

Diversity, uniformity and urban political participation

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Sammendrag

Notatet analyserer effekten på politisk deltakelse av å bo innenfor sosialt heterogene/homogene kontekster. Analysene er gjort innenfor tre norske storbyregioner. Vi har anvendt flernivåanalyse for å undersøke effektene av kontekstuelle faktorer på individuell atferd. De empiriske analysene er basert på kombinasjonen av to datasett: På individnivå (nivå 1) bruker vi en befolkningsurvey gjennomført i de tre storbyregionene Bergen, Oslo og Stavanger. I alt er undersøkelsen gjennomført i 73 kommuner og omfatter mer enn 6.000 individer. På kommunenivå (nivå 2) bruker vi et stort datasett som omfatter en lang rekke opplysninger om kommunene. Et av hovedfunnene fra denne analysen er at det stedet folk bor har en effekt på deres partipreferanser, selv etter at det er kontrollert for betydningen av individuelle bakgrunnstrekk. Én mulig antakelse er at sosial ulikhet innenfor et område skaper stimulerende møter mellom folk med ulik bakgrunn og at dette i neste omgang skaper engasjement og deltakelse. Våre analyser støtter ikke en slik hypotese. I stedet finner vi at politisk deltakelse blant innbyggerne er lavere i kommuner og bydeler preget av sosial ulikhet.

Summary

Our paper aims to analyse the effects of heterogeneity/homogeneity on political participation in three metropolitan areas in Norway. One hypothesis is that socially and/or ethnically homogenous urban areas will have a negative impact on participation. When social groups with different backgrounds are less likely to encounter, the mobilising effect of conflict is weakened. Hence, participation will decline. Another assumption points in a different direction: Diversity may lead to paralysis. Particularly in cases of multiple identities, citizens will be exposed to cross-pressure and will tend to abstain from participating. We have used multilevel modelling in order to investigate the effects of contextual factors on individual behaviour. Hence, the empirical analysis will be based on the combination of two data sets: At the individual level (level 1) we will make use of a comprehensive citizen survey comprising a total of more than 6.000 respondents from three city regions and 73 municipalities. Among these are the three core cities of Oslo, Bergen, and Stavanger. At the aggregate level (level 2) we employ a data set consisting of more than 2.000 variables characterizing the municipalities included in the survey. The analysis reveals a negative relationship between heterogeneity and participation. Hence, our data do not support the contention that social environments consisting of multiple social groups foster vibrant political involvement. On the contrary, our findings lend support to the cross-pressure hypothesis, indicating that the diversity of personal experiences within a community will tend to lessen the citizens' involvement in political affairs.

Introduction

Urban environments are often portrayed as arenas for stimulating encounters between individuals with different experiences and outlooks. On city sidewalks people are bound to meet strangers; people who look, act and think differently from themselves (Jacobs 1961). Exposedness to persons who represent the unfamiliar is likely to provoke some kind of reaction. These reactions may span from positive reflections over one's own identity, through rejection, to downright hostility. The crucial point is that diversities are potentially politically relevant because they define identities by displaying contrasts. In turn, contrasts serve as generators of interests shared by the members of a social group. The recognition of group distinctiveness creates incentives for political mobilisation: Encounters serve as backdrop for comparison with other groups. Comparison creates awareness about self and others. Thus, frictions that arise from social heterogeneity may spur participation. At the same time, tensions stemming from social encounters can cause people to shy away from involvement. Living in a heterogeneous environment exposes citizens to various pressures. Finding one's own position is strenuous. Non-participation is a likely resort.

The overall aim of this paper is to investigate the effects of social diversity on political participation in Norwegian city regions. We take interest in the degree to which societal heterogeneity converts into politically relevant conflicts and thereby mobilises groups of citizens. In addressing factors outside the actors themselves, the paper adds to the literature about contextual factors that may influence political involvement (Eriksson 2007, Gainsborough 2005, Huckfeldt 1979, Walks 2004). We thus assume that certain features of the socio-demographic environment of an individual have a bearing on the decision to involve in political activities - or abstain from it. Although the literature on context has grown rapidly in recent times, the prevailing idea is still to emphasise individual factors in explaining political participation. Obviously we will not deny the importance of individual level explanations. On the contrary, we recognise that individual level explanations are likely to explain the major part of the observed variation in popular participation. Instead we argue that looking at contextual factors allows us to present a more complete understanding of the conditions for participation and non-participation.

A crucial argument put forward in this article is that we need to distinguish between different types of contextual effects. Studies of environmental effects on participations are not always clear as to what kinds of effects are being examined. This paper differentiates between a) aggregate effects of social heterogeneity on the level of participation in a community¹ as a whole, and b) effects on specific groups given their relative position vis-à-vis the dominant social group in the community. Presumably, these two differing forms of diversity have potentially different political implications.

