Cultural Capital and Political Participation in Britain

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Abstract

Existing rational choice, psychological, and sociological accounts of political participation have rarely investigated the importance of cultural capital beyond education. Yet Pierre Bourdieu's work suggests that it should be related to political activity alongside its economic and social counterparts. Original survey data including detailed measures of all three forms of capital, and multiple types of participation allows us to thoroughly investigate this proposition in Britain. The results show a positive relationship between certain types of 'legitimate' cultural capital, such as attendance at the opera and exhibitions, and some forms of non-electoral participation, such as individual, contacting, and collective political activities. They also show a negative relationship between popular cultural capital, such as eating out and shopping for pleasure, and those same forms of participation. The findings offer a fuller account of the resources that relate to political participation and show that, in some cases, it can be considered a culturally distinguished activity.

Keywords: political participation, cultural capital, inequality, privilege, British politics.

Word count: 9,999

Introduction

Why do people participate in politics to different extents and in different ways? The persistence of debates around inequality and mobility indicates the continued relevance of the idea that the unequal distribution of resources, as well as political engagement and recruitment, underpins unequal political participation (Schlozman, Brady, and Verba 2020; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). But despite extensive examination of economic and social capital, people's stocks of cultural capital have seldom been considered as a resource that enables participation. As such, this article provides a theoretical basis for hypothesising a relationship between cultural capital and political participation. It then investigates that relationship by analysing original survey data containing detailed measures of an array of cultural and political activities.

The wide range of political activities considered reflects an inclusive conceptualisation of political participation, drawing on the distinction between individual, contacting, and collective forms of participation (Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley 2004). Rational choice, psychological, and sociological accounts have offered a host of explanations for such activities but have rarely accounted for the role of cultural capital. Introducing Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation of economic, social, and cultural capital addresses this oversight theoretically by offering a fuller account of the resources that enable political participation. This provides the basis for the key independent variable in the survey data: cultural activities. Regression analysis demonstrates a complex set of relationships between cultural and political activities. Specific types of 'legitimate' cultural capital, such as opera and exhibition attendance, are positively related to some types of participation, such as individual, contacting, and collective political activities. By contrast, popular cultural capital, such as eating out and shopping for pleasure, tends to be negatively related to those same non-electoral activities. Further testing these relationships through causal mediation analysis shows

the role of political interest and especially recruitment in mediating the relationship between cultural capital and political participation. Despite the causal ambiguity stemming from the use of cross-sectional data, the results demonstrate that political participation is a culturally distinguished activity in Britain.

What is political participation?

There is a long trend in which the study of political behaviour has focused to a great extent on voting (e.g., Blais 2000; Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008; Riker and Ordeshook 1968). That focus makes sense, given the clear and significant consequences of voting and the ready availability of public data (i.e., election results) to analyse or compare samples against. However, voting is only part of the story of the functioning of democracy: election outcomes are shaped in part by the many hours given up by party members, campaigners and, crucially, less active citizens who have enough interest to sign a petition, post something on social media, or talk to their friends about politics. Such quotidian activities are also important because they can influence elected representatives during the months and years between elections, and because they are the means by which people organise around issues of importance to them. Therefore, acts such as donating money, attending meetings, joining organisations, wearing badges, contacting public officials or politicians, protesting, and going on strike can be considered the lifeblood of democracy (Biggs 2015; Goerres 2009; Scarrow 2007).

Such activities have been organised into a range typologies, from the broad differentiation between 'organized civil society' and 'not as well (as in ad-hoc, "temporarily") organized civil society' (Pichler and Kaufmann 2010), to the more specific categorisation of 'different participation acts according to type of influence, initiative required, level of conflict and scope of outcome' (Leighley 1995). A

distinction has also been drawn between conventional and unconventional participation, with the former described as ‘institutionalised’, ‘traditional’, ‘normal’, and ‘legitimate’, and the latter as less so (Milbrath and Goel 1982; Spannring, Ogris, and Gaiser 2008). The ever-expanding repertoire of political participation has also prompted a move away from nominal definitions to a conceptualisation based on decision-rules that can be applied to any activity in order to discern whether it constitutes political participation (van Deth 2014; Theocharis and van Deth 2018). Here, we consider activities that meet that conceptualisation’s minimalist definition of political participation as voluntary non-professional activity by citizens that engages with political structures or the state. We also consider activities that meet its criteria for political participation that targets, rather than engages with, political structures, or targets local community problems.

We organise the activities considered around the distinction between individual, contacting, and collective modes of participation (Goerres 2009), whilst also focusing on charitable activities and specific acts such as voting and donating. This approach encompasses and groups a wide range of participatory acts that are commonly undertake in the Britain (Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley 2004). These acts are examined within an overarching definition of political participation as any attempt by an individual, in interaction with an institution or organisation, to change or conserve an element of society at some level. This definition transcends the delineation between civic and political acts in order to avoid excluding any political activities and the claims of apathy that can come from overlooking them (Biggs 2015; Schlozman, Brady, and Verba 2020; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Yeo 1974; Zukin et al. 2006). It also encompasses many of the political activities that have been the focus of the literature explaining political behaviour, which can be split into three main camps: rational choice, psychological, and sociological.

Explaining unequal political participation

Rational choice accounts of political behaviour, predicated on the assumption that humans calculate the utility offered by various courses of action and then choose between them, have addressed a host of types of political activity including voting, group and party involvement, and social movements and mass mobilisation (e.g., Aldrich 1993; Blais 2000; Costantini and King 1984; Granovetter 1978; Olson 2009; Opp 1988; Opp and Gern 1993; Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Amendments to rational choice models have added a range of previously overlooked motivations and recognised the limitations on human rationality (Hamlin and Jennings 2011; Pattie, Seyd, and Whiteley 2003; Simon 1985). This moves them towards psychological accounts of human behaviour, which stress the less rational nature of humans' 'fast' system of thinking when compared to the more rational 'slow' system (Kahneman 2011; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000). These accounts accommodate biases in human perceptions, thinking, and decision-making, including those that are shaped by the prevailing narratives and stocks of information in their social contexts (e.g., Darley and Batson 1973; Duffy 2019; Ford 2014; Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008; Landy, Guay, and Marghetis 2018; Partheymüller and Schmitt-Beck 2012).

