ESS Round 8
Question Design Template – New Core Items

Concept: Online expressive political engagement

Question expert: Rachel Gibson and Marta Cantijoch Cunill, University of Manchester

Aim

To develop an item to be added to the existing core battery on political participation (shown below).

ASK ALL
There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent[15] things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? Have you… **READ OUT**…

		Yes	No	(Refusal)	(Don't know)
B15	…contacted a politician, government or local government official?	1	2	7	8
B16	…worked in a political party or action group?	1	2	7	8
B17	…worked in another organisation or association?	1	2	7	8
B18	…worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker?	1	2	7	8
B19	…signed a petition?	1	2	7	8
B20	…taken part in a lawful public demonstration?	1	2	7	8
B21	…boycotted certain products?	1	2	7	8

Reflecting the rise in digital technology, the new item will capture political engagement online.

SECTION A. Theoretical rationale

Why is the topic important? How will including items on this topic in the ESS enhance our understanding of public attitudes and behaviours across Europe?

The topic of online political engagement is an important one given the increasing use made by citizens of digital technologies to undertake a variety of political actions. This includes quite familiar activities such as looking for information, signing online petitions, emailing government authorities and donating to political causes. Other actions such as using social media to register a liking for a politician or political organization, tweeting /retweeting a political opinion appear to constitute a new more immediate type of expressive engagement. Recent research has been

focusing increasingly on these newer forms of informal online engagement with a view to understanding how different they really are and how they might be mobilizing citizens to participate in other more active types of both online and offline engagement such as persuading others to undertaken political action, voting and helping a political party (Rojas and Puig-i-Abril, 2009; Gil de Zuniga 2010; Gibson and Cantijoch, 2013). Do such activities offer a means for younger citizens and those less interested or alienated from formal politics in particular to connect /reconnect with political issues and institutions? Or conversely do they lower attachment to representative institutions and lead people toward more direct and unconventional modes of action. The evidence to date suggests that such activities do generally appeal to younger citizens although take-up in elections is relatively limited with between 5-10% of voters in France and UK saying that they had used social media to share or post political content in national elections or been involved in social network group with political interests during national elections (2010 and 2012) (Cantijoch et al. 2013; Gibson and Cantijoch, 2013). Despite the lower levels of internet connectivity overall, study of e-expressive participation has been conducted in a recently established democracy (Colombia) and it has been seen as an important new form of engagement that may have particular appeal to citizens in countries with a shorter history of traditional types of participation (Rojas & Puig-i-Abril. 2009). Thus, examining the patterns of engagement in these types of activities across new and older European democracies will offer an important basis for comparative analysis of the extent and impact of new types of political practice.

SECTION B. Relationship with other variables in ESS questionnaire

Are the items intended to be used primarily as explanatory/background variables or is the topic primarily of interest as a dependent variable?

The concept of online or e-expressive participation would introduce a new topic of interest to the ESS. It would however be highly relevant to other variables in the ESS core in regard particularly to items in in section B that relate to participation and political activity (Qs B15-B21 in ESS Round 8). The question of whether new forms of online engagement are really new, and their implications for traditional types of political participation are important. Do the new expressive types of online political activity link with other types of existing and more conventional modes of behaviour such as voting and supporting a political party? Can they provide a pathway into these more traditional types of activity or are they aligned with more radical forms of protest and demonstration? Essentially does social media bring in a new set of typically disengaged citizens into the political system or promote new forms of extra-institutional elite challenging types of behaviour? As such e-expressive participation would form a dependent variable – to be explained alongside other types of participation. It would also, however, possibly be an independent variable in that it may be seen as a mediating factor or stimulus to other types of engagement as the notion of a 'pathway' would suggest.

SECTION C. Potential methodological or practical difficulties

Provide brief details of any potential methodological or practical difficulties associated with asking about this topic on a face to face cross-national survey
If no particular problems are anticipated please note this

One potential issue is to make sure that the item works equally well across countries and in future rounds i.e. that it is not too dependent on the examples of particular online platforms given.

There is the potential for discrepancies where those who have said they do not have internet access then also go on to say they have engaged in some online behaviours. Problems of respondent recall error and inconsistency in survey responses are a widely documented problem (see for e.g. Bound et al, 2001). However, a formal check on this potential inconsistency will not be added to the ESS questionnaire. Whilst we would expect a strong correlation between having engaged in online action and current internet use/access, it is possible to have done one without the other.

SECTION D. Concept definition and measurement

Online expressive political participation

The item is designed to fit within the existing political engagement battery in Section B of the core questionnaire (B15-B21)

The new item is intended to capture a new form of political engagement – online or e-participation. The focus is on "expressive" engagement i.e. engagement intended to influence the opinions and/or actions of others.

Question item wording

There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent[1]
things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the
following? Have you…READ OUT…

		Yes	No	(Refused)	(Don't know)
B15	…contacted a politician, government or local government official?	1	2	7	8
B16	…worked in a political party or action group?	1	2	7	8
B17	…worked in another organisation or association?	1	2	7	8
B18	…worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker?	1	2	7	8
B19	…signed a petition?	1	2	7	8

B20	…taken part in a lawful public demonstration?	1	2	7	8
B21	…boycotted certain products?	1	2	7	8
B22	**…posted or shared anything about politics online, for example on blogs, via email or on social media such as Facebook or Twitter[2]?**	**1**	**2**	**7**	**8**

[1] 'Help prevent things going wrong' in the sense of help prevent serious problems arising.

[2] The examples given in the source question should be used where possible. However, if in [Country] there are other social media platforms which it would be more appropriate to include instead of or as well as Facebook and Twitter, please discuss with the translation team.

SECTION E. References

Please provide full references for any studies mentioned in the template below

Bound, J., Brown, C. and Mathiowetz, N., 2001. Measurement error in survey data. *Handbook of econometrics*, *5*: 3705-3843

Cantijoch, M., Gibson, R., & Cutts, D. (2013). Engagement in the Online Campaign in the United States and France. A Comparative Analysis. Paper presented at the *EPSA 2013 Annual General Conference.*

Gibson, R., & Cantijoch, M. (2013). Conceptualizing and measuring participation in the age of the internet: Is online political engagement really different to offline?. *The Journal of Politics*, *75*(03), 701-716.

Gil de Zúñiga, H., Veenstra, A., Vraga, E., & Shah, D. (2010). Digital democracy: Reimagining pathways to political participation. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *7*(1), 36-51.

Rojas, H., and E. Puig-i-Abril. (2009). Mobilizers Mobilized: Information, Expression, Mobilization and Participation in the Digital Age. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14 (4): 902-927.