

# Measuring and analysing political participation using and mixing survey and qualitative data

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# Outline of my talk

- Different forms of political participation and how these have been measured traditionally in surveys
- Measuring participation using qualitative methods and mixing the two: an example

## Political participation beyond elections

“What would you do if you wanted to *influence those in power* on an issue that was important to you (and there was no election taking place any time soon)?”

# Political participation beyond elections

change.org

Start a petition Browse Subscription



Petitioning Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and Leader of the Conservative Party Theresa May MP and 4 others

## Free Nazanin Ratcliffe

**Richard Ratcliffe** London, United Kingdom



My wife Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, 37 year old charity worker, was on holiday visiting her family in Iran. She was at the airport returning to the UK on the 3rd April when she was detained by

### Sign this petition

1,008,093  
1,008,093 have signed. Let's get to 1,500,000.

**Marta Cantijoch** Barcelona, Spain

I'm signing because... (optional)

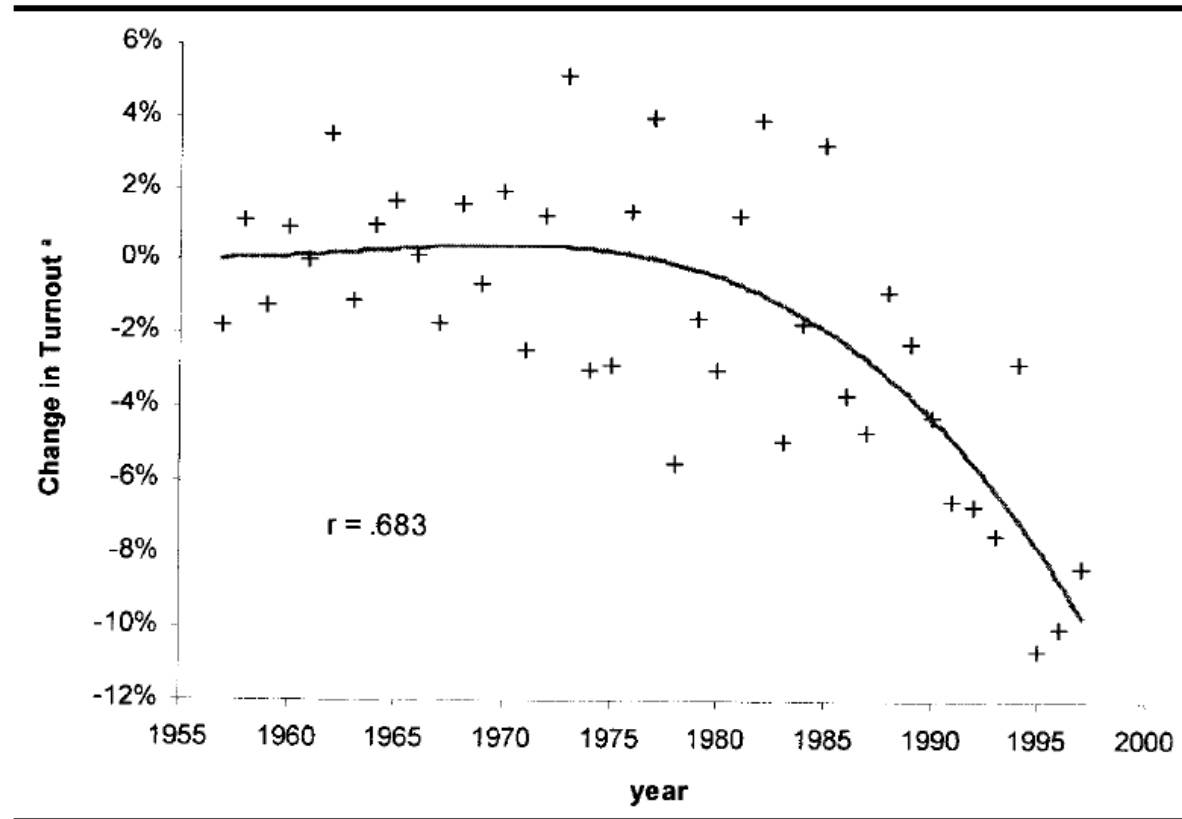
Share with Facebook friends

Sign

☒ Display my name and comment on this petition



## Decline in formal politics...



*Figure 1.* Aggregate trend of change in turnout in 18 organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD) industrial democracies.

