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RESEARCH ARTICLE

UNCONVENTIONAL PARTICIPATION IN TIME OF CRISIS: How Ideology Shapes Citizens' Political Actions

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ABSTRACT: Since democracy requires the involvement of citizens, the topic of political participation has attracted great attention from both practitioners and scholars. During the current financial and economic crisis, there have been various protest movements in many European countries. In this paper, which employs data from the European Social Survey and analyzes some European countries using a longitudinal study (2002-2012), I measure unconventional political participation considering three types of action - signed a petition, participated in a lawful demonstration and joined a boycott. By linking citizens to government ideology and vote for party government to political action through a multilevel model, this paper argues that both ideology and citizens' electoral choices have a bearing on unconventional political participation. In times of crisis, government choices do not feed the level of unconventional political participation. However, differences emerge in terms of political behavior when I consider citizens' ideology, loser status and government ideology.

KEYWORDS: Ideology, Economic crisis, Europe, Loser status, Unconventional political participation.

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1. Introduction

Political actions are the driving force of democracy and its vitality. Following normative democratic theory, civic citizens should be interested and engaged in politics and public affairs (Almond and Verba 1963), participating in the political life of their own countries. The idea starts off with democracy as government or rule by the people: every citizen, being affected by a decision, should have equal opportunities to implement or put the rule into force. Of course, even in the countries where democracy is consolidating, not all citizens participate in the political arena. Many factors encourage citizens to participate, but many others make them cynical towards politics. In this perspective, intention to become active can be related to resources and incentives (Teorell 2006) or people's disengagement from politics. As Verba et al. (1995: 26) suggested, citizens do not participate because 'they can't; because they don't want to; or because nobody asked'. In sum, political participation appears to be a multidimensional concept where social, economic and political factors play an important role.

In regimes where democracy is stable, it is possible to register an appreciable level of political participation, which is higher than within those countries where democracy is still developing. However, there are some exceptions. In the past century, political participation has been declining in the United States, but rising in Western Europe (Putnam, 2000), where a new democratic wind seems to blow in old and new European democracies. The new democracies, rejecting their authoritarian past, have slowly moved toward democratic consolidation and European membership. Nevertheless, the differences between old and new democracies remain. In fact, after the enthusiasm generated by the fall of the communist regimes, political participation declined (Norris, 2004) and it still tends to remain low (Bernhagen and Marsh 2007) among post-communist Eastern countries.

Political participation, as argued by Huntington and Nelson (1976: 14), is 'an umbrella concept which accommodates very different forms of action constituting differentiating phenomena, and for which it is necessary to look for explanations of different nature'. Thus political participation cannot be confined within complex institutions, limited to the electoral ritual or simply played out by representative institutions. Even if voter turnout represents the most studied topic as an act of participation, other political forms, conventional and unconventional, have been analyzed (see Dalton 2008). The results of these works show, in recent decades, that the repertoire of civic activism has expanded. Moreover, not all the forms of participation seem to be in decline, at least among Western democracies (Stolle and Hooghe 2005). Voting and party membership

have declined in most countries (see Dalton 2009) and a clear partisan alignment is falling (Dalton 2000). Although worrisome, these trends can be seen as a reaction of citizens to the performance of democratic governance (Norris 2011) and not as a withdrawal of citizens from the political arena.

In the last decades, dissatisfaction towards political institutions has increased among consolidated democracies (Bellucci and Memoli 2012); citizens are dissatisfied with how democracy works and with political elites. Since the 1990s, this trend has characterized European democracies until the present. In the second half of the last decade, the EU area has been hit by a financial and economic downturn along with an institutional and demographic crisis (Hansen and Gordon 2014). European governments have reacted slowly, but their responses do not appear to be effective in containing the crisis. In different regions of the EU, civic protests against governments have increased, as governments are seen as being responsible for the financial and economic situation (Anduiza et al. 2013). The adoption of countercyclical policies led to an increase in the fiscal deficit, which in turn was aggravated by the rescue of the banking system, and with private debt that has become a public debt. In some member states of the Euro zone, this scenario has fueled many doubts about both the future of the single currency and the future of Europe itself. In a monetary union where imbalances accumulate, problems and tensions inevitably arise (Volz 2012). Moreover, the crisis has weakened the relationship between citizens and their own institutions, national and European, especially where public debt has increased and austerity measures have become more stringent (Roth et al. 2011). At the same time, the crisis has affected the labor market and civil society, eroding the economic stability of families and conditioning the future of young people (Rocha 2012). It also has further expanded the gender gap in terms of employment types, unemployment, wages and poverty (Bettio et al. 2012). Whichever way we look at European countries and their citizens, public opinion appears to be affected by a sense of disillusionment and disenchantment towards parties and politicians (see Di Mauro and Memoli, 2016).

The discontent generated by the economic shocks of recent years, the fiscal crisis and austerity policies have encouraged citizens to demonstrate against banks, politicians and more generally against the malfunctioning of democracy. Although the focus of the protests should be identified within each nation and defined in the light of the decisions of governments, in late 2011 a worldwide protest has pervaded the entire globe: 951 cities in 82 countries around the world recorded numerous protest activities (Perugorria and Tejerina 2013).