The importance of social context and group identities (Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 2001; Turner and Reynolds 2012) in human decision-making links to sociological accounts of political behaviour. These accounts often focus on the important role that early and formative years socialisation plays in shaping political opinions and behaviour (e.g., Dinas 2013, 2014; Grasso et al. 2019; Jennings 2007). They also examine how social cleavages shape those opinions and behaviours, often focusing on gender, ethnicity, and class (e.g., Burns et al. 2018; Culhane and Olchawski

2018; Evans and Tilley 2012; Fox and Lawless 2010; Heath 2015, 2018; Karpowitz, Mendelberg, and Shaker 2012; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Saggar 2007; Sobolewska and Begum 2020). One key intervention presented a civic voluntarism model (CVM) in which differences in participation between groups stem from their differing levels of resources, political engagement, and recruitment (Schlozman, Brady, and Verba 2020; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). This account has the advantage of accommodating an intersectional approach in which class, ethnicity, and gender jointly affect resources, engagement and recruitment, and thus political participation (Barak, Leighton, and Cotton 2018; Crenshaw 1989; Pascale 2007). However, a fuller account of the resources through which people's background characteristics affect their political participation requires us to account for their stocks of capital, and especially cultural capital.

The importance of capital

A holistic conceptualisation of different forms of capital is provided in the work of Pierre Bourdieu. For him, capital:

> can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualification; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title or nobility. (Bourdieu 1986, 243)

Economic, social, and cultural capital appear in accounts of political participation but are rarely conceptualised in such broad and encompassing terms, especially with the idea of social exclusivity and distinction in mind.

The concept of economic capital is commonplace, incorporates both income and wealth, and is related to both vote choice and turnout (Adler and Ansell 2020; Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Foucault 2011; Pfeffer and Hällsten 2012). The idea of social capital is equally commonplace but its features are less agreed upon and it has been described as an 'essentially contested concept' (Woolcock 2010, 482). Work on the role of social networks in prompting political participation reflects Putnam's identification of 'bridging (or inclusive)' social capital (Bhatti and Hansen 2012b, 2012a; Cook 2005; Lowndes 2004; Partheymüller and Schmitt-Beck 2012; Putnam 2001, 22–23). By contrast, Putnam's identification of 'bonding (or exclusive)' social capital dovetails with Bourdieu's conception of it as something exclusive that can be accumulated and exchanged, and that sustains inequalities between groups rather than promoting societal integration (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam 2001, 22–23). Finally, we can see cultural capital at play in work on the role of education, and cultural socialisation preceding school, in electoral and non-electoral participation (Dassonneville and Hooghe 2017; Kam and Palmer 2008; Staetsky and Mohan 2011). But these accounts overlook the broader conceptualisation of cultural capital at the core of Bourdieu's seminal work, *Distinction* (1984). This encompasses elements such as artistic tastes, food preferences and body shape, and use of language and speech patterns. In Bourdieu's account, distributions of economic, social, and cultural capital distinguish groups and act as signifiers of status. As such, society functions as a marketplace in which individuals and groups compete to accumulate capital and assign value to the different types and forms that they hold.

Of particular importance to Bourdieu is the delineation between legitimate cultural capital, which is less widespread and more distinguished, and popular cultural capital, which is more widespread and less distinctive (Bourdieu 1984). Legitimate cultural capital is socially valorised, seen to be 'worthwhile' or 'valuable' and sometimes, problematically, referred to as 'highbrow'. This stands in contrast to the 'lowbrow', less 'worthwhile' or 'valuable' status of popular culture. It is its cachet that makes legitimate cultural capital a useful resource, rendering it a kind of qualification for participation in certain social contexts, including political ones (Bourdieu 1984, 398). The distinction between legitimate and popular cultural capital is therefore of particular interest because we expect the former to be a more valuable resource in enabling political participation.

Bourdieu also identifies an important delineation between institutionalised and non-institutionalised cultural capital. The former is embodied in educational qualifications, which are regulated and awarded contingent on particular knowledge or skills. By contrast, non-institutionalised, or informal, cultural capital is part of our everyday lives and is transmitted through socialisation, with tastes and preferences being shaped by family members and peers. Every time we choose what to wear, decide which restaurant to go to, or mention a film we like, we are manifesting informal cultural capital. It informs many of our daily interactions and can signal our status to those we meet, potentially enabling us to participate more or less easily in certain social contexts. Indeed, the relationship between informal cultural capital and political participation has been observed in relation to expression of opinions in surveys, amongst elites, in specific city contexts, and using limited measures (Harrits 2013; Harrits et al. 2010; Laurison 2015a, 2015b). The limited scope of this work has led to a

call for a fuller account of all three forms of capital and their relationships with political participation (Harrits 2013).

Bourdieu's approach has been influential in sociological accounts of class, status, and inequality (Chan and Goldthorpe 2005, 2006, 2007; DiMaggio 1982; Katz-Gerro 1999; Reay, Crozier, and James 2011; Shipman 2004; Walford 2012). It informed the widely covered *Great British Class Survey* (GBCS; see Devine and Snee 2015), which re-opened debates about the nature of class and prompted a great deal of criticism (Dorling 2013; May 2015; Mills 2015; Savage 2015; Savage et al. 2013; Silva 2015). Bourdieu's approach was also applied to the UK in *Culture, Class, Distinction* (Bennett et al. 2009), which observed a growing tendency towards cultural 'omnivorousness' alongside the persistence of a small elite with high levels of legitimate cultural capital. It further identified the importance of factors beyond class, such as ethnicity and gender, in defining the volume and types of capital possessed.

The three forms of capital, then, are not only constitutive components of class but, more broadly, resources that are differentially distributed and make it easier for privileged groups to engage in political participation. This is a more complete account of the resources that enable political participation and fits with broader analyses that identify resources as mechanisms by which privilege is reproduced (Duster 1976; Kimmel and Ferber 2017; White 1978). It also allows us to focus on factors that are further back in the 'funnel of causality' (Campbell et al. 1964, 24–25), and thus less obviously related to political participation. While we would expect that people cognitively engaged with politics and recruited to take part in it are more politically active, it might be more of a surprise that opera lovers and people who visit stately homes also undertake more political activity.

