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The Varieties of Democracy Approach

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Measuring Political Participation in Southern Europe: The Varieties of Democracy Approach*

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Introduction

Most schools of democratic theory consider political participation to have a positive impact in deepening democracy. Political participation makes democracies more accountable and freer, as well as creating more engaged, civic minded and public spirited citizens. It has been observed that in regimes where citizens lack capacity for self-organization and political engagement this contributes to a lower quality of their democratic regimes and institutions.

Moreover, this connection is even more vital in democratizing settings and new democracies, like the Southern European countries of Portugal, Spain, and Greece. Research has shown that in democracies that emerged after a long experience of authoritarianism there will be a lower capacity for mobilization of citizens. Democratic regimes may become established, with the minimal requirements (freedom of the press, civil and political liberties, a functioning party system, free and fair elections), but they will have a lower quality because there will be very weak attachments of citizens to its institutions. After the euphoria of participation during the transition, *desencanto* (disenchantment, disappointment) settles in, estranging citizens from the democratic process. Contrary to older democracies, where political participation tended to grow steadily after the transition and for decades, in new democracies the high levels of participation of the transition give place to very weak levels of participation. Even more troubling, new democracies are also characterized by strong inequalities in participation, which affect especially popular groups and the poor, but also the middle classes (Fernandes, 2012 and 2014).

Scientific research has already identified variations in levels of political participation between countries. For instance, differences in post-state corporatist democracies (Portugal, Spain) seem to be stark, with the latter having higher levels of associational membership. And as mentioned above, there are also major differences between new and old democracies (Fernandes, 2012, 2013, 2014; Fishman, 2010 and 2011). Still, there isn't a clear cut scientific measure to compare and evaluate patterns of political participation between countries which is accepted both by the academic and the policy-making communities. Academic studies tend to be focused in comparisons between a small number of countries. And contemporary measures of political participation included in major international indices of democracy or development (Freedom House, UNDP, etc) have two major flaws.

First, they are not historical enough (Coppedge et al. 2011). They tend to focus on contemporaneous issues, with very few indicators going back in time prior to the 1970s. This limitation makes assumptions about major trends in participation occurring today, as well as

projections of the future, problematic. Long time series are essential for policymakers, since shaping and influencing future events implies also a deep understanding of the past.

Moreover, existing indices are quite “insensitive to important gradations” across countries and over time. For instance, in 2004, Freedom House gave same score on Political Rights to countries Bulgaria, Denmark, Israel, Mauritius, Panama, South Africa, Uruguay, and the United States (Coppedge, Gerring, et. al., 2011, p. 249; Lindberg, Coppedge, Gerring, Teorel, et. al. 2014). It is common for samples of countries that have competitive elections (ex: Sweden, Portugal and Slovakia) to receive similar scores (“democratic”), despite obvious differences in many other respects. And even indices where gradations in quality of elections, civil liberties, and other aspects of political participation (Freedom House, Polity) are taken into account, democratic countries tend to rank very close to each other. This suggests that scales are not as fine grained as they could be.

In this paper we try to move beyond these shortcomings. First, we analyse the strengths and limitations of existing indices where political participation is taken as a significant dimension. Secondly, drawing from the Varieties of Democracy project, we propose a new conceptualization of political participation¹. Thirdly, we compare the accuracy and rigour of the new V-Dem Indices with other long-established indices (Freedom House, Polity, Vanhanen’s Democratization Index), by using five Southern European countries (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) as test cases.

1. Existing indices of Participation

In this section we list and evaluate some of the most relevant tools for the measurement of participation. We start by describing the general features and operationalisation of the instrument, then focus on the specific items regarding participation and summarise their main strengths and weaknesses.

1.1. Freedom in the World (Freedom House)

Established in 1973 by Freedom House, the Freedom in the World Index (FIW) was the first effort to systematically measure the distribution of freedom across the world. It is comprised of two different indices: the Political Rights Index (PRI) and the Civil Liberties Index (CLI). The PRI is composed of three sub-dimensions, which are the product of 10 indicators. The CLI is structured in four sub-categories, which are the product of aggregating 15 indicators. The PRI

¹ Not to be confused with the Participatory Democracy Index and the Participatory Component Index of the V-Dem project (<https://v-dem.net/en/reference/version-4-mar-2015/>)

and the CLI range from 1 (free) to 7 (not free) depending on the aggregation of scores attributed to each of its individual indicators. The average of the two indices returns a *freedom rating*, and Freedom House subsequently clusters countries within 3 groups: “not free”, “partially free”, and “free”. FITW covers virtually the whole world (both countries and disputed territories). Until recently the reports only provided two aggregated scores (PRI and CLI), but beginning in 2006 Freedom House also began to publicize the scores at the subcategory level (4 for civil liberties and 3 for political rights). The scores for each indicator are coded by country experts. In the 2013 edition there were 60 analysts and around 30 advisers involved.

In the subcategory “Political Pluralism and Participation” of the Political Rights Index countries are awarded from 0 (no) to 4 (yes) in each of the following indicators/questions, leading to a score range in the subsection between 0 and 16 (Freedom House, 2014, p. 8):

- 1) Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?
- 2) Are the people’s political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group?
- 3) Do cultural, ethnic, religious, or other minority groups have full political rights and electoral opportunities?
- 4) Is there a significant opposition vote and a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

The subcategory “Electoral process” (Political rights index) is the product of 3 questions, thus ranging from 0 to 12. It is composed of the following questions (Freedom House, 2014, p. 6):

- 1) Is the head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? [0 – 4]
- 2) Are the national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? [0 – 4]
- 3) Are the electoral laws and framework fair? [0 – 4]

Finally, in the subcategory “Associational and Organizational Rights” (Civil Liberties Index) countries are awarded from 0 (no) to 4 (yes) in each of the following indicators/questions, leading to a score range in the subsection between 0 and 16. The questions are as follows (Freedom House, 2014, p. 12):

- 1) Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion?
- 2) “Are there free trade unions and peasant organizations or equivalents, and is there effective collective bargaining? Are there free professional and other private organizations?”
- 3) Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations?

One of the main strengths of the Freedom House measurement tools is that they are well established and widely used, covering virtually the whole world. And since Freedom House now also publishes the scores in each of the sub-dimensions, there is greater potential analytical leverage.

However, there are also some downsides to the index. For one, Freedom House measures the attainment of thresholds of freedom, democracy and liberties. Therefore, this tool does not allow refined analyses of nuances across different types of democratic regimes. The index has been criticized for alleged bias against leftist governments (Mainwaring et al., 2001, 53) and a lack of transparency in its coding procedures. In the final analysis it is more effective at distinguishing between “free countries” and “not free countries” than assessing the differences between democratic countries (Coppedge, 2012, 21; Coppedge et al. 2012, 249).

FH is also biased towards an extreme liberal conception of democracy and participation. This is clear in the subcategory “Associational and Organizational Rights”, where questions are all framed under topic of freedom. This creates a not very rigorous conception of the institutional framework regulating associations. For instance, the questions conflate the existence of government control of associations and organizations (there is always some degree of it, even in democracies) and repression (clearly a non-democratic trait). The question about the degree to which electoral laws and frameworks are fair suffers from the same inadequacy. Any electoral system in a democratic regime involves biases and distortions, since it empowers some groups and parties in relation to others. But this does not make the system undemocratic as such.

The questions on political pluralism and participation also raise problems. The question “Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive

political groupings of their choice, and is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?” conflates very different things. One part of the question is more about the conditions of participation, the other about the actual dynamics of party building and success. In addition, some democratic systems are relatively closed to new entrants, but still keep their democratic traits.

2.2. Polity

The original version of the Polity index dates back to 1975 when Ted R. Gurr and Harry Eckstein produced a database of the durability of regimes. One of the major innovations of Polity was taking an historical approach, providing data since 1800. Since its inception Polity has evolved and expanded its scope, assuming its current form (Polity IV) in 2000. It is an index suited for capturing changes over time in the patterns of authority in any given country, and covers different aspects of political life. Polity IV encompasses three different components: Executive Recruitment; Independence of Executive Authority; Political Competition and Opposition. At the highest level of aggregation, Polity IV scores range from -10 to +10 and are the product of four dimensions: competitiveness of political participation (1-3); competitiveness of executive recruitment (1-2), openness of executive recruitment (1); constraints on the chief executive (1-4).

