Engaging the Millennials: The Citizens’ Initiative in Finland

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Abstract
Millennials’ disengagement from institutionalized politics has been a cause for concern among scholars and pundits. Consequently, there is an increased interest in possibilities to mobilize them through new participatory mechanisms, but the results are still unclear. We contribute to this research agenda by examining whether the Finnish citizens’ initiative mobilized the millennial generation with data from the Finnish National Election Survey from 2015 (FNES2015). Furthermore, we use the civic voluntarism model (CVM) to explore what factors explain the involvement of millennials in supporting citizens’ initiatives to determine whether users differ from non-users and whether CVM works differently for millennials as compared to the general population. Our results show that millennials are frequent users of the initiative. We find few significant differences between millennial users and non-users, suggesting that using the citizens’ initiative is egalitarian among millennials. We also find no evidence that the CVM model works differently for millennials.

Keywords
Millennials, citizens’ initiative, Finland, political participation, civic voluntarism model

Introduction
Younger generations have been noticeably involved in politics at least since the late 1960s, when widespread student protests and the rise of issue movements among the youth of that time caused many to lambast their juvenile expressions. About 50 years later, we still find ourselves worrying about youth and their capability to ensure the future of democracy. The current target of our concern is the young people who became adolescents around the turn of the century, those often referred to as millennials, who are currently often criticized for being disengaged from political processes. While academic scholars frequently eschew the millennial
label, the political participation of young citizens has been no less of a concern (Bennett, 2008; Farthing, 2010; Grasso, Farrall, Gray, Hay, & Jennings, 2018; Milner, 2010). Even those who contend that millennials engage in political matters acknowledge that they tend to do so in less organized ways that make it difficult for political decision-makers to consider their preferences when deciding on future policies with direct consequences for millennials.

Since traditional forms of political participation do not appeal to millennials, it becomes important to examine how they can be mobilized in more formal forms of political participation to ensure the future functioning of democracy. A possibility is to engage them in so-called democratic innovations, which involves various participatory mechanisms introduced to boost popular involvement in formal political decision-making (Geissel & Joas, 2012; Geissel & Newton, 2012; Smith, 2009). Such involvement at least ostensibly has the potential to channel the views of millennials into formal political decision-making. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether millennials take advantage of the new possibilities for participation. Furthermore, even when they do, increasing participation may serve to reinforce existing inequalities in the general population, if it is primarily millennials with certain resources and skills who take advantage of the new possibilities. It is, therefore, important to examine the characteristics of the millennials who are involved to ascertain the implications for democratic equality.

In this article, we examine the involvement of millennials in supporting citizens’ initiatives in Finland. The Finnish citizens’ initiative offers a novel way of engaging citizens in political decision-making, and it is, therefore, interesting to see how it affects the political involvement of millennials. Our data come from the Finnish National Election Study from 2015 (FNES2015; n = 1591), which is a representative sample of the Finnish population that was conducted following the 2015 parliamentary elections. This also includes adequate indicators on the millennial generation’s involvement in supporting citizens’ initiatives, which make it a suitable source for the present research questions.

In the following, we first outline why the political involvement of millennials has been considered problematic and explain why democratic innovations may provide a solution to the problems. In connection to this, we outline hypotheses concerning the involvement of Finnish millennials in using the citizens’ initiative. These hypotheses are then tested empirically before we finish with a discussion of the results.

**Millennials and Political Participation**

The term ‘millennial’ was first coined by Strauss and Howe (2000) and refers to a generation of young people who reached adulthood by the dawn of the twenty-first century. Here, we use the term to refer to young citizens born between 1981 and 1997, even when the cited authors do not use similar terminology. Hence, the oldest members of the millennial generation are citizens who gained political maturity around the turn of the millennium, while the youngest did not turn 18, thereby gaining full political rights until 2015. While admittedly broad, we use this label since millennials have long been the aim of much criticism from pundits and scholars alike. Millennials are claimed to be less active than older generations in traditional forms of political participation like voting and do not regularly follow political matters
(e.g., Bennett, 2008; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). A recent study also finds that millennials in Great Britain, or ‘Blair’s babies’, are less likely to be politically involved compared to older generations, even in more informal political activities like protests (Grasso et al., 2018). Consequently, there are fears that millennials are political dropouts who will remain so as they grow older (Milner, 2010).

Others challenge these negative assessments and contend that millennials do participate—only in new ways (e.g., Chou, 2013; Dalton, 2016; Kimberlee, 2002; O’Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones, & McDonagh, 2003). Young people are issue-oriented and prefer advancing a specific cause important to them over traditional involvement rooted in ideological convictions. Dalton (2016) builds on Inglehart’s (1997) theory of post-materialism and argues that millennials hold different norms for political participation and therefore prefer involvement in looser networks and non-institutionalized participation (Dalton, 2016, pp. 28–29).

Even if the participation of millennials is changing rather than disappearing altogether, it remains important to involve younger generations in institutionalized forms of participation since these ensure the functioning of a democracy. Studies show that young citizens who do not participate early in life are unlikely to become involved later (e.g., Smets & Neundorf, 2013). When millennials shy away from formal political decision-making as they mature, they are unable to influence decision-makers and policies that affect their lives directly. This could undermine the legitimacy of democratic legitimacy over time.

Since the traditional forms of institutionalized participation fail to engage millennials, it is important to come up with a new participatory mechanism that caters to their needs to ensure that their voices are heard in politics. Democratic innovations offer a potential remedy by creating more issue-oriented forms of participation (Geissel & Joas, 2012; Geissel & Newton, 2012; Smith, 2009). Democratic innovations are institutions that have been ‘specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process’ (Smith, 2009, p. 1). These innovations are not necessarily entirely novel since they often exist and may even have been operating for decades, in other political systems (Geissel & Newton, 2012). They are, however, innovations in the sense that they modify existing structures and complement, or even replace, traditional representative decision-making with participatory involvement. Despite their popularity in recent years, it remains unclear whether these mechanisms can help reverse the negative trends in political participation among millennials.