¹ In our use «community» corresponds to municipality. This is also our context level unit of analysis. Hence, a community is a territorially delimited social unit, and carries no underlying normative assumptions about a particular relationship between its members.

Moreover, their respective effects on participation must be methodologically pursued differently.

Contextual level analysis requires a particular methodological approach. By using individual-level data from a survey designed deliberately for the analysis of multilevel data structures we are able to analyse the effects of social context on citizens' behaviour. Multilevel modelling allows us to differentiate community level effects from individual level effects. Data were collected through questionnaires to 6.166 respondents from 73 municipalities within three city regions in Norway.

The first part of the paper discusses in more detail the relationship between social heterogeneity and political participation, with a particular eye to the intermediate role of social conflict. The next part outlines the status of contextual level explanations in studies of political participation. After having accounted for data and methodology we move to the empirical part of the paper, in which we test our hypotheses about heterogeneity and participation. Finally we round up the paper with a discussion of the main results and their implications.

Diversity, conflict and participation

Our main contextual level variable is social heterogeneity. The concept of social heterogeneity refers to systems characterised by a high degree of variety in terms of social status indicators. Heterogeneity, differences, or diversity is essential to politics. Let us assume the contrary; a community where there are no differences in living conditions or experiences. In that case there would be no need for politics as a means of achieving mutually based solutions. Involving in political activities is uncalled for as long as there is no discord between individuals and groups or between groups. According to Gerry Stoker (2006:5)

Politics matters because there are conflicts and differences of perspective in society about what to do, what resources to collect for public use and how these resources should be spent.

Since taking part in politics necessarily involves taking a stand on issues with potentially opposing outcomes, it can be argued that political participation presupposes some kind of diversity within a social collective. Thus, our initial assumption is that social heterogeneity may generate political participation because it creates tension or conflict between different groups within a community. This simple model is illustrated in figure 1:

Figure 1: *A simple causal model for the relationship between heterogeneity and participation*

Social heterogeneity → (Conflict →) Participation

However, even if it is true that politics presuppose some kind of diversity, it cannot be automatically inferred that more diversity causes more people to take part in political activities. In fact, quite a lot of empirical evidence points in the opposite direction: It is homogenous environments that produce more involvement in politics. The following two sections argue the cases for the two opposing assumptions.

The case for assuming that heterogeneity increases participation

It is important to point out at the very beginning that empirically we are concerned with heterogeneity, not conflict. We simply do not present data measuring the level of conflict in the selected municipalities. However, it is implied by our argument that social diversity alone does not bring about political participation. Differences must create tensions that in turn possibly will spark involvement among certain groups. All differences are not politically relevant. Only differences that are transformed into conflict will attain political salience. Nevertheless, differences are the subject matter of conflict since unequal social conditions or identities may produce different interests. Once these interests are being infringed upon there is an impulse for those who are affected to involve in some kind of political activity. Consequently, the recognition of different interests constitutes the basis of a political conflict. Moreover, as social heterogeneity increases in a society, the chances of being exposed to opinions that differ from your own also increase. Hence, McClurg (2006: 351) argues that diversity and disagreement are interrelated.

In turn, the recognition of contrasts between groups offers a platform upon which political institutions can be developed. Political mobilisation is centred on a set of societal cleavages. Provided these cleavages are recognised as collective identifications, they serve as bases for political organisations. In other words, social differences, in the sense of relatively stable cleavage structures, give the foundation for the institutionalisation of political competition in a community (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). In this scheme differences and ensuing conflict are perceived as the forebears of political mobilisation and, in turn, institutionalisation.

Along these lines it can be claimed that differences constitute an integrating as well as a disintegrating force on communities. A sense of belonging and identity is conceivable only as long as alternative identities are present. By distinguishing one group from another, a potential is created for cohesion and, subsequently, collective action based on group membership. Georg Simmel (1955) has argued that conflict prompts a certain degree of cohesiveness at group level and, at community level, an awareness of contrasts between groups. Hence, the absence of diversity does not ensure a vibrant civic and political community:

The disappearance of repulsive (and, considered in isolation, destructive) energies does by no means result in a richer and fuller social life (...) but in as different and unrealizable a phenomenon as if the group were deprived of the forces of cooperation affection, mutual aid and harmony of interest. (Simmel 1955: 18)

In similar terms, Lewis Coser (1956) has argued that «out-group» conflict increases internal cohesion within an «in-group». In a more recent contribution Robert Putnam (2007: 143) has claimed that there might be a positive relationship between bonding (in-group) and bridging (out-group) social capital. However, Putnam is concerned with civic capacities, not political participation.

Diversity, thus, may provide a politically stimulating environment. According to Schattschneider (1960:1f):

Nothing attracts the crowd so quickly as a fight. Nothing is so contagious. Parliamentary debates, jury trials, town meetings, political campaigns, strikes, hearings, all have about them some of the exciting qualities of a fight; all produce dramatic spectacles that are almost irresistibly fascinating to people. At the root of all politics is the universal language of conflict.