*Source:* Mackie and Rose (1991), IDEA Database (1997).

Source: reproduced from Gray, M., & Caul, M. (2000). 'Declining voter turnout in advanced industrial democracies, 1950 to 1997. The effects of declining group mobilization.' *Comparative political studies*, 33(9), p. 1095

## ... and rise of protest behaviour

Table 10.3 The Rise of Protest Politics, mid-1970s to mid-1990s

	Mid-1970s	Early 1980s	1990	mid-1990s
Signed petition	32	46	54	60
Demonstrated	9	14	18	17
Consumer Boycott	5	8	11	15
Unofficial Strike	2	3	4	4
Occupied buildings	1	2	2	2

Source: reproduced from Norris, P. (2002). *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. Cambridge University Press, p. 198. Data from the Political Action survey (70s) and World Values Study, 7 Western European countries + US.

## Rise of protest behaviour (in Britain too)

*Table 1. Attending lawful demonstrations in Western countries 1974–1990 (in %)*

	1974	1981	1990
France	–	27	33
Netherlands	7	13	25
Belgium	–	14	23
(West) Germany	9	15	21
USA	11	12	15
Great Britain	6	10	14

Sources: Political action (1974), world value study (1981, 1990) in Topf (1995) and Dalton (1996).

Source: reproduced from Van Aelst, P. and Walgrave, S. (2001). 'Who is that (wo)man in the street? From the normalisation of protest to the normalisation of the protester'. *European Journal of Political Research*, 39 (4), p. 463.

## Measuring participation in surveys

Survey question about activities conducted in previous 12 months.  
For example, BES 2015 (post-election face to face survey):

- P 4 Thinking now about how active you are in politics and community affairs, during the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? Please code all that apply
- 1 Contacted a politician, government or local government official?
  - 2 Signed a petition on the Internet?
  - 3 Signed a petition not on the internet?
  - 4 Done any work on behalf of a political party or action group?
  - 5 Given any money to a political party, organization or cause
  - 6 Taken part in a public demonstration?
  - 7 Bought - or refused to buy – any products for political or ethical reasons?
  - 8 Gone on strike or taken industrial action?
  - 9 None of these
  - 10 (Don't know)



## Measuring participation in surveys

The list of activities may vary in different surveys.

For example, in the European Social Survey (round 8, 2016):

### ASK ALL

There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent<sup>15</sup> things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?

Have you... **READ OUT...**

		Yes	No	(Refusal)	(Don't know)
<b>B15</b>	...contacted a politician, government or local government official?	1	2	7	8
<b>B16</b>	...worked in a political party or action group?	1	2	7	8
<b>B17</b>	...worked in another organisation or association?	1	2	7	8
<b>B18</b>	...worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker?	1	2	7	8
<b>B19</b>	...signed a petition?	1	2	7	8
<b>B20</b>	...taken part in a lawful public demonstration?	1	2	7	8
<b>B21</b>	...boycotted certain products?	1	2	7	8
<b>B22<sup>16</sup></b>	...posted or shared anything about politics online, for example on blogs, via email or on social media such as Facebook or Twitter <sup>17</sup> ?	1	2	7	8

# Measuring participation in surveys

These are the results for the United Kingdom (2016):

**Engagement in different types of political participation, UK, ESS 2016 (N=1,959):**

	% have done in last 12 months
Signed a petition	43.5
Posted or shared anything about politics online	28.3
Boycotted certain products	21.0
Contacted politician or government official	17.5
Worn or displayed campaign badge/sticker	9.7
Worked in another organisation or association	7.5
Taken part in lawful public demonstration	5.4
Worked in political party or action group	3.3

## Measuring participation in surveys

The list of activities has been “updated” over the years.  
Compare to ESS 2012:

**ASK ALL**

There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent<sup>6</sup> things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?

