

Conventional and unconventional political participation in times of economic crisis in the Netherlands

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Abstract

In this contribution, we investigate the extent to which the recent economic and financial crisis affected levels of political participation in the Netherlands. We derive competing and complementary theoretical propositions concerning the effect of economic downturn on political participation. Economic decline might mobilize people to voice their concerns in the political arena, especially via unconventional modes of political participation such as demonstrating. Contrastingly, against a background of growing concerns on declining social cohesion and community involvement in the Netherlands, it is also argued that economic adversity might induce apathy, make people less likely to connect with their communities and less likely to participate politically. We use the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies collected both before and during the economic crisis in 2006, 2010 and 2012 to empirically assess these competing claims. We distinguish between conventional (electoral) and unconventional (non-electoral) modes of political participation. Our results demonstrate a general decrease in conventional modes of political participation and an increase in unconventional modes of political participation during the recent economic crisis, especially among the resource poor and lower classes.

Introduction & research question

As the financial and economic crisis hit Europe in 2008, various protest movements took the stage in the media, the political and societal realm. Europe (and beyond) witnessed the uprising of a wide variety of protest movements, for instance protests against austerity measures in Greece, the ‘15M-movement’ in Spain, to the ‘occupy movement’ across the globe. These protests are indications that hard economic times might incentive people to participate in (protest) politics (Ponticelli & Voth, 2011; Munoz, Rico & Anduiza, 2013).

In cross-national comparative studies that focus on the relationship between economic adversity and political participation, it is often argued that deprivation due to economic adversity fuels discontent and induces specific modes of political participation, such as protests, that might go as far as destabilize regimes (Haggard & Kaufman, 1995), or even increase the likelihood of civil war (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). However, this is in sharp contrast with studies at the individual-level that aim to explain who is more likely to participate in politics. When studying the socio-economic situation and attitudes that motivate people to engage in political actions, many scholars argue that discontent (Norris, Walgrave & van Aelst, 2006), grievances and relative deprivation (Dalton, van Sickle & Weldon, 2010) do not motivate citizens to participate in the political domain. Rather, individuals with higher socio-economic resources are more prone to politically participate (Brady, Verba & Schlozman, 1995). This provides an interesting theoretical and empirical puzzle. At the macro-level, it is argued that economic downturn fuels grievances that mobilizes people to participate politically whereas at the micro- or individual-level it is usually found that the relatively well to do, instead of the relatively deprived, participate politically.

Beyond the quintessential literature on economic voting, that dealt with the question whether economic conditions influence party-choice (Anderson, 2007; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000; Radcliffe, 1992) by either supporting or punishing incumbent parties, surprisingly little attention has been drawn to the link between economic conditions and individual determinants for other modes of political involvement such as demonstrating and petitioning. Moreover, the sheer tenacity of the assumption that macro-economic conditions influence political participation, both in the mainstream media as well as in scholarly debates, is worth exploring further.

The Netherlands, a country with traditionally high levels of political and community participation (Gesthuizen, Scheepers, van der Veld, & Völker, 2013; Linssen & Schmeets, 2010). The once stable Dutch pillarized political landscape saw no less than 5 general elections between 2002 and 2012. The three most recent Dutch Parliamentary Elections were held in 2006, 2010, and 2012 and coincided with the rise of the global financial and economic crisis. In 2006, the election came shortly before the global financial crisis. In 2010, the parliamentary elections coincided with the onset of the Eurocrisis and the global economic crisis. Finally, in 2012 after prolonged periods of recession in the Netherlands the minority cabinet Rutte I collapsed over talks on new austerity measures. The timing of

these elections and thereby the timing of the election studies, provides a unique ‘natural experiment’ to explore the effect of economic downturn on levels of political participation.

We attempt to explore the link between macro-economic conditions in recent years in the Netherlands and levels of political participation. Did the economic crisis induce political participation or do citizens refrain from participating in politics? We set out to assess competing and complementary theoretical propositions concerning the effect of economic conditions on political participation in the Netherlands. Economic decline might mobilize people to voice their concerns in the political arena. Contrastingly, it also argued that economic adversity might induce political apathy that makes people less likely to connect with their communities and less likely to participate in politics. Using the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies, we aim to assess to what extent economic conditions affect individual level political participation in the period 2006-2012. Therefore, our research question conditions reads: To what extent are levels of political participation affected during times of economic downturn in the Netherlands between 2006-2012?