We contribute to this research agenda by examining the millennials’ use of the citizens’ initiative in Finland, which is a democratic innovation at the national level introduced in 2012. There are several reasons why this mechanism may appeal to millennials. First, the use is issue-oriented rather than based on traditional ideological cleavages, which have unclear connotations for younger citizens. Second, a web-based platform (www.kansalaisaloite.fi) makes it possible to launch and support citizens’ initiatives online, which may help activate young people into participation since younger people are more likely to adapt such technological advances (e.g., Holt, Shehata, Strömöck, & Ljungberg, 2013; Xenos, Vromen, & Loader, 2014). Third, the citizens’ initiative is a relatively easy form of participation that combines single-issue protest politics with institutionalized participation, which also makes it more appealing to young people (Dalton, 2016).
There are, therefore, valid reasons to expect the citizens’ initiative to have a mobilizing effect on millennials. This effect should, however, not be taken for granted. Although the citizens’ initiative is a new form of political participation in Finland, the Finnish agenda initiative does not fundamentally alter institutional power structures in society (Christensen, Jäske, & Setälä, 2016, p. 436), which is why it may fail to engage the millennials who are sceptical of anything resembling traditional politics. Nevertheless, our first hypothesis states that:

**H1**: Millennials are more likely than the rest of the population to use the citizens’ initiative.

However, the question is not only if millennials use the citizens’ initiative but equally important is finding out what type of millennials are likely to use it. Providing new possibilities for participation can either help to mobilize otherwise inactive groups or exacerbate existing inequalities in political involvement. Zittel and Fuchs (2007), for example, argued that by providing new participatory forms, one can mobilize passive citizens, thereby assuring greater equality in participation. Others expect the participatory pattern to follow the regular trend: those who are already politically active will be more likely to use new participatory possibilities (e.g., Dalton, 2017; Donovan & Karp, 2006; Smith, 2009). Broad participation is beneficial for society since decision-makers are less likely to take silent groups into account when making decisions, which could mean that their needs are not heard (Dalton, 2017, pp. 9, 84).

It has long been recognized that there are consistent patterns in who becomes politically active. The civic voluntarism model (CVM) developed by Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) highlights the importance of three key sources: civic resources and skills, psychological engagement with politics and recruitment networks. Verba et al. contended that these characteristics are systematically associated with abstention from political involvement since people do not participate because (a) they cannot (resources and skills), (b) they do not want to (psychological engagement with politics) and (c) nobody asked them (networks) (Verba et al., 1995, p. 269).

An individual choice to not take part is not necessarily a democratic problem, but it becomes problematic for democratic inclusiveness when it is rooted in factors beyond the individual’s control that systematically bias patterns of participation (Dalton, 2017, p. 9). Resources, psychological engagement and recruiting networks are all closely linked, and certain groups of people tend to have higher levels of all three types of sources, creating distinct patterns of participation and non-participation based on socio-demographic characteristics. Despite the interconnectedness of the three sources, we here conceive them as distinct factors since our goal is to contribute more to explain the involvement of millennials in supporting citizens’ initiatives rather than disentangling the complex interplay between them in shaping participation.

While CVM is a popular analytical model for studying political involvement, the involvement of younger citizens is frequently explained by referring to their political socialization, meaning how the influence of political context, family and peers during a person’s formative years affect their participatory habits and views throughout the life cycle (Grasso et al., 2018; Neundorf & Niemi, 2013; Quintelier, 2013; Smets & Neundorf, 2013). As generations share socializing experiences and
individuals learn social patterns that correspond to their societal position, mobilizing agencies, like schools and family background, tend to be important predictors of participatory habits (Quintelier, 2013; Smets & Neundorf, 2013). We here aim to assess the extent to which CVM can also explain the involvement of millennials in supporting citizens’ initiatives, although we do take socialization into account. Since CVM incorporates factors that previous studies have found to influence the propensity for political participation in the general population, we do not outline explicit causal mechanisms for all aspects included. Instead, we aim to examine whether CVM works in a similar manner for millennials as for the general population. It remains unclear whether CVM has a similar impact among younger generations since studies on youth political behaviour frequently focus exclusively on younger generations (Henn & Foard, 2014; Kimberlee, 2002). While this approach has advantages, such studies are unable to address the question of whether the younger citizens fundamentally differ from the general population. Important exceptions do exist (Grasso et al., 2018; Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2009). Grasso et al. (2018), for example, proposed that the context of socialization of different generations can explain their engagement, or disengagement, in politics, and that different generational effects, not only age, affect the participatory patterns of different generations. Hence, to understand the involvement of millennials in using the citizens’ initiative, it is important to examine not only to what extent the three types of resources highlighted by CVM can explain the involvement of millennials but also whether the associations differ compared to the rest of the population (García-Albacete, 2014). When the CVM factors affect the likelihood of participation in an entirely different manner (i.e., have significantly stronger or weaker effects), it indicates that the millennials as a cohort differ fundamentally from the general population. When the effects are similar across generations, any differences in participation are due to millennials possessing more or fewer mobilizing participatory factors. Such differences indicate life cycle effects that are likely to even out as the millennials grow older.¹ We, therefore, also propose hypotheses on how the impacts of the three sources included in CVM differ for millennials’ participation in the citizens’ initiative.

In the following, we outline how each of the sources may affect the involvement of millennials and how the association may differ compared to the general population.