Regarding the general operationalization of the index, each indicator is coded by an expert. Indicators are not necessarily ordinal (e.g. ranking from “authoritarian” to “democratic”), but are afterwards aggregated into ordinal sub-scores used for the attainment of a score in the “Polity2” (-10 +10) scale. Participation is captured by Polity IV through two variables: 1) the regulation of participation (Marshall, Gurr, & Jaggers, 2014, p. 25) and the 2) competitiveness of participation (Marshall et al., 2014, p. 26). From the interaction of values in these two variables different patterns emerge. Ten potential combinations are *a priori* conceptually determined, ranging from “repressed competition” to “institutionalized open electoral participation”, covering a high number of possible in-between scenarios.

The Regulation of Participation is coded through a five-category scale (Marshall et al., 2014, p. 26):

- 1) Unregulated: Political participation is fluid; there are no enduring national political organizations and no systematic regime controls on political activity. Political groupings tend to form around particular leaders, regional interests, religious or ethnic or clan groups (...)

- 2) Multiple Identity: There are relatively stable and enduring political groups which compete for political influence at the national level—parties, regional groups, or ethnic groups, no necessarily elected—but there are few, recognized overlapping (common) interests
- 3) Sectarian: Political demands are characterized by incompatible interests and intransigent posturing among multiple identity groups and oscillate more or less regularly between intense factionalism and government favouritism (...)
- 4) Restricted: Some organized political participation is permitted without intense factionalism but significant groups, issues, and/or types of conventional participation are regularly excluded from the political process
- 5) Regulated: Relatively stable and enduring political groups regularly compete for political influence and positions with little use of coercion.

The dimension *Competitiveness of Participation* refers to the extent to which alternative preferences for policy and leadership can be pursued in the political arena. Political competition implies a significant degree of civil interaction, so polities coded as “Unregulated (1)” on Regulation of Participation are simply not coded for competitiveness. Competitiveness of participation is coded on a five-category scale (Marshall et al., 2014, pp. 26–27):

- (1) Repressed: No significant oppositional activity is permitted outside the ranks of the regime and ruling party. (...)
- (2) Suppressed: Some organized, political competition occurs outside government, without serious factionalism; but the regime systematically and sharply limits its form, extent, or both in ways that exclude substantial groups (20% or more of the adult population) from participation. (...)
- (3) Factional: Polities with parochial or ethnic-based political factions that regularly compete for political influence in order to promote particularist agendas and favor group members to the detriment of common, secular, or cross-cutting agendas.
- (4) Transitional: Any transitional arrangement from Restricted, Suppressed, or Factional patterns to fully competitive patterns, or vice versa. (...) Sectarian and secular interest groups coexist.
- (5) Competitive: There are relatively stable and enduring, secular political groups which regularly compete for political influence at the national level; (...) Competition among

groups seldom involves coercion or disruption. Small parties or political groups may be restricted in the Competitive pattern

The Polity index has a few strengths. It features extensive instructions for coders and several reliability tests are performed; it also features a long and uninterrupted time-series of coded cases, from 1800 onwards. However, there is a narrow focus on the institutional side of participation. There is an absence of behavioural/altitudinal data, and the equality of participation is not an issue taken into account. Critical analyses of this index also point to the fact that “scores are clustered around particular values suggesting that the scale is not as sensitive as it purports to be” (Coppedge et al., 2011, p. 249). Although it covers a very long temporal period, it leaves unaddressed countries with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants. There is also some fuzziness about what the questions purport to measure specifically. For instance, the dimensions of participation mix aspects of state authority over the territory with issues of participation. The questions seem more suited to grasp the degree to which countries have deep territorial conflicts and security problems. Moreover, they do not allow for subtle differentiations between democratic regimes, as all would fall under the rubric “regulated”.

2.3. Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index

The Economist Intelligence Unit has published its “Democracy Index” (EIUDI) since 2006, with the latest version published in 2013. According to its authors, “measures of democracy that reflect the state of political freedoms and civil liberties [such as those provided by Freedom House] are not ‘thick’ enough” (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013, 26). As such, the EIUDI is designed to achieve more in-depth comparisons of the quality of democracy, as well as more general comparisons. As an input it makes use not only of experts’ views but also of public opinion data and levels of turnout.

The score for any given country is the product of the aggregation of 5 categories, comprising a total of 60 indicators (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013, pp. 29–39):

- 1 - Electoral process and pluralism (12 indicators);
- 2 - Functioning of government (14 indicators);
- 3 – Political participation (9 indicators);
- 4 - Political culture (8 indicators);
- 5 - Civil liberties (17 indicators).

Each indicator is either binary (0/1) or ternary (0/0.5/1). The aggregation of each category is not simply an average of its indicators, as there are some caveats regarding the fulfilment of some critical indicators – e.g. it is a necessary condition to have free and fair elections.

Regarding the dimension of political participation, its values range from 0 to 10, depending on values of the following indicators/questions (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013, p. 33):

- 1) Voter participation/turn-out for national elections: Average turnout since 2000 converted into a three-level response (0/0.5/1). Countries with compulsory vote are penalised, as the EIUDI explicitly considers this not to be a positive contribution towards democracy.
- 2) Do ethnic, religious and other minorities have a reasonable degree of autonomy and voice in the political process? Expert assessment. Three levels (0/0.5/1)
- 3) Extent of political participation. Membership of political parties and political non-governmental organisations: Three-level response (0/0.5/1). Full score 1 if over 7% of population for either;
- 4) Citizens' engagement with politics: Public opinion, preferably from WVS (World Values Survey). Three-level response (0/0.5/1). Full score if over 60% are interested in politics;
- 5) The preparedness of population to take part in lawful demonstrations: Public opinion data, preferably from WVS. Three-level response (0/0.5/1). Full score if over 40% are willing to attend demonstration;
- 6) Adult literacy: Three-level response (0/0.5/1). Full score if over 90%; 6) Extent to which adult population shows an interest in and follows politics in the news: Public opinion data, preferably from WVS. Three-level response (0/0.5/1). Full score if over 50% follows politics the news daily;
- 7) The authorities make a serious effort to promote political participation: Expert assessment, taking into consideration education and other efforts. Three-level response (0/0.5/1);
- 8) Women in parliament: Three-level response (0/0.5/1) (Full score if more than 20% MPs are female).

The EIUDI exhibits important strengths compared with the FITW by FH and Polity. It offers a more detailed analysis of the differences across democratic countries and takes into

consideration not only experts' opinions but other sources of data as well, such as electoral turnout and public opinion data from comparative surveys.

However, the EIUDI is not without its drawbacks. From a data access point of view, indicator-level data are not publicly available, thus inhibiting our ability to investigate different dimensions of participation in political process (e.g. turnout, consultation in public policy, civil society strength). Moreover, it mixes substantively different dimensions of participation. It bundles in the same variable membership in political parties and in political non-governmental organisations—dimensions that can be in tension in many polities. Also, it is problematic to measure citizens' engagement with politics by a measure of "citizens' interest in politics". This is not so much participation, as (and also disputably) a pre-condition for participation. The same reasoning applies to questions like "The preparedness of population to take part in lawful demonstrations", since willingness to attend demonstrations is obviously not the same thing as actually doing it. The same could be said of considering "Adult literacy", "interest in and follows politics in the news" and "perceptions of democracy." A case can be made that these are preconditions for participation but it is hard to sustain the case that these are actual *components* of political participation. Finally, the question about the degree to which "authorities make a serious effort to promote political participation" is unspecific over which arena that effort is directed. Is it about electoral participation, civil society or political parties? And what does it mean, specifically? What are those efforts about?

