

# Introduction

Our paper offers an assessment of inclusions in a range of political practices in a democratic system. Using data reduction techniques, we clarify whether asymmetries of engagement structure a range of practices similarly, or whether formal political participation—voting in a federal election—is more stratified by axes of social inequality than communicative practices in civil society, such as talking politics with friends and family, attending meetings to discuss collective issues, and protesting. Finally, we also theorize solutions for empowering greater inclusion in a range of practices to enhance political systems’ democratic capacities.

In the first section, we review innovations in political theory related to the development of systemic approaches to the study of deliberation and democracy. We make the case that many empirical studies of political participation have fallen out of step with innovations in democratic theory. Often, political behavior researchers adopt a “models of democracy” approach, centering their thinking on a single feature or goal of democracy such as voting or representative responsiveness. The models of democracy approach leads researchers to overextend claims for singular features or goals of democracy, resulting in theoretical dead-ends (Warren 2017). For instance, a narrow focus on achieving the goal of representative responsiveness has led some researchers to the strange conclusion that if electoral institutions insufficiently achieve representative responsiveness, the ideal of democracy itself must be reconsidered (Achen and Bartels 2017). By contrast, democratic *theory* has taken a systemic turn. Increasingly, theorists identifying the different ways a range of political practices—including different forms of communicating, voting, and representing—make unique contributions to broader deliberative and democratic systems (Bächtiger and Parkinson 2019, Curato et al. 2018, Habermas 1998, Mansbridge et al. 2012, Warren 2017). Drawing on these systemic approaches, we argue that political systems are democratic to the extent that people are empowered to participate in a range of political practices that achieve democratic goals essential for self- and collective-rule (Curato et al. 2018, Warren 2017). Democratic goals include empowering inclusions, communicatively forming and enhancing the epistemic

quality of public opinion, and linking public opinion to collective decision-making.

In the second section, we elaborate the idea that democratic processes begin with inclusion. Democracy starts with inclusion because the aims of forming collective opinions and making collective decisions are undermined if those affected by collective endeavors are excluded from participating in them (Fung 2013, Goodin 2007, Warren 2017, Young 2000). Applying a democratic systems framework and using data reduction techniques we offer a broad assessment of inclusion in a range of political practices in the Canadian democratic system. Although we are particularly interested in assessing inclusion in communicative practices, we also consider asymmetries of voter turnout. While patterns of voter turnout is well-studied (Blais 2006), it is useful to include voter turnout in our analysis to see if inequalities and exclusions structure communicative practices in civil society and voting in similar ways, or if social group members who face barriers to electoral engagement are using communicative practices in civil society to try and incentivize political inclusions outside of formal political arenas.

We focus on Canada because the Canadian Election Studies (CES) 2015 is a unique dataset particularly suited to conducting this research. The CES 2015 includes both common questions related to democratic engagement (voting or attending protests or rallies) and a range of less commonly asked questions related to communicative practices such as informal political talk and attending a meeting organized to discuss collective issues. Supporting the intuition that “participation and deliberation go together” (Curato et al. 2017, p. 32), we show that participatory and discursive practices comprise a unidimensional, hierarchically-ordered summative scale—a valuable finding for researchers interested in the nature of communicative practices in civil society.

Identifying whether group-based differences in participation structure all democratic practices similarly or whether there are systematic differences in who is participating in communicative practices in civil society and who is showing up to vote will improve our ability to theorize solutions for empowering political inclusions. In the third section, we

draw out the implications of our findings to theorize institutional fixes for empowering inclusions. We conclude by pointing to avenues for future research and reviewing the benefits of strengthening the ties between normative theory and empirical research.

## Systems-Level Thinking

There has been a tendency to compare idealized “models” of democracy, particularly among more empirically-oriented researchers. For instance, some scholars have tried to reconcile the paradox between citizens’ increasing civic capacities and decreasing electoral participation by suggesting that “a new style of citizen politics” is *replacing* the practices of voting that once characterized an ideal-type representative democracy (Dalton 2013, p. 6). This has contributed to a tendency to compare a “representative model of democracy,” which includes voting and representing, with a “participatory” model which includes more directly participatory practices such as demonstrating, striking, boycotting, and buycotting. Still other researchers have compared and contrast representative or participatory politics with a “deliberative model” (Mutz 2006, Pateman 2012).

Political theorists have not been immune to this thinking. Some early formulations of deliberative theory also contrasted deliberative and participatory models of democracy, treating deliberation as if it was “always opposed to the aggregation and to the strategic behavior encouraged by voting and bargaining” (Bohman 1998, p. 400). Singularly focusing on deliberation—and occasionally non-deliberative political talk (Jacobs et al. 2009, Mansbridge 1999)—ignores important non-deliberative (and non-discursive) practices that are necessary for achieving democratic aims. Voting, campaigning, organizing, mobilizing, and ruling are essential to mass democracy (Walzer 1999).

As Warren (2017, p. 41) argues, contrasting idealized “models” of deliberative, representative, or participatory democracy is akin to giving “the same answers (e.g., deliberation or elections) to different problems of democratic political organization (in particular, empow-

ered inclusion, collective opinion and agenda formation, and collective decision making).” The “models of democracy” theoretical approach to the study of democracy—which centers thinking on a single feature of democracy (such as voting, participating, or deliberating)—tends to overextend the claims for that feature (Warren 2017). Debates over the whether electoral democracy should be “replaced” by more participatory or deliberative sets of political practices lead to theoretical dead-ends. Furthermore, as I have already alluded, conflating important democratic aims (such as achieving representative responsiveness) with *democracy itself* can lead to strange conclusions. For instance, to the conclusion that because electoral institutions designed to achieve representative responsiveness are imperfect, the ideal of citizen participation in collective rule should be reconsidered (Achen and Bartels 2017, see Chambers 2018, for a longer critique of this conclusion).

Partly in response to these problems, democratic theorists are increasingly adopting systemic approaches. Systemic approaches to democratic theory have become particularly well-developed in the subfield of deliberative democracy (beginning, perhaps, with Habermas 1998). While there are a variety of deliberative systems approaches, the central idea is that deliberation takes place across a range of interlinked forums and actors, and forums and actors can be judged by how well they contribute to the deliberative capacities of political systems more broadly (Bächtiger and Parkinson 2019, Curato and Böker 2016, Curato et al. 2017, Goodin 2005, Mansbridge et al. 2012, Parkinson et al. 2012).

In this present work, we adopt the problems-based approach for studying democratic systems. The problems-based account is compatible with the deliberative systems approaches in deliberative democracy, but frames broader questions by identifying the kinds of aims a range of political practices—including deliberation—must achieve for polities to count as democratic (Beauvais and Warren 2018, Warren 2017). Following the problems-based account, political systems are democratic to the extent that people are empowered to participate in political practices—such as voting, deliberating, and protesting—that solve basic problems of democracy. Basic problems that must be solved for polities to count as democratic

include: empowering the inclusion of those affected by collective opinions and decisions, communicatively forming collective opinions and wills, and organizing collective rule. Another important good associated with democracy that is implied in these agent-focused functions is strengthening the epistemological robustness of public opinion and decisions (Landemore 2013).