**Civic Resources and Skills**

It is a commonly accepted notion that individuals who possess more resources and skills are more politically active (e.g., Dalton, 2017; Verba et al., 1995). When these people are also more likely to take advantage of new possibilities for participation, it implies that such new arenas of participation could exacerbate existing inequalities in political participation. Previous studies show that people with more resources are more likely to embrace participatory reforms (Donovan & Karp, 2006, p. 674; Smith, 2009, p. 14). In a similar vein, politically active young people predominantly come from homes with particular socio-economic resources (Henn & Foard, 2014; O’Toole et al., 2003; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2012). All of this leads to our hypothesis for the association between civic resources and skills and the propensity for millennials to use the citizens’ initiative:
H2a: Millennials with more civic resources and skills are more likely to have supported citizens’ initiatives.

The role of resources and skills is likely to be stronger for the millennial generation than for the older generations. While young people often have fewer civic resources and skills simply because they have not had the time to attain them, how these resources and skills affect behaviour are not so straightforward. Nevertheless, there are reasons to expect that these are even more important for millennials compared to older generations, which were politically socialized during a period when social networks, for example, unions and churches, had more power in mobilizing people into participation (e.g., Dalton, 2017, p. 86, Inglehart, 1997). Dalton (2017) argues that resources have become even more important for political participation, and that the existing participation gap is widening. As the participatory repertoire has expanded from voting to non-electoral forms of participation, the required resources and skills for participation have expanded. Social status and especially education have become a strong determinant for political activity (Dalton, 2017, pp. 9–11). This is reflected in our hypothesis:

H2b: Civic resources and skills have a stronger effect on the propensity to support initiatives among millennials compared to the rest of the population.

Psychological Engagement with Politics

Individuals’ psychological engagement with politics explains why individuals may or may not want to engage in politics (Verba et al., 1995). The individual psychological engagement in politics provides internal stimuli for participation, which may explain why resources lead to political participation (Verba et al., 1995, p. 343). Political interest is often considered a precondition for more active forms of involvement; if an individual does not understand the political world or care about the end results of politics, they are unlikely to participate (Verba et al., 1995). According to CVM, it is necessary to consider the role of psychological engagement to understand when millennials become politically active. Their civic norms may be more participatory as they tend to think that citizens ought to participate in a broader repertoire of activities (Dalton, 2016, pp. 28–29). In accordance with this, our hypothesis is:

H3a: Millennials with higher psychological engagement with politics are more likely to have supported citizens’ initiatives.

When it comes to the generational differences between millennials and older generations, it is again commonly believed that younger citizens have lower psychological engagement (Inglehart, 1997), even if some claim that some of the differences may be due to younger citizens having a different view of what is political (O’Toole et al., 2003). Nevertheless, the question of differences in the effect of being engaged on participation is less clear-cut. Thijssen (2016) suggests that the vote choice of younger citizens may be more driven by ‘new politics’ values. García-Alabacete (2014, pp. 158–160) showed that political interest has a stronger effect among older people when it comes to traditional political activities, whereas it is stronger for
younger people when it comes to non-institutionalized forms of participation. These findings in combination with the novelty of the citizens’ initiative in Finland means that the most likely expectation is for psychological engagement with politics to have a stronger effect on involvement in the citizens’ initiative among millennials:

**H3b:** *Psychological engagement with politics has a stronger effect on the propensity to support initiatives among millennials compared to the rest of the population.*

**Networks**

Social institutions, such as family, voluntary associations, workplaces, schools or religious institutions, function as political recruitment sites that help mobilize individuals into political action (Verba et al., 1995, p. 369). Putnam (2000) suggested that even non-political associational involvement serves to create social capital, which increases the likelihood of political participation. As with the general population, we expect millennials with stronger networks to be more likely to use the citizens’ initiative. Our hypothesis is therefore:

**H4a:** *Millennials with stronger networks are more likely to have supported citizens’ initiatives.*

When it comes to differences in effect for recruitment networks between millennials and the general population, García-Albacete (2014, pp. 158–161) finds that party identification has a weaker effect among young people, while the differences for associational involvement are small. Although new form of recruitment networks, like the Internet, may play a central role in predicting participation for the millennials (Holt et al., 2013; Xenos et al., 2014), our final hypothesis is:

**H4b:** *Networks have a weaker effect on the propensity to support initiatives among millennials compared to the rest of the population.*

In the following, we outline how we examine these hypotheses.

**Data and Variables**

In this section, we first present the Finnish case before moving on to describing the data and variables of our study.

**Finland as a Case**

Finland has been a strong representative democracy with limited formal involvement of ordinary citizens in political decision-making between elections. As response to worries over mounting political dissatisfaction, the Finnish citizens’ initiative was introduced in 2012 (Christensen, Jäske, Setälä, & Laitinen, 2017). The Finnish citizens’ initiative gives eligible voters the right to make proposals for legislation, and
if a proposal gathers support from 50,000 citizens within 6 months, the initiative can be submitted to Parliament (Christensen et al., 2016). The Finnish citizens’ initiative is an agenda-initiative, which means that Parliament makes the final decision on the proposal (Schiller & Setälä, 2012, p. 1). The new possibility to launch and support citizens’ initiatives has been popular, and at present, 959 initiatives have been launched since March 2012. About a third of eligible voters have supported at least one initiative, while about 45 per cent say they would be willing to do so if they found one they would want to support (Christensen et al., 2017, p. 424).

The Finnish case constitutes an interesting case for the present purposes, where the successful mobilization of millennials cannot be taken for granted. According to some studies (Myllyniemi, 2014, pp. 19–25), Finnish young people (15–29-year-olds) have a traditional view on politics and consider voting the best way to influence politics, while trust in the democratic system is high. However, their political participation is limited. The millennial generation has the lowest turnout (Wass & Borg, 2012) and participate less in other political activities (Bengtsson & Christensen, 2009). Nevertheless, participatory gaps exist even within the younger generation. For example, among the 25–34-years-olds, the turnout in parliamentary elections of 2015 was 79 per cent among those who completed a higher education, whereas it was only 31 per cent for those who only had a primary school education (Saari, 2018). It is, therefore, interesting to explore whether the citizens’ initiative can help reduce the participation gap not only between generations but also within the Finnish millennial generation.