2.4. Democracy Barometer

The Democracy Barometer was launched in 2011 by a consortium between the University of Zurich and the Social Science Research Center in Berlin (WZB). It differs from previously mentioned indices as its focus is on "the quality of established democracies" (Bühlmann, Merkel, Müller, & Weßels, 2008, p. 39). The index has a complex tree-like structure (Merkel et al., 2014, p. 3): it starts with a base concept ("Quality of democracy") branching into three principles ("Freedom", "Control" and "Equality"). Each of these principles then hierarchically nests functions, components, sub-components, and indicators. Sub-components are divided into two conceptual groups: one group deals with "constitutional settings" (rules) while the other deals with "effective impact" (practice). The authors follow a best-practice/worst-practice approach: each indicator is standardized, ranging from 0 (worst practice) to 100 (best practice) (Merkel et al., 2014, p. 6). It currently covers 70 countries (30 form the core and 40 added later).

The “Equality” principle features among its functions transparency, representation and participation. The codebook provides the sources used for each indicator, which are mostly derived from public opinion data and from other databases. Instead of ranking countries with a value located somewhere amid two fixed poles, each indicator is transformed in order to standardize the distribution between the empirical maximum and minimum. The authors argue that this approach allows them to take into consideration the diversity of empirical forms assumed by democracy and the trade-offs implied by favouring particular functions of democracy over others (Merkel et al., 2014, pp. 6–7).

Equality of participation is measured by the following indicators (Merkel et al., 2014, p. 31):

- 1) Requirements for and disqualifications of active suffrage (Extracted from Inter Parliamentary Union (various years). Chronicle of parliamentary election)
- 2) Registered voters as a percentage of voting age population (Extracted from IDEA-Turnout)
- 3) Representative voter turnout in terms of resources (no participation gap in terms of education and income). Extracted from various continental Barometers, Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, European Election Survey, European Social Survey, International Social Survey, World Values Survey.
- 4) Representative voter turnout in terms of gender and age (no participation gap). Extracted from various continental Barometers, Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, European Election Survey, European Social Survey, International Social Survey, World Values Survey.
- 5) Representative alternative participation (signing petitions, attending lawful demonstrations) in terms of resources (no participation gap). Extracted from various continental Barometers, Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, European Election Survey, European Social Survey, International Social Survey, World Values Survey.
- 6) Representative alternative participation (signing petition and attending lawful demonstrations) in terms of gender and age (no participation gap). Extracted from various continental Barometers, Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, European Election Survey, European Social Survey, International Social Survey, World Values Survey.

Effective participation is measured by the following indicators (Merkel et al., 2014, pp. 31–32):

- 1) Facilitation of electoral participation. Extracted from ACE Electoral Knowledge Network; Blais et al. (2007), IDEA-Turnout, Early Voting. Rules facilitating participation have the following categories: 0 = voters can vote at specific polling station only; 1 = voters can vote everywhere in the same district; 2 = voters can vote everywhere in the country; Additional point (+1) if absentee ballot is possible; Additional point (+1) if there are mobile polling stations; Additional point (+1) if there is a possibility to vote in advance
- 2) Registration: Voter registration is not compulsory. Extracted from ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, CON, Rosenberg/Chen (2009). OSCE
- 3) Mean participation: Mean participation rate in % of registered electorate in legislative election and/or presidential elections (copied to all years) and/or national referenda (calculated into mean in corresponding year). Extracted from African Elections Database, Australian National University, IDEA-Turnout, International Parliamentary Union, University of California (Irvine): The Election Turnout Database, United States Elections Project.
- 4) Effective use of direct democratic instruments. Extracted from the Centre for Research on Direct Democracy (see below)
- 5) Practice of non-institutionalized participation: share of survey respondents who indicate having signed petitions. Extracted from various continental Barometers, Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, European Election Survey, European Social Survey, International Social Survey, World Values Survey
- 6) Practice of non-institutionalized participation: share of survey respondents who indicate having attended lawful demonstrations. Extracted from various continental Barometers, Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, European Election Survey, European Social Survey, International Social Survey, World Values Survey.

The Democracy Barometer has important advantages over the previous indices. By incorporating public opinion data it allows researchers to weigh in the relevance of inequalities in turnout and protest/civil society participation. Inequality is also measured comprehensively, as it includes several dimensions: gender, age, education and income. It also attempts to harmonize public opinion data from multiple sources.

A limitation of the DB is that it relies completely upon secondary sources. It is also biased toward democracy as it is intended to measure quality of democracy, and thus does not allow gradations between non-democratic and hybrid regimes. The procedure of standardization

from 0 (worst practice) to 100 (best practice) might have some unintended consequences, since some indicators, which are institutional preconditions of participation (e.g. freedom of association), could be warranted a more weight (on this point see our discussion below).

2.5. Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2011)

The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) focuses on countries in development and transition. Its 2014 edition is comprised of two different indices: the [Status Index](#), which ranks quality of democracy and market economy, and the [Management Index](#), which ranks the countries according to their leadership's political management performance between January 2011 and January 2013. It covers 129 countries, purposely excluding consolidated democracies, understood as those that were members of OECD by 1989, and countries with less than 2 million inhabitants (with some exceptions, such as Estonia).

It is operationalised as follows: one country expert writes a country report in which (s)he answers 49 questions (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014, p. 6), each of which are then summarised into a numerical indicator (1-10). These indicators are later harmonised in regional and interregional calibration processes. Indicators are aggregated into criteria scores (averages), one of them being “political participation”. Political participation is one of three criteria listed under the “Political Transformation” dimension. It is computed from the following indicators, each ranging from 1 to 10 (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014, pp. 18–19):

- 1) To what extent are political representatives determined by general, free and fair elections?
- 2) To what extent do democratically elected rulers have the effective power to govern?
To what extent are there veto powers and political enclaves?
- 3) To what extent can individuals form and join independent political parties or civic groups? To what extent can these groups associate and assemble freely
- 4) To what extent can citizens, organizations and the mass media express opinions freely?

The BTI also includes inequality as one of the indicators measured under the “Welfare regime” criterion of the “Economic Transformation” dimension. It is thus possible to combine analyses of inequality with political participation. It asks “To what extent are significant parts of the population fundamentally excluded from society due to poverty and inequality?” (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014, p. 26) The codebook stresses that the following should be taken

into account (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014, p. 26): the overall level of socioeconomic development; the poverty rate; the level of inequality with regard to income and education; the level of exclusion, based on gender, religion and ethnicity; the scope of subsistence economy.

Another analytical dimension (*Political and social integration*) assesses whether “stable patterns of representation exist for mediating between society and the state” and the existence of “a consolidated civic culture” (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014, p. 23). It is the product of the following indicators, each ranging from 1 to 10 (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014, p. 23):

- 1) To what extent is there a stable, moderate, socially rooted party system able to articulate and aggregate societal interests? [From 1, lowest score, to 10, highest score, where “The party system is stable and socially rooted: it is able to articulate and aggregate societal interest with low fragmentation, low voter volatility and low polarization”]
- 2) To what extent is there a network of cooperative associations or interest groups to mediate between society and the political system? [From 1 (“Interest groups are present only in isolated social segments, are on the whole poorly balanced and cooperate little. A large number of social interests remain unrepresented.”) to 10 (“There is a broad range of interest groups that reflect competing social interests, tend to balance one another and are cooperative.”)]
- 3) How strong is the citizens’ approval of democratic norms and procedures.
- 4) To what extent have social self-organization and the construction of social capital advanced?
- 5) To what extent does the political leadership enable the participation of civil society in the political process? The political leadership obstructs civil society participation. It suppresses civil society organizations and excludes its representatives from the policy process”) to 10 (“The political leadership actively enables civil society participation. It assigns an important role to civil society actors in deliberating and determining policies.)). This question captures the link between civil society (understood in a broad sense, including “civic, economic and professional interest associations, religious, charity and community-based organizations, intellectuals, scientists and journalists”) and the various stages of the policy process (agenda setting; policy formulation; deliberation and decision-making; policy implementation; performance monitoring) (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014, p. 42).

One of the main strengths of the BTI is that it allows researchers to combine the analysis of participation and equality levels. There is also a high degree of standardization in its coding procedures. However, the fact that one country expert writes a country report in which (s)he answers 49 questions poses some risks, since it is arguably difficult to find a country expert who knows about all aspects of a given polity to the same degree. The use of country/thematic experts is much more rigorous (ex: an expert on elections in Spain; an expert on civil society in Italy). This is the practice used in the V-Dem Project, as reported below. Moreover, the BTI does not cover Western European countries.