Have you...**READ OUT...**

		Yes	No	(Don't know)
<b>B11</b>	...contacted a politician, government or local government official?	1	2	8
<b>B12</b>	...worked in a political party or action group?	1	2	8
<b>B13</b>	...worked in another organisation or association?	1	2	8
<b>B14</b>	...worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker?	1	2	8
<b>B15</b>	...signed a petition?	1	2	8
<b>B16</b>	...taken part in a lawful public demonstration?	1	2	8
<b>B17</b>	...boycotted certain products?	1	2	8

# Measuring participation in surveys

## → Caveats:

- Time reference: standard 12 months but also 5 years (e.g. CSES) or even no time limitation (“ever done”, e.g. BSA or WVS). What is best?
- Big influence of **opportunities structure** for participation in non-electoral activities: not everyone can engage even if they want to.
- As with other analyses using quantitative data, results are a simplification of the phenomenon, often limited to broad patterns → we can use **qualitative data to enrich** our understanding of political behaviour!

## Alternative measurement: participation 'potential'

## World Values Survey questionnaire:

*(Show Card M)*

Now I'd like you to look at this card. I'm going to read out some forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never under any circumstances do it (*read out and code one answer for each action*):

	Have done	Might do	Would never do
V85. Signing a petition	1	2	3
V86. Joining in boycotts	1	2	3
V87. Attending peaceful demonstrations	1	2	3
V88. Joining strikes	1	2	3
V89. Any other act of protest?	1	2	3

**INTERVIEWER: ASK V90 – V94 ONLY TO THOSE WHO SAID THEY “HAVE DONE” THE GIVEN ACTIVITY**

Tell me for each of these activities how often you have done it in the last year! (*Read out and code one answer for each action*):

	Not at all	Once	Twice	Three times	More than three times
V90. Signing a petition	1	2	3	4	5
V91. Joining in boycotts	1	2	3	4	5
V92. Attending peaceful demonstrations	1	2	3	4	5
V93. Joining strikes	1	2	3	4	5
V94. Any other act of protest?	1	2	3	4	5

## Alternative measurement: participation 'potential'

Table 3.1 *Acts of Political Participation*

	Actual	Potential
	% yes	% yes
Donated money to an organisation	62	75
Voted in a local government election	50	71
Signed a petition	42	76
Boycotted certain products	31	59
Raised funds for an organisation	30	55
Bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	28	49
Contacted a public official	25	59
Worn or displayed a campaign badge or sticker	22	49
Contacted a solicitor or judicial body	20	60
Contacted a politician	13	53
Contacted an organisation	11	50
Contacted the media	9	43
Attended a political meeting or rally	5	26
Taken part in a public demonstration	5	34
Formed a group of like-minded people	5	23
Taken part in a strike	2	27
Participated in illegal protest activities	2	13

Source: Weighted 2000 face-to-face survey. Actual: N = c3,120; Potential: N = c3,005.

Questions: 'During the last twelve months have you done any of the following to influence rules, laws or policies?' 'Would you do any of the following to influence rules, laws or policies?'

Source: reproduced from Pattie, Seyd, & Whiteley (2004). *Citizenship in Britain: Values, Participation and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, p.78.

## Measuring participation using qualitative data

- When we analyse political participation, we tend to analyse questions like the following:
  - Why do some people engage in politics while others don't?
  - What drives people to become active in specific forms of participation (e.g. protest)?
- These questions relate to people's **subjective perceptions/interpretations about how they experience participation** → these “personal stories” are best captured using qualitative methods:
  - Rich, in-depth accounts of a lived experience of political participation
  - Focus not on identifying systematic broad patterns but on understanding the complexities around case-based
- Mixed-methodology: Triangulation and complementarity – use the strengths of each method!