As we have seen, there is good reason to suppose such a relationship, because informal cultural capital, especially in its legitimate form, acts as a resource that qualifies people to participate in politics and as a signal of that qualification. As such, we expect informal cultural capital to be positively related to political participation, even when we account for formal cultural capital, in the form of education, as well as social and economic capital. Further, because of its higher value stemming from social valorisation, we expect legitimate cultural capital to be more closely related than popular cultural capital to political participation. As such, this article tests the following two hypotheses:

- ***Hypothesis 1 (H1):*** Informal cultural capital is positively related to political participation.
- ***Hypothesis 2 (H2):*** Legitimate informal cultural capital has a greater magnitude of relationship with political participation than does popular informal cultural capital.

Data and measures

Due to the dearth of data with detailed measures of all three forms of capital and an array of modes of political participation, an original survey was designed to cover the concepts. It was run just over one year before the Conservative victory in the 2015 UK general election, and slightly more than two years before the 2016 Brexit referendum. Due to its length, the survey was split into two waves to maintain respondent engagement. Each wave was fielded to a sample of GB adults drawn from YouGov's online panel of respondents: the first between 17 March and 1 April 2014, and the second between 4 April and 17 April 2014. Overall completion time for the two waves combined was between thirty-five and forty minutes, and 1,405 respondents (73.8 per

cent of first wave starters) completed both waves without displaying signs of satisficing (Krosnick 1999).

The sample is broadly representative in terms of gender and region of residence but is less so in terms of age. Those in their late teens, twenties, forties, and eighties or older are underrepresented, whilst those in their thirties, fifties, sixties, and seventies are overrepresented. In terms of ethnicity, the sample overrepresents White British respondents whilst underrepresenting those in other ethnic groups (on this topic, see Ford, Janta-Lipinski, and Sobolewska 2015). Further, the sample overrepresents those with higher-level educational qualifications (A-level and above) and concomitantly underrepresents those with lower-level (GCSE or below) or no formal qualifications. Finally, although the sample is largely representative in terms of choice in the 2010 general election amongst those who turned out, it underrepresents those who did not vote. The application of the weights provided by YouGov improves the representativeness of the sample to a limited extent for some of these demographic and political measures (Lynn 1996).[1]

The low number of non-voters indicates that the sample is likely to contain a disproportionately high number of politically active people. This is beneficial in the sense that rare political activities such as direct action are over-represented, whilst response quality also tends to be high in internet surveys (Chang and Krosnick 2009). Further, the focus in the subsequent analysis is on relationships between variables and, although there is some evidence to the contrary (Malhotra and Krosnick 2007), the descriptive representativeness of the sample is less important for this purpose (Ansolabehere and Rivers 2013; Pasek 2016; Sanders et al. 2007). There are also

[1] For comparison of the unweighted and weighted sample with the GB population, based on Census and electoral data, see Appendix A.

notable variations in answers to the dependent and independent variables such that there are large numbers of respondents who undertake little or no political activity as well as considerable variation in levels of cultural capital.

Political participation is measured by a question that asked respondents the approximate frequency with which they engage in eleven political acts in relation to issues that mattered to them. These were displaying materials; signing a petition or showing support online; boycotting; meeting elected representatives; attending public meetings; going on public rallies or protests; taking direct action; organising meetings or groups; contacting representatives; contacting the media; and urging others to engage in such activities. There are also measures of charitable activities, which capture the number of ways in which people support charities (membership, donating, volunteering, and holding official positions) and how frequently and long (if at all) they volunteer for the organisations that they support. Finally, the data include indicators of the annual amount of money donated in support of causes, and turning out to vote in the previous general election.

Drawing on both *Culture, Class, Distinction* (Bennett et al. 2009; see also Silva 2015) and the GBCS (Devine and Snee 2015), cultural capital is measured by a question that asked respondents roughly how often they engage in seventeen different cultural activities outside the home. Twelve of the cultural activities are included in the current analysis: attendance at classical music or opera performances; going to the theatre or a musical; watching live dance or ballet; visiting museums; visiting art galleries; visiting historic buildings; going to live music gigs; going clubbing; attending stand-up comedy gigs; eating out with others; going to a pub, bar, or café; and shopping for pleasure.

The survey was also concerned with the two other forms of capital. It measures social capital via questions on whether respondents know people with a range of

different occupational statuses; how many friends they see daily, weekly, and monthly; how often they go out with friends and visit each other's houses; the proportion of their friends who share their gender, ethnicity, and religion; and the types of help that they have received from various groups of acquaintances. Economic capital is measured by indicators of household income, benefits received, perceived ease of paying bills and debts, and housing status. Drawing on the CVM, the survey also included questions on civic skills, spare time, political interest, political knowledge, and external and internal political efficacy. Finally, the survey data include the following control variables: age, gender, social class of parents, region of residence, current social grade, education level, party identity, left–right position, and liberty–authority position.

The fieldwork context

The period of the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government from 2010 to 2015 was one in which economic inequality in the UK continued to be an issue (Burkhauser et al. 2016; Gordon et al. 2013; Wilkinson and Pickett 2010), given the economic recession that followed the financial market crash in 2008. This was complemented by concerns regarding educational opportunities, attainment, and social mobility (Crawford and Vignoles 2014; Hills et al. 2015; Sutton Trust 2011) that were also linked to debates about the nature of class that the GBCS contributed to. Concern about inequality was also reflected in public debates about the prevalence of privately educated white men in Parliament (Cochrane 2010; Hirsch 2010; Sutton Trust 2011). This renewed old concerns about elites (Cameron 2003; Dench 2006; Jones 2015; Williams 2006) and, at the other end of the social spectrum, the demonisation of those in precarious circumstances (Jones 2020; Morris 2015). Thus, the idea that inequality has important consequences for political representation and participation continued to

be prevalent (Beardsworth and Pimlott 2013; Flanders 2013; Freedland 2012; Freeman 2013; Gilani 2013; Hutton 2015; Jones et al. 2015; Mensch 2013; Penny 2013; Richardson 2015; Sellgren 2015; Williams 2013). Given this context, it is fair to describe Britain at the time as a most likely case for observing a relationship between informal cultural capital and political participation. Nevertheless, observing such a relationship would contribute to a fuller account of the resources held by people who participate in politics in different ways and to different extents.

