The Nexus Between Political Orientation and Political Participation

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Abstract

This study examines how citizens' political orientation may affect their political decision-making processes, which are also linked to political participation. This paper also discusses the factors influencing the healthy promotion of political orientation and participation. Professional identity can significantly shape political preferences, which affect how people view governance and policy. Understanding these nuances, this paper attempts to explain the link between political orientation and political participation, which can help analyse political behaviour and design more effective civic engagement strategies.

Keywords: Political Orientation, Political Participation, Democracy, Voting behaviour, Political activism

1. Introduction:

A democratic process is one in which individuals make equitable decisions for themselves. One common conception of democracy is that of "government by the people" or at least as elected representatives by the people. In essence, we can say that in democracy, power and authority rest with citizens. Usually, this type of power is considered political and takes the form of popular sovereignty. Alexis de Tocqueville, in his study "Democracy in America", emphasises that democracy is not merely about the form of government or its choosing; it can sometimes also be applied to a whole society. In the 2024 presidential elections of Sri Lanka, the powerful ruling party toppled and brought about radical changes in the country's political setup, demonstrating the power of the people. The election result in Sri Lanka has demonstrated faith in the power of the people in upholding democracy in the country. A good democracy represents a stable institutional structure that realises liberty and equality of citizens through its working methods, which can also ensure the checks and balances of the working conditions of institutions. This demonstrates that active involvement, well-educated, and responsible citizens are the main actors who contribute to building a good democracy. Informed citizens are crucial when supporting or opposing public policy. Voters make decisions by voting in favour of the candidate or party, or they can oppose by abstaining from voting. National voting systems, such as proportional representation and majority rule, are some fundamental concepts, but the core of this system is that every state citizen who is eligible to vote at the polls is, therefore, free to select the leader, party, or representative of their choice.

This study demonstrates that people frequently prefer political decision-makers and investigates the potential impact of differences on political decision-making. The study also highlights a link between political preferences and political engagement. The function of democracy depends on active citizens who actively engage in public debates, civic activities, and political decision-making processes. Active political participation ensures that civic engagement influences government policies and decisions. These activities may include voting, protesting, and campaigning, and similar civic actions can be included. Support or

opposition to public policies, civic responsibilities, and policy preferences affect citizens' beliefs, views, and values about politics, which can be referred to as political orientations. This means that the success of democracy depends on the involvement of citizens whose political orientations are shaped by their political participation. (Christensen et al., 2014)[1] Found a link between citizens' ideas and their actions. It also ensures citizens' support for the representative concept of democracy by actively participating in civic activities and voting to choose representatives. In addition to these discussions, mainly three decision-making models were identified by (Bengtsson et al., 2014)[2] and (Coffé et al., n. d.)[3] Representative, participatory, and expert models. In the representative model, politicians are the main actors in decision-making. In contrast, the participatory model emphasises citizens as primary political decision-makers. The expert decision-making model is based on experts. These experts are non-partitioning and independent and may be considered the best choice for making particular decisions. Although the expert model is nondemocratic, it may receive support from democratic citizens who hold democratic values. Among these and similar models of democracy, citizen participation is considered the backbone of democracy. All activities like supporting leaders, voting, opposing political representatives, or political decisions are considered the most important modes of participation.

1.1 Key Elements of Democracy

Successful democracy mainly depends on the different elements of civil society that work together to create a strong democracy: empowered citizens, free and fair election processes, responsive policies that represent citizens' values and interests, trustworthy information and communication methods, and voluntary associations for social good. These elements ensure the success of democracy. A multiparty political system, democratic voting system, and citizen participation are some features that ensure strong democracy. Democracy relies on citizens' political orientation and their political participation. Political orientation refers to individuals' ideological beliefs, values, political choices, and preferences. These political orientations and democracy are intimately related because political orientations shape how people interact within the political system, and democracy allows for the expression of varied political orientations. People can freely identify with any political ideology in a democratic society, ranging from liberal to conservative, progressive to nationalist. It also helps identify citizens' perspectives about the government, its policies, and societal challenges. Political orientations also influence people's engagement in democratic activities, such as voting, supporting or opposing policies, boycotting, and protesting. The presence of many political perspectives is essential for a functioning democracy as it promotes political plurality, ensures the representation of different interests, provides equal opportunity for all voices, and helps maintain checks and balances by avoiding the hegemony of one ideology or authority. Political orientation alone does not ensure political participation, but it significantly influences political participation because individuals' beliefs and views about politics determine their level of engagement in political activities. Political participation is the main way in which citizens express political views.