Regarding participation, the variables are similar to those employed by Freedom House, that is, basic thresholds that do not allow for deeply nuanced analyses. Also, welfare regime is only a proxy for inequalities in political participation. Finally, many questions are posed in an imprecise way. For example, the question “To what extent are significant parts of the population fundamentally excluded from society due to poverty and inequality?” does not capture patterns of participation but just socioeconomic exclusion. The two might be positively related, but they are totally different things. And in fact, this would not capture situations where the poor and the excluded *actively* participate, as is the case in some democracies. Moreover, the BTI links a culture of high social trust with the density of civil society (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014, p. 35). Again, these may indeed be positively related, but that is not necessarily so. Contexts of active participation in civil society can generate an anti-democratic political culture and generalized distrust of competing social categories (e.g.: ethnic conflict). It is also problematic to combine in the same question the existence of “veto powers and political enclaves”. The former can be normal democratic institutions like constitutional courts. The later could include separatism and regional-military bosses with the *facto* power and thus reflect a non-democratic situation. Finally, the extent to which “citizens, organizations and the mass media express opinions freely?” is not a dimension of participation as such, though it can, perhaps, be considered as a causal previous condition.

2.6. Civicus - Enabling Environment Index (EEI)

The Enabling Environment Index (EEI) was created by Civicus, a global network of NGOs. An enabling environment is defined as “*a set of conditions that impact on the capacity of citizens (whether individually or in an organized fashion) to participate and engage in the civil society arena in a sustained and voluntary manner*” (Fioramonti, 2013, p. 3). The index thus measures three different dimensions: governance environment (50%); Socio-economic environment (25%); socio-cultural environment (25%). Each of these dimension has a number of associated sub-dimensions, which

are the product of the aggregation of 71 different sources, ranging from other indices (Freedom House, UNHDI, BTI), public opinion data (WVS, EVS, World Giving Index) and other indicators (World Bank Development indicators, Reporters without borders). The EEI thus combines information from a considerable array of different sources into three middle-level indices and one at the highest level of aggregation.

Its main strengths are the focus on civil society and the idea that the environment of participation is a crucial dimension of participation itself. An important limitation is the lack of transparency of the coding procedures; and although it includes several questions on participation (% people who would do or have done acts like signing petitions, participate in boycotts, and attend lawful demonstrations; % of people volunteering; and data on the civil society infrastructure and density) (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2010, p. 2), the data is not available at the indicator level.

2.7. World Bank Governance Indicators

The World Bank Governance Indicators (WBGI) were first collected in 1996 and consist of aggregate indicators in six key governance areas, one of them being “Voice and Accountability” (Kaufmann et al., 2010, p. 2). Each indicator results from the aggregation of several different variables coming from four main types: surveys of households and firms, commercial business information providers, non-governmental organizations, and public sector organizations (Kaufmann et al., 2010, p. 5). It relies upon the aggregation of a diversity of indicators (not all are available for every country) each of them being standardized from 0 to 1. Using an Unobserved Components Model, the authors of this index then standardize the distribution of values across indicators into a [-2.5:+2.5] scale.

The Voice and Accountability (VA) dimension intends to capture perceptions about the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media. It has the following indicators of participation: freedom of association (extracted from Economist Intelligence Unit), and civil society, electoral process, and political rights (all extracted from Freedom House). Thus, the comments about FH and EIU apply here too.

2.8. The Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (CNP, Johns Hopkins University)

The Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (CNP) was launched in 1991 by Johns Hopkins University with the main objective of clarifying “*the scope, structure, and financial base of the nonprofit sector in a cross-section of countries using a coherent, comparative approach*” (Salomon and Anheier, 1992, p. 2). One critical aspect of research on the nonprofit sector was the lack of available data – not only for comparative endeavours but even for analysis at the country level. Therefore the project was designed from its inception to provide a deep understanding of how and why the nonprofit sector differs across contexts. In order to improve the conditions of comparability, the project coordinators established a common definition of the nonprofit sector to be used across countries (Salamon & Anheier, 1992, p. 10):

“(1) formally constituted; (2) nongovernmental; (3) non-profit-distributing; 4) self-governing; (5) non-partisan; (6) non-religious organizations, characterized (7) by some degree of voluntary involvement.”

The process of data collection is as follows (Salamon & Sokolowski, 1999, p. 470). First, an inventory of available statistical data sources for each country is performed in order to account for national economic census, industrial surveys, special surveys on nonprofit organizations, official economic statistics, national registers of legal entities, population census, population surveys, financial budgets, and labour force surveys. Existing data sources are used to estimate values for the various dimensions under analysis. If available data are insufficient, targeted surveys are conducted for supplementing the gaps. The key variables under analysis are (Salamon & Sokolowski, 1999, p. 469):

- 1) Expenditures: The costs incurred in the general operations of an organization
- 2) Employment: computed as a share of total nonagricultural employment
- 3) Volunteers: the number of volunteers working for nonprofit organizations in our target countries
- 4) Revenues: inflows of spendable resources received by the organization during the year
- 5) Fees and charges: membership dues; service charges paid directly by the client in exchange for services; investment income; and income from the sale of goods and services
- 6) Public sector payments: revenues coming from all branches of government
- 7) Philanthropy/private giving: revenues received from individual contributions, private foundation grants, corporate donations and federated giving funds or programs.

The critical strength of the CNP is its effort to cross-nationally chart an arena of society for which comparative data are scarce. A limitation is that more attention is given to the shape of the nonprofit sector rather than the structure and participatory environment of civil society as such. Issues crucial in civil society studies like the number of organizations, their dimension and levels of membership are not considered. It is not possible to know if civil society is constituted by a set of small associations or large mass associations. It excludes unions, religious organizations, and political movements. No data on membership levels are provided.

2.9. Eurobarometer

The Eurobarometer has been carried out by the European Commission since 1973 (European Commission, 2013, p. 5). It currently involves the 28 member states of the EU plus a varying number of candidate countries. The core questions of the “Standard Eurobarometer” deal mostly with attitudes towards the EU and its institutions. However, since 1990, special Eurobarometers have been conducted on a diverse array of topics, including values, attitudes and behaviour towards participation and democracy. In addition, flash Eurobarometers can be requested by the services of the European Commission, and some have dealt specifically with questions of participation such as Flash EB 373 (“Europeans’ engagement in participatory democracy”) and Flash EB 375 (“European youth: participation in democratic life”). The Eurobarometer occasionally features questions about organisational membership in a wide range of organisations (for instance, see EB 73.4, of May 2010), thus providing good indicators about the density of membership in civil society organisations and political parties. However, due to the character of public opinion data in question, the Eurobarometer does not provide any information about the institutional framework on which respondents operate, be it at the national, regional or local scale.

2.10. European Values Study

The European Values Study is coordinated by the Tilburg University and has been responsible for the collection of four rounds of public opinion data, from 1981 to 2008. In its latest round, the European Values Survey covered six research topics (life, family, work, religion, politics, and society) and was applied in forty-seven countries. Participation in the political sphere was covered in this wave by the following questions (EVS, 2011):

- 1) Voluntary organizations and activities: Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organizations and activities and say a) which, if any, do you belong to? b)

which, if any, are you currently doing unpaid voluntary work for? A - Social welfare services for elderly, handicapped or deprived people; B - Religious or church organizations; C - Education, arts, music or cultural activities; D - Trade unions; E - Political parties or groups; F - Local community action on issues like poverty, employment, housing, racial equality; G - Third world development or human rights; H - Conservation, the environment, ecology, animal rights; I - Professional associations; J - Youth work (e.g. scouts, guides, youth clubs etc.); K - Sports or recreation; L - Women's groups; M - Peace movement; N - Voluntary organizations concerned with health; O - Other groups.

2) Forms of political action: I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it. A - Signing a petition; B- Joining in boycotts; C- attending lawful demonstrations, D-joining unofficial strikes, E-occupying buildings or factories

Similarly to the Eurobarometer, it provides a good and reasonably accurate measure of density of membership of civil society. However it does not offer any information about the institutional framework of the respondent, be it at the national, regional or local scale.

