



# **Patterns of Change. A Study of the Relation Between Political Participation and Institutions**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to explain levels and changes in levels of political participation through institutions and institutional change. Three general trends have been distinguished; a decline in 'representative' participation, an increase in 'extra-representative' participation, and an increase in 'direct' participation. The notion that these trends are apparent in most established democracies is rather striking and puzzling. This study specifically contributes to the debate about the current state and health of democracy, considering that it is concerned with both system changes in democracies and levels of popular participation in these democracies.

Changes in these types of participation could partly be explained by changes in the structure of the political system. Although the notion that institutions matter in political life is not debated, and their effects have been examined before, the effects of institutions have rarely been examined structurally in large-scale analyses, specifically concerning participation. In this study, three institutional elements which affect the access points and inclusiveness of the political system are considered: 'horizontal' diffusion of responsibilities (privatisation; the creation of non-majoritarian institutions), 'vertical' diffusion of responsibilities (decentralisation; globalisation) and 'diagonal' diffusion of responsibilities (direct democracy institutionalisation). The main aim of this research is therefore to find to what extent changes in the political system influence levels of different forms of political participation, over time and across space.

The study finds that, generally, representative participation seems to be negatively affected by privatisation, non-majoritarian institutions, globalisation, and the institutionalisation of referendums, with unclear results regarding the impact of decentralisation. Extra-representative participation is generally positively influenced by privatisation, non-majoritarian institutions, decentralisation, and globalisation, while there are some mixed results concerning the influence of the institutionalisation of referendums. Finally, direct participation is negatively affected by privatisation, non-majoritarian institutions, decentralisation, and globalisation, while referendum institutionalisation has generally a positive effect on levels of direct participation.



**Jury: Alexander Trechsel (EUI) (Supervisor), Yvette Peters (candidate), Jan W. van Deth (University of Mannheim), Peter Mair (EUI), Russell J. Dalton (University of California at Irvine) (via videolink)**

**Bio:** Yvette Peters holds a BA and an MPhil in political science from the University of Leiden. In 2007 she arrived at the EUI, where she worked on her Ph.D project which dealt with the institutional determinants of changes in political participation. During this time, Yvette spent a period as a visiting researcher at the Universität Mannheim, Germany. Her research interests include (different forms of) democracy, political participation, comparative research methods, and institutional change; she is generally focused on the general question of how institutions and institutional changes affect the citizenry as well as the core elements of democracy. Since 2010, Yvette is employed as Assistant Professor (wissenschaftlicher mitarbeiter) at the Humboldt Universität in Berlin, where she teaches several courses in comparative politics and is currently setting up a new research project analysing the (empirical) changes of democracy.