

Participation and Conflicting Interests: Toward a Taxonomy of Political Participation
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This paper looks at some of the ways in which political participation and the principle of equal advancement and consideration of interests might come into conflict. The principle of equal advancement and consideration of interests is considered by some, most notably Thomas Christiano, to be the guiding principle and the strongest normative justification for liberal democracy. Political participation is usually understood to be a constitutive element of this principle; however there might be times when the two could come into conflict. This paper argues that while political participation has a critical value in a liberal democracy and should be guaranteed and promoted, it should yield when it comes into conflict with the equal advancement and consideration of interests. Also, this paper considers the definition of political participation itself. An activity should be considered a form of active political participation if it is a genuine attempt to assist in advancing the interests of a group or individual in the public sphere. From this, a taxonomy of various forms of political participation is created, where forms of active political participation are classified as expressive, policy, and supportive forms of political participation. This paper argues that this taxonomy is an improvement over previous taxonomies of political participation, most notably the one provided by Inglehart and Barnes, and allows us to make a better assessment of the state of civic engagement in liberal democracies today.

Several political theorists have offered up different justifications for liberal democracy. In *The Rule of The Many*, Thomas Christiano offers an attractive justification. What justifies democracy for Christiano is its “principle of equal consideration of interests. (...) Citizens’ interests are equally worthy of being taken into account, and political equality is the most important way to embody equal consideration of interests in a political society” (1996: 97). For Christiano, part of the human condition is to advance interests. Individuals have desires and motives that they want to fulfill, and have opinions on certain issues that they believe will do them good or make them happy if they are fulfilled in the public sphere. Christiano argues that democracy is the only form of government that ideally does not give special privilege to the interests of a specific group or individual, but rather considers them equally when political decisions are under taken. This principle is certainly behind voting, but is also behind deliberation as well.

This interest-based justification for democracy places high demands on a liberal democracy. It demands that democratic institutions guarantee a space where everyone can advance their interests freely. It also means that individual and group interests must be accepted or dismissed on the merits of the interest alone, and not on the basis of who is advancing the interest. Privilege should not be given to those who have access to more resources, financial or otherwise. Moreover the interests of an individual should not be dismissed because of their particularities or memberships with groups. Also, civil liberties must be guaranteed so that individual have free space to express their interests, such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom to access other sources of information that do not come from the government, which are three of Robert Dahl’s seven conditions for polyarchy (1982: 6).

As we can readily imagine, the right to political participation on both the individual and collective level is a constitutive part of this interest-based justification. This is especially the case when we consider democratic procedures. This paper considers instances when political participation comes into conflict with the principle of the equal advancement and consideration of interests. In situations where the principle of the equal advancement and consideration of interests comes into conflict with political participation, the latter should be limited so as to give minority interests an effective voice. An individual or group is understood to have an effective voice if two conditions exist. First, the individual or group feel that they can enter the debate in the public sphere and contradict the opinions and statements of those already participating in the debate. Secondly, the appropriate means of political participation exists and does not have a high entry barrier attached to it. The first condition borrows from Helena Catt's (1999) standard of empowerment. "The acid test for equality would be to ask a member at random if, upon hearing a report at a meeting that 'x' has happened, they know enough about the issue to feel comfortable asking a question, were able to interrupt and put the question and felt comfortable in expressing disagreement with what had happened, regardless of who had made the initial report" (Catt 1999: 50).

This also paper discusses various forms of active political participation, and will place them into three categories; supportive forms, expressive forms, and policy forms. An action should be considered political participation if it is a genuine attempt to assist in advancing the interests of a group or individual. Delineating between different types of political participation has two purposes. Firstly, not all forms of political participation are aimed towards achieving the same thing. Secondly, this taxonomy aims to be a comprehensive taxonomy of forms of political participation includes both institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of participation that should be encouraged, with the aim of at least giving others exposure to the democratic process. This provides a more useful taxonomy than separating between "traditional" and "non-traditional" forms of political participation.

Advancement of Interests: Minorities and Organization

Ian Shapiro (1999) argued that that democracy is as much about opposition as it is about government. In a similar Robert Dahl argued that polyarchy, what he called liberal democracy, is as much about minorities as it is about the majority. "The real world issue has not turned out to be whether a majority, much less 'the' majority, will act in a tyrannical way through democratic procedures to impose its will on a (or the) minority. Instead, the more relevant question is the extent to which various minorities in a society will frustrate the ambitions of one another with passive acquiescence or indifference of a majority of adults as voters. (Dahl 1956: 133; Held 1996: 206). Justifying liberal democracy as the equal advancement and consideration of interests is compatible with Dahl's understanding of polyarchy as government by minorities.