Empirical analysis

Key variables:

The dependent variables in the analysis indicate the frequency of undertaking sixteen different types of political activity, the distributions of which are presented in Figure 1. The panels are shaded to indicate the different types of political participation that the activities relate to: individual (panels A to C, light grey); contacting (panels D to F, middle-light grey); collective (panels G to K, middle-dark grey); supporting charities (panels L to N, dark grey); donating (panel O, black); and voting (panel P, black). We can see that voting is by far the most widespread activity and more than four in five people (83.9 per cent) in the sample voted in the previous general election. This is followed by signing petitions and taking online actions (panel A, done at least occasionally by 81.0 per cent), supporting charities (panel L, done to some extent by 69.7 per cent), and donating (panel O, done to some extent by 62.1 per cent). At the other end of the spectrum are direct action (panel J, never done by 94.3 per cent), organising groups and meetings (panel K, never done by 87.4 per cent), and volunteering (panels M and N, never done by 78.7 per cent). Overall, we can see a pattern in which individual activities tend to be the most widespread, followed by

contacting and then collective activities, whilst a minimal level of support for charities is also widespread. Both donating and voting are also widespread but neither relate to the overarching types of political participation that the other activities represent.

Figure 1. Distributions of sixteen political activities

Figure 2 shows the distributions of the frequency of engaging in the twelve cultural activities that are the key independent variables in the analysis. Again, the panels are shaded to indicate the different types of informal cultural capital that they represent: performances (panels A to C, light grey); exhibitions (panels D to F, middle-light grey); shows (panels G to I, middle-dark grey); and consumption-based activities

(panels J to L, dark grey). In general, these cultural activities are more widespread than political activities; the least widespread are still more popular than the least widespread political activities, and the most widespread are more popular than the most widespread political activities. The least popular pastimes are dance and ballet performances (panel C, never attended by 69.4 per cent), classical music and opera performances (panel A, never attended by 63.9 per cent), and clubbing (panel H, never done by 62.8 per cent). Along with stand-up comedy (panel I), a majority of people never do these activities. At the other end of the spectrum, the most popular pastimes are the three consumption-based activities: eating out (panel J, never done by 5.3 per cent); going to pubs, bars and cafes (panel K, never done by 6.5 per cent); and shopping for pleasure (panel L, never done by 11.3 per cent).

We can see a clear divide between more and less legitimate forms of cultural capital here: going to performances and exhibitions are widely considered to be 'worthwhile' and 'valuable' pastimes, but such terms are applied less often to going to shows and engaging in consumption-based activities. In line with the theoretical opposition between legitimate and popular cultural capital, performances are amongst the most legitimate and least popular activities, with the exception of attending the theatre; whilst consumption-based activities are both popular and lacking in legitimacy. However, the popularity of the activities does not neatly reflect their more or less legitimate statuses. Breaking with theoretical expectations, exhibitions are both legitimate and popular whilst shows are less legitimate and often quite unpopular. Thus it is not always the case that capital which has attained legitimacy in the cultural hierarchy is unpopular, nor that capital lacking in legitimacy is necessarily popular.

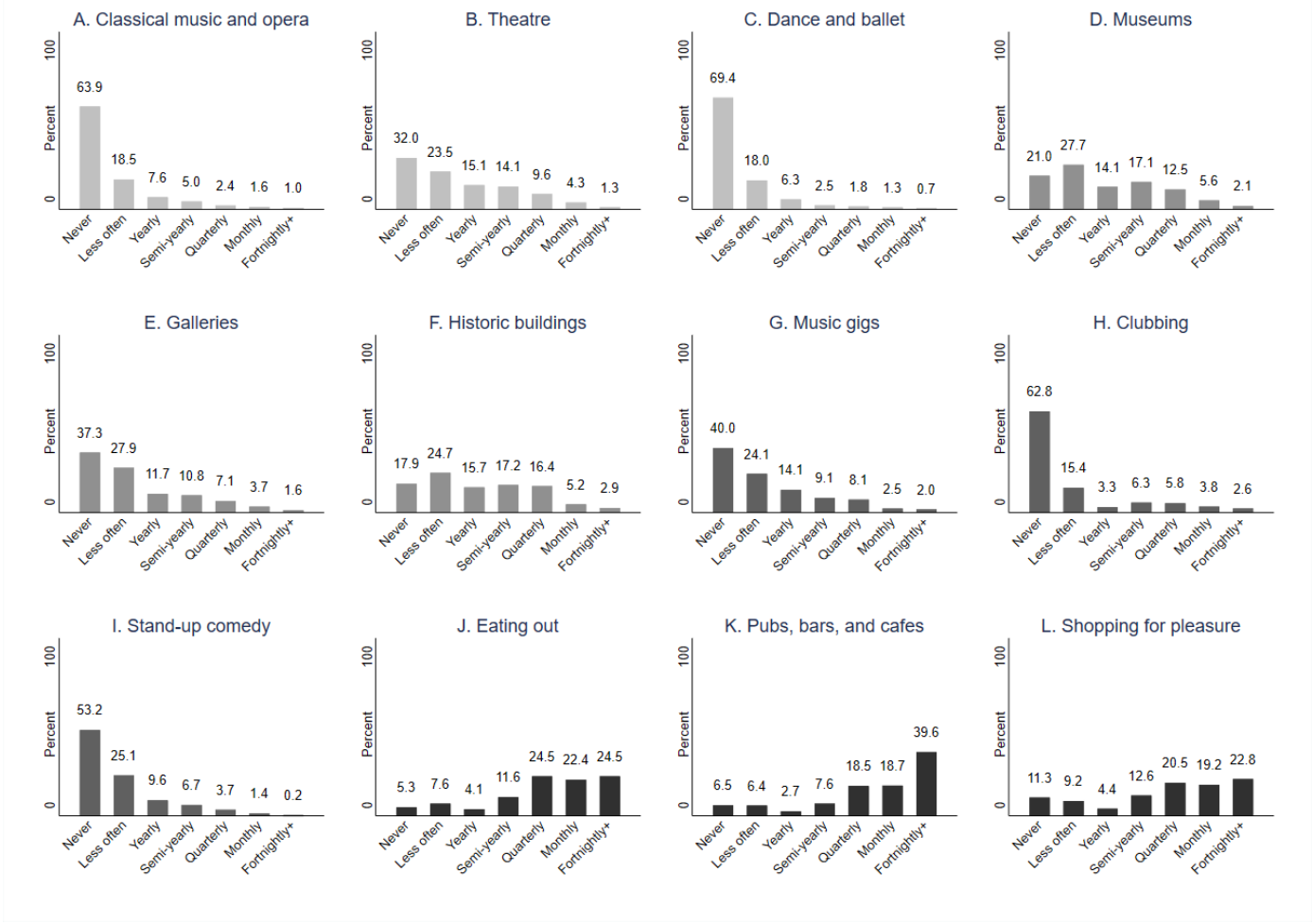

Figure 2. Distributions of twelve cultural activities

Factors underpinning the different types of political participation and informal cultural capital were identified using confirmatory factor analysis with the WLSMV estimator in Mplus 7.4 (Byrne 2012, 131–132). The factors were informed by previous work by Pattie et al. (2004) and Greenwood (2017), and were estimated alongside factors representing various elements of economic and social capital, and psychological engagement with politics.[2] Indices based on these factors were then calculated and

