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Standby citizens: diverse faces of political passivity

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The current debate on political participation is bound to a discussion about whether citizens are active or passive. This dichotomous notion is nurtured by an extensive normative debate concerning whether passivity is an asset or a threat to democracy; and it is especially manifest in studies of young people's political orientations. Drawing on this discussion, the present study goes beyond the dichotomy by keeping political interest conceptually separate from participation in order to improve our understanding of political passivity. Multivariate cluster analysis of empirical data on Swedish youth suggests that we need to consider three distinctive forms of 'political passivity'. In the paper we present empirical evidence not only of the existence of a particular 'standby citizen', but also of two kinds of genuinely passive young people: unengaged and disillusioned citizens. Alongside active citizens, these people are in distinctly different categories with regard to their political behavior. This entails a new analytical framework that may be used to analyze an empirical phenomenon that has received surprisingly little attention in the literature on political participation and civic engagement.

Keywords: political participation; political passivity; latent political participation; monitorial citizens; standby citizens

Introduction

Drawing on the current debate on political participation, civic engagement and democracy, the aim of this paper is to suggest a new way of thinking about 'latent' forms of political participation among young citizens. We argue that the literature contains radically different notions of political passivity among adolescents; some scholars regard passivity as very harmful, while others tend to be more at ease with it. As we demonstrate, these differences are based on very different approaches, encompassing normative as well as empirical considerations. In order to expand the existing literature, we introduce a conceptual framework that considers three different varieties of political passivity. As a first step, we identify the need for looking beyond the simplistic active/passive distinction, in order to understand properly contemporary democracies. In a second step, we demonstrate empirically that what is sometimes dismissed as 'passivity' (i.e. the lack of manifest activity)

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actually consists of distinctly different orientations. Drawing on unique data on Swedish adolescents, we argue that political passivity is not a unidimensional phenomenon; rather, it encompasses *unengaged* as well as *disillusioned* young citizens, and also citizens who only appear passive, and in reality are *prepared* for political action, should circumstances warrant. Such 'standby' citizens are those who stay alert, keep themselves informed about politics by bringing up political issues in everyday life contexts, and are willing and able to participate if needed. Most previous research has failed to distinguish these citizens from unengaged citizens, since both standbyers and unengaged citizens appear, on the surface, to be passive. In this paper, we argue that these seemingly 'passive' standby citizens may in fact be an asset to democracy, due to their particular combination of political interest, trust, and inclination to participate. In this way, the paper contributes to the conceptual development concerning political behavior among adolescents, and also to the empirical analysis of the conditions for citizen participation in contemporary democracies.

The paper breaks down into five sections. In the first, we briefly review previous research. Second, we introduce a conceptual discussion of different forms of political orientations, covering active citizenship alongside three types of 'passive' citizenship. The third section covers method, data, and also a cluster analysis [multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA)]. The fourth section presents the results of the analysis, while the fifth and final part is a general discussion of implications for future research, based on our findings.

Participation and passivity: a general concern

Research on political participation in contemporary democracies has, for a number of years, been concerned with declining levels of civic engagement and party membership, low electoral turnout, eroding public confidence in the institutions of representative democracy, and other signs of public weariness, skepticism, cynicism, and lack of trust in politicians and political parties, among young as well as middle-aged and old citizens. In post-industrial societies, we are told, citizens have become increasingly disengaged in both their political actions and their evaluations of the political system.

At the same time, the literature encompasses both *optimistic* and *pessimistic* interpretations of the ongoing changes (cf., Hooghe and Dejaeghere, 2007: 250). The pessimistic interpretations include Robert Putnam's analysis of the state of democracy in the United States (2000); and similar concerned voices have resonated in numerous other democracies worldwide, for example, in Western Europe, in Scandinavia, and in South-East Asia (cf. Fuchs and Klingemann, 1995; Holmberg, 1999; Pharr and Putnam, 2000). It may be noted that this 'pessimistic' discourse has its intellectual roots in the post-war decades and the discussion about system stability and political culture (cf. Almond and Verba, 1963; Coleman, 1963; Easton, 1965). In a brief overview of the literature, Geissel (2008: 35–37) also

points to the crisis debate of the 1970s, motivated by the radicalization of political life in the late 1960s and early 1970s (cf. Offe, 1973; Crozier *et al*., 1975; Barnes *et al*., 1979). After Crozier and his colleagues – in *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975) – first expressed concerns about 'exuberant democracy', there have been several subsequent studies examining the roots and manifestations of this apparent 'crisis of democracy'. Over the decades, we have grown accustomed to the following picture: an ever-widening gap between citizens and politicians, declining political support, and general feelings of disaffection, all of which appear to be steadily increasing and to be spreading to established as well as new democracies (see Barnes *et al*., 1979; Rose, 1980; Huntington, 1981; Lipset and Scheider, 1983; Dalton, 1988, 1999; Nye, 1997; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Torcal, 2006).

On a more optimistic note, it has been argued that such fears are exaggerated; the development of 'critical citizens' is not the same thing as the erosion of democracy, and the assumption of the decline and fall of civic engagement is, at best, premature (e.g. Norris, 1999, 2002, 2011; Berger, 2009). Moreover, critical citizens have sometimes been regarded as an *asset* to a vital democracy. The idea of public criticism as a *resource* for democracy has become widely accepted in the past two decades (Geissel, 2008: 36; see also Klingemann, 1999; Norris, 1999; Axtmann, 2001; Dalton, 2002, 2004).