This section will look at some issues and dilemmas that arise out of ensuring that all constitutionally viable interests are advanced and considered equally in the public sphere. All interests should be afforded this privilege, which means that not all individuals will be able to participate. This is because it is simply impossible for all individuals to participate at the same time, even assuming that they had the time and the interest to do so. And if everyone did participate at the same time, then not every interest will get an equal opportunity to be heard.

Let me provide an illustration to highlight my case.¹ Suppose we have a town hall meeting where one hundred people turn up to debate garbage disposal policy. Suppose further

¹ I am grateful to Keith Dowding for giving me this example.

that that ninety-nine of these people support garbage incineration and one person supports recycling. Intuitively we might think that a robust participatory meeting would allow for everyone to speak for one minute for example. When it comes time for the participants to speak, we would have ninety-nine minutes of time given to advance the option of incineration and one minute devoted to advancing recycling. The person who is supporting recycling could argue that he is not given equal time to convince others of his opinion, even though he has the same amount of time to speak as any other participant in the town hall. We could increase the amount of speaking time to two minutes. We would then have 198 minutes of time given to incineration and two minutes given to the recycling advocate. We can easily see that the more time allotted to each participant would entail proportionally less time given to the recycling advocate vis-à-vis the incineration group, which works to frustrate the ability of the recycling advocate to advance his interest.

This might seem paradoxical, but it illustrates that there can at times be a tension between the rights of individuals to participate and the necessity to have these interests heard in the public sphere. On one level, it is impossible to have everyone exercising their rights of free speech at the same place and at the same time², and it is not necessary for all advocates of an interest to speak in order to effectively advance any given interest. The majority has a clear preference for incinerating garbage. A vote will readily show this. But we could not say that all interests were advanced or considered fairly. After all, how could the recycling advocate have a reasonable chance of convincing others of his preference if he has two minutes to speak and his opponents have 198 minutes?

If we accept that liberal democracy should allow for the equal consideration of interests, then it follows that a situation that allows advocates of one interest such a disproportionate opportunity to advance their claim over another interest is undemocratic. Interestingly enough, this inequality emerges out of extending the same amount of speaking time to each participant. However the meeting failed to ensure that all interests were advanced and considered fairly and that the method of debate shows a clear bias towards the majority. While the vote might be democratic, the process was not.

Further to the point, remembering Dahl's point about democracy being as much about minorities as it is about the majority, this town hall meeting failed to protect the right for the minority to effectively advance their interest. A more democratic option, if this group wanted to take the protection and promotion of minority interests seriously, would be to have an equal amount of time for both the recycling advocate and the proponents of incineration to speak, say for about thirty minutes³. This would give both sides an equal opportunity to convince the people at the meeting of their views. This situation we can say that all interests were advanced and considered fairly.

This means two things. Firstly, while political participation is important, it is not necessarily the most important element in a liberal democracy. Mass political participation could be used in anti-democratic ways. In this example, it worked to shut out minority interests. As

² See Keith Dowding and Martin van Hees (2003). "The Construction of Rights", *American Political Science Review*. 92:7. 281-293.

³ This would work well if there are only two sides debating. In any given debate there could well be three or more sides. In that case, procedural rules would have to be used that might allow side A to speak, then side B, then side C, and alternating between the three. This opens a debate of how we can fairly determine how many sides there are to a debate. Dryzek and Niemayer (2006) has argued that that one possibility for deliberation is to aim to reach a metaconsensus about the options that are available. This allows for deliberation to narrow the options down to two for the public to then consider in a vote.

stated earlier, the equal advancement and consideration of interests is what justifies democracy, and political participation is a constitutive part of this. This means that a liberal democracy should guarantee and promote the latter and incorporate it into the former. But more simply, the former should take priority over the latter, and if political participation somehow works to frustrate equal advancement and consideration of interests, as it does in the example above, then the right to political participation should yield.