The intensity of the protests and the number of events have fueled the scientific debate about the social, economic and political factors that encourage citizens to

express their ideas. Studies on political participation have analyzed the different faces of this phenomenon, by attempting to connect citizens' discontent (a feeling that has underpinned traditional democracies for more than twenty years) with the mechanisms of mobilization. Political engagement can assume different forms such as confidence in institutions, interest in politics, voting and non-institutionalized political actions. However, political participation appears to be strongly related to citizens' ideology and party (or government) ideology. This is confirmed by recent contributions to the debate on political participation showing the link between ideology and political actions (see Curini et al. 2015; Torcal et al 2015).

In order to contribute to this debate, using data from the European Social Survey (ESS), this article examines the nexus between citizens and institutional ideological profiles and unconventional political participation. Although the number of countries included in the ESS project has increased since 2002, I selected only the waves between 2002-2012, and countries where information has been included.¹ This strategy obviously limits generalizations, but at the same time it generates a lengthier and more detailed picture of the evolution of unconventional political participation during the crisis.

The paper is organized as follow, The second section summarizes the literature on political participation, while the third section presents citizens' political attitude, ideology and unconventional political participation, stating the hypotheses of the research. The fourth section describes the dependent and independent variables. The fifth section introduces the results of the analysis. Finally, the last section highlights the implications of these results, while drawing some conclusions.

2. Political participation

Conventionally, political participation is characterized by 'those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and or the actions they take' (Verba et al. 1978, 46). Although not all scholars consider that participation is always good for the democratic political system, in a democratic regime we expect an active citizenry because their actions help democracy and improve social well-being.

Participating in political life can have both micro and macro consequences (Ikeda et

¹ The countries are Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Netherland, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (UK).

al. 2008). In general, political participation provides the opportunity for citizens to articulate their demands, to have control and to increase public pressure on the political elite (Dalton 2000) by amplifying their voices (Putnam 2000), holding the political class accountable (Letky 2004), strengthening democratic legitimacy (Mayer and Burnett 1977) and contributing to the level of health and quality of democracy (Morlino 2011). The effects of activism on citizens' lives, in many cases, are appreciable: where citizens have more extended possibilities for political participation, they enjoy higher levels of subjective well-being (Stutzer and Frey 2006). Citizens who have particular skills (Verba et al 1995) and have appreciable levels of political efficacy (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003) will be more active and more likely to participate in political life. If we consider that political participation can also be seen as the driving force through which people's efficacy is developed (Stutzer and Frey 2006), it is therefore a cornerstone on which democracy rests and develops.

Studies on political participation usually distinguish between two specific concepts: conventional and unconventional participation. Conventional participation involves electoral processes (Marsh and Kaase 1979), while unconventional participation refers to those actions that are not institutionalized, such as marching in protests and holding demonstrations (Parry et al. 1992). Of course, even unconventional political participation is an essential part of the democratic process and usually, especially among the youth, it complements conventional participation rather than replacing it (Gavray 2012).

In the last decades, political repertoires have changed. While some forms of political participation have declined, others have increased. Gray and Caul (2000) conducted a longitudinal analysis of 18 advanced industrial democracies, considering both parliamentary and presidential elections from 1950 to 1997. Their results show that turnout is declining because the patterns of group mobilization and electorate demographics have changed. Similarly, Blais and Rubenson (2012:112), who focused on eight countries and considered eighty-six elections, found that between 1957 and 2005 'turnout is declining, and most of that decline is concentrated among youth'. The causal mechanism of this decline could be found in the cumulating effect of institutional changes, lack of electoral competition and the choice of citizens to abstain from voting in a political arena where competition is weak (Franklin 2004).

A different trend characterizes new and unconventional actions. In their analysis of the transformation of the democratic process, Dalton and colleagues (2003:6) underline that 'citizens or public groups directly interact with government and even participate in policy process directly; that is, citizens participate in policy deliberation even though the actual decisions remain in the hands of government elites'. Different scholars have

also noted a need to act. Using cross-sectional data, Norris (2002) shows that between 1975 and 1995 the percentage of people who petitioned or demonstrated in advanced democracies increased, with a growing trend in recent times (Dalton 2009). From this perspective, unconventional participation such as petitions, demonstrations, boycotts or other forms of direct action can be considered normal forms of actions of citizenry in post-industrial societies (Inglehart and Catterberg 2002). Focusing on Italy, Quaranta (2012:270) shows that from 1976 to 2009, levels of unconventional participation have increased and its distribution has changed. Accordingly, a new wave of engagement characterizes Italians, who 'reject institutional politics and look for alternative ways of governing their society'. Other researchers show that political consumerism appears to have increased in the past decades (Stolle et al. 2005), becoming a significant part of the political action repertoire and an outlet for grievances. Not all academics, however, seem to agree with these trends. Boarini and Diaz (2015) focus their work on sixteen European countries between 2002 and 2013, analyzing whether unconventional political participation is replacing conventional participation. The longitudinal analysis, even if limited in terms of countries and time, shows 'a very small replacement of formal participation with protest behavior activities' (Boarini and Diaz 2015: 25), at least for some birth - cohorts.