Theory and hypotheses

Political participation

Political participation is loosely defined as those activities aimed at influencing the political decision making process. To take into account a wide range of political actions, we distinguished conventional from unconventional modes of political participation. Conventional political participation refers to all modes of participation directly embedded in legal institutional frameworks or directly referring to the electoral process or representational system, such as voting, contacting politicians or attending hearings (Barnes & Kaase, 1979). Unconventional political participation includes all modes of political participation not directly linked to the electoral process such as petitioning, demonstrating, and boycotting products (Barnes & Kaase, 1979)¹.

Competing perspectives: resources versus incentives.

Various studies have empirically demonstrated that political participation, both conventional and unconventional modes, is more prevalent among higher educated and higher status individuals (e.g. Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Norris, 2002; Desposato and Norrander, 2009; Dalton, van Sickle and

¹ Unconventional political participation has been labelled differently throughout time. One might argue that unconventional activities are increasingly accepted and regarded as ‘normal’ modes of participation (Dalton, 2008; Lamprianou, 2013; Norris, Wlgrave, & van Aelst, 2005). Thus, some of the activities such as attending a demonstration lost its ‘unconventional’ connotation. This renders the term ‘unconventional’ political participation somewhat old-fashioned. However, other labels used such as ‘extra-institutional’ participation, ‘emerging forms of political participation’, and ‘non-electoral participation’ still refer to the same political actions empirically. Thus, although labelled differently, the acts referred to when describing ‘unconventional’, ‘non-institutionalized’ or ‘protest participation’ are identical since they still refer to non-legally-embedded political actions such as petitioning and demonstrating whereas conventional action still refer to legally-embedded modes such as attending hearings and writing to government officials.

Weldon, 2010). Higher status and higher educated people possess more skills needed for participation (Brady, Verba & Schlozman, 1995) and have greater confidence that they understand politics and that participation in the political arena is effective (internal and external efficacy). These factors all facilitate political action (Klandermans, van der Toorn, & van Stekelenburg, 2008; Lassen & Serritzlew, 2011; Morell, 2003). Moreover, higher status and higher educated individuals are also more likely to be involved in civic associations that act as 'schools of democracy' (van der Meer, 2009), and thus surrounded by participatory social milieu, which might reinforce the associations between skills, resources and political participation.

The core difference between the resource perspective and the grievance perspective is that the latter identifies a lack of resources as possible incentive to participate whereas the former treats a lack of resources as a hindrance to participate politically. Thus, grievance theories argue that those with (relatively) few resources are more prone to participate politically. Following the grievance argument, the resource poor are more likely to feel that they have been wronged (Seybolt, 2012), experience a gap between their expectations and reality and thus suffer from invidious comparisons (Gurr, 1970; Gurr & Moore, 1997; Opp, 2009; Pattie et al., 2004). These feelings of deprivation might be redressed in the political arena and hence spur political action, especially since the deprived have the least to lose and the most to gain by challenging the existing political status quo (Wilkes, 2004). Resource poor would be more likely to engage specifically in unconventional political participation (Muller, 1979; Macedo et al., 2005) compared to conventional political activities. These unconventional political actions, such as demonstrating are less skill intensive compared to conventional activities such as lodging a complaint or attending a hearing. Moreover, unconventional political actions are therefore coined as a 'weapon of the weak' (Scott, 1985; Schlozman, Verba & Brady, 2012).

These two competing theoretical perspectives, allow us to derive two hypotheses at the individual level. Given the resource based perspective we expect that the resource rich are more likely to participate (hypothesis 1). For the second competing claim, in the vein of grievance based political participation; we expect that the resource poor are more likely to participate politically, especially in unconventional political actions (hypothesis 2).

Macro economic conditions

From the economic voting literature, which propositions we extend to other conventional and unconventional modes of political participation, we learn that the effect of macro-economic conditions on political participation can take several directions. First, economic adversity might fuel participation. During economic hardship, governments are forced to resort to retrenchments that cause a gap between what electorates expect and what governments are able to offer (Thomassen, 1990).

Governments are blamed for economic duress and this blame spurs political action². This argument is very close to the relative deprivation argument presented above and can be traced back to Marx' concept of 'Verelendung', who argued that in deteriorating economic conditions citizens will resort to protest to voice their political concerns. In the same vein, Davies' (1962) J-curve hypothesis argued that economic conditions mobilizes political participation and might even overthrow regimes if a period of economic prosperity is followed by a (short) period of sharp economic decline. This sharp economic decline would lead to dissatisfaction that induces political action. Hence, during times of economic decline, citizens would be more likely to participate in both conventional and unconventional modes (hypothesis 3).