This brief overview of research on political participation is, of course, highly selective; it is certainly not meant to cover the entire post-war discussion on different forms of participation (cf. van Deth, 2001). Rather, what we would like to emphasize here are the different notions of *political passivity* – the opposite of political participation – found in the literature. Some scholars seem to believe that passivity is harmful, while others seem quite relaxed about it. This, in turn, alerts us to the manifold *explanations* of what political passivity actually means. In Figure 1 below, we have tried to summarize the different interpretations of passivity that can be found in some of the most influential works in the post-war literature. In order to do so in a meaningful way, we have also included a distinction between a focus on *normative* issues (relating to the legitimacy and functioning of the entire political system), and more *empirically* oriented analyses of the quality of democracy. In this way, we point to radically different interpretations of what passivity entails.

On a basic level, we can distinguish among three conventional models of democracy typically found in political science textbooks (cf. Held, 1995). The Weber/Schumpeter-based *minimalist model of democracy* accepts passivity; indeed, even embraces it. Democracy is not about mass participation; rather, non-qualified (and even qualified) citizens should keep out of politics in-between elections.

A radically different and essentially normative position is adopted by Pateman (1980) in her defense of *participatory democracy*. Here, political passivity is unequivocally a bad thing; it constitutes a threat to democracy. As many people as possible *ought* to get involved in politics on a regular basis, since it facilitates good decision making and fosters political empowerment and responsible citizens. The *representative model of democracy* represents an intermediate position in this

		Passivity is an asset	Passivity is in itself neither good nor bad	Passivity is a threat
Pessimistic interpretations	*Normative focus on system stability*		People quite understandably care more about everyday life issues than about politics, but since they do not trust politicians, they have to intervene periodically to hinder the worst forms of corruption. But, unrealistic expectations that political leaders can act quickly to improve things – without debate or compromise – could entail a legitimacy crisis for the political system (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002).	Citizens ought to be involved in politics, as involvement empowers people and improves decision-making. A participatory model of democracy is the preferred solution (Pateman, 1980).
	Empirical focus on the quality of democracy		Counter-democracy: people today generally distrust politicians, so they constantly monitor and criticize the people in power (Rosanvallon, 2008).	Crisis of democracy debate in the 1970s (Crozier et al., 1975) and 'Bowling Alone' debate in the 2000s; declining levels of social trust and civic engagement are a challenge to a democratic society (Putnam, 1993, 2000).
Optimistic interpretations	*Normative focus on system stability*	Politics is not about mass participation; the non-qualified should stay out of politics. A minimalist or Weber-inspired model of democracy is the preferred solution (Schumpeter, 1942).	Citizens should trust government authorities to be fair, feel a sense of civic duty, participate to some extent, but also accept the authorities. A representative model of democracy is the preferred solution (Almond and Verba, 1963).	
	Empirical focus on the quality of democracy	A citizen within the *civic culture* should not constantly be involved in politics, and not constantly oversee the behavior of political incumbents. Some level of passivity – i.e., a lack of widespread public disaffection – is good for the effectiveness of political institutions (Almond and Verba, 1963, 1980).	Advocates of various forms of post-modern citizenship; conventional forms of political engagement are perhaps on the decline, but this is not a threat to democracy. People remain interested and find new channels of engagement (Norris, 1999, 2002; Dalton, 2004; Inglehart, 1997; Welzel and Inglehart, 2005). People are not disinterested in or uninformed about politics, but they avoid conventional forms of participation. They trust others to deal with politics but stay informed, monitor politics, and – should the circumstances warrant – are prepared to take action (Schudson, 1996, 1998).	

Figure 1 Different interpretations of passivity, the quality of democracy and system stability.

respect. Here, as suggested by Almond and Verba (1963, 1980), a sense of civic duty should ideally be combined with some level of passivity, with incumbents being left to decide on most political issues on their own.

In addition to these normative questions about the best way of organizing a democratic political system, the issue of political passivity has, of course, been a standing feature in post-war discussion of the quality of democracy. Here, as already noted, pessimistic interpretations have been quite common, from the 'crisis of democracy' debate in the 1970s to the 'Bowling Alone' debate in the 2000s. It is harder to find scholars today who would make the outright claim that *passivity is an asset to democracy*; the closest would perhaps, again, lie in Almond and Verba's (1963, 1980) notion of a mixed civic culture, where some level of passivity is considered to be good for the effectiveness of political institutions. A good citizen, then, should not constantly be involved in politics or actively oversee the behavior of political decision makers (Almond and Verba, 1963).

In the more recent literature, we find some interpretations of current political developments where passivity – in the form of declining levels of conventional political participation and civic engagement (cf. Berger, 2009) – is not necessarily considered to be a threat in itself to democracy. Rather, we are told, this is more or less what we should expect from postmodern citizens. They avoid traditional forms of political participation, but they also develop new forms of political behavior and stay interested in societal affairs (cf. Inglehart, 1997, 1999; Norris, 2002; Dalton, 2004).

