

Unionisation, Participation and Democracy: Forms of Convergence and Divergence between Union Membership and Civil and Political Activism in European Countries

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Abstract : The issue of democracy in capitalist countries has once again become the focus of debate in recent years. A number of socio-economic and political tensions have triggered discussion of this topic from various perspectives and disciplines. Political developments, the rise of both right-wing parties and populism and the constant growth of inequalities in a context of welfare downsizing, have led scholars to question if European capitalist countries are really capable of creating and redistributing resources and look for elements that might make democratic capital in European countries more dense. The aim of the work is to shed light on the trajectories, intensity and convergence or divergence between political and associative participation, on one hand, and organization, on the other, as these constitute two of the main points of connection between the norms, values and actions that bind citizens to the state. Using the European Social Survey database, some studies have sought to analyse degrees of unionization by investigating the relationship between systems of industrial relations and vulnerable groups (in terms of value-oriented practices or political participation). This paper instead aims to investigate the relationship between union participation and civil/political participation, comparing union members and non-members and then distinguishing between employees and self-employed professionals to better understand participatory behaviors among different workers. The first component of the research will employ a multilinear logistic model to examine a sample of 10 countries selected according to a grid that combines the industrial relations models identified by Visser (2006) and the Welfare State systems identified by Esping-Andersen (1990). On the basis of this sample, we propose to compare the choices made by workers and their propensity to join trade unions, together with their level of social and political participation, from 2002 to 2016. In the second component, we aim to verify whether workers within the same system of industrial relations and welfare show a similar propensity to engage in civil participation through political bodies and associations, or if instead these tendencies take on more specific and varied forms. The results will allow us to see: (1) if political participation is higher among unionized workers than it is among the non-unionized. (2) what are the differences in unionisation and civil/political participation between self-employed, temporary and full-time employees and (3) whether the trajectories within industrial relations and welfare models display greater inclusiveness and participation, thereby confirming or disproving the patterns that have been documented among the different European countries.

Keywords : union membership, participation, democracy, industrial relations, welfare systems

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