Again, the competing perspective argues that economic adversity stimulates apathy instead of incentivizing citizens to participate politically. Citizens are more preoccupied with their personal situation in a sour economy and less able and willing to connect to the remote concerns of politics (Rosenstone, 1982)³. Thus, in times of economic hardship, political participation will decline (hypothesis 4). If the proposition that economic adversity induces apathy holds, we expect that this will disproportionately affect individuals who do not have the resources to participate to begin with (the resource poor) Hence, during times of economic hardship the resource poor will participate even less (hypothesis 5).

However, the studies mentioned are cross-national macro level comparisons that solely connect macro-level determinants, without empirically specifying and assessing the micro-level mechanisms responsible for the macro-level change. Supported by the notion of a negativity bias in political behaviour (Anderson, 2007; Lau, 1982), where people are more inclined to punish than to reward incumbent governments, we propose that macro-economic conditions have a moderating effect on the association between individual level resources, grievance and political participation. Combining the resource and grievance perspectives, we argue that in times of economic recession one needs to be dissatisfied enough to voice concerns and 'punish' incumbents (the deprivation proposition), but also resource-rich enough to be able to challenge the political status quo (the resource mobilization argument).

² The prime assumption behind these theories is that electorates actually blame governments for economic hardship. Although these theoretical propositions heavily rely on this assumption, this link is far from clear, as shown by the divergent findings in the economic voting literature (Anderson, 2007). However, Radcliffe (1992) as well as Tomassen (1990) suggests that in states such as the Netherlands, it is more likely for electorates to blame their governments since they interfere more directly in their electorates' lives through their comprehensive welfare systems.

³ A third perspective argues that there is no effect from the economy on political participation by applying Olson's (1965) logic of collective action. Macro-level economic downturn would be inadequate as a motivating factor to participate politically. A desire for a change in provision of public goods brought about by macro-economic change is not a satisfactory motivation to participate in politics, unless selective benefits will be offered to those who participate. Since all citizens are under economic duress, regardless of their participation, the individual-level rational choice would be to free-ride and not participate in politics.

Given the resource-based perspective, we propose that during times of economic hardship, those who possess resources and skills (i.e. higher educated and higher status individuals) will be even more likely to participate politically. The resource-rich have higher levels of political efficacy and can rely on a broader array of civic skills to participate in times of economic hardship to challenge their government. Thus, the *positive* relationship between individual resources and political participation will be stronger in times of economic adversity (hypothesis 6).

Yet, the competing argument is that during economic downturn, the deprived are even more incentivized to participate since the gap between expectations and reality increased (especially in comparison with the resource rich), fuelling political participation, especially in unconventional, modes of political action. Hence, the competing hypothesis is that the *negative* relationship between resources and political participation as proposed by grievance theory is even stronger in times of economic hardship (hypothesis 7).

Control variables

We controlled for the following socio-demographic characteristics in our analyses: origin, gender, and age. People of non-dutch origin participate less in modes of conventional and unconventional political participation (Fennema & Tillie, 1999). The association between gender, age, and political participation are not entirely straightforward. For instance, age was found to be associated with political participation although the direction of the age effect is still up for debate. Some authors argue that younger people are less likely to participate in politics (Verba et al., 1978, Brady et al., 1995). Contrastingly, others (Inglehart, 1997, Inglehart and Welzel, 2010) argue that younger people are increasingly more likely to participate, especially in unconventional modes. The same holds for gender. The direction of the effects of gender and marital status on political participation are also still up for debate, especially for the Dutch case (van Egmond, de Graaf & van der Eijk, 1998). We use these variables as control variables in our analyses without making prior assumptions on the direction of these effects.

Data & measurements

To test these hypotheses we used the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES) carried out during each general election in the Netherlands. The DPES' aim is to collect high-quality data on the backgrounds of voting behaviour of the Dutch electorate. The sampling frame of the DPES covers the Dutch electorate eligible to vote in parliamentary elections (Dutch citizens aged 18 and older). In 2006 and 2010, respondents were interviewed in a pre-election survey within six weeks before, and shortly after Election Day. In 2012 due to budgetary constraints, only a post-election survey was carried out within a six-week time-frame after Election Day. The post-election waves for the DPES were primarily collected by Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). Additionally, in 2006 and

2010 non-contacts and refusals were re-approached with a shortened questionnaire by telephone or mail. This resulted in response rates of 64.3 % and 57.0 % (compared to the initial sample) in 2006 and 2010, respectively (Schmeets, 2011). In 2012 no refusal conversion techniques were applied and all interviews were carried out using CAPI. This resulted in a response rate of 61.9%.

Dependent variables: conventional and unconventional political participation.