**Data**

The data are from the Finnish National Election Study 2015 (FNES2015; Grönlund & Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2015). The survey includes 1,591 responses and was collected by TNS Gallup Finland from 24 April to 7 July 2015 in face-to-face interviews. We use weighting to ensure that the sample is representative of the Finnish population.

**Defining Millennials**

There is no consensus on the proper definition of millennials, even if it is commonly agreed that millennials are born somewhere between the 1980s and the mid-1990s. For our purposes, we use the definition offered by Pew Research Central and define millennials as the individuals born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2018). This means that the respondents included 417 millennials aged 19–34, whereas the remaining 1,176 respondents belonged to the general population. A dummy variable is used to indicate whether respondents belong to the millennial generation or not. Most of the general population are not only respondents who are 35 or older but also include 13 respondents aged 18 (excluding these from the analyses make no difference for the substantial results, but we chose to keep them).

**Dependent Variable**

To measure support of citizens’ initiatives, we use a question in FNES2015 where respondents indicate whether they supported a state-level citizens’ initiatives (to avoid confusion with a similar instrument at the local level in Finland). The answers
were given in four categories: (a) ‘Have not and will not’; (b) ‘Have not, but might do’; (c) ‘Have supported 1–2 initiatives’ and (d) ‘Have supported at least 3 initiatives’. Since the interest here lies in examining actual participation rather than attitudes towards the citizens’ initiative or the extent of participation, the answers were subsequently recoded to a dichotomy: ‘Did not support’ (coded 0) and ‘Supported at least 1 citizens’ initiative’ (coded 1).

**Independent Variables**

We use four sets of explanatory variables. The first set includes various background variables related to demographic factors and family background, while the other three sets of variables are derived from the CVM. All variables are standardized to vary between 0 and 1 to make coefficients comparable. We explain what variables are included in each group, and descriptive information is presented in Table 1. Several studies have found that family background and socio-demographic characteristics influence youth participation (Quintelier, 2013; Smets & Neundorf, 2013; Verba et al., 1995). For this reason, we include variables that take this into account. These include gender, which is a dichotomous variable (male = 1). We also include perceived childhood class, where respondents indicate what social class they believe their childhood home belonged to. This is a categorical variable, which includes working class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class/upper class, farmer or entrepreneur. We also include a variable measuring the perceived influence of the childhood home on political opinions to grasp the extent of political socialization in childhood.

We include variables measuring each of the three aspects that CVM emphasizes for predicting participation (Verba et al., 1995): civic resources and skills, psychological engagement with politics and networks.

For civic resources and skills, we include education as an indicator for civic skills. This is measured with a seven-point scale with 1 indicating the highest level of education completed. We also include a variable measuring factual political knowledge in the form of an index measuring the number of correct answers to five factual political questions concerning current events and basic democratic principles to capture the scope of knowledge adequately. Four answer alternatives were presented to the respondents for each question. Compared to open-ended questions, this approach may overestimate the extent of knowledge due to false positives, but according to previous research, the differences appear to be minor, and the multiple choice approach has been shown to adequately capture the extent of knowledge of the respondent (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993). We also include household income to measure available economic resources. The variable is constructed by grouping respondents into 10 income groups of roughly equal sizes to acknowledge that this is a rough measure of income. Finally, we include a variable indicating whether the respondent has full-time employment or not (dummy variable 1 = full-time employment, 0 = anything else).

We include four variables that concern psychological engagement with politics. One variable measures the degree of political interest (four-point scale, 1 = highest interest). Political trust is measured with an index constructed based on the extent of political trust in the following institutions and actors measured on a scale of 0–10: ‘The Finnish government’, ‘The Finnish Parliament’, ‘The Finnish President’,
### Table 1. Distribution of Characteristics, Millennials and Rest of Population

| Background                                      | Range | Total Population | Millennials (19–34) | Rest of Population | Significance* |
|------------------------------------------------|-------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| **Gender**                                     | Dummy 0/1       |                  |                     |                    | 0.597         |
| Female                                         | 0      | 793 50.0         | 212 51.1            | 581 49.6           |               |
| Male                                           | 1      | 794 50.0         | 203 48.9            | 591 50.4           |               |
| **Perceived childhood social class**           | Perceived social class of childhood home 0/5 |                  |                     |                    | 0.000         |
| Working class (Ref)                            | 0      | 565 36.1         | 135 33.2            | 430 37.1           |               |
| Lower middle class                             | 1      | 163 10.4         | 58 14.3             | 105 9.1            |               |
| Middle class                                   | 2      | 311 19.9         | 123 30.2            | 188 16.2           |               |
| Upper middle class/Upper class                 | 3      | 112 7.2          | 35 8.6              | 77 6.6             |               |
| Farmer                                         | 4      | 317 20.2         | 29 7.1              | 288 24.9           |               |
| Entrepreneur                                   | 5      | 98 6.3           | 27 6.6              | 71 6.1             |               |
| **Childhood home impact on political values**  | 0–1 (Highest extent of impact) | 0.48  (0.01) | 0.47  (0.02) | 0.49  (0.01) | 0.305         |
| **Civic resources and skills**                 |        |                  |                     |                    |               |
| Education                                      | 0–1 (Highest level of education completed) | 0.47  (0.01) | 0.53  (0.01) | 0.44  (0.01) | 0.000         |
| Political knowledge                            | 0–1 (Highest knowledge) | 0.57  (0.01) | 0.46  (0.01) | 0.61  (0.01) | 0.000         |
| Income                                         | 0–1 (Highest income bracket) | 0.51  (0.01) | 0.43  (0.02) | 0.54  (0.01) | 0.000         |
| **Employment**                                 | Dummy 0/1       |                  |                     |                    | 0.132         |
| Other                                          | 0      | 1087 68.5        | 272 65.5            | 815 69.5           |               |
| Full-time employment                           | 1      | 500 31.5         | 143 34.5            | 357 30.5           |               |

Source: The authors.