## Democracy Begins with Inclusion

Different political practices have different strengths and weaknesses relative to different democratic aims. In this section, we outline the relative strengths and weaknesses of different political practices (focusing on communicative practices in civil society, but also considering voting) relative to the basic democratic goals (inclusion, opinion formation, and decision-making) and other goods associated with democracy. However, it is important to note that democratic processes always *begin* with inclusion. This is because the aims of forming collective opinions and making collective decisions are undermined if those affected by collective endeavors are excluded from participating in them (Fung 2013, Goodin 2007, Warren 2017, Young 2000).

Communicative practices in civil society—including talking politics and especially *deliberating* about politics—are essential for achieving epistemic goods related to learning and opinion change (Baccaro et al. 2014, Esterling et al. 2011, Grönlund et al. 2010, Landemore 2013). Communication is the primary means by which people link personal preferences to collective opinions and agendas (Habermas 1998, Warren 2017). Deliberation, in particular, has been shown to increase civic-mindedness and political interest and attention, can increase peoples’ confidence in public speaking, strengthens the consistency between citizens’ principles and preferences, and helps citizens reach mutual understandings (Fournier et al. 2011). Deliberation refers to a special kind of communication about matters of collective concern characterized by reciprocal reason-giving, mutual respect, and equality, whereas everyday political talk does not necessarily meet deliberative standards (Mansbridge 1999). However,

even political communication that does not necessarily meet deliberative standards makes important contributions to deliberative and democratic systems. For instance, political talk with the like-minded can be tremendously mobilizing, encouraging voters to show-up on election day (Mutz 2006) or incentivizing activists to show-up to protests or rallies (Walzer 1999).

Communicative practices are deeply interlinked with “participatory” practices in civil society, such as demonstrating, striking, and signing petitions (Curato et al. 2017). Action-centric practices are also communicative because they serve illocutionary aims, signaling citizens’ preferences—often, frustration or anger—to decision-makers. Showing-up and standing together is “participatory,” but the physical presence of bodies in space—marching together or refusing to move—sends a powerful message. An emphasis on physical presence reminds us that the public sphere is “a space not only to be heard but also to be seen” (Curato et al. 2018, p. 7). Participatory communicative practices are an important means for incentivizing inclusions, particularly when social group members have been excluded from participating in electoral politics (Tully 2008) or face external or internal exclusions barring them from participating in communicative reason-giving (Young 2000). Democratic processes, including communicative practices in civil society, always begin with inclusion because otherwise the collective opinions and agendas that are developed and expressed in civil society are less reflective of excluded voices.

However, communicative practices in civil society cannot achieve all democratic aims. Notably, communication lacks an inherent decision rule, and can suffer from indeterminacy and path-dependency. As such, democratic decision-making often requires that decision-makers “first talk, then vote” (Goodin 2008, p. 107). Furthermore, protestors and demonstrators often act as veto players and can undermine political systems’ collective decision-making capacities by contributing to gridlock (Beauvais and Warren 2018).

When it comes to collective decision-making in mass democracies, voting is essential. Voting (and organizing voting into electoral institutions) is central to mass democracy in no

small part because the principle of “one person, one vote” empowers political inclusion by enshrining the value of universal equality into law. Voting is essential for collective decision-making because voting provides clear decision-rules while retaining dissent. Providing clear decision rules while retaining dissent is important even when, as in the case in general legislative or executive elections, voters are only deciding which representatives they will delegate their decision-making powers to. Finally, when institutions are functioning properly voting and elections should motivate representative responsiveness. Of course, voting and elections do not achieve all democratic aims: voting without talking and thinking through one’s options often produces epistemically-impoverished vote choices (Goodin 2008). Furthermore, while elections can serve as “information campaigns” for the already politically well-informed, less informed voters often fail to learn new or more information over the course of elections (Nadeau et al. 2008). Low-information voting and political institutions that grant powerful interest groups disproportionate access to political decision-makers can undermine the ability for voting and elections to achieve representative responsiveness (Achen and Bartels 2017).

The problem of powerful interest groups having disproportionate access to decision-makers returns us to the requisite role of empowering inclusions. Inequalities are problematic because power asymmetries function to exclude disempowered social group members from participating in and influencing political practices that achieve essential democratic aims. To take an obvious example, consider how unequal political rights entail formal political exclusions. Limiting the right to talk politics and vote to White, property-owning men obviously prevents people of color, the poor, and women from being able to participate in essential political practices.

In today’s democracies, all citizens enjoy formal, legal political equality. However, external and internal exclusions continue to prevent disempowered group members from participating in political practices essential for collective rule. For instance, inequalities of wealth entail exclusions that are “external” when they preclude the poor from participating in pol-

itics at all, if, for instance, people simply cannot afford costs associated with participation. However, inequality can also structure social cognition to entail *internal exclusions* (Young 2000). Internal exclusions refer to when, even in the absence of formal political or economic asymmetries, cognitive dispositions shape how people perceive themselves and their place in social systems to produce asymmetries in political participation and influence (Bourdieu 2000). Consider how those who have historically been excluded from the franchise—the working class, people of color, and women—may internalize a sense of “feeling out of place” in politics and abstain even when they are formally entitled to participate.

## Assessing Inclusions in Political Practices

As we have explained, equality is important because it distributes symmetrical empowerments that enable more equal participation and influence in political practices necessary for collective rule. We understand equality relationally and structurally, as equalities of social status, standing and authority between social group members (Anderson 1999, Bourdieu 2000, Young 2011). Following a relational understanding of structural equality, *inequality* refers to hierarchical social “relations between superior and inferior persons” (Anderson 1999, p. 312). Structural inequalities—social hierarchies relegating social group members to relations of superiority and inferiority—entail exclusions that prevent those assigned to inferior positions from participating in political practices necessary for collective rule.

Understanding how inequalities distribute asymmetrical empowerments and exclusions requires recognizing the way power becomes accumulated in resources to function as *capital*. For instance, power can become accumulated in economic capital (property and money) or cultural capital (knowledge, credentials, and information) (Bourdieu 1986). In this paper, we focus our attention on how social hierarchies distinguish relations between members of higher and lower socio-economic status, men and women, and between Indigenous peoples, “settler” (non-Indigenous) White Canadians, and settler people of color.

Drawing on the literature, we can confidently expect that voter turnout is structured by socio-economic status (Blais 2000). Those with lower SES are more likely to face external exclusions to political participation, such as the costs associated with attending face-to-face political events. Lower SES individuals who have not acquired cultural capital (e.g., political interest and knowledge) through education and childhood socialization also face internal exclusions.

The historical experience of disenfranchisement also seems to contribute group-level asymmetries of electoral engagement among women (White settler Canadian women obtained the unrestricted federal franchise in 1918). Decades after winning the right to vote, women continued to face internal exclusions to electoral politics, showing up to vote at lower rates than men (Paxton et al. 2007). This was likely due to the way gender norms internalized through childhood socialization entail internal exclusions in later years: girls are less likely than boys to envision running for office and this impacts their political engagement as women (Fox and Lawless 2011, 2014). However, more recently women appear to be closing the gender gap in voting in national elections (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010).