We distinguished between unconventional and conventional political participation (Barnes & Kaase, 1979). Our measure for unconventional political participation referred to participation in political discussions on the internet, participating in action groups and participation in demonstrations or protest meetings. We used involving political parties or organisations, attending hearings, and contacting politicians or civil servants as indicators of conventional political participation. See Table 1 for the exact question wording in the DPES.

Table 1 Question wording political participation Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies 2006-2012

	Item	Answer categories
	There are several ways to influence politicians, civil servants or the government. Please list which one you used during the previous five years.	
Unconventional political participation	Participated in a political discussion on the internet, via sms or e-mail.	Yes / No
	Participated in an action group.	Yes / No
	Participated in a demonstration or protest meeting.	Yes / No
Conventional political participation	Contacted a politician or government official.	
	Participate in a hearing or consultation meeting organized by the government.	Yes / No
	Tried to involve political party or organisation.	Yes / No

Resources and grievances

We operationalized resources in three different ways. First, we used education as a proxy for someone's civic skills and resources. Education is measured as low, middle, and high level of education. The category low level of education refers to respondents who completed elementary education, lower vocational education, or secondary education. The middle category consists of respondent who completed middle level vocational education or higher level secondary education. Those who completed higher level vocational education or university are classified as having a high level of education.

Second, we used social class as a proxy for resources and relative deprivation. Respondents' were asked which social class they perceived themselves to be a member of: "One sometimes speaks of the existence of various social classes and groups. If you were to assign yourself to a particular social

class, which one would that be?” Respondents could choose between upper class, upper middle class, middle class, upper working class, and working class.

Third, we used income as a proxy for resources versus relative deprivation. The DPES data was enriched with registry-based information on respondents income drawn from the Dutch tax office. We used the standardized disposable annual income. The disposable income is composed of wages, profits (for self-employed persons) and other allowances minus social contributions and taxes, standardized for household size and composition. To arrive at a longitudinally comparative measure of income the standardized household income was classified in vigintiles according to the Dutch population. For reference, the lowest vigintile in 2006 represents spendable incomes lower than € 9530 per annum whereas the highest category represents spendable incomes of € 41243 and higher

As mentioned before, we controlled for age, gender, marital status, and ethnicity. Age was defined as age at Election Day. In the Netherlands, the age threshold for participating in elections is 18 years. To control for possible non-linear effects of age we included a quadratic term for age as well. For origin we distinguished between Dutch origin and non-Dutch origin. Respondents who were born in the Netherlands and have parents that were born in the Netherlands were classified as of Dutch origin. Those who were born outside the Netherlands themselves or their parents were classified as non-Dutch.

Scale construction: conventional and unconventional political participation

We constructed separate scales for conventional and unconventional political participation that represent the average score on the relevant dichotomous indicators. We assessed the scalability of these items using probabilistic scale analysis techniques (Mokken, 1971; van Schuur, 2003). Mokken scale analysis is the probabilistic version of the deterministic Guttman scale. Mokken scale analysis uses a set of dichotomous indicators (e.g., involving a political party yes/no, and evaluates whether some items (e.g. political discussion on internet) may be easier –more popular- activities compared to others (e.g., attending a demonstration). The decisive notion is that those who engage in more difficult, i.e., less popular, activities (e.g attending demonstrations) will probably (not necessarily, like in the deterministic Guttman scale) also engage in easier or more popular activities (e.g. political discussion in the internet)⁴. In the context of Item Response Theory, this means that the probability of a positive response to an item (specific acts of political participation) increases in concordance with the value of a subject’s latent trait (conventional or unconventional political participation). Applied to

⁴ Mokken scale analysis has numerous advantages over more mainstream scaling methods, such as factor analyses and measurement models specified in structural equation modeling. These methods are based on the decomposition of covariances and assume that frequency distributions of the items can be regarded as ‘parallel’ and the items have more or less the same mean and standard deviation. Thus, all items need to be equally ‘popular’ to be adequately used for scaling (van Schuur, 2003). Distribution of the items for political participation clearly demonstrate that this is not the case, e.g. the proportion of people who engage in political discussion on the internet, is considerably larger compared to the proportion of people who attended a demonstration.

political participation this means we test whether individuals that engage in a more difficult (less popular) activity (e.g. attending a demonstration), thereby having a higher score on the 'latent trait' political participation, also engage in easier (more popular) activities (e.g. engaging in political discussion via the internet).

In terms of comparability of measurements, or equivalence, we analyse the extent to which the ordering in terms of difficulty of the items are similar over time and between the resource rich and the resource poor. If the ordering in modes of political participation is similar over time and across groups, measurements are equivalent and the scale-scores can be compared.