Notes: Entries are number of percentages of respondents for categorical variables; mean scores with standard errors in parentheses for continuous variables. *Significance indicates result from a \( t \)-test calculated with Welch's approximation/Pearson's \( c^2 \) for categorical variables.
| Psychological engagement | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Political interest       | 0–1 (Very interested) | 0.61 (0.01)     | 0.54 (0.01)     | 0.63 (0.01)     | 0.000            |
| Political trust          | 0–1 Highest level of trust | 0.63 (0.00)     | 0.59 (0.01)     | 0.65 (0.00)     | 0.000            |
| Internal efficacy        | 0–1 (Highest level of efficacy) | 0.36 (0.01)     | 0.35 (0.01)     | 0.37 (0.01)     | 0.338            |
| Citizen norm             | 0–1 (Participatory norm) | 0.44 (0.00)     | 0.51 (0.01)     | 0.42 (0.01)     | 0.000            |
| Networks                 | | | | | |
| Social Trust             | 0–1 (Highest level of trust) | 0.66 (0.01)     | 0.64 (0.01)     | 0.66 (0.01)     | 0.077            |
| Member of association    | Dummy 0/1        |                 |                 |                 | 0.000            |
| No                       | 0                | 918             | 58.0            | 277             | 67.1             | 641              | 54.7             |
| Yes                      | 1                | 666             | 42.1            | 136             | 32.9             | 530              | 45.3             |
| Party identification     | Dummy 0/1        |                 |                 |                 | 0.000            |
| No                       | 0                | 805             | 51.0            | 266             | 64.6             | 539              | 46.2             |
| Yes                      | 1                | 773             | 49.0            | 146             | 35.4             | 627              | 53.8             |
| Internet usage           | 0–1 (Highest usage) | 0.71 (0.01)     | 0.94 (0.00)     | 0.63 (0.01)     | 0.000            |
| n                        | 1591             | 415             | 1176            |                 |                  |

Source: The authors.

Notes: Entries are number of percentages of respondents for categorical variables; mean scores with standard errors in parentheses for continuous variables. Significance indicates result from a t-test calculated with Welch’s approximation/Pearson’s $\chi^2$ for categorical variables.
‘Politicians’ and ‘Political parties’. An exploratory factor analysis shows that the five items load uniformly onto a single dimension (eigenvalue = 3.437), and it is therefore measured with a composite index (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.91). The internal political efficacy is measured with answers to a question on the comprehension of political matters (the statement, ‘Sometimes politics seems so complicated that I can’t really understand what is going on’, is rated on a four-point Likert scale, 1 = highest efficacy). Finally, we include citizen norms, which is a variable grasping the developments in civic norms identified by Dalton (2016). The variable is an index based on answers to two questions where respondents indicate the extent to which they agree with statements on the role of citizens as more duty-based or more engaged (‘It is important that citizens constantly voice their opinions’ and ‘Citizens must influence the direction of politics primarily by voting in elections’; 1 = participatory norm).

The final aspect includes variables that gauge the organizational involvement of the respondent in formal and informal networks. We include two standard measures of social capital (Putnam, 2000): social trust (answers to question ‘Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or you can’t be too careful’ on an 11-point scale) and associational involvement (dummy variable 0 = no, 1 = yes). We include party identification to grasp involvement within formal political parties (dummy variable 0 = no, 1 = yes) and the extent of Internet usage to examine the effect of the Internet on usage (How often do you use the Internet? 1 = more than 2 h per day). Although this measure does not make it possible to distinguish how respondents used the technology or for what purposes, it gauges the extent to which they access these possibilities on a regular basis.

The inclusion of several items that cover similar aspects of the CVM may increase the risk for multicollinearity in the analysis. However, VIF scores suggest there are no cause for concern since the highest VIF score is 1.48 for education and the average VIF score is 1.29. Correlation analysis indicates similar conclusions since most correlations are weak or average, the highest Pearson’s correlation coefficient being 0.41 between full-time employment and income. Hence, there is nothing to suggest that multicollinearity affects the results from multiple regression analysis. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, we use logistic regression analysis (logit) with robust standard errors. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics on all variables.

Analysis

We first explore differences in the distribution of the independent variables between millennials and the rest of the population. Table 1 shows mean scores for millennials and the rest of the population.

There are several important differences between millennials and the general population. For resources and skills, millennials have slightly higher levels of education, but lower levels of political knowledge and income, whereas the employment situation is similar. The pattern is less clear-cut when it comes to psychological engagement with politics, where millennials have lower levels of political interest
and trust, but have more participatory civic norms. Relating to networks, the differences for social trust are negligible, while millennials are less likely to be involved in voluntary associations or identify with a political party. This may be compensated by Internet usage, where millennials are significantly more active than the rest of the population.

Hence, there is no uniform tendency for millennials to hold either lower or higher levels of characteristics that may promote involvement in supporting citizens’ initiatives. The implications for involvement in supporting citizens’ initiatives may therefore be mixed.

To examine H1 and the extent to which millennials make use of the citizens’ initiative, we, as shown in Figure 1, start by plotting the relationship between percentages supporting initiatives and age.