3. Political attitudes and ideology

Political ideology is a compass orientation in the context of political space. It aggregates a set of beliefs about the order at the base of society and the ways to reach it (Erikson and Tedin 2003). Developing a specific program of action (Gerrin 1997), political ideology looks like an orientation to normative and prescriptive issues, where values play a very prominent role for citizens attitudes. Even if ideology is heritable (Alford et al. 2005) and related to the different ways liberals and conservatives process information (Jost et al 2003), it can support and help citizens to choose among different aspects of life. This ability reflects a socialization of political ideology formed from interactions with family and friends, network, and elites, who influence their ideology through media and campaigns. In this view, political ideology represents an important key to explain political behavior and political attitudes (Carsey et al 2006). However, different political actions characterize leftists or rightists. Leftists are likely to seek change through political activism, to participate more than others (see Christensen 2013) and to be open to non-conventional political engagement (Baglioni 2007:102),

while rightists are generally more inclined to justify the status quo (van der Meer et al 2009) and less disposed to take part in a protest (Hutter and Kriesi 2013).

In addition, there is a direct relationship between ideological extremism and participation. By analyzing turnout and activism in the American 2004 election, Abramowitz and Saunders (2008: 554) found that '... active citizens are much more polarized in their political view'. Sanders and Bellucci (2012), who analyzed twenty-seven European countries over the period 1975-2007, found that people who place themselves on the extreme sides of the political spectrum are more likely to engage in political discussion and persuasion. In their analysis of twenty-six European countries between 2002 and 2011, Torcal and colleagues (2015) showed that left-wing individuals protest more under right-wing governments than under left-wing governments. At the same time, they found that those 'who place themselves on the extreme right of the political scale show a greater propensity to protest when the government's ideological orientation is right-wing' (Torcal et al 2015: 14). Curini et al (2015), who took a longitudinal view of thirty-six consolidated democracies, estimated the effect of ideology on political participation. The main results show that ideological factors can influence whether citizens engage on different kinds of political action. Specifically, citizens with extreme views (especially leftists) are more inclined than moderates to contact politicians or government officials, work in election campaigns, and join protests. In other words, the more citizens are ideologically extreme, the more they tend to participate in political activities (Martin and van Deth 2007).

Even if ideological factors do not perfectly predict a voter's choice (Adams et al 2005), when citizens' views overlap with ideological inclinations of parties controlling the government, they are less likely to enter the political arena or to protest against their own political elite (see van der Meer et al 2009). Since political conservatism is also associated with a lack of government intervention in the lives of citizens, in time of economic crisis citizens would ask their government for help, regardless of its ideology. Looking at European countries in time of crisis it is possible to explain unconventional political participation testing the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: citizens with leftist political ideologies participate in political life more than other citizens.

Hypothesis 2: citizens with loser status will participate more than individuals with winner status.

Hypothesis 3: in time of crisis, right governments' ideological orientations increase citizens' participation.

Hypothesis 4a: citizens with loser status who identify themselves with left ideologies will participate more than people who have loser status and identify themselves with right ideologies.

Hypothesis 4b: when a government tends to have right (left) ideological positions, leftist (rightist) individuals will participate more (less) than people who are on the right (left) of the political spectrum.

4. Dependent and independent variables

The hypotheses discussed in the previous section will be tested on fourteen European countries using data from the ESS, gathered over the period 2002-2012. The ESS contains a wide range of indicators for political participation and information on approximately 1,400 individuals per country. Since we are interested in shedding light on unconventional participation, we focus on three types of action.² Running a Principal Component Analysis³ on ESS data, we obtained only one factor,⁴ which explains 50.3% of all the variance. The three activities fit well together, as confirmed by reliability analysis, allowing us to assess the internal consistency of a scale.⁵ The dependent variable⁶ ranges between -0.613 (a citizen has not participated in any of these activities) and 3.547 (a citizen has taken part in all three activities): 33.5% of the respondents from all the European countries in the sample have taken part in one or more types of activities.

Figure 1 displays the percentage variation of unconventional political participation between 2002 and 2012. Among the European countries considered in this study, the

²The questions considered are the following: *'There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? ... signed petition last 12 months; ... taken part in lawful public demonstration last 12 months; ... boycotted certain products last 12 months'*. The modalities of each question have been coded in the following way: 0=no, 1=yes.

³We ran a Polychoric Principal Component Analysis given that a Principal Component Analysis is not advisable when the variables under investigation are not continuous, as is in our case (see Kolenikov and Angeles 2004). Those who choose the answer 'do not know' or 'do not answer' were excluded from the analysis. Our dependent variable is therefore represented by an index (factor scores).

⁴The eigenvalue value is equal to 1.509.

⁵The Cronbach alpha coefficient would exceed .7, but with respect to the political participation index, values around .6 are deemed acceptable (see Flavin and Keane 2012). Our index has a Cronbach's alpha of +0.503, positive though not very high by the standards of the Likert attitude-scale.