The notion of 'monitorial citizens' (Schudson, 1996, 1998) constitutes one of the most optimistic interpretations of citizens' political behavior in contemporary democracies. Schudson claims that citizens today are not politically passive, even if they do not formally participate in politics; rather, they are politically involved as 'monitorial citizens', which is 'a critical and observational form of citizenship, avoiding any routine-based or institutionalized forms of political participation' (Hooghe and Dejaeghere, 2007: 250–251). The decline in conventional forms of participation does not entail a crisis of democracy; rather, 'monitorial citizens' supposedly stay interested in, and informed about, politics, display sufficiently high levels of political trust, and show a high level of belief in political self-efficacy. The low level of formal political participation reflects rational decision making. Only when the need to intervene is felt will the 'monitorial citizen' act – but, up until then, she or he stays out of politics (cf. Hooghe and Dejaeghere, 2007: 251).

A seemingly similar account of the existence of politically passive citizens in contemporary democracies is found in Rosanvallon (2008). He argues that people today are, despite declining levels of party membership and so on, not uninterested in politics. Rather, citizens generally monitor the people in power, and in this way, are 'interested in politics'. However, the reason for doing such monitoring has to do with *distrust* rather than anything else; most people supposedly tend to distrust politicians, and for that very reason, they feel that they have to stay informed, and supervise and constantly criticize the people in power. And they do this in new ways

rather than through the established or conventional channels of political participation. Thus, Rosanvallon's (pessimistic) notion of contemporary 'counter-democracies' is actually very different from Schudson's (optimistic) notion of modern polities with a significant proportion of 'monitorial citizens'.

Rosanvallon (2008) has perhaps more in common with Theiss-Morse and Hibbing (2005), who also address political passivity in contemporary society. Theiss-Morse and Hibbing find it perfectly reasonable that most people today – in the United States – should be more interested in everyday life issues than in politics. Still, like Rosanvallon, Theiss-Morse and Hibbing claim that most people tend to *distrust* politicians, and consequently, even if they desire to stay out of politics altogether, they still feel that they are obliged to intervene from time to time, in order to prevent the worst forms of political corruption. To Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, political passivity is not in itself a threat to democracy, but they argue that sporadic interest in politics, and the perceived notion that all politicians are the same, may bring about a crisis for the entire political system. Because of their orientations towards politics, people may develop unrealistic expectations that political leaders can act quickly to improve things, once they are told off by the public, without debate or compromise with political opponents. This might then give rise to a more serious legitimacy crisis (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, 2005).

Passivity and participation among young citizens

Perhaps the controversy over optimistic and pessimistic interpretations of the state of Western democracies is most obvious when it comes to the debate on young people's political involvement. On the one hand, scholars point to alarmingly low levels of young people's engagement in politics. Precisely, adolescents seem to demonstrate an increasing disinterest in conventional modes of politics, such as voting in general elections (Pattie *et al.*, 2004; Dalton, 2008), membership of political parties (Mycock and Tonge, 2012), and activities in associational life (Putnam, 2000). Furthermore, even the reinvented types of involvement that have been specifically designed for young people seem to have failed, possibly because of the initiatives' non-inclusive and unresponsive character (Harris *et al.*, 2010; Vromen and Collin, 2010). Simultaneously, the institutional shortcomings may reflect young people's seemingly robust political apathy or political alienation (Marsh *et al.*, 2007), which is sometimes referred to as 'partisan dealignment' (Phelps, 2012), or 'dissenting citizenship' (O'Loughlin and Gillespie, 2012). In short, there seems to be good reasons for being pessimistic concerning political participation among contemporary youths (Zukin *et al.*, 2006), even if the comparative patterns remain nuanced and complex (Hoskins *et al.*, 2012; Sloam, 2012).

In spite of such seemingly well-founded pessimism, some scholars have argued that, even if young people undoubtedly are less engaged in politics than middle-aged citizens, increasingly more young people have supposedly become involved 'in emerging forms of civic engagement that take place outside the institutionalized

sphere of politics' (Stolle and Hooghe, 2011: 119; see also Flanagan, 2013). This is not an entirely new approach. One particular debate has been about whether voluntary work can be seen to be political. Some have argued that voluntary activities and involvement in politics may indeed cross-fertilize one another (Burns *et al.*, 2001; Fisher, 2012), and that, depending on the circumstances, voluntarism can certainly be political (Fiorina, 2002). What are new are the emerging forms of engagement among youths that seem to be signs of a new style of citizenship, manifested most notably in the web sphere (Loader, 2007; Bennett *et al.*, 2011), but also in other modes that diversify agencies and repertoires as well as targets, to quote Norris (2002). In a sense, the very concept of 'politics' is broadened to include things like the political–ethical-based patterns of consumption at local markets (Micheletti, 2003) and food preferences (Micheletti and Stolle, 2009). If all these types of involvement and interest are taken into account, the overall picture is not as dark as conventional assessments would suggest (Quintelier, 2007). In the United States, if not in Europe, scholars have recently reported on 'an unmistakable expansion of youth interest in politics and public affairs' (Sander and Putnam, 2010: 11).