The historical experience of disenfranchisement may have also contributed group-level asymmetries of electoral engagement among Indigenous peoples in Canada (who obtained the unrestricted franchise in 1960) and settler people of color (“race” was repealed as a grounds for exclusion from in 1948). There is some evidence that Indigenous peoples are less likely to vote than other group members (Harell and Panagos 2013). Less work has considered the political participation of people of color in Canada, as Canadian researchers tend to focus on linguistic differences (Nath 2011). However, there is some evidence that people of color participate in political practices at lower rates than White settlers (Beauvais 2019).

It is important to note that Indigenous non-participation in electoral politics may not simply be the result of implicit, cognitive dispositions disincentivizing participation. Indigenous non-participation in settler-colonial political practices may itself be an expressive

political act: the explicit rejection of settler-colonial institutions that are viewed as illegitimate by colonized peoples (Coulthard 2014, Simpson 2015). Rather than participate in settler-colonial institutions, some activists and community leaders advocate participating in Indigenous Resurgence, or Indigenous resistance to colonialism by speaking traditional languages and practicing traditional social, political, and spiritual practices.

There is greater debate over whether communicative practices in civil society—such as talking politics or protesting—are as stratified by social inequalities as electoral engagement. The literature suggests two hypotheses, what we call the *suppression hypothesis* and the *activation hypothesis*. Existing empirical research offers mixed evidence for these two hypotheses. The suppression hypothesis suggests that structural inequalities and the historical exclusion of certain group members from the formal political arena—the poor, women, Indigenous peoples, and racialized minority settlers—remains as a legacy of non-participation across a range of political acts. Following the logic of the suppression hypothesis, ongoing axes of inequality defining social hierarchies are expected to structure all political practices, rather than targeting certain practices (such as voting) more than others.

Some of the literature seems to support the concern that inequalities and exclusions suppress participation across all political practices. For instance, some research shows that citizens who abstain from voting are the same citizens who do not turn out to protest (Gidengil et al. 2003, Norris 2002). These findings have led some proponents of the suppression hypothesis to caution that encouraging communicative politics in civil society will *worsen* existing asymmetries of political participation because communicative practices make greater demands on participants' knowledge, interest, and time (Brady et al. 1995, Skocpol 2004).

By contrast, the activation hypothesis suggests that while inequality and exclusion disproportionately suppress participation in more formal, electoral politics, historically disempowered group members may be *more* likely to engage in non-electoral, communicative practices in civil society (Fung and Warren 2011, Warren 2009). Some of the literature seems to offer evidence that those disempowered by social hierarchies are more likely to participate

in communicative practices in civil society to try to incentivize political inclusions outside the electoral arena. For instance, qualitative research on Indigenous youth participation suggests that although some Indigenous youth do vote, many prefer non-conventional practices to create “space in public discourse and democratic arenas... to bring back the ‘action’ in politics” (Alfred et al. 2007). With respect to women’s participation in civil society, research shows that certain participatory practices such as boycotting—purchasing a product for political or ethnical reasons—tend to be more woman-friendly (Stolle and Micheletti 2006). Can we expect similar asymmetries in communicative practices in civil society and in the formal electoral arena, or are certain forms of engagement more stratified than others?

## **Analysis**

### **Data**

We use data from the Canadian Election Study (CES) 2015 Web Survey to achieve our three goals of assessing inclusions in a range of political practices in a democratic system, clarifying whether asymmetries of engagement structure a range of practices similarly, and theorizing solutions for empowering greater inclusion in democratic systems. The CES 2015 Web Survey was completed by a nationally representative panel of Canadian respondents recruited by Survey Sampling International.

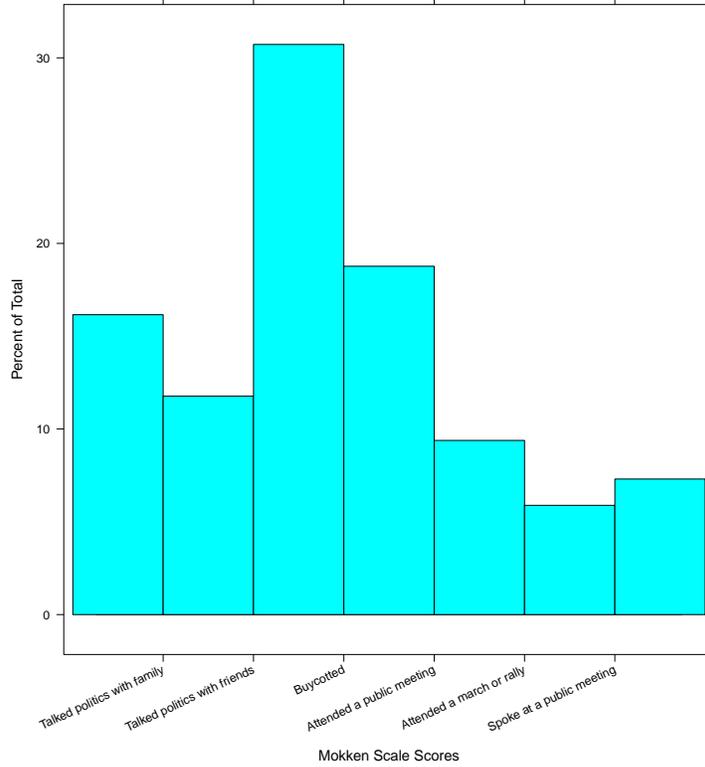
### **Outcomes**

The central outcome variable of interest in our analysis is a measure of communicative practices in civil society (Figure 1). We include a battery of six items tapping into communicative and participatory practices in civil society: talking about politics or the news with family, talking about politics or the news with friends, attending a public meeting to discuss matters of collective concern, speaking at such a meeting, purchasing goods for political or ethical reasons (“boycotting”), and attending a march or rally. The items are coded 1 if the respondents affirmed they had done the political practice at least once in the past 12 months

and 0 if they had not. Results from a reliability analysis (see Table S1) and factor analysis (Table S2) offer strong evidence that the six items tapping into communicative practices in civil society are unidimensional, and that voting does *not* load onto the latent factor of communicative practices (see SM for a longer discussion).

Not only do these variables measuring communicative practices in civil society tap into a unidimensional concept, but Mokken scale analysis reveals another interesting property of the data: these items are hierarchically related, and can be ordered by degree of “difficulty” (Figure 1). Note that rating the “difficulty” of each item on the scale reflects properties of the data, *not* the subjective judgements of a researcher. Mokken scaling belongs to the family of Item Response Theory (IRT), and uses both column (variable) and row (respondent) information to order items hierarchically, based on the difficulty of each item (Van Schuur 2011). Difficulty refers to the probability a respondent affirmed they participated in a political practice (passing the threshold for participation). The scale is hierarchical and cumulative because passing a higher threshold means any given respondent can probabilistically be expected to have passed all lower thresholds.