2.11. World Values Survey

The first wave of the World Values Survey was applied in tandem with the EVS in 1981. Currently the World Values Survey Association autonomously administers the survey, which has been conducted over six waves (World Values Survey, 2015). The WVS has a global scope, having covered over all the waves some 90 countries throughout the world. It features questions about values and attitudes towards politics, the economy, society and religion, as well as on the activities developed by respondents within different types or organizations. The latest wave, which was applied in 55 countries, included the following questions on participation (World Values Survey, 2014, p. 2):

1) "For each organization, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organization?" A - Church or religious organization; B - Sport or recreational, C- Art, music or educational organization; D- Labor Union; E-political party, F-environmental organizations, G-professional organizational, H-humanitarian or charitable organization, I-consumer organization, J- Self-help group, mutual aid group; K - Other organization

2) “I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never under any circumstances do it (read out and code one answer for each action): A- Signing a petition; B- Joining in boycotts; C- Attending peaceful demonstrations; D- Joining strikes; E- Any other act of protest. For those reporting as having done any of those, a further question asks how many times the respondent engaged in that behavior over the last year.

The strengths and limitations discussed above for the European Values Study apply here too.

2.12. Vanhanen’s Democratization Index

In the 1960s, Tatu Vanhanen started collecting data about the distribution of power in an increasing scope of societies around the world (Vanhanen, 2014). In a similar way to Robert Dahl, Vanhanen considers that the degree of democracy can be fundamentally captured by the interaction of two dimensions central to the electoral realm: competition and participation. The degree of competition is defined as “the smaller parties’ share of the votes cast in parliamentary or presidential elections, or both” (Vanhanen, 2014, p. 8). Participation is measured by “the percentage of the population which actually voted in the same elections” (Vanhanen, 2014, p. 8). The index of democratization is the product of these two by dimensions divided by 100.

An advantage of Vanhanen’s index is its extensive coverage. The dataset encompasses virtually all independent countries in the world from 1810 to 2012. However, it sticks to a strictly electoral conception of democracy, not capturing evolutions in other dimensions.

2.13. General evaluation

Although extant measures are useful for some purposes, applied work and research on the causes and consequences of democracy are share a few common limitations. First, most indices are highly aggregated, which means they are helpful for summary judgments but not for a more nuanced understanding. Even where various components of an index are available these components still measure quite general concepts. What is more, the degree to which various components of an index are truly independent of one other is unclear: they may simply reflect a coder’s overall sense of how democratic a country is. Second, most indices are constructed to measure only one or two dimensions of democracy – generally, the “liberal” (Madisonian) or “electoral” (Schumpeterian) dimensions. Third, indices tend to cover a global sample of countries for recent years but rarely extend back further in time. Fourth, attention is rarely paid to transparency and replicability in data collection and aggregation. Fifth, although public

opinion data can be revealing about how citizens of each country evaluate their own political system, their opinions are not intended to compare their country to others, and there is little reason to believe that they are comparable across countries. Finally, potential problems of measurement error are left unaddressed, while routine tools such as inter-coder reliability scores tend to be ignored. The absence of reliability data means that the accuracy of the data is either unknown or unreported. Indeed, several recent analyses have shown that they cannot make fine distinctions reliably.

3. Conceptualizing and Measuring Political Participation using the Varieties of Democracy Approach

Defining a social concept is a necessary step before attempting to measure it (Goertz, 2006; Sartori, 1970). In the case of political participation, we can think of it as being structured in three main arenas. The first of them is the electoral arena. In a democratic polity elections are the critical instrument at the disposal of citizens to determine the choice of their representatives and, consequently, to influence the policies pursued by those (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). Despite longstanding discussions about the necessary conditions for a regime to be considered democratic, free and fair elections do constitute a core requirement of virtually all conceptions of democracy – even minimalist ones (Munck, 2009, p. 17).

The second arena of participation lies within the realm of political parties. These organizations play a pivotal role in aggregating and expressing political preferences, recruiting potential members of the political elite and offering alternative political platforms to the electorate (Schmitter, 2001)

Finally, there is the arena of civil society, which can be synthetically defined as the “networks of formal and informal associations that mediate between individual actors and the state” (Bermeo, 2003, p. 7). The conceptual and practical boundaries between political parties and civil society are not always clear (Katz & Mair, 1995); however, for the purposes of defining and measuring political participation, subsuming political parties in the sphere of civil society would carry fewer advantages than granting them an autonomous arena mediating between the state and society. It has been argued that widespread participation in civil society organizations yields positive effects at both the societal and individual level (Bernhard, 1993; Bernhard & Kaya, 2012; Putnam, 1993, 2000), although some authors dispute this assertion (Berman, 1997; Jamal, 2007).

We try to measure each of these arenas taking into consideration whenever possible indicators from three relevant dimensions. The first is the institutional: the opportunities for participation at the disposal of citizens vary deeply from country to country. These frameworks are shaped by a set of interrelated institutions, which are not neutral in the sense that they constitute “collections of standard operating procedures and structures that define and defend interests” (March & Olsen, 1984, p. 738). The second dimension that we bear in mind is the organizational, or behavioural. This dimension refers to the conversion by citizens of the opportunities laid out by their institutional context. Indeed, most comparative analyses of participation take into consideration its level or volume (e.g. levels of turnout; membership and participation in political parties; membership and participation in civil society organizations). Finally we try to account for the political culture inherent to participation contexts (Almond & Verba, 1965; Sabetti, 2007). By doing so, we try to measure the adhesion of political participation actions to core democratic values.

The combination of these three dimensions implies a sequence of logically nested questions. The institutional context is arguably the most critical for participation to occur: Are citizens offered the opportunities to participate (be it in elections, political parties or civil society organisations)? The organisational and behavioural context refers to the level and variety of ways of participating: Given the opportunity to participate, do citizens embrace it, and how much do they so? Finally, the cultural dimension offers an insight into the contours of political action: How do citizens make use of participation?

The following step is to find relevant indicators for each arena. For this purpose, the V-Dem project seems like the most valuable source of indicators. Once completed, V-Dem will arguably provide the most thorough dataset on democracy allowing end-users to make use of its disaggregated indicators in order to build their own indexes. Indeed, the approach outlined in this section would require its own data collection if it were not for the publicly available disaggregated data available in V-Dem, and not in its competitor indices.

Table 3 summarizes the information we are seeking to combine². Regarding the electoral arena, this is one of the areas in which V-Dem provides substantial data, of which we start by selecting the degree to which national elections were *multiparty*, their *free and fair character*,

² Given the variety of measurement scales, every variable was converted into a [0:1] interval using the following formula:

$$x' = \frac{x - \min(x)}{\max(x) - \min(x)}$$

Where both $\min(x)$ and $\max(x)$ refer to the values, within the V-Dem dataset, attributed to Southern European countries for a given year/indicator pair. The scores would be quite different, probably higher, if they were calculated for a global sample covering a longer time period.

and the elected (vs. appointed) nature of *local government*³. The behavioural dimension of electoral participation is captured through *turnout* in the closest election. Turnout is often subject to various measures that might affect its comparability, so we choose to go for the proportion of voters within the voting age population as provided by the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance and also distributed in the V-Dem dataset. Regarding the cultural dimension of electoral participation, we incorporate the *freedom of the media coverage during campaign*, which accounts for the extent to which electoral participation is enhanced by a fully democratic campaign environment. An informed electorate with access to a diversity of political views during campaign time is critical for a fully democratic election process.

Table I.A – Variables in the index

Arenas	Indicators
Electoral (1 st term)	Election free and fair (V-Dem: v2elfrfair)
	Elections multiparty (V-Dem: v2elmulpar)
	Local government elected (V-Dem: v2ellocele)
	Election free campaign media (V-Dem: v2elfrcamp)
Electoral (2 nd term)	Election Voting Age Population turnout (V-Dem: v2elvaptrn) ⁴
Political parties	Party ban (V-Dem: v2psparban)
	Opposition parties autonomy (V-Dem: v2psoppaut)
	Party linkages (V-Dem: v2psprlnks)
	Distinct party platforms (V-Dem: v2psplats)
	Party branches (V-Dem: v2psprbrch)
Civil society	CSO entry and exit (V-Dem: v2cseeorgs)
	CSO repression (V-Dem: v2csreprss)
	CSO consultation (V-Dem: v2cscnsult)
	CSO participatory environment (V-Dem: v2csprtcept)

³ Some of these variables refer to specific general elections, while others are coded every year. For the years in which a general election did not occur, the most straightforward solution is the method already employed by the V-Dem of using the values coded for the most recent election, unless there is an interruption of the electoral regime.