Secondly, the right to engage in various forms of political participation should be considered an important right in liberal democracy, and more participation is generally preferred than less. However, this does not mean that it is feasible to have everyone in a society participating in politics. It is incumbent for a government to protect, promote, and encourage citizen participation. It can do so by creating institutional reforms to allow for more participation, or work to equip citizens with the necessary skills to participate, or further still to create a culture of empowerment so that citizens feel that they can participate effectively in the public sphere. But that is as far as governments can go. It cannot force citizens to participate. What would contribute to a more robust democracy is to have a social culture that is friendlier to democratic processes, and increased political participation is a key element of this (Barber 1984).

Promoting more citizen participation also means guaranteeing citizens' right to not participate. Non-participants or free riders have always posed a problem for participatory democrats because they link democratic politics either with positive freedom along the lines of Rousseau (Rousseau 1754/1987; 1762/1987; Barber 1984: 179), or describe it as a higher pleasure along the lines of John Stuart Mill (Mill 1863/1993; Pateman 1970). Non-participants are either seen as not free or following some baser pleasure. However this view makes no attempt to understand the various reasons for non-participation. Look at attending a town hall. Non-participants could choose not to participate for different reasons. Some of these reasons pose problems and others do not. One person finds politics so boring that she would rather stay at home and watch television. Another, a student let us say, has to stay home to finish a term paper and does not have the time to go, although would have gone had he had the time. Others may not attend because they feel disempowered and think that their views will not be taken seriously. Only this last option should be a concern for those interested in promoting political participation. While political participation would increase if political participation is taken seriously and encouraged, we should accept that despite best efforts we will have some non-participants because they would rather devote their time to other interests. These people do not pose a problem, so long as they are not resentful against liberal democracy itself.

The equal advancement and consideration of interests means ensuring that all minority groups have an equal opportunity to advance their claims in the public sphere effectively. There are times when some groups do not have an adequate opportunity to make their voices heard, and as a result the public and elected representatives will have a skewed view of public opinion (Ackerman and Fishkin 2002). Ackerman and Fishkin argue that this is why liberal democracies should adopt deliberative polls in the hope that they reveal some interests and viewpoints that may not be expressed through more conventional means of political participation. This in turn will allow for elected representatives to have a fuller picture of public opinion.

Three Forms of Political Participation

I would now like to turn to the ninety-nine people in the town hall and discuss the different methods of political participation. An action should be considered an act of political participation if it is a genuine attempt to assist in advancing the interests of a group or individual,

even though the participant may not be engaging others in debate. Recall that ninety-nine people support incineration in a town hall, and each of these people is given two minutes to speak. I have argued about the problems this rule has for fair minority interest advancement, but let us say these rules remain in place. Now as we can imagine, some of the reasons supporting incineration might be repeated and some people decide not to speak because they do not want to repeat any of the arguments. Suppose further that one person, after hearing someone eloquently defend the virtues of incineration, decides not to speak because he felt that the person before him made the case so well that his participation was not necessary. Are they participating or not?

There are two points to be stressed. Firstly, while these people may not be actively participating in the town hall meeting, they are at least passively engaged in the discussion. They have an interest in seeing incineration become town policy, but think that others can advance the cause more effectively and leave it to them. This could potentially be a problem, as it could be understood that those who feel incapable of participating do not pose a problem to the health of a liberal democracy. But there is a large difference between the non-participant described above and the person who feels incapable of participating. The first opts out because of choice, while the second feels that he has no choice in participating. Catt's standard fits in well here. The first participant meets this standard. Even though he feels that someone else is doing a good job of advancing his interest, he could well judge later that the more eloquent speaker is making errors and decides to intervene. The second one does not because he feels incapable of participating, either because he feels that his opinions will not be taken seriously, or that he does not know enough about the issue, or cannot communicate effectively with others.

Secondly, there is no entry barrier preventing anyone from participating in this situation. So long as all participants meet Catt's standard, that is to say, that they feel comfortable in jumping into the fray and contradicting anyone's opinions, then there is no concern. While not everyone is participating in the discussion, anyone can participate if they wish. In essence, this should be a minimum standard that liberal democracies should aim at. This would allow for a fully open liberal democracy, and one that is more amenable to political participation than the status quo in much of the Anglo-American world.