# Example of a mixed-methods study

- Background:

The online environment provides new opportunities for people to engage in their communities.

Case study: civic websites operated by the charity mySociety.

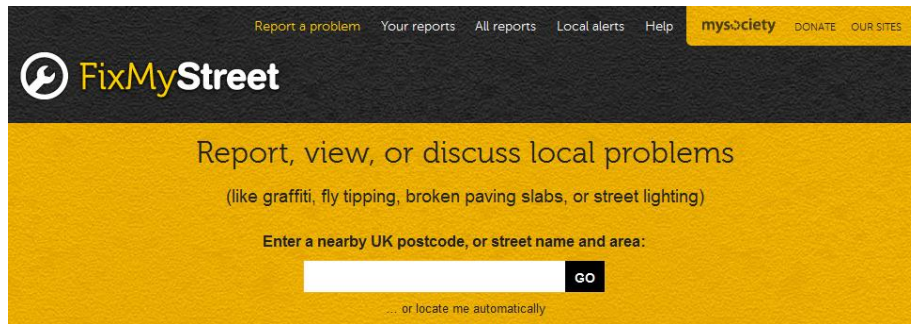
- Research questions:

- Who are the users of these sites? What is their profile?
- Do these sites serve as a gateway into a deeper level of civic or community engagement?
- What is the role of these websites in promoting processes of development of community engagement?


Cantijoch, M., Galandini, S., & Gibson, R. (2016). “‘It’s not about me, it’s about my community’: A mixed-method study of civic websites and community efficacy”. *New Media & Society*, 18(9): 1896-1915.



# Civic websites: mySociety



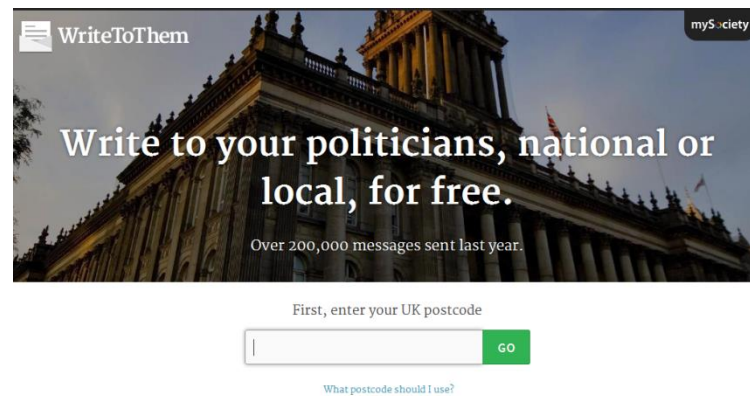
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Report, view, or discuss local problems  
(like graffiti, fly tipping, broken paving slabs, or street lighting)

Enter a nearby UK postcode, or street name and area:

[... or locate me automatically](#)



 WriteToThem mysociety

**Write to your politicians, national or local, for free.**

Over 200,000 messages sent last year.

First, enter your UK postcode

[What postcode should I use?](#)

# The mixed-methods study design

- Methods applied:
  - Online panel **survey** in two waves.
    - N= 6,239 in wave one and N=719 in wave 2.
  - Weekly online **time diaries** over 12 weeks.
    - 342 participants in week 1, 108 by week 12.
  - Online **focus groups**.
    - 21 participants

# The mixed-methods study design

[About](#)[mySociety](#)1 2 3  5 6

Before completing the second and final part of your diary, we have a quick question for you:

In the past 2 weeks, have you done any of the following activities? Tick all that apply.