The cumulative nature of the response on the items for political participation also has important theoretical implications that are neglected when analysing these items separately. It is theoretically implicitly or explicitly assumed that people specialize within either conventional or unconventional modes of participation and that participation is cumulative (c.f. Millbrath 1965; Verba et al. 1978; Zukin et al. 2006). Mokken-scaling incorporates the respective 'difficulty' of certain acts of political participation vis-à-vis other, easier or more mainstream acts of political participation. By assessing the respective difficulty of acts of political participation using Mokken scaling, we acknowledge this cumulative nature of participation.

The results of the Mokken scale analysis are presented in Table 2. For each act of political participation the proportion of people that engaged in these acts the past five years is shown for conventional and unconventional modes. In the context of Mokken scale analyses, these proportions represent the 'item difficulties'. We find that for unconventional modes of political participation the item ordering, from most popular – or easiest- activity to least popular activity is political discussion on the internet, participation in an action group, and demonstrating respectively. For conventional modes of political participation Table 2 shows that contacting a politician or government official is the most popular activity, followed by attending a hearing. Involving a political party is the least popular conventional political activity.

Table 2 demonstrates that, first of all, based on the acts of political participation studied here, participation is a rather rare phenomenon given the low proportions displayed in Table 2. Furthermore, when comparing the different sub-groups in terms of social class and education we see that there are large differences between these groups in their level of participation. For instance, concerning unconventional political participation we see that the proportion of people participating in a demonstration is three times as high among the higher educated compared to the low educated. We find a similar picture for conventional modes of participation. Again, as an example, the proportion of people who tried to involve a political party or organisation is in the upper class (0.12), is six times higher than the proportion of people who tried to do this in the lowest class (0.2).

Table 2 Mokken scale analysis: Item difficulties (proportion positive responses) and Loevinger's H, by years and subgroups

Item	<i>Unconventional political participation</i>				<i>Conventional political participation</i>			
	Proportion positive responses (item popularity)				Proportion positive responses (item popularity)			
	Participated in political discussion on the internet, via sms or e-mail.	Participated in an action group.	Participated in demonstration or protest meeting.	Loevinger's H	Contacted a politician or government official.	Participate in a hearing or consultation meeting organized by the government.	Tried to involve political party or organisation.	Loevinger's H
<i>Years</i>								
2006	0.19	0.08	0.04	0.32	0.12	0.12	0.06	0.42
2010	0.22	0.05	0.03	0.31	0.13	0.12	0.05	0.45
2012	0.24	0.07	0.04	0.33	0.10	0.09	0.04	0.45
<i>Social class</i>								
Working class	0.11	0.04	0.02	0.26	0.08	0.04	0.02	0.41
Upper working class	0.17	0.05	0.03	0.35	0.11	0.09	0.05	0.37
Middle class	0.21	0.08	0.04	0.31	0.11	0.11	0.05	0.45
Upper middle class	0.30	0.08	0.05	0.34	0.18	0.19	0.09	0.43
Upper class	0.34	0.05	0.05	0.12	0.26	0.23	0.12	0.39
<i>Education</i>								
Low	0.10	0.04	0.02	0.23	0.06	0.05	0.02	0.42
Middle	0.20	0.06	0.03	0.27	0.09	0.09	0.04	0.41
High	0.34	0.11	0.06	0.34	0.20	0.20	0.10	0.43
<i>Total</i>	0.21	0.07	0.04	0.32	0.12	0.11	0.05	0.44

We do find that the item-ordering pattern is similar across time and across groups. This is also represented in the Loevinger's H coefficients. These represent the scalability of the Mokken scale based on the number of violations of the item-ordering pattern. A violation of the item ordering pattern would occur if respondents do engage in more difficult acts (for instance demonstrating), but do not engage in easier more popular acts (for instance joining a political discussion on the internet). The Loevinger's H coefficients are mostly above the cutoff value of 0.3 (Sijtsma and Molenaar 2002). There are some exceptions for unconventional political participation. Among the lowest category of education and the lowest category for class, as well as the highest category of class, Loevinger's H is below 0.3. Although, the item-ordering pattern in terms of difficulty in items is comparable to the other categories, the scale and thus the cumulative nature of the response for unconventional political participation is weak in these categories. Given the relatively small number of respondents in these categories compared to the others, Loevinger's H is relatively sensitive to a very small number of violations of the item ordering pattern. Yet, the item ordering pattern is still equivalent to all other sub-groups distinguished here. Apparently, the order in which people engage in different political activities does not change over time and does not differ per sub-group.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics

