

European Social Survey Round 1 module proposal

Citizenship, Involvement and Democracy

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Theory and Relevance of the Topic

Civic engagement, voluntary activity, and social capital are at the heart of a major debate in the social sciences that currently covers five continents and the academic disciplines of political science, sociology, economics, and anthropology. The debate is important and controversial because it deals with the major problems that confront modern large-scale and impersonal society in the form of a growing social isolation and political disengagement, a loss of community and social solidarity, and a long term decline of trust and social capital that is said to threaten social integration and democracy. Current debates about communitarianism, social capital, and civil society provide the theoretical background to this literature, but the debate is of practical importance because a revival of patterns of civic engagement and citizenship can compensate for the deficiencies of society and modern democracy. Governments in several European countries have expressed a strong interest in this sort of work, under the title of citizenship studies, social inclusion and exclusion, citizenship audits, and community-building.

Concern with social involvement in the community – especially with a large number and wide variety of voluntary associations and intermediary organisations – goes back to de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill, who believed that such activity generated the civic virtues of trust, reciprocity, co-operation, empathy, and the ability to empathise with others and to organise to attain common goals and the public good. This central theme was later taken up and developed in different ways by social and political theorists as diverse as Durkheim, Simmel, Toennies, Weber, Kornhauser, Parsons, and C. Wright Mills.

More recently, democratic theory has emphasised a broader conception of involvement that goes beyond the traditional concepts of both "conventional" (that is, institutionalised modes of participation) and "unconventional", (non-institutionalised) and direct protest activities. In particular, the concepts of "consumer democracy", and of "direct" or "small" democracy, based upon an active relationship between public services, on the one hand, and their clients/customers, on the other, have shifted the attention from the realm of large-scale, and hierarchically organised politics to the immediate concerns of day-to-day life. Theory suggests, in fact, that active involvement in areas such as schools, work places, and the health system, as well as social movements, community organisations, and self-help groups, might well have a crucial contribution to contemporary democracy.

In other words, a theoretically meaningful analysis of citizen involvement in contemporary democracy requires (i) an analysis of both social and political patterns of involvement, and (ii) an understanding of the complex relationship between social and political participation and how this, in turn, meshes with alternative forms of small scale social involvement. It also requires (iii) a conceptualisation of "political" involvement that encompasses conventional participation, protest activities, and active involvement in local contexts, on the one hand, and the participation of clients or consumers of public services on the other. Finally, and most importantly, attention has to be given to the various modes in which social participation is linked to political participation, and how "small" democracy relates to "big" democracy. In this concrete sense, a broad comparative approach is intimately linked to the main theoretical question of this proposal, namely:

Under what social and political conditions does the social involvement, broadly defined, of citizens contribute towards the qualitative ("better" democrats) and quantitative (more active democrats) improvement of contemporary democracies?

Research Design

The research topic of citizenship, involvement, and democracy represents one of the biggest and most controversial topics in the social sciences in the last decade, but the debate has been dominated by theoretical and ideological approaches, and by a marked deficiency of systematic, cross-national empirical evidence. The major cross-national surveys (World Values Studies and the Eurobarometer) touch upon some of the themes in a useful way, but their questions were framed some time before the broad theory emerged in its present form and showed itself capable of tying together several broad areas of social research. More specific research tools have been developed that are better adapted to testing the theory but even here, the evidence is unsatisfactory in two major respects. It has usually been restricted to a single country or region, most usually the United States, and it is usually restricted to rather narrow concerns, focusing either on political participation, or particular aspects of citizenship, or on social involvement activities. Rarely has it tried to analyse these related topics as part of a more general research strategy.

What is lacking, therefore, is a comprehensive research design, which allows us to test the complex relationships between social and political activity, on the one hand, and ideas about citizenship and involvement, on the other. Such an encompassing research design would permit us to answer the crucial question of whether -- and if so, to what extent -- modes of social involvement indeed contribute to a qualitative and quantitative improvement of contemporary democracies. Comparatively speaking, there is ample reason to assume that the link between the "social" and the "political", and between "big" and "small" politics exists in manifold contextual and institutional variations. However, little is known about such variations, and still more important, how such variations might contribute in various ways to democracy.

Steps have been taken to fill this research gap by a network of scholars who came together on an ESF project on Citizenship, Involvement and Democracy (CID). Initially, existing studies in Sweden (the extensive study on citizenship co-ordinated by Anders Westholm, Uppsala), in the Netherlands (several studies on citizenship and participation co-ordinated by Paul Dekker), in Austria (study on citizenship and social capital co-ordinated by Peter Ulram), in Norway (study on citizenship and democracy co-ordinated by Tore Hansen), and in Germany (study on citizenship co-ordinated by Oscar Gabriel) were reviewed. These studies cover a wide variety of related topics and gave us the chance to review different methods and approaches to them.

The ESF Network on Citizenship, Involvement and Democracy then constituted itself as a formal organisation with a Steering Committee, a list of members, a web site (see below) and a series of meetings. After intensive discussions on the basis of an elaborate overview of existing surveys, a Common Core questionnaire was developed by the group for use in all participating countries. This has been accepted by specialist researchers in more than sixteen European countries, and by the Autumn of 2001 had been applied in five of them – Denmark, Switzerland, Russia, Germany, and Portugal. However, the work has proceeded in an *ad hoc* manner because money for surveys has become available in different countries at different times and sometimes for slightly different purposes. Most work has used the complete questionnaire, but some has not. Some of it has used face-to-face or phone interviews, employed different sampling methods and sizes, and surveys have been carried at different times. In this sense an ESS module would be a heaven-sent opportunity for a research group that is up and running, has already done the ground work, has gone into the field in a few countries, but has no resources to complete its work in a properly systematic cross-national fashion.

