

# Political Participation and Dissatisfaction with Democracy: A Comparative Study of New and Stable Democracies

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## 1) Introduction

Political participation is a central concept in political science and an important political phenomenon. Recently, a lot of effort has been made to understand the worldwide erosion in political participation (Pippa 1999, Klingeman and Fuchs 1995). Many excellent quantitative researches have been devoted to understand the main causes of the erosion or surge of political participation (Conway 1991, Verba, Nie & Kim 1978). As a result, three famous thought schools have emerged to explain political participation. They are the social structure school, the political culture school and the institutional school. Respectively, these three schools take socio-economic background, political culture and institutional affiliation as their main determinant of political participation. In the past, empirical research has not only built solid foundation to support these three schools, but also has provided evidence to evaluate the relative explanatory power of these three schools. However, empirical evidences generated in the past are mostly from stable democracies or so-called industrial democracies (Almond and Verba 1963, Verba and Nie 1972, Jackman 1987). Only in the last decade, researchers started to study political participation in new democracies (Bahry and Silver 1990, Bratton 1999, Mishler and Rose 1995, Duchs 1993). Their results have provided good evidence to examine political participation in a few new democracies, but have not supplied any evidence to compare the relative explanatory power of the three schools mentioned above. Due to this, we do not know yet if the same conclusion inferred by these three schools will hold in new democracies such as in Taiwan or in Romania. To fill in this gap, our comparative research aims to further study the relative explanatory power of these three schools and the political participation in new democracies.

Recently, more and more quantitative studies have been conducted to examine the causes of satisfaction with democratic systems as one of the most important issues for democracy research (International Political Science Review 2001, Chu, Diamond and Doh 2001, Pippa 1999, Hans-Dieter and Fuchs 1995). Even it is widely recognized that dissatisfaction with democratic systems is the starting point of political participation (Klingeman and Fuchs 1995), “dissatisfaction with democratic systems” has not been included in most of the past studies of political participation except for a few like the study on dissatisfaction with economic reform and voting in Poland (Powers and Cox 1997).

In our opinion, there is a need to bridge these two branches of the mass politics research, namely the study of dissatisfaction with democracy and that of political participation. Our research is in responding to this need that we aim to bring “dissatisfaction with democratic process” into our political participation research framework. By doing so, it enables us to further examine various kinds of determinants of political participation and especially for us to understand if these relationships will be changed after controlling dissatisfaction as the source of political participation. By bringing in a study of dissatisfaction as a research to cover the starting point of political participation, we will make our political participation research a complete one. Especially, for any comparative study between stable democracies and new democracies, we

cannot afford to ignore the interaction between political participation and the dissatisfaction with democratic process, as it is what differentiates new democracies from stable democracies.

## **2) A Review of the Three Competing Theories of Political Participation and Dissatisfaction with Democratic Processes**

In the literature, three competing theories of political participation are prominent. They are socio-economical, political cultural and institutional schools.

Socio-economic school takes social economic background as the main factors to explain individuals' difference in political participation. They claim that higher income and better education create more active citizens (Nie, Powell and Prewitt 1969). In its simplest form, this approach is reduced to an "SES (socio economic status) model in which education, income and residential location – alone or in some combination – carry most of the explanatory power to study political participation (Conway 1991, Nagel 1987, Verba and Nie 1972)".

Rather differently, political culture school emphasizes the importance of political value and attitudes. They believe that political efficacy and political trust affect political participation more than other factors (Almond and Verba 1963, Brady, Verba and Scholzman 1995). Here, the most basic psychological orientation is individual's "interests in politics". In the past comparative research, interest in politics has been shown to be positively related to political participation, and importantly constitutes a foundation on which other political attitudes such as political efficacy and political trust are built (Bratton 1999, Duch 1993, Mishler and Rose 1995).

Institutional school brings organizational affiliation into the equation. Scholars in this school have focused on the ways in which macro institutions create incentives and sanctions for political participation (Jackman 1987). Previous studies have established that affiliation with voluntary association and party affiliation seem consistently to increase political participation (Almond and Verba 1963, Brady et al 1995, Bratton 1999). It has been claimed that institutional argument outperforms the cultural account of conventional political participation (Jackman and Miller 1995).

