this research, they are both supporting democracy.

Education needs to focus more on learning skills rather than learning content. While education is important, it needs to be just as important to give people tools to develop their knowledge independently and develop critical thinking. This supports people across different social groups and resources to gain knowledge and information encouraging participation.

Future research

I suggest that future research looks further into the resources model to identify which resources are *most* significant in facilitating electoral participation. Furthermore, while this research was about reasons to vote, reasons not to vote must not be overlooked. To fully understand electoral participation, both perspectives must be considered.

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