[1] Christensen, K., Guldvik, I., Of, M. L.-S. J., & 2014, U. (2014). Active social citizenship: the case of disabled peoples' rights to personal assistance. *Taylor & FrancisK Christensen, I Guldvik, M LarssonScandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 2014•Taylor & Francis*, *preprint* (SUPPL.1), 19–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/15017419.2013.820665

[2] Bengtsson, Å., Opposition, H. C.-G. and, & 2016, undefined. (2014). Ideals and actions: Do citizens' patterns of political participation correspond to their conceptions of democracy? *Cambridge.OrgÅ Bengtsson, H ChristensenGovernment and Opposition, 2016•cambridge.Org*. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2014.29

[3] Coffé, H., & Michels, A. (2014). Education and support for representative, direct and stealth democracy. *Electoral Studies*, *35*, 1-11.

(Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980)[4] Studies show that political efficacy and interest in politics are interrelated with political participation and active involvement in political actions and also require individual motivation, personal values, traits, and beliefs towards their political system, identified as political orientation. A political orientation does not ensure citizen participation in civic activities, for instance, even though people may have political orientations, they may not participate in civic activities. Education plays an important role in this situation since it supports an individual in developing a political orientation, which in turn makes them take an active part in political activities, by educating them about their role in public policies, thereby improving their lives; however, if it fails, it can destroy the same. Upholding democracy in any country needs legitimacy concerns, which include acceptance and support of democratic rules and institutions to achieve this. Active, responsible citizens and their political orientations and political participation play an important role.

1.2 Factors influencing the healthy promotion of political orientation and participation

Political participation is a strong indicator of how democratic a state is, as it shows the people's interest in political issues within a society in different forms like supporting, rejecting, protesting, or demonstrating political issues or ideas, etc. Political participation depends upon the knowledge and the behaviour of an individual in political activities. It is an individual activity at different levels of the political system. Political participation is affected by social and economic factors, such as gender, age, education, family background, unemployment, income level, economic growth, and religious affiliation. Furthermore, political factors also affect political participation, such as the right to vote, candidates' performance, political trust, political affiliation, party activities, and party agendas. Political participation encompasses various activities through which individuals engage in the political process, including voting, attending protests, joining political parties, and participating in civic discussions. Understanding the factors that influence such participation is crucial for fostering an inclusive representative democratic system. Some of the key determinants are as follows. [5]

1.2.1 Socio-economic Status and Education

Political participation is strongly influenced by socio-economic status (SES). Voting and other political participation are more common among those with greater incomes. This correlation is due to greater access to resources, and time that promotes participation. Similarly higher education enhances political participation increasing political awareness.[6]

1.2.2 Political Efficacy

Participation levels are significantly influenced by political efficacy which denotes belief in one's ability to influence political processes. A strong sense of political efficacy emphasises people are more likely to participate in politics. Different studies showed that political efficacy has a differentiated impact on various forms of participation influencing the likelihood of individuals.[7]

[4] Weinschenk, A. C., Dawes, C. T., Oskarsson, S., Klemmensen, R., & Nørgaard, A. S. (2021). The relationship between political attitudes and political participation: Evidence from monozygotic twins in the United States, Sweden, Germany, and Denmark. Electoral Studies, 69, 102269.

[5] Kulachai, W., Lerdtomornsakul, U., & Homyamyen, P. (2023). Factors Influencing Voting Decision: A Comprehensive Literature Review. *Social Sciences*, *12*(9), 469. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12090469

[6] Deimel, D., & Abs, H. J. (2022). Local Characteristics Shape the Intended Political Behaviours of Adolescents. *Social Indicators Research*, *162*(2), 619–641. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-021-02852-y

[7] Prats, M., & Meunier, A. (2021). Political efficacy and participation: An empirical analysis in European countries.

1.2.3 Community and Social Network

Political participation is also influenced by the features of social networks and local communities. Social interaction and involvement in communities can enhance an individual's propensity to participate in political processes. Studies show that social trust and community engagement are important determinants of political participation.[8]

1.2.4 Social Media and Youth Engagement

Social media to a greater extent transforms political participation, especially among youth. Its effect on offline involvement and voting behaviour is less noticeable however social media use has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on online political activities which indicates that digital platforms serve as a gateway for broader political involvement among the young generation.[9]

1.2.5 Gender and Political Participation

Gender differences also play an important role in political participation. Studies have examined the impact of gender on political participation highlighting various social and economic factors.[10] (Lawless, 2004)[11] Emphasises that the participation of women is lower than that of men as there is a lack of female representatives in many political parties, which in turn causes the low and limited participation of women in political issues.

(Romana et al., 2019)[12] Studied the impact of age on political participation. According to this study, young people showed lower voting turnout than older people. (Fox 2015, n. d.)[13] study linked social well-being money and economic development like income levels with political participation. According to the study, high income and wealth encourage individuals to take active participation. The unequal distribution of wealth also impacts political participation. (Ahrend et al., 2005)[14] Stated that differences in regions within a country affect political participation. For example, within a country, different ethnic diversity can be observed, which impacts culture and political orientation, and thus influences political participation.