In the contrary case the absence of diversity will remove politically relevant issues from a community. Oliver (2001) predicted that American suburbanisation has had the effect of homogenising local communities and thus taking away the tension that may accommodate political strife and competition. For that reason, he argues, we may expect all-white middle class neighbourhoods to exhibit relatively lower degrees of participation than neighbourhoods with a demographic mixture of affluent and deprived people. Oliver does find some support for his contention: Affluent, homogenous communities still have a larger share of politically active citizens, but this is essentially down to individual level factors. Once the individual variables have been controlled for, homogenous communities are, in Oliver's study, slightly less vibrant in terms of political involvement than are more heterogeneous communities. Similar concerns about the effects of segregation are raised by Carr (2006).

The case for assuming that heterogeneity causes non-participation

Active involvement is by no means the necessary outcome of conflict. Non-participation may just as likely be the result, or, if we turn the argument around, high levels of participation may possibly be related to homogenous environments, not heterogeneous. Recent empirical work provides no clear-cut answer to what exactly is the relationship between social heterogeneity and participation. On the contrary, there is evidence to support both outcomes. While Oliver finds that economic diversity within a community tends to incite participation, Gimpel, Lay and Schuknect (2003) observes that increased heterogeneity results in decreased participation.

The literature offers two major reasons for assuming a negative relationship between heterogeneity and participation (Rubenson 2005). First, people are more able to overcome problems of collective action in environments that they conceive of as friendly. According to one line of reasoning exposure to conflicting or disagreeable information tends to dampen people's desire to participate. Among others, this argument is forwarded by students of social capital, who claim that diversity creates lower levels of trust and, thereby, less political involvement. Second, when the citizens within a community experiences that their fellow citizens share their norms and values, they are more willing to engage in collective problem solving. Integration into a collective increases one's commitments towards the other members of the collective. The likelihood that citizens volunteer for political work increases when they are experiencing strong social ties to relatively like-minded citizens.

Barriers to participation in heterogeneous environments are psychological as well as organisational. Psychological barriers stem from exposure to cross-pressures;

expectations drawing in opposing directions, causing people to abandon collective involvement altogether. Organisational barriers come from practical problems in group formation in diverse environments.

Political vs. civic participation

The evidence is not clear regarding the relationship between social heterogeneity and participation. While some writers do not find contextual differences at all (Eriksson 2007), those who do establish contextual variation are at odds as to how heterogeneity affects participation. Some find a positive relationship, others find a negative relationship.

Campbell (2004) argues that the differences in results are down to a lack of differentiation between civic and political activities. The same view is maintained by Rubenson (2005): Political participation is fuelled by heterogeneity, whereas civic participation is facilitated by homogeneity. Whereas civic activities are mainly directed towards civil society, political activities are directed towards government institutions. The aim of political participation is to influence government actions or public policies directly. Civic activities aim to pursue collective goals without influencing government actions. Campbell observes that political participation is fuelled by heterogeneity, whereas civic participation is facilitated by homogeneity.

This paper however is basically concerned with the political significance of heterogeneity, and, as such, with forms of participation that aims at influencing public policies. Moreover, as can be inferred from Solt, Campbell's contention that different results are due to differences in dependent variables cannot be upheld. The reason is that the empirical evidence is quite contradictory even when looking at political participation alone. McClurg (2006) points out that previous research indicates a positive relationship between disagreement and attitudes such as tolerance, but a negative relationship between disagreement and participation. Hence, the lack of consistence in findings cannot solely be down to differences in dependent variables.

Moreover, Solt emphasises that quite often diversity does not simply entail dissimilarities between individuals or groups, it also involves *inequality*. It might be argued that the likelihood that diversity evolves into political conflict increases if diversities constitute inequality in material living conditions. As long as the most disadvantaged groups are not actively suppressed by the more advantaged, asymmetries are likely to produce tensions between groups. In turn, these tensions may spill over into manifest conflicts. But even if inequality increases the probability of conflict, it cannot be treated as a condition for conflict.

Solt (2008: 49f) distinguishes between two strands of theorising about the way social context influences participation. The assumption that conflict prompts participation, he labels «conflict theory». On the other hand, he identifies a «relative power theory». According to this school of thought asymmetries in resources only serve to reinforce asymmetries in political power. First greater inequalities give the affluent a greater advantage in manifest conflicts. Second, in line with Bachrach and Baratz (1970), it can be assumed that the more affluent one group is, relative to other groups, the greater is its potential to control the political agenda by suppressing certain issues. Solt thus

contends that socioeconomic inequalities are detrimental to political participation. Especially the less privileged have little incentive to get involved in politics.