⁶It is represented by factor scores derived from the application of factor analysis

average percentage of respondents who have undertaken at least one political action has increased from 32.5% in 2002 to 33.8% in 2012. Spain, Sweden, and Germany are regions where political action levels have significantly increased over time (at least 7.5%). At the other end of the spectrum, the trend is negative, especially in the UK and Belgium, where unconventional political participation has decreased by more than 10% in ten years.

With the arrival of the economic and financial crisis in 2008, not all citizens expressed their dissent and reacted to austerity policies adopted by governments. Since 2008, only 50% of countries show an increasing trend, while in the other countries the reaction is noted only in later years, when citizens experienced the effects of the crisis and austerity policies. An exception is represented by Denmark, Finland, Hungary and Slovenia, where, despite the crisis, since 2008 the level of political participation continues to decrease over time.

Using a regression model, we test the hypotheses, including three independent variables. The first one is ideological self-placement,⁷ while the second one is loser status with respect to the incumbent government. The loser variable derives from the respondents' statement about how they voted in the previous national election, with those who did not vote for one of the incumbent governing parties coded as 1, and the remainder coded as 0. The third variable is represented by government ideology.⁸

We control the effect of these variables and their interaction on the unconventional political participation index for several individual characteristics. In addition to the standard demographic controls (age⁹, gender¹⁰, education¹¹), we also consider citizens'

⁷ 'In politics people sometimes talk of "left" and "right". Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right? The variable is recoded in the following way: 0 refers to the center (we aggregate values 4-6); 1 refers to the extreme left (we aggregate values 0-1); 2 refers to the left (we aggregate values 2-3); 3 refers to the right (we aggregate values 7-8) and 4 refers to the extreme right (we aggregate values 9-10).

⁸ The government ideology indicator is based on a weighted average between party ideology and its number of seats, which provides a more valid measure with greater variation in government ideology. We use party position from the Chapel-Hill expert survey.

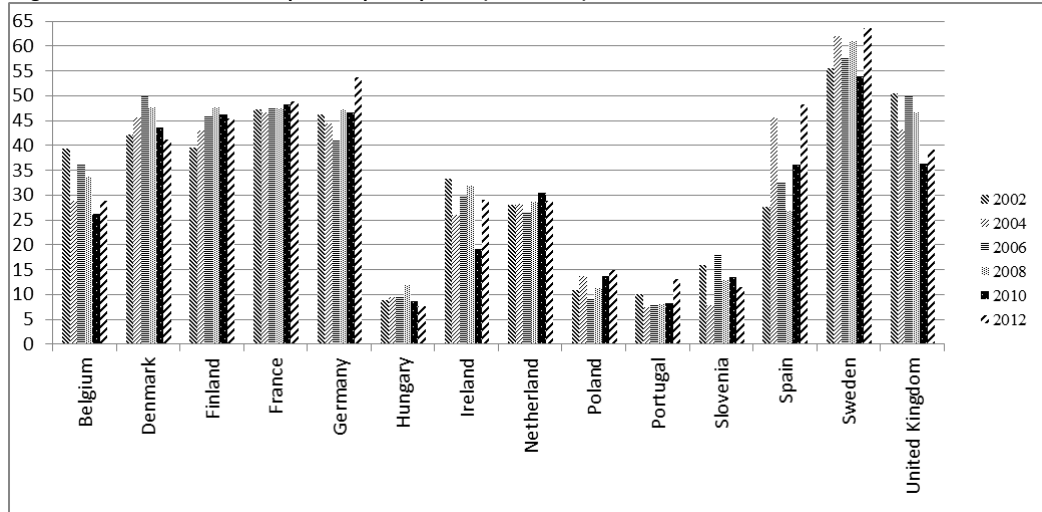
⁹ It is represented by an ordinal variable coded in the following way: 0=71 years and over; 1=18-25; 2=26-39; 3=40-55; 4=56-70.

¹⁰ It is represented by a dummy variable coded in the following way: 0=male; 1= female.

¹¹ It is represented by an ordinal variable coded in the following way: 0=less than lower secondary education; 1=lower secondary education completed; 2=upper secondary education completed; 3=post-secondary non-tertiary education completed; 4=tertiary education completed.

perception of their national economy¹². At the country-level we consider average GDP growth as well as unemployment level in the five years preceding each survey.¹³

Figure 1 – The unconventional political participation (2002-2012)



Note: Entries are the percentage of those who have done at least one political action.

Source: European Social Survey (2002-2012)

5. Analysis and results

Since our dataset is hierarchically organized, with one level (respondents) embedded within another (country), we apply a random effect multilevel model that allows for each observation to be correlated within countries (for example, Belgium 2002, Belgium 2004, and so on). In addition, we corrected standard errors for intra-group correlation and heteroscedasticity by clustering individuals at the country-year level.

In Models 1 to 3 (Table 1) I test the impact that ideology, loser status and government ideology have on unconventional political participation. All models include both individual and aggregate variables to control for the effects of principal independent variables. In Model 1 we found that individuals who are on the extreme left, with almost twice the intensity to those that are to the left, appear to be more prone to adopt

¹²The question is 'On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [country]?' The variable was coded in the following way: 0=not satisfied; 10= satisfied.