In addition to the pessimists and optimists, some scholars argue for a more balanced view. Drawing on the results of over 50 years of research on engagement and participation, Zukin and colleagues reject the pessimistic image of American youth as being increasingly politically apathetic. At the same time, they do call for continuous concern about 'the lack of direct involvement in the political realm of Americans in general, and young generations in particular' (Zukin *et al.*, 2006: 200). In a similar fashion, reviewing the literature on electoral turnout among young people in Britain, Phelps questions the somewhat rosy picture of the new forms of political activity that have supposedly replaced the traditional modes. The problem is that no research has shown precisely the extent to which these will compensate for the decline of old ones (Phelps, 2012). Furthermore, the analysis of British citizenries by Pattie *et al.* (2004) also demonstrates that young people still are more unengaged than their older counterparts. In conclusion, as Fisher has recently noted, after reviewing sociological and political science research on youth participation in America, it is hard to get a synthesized understanding of the conditions for youth participation, due to the fragmentation between research on activism on the one hand and electoral politics on the other (Fisher, 2012).

The controversy between optimists and pessimists demonstrates the need for theoretical development, aimed at explaining the full range of politics and activism (Fisher, 2012; Phelps, 2012). Also, given the recharged interest in youth political engagement and passivity among political scientists, there is a striking contrast between the intense efforts to understand political activity in all possible forms, and plain ignorance of the political orientations of the non-active, not seldom the majority of young people. An understanding of these seemingly passive youths and their orientations towards politics may increase realism in the debate over youth political participation as well as add to our understanding of the ways in which contemporary democracies work.

The present contribution: different varieties of passivity

Above, we have identified the need for looking beyond the simplistic active/passive distinction, in order to properly understand, for example, youth participation in contemporary democracies. Drawing on the discussion about different rationales for being politically active or passive in a conventional sense, the idea of this study is to expand the literature by introducing a framework for distinguishing between different varieties of passivity, which may also be used in empirical studies to capture a largely neglected political orientation of crucial importance for our understanding of the logic behind political behavior in contemporary democracies. The idea is thus to demonstrate empirically that what is sometimes dismissed as 'passivity' (i.e. the lack of manifest activity) actually consists of distinctly different orientations. And one of these seemingly passive orientations (the standby category) could actually be regarded as an asset to a sustainable democratic society.

In order to find the most basic characteristics of how a citizen is actually oriented towards politics, two concepts in particular stand out in the literature (cf. above). The first is *political interest*. In addition to its normative connotation of good citizenship (Dahl, 1971, 1989), it has been widely used in an empirically solid way to capture variation in citizens' degrees of concern about politics (Prior, 2010). In line with Hooghe and Dejaeghere (2007: 257), we find it reasonable to assume that citizens' interest precedes any form of political action: 'If they are not interested, there is no way they could monitor the political process in an adequate manner'. An often referred to definition of political interest is one launched by van Deth: 'The degree to which politics arouses a citizen's curiosity' (1989: 278). More recently, Dostie-Goulet has suggested a similar definition: 'the extent to which politics is attractive to someone' (2009: 406). The advantage of both these definitions is that they stick to cognitive aspects, leaving relationships to possible actions aside. Thereby, they are able to cover a wide range of possible degrees of political interest – from the non-interested to the fairly interested to the very interested – while keeping distance from motives for being interested, and also from possible incentives to act.

As we have shown above, the importance of *political participation* for democracy has seemed incontrovertible over the decades; in fact, only the issue of a minimum level of participation has been in dispute in normative discussions. However, our understanding of political participation has undergone a remarkably expansive development, covering more and more domains in a citizen's participatory repertoire. Originally, for example, according to Tingsten (1937), it was simply equivalent to voting. Step-by-step since then, the concept has widened to encompass campaigning, contacting officials, and signing petitions, etc. – nowadays often summarized as 'conventional participation'. In particular, from the 1960s, political participation has also included protest actions and engagement in social movements (Campbell *et al.*, 1960; Barnes *et al.*, 1979). In the late 20th century, social engagement and civic participation came to be included in studies of political participation (Norris, 2002). Of course, the conceptual expansion to cover presently some

70 activities also mirrors an expansion of the political domains in Western societies. In fact, the very politicization of various spheres of life in many democratic societies may undermine any effort to delimit politics from other processes (van Deth and Elff, 2000).

We do not need to take a more precise stand regarding the general conceptualization of political participation. For our theoretical purposes, it is enough to focus on the deliberate steps a citizen takes, independent of where it happens in public. In order to expose our data to a tougher test than a more inclusive approach would allow us to adopt, we have chosen to understand political participation as 'ways in which ordinary citizens try to influence the political decision-making process' (Parry *et al.*, 1992: 39).

Hence, keeping interest separated from participation enables us to get a qualified characterization of actual citizenship styles, that is, different combinations of interest and participation. In particular, even more interestingly, maintaining the distinction gives us an opportunity to connect contemporary discussions, both normatively and empirically, to a fairly neglected observation by Almond and Verba in their seminal comparative study of five nations, some 50 years ago. They claimed that some civic cultures facilitate on-the-surface passivity, which in reality is combined with, not permanent but uneven, cyclical activity. They saw a civic reserve and a civic culture in 'the potentially active citizen' (Almond and Verba, 1963: 481), a citizen who is not 'constantly … involved in politics /…/ [but who has] the potential to act if there is a need'. In the present study, we call this type of citizenship style *standby citizenship* (Amnå, 2010), which refers to citizens who are interested in politics without participating, for the time being.

The debate since Almond and Verba's ground-breaking study seems to have been somewhat paralysed by passive/active, elitist/participatory, weak/strong, stable/unstable, and other bipolar controversies in normative democratic theory during the second half of the 20th century. By contrast, empirical analyses of the logic behind seemingly growing passivity have been rare (Hooghe and Dejaeghere, 2007; Hustinx *et al.*, 2012).