The scatterplot shows that younger people tend to be more active in supporting initiatives, and older generations are less likely to be involved. Nineteen-year-olds form an exception, but this is hardly surprising since they have had a much shorter time to find an initiative they want to support. Furthermore, while the younger are more likely to be active, it is also clear that there is considerable variation around the fitted line. A bivariate regression indicates that the relationship between age and supporting initiatives is curvilinear since a quadratic term is significant (age $B = 0.36, p < 0.01$; age$^2 B = -0.01, p < 0.000$).

The main question for H1 is whether millennials (between the vertical lines at age = 19 and age = 34) are more likely to participate than the rest of the population.

![Figure 1. Percentage of Supported Citizens’ Initiatives and Age](source: The authors.)
(to the right of the line), as suggested by H1. We tested differences in mean values between millennials and the general population with the help of a *t*-test, the results of which are shown in Table 2.

The results show that, on average, 49 per cent of the millennials have supported at least one citizens’ initiative, whereas only 28 per cent of the general population have done so. This difference is significant (*p* < 0.000) and shows that millennials are more likely to support initiatives compared to the rest of the population, and this finding supports H1.6

H2a, H3a and H4a are concerned with what type of millennials make use of the possibility to support citizens’ initiatives. To examine this, we performed logistic regressions among the millennials to examine how well the characteristics derived from CVM explain the willingness to support initiatives. The results are shown in Figure 2.7

The coefficient plot of regression results displays the coefficients as dots, while the lines are 95 per cent confidence intervals. Dots to the right of the vertical dotted line are positive coefficients, while those to the left are negative coefficients. When the confidence intervals do not overlap the vertical line, it entails that the coefficients are significant at *p* < 0.05.

For the background variables, we see that there is a slight gender difference since female millennials are more likely to use the citizens’ initiative, especially when considering other factors. The impact of childhood factors appears limited, even if those coming from a lower middle-class background are less active compared to those from a working-class background in the multiple regression.

For civic resources and skills, the most interesting result is the negative significant coefficient for income that we find in the multiple regression, even though the association is non-significant in the bivariate analysis. This shows that having a lower income than expected considering other factors is associated with a higher propensity for supporting citizens’ initiatives. The weak effect of education is also noteworthy. It is less surprising that factors like education lose significance when including more factors in the model, since these effects are mediated through

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**Table 2. T-test for Mean Differences in Supporting Citizens’ Initiatives Between Millennials and Rest of Population**

|                  | N   | Mean | 95% CI         |
|------------------|-----|------|----------------|
| Millennials      | 413 | 49.15| 44.32–53.98    |
| Rest of population | 1156| 28.37| 25.77–30.98    |
| Total            | 1569| 33.84| 31.50–36.19    |
| *T*              |     | −7.8026|          |
| Degrees of freedom |   | 1567 |              |
| *P* (H0: Millennials = Rest) |   | 0.0000 |            |

**Source:** The authors.

**Notes:** Unweighted data. Levene’s robust test statistic for the equality of variances between the groups showed that we cannot reject the hypothesis that the variances are equal. Nevertheless, we rechecked results using Satterthwaite’s and Welch’s approximations for the degrees of freedoms to test the differences, and the levels of significance are equal.
attitudinal and network factors in accordance with the CVM model. However, the differences are non-significant even in the bivariate regressions, which suggests that using the citizens’ initiative is an egalitarian form of participation compared to other modes of participation where education plays a strong role (Marien, Hooghe, & Quintelier, 2010). This suggests that citizens’ initiatives also attract millennials with fewer resources and skills, thereby promoting democratic inclusiveness. The only result that really contradicts this pattern is the coefficient for millennials with full-time employment, who are more likely to make use of the initiative, which shows that a connection to the labour market is an important asset. Nevertheless, the evidence in total refutes H2a since there is little evidence to suggest that civic skills and resources is a primary factor for explaining millennials’ use of the citizens’ initiative.

When it comes to psychological engagement with politics and H3a, only political interest has a positive significant effect in the multiple regression, while the coefficients for political trust, internal efficacy and citizen norms grow insignificant when including all factors. For the latter two, there are positive significant effects in the bivariate analyses, showing that active millennials are characterized by more positive attitudes in these regards, although it is impossible to establish independent effects. For political trust, the coefficient is negative, which shows that active millennials tend to have lower levels of trust, although the evidence here is even shakier. All in all, it is not possible to confirm H3a since the differences for psychological engagement with politics are inconclusive.
The situation is similar for H4a and the variables connected to networks. While the associations are in the expected positive direction, they are generally not significant, even in the bivariate analyses. The only exception is party identification, where those millennials who identify with a political party are more likely to engage, but this effect grows insignificant in the multiple regression. It is surprising that the effect of the Internet usage is not significant considering how important this technology is often claimed to be for this generation. However, the popularity among millennials is exactly the reason why there is no discernible effect, since both those who supported and those who did not are ardent users of the Internet. Therefore, the most appropriate conclusion is to reject H4a.

H2b, H3b and H4b are all concerned with whether there are differences in effects for millennials compared to the rest of the population. To test this suggestion, we did a moderation analysis to examine whether the relationships between the CVM factors and the propensity for supporting citizens’ initiatives differ for millennials and the general population. This is tested by including interaction effects in the multiple regression model. Each interaction effect consists of a dummy indicating being a millennial and one of the characteristics included in the model. Since this leads to 13 interaction effects, we decided to include them separately to avoid overfitting the statistical model. This means that we run an increased risk of Type I errors in the form of false positives, that is, finding moderating effects that are not present. The main results are reported in Table 3.

First, we see that for several characteristics, the differences are more pronounced among millennials than in the rest of the population. The coefficients for gender, lower middle class, income, employment and internal efficacy are significant among millennials, but not in the rest of the population. Coming from a farmer background, political interest and citizen norms, on the other hand, have a significant effect in the rest of the population, but not among millennials.