[2] Because of the number of factors (27) and indicators (103), five different models were run, encompassing political participation, economic capital, social capital, cultural capital, and political engagement. These separate models confirm the same factors as a single model with all of the factors and

normalised to run from zero to one for the subsequent analysis, though substantively similar results are obtained when the factors scores themselves are used.[3] As such, the dependent variables in the below analysis are four normalised indices representing individual, contacting, collective, and charity-supporting activities, as well as two individual variables representing donating and voting activities. The key independent variables are four normalised indices representing cultural activities focused on performances, exhibitions, shows, and consumption.

Regression analysis:

The relationships between political participation and informal cultural capital were investigated using a series of ordinary least squared (OLS) regressions for each of the four dependent indices, ordered logit regressions for donating, and binary logistic regressions for voting.[4] For each dependent variable, four models were run: one including only informal cultural capital; one including economic, social, and cultural capital; one including all three forms of capital and standard controls (party identity,

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indicators included but, unlike the latter, do not create multicollinearity between the saved factor scores. The models also fitted factors covering holiday-based cultural activities, and tastes for world cuisine, blockbuster films, and educational films. However, these factors are rarely related to political activities so are not focused on subsequently. Results of the separate confirmatory factor analysis models can be found in Appendix B, and the separate models and single model can be reproduced using the replication files available at: [insert link].

[3] The statistical significance of some coefficients is not replicated when factor scores are used in place of normalised indices, whilst some coefficients attain statistical significance when factor scores are used but not when normalised indices are used. Results are available in Appendix D and Appendix E.

[4] Regression diagnostics are available in Appendix C. Figures showing the bivariate relationships between each measure of cultural activity and political activity are available in Appendix G.

left–right position, liberty–authority position, age, gender, parental social class, region of residence, current social grade, and education level); and finally, one adding the remaining elements of the CVM (civic skills, spare time, political interest, political knowledge, external political efficacy, and internal political efficacy). Coefficient plots showing the relationship between the four types of cultural capital and each of the types of political participation are shown in Figure 3.

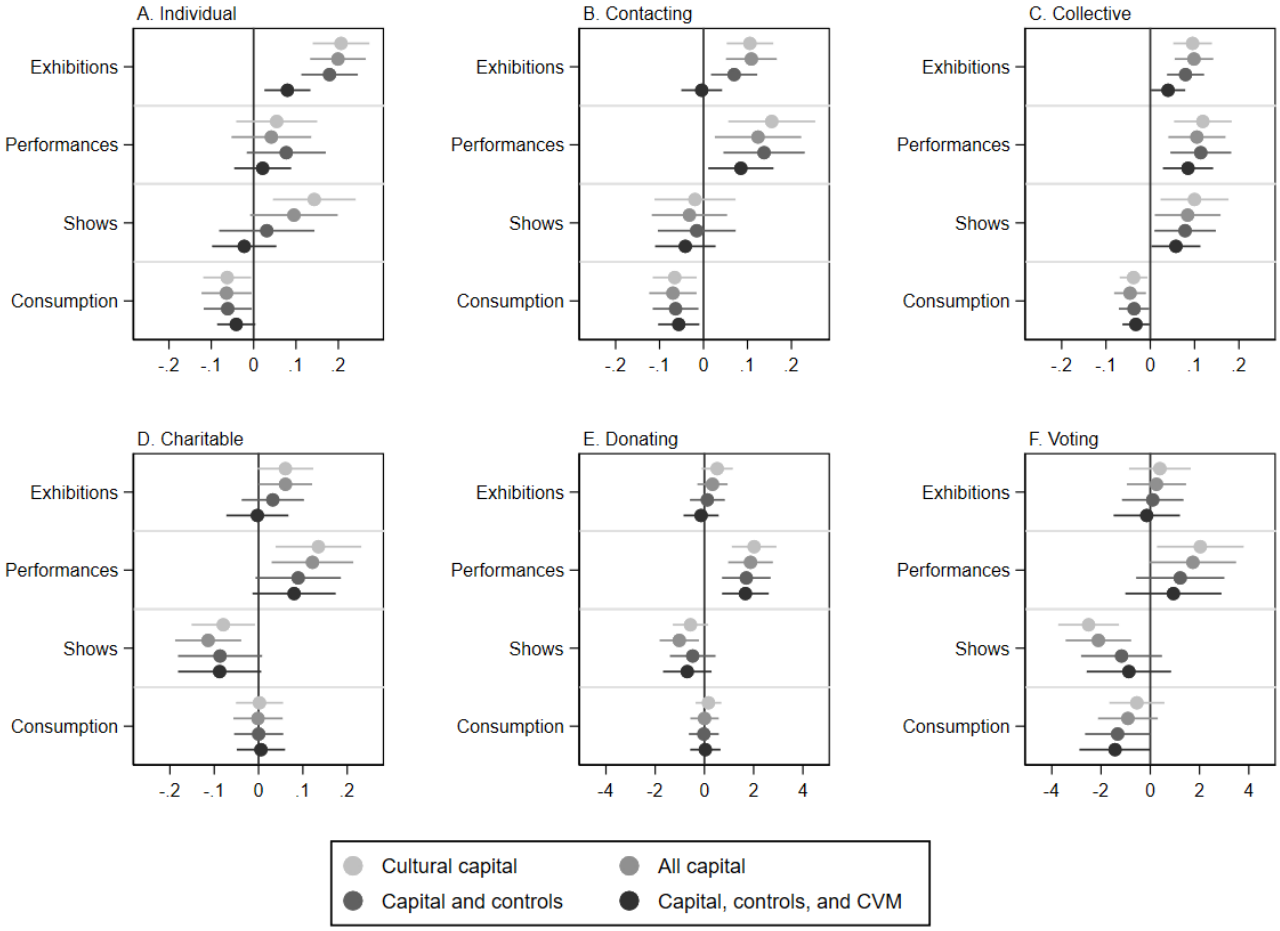

Figure 3. Coefficient plots for regression of political participation indices on cultural capital indices.