The idea of the present analysis is to investigate different forms of political passivity. In this way, we will be able to distinguish between genuine passivity and more latent forms of engagement (Ekman and Amnå, 2012). As noted in the section on previous research, we have seen a few attempts in recent years to account for the specific type of orientation we are interested in here, that is, a *combination* of political interest and a low level of participation. In particular, Hooghe and Dejaeghere's (2007) empirical test of the existence of Schudson's 'monitorial citizens' (Schudson 1996, 1998) is relevant to the present study. Asking if monitorial citizens exist outside the United States, they demonstrate that, in the Nordic countries, empirical evidence does not support the theoretical expectations; here, people are not necessarily 'critical citizens' (Norris, 1999), nor are they necessarily very well educated or distanced from the realms of institutionalized politics, as would be expected from accounts of postmodern political orientations.

Hooghe and Dejaeghere (2007: 257) detect four defining characteristics of the monitorial citizen: (i) political interest *in combination* with (ii) political efficacy and (iii) some level of political activity, but only in (iv) postmodern forms of participation. In this study, we try to identify, in a more straightforward manner, the *presence* of types of citizens, not only those with genuinely passive orientations, but also those who are disposed to act under certain circumstances. As a first step, we want empirically to capture three types of citizens: active citizens, manifestly passive citizens, and those who stand somewhere in-between, that is, standby citizens. At a second step, we are interested in the behavior characteristics of these different categories of citizens, and, in particular, in those of the intermediate position between passivity and activity. What does it entail? In the absence of manifest action, how do standbyers relate to politics in their everyday life? Our empirical analysis will demonstrate the way standby citizens think, feel and act in relation to politics. In this way, the notion of standby citizenship is close, but not similar, to the notion of monitorial citizenship. The idea is to reach a fuller understanding of the way contemporary citizens relate to politics, by shedding light on what citizens actually do when they appear to do nothing.

More specifically, we want to make sure that the young standby citizen – if actually existent – has the resources and the competencies needed to step in, if it should be needed. In order to be able to intervene, he or she has to be knowledgeable. To be a standby citizen should not, according to our theoretical understanding, be an effect of a lack of socioeconomic resources, or a lack of knowledge about how to act, factors known to be powerful in explaining political activity and passivity among young people (Milner, 2010). For the same reason, political news consumption would be a sign of keeping oneself continuously updated. Additionally, a standby position should not be a sign of a weak personal sense of political efficacy, another factor that has been found to be closely associated with participation (Hooghe and Dejaeghere, 2007: 257).

Moreover, we want to exclude the possibility that young citizens are on standby because of a lack of trust in their political institutions (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, 2005; Rosanvallon, 2008), or even dissatisfaction with the way politics is run, thereby making political participation meaningless. Standbyers should not, in our understanding, have genuinely hostile feelings about politics. In other words, their political interest should not be fuelled by political antipathies or negative general feelings about politics, in such a way that the only trigger for political action becomes a selfish interest in the defense of personal interest if threatened. Furthermore, being a standby citizen should not be an effect of a general hesitation to cooperate with others because of a lack of social capital or interpersonal trust.

Finally, we want to underline that staying passive in public life is not equivalent to passivity in any one of the everyday life contexts of youth. To the contrary, to bring up political issues with family members, peers, schoolmates, and Internet friends is a way for young people to be politically active in private spheres, thereby also preparing themselves (and others) for future public actions.

All in all, standby citizens are those who stay alert, keep themselves informed about politics, and are willing and able to participate if needed. In short, they can be seen as potential political participants, which contrasts with citizens who are genuinely passive by virtue of doing nothing and by shunning politics altogether.

Method, data, and empirical analyses

In order to demonstrate the validity of our suggested framework, we have utilized a data set of young citizens in Sweden. As noted above, since young people in particular, in the current debate, have been depicted as most reluctant to participate in conventional modes of politics, their orientations may be the best ones to analyse in order to give us a deepened understanding of the characteristics of seemingly non-active citizens. In addition, more than others, Swedish youths appear to be postmodern, post-materialist, and individualized (Hooghe and Dejaeghere, 2007: 252; cf. Welzel and Inglehart, 2005).

Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of middle adolescents coming from a Swedish city of 137,000 inhabitants. The city resembles the national average on factors such as population density, income level, and unemployment (Statistics Sweden, 2010). The proportion of persons who were born outside the country or whose both parents were born outside the country was somewhat higher (20.4%) in the city than nationally (19.1%). While 33% of the 5- to 24-year olds in the city had parents born outside Sweden, the national average was 20%. The sample of adolescents was selected from three of the largest high schools in the city that admitted students from different neighborhoods. This method allowed the inclusion of participants with varying social and ethnic backgrounds, assigned to both vocational and college-track programs.

Of the 1052 students registered in grade 10 at three schools, 892 (85%) were present on the day of data collection. Of these, 863 (82%) had sufficient data to be included in the study (444 females and 419 males). The mean age was 16.6 years (SD = 0.72). The data collections took place during school hours and were administered by trained research assistants. Participants were informed about the types of questions included in the questionnaire, the approximate amount of time required, and that their participation was voluntary. Participants were also ensured that no one would see their answers – neither parents, teachers, nor anyone else. Each class received a payment of ∼€100 to their class fund for participation. Parents were informed of the study ahead of time, and could refuse their children's participation by returning a note in a prepaid envelope. The Regional Research Ethics Committee approved the study and procedures.