**Figure 1:** Mokken Scale of Communicative Practices in Civil Society



The scale of communicative practices is a seven-point scale ranging from zero to six. The first category includes respondents who failed to pass any engagement thresholds—we can expect these respondents (about 17% of respondents) participated in *none* of the communicative practices. The second category on the scale includes respondents who passed the first “threshold,” talking politics with family. We can expect respondents in the first category talked politics with family but did not participate in any of the other practices (about 12% of respondents). The third category includes respondents who passed the second “threshold,” talking politics with friends. This is the most frequently occurring category—we can expect that just under a third of the sample talked politics with family *and* talked politics with friends but did not participate in any other practices. The highest category includes

respondents who passed the final threshold, and actually spoke at a meeting organized to discuss collective issues (less than 10% of respondents). This practice is the most “difficult” because the Mokken analysis reveals respondents who passed the threshold of speaking at a meeting can be expected to have participated in all the other practices (talking politics with family, talking politics with friends, boycotting, attending a march or rally, and attending a meeting organized to talk about collective issues). The scalability coefficient H is 0.65, meaning the scale is classified as strong.

In addition to communicative processes in civil society, we also consider “likelihood of voting.” Although voter turnout is well-studied in Canada, including a measure of likelihood of voting helps us identify whether social inequalities and exclusions suppress all political practices similarly, or if inequalities and exclusions from electoral politics actually activate engagement in communicative processes in civil society. Likelihood of voting is coded 1 if respondents indicated they were “definitely” going to vote in the 2015 federal election or had already voted in the advance polls and 0 if they gave any other response (see Table 1 for variable distributions). While social desirability means voting is always over-reported in surveys, the percentage of CES 2015 respondents who said they had already or would definitely vote (76%) is fairly close to actual turnout in 2015 (69%) (Elections Canada n.d.).

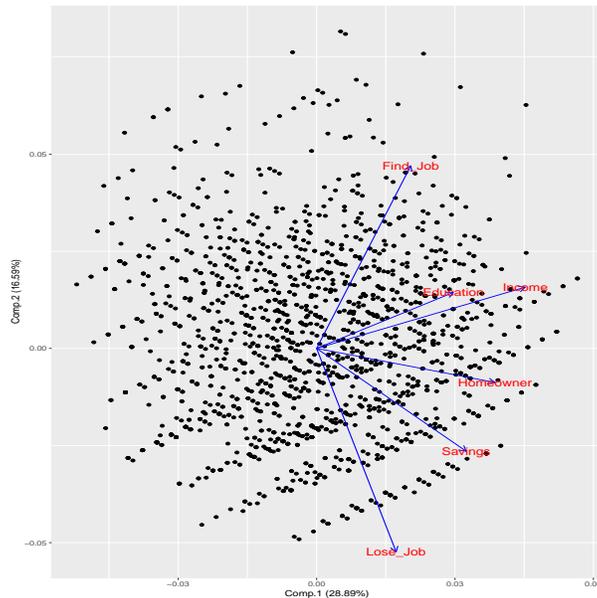
**Table 1:** Variable Distributions

Variables	Freq.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Communicative Practices	2,254	2.40	1.69	0	6
Will Vote	2,254	0.76	0.42	0	1
Ethnicity					
<i>White settler</i> (= 1)	2,254	0.89	0.31	0	1
<i>Person of color</i> (= 2)	2,254	0.07	0.25	0	1
<i>Indigenous</i> (= 3)	2,254	0.04	0.19	0	1
Age	2,254	50	15.95	18	93
Quebec	2,254	0.34	0.47	0	1
Immigrant	2,254	0.06	0.24	0	1
Socioeconomic status	2,254	0	1.31	-3.24	3.53
Political knowledge	2,254	1.90	1.22	0	4
Political interest	2,254	6.10	2.46	0	10

## Independent Variables

The main independent variables of interest are socio-economic status (SES), gender, and ethnicity. By SES we are referring to the combined effect of economic capital in the form of property, income and job security, as well as cultural capital accessed through higher education. The CES 2015 contains a number of variables that tap into these various forms of capital, including income, homeownership, having savings, job security (fear or losing one's job and the ease of finding a new job), and education. For the question wording see Supplementary Material (Table S3). We use principal components analysis (PCA) to create a single index tapping into socio-economic status. PCA is one of the most commonly techniques for estimating a single index of socio-economic status from a larger number of variables (Filmer and Pritchett 2001, Gwatkin et al. 2007, Moser et al. 2005). The results of our PCA are displayed visually in a biplot (Figure 2). Our resulting SES scale is mean centered at 0 and ranges from -4 to 4, where higher values indicate higher SES.

**Figure 2:** Biplot of Variables Measuring Socio-Economic Status



The results of the PCA actually reveal evidence for two components of socioeconomic status. The first component (along the horizontal axis) explains nearly a third of the shared

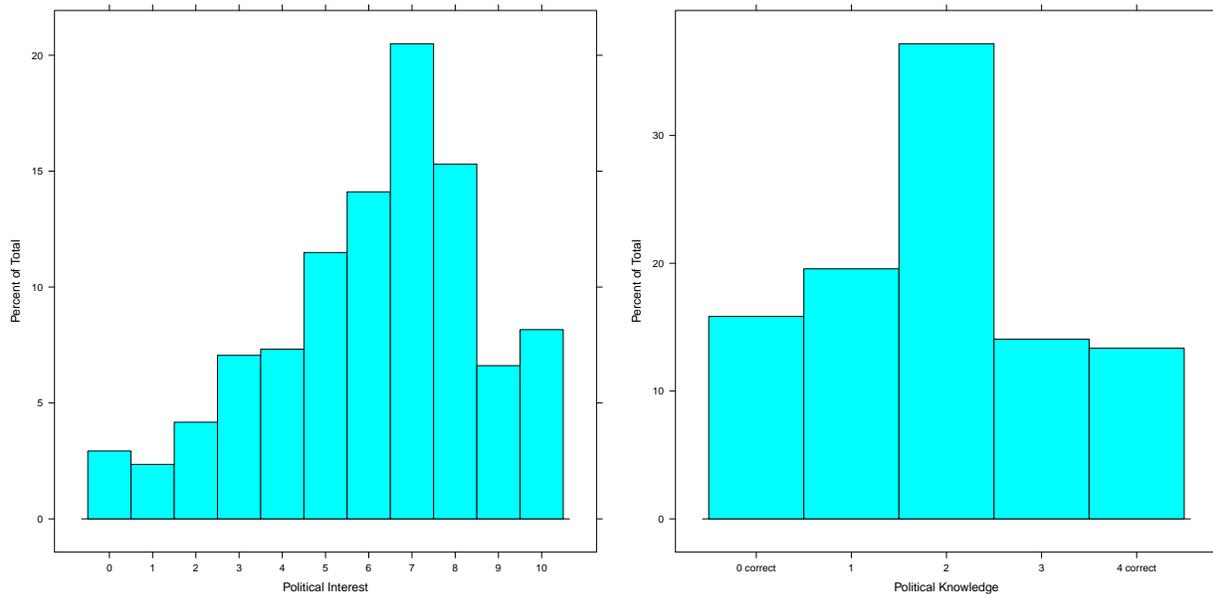
variance of measures more classically associated with SES, with income, education, home ownership, and savings explaining most of the variance. The second component (along the vertical axis) explains shared variance in what might be termed “job insecurity.” Because the first component explains more shared variance—including shared variance from the items we are more theoretically interested in—we retain this first component as our index of SES.