1.3 Nexus between political participation and political orientation

The political orientation of a person significantly influences their participation in politics. Political participation is more likely to occur among individuals with strong ideological beliefs. Political orientation shapes citizens' perceptions of political issues. This requires them to take part and act according to their beliefs. As political orientation is shaped and developed by different factors, traditional classroom-based civic education can help students develop political knowledge. Political knowledge develops attitudes, views, and values about politics, which are referred to as political orientation. These factors, in turn,

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[8] Alelaimat, M. S. (2023). Factors affecting political participation (Jordanian universities students' voting: field study 2017-2018). *Review of economics and political science*, *8*(1), 54-67.

[9] Barati, M. (2023). Casual Social Media Use among the Youth: Effects on Online and Offline Political Participation. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2312.10095*.

[10] Ezra, Sherly, Margareth, Silalahi. (2024). Women's Political Participation in the United States After Women's Suffrage: Women's Representation in the Legislature of the House of Representatives and the Senate. JPPI (Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia), 10(3):348-348. doi: 10.29210/020244071

[11] Lawless, J. L. (2004). Women, war, and winning elections: Gender stereotyping in the post-September 11th era. *Political Research Quarterly*, *57*(3), 479-490

[12] Romana, G. F., Davide, S., Filomena, C., Daniele, S., Antonio, M., & Monica, G. (2019). Old Age and Women's Identity. In *Geriatric Medicine and Gerontology*. IntechOpen.

[13] Fox, J. A. (2015). Social accountability: what does the evidence really say? *World development*, *72*, 346-361.

[14] Ahrend, R. (2005). Speed of reform, initial conditions, or political orientation? Explaining Russian regions' economic performance. *Post-communist economies*, *17*(3), 289-317.

influence individuals to actively participate in different political activities. Popkin and Dimmock's[15] study revealed that a low level of knowledge and information does not follow public discussions on issues, which, in turn, can be seen in the less interested ones taking active participants in political activities. The two relationships between political orientation and political participation are complex but cannot be denied their overlapping influence on one another. Political orientation refers to actions taken by citizens to influence political processes or governmental decision-making processes. These actions can be institutionalised or non-institutionalised depending on the individual's political orientation. If an individual on the political left (liberal or progressive ideologies) engages in non-institutionalised forms like protests, and demonstrations, it may take different forms like civil disobedience, street protests and campaigns, which may further become a tool for mobilising collective action. On the other hand, individuals concerned with political rights (conservative or libertarian ideologies) generally participate through institutionalised political channels such as voting and supporting parties. Individuals prefer to work within established systems rather than seeking radical changes. However, both forms of participation are valid, but they reflect different ideologies regarding the role of citizens in influencing decisions. According to Huntington[16] and Nelson[17], political participation is an activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action either by directly affecting the implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make these policies. According to (Verba & Nie, 1987)[18], some measures of political participation include the number of registered voters, civic and political organisations and census response rate. Political participation explains that individuals' political beliefs and ideologies significantly influence their level and type of political participation. For instance, individuals with liberal orientation typically engage in protests, signing petitions, boycotting, and advocating for social justice. Individuals with traditional or conservative orientations tend to participate in voting, attending rallies, campaigning for candidates, and supporting party agendas. Political trust also moderates the relationship between political orientation and political participation as higher trust in political institutions and government procedures is used to engage in official channels, whereas lower trust leads to other forms of participation like boycotting the policies. Political orientation can take different forms: liberal, conservative, libertarian, moderate, and authoritarian. Further discussion has led us to understand that these different forms require individuals to act differently. For instance, different forms of political orientation may alter political participation methods as follows.

1.3.1 Voting behaviour

Liberal individuals frequently advocate progressive policies and social reforms. Voting, campaigning for progressive candidates, and participating in social movements or protests are common activities undertaken by these groups. They often vote for candidates who support progressive social justice, environmental protection, and economic equality policies. Conservatives usually support traditional values and policies that emphasise stability and continuity. They often vote, support conservative candidates, who emphasise traditional values, economic conservatism, and national security, and engage in community organisations that align with their beliefs. A moderate holds centrist views and may support liberal and conservative policies. They focus on specific policies rather than political lines when engaging

[15] Dimock, M., & Popkin, S. L. (1997). Political knowledge in comparative perspective. *Do the media govern*, 217-24.

[16] Huntington, S. P. (1991). How countries democratize. *Political science quarterly*, *106*(4), 579-616.

[17] Nelson, W. (1984). Huntington on democratic politics: A review of american politics: The promise of disharmony. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 89-98.