¹³The source of the data is the World Bank.

unconventional actions (hypothesis H1). A similar trend also characterizes, with a lower intensity, respondents placed on the opposite side of the left-right political continuum ($b=0.073$). This result is not new, as underlined by Torcal et al. (2015) who analyze only the participation of citizens in demonstrations. Nevertheless, it confirms that in times of crisis, leftist citizens tend to participate in the political arena by adopting a confrontational repertoire more than citizens on the right. In Model 2, testing hypothesis H2, it is observable that when citizens have the loser status, namely when they did not vote for a governing party, they appear to be more inclined to disapprove the choices made by the government ($b=0.133$) tending to increase their political activity. Since voting choices reflect issue positions, a citizen could be satisfied with the policies of the government even if the party voted is not in the government coalition. Thus, in Model 3 I estimate the government ideology effect on the dependent variable. Results confirm that in time of crisis, when the ideological position of the government tends to lean to the right, citizens do not appreciate political conservatism of the right-wing governments ($b=0.056$) and consequentially participate more (hypothesis H3).

The level of unconventional political participation, as underlined by other scholars, is high among women, and lowest among those who are dissatisfied with the national economic performance. When levels of education increase, the propensity to participate actively in the political space grows. From lowest to highest levels of education, the effect is increased nearly four times; the youngest participants (18-24 years old) are the most politically active cohorts. It is not new, if the difficulties encountered by the youngest citizens entering the labor market and by those (40-55 years old) who in the past were probably employed (and now are looking for new jobs) are considered. People are more likely to participate through unconventional actions, when unemployment is higher. Otherwise, participation declines where economic well-being increases.

Table 2 reports the results obtained testing H4a and H4b. Model 1 presents the effects that ideology and loser status jointly have on the index of unconventional political participation. In addition to being more involved in terms of unconventional participation, people who are loser and positioned on the left tend to be more politically active than individuals who are positioned on the right (hypothesis 4a). The leftist extremists are three times more likely to participate actively than rightist extremists when the party voted is not in government (Figure 2). This difference was also observed when we compare the ideological groups in the same ideological area, namely leftist extremists with leftists and rightist extremists with rightists.

Table 2 Unconventional political participation models

	Model1		Model 2		Model 3	
Left-right (ref. 0=center)						
Extreme left	0.505 (0.042)	****				
Left	0.282 (0.016)	***				
Right	0.004 (0.011)					
Extreme right	0.073 (0.027)	***				
Loser (0=no, 1=yes)			0.133 (0.025)	****		
Government ideology					0.056 (0.029)	*
Sex (0=man; 1=woman)	0.069 (0.011)	****	0.070 (0.017)	****	0.069 (0.012)	****
Age (ref. 71 and more)						
18-25	0.329 (0.027)	****	0.348 (0.030)	****	0.355 (0.030)	****
26-39	0.249 (0.021)	****	0.256 (0.023)	****	0.259 (0.023)	****
40-55	0.263 (0.017)	****	0.277 (0.019)	****	0.280 (0.019)	****
56-70	0.176 (0.013)	****	0.186 (0.014)	****	0.187 (0.014)	****
Education (ref. less than lower secondary education)						
lower secondary education completed	0.163 (0.019)	****	0.153 (0.020)	****	0.154 (0.020)	****
upper secondary education completed	0.289 (0.020)	****	0.279 (0.020)	****	0.281 (0.020)	****
post-secondary non-tertiary education completed	0.448 (0.033)	****	0.448 (0.035)	****	0.450 (0.035)	****
tertiary education completed	0.568 (0.025)	****	0.577 (0.026)	****	0.580 (0.027)	****
Satisfaction with national economy	-0.023 (0.003)	****	-0.026 (0.003)	****	-0.029 (0.003)	****
Unemployment (5 years)	0.021 (0.011)	**	0.022 (0.011)	**	0.026 (0.011)	**
Gdp growth (5 years)	-0.042 (0.116)	****	-0.049 (0.016)	***	-0.053 (0.015)	****
Constant	-0.508 (0.104)	****	-0.306 (0.106)	***	-0.681 (0.203)	***
Sigma_u	0.205		0.221		0.222	
Sigma_e	0.965		0.975		0.977	
Rho	0.043		0.049		0.049	
R square	0.088		0.071		0.069	
Wald chi (sig.)	0.000		0.000		0.000	
Countries	14		14		14	
Countries*wave	84		84		84	
Number of observation	93,909		93,909		93,909	

Note: **** $p < 0.001$, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

In Model 2, the interaction between ideology positions and government ideology is tested. In line with my expectations, when an individual's ideology is contrary to the government's ideological standing, citizens tend to become more involved. However, the differences among the levels of personal ideology are minimal, especially when we look at the extremes of the ideological continuum (Figure 3).