I return to the non-speakers in the town meeting. They have chosen not to actively participate in the debate, but remain actively engaged in the discussion. To state the obvious, it is clear that a population with an engaged citizenry will yield a higher participation rate than a less engaged citizenry. While these citizens are not actively participating, they did nonetheless come to the town hall meeting, gathered information about the debate in the process, and listened to all the participants. This is participating, but different from active participation which advances or helps advance interests in the public sphere. Activities that fall into the category of passive participation are 1) gathering information via newspapers, television, radio, and the Internet, 2) joining and/or paying membership fees for NGOs and political parties, 3) attending political meetings and discussions, and 4) listening to the proceedings. Some might call these forms of participation cheap (Jordan and Maloney 1998), but they play a valuable role in a liberal democracy in two ways. Firstly, passive forms of political participation provide the groundwork for active participation. Without them, active participation is impossible, or at best, highly ineffective. To state the obvious, engaged citizens or passive participants – we can use these terms interchangeably – are more likely to actively participate than apathetic citizens. Secondly, even those citizens who are only slightly engaged in the process – let us say they only have a concern in garbage incineration follow the debate in the media – are much more likely not to feel resentful against democratic processes and institutions, which in turn would

lead to a healthier liberal democracy while at the same time working to promote meaningful citizen participation.

However, these non-speakers in the town meeting might still feel that they have something to contribute to the decision-making process. Let us assume that in addition to the town hall meeting, there will be a referendum in the town a week later. And let us also assume that the recycling advocate gave a stirring speech that caused fifty people to stand up and give a standing ovation in his two minutes of speaking time. This left the incineration supporters concerned that their large support would drop, and that the incineration option would not win in the referendum.

Later the non-speakers and speakers meet – let us say that there are twenty of them in total - after the town hall to discuss the results of the meeting. They all agree that the strong performance of the recycling advocate greatly eroded their support. They decide that they should canvass door-to-door and hand out flyers and pamphlets to try and convince others of their views. The group agrees that the speakers in the town hall should go door to door and talk to the undecided, but they identify a lot of supportive work that needs to be done in order to get this one-week campaign off the ground. For instance, the speakers need help in determining which houses to visit. In terms of the print campaign, people are needed to print out, photocopy, and distribute the flyers to other townspeople, as well as post them around the town. The non-participants in the meeting offer to provide this role. Are they participating, even though they are directly engaging in a discussion with anybody?

The answer should be yes, even though they participate in a different way than the town hall speakers. These supportive and administrative forms of political participation may not entail going into the public sphere, but they place a necessary role in advancing interests. Without organisation, many interests will have no chance of becoming public policy. As interests are complex and require complex methods of expression, the advancement of interests in the public sphere will often require the pooling of persons with a wide range of skills in order to perform various activities so as to convince others that an interest is worthwhile. Such activities might be providing volunteer work to a political party or NGO, canvassing, answering phones distributing flyers or even answering phones, and agreeing to have campaign signs placed on one's lawn.

However, this statement comes as a double-edged sword. Pooling the necessary resources to effectively advance an interest will require a considerable amount of financial resources. Often several interest groups will not have adequate financial resources to organize and campaign effectively in the public sphere. This has often been the case in referenda in California (Hadwiger 1992: 540, cf. Magleby 1984: 187; Cronin 1989; Lee 1981; Shockley 1980; Zisk 1987). This of course gives an unfair advantage to more privileged groups that have more financial resources at their disposal, which makes it easier for them to build a larger organisation, and thus build more political resources to advance their interest. However, more money does not always translate into an effective political campaign. The Yes side in the 1990 Charlottetown Accord referendum was a good example of that. Nonetheless, we can see how citizens' initiatives and referenda could help entrench further the gaps between the groups and/or individuals that have vast financial resources at their disposal and those that do not. Sabato *et al.* (2001: 187) argues that well-funded interest groups would dominate participatory democratic measures such as referenda and citizens' initiatives.

This runs against the principle of the equal advancement and consideration of interests. A consequence of this principle is that interests should be considered strictly on their merits. As we saw with the recycling advocate, there are ways in which political participation could run