Note: Coefficients are from OLS (panels A-D), probit (panel E), and binary logistic (panel F) regressions, are unstandardized, and all models use sampling weights (pweight) and robust standard errors.

Frequency of exhibition attendance is positively related to frequency of individual political activity (panel A), such as signing petitions and boycotting products. This relationship persists when all other variables are included in the model but does not retain significance when models are estimated using factor scores rather than the indices. The same applies to the positive relationship between frequency of attending legitimate performances, such as opera and ballet, and frequency of contacting political acts (panel B), such as meeting an elected representative or writing to the media, as well as collective political participation (panel C), such as organising meetings and groups or protesting. Frequency of attending shows such as comedy and live music is also positively related to frequency of collective political activities in all models, but the relationship does not attain significance when factor scores are used in place of the indices. By contrast, regardless of how we specify the models, we see the negative relationships between consumption-based cultural activities, such as eating out and shopping, and both contacting and collective political activities.

Taking the coefficients from the models including all forms of capital, controls, and the variables from the CVM, people who partake in consumption-based activities with the highest level of frequency, participate in contacting political activities 0.05 points less frequently on a zero to one scale (S.E. = 0.023, $p < 0.05$) than people who never partake in those cultural activities. Similarly, they participate in collective political activities 0.03 points less frequently (S.E. = 0.015, $p < 0.05$) than their counterparts who never engage in consumption-based cultural pastimes. Additionally, one area in which the positive relationship between frequency of attending performances and political participation persists across all models is donating to organisations (panel E). People who attend performances with the highest level of frequency donate 1.665 points more per year on a seven-point scale (S.E. = 0.484, $p <$

0.001) than do people who never attend such performances. As such, across all model specifications, we see that people who exhibit popular cultural capital by frequently engaging in consumption-based activities are less likely to contact their elected representatives or the media, or to collectively campaign on issues that matter to them. By contrast, people who frequent the refined atmosphere of legitimate performance venues are more generous with their donations to the causes that they support.

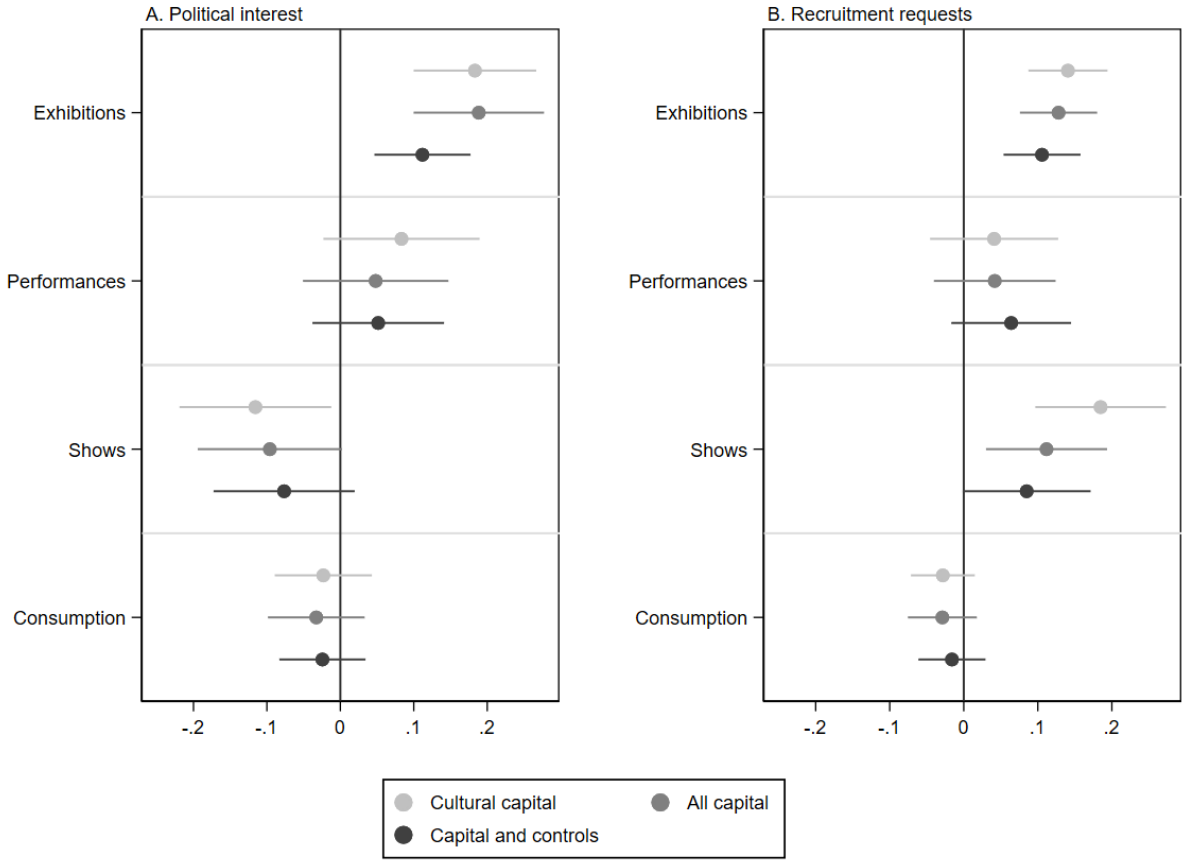

Figure 4. Coefficient plots for regression of political interest and recruitment requests on cultural capital.

Note: Coefficients are from OLS regressions, are unstandardised, and all models use sampling weights (pweight) and robust standard errors.