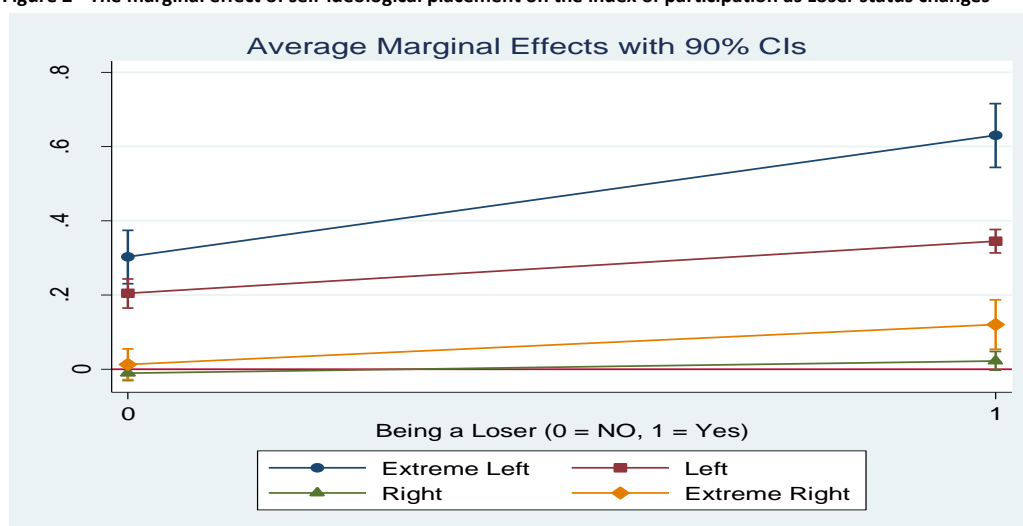
Table 2 Unconventional political participation models

	Model1		Model 2	
Left-right (ref. 0=center)				
Extreme left	0.303 (0.044)	****	0.080 (0.172)	
Left	0.205 (0.024)	***	0.095 (0.082)	
Right	-0.011 (0.012)		0.110 (0.064)	*
Extreme right	0.013 (0.025)		0.370 (0.128)	***
Loser (0=no, 1=yes)	0.044 (0.016)	***		
Government ideology			0.051 (0.028)	*
Loser * Left-right (ref. 0=center)				
Extreme left	0.328 (0.058)	****		
Left	0.141 (0.030)	****		
Right	0.033 (0.019)	*		
Extreme right	0.107 (0.048)	**		
Government ideology * Left-right (ref. 0=center)				
Extreme left			0.078 (0.032)	**
Left			0.034 (0.014)	**
Right			-0.019 (0.010)	*
Extreme right			-0.054 (0.022)	**
Sex (0=man; 1=woman)	0.070 (0.011)	****	0.069 (0.011)	****
Age (ref. 71 and more)				
18-25	0.321 (0.028)	****	0.327 (0.027)	****
26-39	0.244 (0.022)	****	0.247 (0.021)	****
40-55	0.258 (0.018)	****	0.262 (0.017)	****
56-70	0.173 (0.013)	****	0.175 (0.013)	****
Education (ref. less than lower secondary education)				
lower secondary education completed	0.161 (0.019)	****	0.164 (0.019)	****

upper secondary education completed	0.285 (0.019)	****	0.289 (0.020)	****
post-secondary non-tertiary education completed	0.445 (0.033)	****	0.449 (0.033)	****
tertiary education completed	0.563 (0.025)	****	0.568 (0.025)	****
Satisfaction with national economy	-0.020 (0.003)	****	-0.021 (0.003)	****
Unemployment (5 years)	0.022 (0.010)	**	0.025 (0.010)	**
Gdp growth (5 years)	-0.041 (0.015)	***	-0.044 (0.015)	***
Constant	-0.549 (0.104)	****	-0.810 (0.200)	***
Sigma_u	0.206		0.208	
Sigma_e	0.963		0.964	
Rho	0.044		0.044	
R square	0.093		0.093	
Wald chi (sig.)	0.000		0.000	
Countries	14		14	
Countries*wave	84		84	
Number of observation	93,909		93,909	

Note: **** $p < 0.001$, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

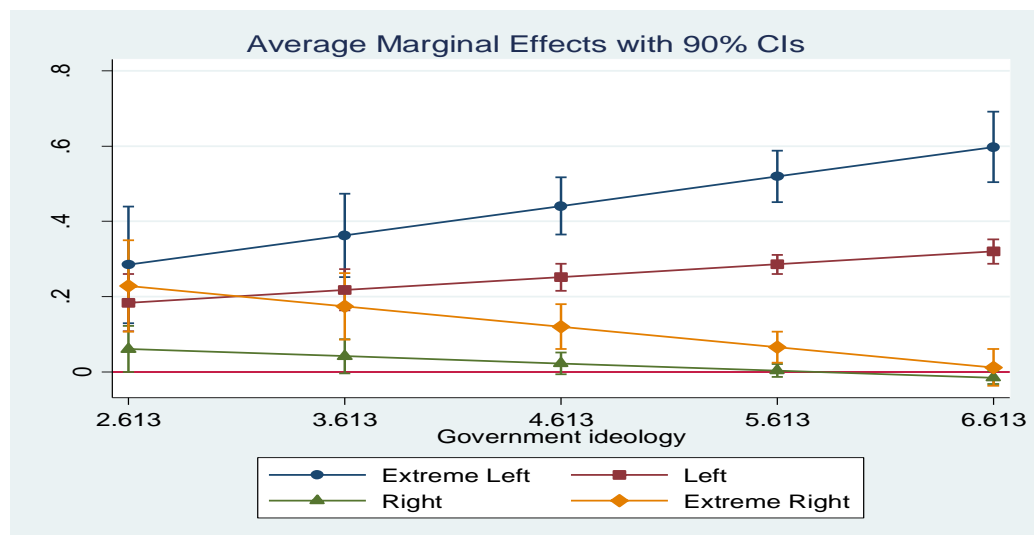
Figure 2 - The marginal effect of self-ideological placement on the index of participation as Loser status changes