- ☐ Helped your neighbours in any ways (e.g. by lending toolbox, collecting post for them or taking care of their pets while they were on holiday or at work)
- ☐ Helped improve or support your local community on your own (e.g. by supporting a local business, contacting a councillor, reporting a problem or crime)
- ☐ Helped solve a problem in your community by working with fellow citizens (e.g. by taking part in a neighbourhood watch, a residents' association or cleaning parks or streets)

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# The mixed-methods study design

[About](#)[mySociety](#)1 2 3 4 **5** 6

We would like to know more about the activities we just asked you about, that is helping your neighbours or your local community either alone or with other people. This could include (but is not necessarily limited to) things like minding pets or looking after a neighbour's house while they are away, getting involved in a neighbourhood watch scheme, making a point to support local businesses or volunteering your time to help improve your local area.

While writing your diary, consider telling us about the following:

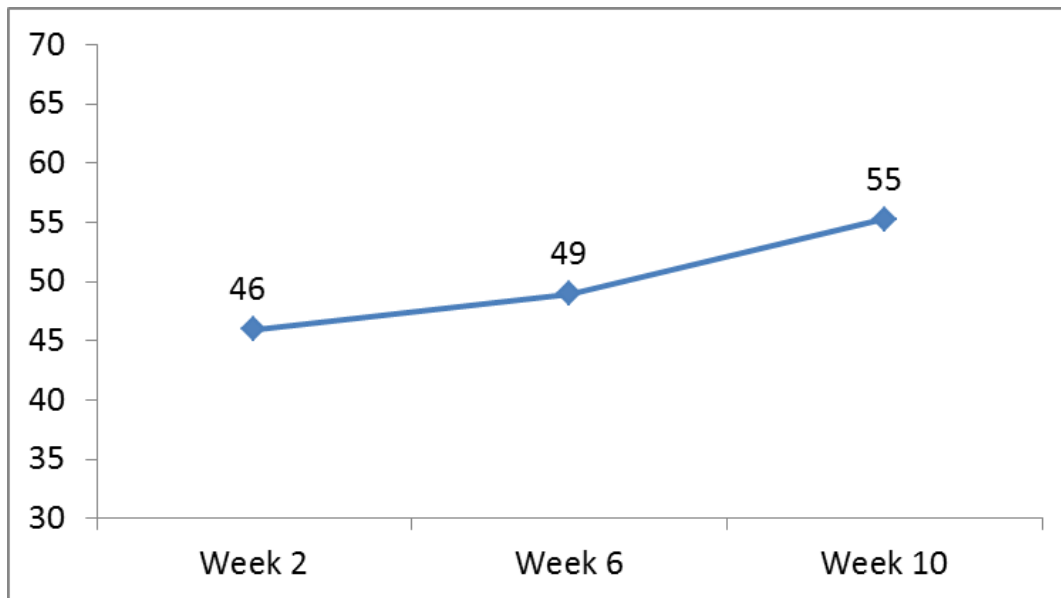
- How did you help you neighbours or try to improve your community?
- Is this something that you do regularly or was this the first time?
- How did helping your neighbours or community make you feel? Why was it important to you and what difference you feel (if any) it made to others?

If you haven't done any of these activities over the past couple of weeks then we are still interested in hearing from you since there are lots of reasons for this, e.g. lack of time and opportunity, there are no particular issues or problems needing to be solved. If you could take a moment and let us know why you have not been involved in any local activities in these two weeks we would be very grateful. It might be you have been active in these types of activities at an earlier time and if so then could you tell us about what did you do and why?

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# Findings

- Exploring quantitative and qualitative evidence collected through the time diaries, **we observed changes in levels of commitment and involvement with the local community**



Among regular users of the sites, we saw an increase in feeling that they could have an impact in making their communities a better place to live

# Findings

- A **motivation to get involved** is the **feeling experienced** when people work with others to generate change in their communities:

*“People when acting together can have a big impact on their community, people power does work as it inspires people to move together and is **rewarding at a very deep, emotional level**” (Diaries, Woman, 54)*