Based on past research on stable democracies, some conclusion has been made about the relative explanatory power of these three schools. That is, institutional school is the first, cultural is the second, and SES is the last. However, we suspect that this rule might not hold for new democracies.

## **3) The Data**

We are using the data from the CSES project located in <http://www.umich.edu/~nes/cses/cses.htm> . The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) is a collaborative program of cross-national research among election studies conducted in over fifty consolidated and emerging democracies. The dataset contains information collected from surveys made in 27 countries in 1996.

## **4) Research Design and Measurements**

Our research does not aim to evaluate these three schools in terms of their relative explanatory powers. Instead, we will examine their difference when these three approaches are applied to study political participation in new democracies and stable democracies. In other words, we

believe the explanatory power of these three schools is different when used in studying new democracies than in studying stable democracies.

At the same time, we will bring “dissatisfaction with democratic systems” into our study. The interaction between dissatisfaction with political systems and voting behavior is one of the most important factors that differentiate new democracies from stable democracies. Therefore, we are interested in whether the explanatory power of these three schools will change after we control the dissatisfaction with democratic systems. Also, we are interested in whether a combination of the dissatisfaction factor into the three approaches will provide a better explanation than that provided by the three schools alone.

To sum up, our main hypothesis is that the three sets of determinants of political participation will behave differently in new democracies than in stable democracies. To obtain a complete picture, we study both the voting behavior and contacts with politicians as forms of political participation.

There are four groups of variables for our study. Political participation is our dependent variable. To measure it, for this research, we have chosen two indicators for political participation: vote and contacts with politicians. These are the two most important ones of the four main dimensions of political participation (Verba and Nie 1972).

Our set of SES variables includes education, income and urban residence. For political culture, we have created a new alienation scale that is a combination of four measurements on individuals’ belief in (1) who is in power can make a difference, (2) politicians know what people think, (3) political parties are necessary, (4) political parties care what people think. Whether or not close to a political party is used to measure political institutional affiliation.

To be as inclusive as we can, our research has also included performance evaluation and political knowledge measurements. Besides the dissatisfaction index, an evaluation measure on economic improvement has also been included into our research. Political knowledge and performance evaluation are very important that they become the controlling variables in our study.

Alienation is our most important political value variable. Therefore, we will conduct our own factor analysis and use the results to construct our own alienation measurement.

To sum, the following is a list of all our variables and their relevant measurements:

- a) Political Participation – Vote (V115), ContactPolitician (V52)
- b) Performance evaluation of democratic systems – Dissatisfaction (V1), EcoNoImprove (V48)
- c) Political Culture – Alienation Scale
- d) Institutional Affiliation – NoCloseParty (V3)
- e) Social/economic Variables –Education (V90), Income (V99), Urban (V109)
- f) Political Knowledge – PolKnowledge (V28)
- g) Stable democracies: Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Netherland, Norway, USA, England vs. New Democracies: Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Hungary and Taiwan

[For more details, please see also table III and table IV in Appendix]

As listed above, our new democracies include four post-communist states in East Europe and Taiwan. In consideration of the big difference between these East European post-communist states and Taiwan as an Asian new democracy, we analyze Taiwan and Post Communist states separately.

## 5) Results and discussion

As a first step of our analysis, we conducted a preliminary examination of the interaction between voting and dissatisfaction in new democracies and stable democracies. In new democracies, 21.33% of all the respondents were dissatisfied AND did not vote. In stable democracies, only 9.54% does so. This confirms our hypothesis that the interaction between dissatisfaction with political systems and voting behavior is indeed one of the most important factors differentiating new democracies from stable democracies. In other words, the inclusion of dissatisfaction with democratic processes in our study is necessary to obtain a complete understanding of the determinants of political participation.