Measures

Participation.   To measure participation in political activities we asked: 'Have you done any of the following during the last 12 months?' The youths responded to a list of activities. The following 11 items were used in the present study: 'attended a meeting dealing with political or societal issues', 'collected signatures', 'distributed leaflets with a political content', 'contacted a politician or public official', 'boycotted or bought certain products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons', 'worn a badge or a t-shirt with a political message', 'participated in a legal demonstration or strike', 'donated money to support the work of a political group or organization', 'written an article in an organization journal, etc.', 'protested when someone outside your family has been unfairly treated', and 'taken part in concerts or a fundraising event with a political cause'. Responses ranged from 1 (*no*) to 3 (*yes, several times*). α reliability was 0.82.

Interest.   Youths' interest in politics was measured as the mean of responses to the questions: 'How interested are you in politics?' and 'How interested are you in societal issues?' The correlation was 0.59. Responses were given on a 5-point scale ranging from (1) *very interested* to (5) *not at all interested*.

Citizen competencies
Perceived political efficacy.   Youths responded to 10 statements such as: If I really tried I could 'Be an active member of a political organization' and 'Convince others to sign petitions about political or societal issues' ($\alpha = 0.93$). Responses ranged from 1 (*I could definitely not manage that*) to 4 (*I could definitely manage that*).

Trust in institutions.   Youths responded to seven items regarding their trust in institutions such as the government, the political parties, the EU, etc. Responses were given on a 4-point scale ranging from (1) *no trust at all* to (4) *a lot of trust* ($\alpha = 0.90$).

Social trust.   Youths responded to two statements ($r = 0.69$): 'Most people are trustworthy', and 'Most people are fair and do not try to take advantage of you'. Responses ranged from (1) *don't agree at all* to (4) *agree totally*.

Feelings about politics.   Youths were asked: 'People differ in what they feel about politics. What are your feelings?' Response options were: *extremely boring* (1) to *really fun* (6).

Satisfaction with democracy.   Youths responded to two statements: 'On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Sweden?' and 'How satisfied are you with how the people now in national office are handling the country's affairs?' ($r = 0.50$). Response options were: *very satisfied* (1) to *not at all satisfied* (4).

Ambitions.   Youths were asked: 'Some people have set goals for themselves concerning their engagement in societal issues. Have you?' Four response options were available, ranging from '*I will work actively in organizations and I'm already a member of an organization*' to '*I'm not interested in organizations, rather the opposite. I will certainly not commit myself to do anything for them*'.

News consumption.   Youths responded to how often they acquainted themselves with news in different media. The media were: newspapers, radio, TV, and Internet. Responses ranged from *at least 5 days a week* (1) to *never* (5). α reliability was 0.63.

Knowledge.   Youths answered seven questions regarding their knowledge, such as: 'Which of the following countries are not a member of the EU?' and 'All but one of the following persons has been the prime minister of Sweden, who?' Four response options were available per question.

Activities in other contexts
Parents and friends.   Youths responded to two statements about whether they tried to influence parents and friends: 'Do you try to encourage your friends to become more aware of environmental issues?' and 'Do you try to encourage your friends to become more aware of what happens in the world' ($r = 0.68$). The same statements were responded to with reference to parents ($r = 0.58$). Responses were given on a 5-point scale ranging from *almost always* to *never*.

School.   Youths responded to four statements regarding how active they were in a school setting. Examples of items were: 'Have you brought up a political issue during class?' and 'Have you brought up things that have to do with the environment (e.g. recycling, saving energy) during class?' Responses ranged from *has never happened* (1) to *very often* (5). α reliability was 0.88.

Internet.   Youths were presented with 19 items concerning their political engagement on the Internet during the last 2 months. Examples of these items were: 'Discussing societal or political issues with friends on the net' and 'Reading about politics in a blog'. Responses ranged from 1 (*yes, several times*) to 3 (*no*). α reliability was 0.91.

Results

Citizenship orientations

Our question was whether youths' participation and interest can be used to identify different citizenship orientations. To find the naturally occurring orientations, the standardized scores of youths' participation and interest were entered into a hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method. The analysis produced

not a three-cluster but a four-cluster solution that explained 72% of the error sum of squares, which exceeds the recommended minimum of 70% (Bergman *et al.*, 2003). In addition to the three clusters, we expected deductively (active, passive, and standby), the passive category actually turned out to consist of two distinct groups. Thus, there were four citizenship orientation groups: *Active* (high interest and highest participation; $n = 51$), *Standby* (highest interest and average participation; $n = 401$), *Unengaged* (low interest and low participation; $n = 226$), and *Disillusioned* (low participation and lowest on interest; $n = 185$).

We used MANOVA to examine differences across the citizen groups. MANOVA does not lead to inflated Type-I error rate when there are multiple and correlated criteria variables, unlike when a series of ANOVAs is conducted to examine group differences (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2012). Table 1 shows the results of the MANOVA examining how the citizen groups differ on the criteria variables. Specifically, youths in the active group reported the highest levels of participation and interest, but importantly, youths in the standby group did not differ from the active group with regard to interest. Youths in the unengaged and disillusioned groups did not differ in level of participation, but youths in the disillusioned group showed lower interest compared with youths in the unengaged group. In conclusion, the groups differ in meaningful ways on the criteria variables.