Another potential axis of social inequality that might entail internal exclusions from participation in political practices is gender. Gender is measured with a self-reported dummy variable (woman= 1). We use the concepts of “man” and “woman” inclusively to refer to the continuums of culturally-contingent masculine and feminine behaviors and characteristics (“gender roles”) and the culturally-contingent continuums of male and female physiological attributes (“sexes”) (Butler 2002, Hawkesworth 2019). Using the term woman inclusively to refer to these sets of overlapping concepts is sometimes written as women+ and includes any persons *identifying as women* regardless of their physiological attributes or the gender roles they play. We also use the term man inclusively (man+) to refer to any persons self-identifying as men. The third axis of social inequality we are interested in is ethnicity, defined by group-based positions in racialized and colonial social hierarchies. Identity is measured with a three-category variable indicating if a respondent is a “White” settler (a person of European descent), Indigenous (self-identifies as “Aboriginal,” including First Nations, Métis, or Inuit), or a person of color who is not Indigenous (Table 1 Variable Distributions).

Our theoretical frameworks leads us to expect that lower participation among disempowered group members are at least partly due to the way internalized dispositions entail internal exclusions, disincentivizing the poor, women, and racialized and colonized group members from participating in political practices. In the full models, we also include variables to tap into important cognitive dispositions—political interest and political knowledge—to identify the extent to which these dispositions mediate and moderate the effect of between axes of inequality—SES, gender, and ethnicity—and participation in different political practices. Political interest is a self-reported measure which asks respondents how interested they are

in politics generally, on a scale from zero (“no interest”) to 10 (“a great deal of interest”) (variable distribution in Figure 3). Political knowledge is a summated scale constructed with four questions tapping into factual knowledge of the formal political arena. Specifically, respondents were asked to name their provincial premier, Canada’s governor general, Canada’s minister of finance, and the president of Russia. The five-point scale ranges from zero (no correct responses) to four (all four items answered correctly) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** Potential Cognitive Dispositions Motivating Political Practices



In addition to our main independent variables—SES, gender, and ethnicity—and (in the full models) political interest and knowledge, we also control for basic demographics (age, immigration status, and region). Age measures the age of respondents at the time of the survey. Immigration status is measured with a dichotomous variable indicating whether a respondent was born in a country other than Canada. Controlling for immigration status is important for estimating the independent effect of being a racialized minority because, as in

the case of many Western democracies, Canadian immigrants are more likely to be people of color and recent citizens are less likely to participate in politics. Our measure of region is a dummy variable controlling for the effect of living in Québec (region of Québec= 1). It is important to control for the region of Québec because the Québec/Canada outside Québec cleavage accounts for most of the variation in political preferences (Anderson 2010).

## Methods

Communicative practices in civil society is an event count. Event counts are dependent variables measuring the number of times an event—such as participating in a communicative practice—occurs (King 1988). Recall that our Mokken scale of communicative practices is scaled such that respondents in the first category participated in no communicative practices, respondents in the second category participated in one practice (talking politics with family), respondents in the third category participated in two practices (talking politics with family *and* with friends), and so on. As such, we model our Mokken scale of communicative practices using an even count model (Poisson regression). We model voting (a dichotomous outcome) using logistic regression. We estimate small, coherent regressions with minimal controls (Achen 2005, Kmenta 2010), including only the main independent variables and basic controls in the baseline models (Table 2). We include political interest and political knowledge as in the full models to identify the extent to which these variables mediate (Table 3) and moderate (Figures 4, 5, 6) the effects of SES, gender, and ethnicity on participation in different political practices.

## Results

Modeling communicative practices in the public sphere and voting offers mixed support for the suppression and activation theses (regression coefficients reported in Table 2, for effect plots see Figure S2 and Figure S3). Congruent with past research, we find voting is stratified by socioeconomic status. However—at least in 2015—women do not differ from

men in their reported likelihood of voting, and neither settlers of color or Indigenous peoples differ from White Canadians in terms of their reported likelihood of voting. Congruent with the *suppression hypothesis*, lower SES individuals are significantly less likely to participate in civil society. Furthermore, women score significantly lower than men on the communicative practices scale suggesting that at least with respect to gender, social identity can suppress participation in more demanding political activities in the public sphere. However, congruent with the *activation hypothesis*, Indigenous peoples are significantly *more* likely than White settlers to participate in communicative practices in civil society.

**Table 2:** Baseline Models

	Communicative Practices (Poisson Coefficients)	Vote (Logit Coefficients)
(Intercept)	1.25*** (0.05)	-0.64*** (0.19)
SES	0.07*** (0.01)	0.24*** (0.04)
Gender (Woman= 1)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.05 (0.11)
Person of Color	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.20 (0.21)
Indigenous identity	0.24*** (0.06)	-0.15 (0.25)
Immigrant	0.02 (0.06)	-0.57* (0.22)
Age	-0.01*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)
Quebec	-0.12*** (0.03)	0.26* (0.11)
<i>N</i>	2254	2254
AIC	8456.79	2279.89
BIC	8639.84	2462.94
log <i>L</i>	-4196.39	-1107.94

Standard errors in parentheses

† significant at  $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Controlling for political interest and knowledge of the formal political arena helps clarify whether cognitive dispositions that entail internal exclusions can account for group-based

differences in political engagement. Comparing the coefficients in the full models (Table 3) to those in the baseline models (Table 2) gives a sense of whether political interest and knowledge mediate—or account for the relationship—between axes of social differentiation (SES, gender, and ethnicity) and our outcomes of interest (communicative practices and voting).

**Table 3:** Full Models

	Communicative Practices (Poisson Coefficients)	Vote (Logit Coefficients)
(Intercept)	0.49*** (0.06)	-2.81*** (0.26)
SES	0.05*** (0.01)	0.12** (0.04)
Gender ( <i>Woman</i> = 1)	0.03 (0.03)	0.31** (0.12)
Person of Color	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.26 (0.22)
Indigenous identity	0.23*** (0.06)	0.01 (0.27)
Immigrant	0.05 (0.06)	-0.50* (0.24)
Age	-0.01*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)
Quebec	-0.13*** (0.03)	0.18 (0.12)
Pol. Interest	0.13*** (0.01)	0.24*** (0.02)
Pol. Knowledge	0.02 (0.01)	0.44*** (0.05)
<i>N</i>	2254	2254
AIC	8002.27	2042.23
BIC	8231.09	2271.05
log <i>L</i>	-3961.13	-981.12