Table I: Impacts on VOTE

|                 | Stable   | Post Communist | Taiwan    |
|-----------------|----------|----------------|-----------|
| Income          | -0.013   | -0.063*        | -0.102**  |
| Education       | 0.061*   | 0.207*         | -0.144**  |
| UrbanRes        | 0.190*   | -0.066**       | 0.076     |
| Alienation      | -0.126*  | -0.137*        | 0.004     |
| PolKnowledge    | 0.061*   | 0.468          | -0.111    |
| NoCloseParty    | -0.278*  | -0.149*        | -0.098*** |
| EcoNoImprove    | 0.021    | 0.048**        | -0.050    |
| Dissatisfaction | 0.036*** | -0.054*        | 0.055     |

Table II: Impacts on Contacts with Politicians

|                 | Stable   | Post Communist | Taiwan  |
|-----------------|----------|----------------|---------|
| Income          | -0.047   | 0.015          | 0.002   |
| Education       | 0.302*   | 0.164*         | 0.016   |
| UrbanRes        | -0.125** | 0.056*         | -0.041  |
| Alienation      | -0.069*  | -0.091*        | -0.097* |
| PolKnowledge    | 0.138**  | -0.076*        | 0.049   |
| NoCloseParty    | -0.253*  | -0.129*        | -0.198* |
| EcoNoImprove    | -0.007   | 0.001          | -0.074  |
| Dissatisfaction | -0.094*  | 0.006          | 0.036   |

We conducted two logistic regression analyses of our dataset. The first takes VOTE as our dependent variable and have Income, Education, UrbanRes, Alienation, PolKnowledge, NoCloseParty, EcoNoImprove, and Dissatisfaction as our independent variables. Then, we take Contacts with Politician as our dependent variable and have the same independent variables for our second logistic regression model. The results are presented in table I and table II. Coefficients in these tables represent the probability change on dependent variables as caused by one unit change of independent variable. For example, as individual's education increases by one unit like a change from no education to incomplete primary, the chance to vote of this individual will be increased by 6.1%. In summary, our logistic regression has produced the following results:

- (a) Dissatisfaction has significant positive effects on voting behavior in stable democracies and post communist states. However, its effect in stable democracies is positive while the effect is negative in post communist states.

Furthermore, dissatisfaction has negative effects on contacts with politicians in stable democracies, but has no significant effects on contacts with politicians in new democracies including both post communist states and Taiwan.

- (b) Education has significant positive effects on both voting behavior and contacts with politicians in both stable democracies and post communist states. However, in Taiwan, education has significant negative effects on voting behavior and has no significant effects on contacts with politicians.
- (c) Income has significant negative effects on voting behavior only in new democracies, not in stable democracies and not on political contacts at all states.
- (d) Urban residence has significant effects on both voting behavior and contacts with politicians in both stable democracies and post-communist states. However, the effects of urban residence on political participation are not significant in Taiwan.

It is interesting that directions of the effects of urban residence are in opposite direction in post communist states than that in stable democracies. In addition, the directions of its effects on voting are in opposite direction of that on contacts with politicians in both stable and new democracies.

- (e) Alienation has significant negative effects on both voting behavior and contacts with politicians in both stable democracies and post communist states. However, in Taiwan, it has only significant effects on contacts with politicians, while it has no significant effects on voting.
- (f) NoCloseParty is the only variable that has consistent significant negative effects in all our equations. That is, not close to any political party will decrease all kinds of political participation in all the states that we are studying.
- (g) EcoNoImprove has significant effects only on voting behavior and only in post communist states.
- (h) Political knowledge, as measured by number of candidates correctly names, has significant positive effects on political participation including both voting and contacting politicians in stable democracies. But, it has negative effects on contacts with politicians and no significant effects on voting in post communist states.

The above results demonstrate great differences between stable democracies and new democracies about how various sets of factors account for the variations of political participation. In stable democracies, our results are quite consistent with conventional theories of political participation: (1) Education increases political participation in all forms. Urbanization increases voting, but decreases contacts with politicians. (2) Alienation produces a low political participation in all forms. (3) Political knowledge increases political participation including both voting and contacts with politicians. (4) Institutional affiliation as closeness to political parties increases political participation greatly. (5) Dissatisfaction increases voting, but decreases contacts with politicians. (6) Economic performance of a government has no effects on political participation.