counter to this principle, and the equal consideration and advancement of interests should serve as a trump against it. Here we have another example where political participation can be at odds with this principle. In the previous case the principle was upheld by aiming to guarantee equal time to all interests as much as possible. The institution of strict campaign finance legislation could be employed here. There is a consensus that campaign finance reform is a necessary measure to help curb elite control of the public agenda, at least in the United States and Canada. Goidel and Gross (1996) argue that strict campaign finance would have levelled the playing field considerably in the 1988, 1990, and 1994 Congressional elections in the United States between challengers and incumbents, making it easier for outsiders to the political process to challenge incumbents. Several academics favour campaign finance reform and limiting political expenditures as means of promoting equality and limiting influence of the more rich and powerful (Adamany and Agree 1975; Raskin and Bonifaz 1993; Foley 1994; Wertheimer and Manes 1994; Sunstein 1994; Fiss 1996; Hasen 1996, 1999; Neuborne 1999a, 1999b cf. Grant and Rudolph 2003: 453). There are opponents of expenditure limits who argue that campaign finance reform would work to limit free speech (Smith 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001; McConnell 2001, cf. Grant and Rudolph 2003: 453). However the right of political participation becomes a problem when an individual or group is participating at the expense of others' ability to participate. In this sense, limiting some group's right to speak so to give others an opportunity to do the same is legitimate in order to protect minority rights. Campaign finance reform is certainly in this spirit. Limiting political expenditures could help take away some of the problems brought about by massive financial inequalities between some groups wishing to campaign. Nonetheless, it is an issue that citizens and elected representatives alike have to constantly vigilant about.

This aside, the main point here is that any political activity, provided that it is legal⁴, that helps advance an interest should be considered a viable form of active political participation. These forms are distinct from passive forms of participation that help provide a basis for active political participation. This leaves us with a myriad of types of political activity. It would be useful to come up with categories of political participation to help classify different types of political participation. Some forms of activities play a supportive and/or administrative role in advancing interests. These tasks may often seem to be mundane and are similar to other administrative functions performed for other non-political groups, such as answering phones, taking messages, typing letters, etc., as well as the performing some IT jobs such as designing web pages. However only the administrative work that directly assists in advancing interests should be considered as political participation. For example, while a secretary working for a Labour Party candidate who types a letter to be sent out to the constituents is participating politically, the IT person who troubleshoots the candidate's PC is not. This clerical and administrative work, along with other activities such as putting up a campaign sign on one's lawn, and distributing and putting up flyers should be seen as supportive forms of political participation.

Other forms of political participation, labelled here as expressive forms of political participation, deal with engaging the public to advance their interests. The purpose of these forms of political participation is twofold. Firstly, the individual simply wishes to express her views in the public sphere, perhaps without necessarily wishing to convince others of their opinions. Secondly, the individual might wish to engage in dialogue and/or debate with others to convince others of their views. Forms of political participation that fall under this category are participating in deliberative polls, citizens' assemblies, and other deliberative fora, They also

⁴ It should be obvious that the courts have a critical role in determining which activities are legal and constitutional, as well as which interests are constitutionally "out of bounds", leaving the legislators and the public to decide which interests should be followed. In this sense, the courts can help narrow the range of options using the constitution as a guide. Shapiro, *Democracy's Place*, p. 257-8. See also Robert A. Burt (1992), *The Constitution in Conflict*, p. 29.

include writing letters to newspapers, blogging, gathering petitions, and directly campaigning for political parties or NGOs.

There has been a lot of literature within deliberative democratic circles about the effects on individual preferences when they are disclosed in public. Dryzek and List come up with four ways in which deliberation helps to alter an individual's preferences. They are;

“(inf) confront people with new facts, new information or new perspectives on a given issue, as well as corroborate or falsify previously believed facts, information or perspectives; (arg) draw people's attention to new arguments about the interdependence of issues, confirm or refute the internal consistency of such arguments, make explicit previously hidden premises and assumptions, and clarify whether controversies are about facts, methods and means, or values and ends; (ref) induce people to reflect on their preferences, in the knowledge that these preferences have to be justified to others; (soc) create a situation of social interaction where people talk and listen to each other, enabling each person to recognize their interrelation with a social group” (Dryzek and List 2003: 9).

Briefly, deliberative democrats embrace what Chambers (2004: 390) calls the publicity principle. In essence, revealing one's preferences and the reasons for having these preferences and discussing them with others has a positive effect on any decision-making process, including institutionalised democratic ones (see Cohen 1997: 76-77; Benhabib 1996: 72; Gutmann and Thompson 1996: 100-101; Elster 1996: 12; Goodin 1992: 124-146; cf. Chambers 2004: 390). Indeed, part of James Fishkin and Bruce Ackerman's Deliberation Day project is to show how public reasoning “can make a difference in how people think about politics and how they vote” (2004: 75), which in turn forces politicians and election strategists to seek out what voter's refined preferences are. As they explain; “Rather than slavishly following the numbers [of polling], incumbents will be driven by electoral self-interest to exercise their own political judgment in ways that seem persuasive to their more informed constituents on [Deliberation Day]” (Ibid.: 79, parentheses mine). A key claim of deliberative democrats is that the publicity of interests and their supportive reasons have a positive effect in debate. The publicity of reasons helps all individuals consider and re-consider their own opinions, and alter them if they cannot stand up to public scrutiny. Also, more publicity allows for more accountability and allows for the exposure of corruption.