The systematic removal of these issues from the political agenda has predictable consequences for political engagement. Poorer citizens, confronted by a political system that fails even to develop alternatives regarding the many issues of importance to them, can be expected to become more and more likely to rationally conclude that there is little point to being engaged in politics (Solt 2008: 49)

Individual vs. contextual level explanations

Generally, contextual explanations direct attention to factors outside the actors; to features of their surroundings. Certain contextual variables have been thoroughly investigated. For instance, certain characteristics of political or administrative entities, like their organisation, economy or composition of personnel, are examples of contextual factors that may influence political behaviour. In this paper we will direct attention to another group of variables not necessarily related to specific political-administrative entities: The social environment within which the actor lives.²

Only to a limited extent has the research on political participation been occupied with participatory contexts. Certainly, there are a number of studies on the relationship between participation and the size of political units (Dahl and Tufte, 1973, Rose 2002). Research on size and democracy, however, is rarely specific about what dimensions of size that are assumed to affect behaviour. In addition to the size and democracy studies, some studies deal with differences between urban and rural settings in connection with political participation (Tarrow 1971). But the distinction between urban and rural contexts is too crude to come to terms with the development of larger metropolitan areas.

The bulk of literature on political participation has concentrated on individual level explanations. Particularly influential has been the so-called Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) (Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995, Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). This model focuses on the socioeconomic resources of individuals, but it also includes dispositions in terms of political interest, and network involvement, in terms of memberships in organisations. The models' success in explaining differences in political involvement can partly account for the lack of interest in contextual factors. For instance, proponents of the CVM model would not deny differences between various neighbourhoods in a city, but they would argue that this variation is caused by differences in the social composition of its residents: When affluent neighbourhoods are more vibrant, this has nothing to do with the environment but simply with the aggregated effects of individual resources.

Considering the very strong evidence in favour of individual-level explanations, it would be unwise to argue against their importance. However, much of the dominant theories within the social sciences imply that context does matter. Institutional theory is based on the assumption that certain environmental, non-individual factors do affect the behaviour of individuals. In a similar vein, political geography assumes that spatial

² For general discussions of contextual explanations, see Tingsten (1937) and Stinchcombe (1968)

factors influence politics, independently of the individuals that inhabit an area. Thus, in addressing contextual explanations we have no intention of dismissing or decreasing the importance of social and economic status in accounting for variation in political participation. Instead our contention is that the success of the CV model and other individual-based models has meant that students of political participation have lost somewhat sight of context. Newer studies reveal that place and local belonging do play a part even after one has controlled for individual attributes: Similar citizens in dissimilar places differ in the ways and degrees to which they involve politically (Johnston et al. 2005; Gainsborough 2005, Oliver 2001). Not least studies of political behaviour in metropolitan areas have demonstrated how changes in demographic patterns require a renewed interest in contextual explanations (Hoffmann-Martinot and Sellers 2005). Some studies have even shown that the effects of context-level factors have increased over time (Walks 2004).

Even if we argue that contextual factors have been underrated, it is crucial to relate contextual explanations to the more widely used socioeconomic variables (Verba, Nie and Kim 1978). An important ambition must be to search for possible interaction effects between contextual and individual-level factors. (Huckfeldt 1979, Sapiro and Conover 1997).

The difficult notion of context

When studying how contextual factors affect political participation it is crucial to be clear about what aspects of context is at the centre of attention. By addressing the concept of heterogeneity we have already made it clear that we are spotlighting the *socio-demographic* environment of citizens. Still, further distinctions need to be made.

McClurg (2006) thus maintains that context is a multi-layered phenomenon, in which various levels interplay to produce specific effects. His interest is in the interaction between the aggregate level context and each person's social network. However, we want to direct attention towards a distinction between two different perspectives on what McClurg characterises as aggregate contexts. The literature on heterogeneity and political participation seems to be ambivalent as to what perspective on context that is applied. On one hand aggregate-level context is thought to influence all residents within a geographical area «flatly». For instance, from knowledge of the level of social heterogeneity within a community we may make assumptions about the general level of participation. On the other hand, assumptions about the significance of context may be made on the basis of knowledge about specific groups and their relative position vis-à-vis the dominant social group in the community. Within the first perspective, diversity may imply that two or more groups exist alongside each other in a given community, competing for scarce resources. Within the second perspective, diversity entails discrepancy between individual groups and the larger collective, with one group dominant. These two situations are fundamentally different, and may have different consequences for political behaviour within that community. In the ensuing empirical analysis, we will include both conceptualisations of context.

«Us and them»: Assuming that social context affects the aggregate level of participation

Within the literature on contextual effects on participation, the argument about «critical mass» is important. For a group to be able to participate effectively in community affairs, it is necessary to reach a certain number of members. Only when this (unspecified) number is attained, organised interaction is likely to take place (Cho, Gimpel and Dyck 2006, Fischer 1975, Wilson 1986).

In this case the problem we are dealing with concerns the overall social make-up of a community. The prime question is whether a community can be characterised as largely homogenous or largely heterogeneous. In turn, the social diversity or uniformity of a community is expected to affect the general level of conflict and, in so doing, affect political involvement within that same community. The basic assumptions are elaborated above and need not be reiterated.