[18] Verba, S. (1995). Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics. *Harvard UP*.

in politics. Their voting patterns can vary, often supporting candidates based on specific issues rather than party affiliation. Strong central authority is supported by those who lean authoritarian, and they frequently back measures that prioritise control and order. Their involvement could take the form of endorsing politicians or policies that guarantee strict legal enforcement and capable leadership.

1.3.2 Activism and Protests

Liberals, in general, engage in activism and protests to advocate for civil rights, social justice, and environmental issues and concerns.

Conservatives usually support candidates who advocate traditional or conservative values and give emphasis on national security. With this orientation, they usually participate in rallies or movements that support traditional values and want to maintain the status quo not to bring any sudden change in their society.

Authoritarians usually give references to candidates who promote firm leadership and want to enforce laws. They are usually less likely to participate in protests, but they may strongly support movements calling for strong government control and order.

Moderates are less likely to engage in protests, but they may participate in issue- or ideal-based activism that aligns with their views. Libertarians often protest government overreach and for individual liberties.

1.3.3 Community Involvement

Liberals participate in community groups that support environmental sustainability, education, and social welfare.

Members of conservative communities are active in religious and business associations that uphold traditional values.

Moderates become involved in community events that demand bipartisan cooperation and take action to address local issues.

Authoritarians, while centralised control is a common priority of authoritarian regimes and leaders, may also encourage neighbourhood watch programmes and other community-level efforts as a means of strengthening local security under wider supervision. Although these programs may also strengthen social control and monitoring under the pretence of public safety, they might be presented as community empowerment efforts

1.3.4 Online Engagement

Political orientation and political participation can also be influenced by media exposure because online engagement can also impact their level of orientation and type of political participation. Liberals use social media to organise events, share information, and mobilise support for progressive causes. Social media influences political participation and orientation as politically active individuals often engage across multiple platforms and provide information regarding positive or negative views of politicians or political parties, which further helps individuals gain or rebuild their opinions, views, and values. Gender, age, demographical condition, and education also play an important role in online engagement.

1.3.5 Economic Factors

Political participation and inclination are strongly influenced by occupation. People's opinions about economic policies, labour rights, and regulations—all frequently linked to political ideologies—are shaped by their work experiences. Professions are groups of occupations that have limitations. Professionals like law and medicine are considered ideal types few others like public-sector professions

with significantly less power are described as 'Semi- Professions' by Zacher.[19] The work of professionals can be viewed in terms of several interconnected sets of power relations. However, state-framed regulations interlink all these relationships. Many differences can be observed between personal knowledge and professional working conditions, as their ideas, judgements and behaviours are embedded in their performance. Professional knowledge cannot be considered independent because it is dependent on different factors, including state regulatory institutions.[20] People who work in fields where government regulations are strict, for instance, might form strong views about governance, which would then influence their political inclination, or professionals working in the public sector may have limited scope to discuss or express their political views during their working hours, which may limit their political participation to minimal action. Moreover, a sense of identity misfit resulting from a mismatch between a person's political inclination and his/her line of employment might affect how that individual participates in political discourse and activities in both the workplace and larger society. In the workplace, political divergence can lead to feelings of not belonging, a lack of commitment, and a higher chance of leaving the job. To improve workplace relationships and employee well-being, organisations must understand how political ideologies can affect organisational culture and employee experiences. Further understanding of the context reveals that a person's professional identity can also serve as a platform for political engagement, allowing them to advocate for social change and influence legislative decisions.

Conclusion:

Political engagement and orientation are closely related, highlighting a dynamic interaction in which each influences the other. People's political orientation influences their type and degree of engagement, which is influenced by things including their personal beliefs, occupation and outlook for the future. Strong political identities or orientations, for example, increase the likelihood of engaging in formal or institutionalised political activities; on the other hand, non-institutionalised or grassroots movements centred around certain problems may be pursued by others. This connection is crucial in democratic regimes. Democracy depends on its citizens' active participation, and a person's attitude towards political trust and governance can increase or decrease such participation. Moreover, professional identity can significantly shape political preferences, which affect how people view governance and policy. Each political orientation shapes not only the type of participation but also the motivation behind it. Understanding these nuances can help analyse political behaviour and design more effective civic engagement strategies. In summary, an individual's political participation reflects their orientation, which is shaped by various personal, professional, and societal circumstances. Orientation may influence the type and extent of political involvement because of the reciprocal relationship between political ideas and civic engagement.

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[19] Zacher, Hannes & Rudolph, Cort. (2022). Effects of Person-Occupation Political Orientation Misfit on Occupational Identification: An Experimental Study. Applied Psychology. 72. 10.1111/apps.12433.

[20]Uhlaner, C. J. (2015). Politics and Participation. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences: Second Edition*, 504–508. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.93086-1