Standard errors in parentheses

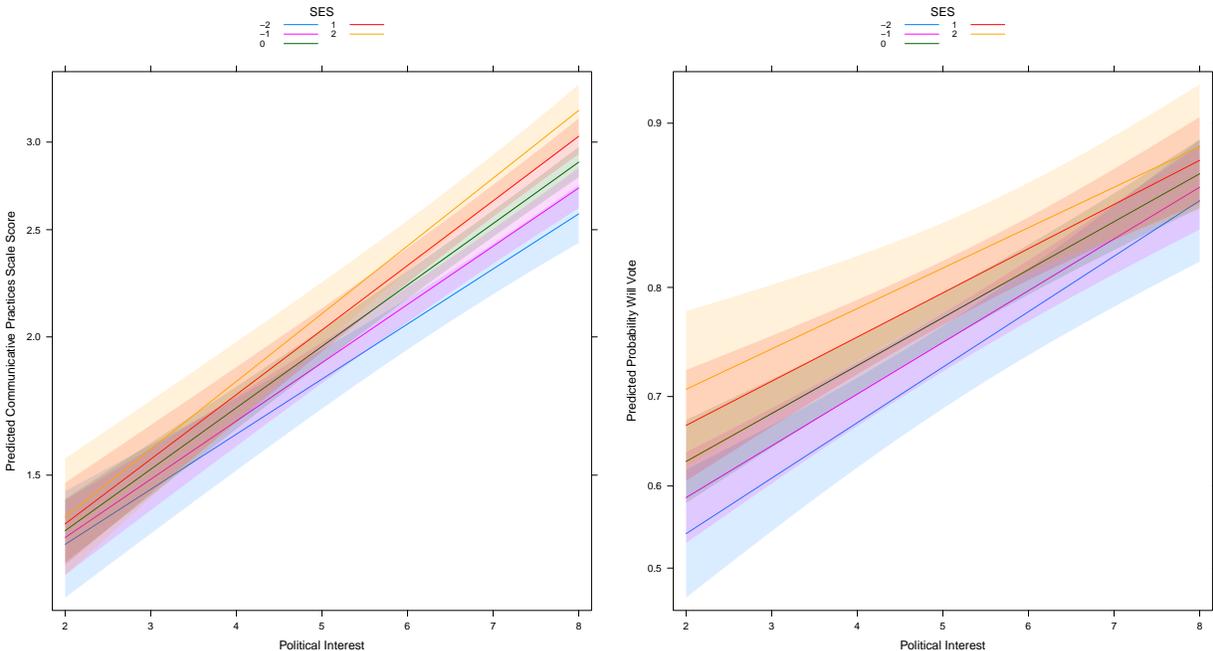
† significant at  $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

As Table 3 shows, political interest is strongly and positively related to participation in communicative practices and likelihood of voting. Interestingly—although perhaps not completely surprising—formal political knowledge is completely unrelated to communicative

practices in civil society but a strong predictor of voting. The results reveal that political interest and formal political knowledge do *not* account for much of the relationship between SES and communicative practices (the coefficients for SES are essentially unchanged). However, the results also show that cognitive dispositions *do* explain women's lower participation in communicative practices—controlling for political interest, there is no difference in women's and men's civil society engagement. In fact, controlling for political interest and knowledge, on average women indicate a higher likelihood of voting (suggesting a moderation effect). Finally, it is also interesting to note that cognitive dispositions do little to explain high levels of Indigenous engagement in communicative practices in the public sphere (the coefficients for Indigenous identity are essentially unchanged).

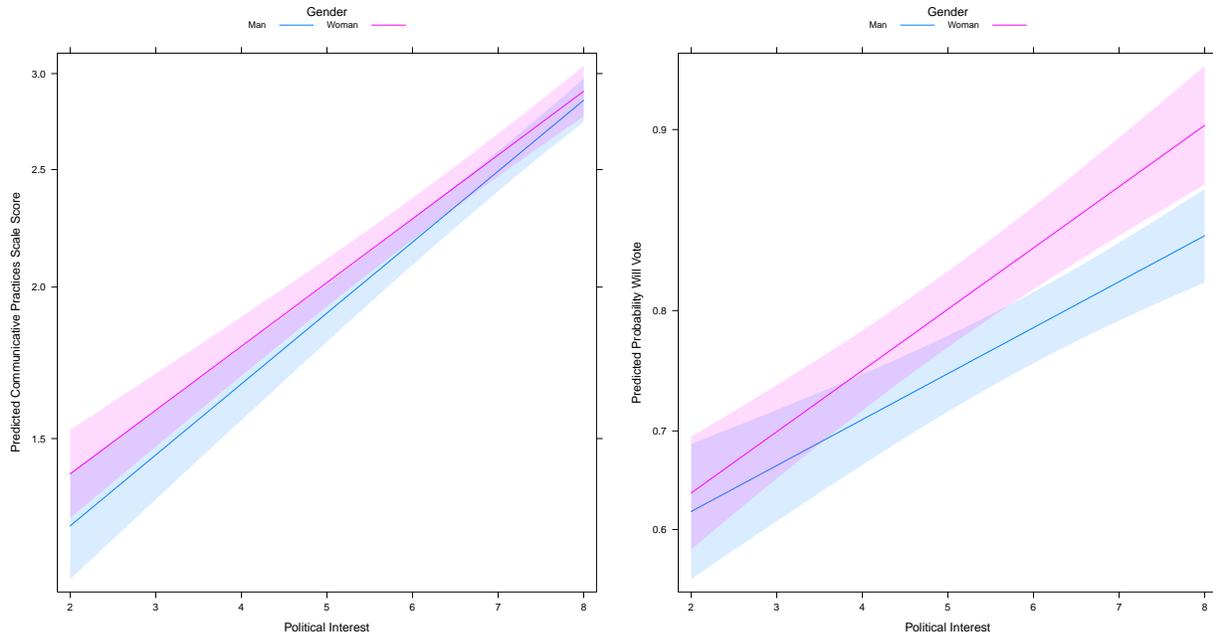
In addition to clarifying whether cognitive dispositions mediate the relationship between axes of social differentiation (SES, gender, and ethnicity) and political practices, it is also interesting to know whether cognitive dispositions *moderate* the relationship between axes of social differentiation and our outcomes of interest. Recall that moderators affect the strength or direction of the relationship between a predictor and an outcome (Baron and Kenny 1986). Because knowledge of formal politics does not even correlate with communicative practices, our primary outcome of interest, we only estimate models with interactions between political interest and each of our three primary independent variables of interest (SES, gender, and ethnicity). The results are presented graphically.