Citizenship orientations and citizenship competencies

An important question is whether the citizenship groups differ in meaningful ways on measures of citizenship competencies, such as political efficacy and news consumption. Do, for example, youths in the standby group perceive themselves as more efficacious than youths in the unengaged group? Table 2 presents the results of a 4 (citizenship group) $\times$ 2 (gender) MANOVA that examines mean-level differences between the groups on different measures. The results show that

Table 1. Results of a 4 (citizenship orientation) $\times$ 2 (gender) MANOVA examining differences on measures used in the cluster analysis (*z*-scores)

	M (SD)					
	Active ($n = 51$)	Standby ($n = 401$)	Unengaged ($n = 226$)	Disillusioned ($n = 185$)	*F*-values (d.f.)	η^2
Participation	3.29_a (1.31)	0.03_b (0.56)	-0.44_c (0.18)	-0.44_c (0.19)	$793.85_{(3,859)}$***	0.74
Interest	0.71_a (1.10)	0.73_a (0.59)	-0.30_b (0.24)	-1.37_c (0.44)	$689.34_{(3,859)}$***	0.71

Note: Multivariate *F*-test (Wilks' λ), $F(6, 1716) = 690.44$, $P < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.71$.
Within each row, means with different subscripts differ significantly at $P < 0.05$ in Tukey's HSD *post-hoc* comparisons.
*$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$; ***$P < 0.001$.

Table 2. Results of a 4 (citizenship orientation) × 2 (gender) MANOVA examining citizenship orientation group differences on measures of citizenship competencies (z-scores)

	M (SD)					
	Active ($n = 51$)	Standby ($n = 401$)	Unengaged ($n = 226$)	Disillusioned ($n = 185$)	F-values (d.f.)	η^2
Political efficacy	0.73_a (1.01)	0.36_b (0.84)	-0.24_c (0.84)	-0.67_d (1.01)	$76.55_{(3,760)}$***	0.23
Trust in institutions	0.08_{ab} (1.06)	0.30_a (0.85)	-0.02_b (0.95)	-0.62_c (1.02)	$436.36_{(3,760)}$***	0.13
Social trust	-0.17_{ab} (0.93)	0.12_a (0.97)	0.04_a (1.01)	-0.24_b (1.03)	$6.92_{(3,760)}$***	0.03
Feelings about politics	0.74_a (0.99)	0.58_a (0.70)	-0.25_b (0.72)	-1.14_c (0.65)	$265.98_{(3,760)}$***	0.51
Satisfaction with democracy	-0.44_b (1.24)	0.15_a (0.95)	0.12_a (0.82)	-0.35_b (1.10)	$17.43_{(3,760)}$***	0.06
Ambitions	1.14_a (1.24)	0.33_b (0.91)	-0.31_c (0.71)	-0.66_d (0.83)	$88.21_{(3,760)}$***	0.26
News consumption	0.50_a (0.89)	0.32_a (0.93)	-0.17_b (0.84)	-0.62_c (0.99)	$45.97_{(3,760)}$***	0.15
Knowledge	0.06_{ab} (1.10)	0.23_a (0.98)	-0.17_b (0.96)	-0.30_b (0.93)	$15.51_{(3,760)}$***	0.06

Note: Multivariate F-test (Wilks' λ), $F(24, 2184) = 34.87$, $P < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.27$.
Within each row, means with different subscripts differ significantly at $P < 0.05$ in Tukey's HSD *post-hoc* comparisons.
Means sharing any *one* of the subscripts do not differ. For example, ab does not differ significantly from a or b, but ab differs from c.
*$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$; ***$P < 0.001$.

youths in the active group reported the highest levels of political efficacy and ambition, as compared with the other groups. In turn, youths in the standby group reported greater efficacy and higher ambition than those in the unengaged and disillusioned groups; and, of the two latter groups, youths in the disillusioned group reported lower efficacy and lower ambition than those in the unengaged group. The active and standby groups did not differ on how they felt about politics and on the level of news consumption; the youths in the disillusioned group felt worse about politics and consumed less news than those in the unengaged group. Youths in the standby and unengaged groups reported being more satisfied with democracy than those in the active and disillusioned groups. There were no interactions between the citizenship orientation groups and gender. In sum, the citizenship groups differed in meaningful and expected ways.

Citizenship orientations and activities in other contexts

Do the citizenship groups differ in terms of how active they are in different contexts, such as whether they try to influence parents and friends, whether they bring up political and societal issues during class in school, and how active they are on the Internet? These questions were addressed by a 4 (citizenship group) × 2 (gender) MANOVA. The results are given in Table 3. Youths in the active group reported trying to influence their parents and friends more than those in any of the other groups; they were also more active in school and on the Internet. In turn, youths in the standby group were more active in all contexts as compared with those in any of

Table 3. Results of a 4 (citizenship orientation) $\times$ 2 (gender) MANOVA examining citizenship orientation group differences on measures of activity in other contexts (z-scores)