Since the differences between citizens' ideologies are more evident when we analyze unconventional political participation in terms of loser status than when we look at government ideology, it is appropriate to repeat the analysis in regards to Models 4 considering the period before and during the crisis. The first period goes from 2002 to 2006, while the second one goes from 2008 to 2012.

As it is possible to see from Table 3, passing from the first (Model 1 and Figure 4) to the second period (Model 2 and Figure 5), the loser right-wing extremists have made their voices heard ($b=0.129$), more than in the past. In contrast, an opposite trend marks the loser left extremists. Although characterized by an appreciable level of non-institutionalized participation, after the economic crisis hit, they participate less than in the past.¹⁴

Figure 3 - The marginal effect of self-ideological placement on the index of participation as Government ideology changes



It is hard to determine if such behavior results from the fact that the choices of the governments have contradicted the liberalism/conservatism embodied citizens' ideology, or whether the behavior is an effect of institutional dissatisfaction that since the 90's is characterizing Western democracies. It emerges clearly that with the economic crisis, unconventional participation has also become a type of activity used by loser voters who are extremists from the right of the political spectrum.

¹⁴ The results do not change even when selecting only governments of right wing coalitions.

Table 3 Unconventional political participation models

	Model 1 2002-2006		Model 1 2008-2012	
Left-right (ref. 0=center)				
Extreme left	0.298 (0.059)	****	0.308 (0.064)	****
Left	0.204 (0.036)	****	0.201 (0.024)	****
Right	-0.011 (0.016)		-0.009 (0.018)	
Extreme right	0.027 (0.031)		0.001 (0.040)	
Loser (0=no, 1=yes)	0.027 (0.023)		0.062 (0.21)	***
Loser * Left-right (ref. 0=center)				
Extreme left	0.382 (0.080)	****	0.285 (0.077)	****
Left	0.139 (0.047)	***	0.144 (0.032)	****
Right	0.033 (0.028)		0.031 (0.024)	
Extreme right	0.085 (0.075)		0.126 (0.062)	**
Sex (0=man; 1=woman)	0.065 (0.016)	****	0.075 (0.016)	****
Age (ref. 71 and more)				
18-25	0.343 (0.041)	****	0.299 (0.037)	****
26-39	0.255 (0.027)	****	0.234 (0.034)	****
40-55	0.277 (0.024)	****	0.242 (0.025)	****
56-70	0.166 (0.018)	****	0.181 (0.018)	****
Education (ref. less than lower secondary edu- cation)				
lower secondary education completed	0.168 (0.027)	****	0.150 (0.026)	****
upper secondary education completed	0.299 (0.026)	****	0.268 (0.028)	****
post-secondary non-tertiary education completed	0.412 (0.045)	****	0.455 (0.048)	****
tertiary education completed	0.573 (0.036)	****	0.550 (0.035)	****
Satisfaction with national economy	-0.019 (0.003)	****	-0.020 (0.004)	****
Unemployment (5 years)	0.020 (0.016)		0.024 (0.013)	*
Gdp growth (5 years)	-0.038 (0.021)	*	-0.046 (0.022)	**
Constant	-0.542 (0.160)	***	-0.553 (0.133)	****
Sigma_u	0.205		0.185	
Sigma_e	0.960		0.965	
Rho	0.044		0.035	

R square	0.087	0.100
Wald chi (sig.)	0.000	0.000
Countries	14	14
Countries*wave	42	42
Number of observation	46,600	47,309

Note: **** $p < 0.001$, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

Figure 4 - The marginal effect of self-ideological placement on the index of participation as Loser status changes (pre-crisis period 2002-2006)