But in post-communist states, our results exhibit a very different pattern than that described by conventional political participation theories: (1) Urbanization increases contacts with politicians, but decreases voting. (2) Dissatisfaction decreases voting. (3) Political knowledge decreases contacts with politicians, but has no effects on voting. (4) Economic performance of a government has very significant effects on voting. However, the effects of education, political alienation and political affiliation in post communist states are similar to that in stable democracies.

In Taiwan, a rather small society where people interact with each other a lot, the determinants of political participation exhibit even more different effects than in stable democracies. Institutional political affiliation via party is still the most significant factor in increasing political participation. But, education and income decreases political participation. The other variables included in our study do not have any significant effects.

From another perspective, our findings show that in both new and stable democracies, socio-economic background, political values and institutional affiliation are ALL accountable to explain the political participation of citizens, as demonstrated by the consistent effects of education, political alienation and political party affiliation in this study. As for the directions of these effects, they are all similar in between stable democracies and new democracies. Only urbanization behaves completely differently between stable democracies and post communist states.

In order to compare the impact scope of all our independent variables, we calculate the voting probability change as the value of an independent variable switch from its lowest possible value to its highest 10% (see table IV). For example, if a person's income changes from the lowest possible to reach the richest 10%, he or she will have 25.5% less probability to vote in post communist states.

By using this information, we find that in stable democracies, closeness to a party has the biggest impact. Political party affiliation is the only factor that has significant effects on political participation in both stable and new democracies including Taiwan. Nevertheless, relatively, political affiliation has less influence in new democracies than in stable democracies. That is, it has been confirmed that institutional factors outperforms cultural and SES in explaining political participation in stable democracies, but not necessary in new democracies.

However, in post-communist states and in Taiwan, education has the biggest impact. Relatively, education has bigger impacts on voting behavior in new democracies than in stable democracies. In other words, education outperforms income as a predictor of political participation in stable democracies (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993), but not in new democracies.

In both stable democracies and in post communist states, alienation is the second most important factor influencing political participation. That is, our findings confirm that institutional factor is still the most important determinant of political participation in stable democracies. However, in post communist states, SES and political culture are more important than institutional factors. In addition, in Taiwan, SES is more influential than institutional factor.

Dissatisfaction does incite citizens to vote in stable democracies, but not much in new democracies. However, in post communist states, dissatisfaction with government's economic performance is a more important factor for political participation than dissatisfaction with democratic processes. The effects of all these three groups still exist, after controlling for dissatisfaction. In other words, whether or not dissatisfied, social structure, political culture and institutional affiliation will all affect individuals' political participation.

Table III: Cutting Points for the Highest 10<sup>th</sup> Group

|              | <b>Stable</b> | <b>Post Communist</b> | <b>Taiwan</b> |
|--------------|---------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Income       | 5             | 5                     | 5             |
| Education    | 8             | 7                     | 8             |
| UrbanRes     | 4             | 4                     | 4             |
| Alienation   | 10.98         | 11.41                 | 17.17         |
| PolKnowledge | 2             | 2                     | 2             |
| NoCloseParty | 5             | 5                     | 5             |
| EcoNoImprove | 5             | 5                     | 5             |
| NotSatisfied | 4             | 5                     | 5             |

Table IV: Voting Change as Each Independent Variable Changes from Lowest to Highest 10%

|              | <b>Stable</b> |   | <b>Post Communist</b> |   | <b>Taiwan</b> |   |
|--------------|---------------|---|-----------------------|---|---------------|---|
| Income       | -0.052        |   | -0.252*               | 4 | -0.408**      | 2 |
| Education    | 0.427*        | 4 | 1.242*                | 1 | -1.008**      | 1 |
| UrbanRes     | 0.57*         | 3 | -0.198**              | 6 | 0.228         |   |
| Alienation   | -0.762*       | 2 | -1.015*               | 2 | 0.0527        |   |
| PolKnowledge | 0.122*        | 5 | 0.936                 |   | 0.222         |   |
| NoCloseParty | -1.112*       | 1 | -0.596*               | 3 | -0.392***     | 3 |
| EcoNoImprove | 0.084         |   | 0.192**               | 7 | -0.2          |   |
| NotSatisfied | 0.108***      | 6 | -0.216*               | 5 | 0.22          |   |