	M (SD)					
	Active ($n = 51$)	Standby ($n = 401$)	Unengaged ($n = 226$)	Disillusioned ($n = 185$)	F-values (d.f.)	η^2
Friends	0.72_a (1.25)	0.31_b (0.93)	-0.23_c (0.83)	-0.60_d (0.82)	$57.56_{(3,835)}$***	0.17
Parents	0.66_a (1.13)	0.28_b (0.94)	-0.15_c (0.85)	-0.61_d (0.88)	$51.30_{(3,835)}$***	0.16
School	0.92_a (1.12)	0.32_b (0.99)	-0.34_c (0.73)	-0.53_c (0.79)	$65.54_{(3,835)}$***	0.19
Internet	1.89_a (1.77)	0.20_b (0.87)	-0.35_c (0.53)	-0.52_c (0.54)	$126.93_{(3,835)}$***	0.31

Note: Multivariate F-test (Wilks' λ), $F(12, 2201) = 42.36$, $P < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.17$.
Within each row, means with different subscripts differ significantly at $P < 0.05$ in Tukey's HSD *post-hoc* comparisons.
*$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$; ***$P < 0.001$.

the other groups. There was one interaction between gender and group belonging. Follow-up analyses showed that males in the active group were more active on the Internet than females. However, group belonging did not have any effect on gender, meaning that the pattern of activity on the Internet was similar for males and females, who showed exactly the same pattern as for the whole group. So, youths in the active group were the most active in other contexts, and youths in the un-engaged and disillusioned groups were consistently the least active, lending further support to the validity of the citizenship orientation grouping.

Socioeconomic status and the citizenship orientation groups

Do the citizenship orientation groups differ in terms of resources? We used both youth reports on resources (five items; $\alpha = 0.82$; for example, 'How often do you and your family go on vacation?' and 'Does your family have more or less money than other families where you are living?'), and reports on parents' education. Parents' education was dichotomized into lower (compulsory school/practical high school) and higher education (theoretical high school/university). The results showed that youths in the standby, unengaged, and disillusioned groups perceived themselves to be better off than members of the active group. Further, with regard to parents' education, it was found that the parents of youths in the standby group had higher levels of education, and the parents of youths in the unengaged group lower levels of education, than would be expected by chance.

Discussion

In this study, we have claimed that, if the research into political participation is to be able to contribute to our understanding of how modern democracies function,

the analysis has to go beyond a simplistic and static passive/active dichotomy. In this study, we have presented empirical evidence not only of the existence of a particular 'standby citizen', but also of two kinds of genuinely passive young people: unengaged and disillusioned citizens. Alongside active citizens, these people are in distinctly different categories with regard to their behaviors.

It can be argued that these findings of different combinations of political interest and participation are bound to a very specific cultural context. For sure, the notion of latent activity goes hand in hand with other accounts of Scandinavian citizenries, arguing that they are not characterized by a permanent high level of activity, but rather by the extensive absence of lifelong inactivity (Hoff and Andersen, 2001). People stay alert by maintaining their political knowledge and nurturing their political interest in order to get involved when needed.

On the other hand, our notion of three faces of political inactivity could be seen as having general relevance. As Gamson pointed out, '… inactivity can be a sign of confidence as well as alienation. Or it may simply be a sign of irrelevance of politics and government for many people much of the time' (Gamson, 1968: 48). Moreover, Almond and Verba have figured out the logic of not least the participatory potentials in civic cultures. Their account prompted instant objections (cf. Pateman, 1980). Defenders of a strong and participatory democracy had either taken for granted, or argued for, linear growth in dutiful citizens, who willingly spent their spare time on political activities (Barber, 1984). Both theoretical (Downs, 1957) and empirical (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, 2005) research has suggested an almost opposite logic, in which people try to avoid involvement in what they regard as boring and unreliable political activities on rational grounds. The less participation, the better. Furthermore, recent studies have suggested that young people in mature democracies are particularly prone to be non-active (Amnå and Zettterberg, 2010; Hoskins *et al*., 2012).

Finally, returning to the general concern over the state of contemporary democracies, the classic work by Almond and Verba presented a fairly optimistic view of democratic politics, in that it argued for a balance in civic culture, which, on the one hand, made it rational for even competent citizens not to act, and, on the other hand, would 'allow governmental elites to act' (1963: 346). Fifty plus years on, an increasing number of citizens of the same democracies have obviously lost their 'sense that they can influence decisions and that the political system is responsive to them and well-functioning' (Stoker, 2010: 51). The presence of such disillusioned citizens, as found in our study, cannot be interpreted as anything but a threat to democracy, in the pessimistic tradition. Further, the combined rise of standby citizens and a general political disenchantment may imply the increasing prevalence of a mode of thinking and behaving, cherished by the standbyers, that de-emphasizes humanitarian and altruistic values while giving scope for more hedonistic ones, rooted preferably in self-oriented values.

Other aspects, which necessitate further research, have to do with when and why standby citizens choose to become active in public, and also why active

citizens under certain circumstances prefer to become (seemingly) passive. This calls for the incorporation of available political opportunities and incentives as well as the new forms of political communication. A closely related concept to standby citizens seems to be the 'everyday makers' (Bang and Sørensen, 1999) who appear to combine life politics with the project politics characterizing contemporary democratic governance structures. Finally, it should also be noted that this paper is based on a rather confined data set. National and cross-national analyses are needed to further substantiate our findings. When new longitudinal data are available in the project, which this research is based on, we will be able to say more about the causes and directions of possible changes over time. Our ambition here has been more modest; we have suggested a new analytical framework that may be used to analyze empirically a phenomenon that we feel has received surprisingly little attention in the literature on political participation and civic engagement.

Acknowledgements

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