If one accepts that more publicity has a positive effect on the political process, then these forms of political participation should be promoted more among the citizenry. The public sphere should be considered an arena of social criticism and debate, which provides a framework where participants can better understand their opinions as well as the interests of others, and develop their communicative and deliberative skills. This understanding of a public sphere can be traced back to Kant, Mill, Dewey, and Habermas. In this understanding of democratic politics, the purpose of the public sphere is to generate public debate and social criticism, encourage discussion among citizens and provide the support by which citizens improve their capacity for public debate.

Expressive forms of political participation are a key method in accomplishing these tasks. These forms can improve the quality of public debate and help citizens develop their communicative and deliberative skills. These are some positive effects of making more opinions and their supportive reasons public. There is some merit in the argument made by deliberative democrats that the public sphere should provide “the basis for critical reasoning free of social and political pressures, and generate a public opinion embodied moral authority and that could serve as a check on political decision-making” (Zittel 2007: 14, cf. Habermas 1992, 1998: 383). Habermas argues both in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and *Between Facts and Norms* that in the transition from an industrial to an information society individuals were forced to specialize into various jobs or functions. And in this specialization, a vast number of individuals did not learn the necessary skills to participate effectively in public discussion.

Instead, they learned whatever skills were necessary to perform their task, which the individual was forced to choose due to economic constraints (Habermas 1989; Habermas 1996: 325, Brookfield 2005: 1136). Because of this specialized training, deliberative and communicative skills are often left undeveloped at an early age and remain so throughout adulthood.

I turn now to discuss the institutionalization and proliferation of expressive forms of political participation. In the case of deliberative fora, institutionalization remains experimental. Ackerman and Fishkin say that their Deliberation Day proposal remains a distant future. They say that the Iowa caucuses are the closest things in American politics to deliberative polls (Ackerman and Fishkin: Appendix B). Very few deliberative fora exist. The exceptions would be town halls in the United States and Royal Commissions in Canada (town halls have direct policy influence, royal commissions do not). Their institutionalization would give voice to more diverse opinions and can refine opinions and their supportive arguments, thus having a salutary effect on the democratic process. They also can help “blow off steam” and give people the opportunity to convince others of their views, but more importantly, it is another manner by which more minority interests can be heard, and is consistent with liberal democracy’s justification of allowing for the equal advancement and consideration of interests.

The rest of the expressive forms of political participation are guaranteed as political rights in most liberal democracies. All liberal democracies allow citizens the freedom to write to newspapers and post blogs on the Internet. They also guarantee the right to political association, which gives citizens the opportunity to canvass for political parties and NGOs, as well as gather petitions. This is stating the obvious, but the point here is that we are not talking about the problem of creating legal opportunities or institutionalization with these forms of political participation. The question here is one of frequency and quality. In some cases, the general trend is mixed. Activity with political parties, like voting, has dropped off dramatically (Scarrow 2000). However, activity with NGOs, along with civic activism, is on the rise (Jennings & van Deth 1990; Klingemann & Fuchs 1995). As Dalton (2000) explains; “participation levels and the various methods of political action are generally expanding in most advanced industrial societies—even when participation in political parties and electoral politics is decreasing” (929). While traditional expressive forms of political participation are on the decrease, unconventional forms of political participation are becoming more popular. As Norris (2000) explains; “political activism has been reinvented in recent decades by a diversification of the *agencies* (the collection organisations structuring political activity), the *repertoires* (the actions commonly used for political expression), and the *targets* (the political actors that participants seek to influence). The surge of protest politics, new social movements, and internet activism exemplifies these changes” (216).