## 6) Conclusion

In new democracies, all three groups of factors do exhibit significant impacts as they do in stable democracies. Especially, institutional affiliation exhibits significant effects in both stable and new democracies. However, education outperforms income in stable democracies, and also in all new democracies. Institutional argument outperforms SES in stable democracies, but not in new democracies. In other words, institutional factors are more important in stable democracies than in new democracies.

Our results show that cultural factors affect political participation consistently in both stable and new democracies.

The effects of dissatisfaction on political participation are significant in both stable and new democracies, but exhibit very different directions in new democracies. This relationship demonstrates the key difference between stable and new democracies.

## 7) Literature

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## 8) Appendix

Table V: Variable Definitions

| Variable Name | Variable Name in CSES & Definition       | Values  |
|---------------|--|---|
| Vote          | V115 Vote                                | Recoded Dummy Variable (1 – Voted, 0 –No)   |
| PolContacts   | V52 contact with politician              | Recoded Dummy Variable (1 – Voted, 0 –No)   |
| Income        | V99 Household income level               | 1-lowest fifth, 2-second fifth, 3-third fifth, 4-fourth fifth, 5-highest fifth  |
| Education     | V90 education                            | 1-none, 2-incomplete primary, 3-primary completed, 4-incomplete secondary, 5-secondary completed, 6-post secondary trade/voc, 7-university undergraduate incomplete, 8 university undergraduate completed |
| UrbanRes      | V109 rural or urban                      | 1-rural area or village, 2-small or middle-sized town, 3-suburbs of large town or city, 4-large town or city  |
| Alienation    | alienation                               | 20-point alienation scale   |
| PolKnowledge  | V28 Number Candidates Correctly Names    | 0-correctly identified none, 1-correctly identified one, 2-correctly identified two or more   |
| NoCloseParty  | V3 Close to any pol party?               | 1-yes, 5-no   |
| EcoNoImprove  | V48 Economy Improved over last 12 months | 1-gotten better, 3-stayed the same, 5-gotten worse  |
| NotSatisfied  | V1 Satisfaction with Democratic Process  | 1-satisfied, 2-fairly satisfied, 4-not very satisfied, 5-not at all satisfied   |

Table VI: Descriptive Statistics (Mean and St Dev)

|              | Stable | Post Communist | Taiwan |
|--------------|--------|----------------|--------|
| Vote         | 0.90   | 0.75           | 0.92   |
|              | 0.30   | 0.44           | 0.27   |
| PolContacts  | 0.16   | 0.07           | 0.08   |
|              | 0.36   | 0.25           | 0.27   |
| Income       | 2.39   | 2.86           | 3.21   |
|              | 1.79   | 1.70           | 2.36   |
| Education    | 5.08   | 4.30           | 4.47   |
|              | 1.70   | 1.64           | 1.92   |
| UrbanRes     | 2.23   | 2.12           | 2.42   |
|              | 1.45   | 1.13           | 1.20   |
| Alienation   | 7.243  | 7.781          | 9.581  |
|              | 2.278  | 3.116          | 4.619  |
| PolKnowledge | 2.52   | 0.72           | 0.61   |
|              | 3.15   | 0.84           | 0.85   |
| NoCloseParty | 2.90   | 3.39           | 3.76   |
|              | 2.02   | 2.22           | 2.03   |
| EcoNoImprove | 2.58   | 3.45           | 4.18   |
|              | 1.59   | 1.76           | 1.72   |
| NotSatisfied | 2.44   | 3.30           | 3.42   |
|              | 1.48   | 1.75           | 2.27   |