Figure 4: SES\*Political Interest Plots



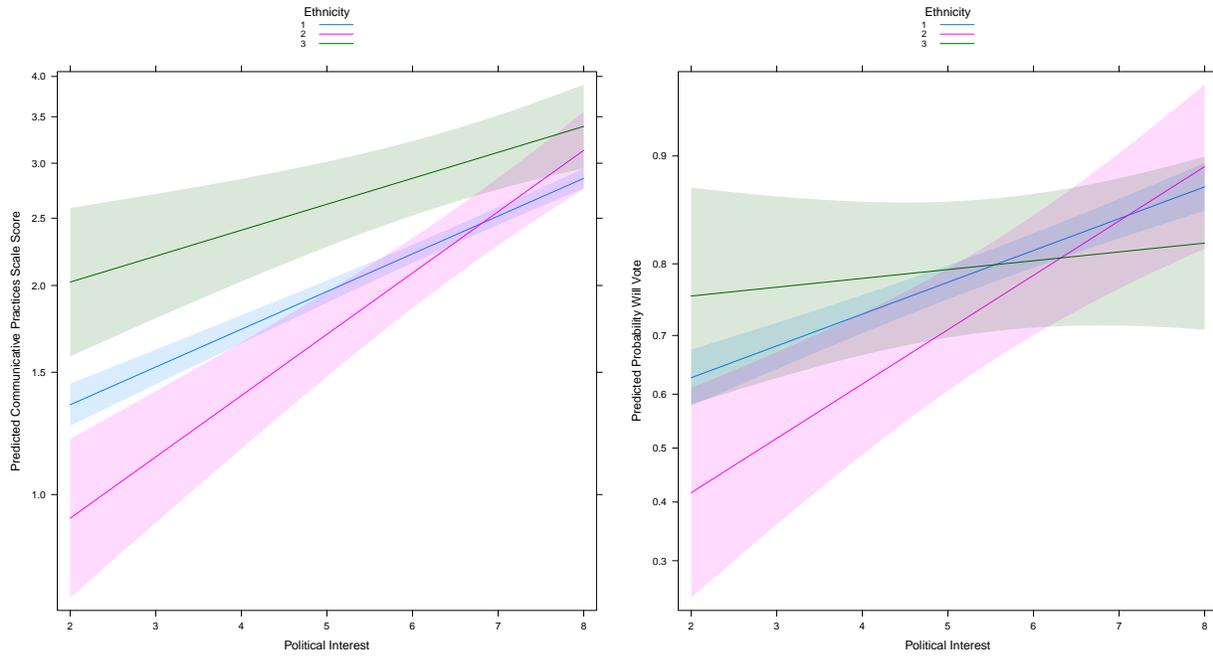
We find no evidence of an interaction between political interest and SES (Figure 4). Greater political interest increases scores on the communicative practices scale and increases the reported likelihood of voting similarly for different levels of SES.

**Figure 5:** Gender\*Political Interest Plots



With respect to communicative practices, we also find no evidence of an interaction between political interest and gender (Figure 4). Greater political interest increases scores on the communicative practices scale similarly for women and men. On average, women report less participation in communicative practices in large part because, on average, women express less interest in politics. However, there is evidence of an interaction between political interest and gender when we model voting: in a hypothetical world where women express as much or more political interest than men, we would actually expect women to be *more* likely to cast their ballots on election day.

**Figure 6:** Ethnicity\*Political Interest Plots



With respect to whether there is an interaction between ethnicity and political interest, the results are suggestive but the wide confidence intervals (due at least in part to the small number of non-white or non-settler respondents in our sample) make it difficult to draw strong conclusions. What is particularly interesting to note is that, with respect to Indigenous participants (Indigenous= 3), the slope of the line denoting the relationship between political interest and communicative practices is somewhat flatter and the line denoting the relationship between political interest and likelihood of voting is almost completely flat. This affirms the intuition that—at least in 2015—cognitive dispositions hardly seemed to matter for Indigenous participation, although cognitive dispositions do seem to matter for settlers, especially settlers of color (settler of color= 2).

## Implications for Empowering Inclusions

Our findings offer new insights for scholars interested in empowering inclusions in political practices. In particular, the cumulative nature of communicative practices in civil society points to the central importance of primary socialization and social context—talking politics with family and friends—as essential stepping stones for other communicative practices in civil society. Political communication with family and friends are important “gateway practices” for more publicly expressive political acts such as attending public demonstrations or meetings. This finding underscores the importance of informal communication networks in the mass public for deliberative and democratic systems (Chambers 2009, Habermas 1998, Mansbridge 1999).

With respect to whether inequalities and exclusions suppress all political practices or actually activate participation in civil society, our findings suggest that the impact of social stratification on political practices varies depending on the axes of social differentiation (whether class, gender, or ethnicity). The experience of being lower-SES suppresses participation across both communicative practices in the public sphere and voting. Cognitive dispositions—at least the ones we control for—do not explain why the poor and less educated are less likely to participate in politics. It seems likely lower SES individuals also face external exclusions. Enhancing political engagement likely requires social redistribution to alleviate poverty and to increase access to high-quality education.

The historical exclusion of women from the public sphere means girls and women tend to internalize less interest in politics, resulting in women’s unrepresentation in communicative practices in civil society. By contrast, the experience of being Indigenous in a post-colonial state *activates* engagement in the public sphere: Indigenous peoples are more likely to engage in communicative practices than either White settlers or settlers of color.

These findings may be explained in part because, although Indigenous peoples in Canada are highly diverse—there are over 50 Indigenous nations and 618 registered bands in Canada (Government of Canada 2018)—shared experiences with colonialization has ensured that

indigeneity is a highly salient social category. Indigenous identity was particularly politically salient when our data was collected due to the mobilizing power of Idle No More. Idle No More is a grassroots, anti-colonial and pro-environmental movement organized around Indigenous Resurgence that was particularly active prior to the 2015 election (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014).

By contrast, being a “settler of color” is not a salient basis of social identification. This category is theoretical, created by recoding responses to a CES 2015 question on “ethnic background.” The recoded ethnic background measure includes respondents who self-identified as being of African, Arab, Black, Caribbean, East Asian, Latin American, South Asian, and Southeast Asian descent. Furthermore, social class in Canada has been less politically salient and is less likely to be a source of collective action (Gillespie and Lenton 1989). Finally, gender is often prevented from acting as a source of collective action because of the heterogeneity of the large categories “women” and “men.”

It appears that axes of social inequalities are more likely entail internal exclusions and *suppress* political engagement across the board when the axes of inequality themselves are not salient sources of political action. However, axes of inequality appear to *activate* engagement in communicative practices in the public sphere when they become politically salient and act as a basis for collective action. To borrow a phrase, axes of social distinction become a source of political action when social groups cease to be groups in themselves and become groups for themselves. This finding supports insights from critical (Marx and Engels 2002), critical race (Coulthard 2014, Fanon 1963), and feminist (Fraser 1990, MacKinnon 1979, Mansbridge 1999) theories related to transforming objective group positions into sources of subjectively-recognized, group-based collective action.

Political participation in the public sphere is essential for citizens to communicative link their personal preferences into collective opinions. However, as we discussed, communicative practices lack inherent decision rules. Voting is an essential practice for collective decision-making, even if only for deciding which representatives citizens will delegate their decision-

making capacities to. Low levels of turnout cannot be fully compensated by activating higher levels of engagement in other political practices so long as non-electoral practices are insufficiently linked to elected decision-makers. Compulsory voting, which would promote more equal electoral participation, is one solution that has been proposed (Hooghe and Pelleriaux 1998). This would be particularly effective for promoting greater representative responsiveness toward lower-SES citizens who constitute large segments of the population.