Another category of political participation, which I call policy forms of political participation, involves direct engagement with elected representatives with the aim of changing public policy or the government itself. Examples of policy forms are voting, lobbying, participating in town halls as in the United States, participating in direct democracy initiatives such as the Citizen’s Assembly for Elected Reform in British Columbia and Ontario, petitions, referenda, recall, and public initiative. The difference between expressive forms of political participation and policy forms is that the latter aims to directly engage elected representatives or democratic institutions in order to create a legislative or policy change. Expressive forms may not aim to necessarily engage elected representatives. There is often an overlap between policy forms and expressive forms of political participation, but they form distinct forms because they entail distinct steps in citizen-driven policy formation. Elected representatives are more likely to be swayed by a large group of people than one individual. Thus it is important for an individual to convince others of her interest first to then try to convince elected representatives that it

should become law. It seems that both forms of political participation are needed if the citizenry is going to have a larger impact on policy formation than they do now.

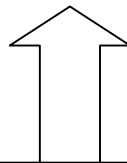
<p style="text-align: center;">EXPRESSIVE FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION</p> <p>deal with engaging the public to publicise interests and/or convince others of their interests.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deliberative polls, • writing letters to newspapers, • blogging, • gathering petitions, • and directly canvassing for political parties or NGOs • testifying at Royal Commissions (Canada, United Kingdom). • participating in debates 	<p style="text-align: center;">POLICY FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION</p> <p>deal with engaging elected representatives so that interest become policy or law.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • directly lobbying elected representatives, • participating in town halls (United States), • participating in direct democracy initiatives such as the Citizen’s Assembly (Canada), • referenda, recall, and citizens’ initiative. • voting and running for elected office
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Figure 1: Taxonomy Of Different Forms of Political Participation

ACTIVE FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

SUPPORTIVE FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

- Includes various types of administrative/clerical work done to directly aid those who engage the public in advancing interests.
- Also includes activities such as making, printing, distributing, and posting of flyers and campaign signs.



PASSIVE FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

- Includes gathering information from various sources such as newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet.
- Also includes attending political meetings and discussions and listening to the proceedings.
- Also includes being a member of an NGO or political party

The amount of literature written on the successes and drawbacks of policy forms of political participation is enormous, and for the sake of space I will not touch upon them in depth here. One problem that I outlined earlier is that citizens' initiative and referendum could be controlled by the same special-interest groups that were lobbying elected representatives without any tough campaign finance laws (Laschel, Hagen, and Rochlin 1995: 774), which leads to several minority interests not being heard. However Smith (2002: 901) argues that these who vote in referenda and citizen initiatives gain in civic abilities, while non-voters remain at the same skill level. He argues that this learning does not occur immediately in one election or vote, but over the course of several votes (Ibid: 894). Smith suggests that more practice and exposure one receives in even voting in referenda improves civic knowledge and develops communicative and deliberative skills. This can empower some minority groups so long as they participate in the process. While these forms of political participation might have direct legislative effect, it may not always do well in ensuring that minorities can effectively advance their interests and have them considered fairly. I will deal with this issue more fully when I discuss these forms of political participation as crafts with educative qualities.

This categorization, summarised in Figure 1, is an improvement over the traditional/non-traditional (or conventional/non-conventional) participation dichotomy since it separates various forms of political participation along the lines of aims. While I acknowledge that there has been this shift towards civic activism, we cannot say that this means that there should be no concern about the rate of public participation. Some scholars (Barnes *et al.* 1979; Henn, Feinstein, and Wring 2002: 186; Inglehart and Catterberg 2002: 302) argue that this increase in non-conventional political participation indicates that there is no problem with the rates of political participation, because increases in non-traditional forms of political participation have offset the decreases in traditional forms of political participation. However, if we look at some of the findings of Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*, we have no reason to be encouraged. Putnam found that while people who were aged 30-59 and those aged 59 and above participated more in protest demonstrations than they did twenty years ago, he also found that the rate of participation of individuals under the age of 30 dropped by about 7% (Putnam 2004: 165, Figure 45). If this is the case, then this increase in participation is coming from senior citizens. This increase in participation is hardly sustainable. Once these older civic activists drop off, the younger generation will not replace them, if Putnam's findings are accurate.

There are a few reasons why the dichotomy between conventional and non-conventional forms of political participation is not a useful one. It is not entirely clear how these scholars use the term "conventional". They could be using it in a historical sense. However, voting and writing to elected representatives are not conventional in the historical sense. Forms of civic activism and civil disobedience such as protests and strikes have been occurring in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom for at least a century. Some minorities, most notably women, were engaging in forms of civic activism and civil disobedience long before they received the right to vote. In cases such as the suffragette movement and other similar women's rights movements, the *satyagraha* movement in India, and the civil rights movement in the United States, various groups and individuals used so-called non-conventional forms of political participation to lobby for the right to participate in conventional forms of participation. Several of these individuals were probably engaging in non-conventional forms of political participation long before they got the right to vote. In a historical sense, it would be wrong to say that various forms of civic activism and civil disobedience are non-conventional.