	<i>min</i>	<i>max</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>s.d</i>
Conventional political participation	0	1	0.09	0.22
Unconventional political participation	0	1	0.11	0.19
Income	1	20	11.40	5.63
Age	18	96	49.17	16.74
	<i>%</i>		<i>n</i>	
Education				
Low	28.73		1,324	
Middle	40.78		1,879	
High	30.49		1,405	
Social class				
Working class	16.10		742	
Upper working class	12.54		578	
Middle class	50.04		2,306	
Upper middle class	19.03		877	
Upper class	2.28		105	
Gender				
Male	49.80		2,296	
Female	50.20		2,312	
Origin				
Dutch origin	89.70		4,133	
Non-Dutch	10.30		475	
<i>Total</i>			4608	

Based on the results of these Mokken-scale analyses, we construct a scale that consists of the average score on the items pertaining to conventional and unconventional political participation that ranges between 0 and 1. The descriptive statistics for all relevant variables are presented in Table 3.

Analyses

Given the ordinal nature of the scales for conventional and unconventional political participation combined with the very skewed nature (most people do not participate politically) of our dependent variables we employ an ordinal logit regression. First, we enter the variables that proxy resources and grievances. We include dummy variables for the years 2006, 2010, and 2012 to assess whether there is longitudinal variation in political participation in the Netherlands in times of economic duress in the same model (hypothesis 1, 2, 3, and 4). Additionally we enter our control variables to assess the resource and the grievance based hypothesis in Model 1. To assess whether resource rich or resource poor are more likely to participate times of economic hardship and to assess whether economic hardship disproportionately influences the resource poor (hypothesis 5) we include interaction terms with the time determinants in the subsequent models. The interaction terms for time and education are displayed in model 2, for class and time in model 3, and finally for income and time in model 4, to test hypothesis 6 and 7. The results of the analyses for conventional modes of political participation are displayed in Table 4, the results of the analyses for unconventional political participation are presented in Table 5⁵.

Results

Let us first look at conventional political participation in Table 4. In model 1 we find that the higher educated and higher classes are more likely to participate conventionally compared to lower educated and lower classes when controlling for gender, age, and origin. This lends support to the well-known resource based models (hypothesis 1) of political participation in favour of the alternative grievance based explanation (hypothesis 2). Income does not have an effect on conventional political participation when taking into account social class and education simultaneously. Furthermore, in model 1 we find that all in all, conventional political participation declined in 2012 in comparison with 2006 (and also in comparison with 2010 if the reference category is changed). During times of prolonged recession, conventional political participation is in decline. This lends support to the hypothesis that economic hardship induces apathy (hypothesis 4). In model 2, model 3, and model 4, we include interaction terms to assess whether times of economic hardship affected conventional political participation of the resource rich and resource poor in a different fashion. None of the interaction terms are significant. Thus we do not find a widening gap between resource rich and

⁵ These analyses presented here were performed on the unweighted sample. Analysis with the sample weighted according to age, gender, marital status, urbanization, region, ethnicity, turnout (i.c. voted in most recent parliamentary elections yes/no) and voting behaviour did not qualitatively differ from the results presented here for both conventional and unconventional political participation.

resource poor in times of economic hardship and reject hypothesis 5, 6, and 7, for conventional political participation.