The conflict model, represented by Oliver (2001) and, indirectly, Schattschneider (1960), are cases in point. These writers claim that the aggregate level of conflict affects the general level of involvement. They portend that social opposites creates the conditions for a vibrant local community. Such opposites generate rivalry and competition, something that in itself begs interest. Besides, a competitive environment may stimulate participation because citizens feel that their voice might make a difference.

Pointing in the opposite direction, the cross-pressure hypothesis, originally formulated by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948), posits that conflicting identities and/or divergent information causes people to refrain from political activities. Cross-pressure is particularly relevant in situations where individuals are subject to contradictory group expectations (Lipset 1981: 211f), a typical feature of heterogeneous environments. Yet, even if the conflict model and the cross-pressure hypothesis advocate the exact opposite effects stemming from social heterogeneity, they both address the way heterogeneity/homogeneity at the aggregate level may affect the general level of participation in a given community.

On the basis of these considerations we may formulate two hypotheses:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between social diversity and participation

H₂: There is a negative relationship between social diversity and participation

«People are Strange»: Individual groups' relative position towards dominant groups in their social environment

As we have seen, the other perspective on social context does not address the general level of participation in a community, but rather the relative position of particular groups towards the prevailing social group in the community.

There is an interesting question to be raised about the effects of being an outsider in a particular context. A tension may occur between a prevailing group in a community and those individuals who somehow differ from this numerically dominant group. The question to be asked is how it affects individuals who deviate from the general

population within a particular social unit. The so-called «frog pond» theory contends that being a small frog in a pond with otherwise large frogs will have some effect on a particular individual. Equally, being a large frog in a pond consisting of otherwise small frogs will have an effect on the individual frog that deviates from the rest of the group (Hox 2002: 6).

Applied to the problem of political participation: How do relatively deprived individuals react to living in a context with mainly affluent citizens? Conversely, how do relatively affluent people react to living in a deprived context? One hypothesis is that deviance enhances citizens' participation: Thus we assume that the less-resourced are lifted by the greater collective, whereas those who deviate in a positive direction will have their role as elite individuals bolstered by the fact that they are relatively superior to their neighbours.

Just as well we may hypothesise the opposite effect: Socially deviant individuals will tend to participate less. Those who possess relatively less resources in a well-off community will find few fellow citizens with whom to interact. Hence, they risk being isolated within their environment. Conversely, persons who are more affluent than the main bulk of residents in a community will be discouraged by the general level of activity.

Tingsten's «law of social gravity» (Tingsten 1937) must be understood as an effort to conceptualise social context in these terms. To Tingsten, the crucial attribute of a social environment was the numerical strength of the dominant social group. He observed that different social groups' behaviour had to be understood in light of their relative position towards the dominant group. Being a member of the main group generated a higher degree of within-group uniformity than being a member of numerically smaller group. Hence, in districts where the working class was numerically superior, working class members turned out in comparatively higher numbers in elections. Moreover, their support for the Social Democratic party was comparatively stronger than in districts where the numerical position of the working class was weaker.

On the basis of the discussion above we may formulate these two hypotheses:

H₃: Resourceful environments strengthen the effects of individual resources

H₄: Resourceful environments weaken the effects of individual resources

Data and methods

In analysing potential effects of context on political participation, we assume a relationship between two levels in a hierarchical structure of determinants. In our research design individual respondents are *nested* within municipalities. On the individual level (level 1) we have individual respondents. On the contextual level (level 2) we have municipalities within city-regions. We will use multilevel analysis in order to investigate the effects of contextual factors on individual behaviour. Hence, the empirical analysis will be based on two data sets: At the individual level (level 1) we will make use of a comprehensive citizen survey comprising a total of 6.166 respondents from three city regions and 73 municipalities. Among these are the three core cities of Oslo, Bergen,

and Stavanger. At the aggregate level (level 2) we employ a data set consisting of a series of key variables characterizing the municipalities included in the survey.

Testing the hypotheses

Indicators of political participation

Political participation may be measured in a number of ways. In this paper we rely on a battery of questions about participation covering a wide number of political activities. To our purpose it is crucial that socio-demographic context is likely to affect political participation differently depending on the type of participation in question. Hence, from the extensive survey battery we have selected a number of indicators that may reasonably be expected to vary according to socio-demographic environment. At the same time it can be argued that these indicators span the most important modes of political participation. We distinguish between voting, contacting, manifestations, political organisation, influencing specific issues, and civic activities. The classification draws on a number of previous studies, notably Lidström (2006), Parry, Moyser & Day (1992: 51f), Verba & Nie (1972), and Verba et al. (1995: 48). The various modes of participation and their operational indicators are shown in table 1.