⁴ We chose turnout using as denominator the voting age population (VAP) to avoid the problem of outdated electoral registries. The VAP is not without its shortcomings, though: it is composed of all the individuals older than a certain threshold, without accounting for different electoral status (residents who are non-nationals and therefore are not allowed to vote, for instance). The data have been originally collected by IDEA and are part of the V-Dem dataset as well.

V-Dem also offers a comprehensive array of indicators related to the participation in political parties. Regarding its institutional dimension, we select two variables: the *existence of bans* on political parties, and the *autonomy of opposition parties*. Although V-Dem does not offer information about the level of adhesion to political parties, there are two meaningful and helpful organizational indicators: the professionalization of party organizations, their territorial diffusion, and the existence of party linkages with other organisations. The political culture of parties can be captured by the degree of dissimilitude between party platforms of different parties.

Finally, we try to capture the institutional context of civil society by incorporating three variables: the individual *freedom to join and exit* organizations; the extent to which *civil society operates without restraint*; and civil society's role *in public policy consultation*. The organisational and cultural dimensions are captured through a variable measuring the proportion of citizens involved with organizations.

At this point we have chosen several relevant indicators from the V-Dem database and converted into a [0:1] scale. The following step has to do with the aggregation of each set of indicators into a single arena sub-score⁵. Three principal components analyses were performed using as a source the V-Dem values of five Southern European countries: France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. This implies that the domain of comparison and the range of the variables were restricted to this subset. If the Principal Component Analyses was to be carried out using information from the whole globe from 1900 on, as the dataset would have allowed, the resulting scores would very likely make the Southern European countries have closer values, as historically extreme cases of low participation would have been taken into account. The procedure carried out here thus allows for a more detailed comparison between a limited set of countries in a limited period in time (1970-2012). This statistical procedure implies that different sets of data generate different weights.

After performing the three PCA, we observe that the only case in which one variable did not show a satisfactory correlation with the remaining ones was turnout. Given the centrality of turnout to assess electoral and political participation writ large, we have chosen to make it interact with the remaining variables through a multiplication. The electoral arena participation score is thus the product of 1) the aggregation of the four previously mentioned variables into a single score via PCA, and 2) the level [0:1] of turnout in the latest election. The other two sub-

⁵ There would be alternatives to this procedure. One of them would be to attribute a priori weights to each of the variables instead of relying on the scores yielded by principal components analysis. However, this could be a potential source of bias. Another option would be to develop a cumulative scale (Skaaning S.-E, Bartusevicius H, & Gerring J, 2014), with the caveat that its constitutive elements would not be binary but continuous. This would allow to establish a theoretical hierarchy between dimensions (such as institutional context > density > culture).

indices result from the loadings of the variables that compose each arena according to the scores obtained in PCA. The PCA results are available as appendixes.

Table 2. Correlation matrix between the three scores

Correlations (Pearson)				
	Electoral arena (with turnout)	Political parties arena	Civil society arena	
Electoral arena (with turnout)	1			
Political parties arena	0.79	1		
Civil society arena	0.67	0.90	1	

The three resulting arena scores are correlated with each other in different degrees. Participation in political parties and in civil society are highly correlated (0.90), whereas the aggregate score of the electoral arena is relatively less correlated with the latter (0.67).

A final step is thus to aggregate these three scores into a single measurement for every country-year. As discussed by Munck (2009, pp. 48–49), there are two main decisions when deciding the method of aggregation to use: 1) should a high score in an indicator be annulled by a low score in other indicator (interaction) and 2) can a low score in an indicator be attenuated by a high score in other indicator (compensation).

Since each of the arenas is vital for a vibrant democracy we follow the example of the Human Development Index of the United Nations (2010, p. 15) and aggregate the final score of using a geometric mean rather than an arithmetic one. The three sub-scores were rescaled into a [0:1] interval and subsumed into a general political participation index, with participation for country i in year t thus being given by:

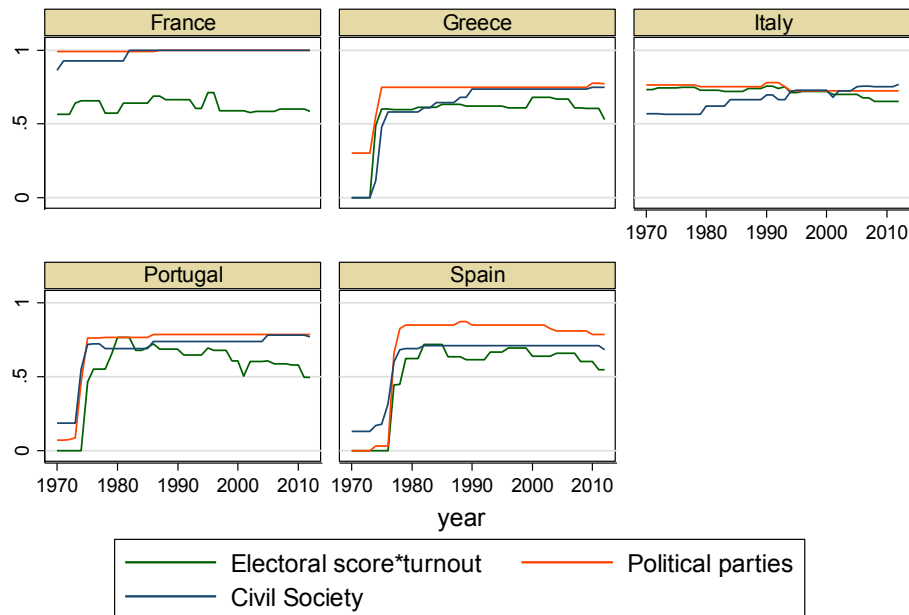
$$\text{Participation}_{it} = \sqrt[3]{\text{Electoral}_{it} \times \text{Political parties}_{it} \times \text{Civil society}_{it}}$$

Results are displayed in figures 1 and 2.

3.3. Comparison with other indicators

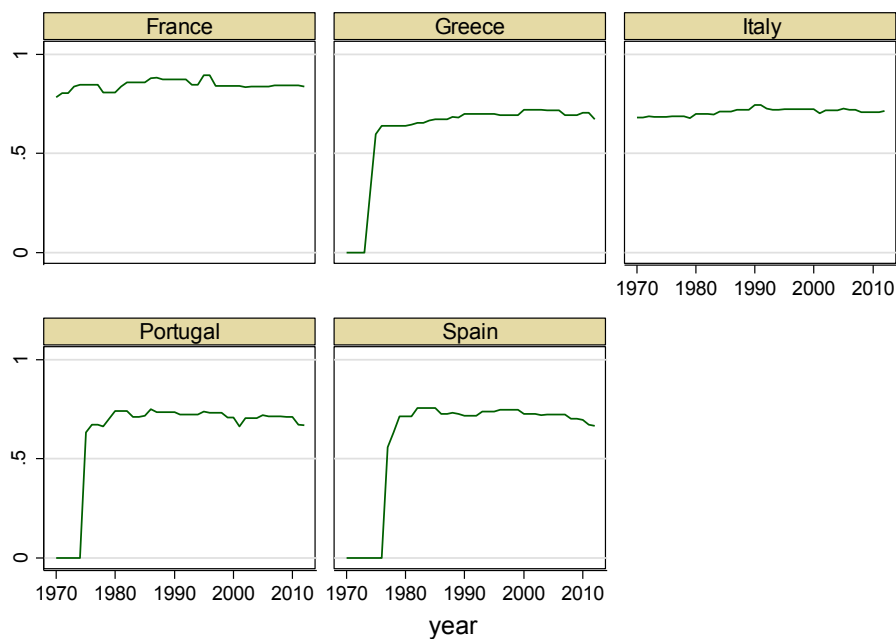
After computing the arena scores and the final index, we compare their performance of with some of the established indicators reviewed in the second section. We will discuss the evolution of these indices across the five countries.