Inglehart and Barnes use the dichotomy of elite-controlled forms of political participation and elite-challenging forms of political participation. This dichotomy is more plausible than the dichotomy described above. But this dichotomy is also problematic. Elites do not generally control the voting process, and voting also can be used to challenge elites just as much as civic activism can. It seems counter-intuitive to see constituents writing their elected representatives to express their satisfaction. Rather they will write to express some form of discontent. The same can also be said for voting. While there are voters who vote to keep the incumbents in office, it also true that several voters use the vote as a form of protest against the incumbents. Often this kind of voting will cost the incumbents re-election or reduce their legislative strength to a minority. We can think of several elections in liberal democracies where the elite consensus was challenged either with the introduction of new parties or the unseating of a long-governing party. Thus so-called "elite-controlled" forms of political participation can also be used to challenge elite consensus.

Both elite-controlled and elite-challenging forms of political participation can often be used to achieve similar goals. Voters will vote either as a form of protest and use their vote against the status quo, or at times will vote to support it. While it is often the case that forms of civic activism are used to challenge the status quo, they can also be used to maintain it. Various abortion rights groups in the United States are a good example of this. The distinction offered

by Barnes and Inglehart is not useful because any given type of political participation can have different aims, and that the same type of political participation can be used to challenge elite control as well as reinforce it. Because of this, the conclusion that Inglehart makes about the purpose of political participation shifting to challenging elites from reinforcing elite consensus is on shaky ground. Simply because there is more civic activism than ever does not necessarily mean liberal democratic institutions are being challenged.

It would be more useful to look at the different aims that the forms of political participation hope to achieve, and categorise them that way. The taxonomy provided in Figure 1 does precisely that. This can be useful in empirical studies that look at rises and declines of political participation. The traditional/non-traditional dichotomy only focuses whether political participation is being used to challenge the traditional liberal democratic institutions or not. This certainly is something that should be examined, however it could also be potentially useful to understand why people participate in politics and what aims they hope to accomplish.

This categorisation does not distinguish between forms of participation that fall within the purview of the state and others that do not, but instead places all forms of political participation in one large group and looks at what it aims to achieve. For example, engaging in public demonstrations or a letter-writing campaign to MPs might both be considered expressive forms of political participation, even though the former does not try to engage the state directly while the other does. With this categorization we can observe which forms of political participation experience increases or decreases of participation, which might allow us to make empirical observations about how citizens as a whole feel about political participation and what it can achieve. Using this categorization and applying it to the drops and rises of political participation might give us a more accurate picture of the state of political participation in a given political entity, especially if we were to investigate the reasons why participation in each form is up or down. This allows for a more nuanced picture of political participation to arise. It is assuredly an improvement of the old and, to be blunt, well-exhausted way of assessing political participation and apathy, which was simply to look to decline in voter turnout, and perhaps the decline in other forms of political participation, and then make global assessments about the desirability or non-desirability of apathy.

The principle of equal advancement and consideration of interests is considered by some, most notably Thomas Christiano, to be the guiding principle and the strongest normative justification for liberal democracy. This paper examined various things about political participation. Firstly, it makes the case that political participation can come into conflict with the principle of the equal advancement and consideration of interests, and in instances such as these, the right to political participation should yield. For our purposes, political participation was defined as a genuine attempt to assist in advancing the interests of a group or individual in the public sphere. From there, various forms of political participation were delineated, and I have argued that there that there are three different forms of active political participation, which should be considered separate from passive forms of political participation. The three forms of active political participation are 1) expressive forms of political participation, which deal with engaging the public to publicise interests and/or convince others of their interests, 2) policy forms of political participation, which deal with engaging elected representatives so that interest become policy or law, and 3) supportive forms of political participation. This taxonomy is superior than the previous taxonomies of political participation which only talked about traditional and non-traditional forms of participation. I hope that the taxonomy presented here can provide a better understanding of the rise and fall of rates of political participation that what political scientists generally have dealt with in the past.

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