Table 4 Conventional political participation: Ordered logit regression analysis (n = 4608)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B		s.e.	B		s.e.	B		s.e.	B		s.e.
2006	Ref.			Ref.			Ref.			Ref.		
2010	-0.022		0.091	0.023		0.210	0.043		0.331	-0.204		0.214
2012	-0.345	***	0.098	-0.421	*	0.239	0.266		0.309	-0.346		0.252
Education: Low	Ref.			Ref.			Ref.			Ref.		
Education: Middle	0.358	***	0.118	0.438	***	0.174	0.364	***	0.118	0.361	***	0.118
Education: High	1.154	***	0.124	1.075	***	0.179	1.161	***	0.124	1.159	***	0.124
Working class	Ref.			Ref.			Ref.			Ref.		
Upper working class	0.620	***	0.173	0.623	***	0.173	0.921	***	0.278	0.623	***	0.173
Middle class	0.511	***	0.150	0.516	***	0.150	0.784	***	0.240	0.514	***	0.150
Upper middle class	0.824	***	0.169	0.827	***	0.169	0.891	***	0.262	0.826	***	0.169
Upper class	1.175	***	0.251	1.171	***	0.251	1.730	***	0.418	1.175	***	0.251
Income	0.008		0.008	0.008		0.008	0.008		0.008	0.002		0.011
<i>Interaction terms</i>												
Education: Middle	2010			-0.197		0.258						
	2012			-0.047		0.289						
Education: High	2010			0.067		0.250						
	2012			0.203		0.278						
Upper working class	2010						-0.252		0.420			
	2012						-0.726		0.415			
Middle class	2010						-0.147		0.355			
	2012						-0.751		0.339			
Upper middle class	2010						0.196		0.373			
	2012						-0.441		0.365			
Upper class	2010						-0.531		0.575			
	2012						-1.169		0.594			
Income	2010									0.015		0.016
	2012									0.001		0.018
<i>Control variables</i>												
male	0.440	**	0.079	0.437	***	0.079	0.443	***	0.079	0.438	***	0.079
Age	0.092	**	0.015	0.092	***	0.015	0.092	***	0.015	0.092	***	0.015
age ²	-0.001	**	0.000	-0.001	***	0.000	-0.001		0.000	-0.001	***	0.000
Dutch origin	Ref.			Ref.			Ref.			Ref.		
Non dutch origin	0.033		0.127	0.036		0.127	0.016		0.127	0.031		0.127
<i>Thresholds</i>												
0	5.116	***	0.397	5.129	***	0.409	5.336	***	0.430	5.052	***	0.411
0.33	6.339	***	0.401	6.352	***	0.413	6.561	***	0.434	6.275	***	0.415
0.67	7.727	***	0.412	7.740	***	0.424	7.951	***	0.444	7.664	***	0.426
1	Ref.			Ref.			Ref.			Ref.		
Nagelkerke pseudo r ²	0.111			0.111			0.113			0.111		

*p < 0.10 ** p < 0.05 ***p < 0.01

Table 5 Unconventional political participation: Ordered logit regression analysis (n=4608)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			
	B	s.e.		B	s.e.		B	s.e.		B	s.e.		
2006	Ref.			Ref.			Ref.			Ref.			
2010	-0.035	0.083		0.321	0.197		0.123	0.279		0.194	0.196		
2012	0.158 *	0.083		0.336 *	0.200		0.717 ***	0.249		0.602 ***	0.202		
Education: Low	Ref.			Ref.			Ref.			Ref.			
Education: Middle	0.669 ***	0.099		0.586 ***	0.165		0.421 ***	0.102		0.416 ***	0.102		
Education: High	1.318 ***	0.108		1.298 ***	0.173		1.085 ***	0.110		1.091 ***	0.110		
Working class	Ref.			Ref.			Ref.			Ref.			
Upper working class	0.276 *	0.148		0.276 *	0.149		0.553 **	0.252		0.281	0.149		
Middle class	0.388 ***	0.121		0.424 ***	0.123		0.650 ***	0.205		0.428 ***	0.123		
Upper middle class	0.465 ***	0.141		0.477 ***	0.143		0.809 ***	0.227		0.480 ***	0.143		
Upper class	0.544 **	0.236		0.552 **	0.239		0.909 **	0.418		0.555 **	0.239		
Income	-0.006	0.007		-0.005	0.007		-0.005	0.007		0.011	0.010		
Interaction terms													
Education: Middle	2010			-0.146	0.238								
	2012			-0.393 *	0.237								
Education: High	2010			-0.218	0.240								
	2012			-0.444 *	0.237								
Upper working class	2010					0.089	0.370						
	2012					-0.910 **	0.359						
Middle class	2010					-0.150	0.303						
	2012					-0.490 *	0.274						
Upper middle class	2010					-0.339	0.327						
	2012					-0.618 **	0.305						
Upper class	2010					0.050	0.562						
	2012					-1.130 *	0.582						
Income	2010									-0.018	0.015		
	2012									-0.034 **	0.015		
male		0.112	0.070	0.114	0.070	0.117 *	0.070	0.114	0.070				
Age		0.034 ***	0.013	0.035 ***	0.013	0.033 ***	0.013	0.035 ***	0.013				
age ²		-0.001 ***	0.000	-0.001 ***	0.000	-0.001 ***	0.000	-0.001 ***	0.000				
Dutch origin		Ref.		Ref.		Ref.		Ref.					
Non dutch origin		-0.001	0.113	0.002	0.113	-0.002	0.113	-0.008	0.113				
Tresholds													
0		2.097 ***	0.133	2.347 ***	0.330	2.396 ***	0.343	2.390 ***	0.330				
0.33		4.124 ***	0.148	4.398 ***	0.337	4.450 ***	0.349	4.443 ***	0.336				
0.67		6.130 ***	0.223	6.407 ***	0.375	6.460 ***	0.386	6.452 ***	0.375				
1		Ref.											
Nagelkerke pseudo r ²		0.106			0.107			0.110			0.108		