The Citizenship, Involvement and Democracy group has gone beyond national sample survey research to an in-depth consideration of how to contextualise individual survey items by placing them in a community and organisational environment. An inventory of local studies has been discussed and agreement has been reached about the necessity for including this type of work into the overall research design. A common research design, together with a questionnaire addressed to activists in voluntary organisations, has been accepted and is currently being implemented in a Scotland, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Further organisation studies are being planned for England, Spain, Denmark, and Slovenia.

The idea is to integrate individual sample survey research for nations with studies of activists and organisations in localities and communities. This will allow a three-way comparison of (i) sample surveys of populations across nations, (ii) local surveys with national surveys within nations, and (iii) cross-national community studies of activists and organisations. Although the CID group as a whole is carrying out both national surveys of individuals and organisational community studies of activists, this proposal to the ESS is concerned only with the development of cross-national survey research of a sample of citizens.

The Expertise of the Research Team

The research team has extensive experience in survey research and in the substantive field of the topic, as well as a long track record of published work, including for the Political Action, and the Beliefs in Government projects, as well as many single-nation and cross-national surveys concerned with the substance of this research proposal. The Network Convenor is Jan W. van Deth (Mannheim), and the members of the Steering Committee are Jorgen Andersen, (Aalborg), Klaus Armingeon (Bern), Peter Geurts (Enschede), William Maloney (Aberdeen), José Montero (Madrid), Per Selle (Bergen), Peter Ulram (Wien) Anders Westholm (Uppsala), and Marianne Yagoubi (ESF). Other active members of the group include Gabriel Badescu (Bukarest), Simone Baglioni (Geneva), Jaak Billiet (Leuven), Paul Dekker (Den Haag), Bas Denters (Enschede), Oscar Gabriel, (Stuttgart), Richard Gunther (Ohio), Tore Hansen (Oslo), Hanspeter Kriesi (Geneva), Jose Viegas (Lissabon), Andrej Rus (Ljubljana), Patrick Seyd (Sheffield), Lise Togeby (Aarhus), Mariano Torcal (Barcelona). At present, a total of fifty nine researchers are participating in the project. This proposal to the ESS is co-ordinated by Kenneth Newton (Southampton).

The published work of this group is far too voluminous to quote in any detail, but work of relevance to this proposal includes *Continuities in Political Action* (van Deth); *Beliefs in Government* (van Deth and Newton); *Social Capital and European Democracy* (van Deth and Newton); *Social Capital and Participation in Everyday Life* (Paul Dekker and Eric M. Uslaner eds., Routledge 2001); *Private Groups and Public Life* (van Deth); José Ramón Montero, Richard Gunther and Mariano Torcal, "Democracy in Spain: legitimacy, discontent, and disaffection", in *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 32/3, 1998; Jose Montero and Mariano Torcal, *Political Disaffection in the Modern World*, (forthcoming); Oscar Gabriel, *Politische Orientierungen und Verhaltensweisen im vereinigten Deutschland*. Politisches System 3 (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, Hrsg.1997); Richard Gunther, *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation* (Johns Hopkins, 1995), *Politics, Society, and Democracy: The Case of Spain* (Westview, 1993), *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin American and Southern Europe* (Cambridge, 1992); 'Organized environmentalists: democracy as a key value?', *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-Profit Organisations*, (Vol. 9, No. 4 (Per Selle and Kristin Strømsnes,); *Schweiz, Österreich, Deutschland. Die politischen Systeme im Vergleich. Ein sozialwissenschaftliches Datenhandbuch*, Opladen: Leske und Budrich (Klaus Armingeon and Markus Freitag); *Democracy and Leadership. Report from the Democratic Audit of Sweden 1996*, Stockholm: SNS Förlag, 1997 (Anders Westholm with Michele Micheletti, Olof Petersson, and Jörgen Hermansson).

This group of scholars will all be involved in the analysis of the cross-national data, and in the production of the books and articles that come out of it. Some will want to take out their own national data for in-depth analysis, some may well take out data for similar countries (Scandinavia or Nordic nations, for example), but the research team will also make sure that the complete cross-national data set is analysed as a whole, and that every opportunity will be used to add aggregate country variables (federal-unitary country government, voting systems, neo-corporatist arrangements, GNP, etc) to the file. We expect the group to produce a wide variety of published work from this material, including journal articles, edited books, and authored volumes.

The Questionnaire

Several important points should be made about the proposed CID module:

- All the questions proposed are taken from the “Common Core Questionnaire” of the ESF Network.
- Virtually all the items in the questionnaire have been used in previous surveys, although there are a few new ones. In using existing items we have been acutely aware of the need to balance continuity against originality, and the need to ask new questions in order to keep up with developments in theory.
- The items we propose are those we assume are not already in the core module (socio-demographic questions and substantive items about things such as political efficacy, the left-right scale, political interest, voting, party ID, etc.).
- The CID questionnaire has already been pilot-tested and used in a small number but a wide variety of countries (Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, Russia, and Portugal). To this extent, need for further pilot-testing is very substantially reduced.
- We estimate that the CID module will take an average of 20 minutes to complete.
- The questions are numbered according to their position in the complete CID core questionnaire – i.e. with items we believe will be duplicated in the ESS core module deleted.
- The Network can offer the questionnaire translated into German, Russian, French, Portuguese, Italian, Danish, and Spanish.
- If accepted, there would have to be further discussions about the length and composition of the CID module. This will provide no difficulties since the CID group can communicate rapidly and effectively through its e-mail listing.

Further Information about the CID Network is available from:

<http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/cid/>