Table 1: *Six modes of participation and their respective indicators*

Mode of participation	Indicators
Voting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voted in the 2007 local elections
Contacting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacted local councillor • Contacted MP
Political organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taken part in the activities of a political party • Member of an activist group/protest group
Manifestations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taken part in public demonstrations
Direct policy influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signed a petition
Civic engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taken part in the activities of a voluntary organisation

We assume that sensitivity to environmental influence varies according to three criteria. First, we expect the *degree of exposedness* to determine whether context matters. While voting, contacting and signing a petition basically take place within a private setting, participating in demonstrations or being active in a political party is a more visible activity, and consequently more exposed to evaluation by other members of the local community. Thus, in municipalities where social control is effective, one may expect lower levels of activities that are clearly visible to the local community. Second, for local context to affect the level of participation in a particular activity, we suppose that the activity needs to be primarily *locally based*. This line of reasoning is in accordance with a supply-sided argument for why context should matter: Variation in policy and issues between different communities accounts for variation in participation, but this pertains

more strongly to activities that have a local origin. Hence, contacting of local councillors is more likely to be affected by contextual factors than contacting MPs. Thirdly and finally, previous work has suggested that contextual factors apply differently to *political and civic acts* respectively. Aspects of social context may affect both forms of participation, albeit differently. Diverse and conflictual environments are more likely to produce involvement in political activities, whereas uniform environments stimulate involvement in civic activities (Campbell 2004, Rubenson 2005). Therefore, although we are primarily interested in political participation, we have included an indicator of civic engagement as a control variable.

Level-2 variation

Is there significant variation in our eight participation indicators at municipal-level? Table 2 depicts the result in form of separate (unit-specific) multilevel logistic regression models for each of the eight participation indicators. In multilevel logistic regression, the outcome is linear based on log-odds (the natural log of the odds) and includes a random effect for the municipal-level. The empty model includes not predictors at either level, but provides an overall estimate of the likelihood of participation between municipalities.

To illustrate the interpretation of the entries in the table we use the first column, contact with local politicians, as an example. The predicted logit for having contacted local politicians for a typical municipality in the sample is -1.1. The estimated odds of contacting local politicians in a typical municipality is $\exp(-1.1)=0.33$, and thus the estimated mean probability for contacting local politicians for the respondents is $0.33/(1+0.33)=0.25$. The overall proportion of respondents who answered that they had contacted a local politician in the survey was 19 per cent. We further estimate that 95% of the municipalities in this sample have a plausible value range when it comes to contacting between 16 and 44 per cent. Hence, some municipalities have a considerable percentage of respondents who did contact a local politician. We also find significant variability around the intercepts for this collection of municipalities (Level-2 variance=0.20, Chi-square 133.8). One addition appealing characteristic of multilevel models is the determination and interpretation of the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) (see Snijders and Bosker 1999 for estimating ICC for dichotomous outcomes). For contacting the ICC is 0.06 which means that municipalities (so far) seems to account for 6 percent of the variation in contacting.

Looking on the overall participation level voting is unmatched by any of the other forms of participation. Still, we find fairly high average levels of activity within voluntary associations, petition signing and citizen-contacting of local councillors. Participation in demonstrations represents the lowest average level among the activities included in table 2, but participation in protest groups as well as contacting politicians at the national level is also relatively limited. If we move on from the grand mean to the variation between municipalities, citizen contact with local politicians varies the most. However, quite considerable differences between municipalities are also found in petition signing, taking part in the work of a voluntary association, and party activities. On the other hand, very little contextual level variation is to be found in MP contacting and voting.

Table 2: Multi-level empty logistic regressions: eight participation indicators. Random-effects, odds ratios, intraclass correlations, LR-tests and plausible value ranges.

	Contact local pol.	Contact nat. pol.	Action group/protest group	Demon- stration	Sign petition	Taking part in the activities of a voluntary association	Voting	Taking part in the activities of a political party
<i>Fixed effects</i>								
Coeffisient	-1.1*	-2.7*	-2.6*	-3.2*	-0.4*	-0.4*	1.9*	-2.3*
Odds Ratio	0.33	0.07	0.07	0.04	0.66	0.70	6.9	0.10
Level-2 variance	0.20	0.01	0.14	0.20	0.04	0.04	0.01	0.18
Chi-square (p)	133.8*	1.4	16.7*	74.4*	17.2*	31.5*	0.4	35.5*
Intraclass-correlation	0.06	0.004	0.04	0.06	0.01	0.01	0.001	0.05
<i>Plausible value range (95%)</i>								
Lower	0.16	0.06	0.04	0.02	0.31	0.32	0.85	0.05
Mean	0.25	0.06	0.07	0.04	0.39	0.41	0.87	0.09
Upper	0.44	0.08	0.13	0.09	0.50	0.48	0.89	0.19

* Significant at the 0.00 level. N- Level 1=6144, N-Level 2=73.