*p < 0.10 ** p < 0.05 ***p < 0.01

The results for unconventional political participation are presented in Table 5. In Model 1 in Table 5, we find, that the resource rich, measured by education, and class are more likely to participate in unconventional political actions. This is similar to conventional political participation where we also found support for the resource-based perspective (hypothesis 1). Again, income does not have an effect when analysed with education social class and all control variables simultaneously. Concerning

our time variables, we find an increase in unconventional political participation in 2012 compared to 2006 (and also compared to 2010 if the reference category is changed). In model 2 we enter the interaction terms for education and find negative interaction terms for 2012. The same holds for social class in 2012, in model 3. Given the positive main effects in model 1, this indicates that the positive association between education, class and political participation is less strong in 2012. This is not in line with the hypotheses we formulated on the effect of economic recession on political participation. We formulated competing hypotheses following grievance theory (deprived participate most) against the resource based perspective (resource rich participate most). Our result confirms the resource based perspective since the resource rich still participate most (hypothesis 1). Additionally we find that deteriorating economic conditions induce unconventional political participation, which is in line with hypothesis 3. We hypothesized widening gaps between resource rich and relatively deprived under conditions of economic downturn in hypotheses 5, 6, and 7. However, we find that the low educated, lower classes and those with low incomes are catching up with the resource rich during economically deteriorating times in their level of unconventional political participation. Hence, the gap between the resource rich and resource poor is closing rather than widening as we hypothesized.

Conclusion and discussion

In this contribution, we attempted to explore the effects of the economic crisis on levels of political participation in the Netherlands between 2006 and 2012. We used the classic distinction between conventional and unconventional modes of political participation as proposed by Barnes & Kaase (1979). Conventional modes are political activities embedded within the legal institutional framework and unconventional political participation refers to all extra-institutional modes of voicing political concerns. Against the background of the recent economic crises, we argued that economic downturn would either incentivize citizens to voice their concerns in the political domain or that economic downturn induces political apathy. We combined this with the expectations following from grievance theory with the expectations from the resource model. Grievance theory argues that the relatively deprived are more prone to participate politically (Gurr, 1970; Gurr & Moore, 1997; Opp, 2009; Pattie et al., 2004) while the resource-model argues that the relatively well-to-do are more likely to participate.

Using probabilistic scale modeling techniques (Mokken scale analysis) we demonstrated that both conventional and unconventional political participation is cumulative. Hence people that engage in more difficult political acts, such as demonstrating also engage in easier or more mainstream acts of political participation such as joining political discussion on the internet. Moreover, we demonstrated that the pattern in modes of both conventional and unconventional political activities does not change over time and does not differ according to various sub-groups in the Netherlands. Our results indicate that, first and foremost, being politically active is somewhat exceptional in the Netherlands, as most

people do not engage in any conventional and unconventional mode of political participation studied here. We find that in recent times of economic downturn in the Netherlands, conventional political participation decreases while unconventional political participation increases. We find no support for the grievance-argument as we consistently find that those with more skills and resources (higher educated) and people in higher social classes participate more in both conventional and unconventional modes of participation. However, we demonstrated that the relatively deprived (low education, lower classes, and low income) participate more during the recent time of economic adversity and catch up with the relatively well-to do. We speculate that the increase in unconventional political participation and the decrease in conventional political participation is due to the difference in required skills for modes of conventional and unconventional political participation. It takes more civic skills to involve a political party compared to joining in a political discussion on the internet and during times of economic downturn the resource poor might voice their concerns through more accessible means of political participation. The underlying mechanisms governing this effect need to be taken into account in more detail in further research to assess the validity of this assumption.

We left voting out of our analyses since this is a different kind of political activity compared to the conventional and unconventional activities studied here. Voting is done once every few years while most of the conventional and unconventional political activities studied here, such as attending a demonstration or writing to government officials require more prolonged time commitments.

Yet, in the interpretation of the results it needs to be acknowledged that the time-span studied here is very short and that comparing levels of conventional and unconventional political participation between 2006, 2010, and 2012 is a crude attempt at grasping a comprehensive measure of economic downturn. However, note that within this timeframe, the Netherlands experienced the most severe economic crisis since the 1930s and should there be an effect of macro-economic conditions on political participation, this would especially be observable within the time frame studied here. However, further research incorporating a wider time span using more detailed measures of economic downturn would be a potentially fruitful alley for further research.

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