Despite these differences, there are no significant interaction effects at a conventional \( p < 0.05 \) threshold, implying that we cannot conclude that there are differences in effects between millennials and the rest of the population. Since significance tests can be misleading when it comes to interaction effects (Brambor, Clark, & Golder, 2006), we plotted differences between millennials and the rest of the population in the predicted probabilities for supporting initiatives depending on the characteristics that come closest to significance: Childhood impact on political opinions \((p = 0.082)\), full-time employment \((p = 0.077)\) and internal efficacy \((p = 0.053)\). The results are shown in Figure 3.

The plots show predicted developments in the likelihood of participation for millennials and the rest of the population for different values of childhood impact on political opinions, full-time employment and internal efficacy. The results reveal some tentative differences since all three factors have a stronger mobilizing effect among millennials than that of the rest of the population, where the effects are meagre or even negative. Nevertheless, the substantive differences are minor, especially considering that few respondents place themselves at the higher ends of the characteristics among the millennials. Considering this and the lack of statistical significance for any of the interaction effects, we reject H2b–H4b.
Table 3. Moderation Analysis of Differences in Effects Between Millennials and Rest of Population

| Background                                      | Millennials | Rest of Population | Interaction Effects |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Gender (ref. Female)                           | −0.69*      | −0.17              | −0.38              |
| Childhood class (Ref. Working class)           |             |                    |                    |
| Lower middle class                             | −1.01*      | −0.19              | −0.78              |
| Middle class                                   | −0.28       | 0.09               | −0.36              |
| Upper middle class/Upper class                 | −0.63       | −0.49              | −0.04              |
| Farmer                                         | −0.87       | −0.82**            | 0.11               |
| Childhood impact on political opinions         | 0.63        | −0.17              | 0.76               |
| Civic resources and skills                     |             |                    |                    |
| Education                                      | 0.08        | 0.15               | −0.08              |
| Political knowledge                            | 0.02        | 0.10               | 0.03               |
| Income                                         | −1.33*      | −0.02              | −0.56              |
| Full-time employment                           | 0.98**      | −0.09              | 0.59               |
| Psychological engagement                      |             |                    |                    |
| Political interest                             | 1.15        | 1.03**             | 0.57               |
| Political trust                                | −1.49       | −0.95              | −0.10              |
| Internal efficacy                              | 1.13*       | −0.13              | 1.00               |
| Citizen norms                                  | 1.41        | 2.05***            | −0.68              |

(Table 3 Continued)
| Networks                          | Millennials | Rest of Population | Interaction Effects |
|----------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|---------------------|
|                                  | β          | 95% CI            | β          | 95% CI | β   | 95% CI | P  |
| Social trust                     | 0.47       | −0.79 1.74        | 0.44       | −0.42 1.29 | 0.33 | −1.02 1.69 | 0.630 |
| Associational involvement (ref. No) | −0.06      | −0.66 0.55        | 0.15       | −0.24 0.53 | −0.14 | −0.77 0.49 | 0.661 |
| Party identification (Ref. No)   | 0.48       | −0.12 1.09        | 0.43*      | 0.06 0.80 | 0.13 | −0.50 0.77 | 0.686 |
| Internet use                     | 0.71       | −2.08 3.50        | 1.71***    | 1.09 2.33 | −0.61 | −3.24 2.02 | 0.648 |

**Source:** The authors.

**Notes:** The first two columns show coefficients and 95 per cent confidence intervals for separate multiple logit regression analyses among millennials and the rest of the population. The third column shows logit coefficients, 95 per cent confidence intervals, and significance levels for interaction effects between millennials/rest of population dummy and the characteristic in question from analysis of pooled data. Each interaction effect was examined separately. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.
Figure 3. Predicted Probabilities of Supporting Citizens’ Initiatives for Millennials and Rest of Population; Childhood Impact on Political Opinions, Full-time Employment and Internal Efficacy

Source: The authors.
Conclusions

There are significant concerns about millennials’ disengagement from institutionalized forms of politics and, consequently, an increased interest in possibilities to mobilize them through new participatory mechanisms.

Our study of millennials and the citizens’ initiative in Finland gives some hope that it is possible to attract millennials into more formalized forms of political participation. The Finnish citizens’ initiative has successfully mobilized millennials since this generation is the most frequent user of the initiative. While this does not necessarily mean that they will learn to embrace the participatory habits of older generations, it at least shows that they are by no means doomed to be political drop-outs (Milner, 2010). On the contrary, when given the chance to participate on their own terms, they are willing to do so. Hence, while reviving democracy necessitates adapting representative structures to suit the needs of younger generations, the task appears feasible.

However, this success may create new problems. Introducing new participatory methods can increase participatory exclusion, as already active citizens are more likely to embrace new participatory possibilities (Dalton, 2017; Donovan & Karp, 2006; Smith, 2009). Our results were comforting also in this regard since we found little evidence to suggest that the citizens’ initiative only mobilized certain groups of millennials with specific participatory resources. It is especially noteworthy that educational attainment does not skew participation among millennials, and having a lower income is even linked with a higher propensity for using the citizens’ initiative. These results suggest that the citizens’ initiative also attracts millennials with fewer resources and skills, thereby furthering democratic inclusiveness. This finding supports Zittel and Fuchs (2007), who claim that providing new participatory forms can mobilize otherwise passive citizens, thereby helping to assure greater equality in participation. This is important since governments are more likely to listen to citizens who exercise their political voice (Dalton, 2017). This shows that while the citizens’ initiative is no panacea for democratic ails, it can help ensure that more voices are heard in the political debate.