Turning to the ICC scores the table reveals most of the variation in participation is to be found on level-1. That said, the results also show that we cannot disregard possible municipal effects. The municipalities seem to account for between 4 and 6 percent of the total variation for several of the participation indicators. Even ICCs as small as 0.01 (1 percent) are significant, and only for voting and MP contacting can we disregard contextual effects. As pointed out by Steenbergen and Jones (2002:231) «to ignore these sources of variance is to miss out on important aspect» of participation. Even an ICC score of 0.01 are significant, and only voting and MP contacting do not show significant variance at level 2.

According to the arguments furthered above we expected the forms of participation that clearly expose participants to their environments to show the lowest degree of contextual variation. Taking part in demonstrations is the most evident example of a highly exposed activity. The ICC shows that involvement in demonstrations is indeed sensitive to environmental influence. However, so is contacting, which is normally a political act that is not exposed to the broader environment. These findings offer clearer support in favour of the second assumption, that participatory forms with strong local links show the strongest municipal variation. Voting and contacting MPs both have strong ties to national politics and are unaffected by contextual factors (not significant municipal-level variance).

To sum up the analyses of the empty models, municipalities seem to be important for how people participate. Individual-level factors play a decisive role, but we cannot ignore the possibility that people participate in similar ways because of where they live. Thus, contextual predictors may be important in order to explain differences in participation level across municipalities. Before entering our municipal-level explanatory factors, the next step is to ask if the variance at municipal-level still holds when we introduce individual-level explanatory variables in the model.

Contextual-level determinants of political participation

We proceed to analyse four of the eight dichotomous participations indicators from table 2, where we can reasonably expect context to matter for the level of participation:

1. Contacting a local politician
2. Taking part in public demonstrations
3. Being a member of an activist group
4. Taking part in the activities of a political party

These four types of participation differ as to whether they are embedded in the representative institutions or not. Whereas contacting and party activities clearly must be placed within the realm of the representative system, taking part in a demonstration or an action/protest group are organised outside these institutions, possibly in opposition to them. Following Hox (2002) and Steenbergen and Jones (2002) we aim at testing the multilevel model beyond the empty model in three steps:

- *Model 1:* Introduce individual level (level 1) explanatory variables. By introducing explanatory variables at level 1, we are able to compare a model with individual-level explanatory variables to the empty model (step 1). The intention at this point is to see how much of the variance at municipal-level that can be explained by the individual-level variables.
- *Model 2:* Introduce contextual level (level 2) explanatory variables. In this model we are adding explanatory variables at contextual (municipal) level. Again, this model is compared to the previous in order to assess how much variation in the dependent variable is reduced. In our case model 3 tests the hypotheses 3 and 4 above; whether collective-collective diversity affects the level of participation in a municipality.
- *Model 3:* Introduce cross-level interaction effects. This model enables us to assess whether any of the slopes varies significantly between the groups; that is to say between the municipalities. It allows us to assume that level-1 explanatory variables may have a different effect in different contexts. Hence, this model enables us to test the hypotheses 1 and 2 above. Here we assume that similar individuals will act differently depending on the municipality in which they live.

Furthermore, we have employed three measures of diversity at level 2: 1) Income, 2) share of population with higher education, and 3) share of population with leftist or rightist political self-identification. Since we are interested in the heterogeneity of a community; that is the dispersion of the population within the various groups (municipalities), our level-2 variable is the *standard deviation* of these three measures. However, such measures are not available at the municipal level. Consequently, we have to aggregate the standard deviations from individual data observations. We are thus using the standard deviation of a variable at level 1 as an explanatory variable at level 2. This is a common method used in multilevel analysis (Hox 2002).

In measuring the cross-level interaction effects we have calculated interactions by seeing each individual's score on an individual variable relative to the aggregate level of the same variable in each group. The question is, for instance, how an individual with high education behaves in a context of mainly low-education individuals. Thus, we only test for cross-level interaction for significant individual-level variables.

The empirical results are shown in tables 3 and 4. Only significant results are presented.

Table 3: Multilevel logistic regression: Contacted local politician/participated in party activities

	Dependent variable: Contacted local politician			Dependent variable: Participated in political party activities		
	MODEL I	MODEL II	MODEL III	MODEL I	MODEL II	MODEL III
<i>Fixed Effects</i>						
Constant	-2,838***	-1.673	-	-	-2.451***	-2.782***
			1.795***	3.354***		
Male	0.335***	0.337***	0.338***	0.563***	0.560***	0.467***
Univ. level education	0.317***	0.318***	0.791***	0.428***	0.425***	1.165***
Age	0.018***	0.017***	0.017***	0.020***	0.020***	0.020***
Party member	1.341***	1.324***	1.325***			
<i>Level 2 Effects</i>						
SD Income		-1.344**	-1.235**		-1.021*	-1.073**
<i>Cross-level interaction effects:</i>						
Education * percent higher education			-0.016**			-0.028**
<i>Variance Components</i>						
Level 2	0.210	0.201	0.183	0.173	0.173	0.162
rho	0.060			0.050		