These specific results are part of a wider trend, clear in Figure 3, in which legitimate cultural capital is positively related to political participation, whilst the

opposite is true of popular cultural capital. Specifically, frequency of attending exhibitions is positively related to individual, contacting, and collective participation in most models, and the same is true of the relationship between frequency of attending performances and contacting and collective participation as well as donating. Conversely, frequency of consumption-based activities is negatively related to individual, contacting, and collective participation as well as voting. Where these relationships cease to attain significance, whether using indices or factor scores, it is usually because of the addition of the variables from the CVM. In particular, two indices are especially strongly positively related to multiple forms of political participation: political interest and receipt of requests to undertake political acts. In that light, additional OLS regressions were run with those two requests indices treated as the dependent variables, and the resulting coefficients are plotted in Figure 4.

Again, multiple models were run for each of the two dependent variables: one including only the cultural capital variables; one including economic, social, and cultural capital; and one including all three forms of capital and controls. As we can see, frequency of attending exhibitions is positively related to both political interest and recruitment requests, though the former relationship does not attain significance when factors scores are used and controls are included. Focusing on recruitment requests, people who attend exhibitions with the highest level of frequency receive requests to participate 0.106 points more frequently on a zero to one scale (S.E. = 0.265, $p < 0.001$) than do people who never attend exhibitions. These relationships, along with the above results, suggest that the relationship between legitimate cultural capital—as represented by attendance at exhibitions, and political participation—is mediated by recruitment requests and, perhaps, political interest. In other words, engagement with educational and information-rich cultural contexts may support greater interest in politics and imbue

people with the kinds of knowledge that make them attractive targets for requests to participate in politics, both of which prompt them to participate more frequently.

Causal mediation analysis:

Causal mediation analysis (Imai, Keele, and Tingley 2010) was conducted to test whether frequency of exhibition attendance has an indirect relationship with the forms of participation that are related to political interest and recruitment requests.[5] Figure 5 shows the key relationships from the models in which significant mediation effects were identified. More than a quarter of the relationship (26 per cent, 95 per cent confidence intervals: 18–48 per cent) between exhibition attendance and individual political activity (panel A) is mediated by political interest, and the figure is similar (24 per cent, 95 per cent confidence intervals: 16–45 per cent) for the relationship between exhibition attendance and collective political activity (panel B). The figures are higher for frequency of receiving recruitment requests, which mediates 41 per cent of the relationship (95 per cent confidence intervals: 28–72 per cent) between exhibition attendance and individual political activities (panel C), and 32 per cent of the relationship (95 per cent confidence intervals: 21–63 per cent) between exhibition attendance and collective political activities (panel D).[6] These results are consistent with

[5] In order to be used as a treatment variable in the causal mediation analysis, exhibition attendance was recoded into a binary variable indicating high frequency of attendance or not. The models included all significant variables from the OLS regressions relating to each form of political participation, as well as controlling for age, gender, parental social class (when the respondent was 14), and education. Full results tables can be found in Appendix F.

[6] Sensitivity analysis was conducted for each model in order to identify the condition in which we would conclude that the mediation effect is not significantly different from zero, which is the presence of an unobserved confounder that affects both the mediator and the dependent variable in the same direction

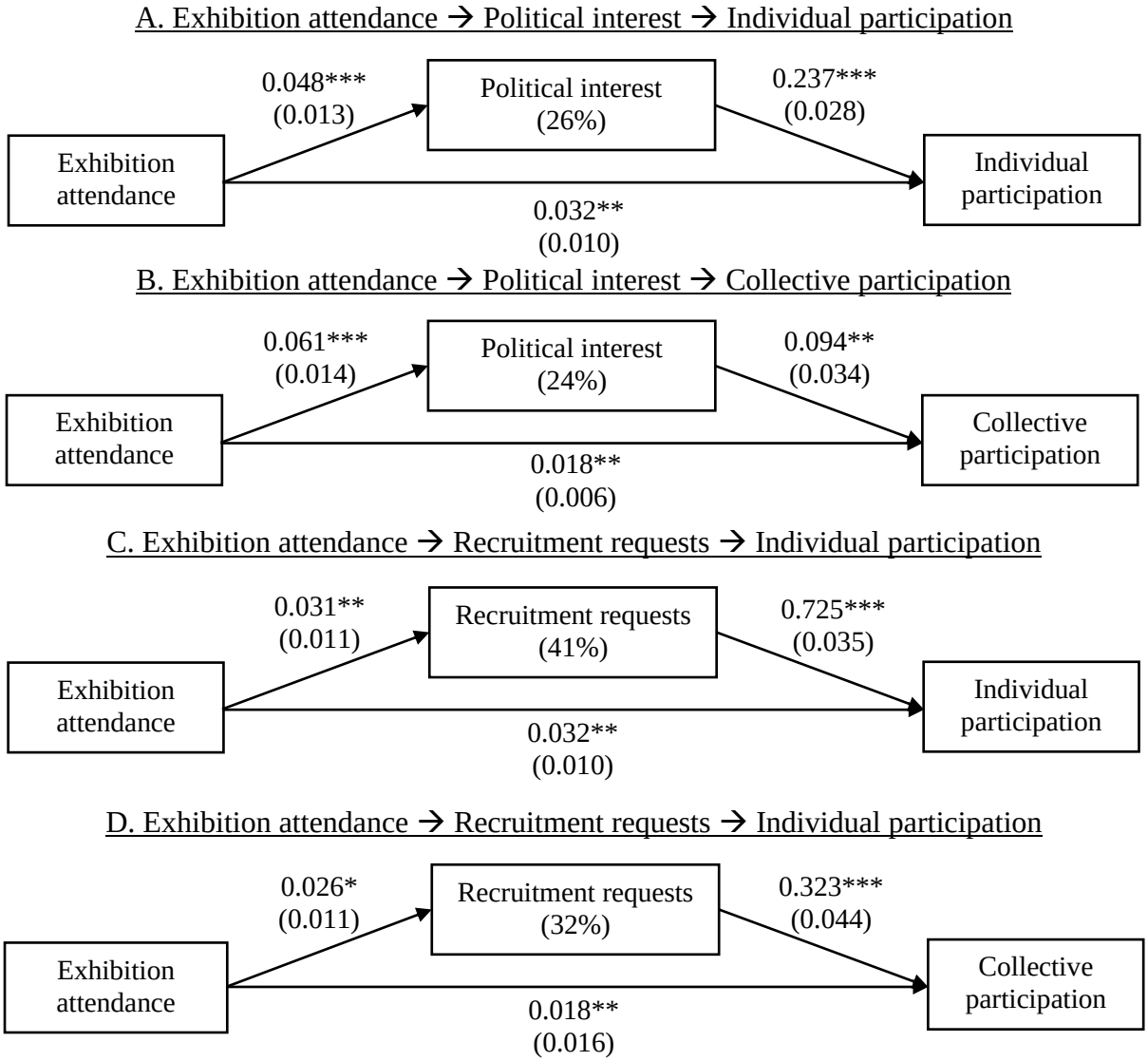

Figure 5. Results of causal mediation analysis.