Figure 1: Arena Scores



Graphs by country name

Figure 2: Participation index



Graphs by country name

We compare it against the two Freedom House scores (Civil Liberties and Political Rights), the Polity 2 revised score, and the Vanhanen index. The data on these external indicators come are obtained via the Quality of Government dataset of Gothenburg University (Teorell et al. 2015).

The correlation matrix is presented in table 3. Correlation coefficients with the existing indices are high. While this is somewhat reassuring in terms of the external validity of our aggregated index, it also raises the issue of whether it is efficient in adding new information about the polities. However, visual inspection of the country trends suggests that our Participation Index might be more sensitive to short term effects.

Table 3. Correlation matrix with other indices (1972-2010)

	Part_Index	fh_pr	fh_cl	p_polity2	p_parcomp	p_parreg	van_index	van_part
Part_Index	1							
fh_pr	0.89	1						
fh_cl	0.73	0.76	1					
p_polity2	0.88	0.91	0.80	1				
p_parcomp	0.49	0.49	0.27	0.44	1			
p_parreg	0.46	0.47	0.24	0.41	1.00	1		
van_index	0.72	0.79	0.55	0.80	0.44	0.41	1	
van_part	0.69	0.82	0.63	0.87	0.45	0.43	0.91	1

Notes: N = 190.

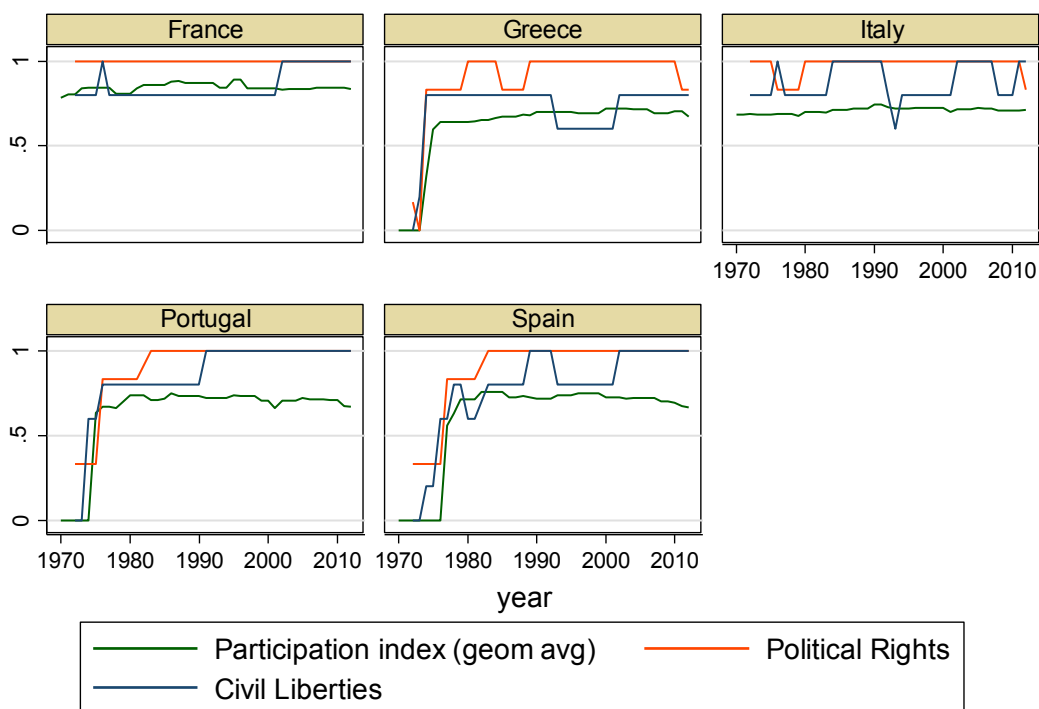
The evolution of our indicators of participation can be compared with the values in other indices as a way to ensure validity but also to show whether it captures something else. We pick three indices for comparability purposes: Freedom House, with its two dimensions (“Political rights” and “Civil liberties”); Polity (revised combined score); and Vanhanen’s index of democratization. All indices converge in the marked increases that followed the regime changes in the 1970s in Portugal, Greece, and Spain.

In the five countries under consideration, after the transitions to democracy were complete, Freedom House’s two indices range between 1 and 3. While in some countries (France and Portugal) this has meant that the values have basically remained constant, in others a more dynamic evolution is implied by the data. The V-Dem political parties, when compared to the

equivalent Freedom House index (the political rights index), shows a similar high ranking and classification for the case of France comparatively to the other southern European countries. V-Dem and Freedom House also capture in similar ways the rankings of the three countries that democratized in the 1970s, all showing a spectacular rise in the political parties indexes from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s.

But when looking for finer variations between the cases of Greece, Spain, Italy, and Portugal, the FH index is not enough. All these democracies evidence very similar scores and no signs of change over time since 1980. By contrast, the V-Dem index is better able to capture significant political change in the realm of political parties, namely Italy's slight decline since the 1990s, with the end of the traditional post second world war party system, Spain's decline since the early 2000s because of corruption scandals (Gunther and Diamandouros, 2001; Gunther, Montero, Botella, 2004), and even the slight rise in Portugal since the mid-1980s, when the party system stabilized after the electoral defeat of political parties sponsored by the President of the Republic (Jalali, 2007).

Figure 3: Freedom house – Political rights and Civil liberties indices



Graphs by country name

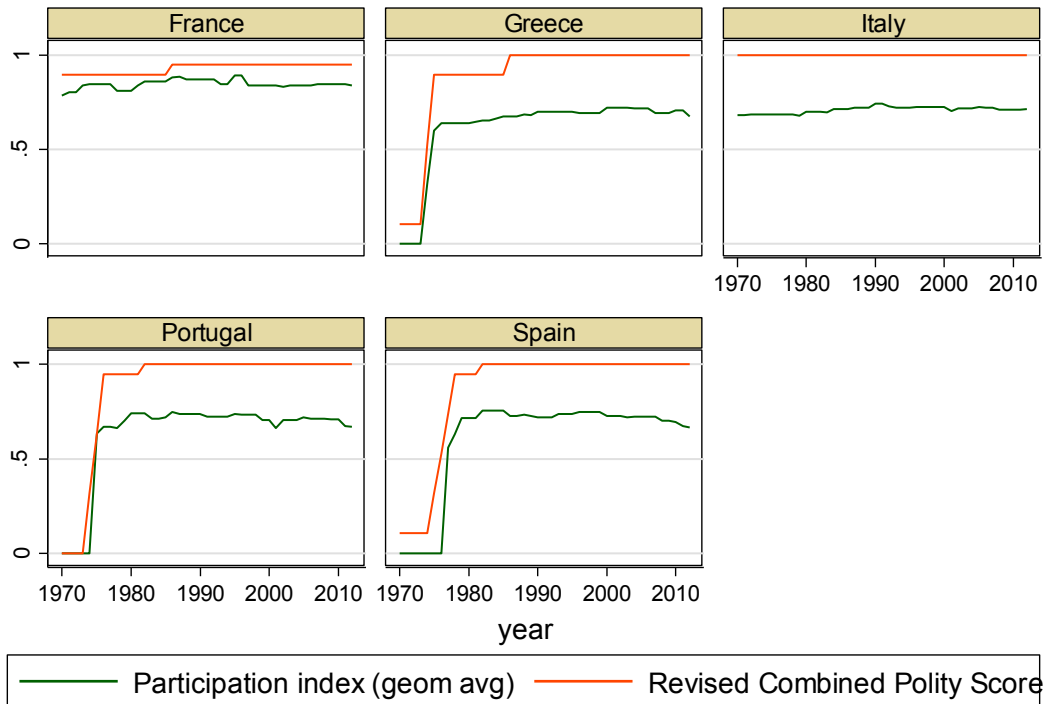
Civil society indexes by Freedom House (civil liberties index) and V-Dem are both able to track some major trends, like the huge rise of civil society during transition and early consolidation of democratic regimes (mid-1970s to mid-1980s). But V-Dem is able to portray much more specifically the evolution and different nature of civil society in countries like Portugal and Spain, where the superior density and political incorporation of Portuguese civil society demonstrated by V-Dem confirms existing historical and qualitative research (Fishman, 2011; Fernandes, 2014). Portugal ranks always above Spain since the mid-1980s in the V-Dem index, whereas in the Freedom House civil liberties index both countries have almost similar scores.