Table 4: Multilevel logistic regression: Taken part in public demonstration/action group

Dependent variable: Taken part in public demonstration		Dependent variable: Participated in action group	
MODEL I	MODEL II	MODEL I	MODEL II
<i>Fixed Effects</i>		<i>Fixed Effects</i>	
Constant	-2.209***	Constant	-2.929***
Income	-0.291***	Univ. level education	0.284**
		Age	-0.007**
Univ. level education	0.336**	Party member	1.270***
Age	-0.019***		1.259***
Party member	1.087***		
<i>Level 2 Effects</i>		<i>Level 2 Effects</i>	
SD Income	0.687	SD Income	-1.166**
SD left/right scale	-0.433		
SD percent higher education	-0.427		
<i>Variance Components</i>		<i>Variance Components</i>	
Level 2	0.193	Level 2	0.122
rho	0.055	rho	0.035

Introducing individual level explanatory variables (Model I) does not reduce level-2 variance noteworthy. This can be seen when comparing variance components from the

empty models presented in table 2 with those in tables 3 and 4. Consequently, we can safely conclude that the contextual effect remains even after having controlled for individual level explanations. In other words, contextual level effects are not caused by the composition of residents in each municipality; they are not so-called compositional effects.

So far we have merely established the group-level effects on these four types of political participation. Now we move to the substantial results. In one instance (table 4, demonstrations) we find no significant effects of the level-2 variables that we were interested in, but in the remaining three measures of participation we do observe significant effects of one particular contextual variable: The standard deviation of income. Thus, concerning aggregate heterogeneity, the results are consistent across three out of four analyses. The implication is that municipality-level heterogeneity does have a significant on political participation in our data. Furthermore, in the three instances where this particular variable is significant, its impact is negative. That is, in heterogeneous communities the level of political participation is generally lower than in homogenous communities. Consequently, these results lend support to H_2 , assuming a negative relationship between diversity and political participation. Moreover, the results enable us to reject the assumption that heterogeneity, and subsequent conflict, leads to higher levels of participation.

If we move on to the last step of our analyses, we see that significant cross-level interaction effects have been obtained for two out of four indicators of participation. This applies to the contact variable and the party activity variable. The results are consistent for both dependent variables. The cross-level interaction effect of individual level education relative to municipality-level education is negative. The interpretation of this result is that well-educated individuals are induced to participate less in high-education contexts. Hence, the effect of education on the individual level is reduced in environments characterised by a high level of education.

Concluding remarks

This paper has addressed the question of social heterogeneity and political participation. While diversity is at the centre of all political activity, social heterogeneity within a community does not necessarily enhance political participation. The empirical evidence is ambiguous, some studies observing a positive relationship between heterogeneity and political involvement, while others find a negative relationship.

We have initially pointed out that the question about diversity and participation has in previous research been approached in different ways. One group of assumptions postulates that aggregate social heterogeneity influences the general level of participation within a community. Heterogeneity fosters disagreement, which in turn may constitute the basis of political mobilisation. Alternatively the degree of tension will tend to put people off from engaging in politics. The second type of assumptions deal with how the behaviour of specific groups is affected by their relative position vis-à-vis the general socio-economic level in their community. We have tried to incorporate both these approaches in our empirical analysis.

As an indicator of the aggregate level of heterogeneity we have used the aggregated standard deviation of education. The analysis reveals a negative relationship between heterogeneity and participation. Hence, our data do not support the contention that social environments consisting of multiple social groups foster vibrant political involvement. On the contrary, our findings lend support to the cross-pressure hypothesis, indicating that the diversity of personal experiences within a community will tend to lessen the citizens' involvement in political affairs. What's more, our results do not support Oliver's (2001) conclusion that the need for involvement is greater in communities where people differ in background and experiences. Instead, the threshold for engaging appears to get higher as differences increase. Alternatively, the barriers of collective organising are higher in heterogeneous communities and thus reduce the general level of activity.

Interestingly, earlier work has emphasised the distinction between civic and political participation, maintaining that political participation will be stimulated by heterogeneous environments whereas civic engagement is to be encouraged by homogenous environments. Our research puts a damper to the hope that the puzzle of environmental effects is solved by this distinction. Although our focus is *political* participation it is not promoted by heterogeneous environments.

Our indicator of the second form of environmental effects is the cross-level interaction effects of education within a community with a given level of education. We find that the effect of education on participation is reduced in contexts typified by high levels of education. Tingsten's (1937) law posits that the effects of belonging to a particular group will be enhanced when that same group holds a dominant position within the community. If Tingsten's law was to be supported by our findings, we would expect the effect of education to be particularly strong in high-education contexts. Thus, our results run contrary to Tingsten. A likely interpretation of this particular result is feather-riding. According to this view individuals high on the status ladder do not feel inclined to involve in politics when many of their fellow citizens may be expected to commit themselves to political activities.

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