However, prescribing “more voting” cannot be the only answer. First, even full electoral turnout would not necessarily grant minority groups—such as Indigenous peoples and settlers of color—much clout in electoral politics. The second reason “more voting” cannot be the answer is because participation in Canadian settler-state institutions is seen as illegitimate by some Indigenous peoples. Even communicative practices such as deliberation have been challenged as Western-centric, colonial practices by some Indigenous theorists (Coulthard 2010). Instead, Coulthard and Simpson (2016, p. 254) argue that Indigenous political empowerment requires “Indigenous place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge” to provide ethical frameworks for Indigenous grounded normativity.

While some Indigenous peoples may have no interest in being linked to the Canadian state apparatus, members of other historically disempowered groups—as well as some Indigenous peoples who want to advance Indigenous rights within the state apparatus—might. Democratic innovations such as participatory budgeting councils or mini-publics can supplement existing legacy institutions of representative democracy to deepen democratic systems’ capacities for empowered inclusion, deliberative agenda formation, and collective decision-making. (Beauvais and Warren 2018, Curato and Böker 2016, Niemeyer 2014, Smith 2009). Because of the inclusive and deliberative qualities of democratic innovations such as mini-publics (Beauvais and Bächtiger 2016), democratic innovations enhance the epistemic quality of public opinion (Curato et al. 2017, Fournier et al. 2011, Landemore 2013, Warren and Gastil 2015). Democratic innovations can also increase political systems’ capacities for collective action. This is because elected officials can borrow democratic legitimacy from

citizens' assembly proposals, making it both easier and more likely elected representatives will act (Beauvais and Warren 2018).

## Conclusion

Much empirical work has fallen out of step with innovations in democratic theory related to the relationship between a range of political practices that, taken together, enhance the democratic capacities of political systems. Comparing and contrasting idealized “models” of representative, participatory, or deliberative democracy leads to theoretical dead-ends. Our present work is an example of how systemic approaches to democratic theory can motivate empirical research on political engagement. We adopt a problems-based approach to democratic theory and use data reduction techniques to offer an assessment of inclusions a democratic system and to clarify whether asymmetries of engagement structure a range of practices similarly.

Using scaling and dimensional analyses offers interesting insight into the nature of communicative practices. That a range of practices in civil society comprise a single, unidimensional scale supports the intuition that “participation and deliberation go together” (Curato et al. 2017, p. 32). Furthermore, the cumulative nature of communicative practices in civil society offers important insights for theorists, researchers, and practitioners interested in incentivizing inclusions. In particular, the finding that talking politics with family and friends are essential gateways for other communicative practices in civil society underscores the importance of informal communication networks for deliberative and democratic systems (Chambers 2009, Habermas 1998, Mansbridge 1999).

We find that axes of group-based social inequality only seem to activate political engagement in communicative practices in civil society outside the formal electoral area when those axes of inequality are politicized, as is the case with Indigenous peoples in Canada. When group-based inequalities exist only as objective (but not subjectively recognized) sources of

social differentiation, axes of social inequality tend to entail internal exclusions that suppress the participation of disempowered group members in communicative practices in civil society.

Our analysis also helps us theorize solutions for empowering greater inclusion in democratic systems. From the perspective of grass-roots activism, our findings reinforce intuitions from critical, critical race, and feminist theories which posit that those who are disempowered by social hierarchies must participate in symbolic struggles to make the objective conditions of their existence subjectively recognized in order for these conditions to become a basis for *praxis*.

From the perspective of institutional reform, even if full electoral inclusion (full and equal voter turnout) was achieved, legacy institutions of representative democracy could not do all the work of empowering inclusions, forming epistemically-sound public opinion, and linking collective opinions to collective decision-making necessary for political systems to count as democratic. Efforts can be made to enhance inclusion in communicative processes of opinion formation in the public sphere and to linking communicative processes to collective decision-making. This includes—where it is desired by those affected—creating more formal links between communicative and deliberative forums and elected decision-makers. A range of institutional innovations—democratic innovations such as mini-publics, participatory budgeting, and Deliberative Polls—can incentivize inclusions, enhance the epistemic quality of public opinion, and link communicative processes to elected decision-makers. Decision-makers interested in enhancing the inclusiveness, deliberativeness, and decision-making capacities of democratic systems should consider supplementing legacy institutions of representative democracy with these kinds of democratic innovations.

Our work provides an example for how using systemic approaches to democratic theory can motivate empirical research. Note, however, that by advocating a systemic approach we are *not* suggesting theorists and researchers must consider all political practices in every study. We chose to employ data reduction techniques—including Mokken scaling to create

a scale of communicative practices—in this present analysis because it is suited to the goals of our current analysis. The goal of all statistical modeling, including all data reduction techniques, is to provide useful and illuminating views of phenomena of interest. Statistical models do not represent a single, “correct” view of phenomena (Box and Draper 1987, Box et al. 2005). Data reduction techniques allow us to achieve our goals of illustrating the relationship between a range of communicative practices in civil society, and to reduce complexity to facilitate a wider assessment of inclusion in political practices in a broader democratic system.

However, the kinds of scaling techniques we employ in our analysis sacrifice depth for breadth. Because we have opted for breadth, we have not looked deeply into, for instance, how social identities intersect. As we mentioned in passing, social categories such as “woman” and “man” are large, heterogenous groups that overlap with other identities in meaningful ways. Future research should consider how intersections of different identities impact communicative practices.

Another limitation of research is that, although we have shown that more informal political talk in close social networks is typically a prerequisite to other communicative practices in civil society, we cannot explain how or why people make the leap from talking politics within their personal networks to more public illocutionary acts such as showing up to demonstrate or speak at a public meeting. Our work also says nothing about how internal exclusions structure communicative *influence*. Even when disempowered group members participate in communicative practices, they do not always enjoy equal influence (Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2014). Other, more in-depth analyses of political practices using a range of methodological approaches—experimental studies of mini-publics, qualitative studies, cross-national comparative research, and time-series analyses—will help answer many of the questions we cannot.

Regardless of the methodological approach, we encourage theorists and researchers to adopt innovations from democratic theory and consider sets of political practices systemi-

cally, attending to the ways political practices contribute to the capacities of deliberative systems or systems of representations that are themselves nested within broader democratic systems (Bächtiger and Parkinson 2019, Curato et al. 2018, Habermas 1998, Mansbridge et al. 2012, Warren 2017). This kind of systems-level thinking should help avoid the pitfall of judging democracies by the successes or failures of specific sets of practices or institutions. For instance, helping to avoid the pitfall of judging democracies by the successes or failures of voting for achieving representative responsiveness. Instead, systems-level thinking should motivate theorists, researchers, and practitioners to envision institutional innovations for addressing the shortcomings of existing political institutions to enhance the democratic capacities of political systems more broadly. We also strongly advocate collaborative work between more theoretically-oriented researchers and theorists. Strengthening the ties between normative theory and empirical research can help theorists hone and clarify existing concepts, encourage researchers to be more attentive to the normative implications of their work, and ultimately motivate the kind of research that offers practical solutions for addressing injustices and deepening democracy.

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