Finally, we found no evidence to suggest that the CVM model works fundamentally differently for millennials, which is in line with the work of Grasso et al. (2018) and Kestilä-Kekkonen (2009), who also find that explanatory factors have roughly the same effects across age groups. Moderation analysis shows that CVM works among millennials as it does for the general population, which suggests that we need to consider the differences in the distribution of key participatory resources when we are to comprehend the differences between millennials and the rest of the population. The most pervasive difference we found here was that the millennials use the Internet more than the rest of the population (even millennials who did not support citizens’ initiatives). This is in line with previous research that has found that providing online access is central for mobilizing millennials (Holt et al., 2013; Xenos et al., 2014). That taking advantage of the new technological possibilities seems to be the key for mobilizing millennials may also provide a lesson for other forms of participation such as voting. The introduction of e-voting could help mobilize millennials, thereby decreasing generational differences in this regard.

While these results are encouraging for the political participation of millennials, our results come with some caveats. Most importantly, we only rely on cross-sectional
data. Hence, we are unable to establish whether this is a generational or a cohort effect (Grasso et al., 2018; Smets & Neundorf, 2013). It may be that the current results are only valid for the current generation of citizens who became politically mature when the citizens’ initiative was introduced, while future generations will find it less appealing as yet another expression of politics-as-usual. We also need to acknowledge that our models fail to adequately explain the involvement of millennials. Hence, although we explain all major explanatory factors included in the literature on political participation, there may be some unobserved factors that fundamentally alter our current conclusions. Despite these uncertainties, our conclusion so far is that all hope is not lost for the political involvement of millennials and the future of democracy.

**Table A1. Logistic Q Regression Models Among Millennials**

| Background                        | Bivariate Coef | Bivariate SE | Bivariate P | Multiple Coef | Multiple SE | Multiple P |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|
| Gender (ref. Female)              | -0.460         | 0.211        | 0.029       | -0.686        | 0.295        | 0.020       |
| Childhood class (Ref. Working class) |                |              |             |               |              |             |
| Lower middle class                | -0.428         | 0.302        | 0.157       | -1.008        | 0.459        | 0.028       |
| Middle class                      | -0.005         | 0.228        | 0.981       | -0.281        | 0.355        | 0.430       |
| Upper middle class/Upper class    | -0.396         | 0.365        | 0.278       | -0.628        | 0.576        | 0.276       |
| Farmer                            | -0.137         | 0.444        | 0.757       | -0.866        | 0.609        | 0.155       |
| Entrepreneur                      | 0.392          | 0.419        | 0.350       | 0.204         | 0.557        | 0.714       |
| Childhood impact on political opinions | 0.517    | 0.313        | 0.098       | 0.632         | 0.407        | 0.120       |
| Civic resources and skills        |                |              |             |               |              |             |
| Education                         | 0.530          | 0.487        | 0.277       | 0.078         | 0.749        | 0.917       |
| Political knowledge               | 0.724          | 0.363        | 0.046       | 0.025         | 0.598        | 0.967       |
| Income                            | -0.550         | 0.361        | 0.127       | -1.333        | 0.551        | 0.016       |
| Full-time employment              | 0.534          | 0.222        | 0.016       | 0.976         | 0.359        | 0.007       |
| Psychological engagement with politics |            |              |             |               |              |             |
| Political interest                | 1.720          | 0.423        | 0.000       | 1.148         | 0.714        | 0.108       |
| Political trust                   | -0.278         | 0.566        | 0.624       | -1.492        | 0.818        | 0.068       |
| Internal efficacy                 | 0.896          | 0.374        | 0.016       | 1.131         | 0.533        | 0.034       |
| Citizen norms                     | 1.428          | 0.613        | 0.020       | 1.406         | 0.820        | 0.086       |
| Networks                          |                |              |             |               |              |             |
| Social trust                      | 0.889          | 0.513        | 0.083       | 0.473         | 0.647        | 0.464       |
| Associational involvement (ref. No) | 0.386    | 0.227        | 0.089       | -0.056        | 0.307        | 0.855       |
| Party identification (Ref. No)    | 0.777          | 0.227        | 0.001       | 0.485         | 0.311        | 0.119       |
| Internet use                      | 1.691          | 1.079        | 0.117       | 0.713         | 1.424        | 0.616       |

**Source:** The authors.

**Notes:** Entries are coefficients (Coef) from logistic regression models with robust standard errors (SE) and significance (P).
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Notes

1. To settle this issue conclusively, we would need longitudinal data spanning several generations, which is currently unavailable.
2. At the time of writing, 32 initiatives collected the required 50,000 signatures and 25 had been submitted to Parliament.
3. Part of the survey was self-administered, but we only rely on data from face-to-face interviews. For more information on data collection and access, see https://services.fsd.uta.fi/catalogue/FSD3067?tab=description&lang=en&study_language=en
4. Survey studies always entail a risk of biases since some groups may fail to answer questions truthfully. Nevertheless, this approach is the best available considering our research questions.
5. The questions were (% correct answers): (a) ‘Who was the Finnish Minister of Finance right before the recent parliamentary elections?’ (69.9%); (b) ‘What was the unemployment rate in Finland in February 2015?’ (29.4%); (c) ‘Which of the following parties has the second largest number of seats in the newly elected Parliament?’ (76.1%); (d) ‘Who is the current Secretary-General of the United Nations?’ (50.0%) and (e) ‘What do you think is meant by a parliamentary system of government?’ (58.3%).
6. As Figure 1 also shows, respondents who are slightly older than the millennials are also more active than the population at large, meaning the citizens’ initiative is not only used by the millennials. Nevertheless, there is nothing that indicates that the millennials are less active as the sceptics propose.
7. All regression models are included in Table A1.
8. Only 57 respondents (13.8%) report seeing themselves at the higher levels of childhood impact on political opinions and 25 respondents (6.2%) do so for internal efficacy. The number of millennials in full-time employment is higher, but still only include 143 respondents (34.5%). These figures show that even when the differences appear to be substantial, they are valid for a limited number of people.

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