Note: Coefficients are from OLS regressions, are unstandardised, all models use sampling weights (pweight), and robust standard errors are presented in parentheses. Statistical significance: *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.

(Imai, Keele, and Tingley 2010, 776). For the first model (panel A of Figure 5), such a confounder would need to cause correlation between the error terms of political interest and individual participation that is greater than 0.273. For the second model (panel B), the correlation would need to be 0.241, for the third (panel C) it would need to be 0.591, and for the fourth (panel D) it would need to be 0.457.

the idea that particular types of legitimate cultural capital sustain political interest, perhaps through a sense of qualification, and prompt requests to participate, with both leading to higher levels of individual and collective political participation.

Discussion

In a number of ways, the results emerging from the empirical analysis paint a complex picture. Whilst there is a clear divide between legitimate and less legitimate cultural pastimes, this divide does not neatly map onto the popularity of those pastimes. There are some forms of informal cultural capital that are legitimate and not widespread (performances) and others that are less legitimate and more widespread (consumption-based), but there are also some that are legitimate and popular (exhibitions) and others that are less legitimate and also unpopular (shows). It is also not simply the case that informal cultural capital is positively related to all forms of political participation. In line with ***H1***, there is evidence that exhibition attendance is positively related to individual and collective participation, and that performance attendance is positively related to contacting and collective participation, as well as donating. However, counter to ***H1***, consumption-based cultural capital is negatively related to individual, contacting, and collective participation, whilst charitable participation and voting are unrelated to informal cultural capital.

These results show that when informal cultural capital is related to political participation, it is legitimate types that are positively so whilst less legitimate types are negatively so.[7] Thus, counter to ***H2***, it is not the case that legitimate cultural capital has

[7] They also show that we are not observing a general 'being active' effect in which people who do some activities more frequently also do all the other activities more frequently. There are likely to be some

a greater magnitude of relationship with political participation than does less legitimate cultural capital. Rather, it has the *opposite* relationship. This speaks of at least some forms of political participation as refined pastimes that are more readily undertaken by people with valorised types of informal cultural capital, whilst being less attractive to people without the requisite cultural cachet. However, the causal picture is rather murky and there are at least three stories that are consistent with the results.

The first possibility, that participating in politics prompts people to discover a newfound enthusiasm for going to the opera, theatre, and exhibitions, seems unlikely. However, it is possible that people who are politically active choose to deprioritise consumption-based cultural activities because they would rather save their energy for politics and legitimate cultural pastimes. Even this, though, suggests a decision based on perceptions of valuable, or legitimate, ways to spend time and thus a pre-existing hierarchy of cultural pastimes. This is reflective of the second causal possibility, stemming from Bourdieu's idea of 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1984). This explanation proposes that the processes that form cultural tastes and practices are the very same ones that lead to an inclination to engage, or not, in political activities. Political activity is not caused by cultural capital but is part of the same package of tastes and habits, which simultaneously imbues people with a sense of ease when engaging in legitimate cultural contexts and political participation. In this account, socialisation is a key mechanism by which privilege, imbued in all three forms of capital, is passed from generation to generation. This is also the case for the third causal account, represented by the CVM (Schlozman, Brady, and Verba 2020; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). The difference is that the latter sees resources such as capital as distributed differentially

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people who are active across the board, but the results demonstrate there are also distinct trends in the relationships between particular types of activity.

between groups, as Bourdieu does, but that political participation emerges as a consequence of this rather than as part of the same process. In other words, people are imbued with a set of resources, referred to here as capital, and then are more or less able to engage in politics because of those resources.

The causal mediation analysis tests models that draw on the third causal explanation, and the results are consistent with the idea that legitimate cultural capital sustains interest in politics and attracts requests to participate in politics by signalling qualification to do so. Political interest and recruitment then drive political participation itself. However, the results are also consistent with the second possibility, drawing on Bourdieu's 'habitus', and the cross-sectional nature of the data means that we cannot adjudicate between the two possibilities. This reflects a fundamental challenge when investigating the relationship between informal cultural capital and political participation: we cannot easily allocate cultural capital randomly, and there is no panel data that contains detailed measures of both the independent and dependent variables. In this light, further work is required to produce panel data that includes such measures, and to experimentally test the elements of the causal process that can be randomly allocated.

There is the possibility of investigating the signals that types of informal cultural capital send by testing whether people vary who they target with requests for participation depending on the levels of legitimate and popular cultural capital held by the potential recipients. Further, it is possible to investigate perceptions of people in political contexts depending on their stocks of capital, and the effect that these perceptions may have on willingness to participate in those contexts. Thus, this article's identification of relationships between informal cultural capital and political

participation provides grounds for further investigation of the causal processes at work in those relationships.

Conclusion

This article makes two key contributions. First, identifying the theoretical basis for considering informal cultural capital a relevant factor for political participation, and also pinpointing the paucity of research considering this relationship in a detailed fashion. Second, testing the relationship using detailed measures of both informal cultural capital and a range of political activities. The results of the analysis reveal a complex picture in which attendance at legitimate cultural performances and exhibitions are positively related, to differing degrees, to individual, contacting, and collective participation, as well as donating. By contrast, popular consumption-based cultural activities such as eating out and shopping for pleasure are often negatively related to those political activities. There is also evidence that legitimate cultural capital may be related to political participation via political interest and recruitment, though the causal picture remains murky until detailed measures of the concepts are included in panel data, and elements of the causal process are tested experimentally. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that political participation in Britain is a distinguished activity, disproportionately undertaken by those with the 'right' cultural tastes and practices. This is a picture of politics that is not equally open to all.

Data Availability Statement

The data, Stata so-files, Stata logs, Mplus input files, and Mplus output files for this article are available on the journal Dataverse: [insert link].

Competing Interests

The author declares none.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available alongside the article on the journal website: [insert link].

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