The revised polity score results from the combinations of two other Polity scores, where the autocracy score is subtracted from the democracy score. The results from each of these two the indices are calculated on the basis of four dimensions: competitiveness of political participation, openness of executive recruitment, competitiveness of executive recruitment, and constraints on the chief executive. Since each of the two previous indices “p_autoc” and “p_democ” vary from 0 to 10, the revised polity score varies between -10 (autocracy) and 10 (democracy) (Teorell et al. 2015).

The *Polity index* remains quite insensitive to finer variations as well. Like the previous indexes, it captures the major regime transitions of the mid-1970s. At the same time it is unable to capture any variation between countries, since these have a totally equal ranking and classification, something which is quite implausible. The V-Dem elections index is much better in this regard. For instance it clearly shows that Italy and France rank higher than any other Southern European democracy. This finding gives validity to theories that argue that older democracies tend to have more competitive and free elections and higher turnout, because of the fact that they started in an pre-television era, when strong mass mobilizing parties were the only vehicles linking masses to elites (Bartolini & Mair, 2001). But V-Dem also captures variations between older democracies, showing a decline in the elections index in all countries since the 2000s, with the exception France, a puzzling variation which remains to be explained.

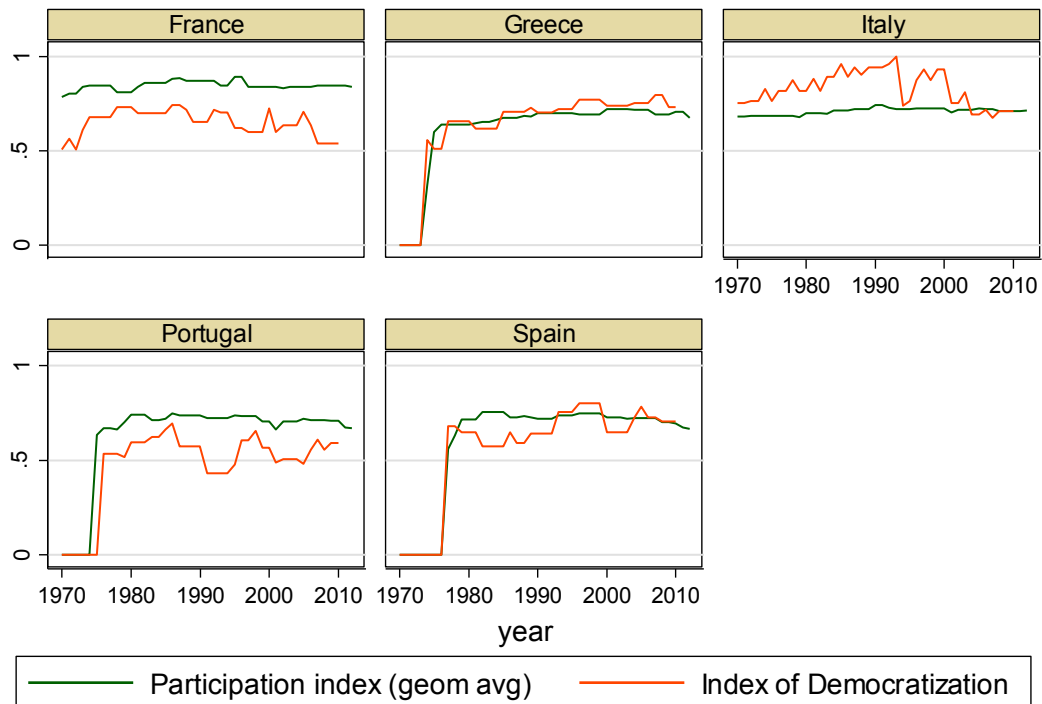
Vanhanen’s index uses a dimension of competition derived from electoral results that is absent from our index. It provides an interesting comparison as it is the only of the three that takes into account voter turnout. Indeed, it has a high Pearson coefficient of correlation with our electoral score for the countries and years under consideration (0.88).

Figure 4: Revised combined Polity Score



Graphs by country name

Figure 5: Vanhanen's Index of Democratization



Graphs by country name

Vanhanen's index of democratization can also be compared to our general index of participation (Figure 5). Both indexes can somehow be considered approximations to the quality of democracy in these countries, but V-Dem's index is much more complete, since it implies the aggregation of levels of citizen participation in elections, civil society and party organizations, whereas Vanhanen's only captures levels turnout. From Vanhanen's index, which is just an electoral point of view, France has the weakest quality of democracy, whereas our V-Dem index gives France (immediately followed by Portugal), the best score. This lends confirmation to existing research that shows that post-revolutionary societies, of which Portugal and France are examples, tend to have better democracies (Fishman, 2011) and higher levels of civic and political participation (Fernandes, 2014; Hunt, 1984; Sewell, 1980; Tilly, 1986).

Conclusion

In this paper we presented and discussed existing measurements of participation and offered an alternative conceptualization based on the possibilities offered by the V-Dem project. By taking into account the diversity of participation channels that citizens have at their disposal, we were able not only to create a more multidimensional index, but also to chart more clearly for the Southern European region its country-specific trajectories and between-country variations. Moving beyond the identification of these trajectories and trying to assess their underlying causal roots will be the next crucial step in future research.

Appendix I.A - Output of Principal Components Analysis: Electoral arena (before taking turnout into account)

Principal components/correlation Number of obs = 215
 Number of comp. = 1
 Trace = 4
 Rotation: (unrotated = principal) Rho = 0.8336

Component	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Comp1	3.33	2.92	0.83	0.83
Comp2	0.42	0.25	0.10	0.94
Comp3	0.17	0.90	0.04	0.98
Comp4	0.08		0.02	1.00

Principal components (eigenvectors)

Variable	Comp1	Unexplained
v2elmulpar	0.46	0.29
v2xel_locelec	0.52	0.11
v2elfrcamp	0.49	0.21
v2elfrfair	0.53	0.06

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy

Variable	kmo
v2elmulpar	0.81
v2xel_loce~c	0.85
v2elfrcamp	0.82
v2elfrfair	0.72
Overall	0.79

Appendix I.B – Output of Principal Components Analysis: Political parties arena

Principal components/correlation

Number of obs = 215

Number of comp. = 1

Trace = 5

Rotation: (unrotated = principal)

Rho = 0.7727

Component	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Comp1	3.86	3.10	0.77	0.77
Comp2	0.76	0.55	0.15	0.92
Comp3	0.21	0.08	0.04	0.97
Comp4	0.13	0.09	0.03	0.99
Comp5	0.37		0.01	1.00

Principal components (eigenvectors)

Variable	Comp1	Unexplained
v2psoppaut	0.48	0.11
v2psparban	0.45	0.23
v2psprbrch	0.40	0.38
v2psplats	0.47	0.13
v2psprlnks	0.43	0.27

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy

Variable	kmo
v2psoppaut	0.86
v2psparban	0.86
v2psprbrch	0.76
v2psplats	0.71
v2psprlnks	0.71
Overall	0.78

Appendix I.C – Output of Principal Components Analysis: Civil Society arena

Principal components/correlation

Number of obs = 215

Number of comp. = 1

Trace = 4

Rotation: (unrotated = principal)

Rho = 0.8636

Component	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Comp1	3.45	3.24	0.86	0.86
Comp2	0.21	0.01	0.05	0.92
Comp3	0.20	0.07	0.05	0.97
Comp4	0.13		0.03	1

Principal components (eigenvectors)

Variable	Comp1	Unexplained
v2csprtcpt	0.50	0.15
v2cseeorgs	0.51	0.11
v2csreprss	-0.49	0.16
v2cscnsult	0.50	0.13

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy

Variable	kmo
v2csprtcpt	0.89
v2cseeorgs	0.83
v2csreprss	0.89
v2cscnsult	0.86
Overall	0.87

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