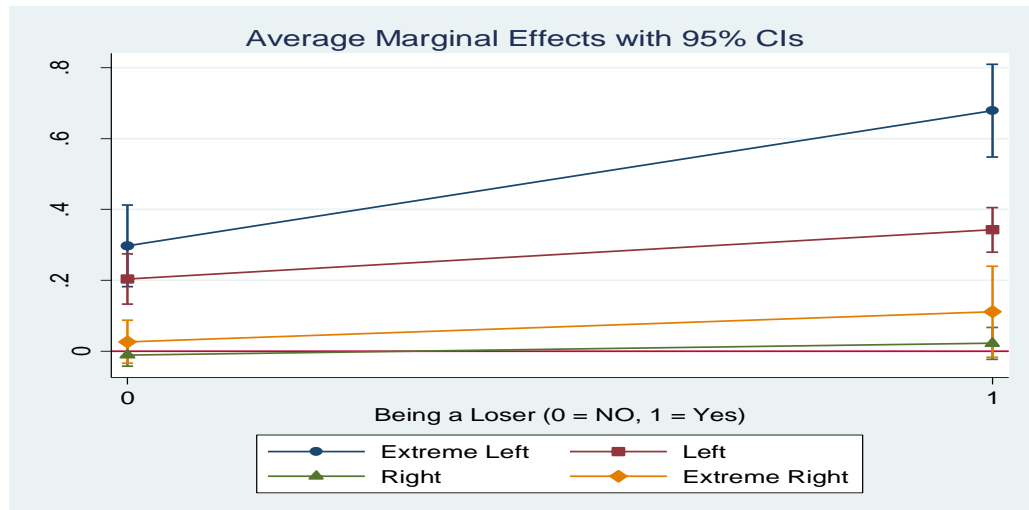
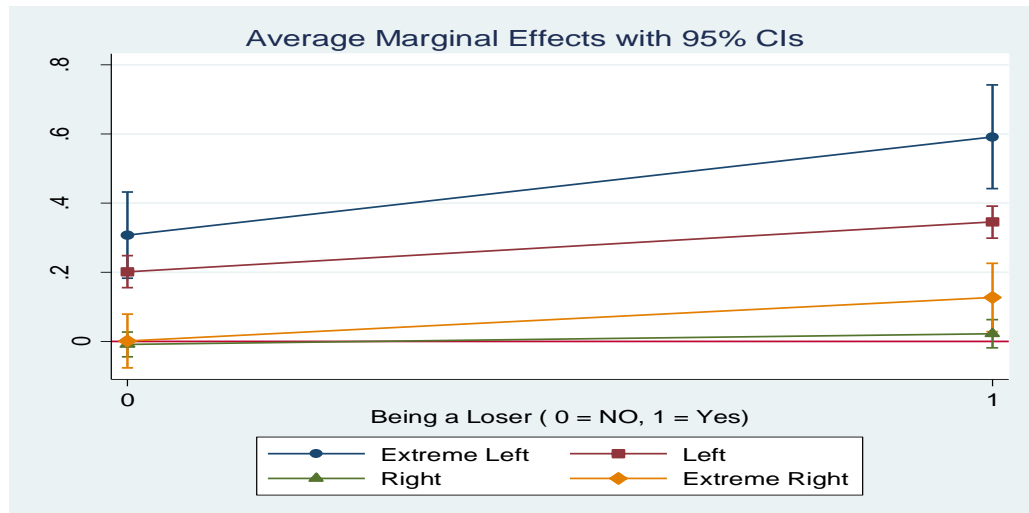


Figure 5 - The marginal effect of self-ideological placement on the index of participation as Loser status changes (crisis period 2008-2012)



6. Conclusions

This paper analyzed unconventional political participation from a longitudinal view, looking at the economic and financial crisis. At the end of the last century, some studies have shown that citizens have become more critical of their political representatives and more disenchanted with policy. With the crisis, European citizens do not seem discouraged about government choices and do not appear to passively accept the austerity policies proposed by them. In some countries, like Spain, Germany and Sweden, the level of unconventional political participation increased, while in others, like the UK, and Belgium it decreased. Although the political involvement of citizens has a patchy distribution, the level of political participation continues to be similar to those of the early Millennium.

As other scholars have already underlined, in the last decade leftists and other individuals located at the ideological extremes were more likely than others to actively participate in political life. In this view, the economic crisis seems to have affected the desire and commitment of citizens in the political arena. Among those with the loser status, non-institutionalized political participation appears to be a favorite. Furthermore, the discontent nourished by electoral defeat and the economic crisis seems to have called for greater participation through a repertoire of unconventional actions. Concurrently, a new way of participation is characterizing the extreme right. Voters on the right are becoming even more systematic, not only with protest, as pointed out by Torcal and colleagues (2015), but also with a series of actions that fall within the unconventional repertoire. However, the available data do not allow us to understand if that behavior is the result of a new style of participation that characterizes the extreme right, or if it is just a reaction to the exasperation of the economic conditions.

The relationship between individual ideology and unconventional political participation is connected to loser status, the economic crisis and government ideology. Moreover, political participation appears related to two other aspects. One is connected to political institutions; the other is related to ideology. Regarding the first, our empirical trends show how an economic shock affects attitudes and behaviors of citizens. A good economy does not lead to protest, citizens instead continue to participate in the political system conventionally. Similarly, in regards to the ideological dimension, a clear position on ideology or a vote for a party that is not in government does not have much weight in explaining unconventional political participation in society. Each of them has only a partial effect on unconventional participation at all.

Only when the two aspects are combined, it is possible to affirm that in time of crisis citizens, especially if losers on the extreme right, have become more critical and more active in protecting their needs. In other words, since 2008 political engagement has changed, including the type of political activities employed by citizens. Ideology continues to differentiate citizens, even in times of crisis, inevitably conditioning unconventional political participation levels.

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