

4 Political Participation in Southeast Europe

A Scoping Review

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Introduction

The quality of democratic governance has declined globally (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). Unlike the democratic collapses of the past, the latest wave of autocratization is gradual instead of abrupt (Bermeo 2016). Countries experiencing autocratization have moved from liberal or electoral democracies to electoral autocracies (Lührmann et al. 2018), stable types of regimes with characteristics of both democracies and autocracies (Levitsky and Way 2002), which have proliferated since the early 2000s (Levitsky and Way 2020). In autocratizing countries, democratic institutions have become a facade, concealing entrenched power in the formal institutions, ensuring that while elections are held, power transfer has become unlikely (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). This wave of autocratization has severely hit the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Following the Great Recession of 2008–2009, Hungary and Serbia, as well as Poland and Turkey, were among the five countries that experienced the sharpest decline in Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)'s Liberal Democracy Index (Wiebrecht et al. 2023).

The democratic malaise in stable democracies has been developing through growing citizens' disillusionment with electoral politics, decreasing political participation and interest, declining trust in institutions and overall disengagement (Mansbridge 2020; Merkel 2014; Norris 1999; Rahman and Russon Gilman 2019; Scharpf 1999). In the process of autocratization in Central and Eastern Europe, the political competition becomes distorted (Hauser 2019; Helms 2021; Ilić 2022; Laštro and Bieber 2021), and other forms of informal political participation, such as protests, gain ground, which signal dissatisfaction with the regime or its policies (Borbáth and Gessler 2020; Brancati 2016; Ekiert and Kubik 2017). This shrinking of the democratic space for political opposition, civil society and other social and political actors intensified particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022 (Bethke and Wolff 2020; Edgell et al. 2021; Fiket, Pudar Draško and Ilić 2023).

Political participation has been one of the most central topics of contemporary research on political processes, and the research findings show different ways in which it has changed in the last decades. While conventional participation,

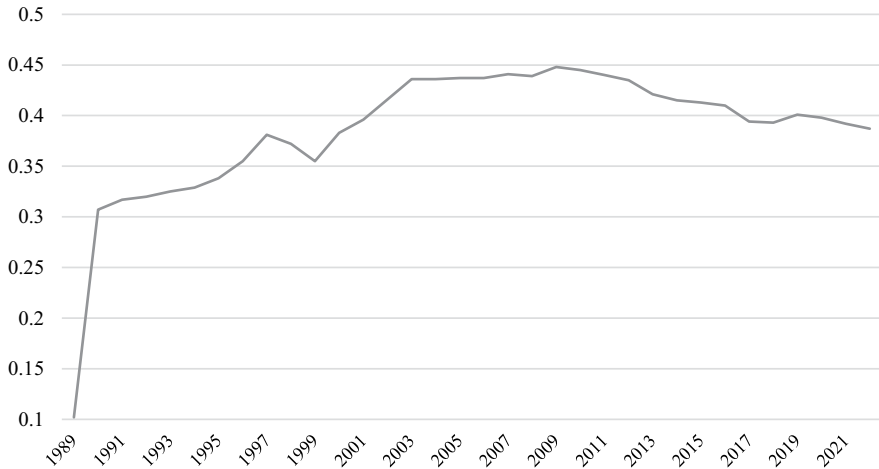


Figure 4.1 Mean SEE V-Dem Participatory Democracy Index 1989–2022, unweighted.

such as voting, has declined, unconventional forms, such as protests, have proliferated, and new modes of participatory innovations have been taking ground (Dalton 2008; Grasso 2016; Norris 2002; Van Deth 2014).¹ However, we are still determining what happened to participation in Southeast Europe (SEE) between the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. Looking at the V-Dem Participatory Democracy Index from the end of the Cold War to 2022, for the 11 countries of the region, the average unweighted score rose until 2009 and has declined since then (Figure 4.1). However, how much do we know about this process? This chapter surveys the literature about broadly understood participation in broadly conceived SEE to address this question. How has the research agenda on political participation changed during this period, and what have we learned from it about participatory practices?

For our analysis, we employ a scoping review of academic literature on political participation published from 2010 to 2022 in the SEE region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia).² Even though SEE has different geographic and political definitions, we opted for a broader scope that would include neighboring countries, more often associated with Central Europe.

Our review identified several gaps in knowledge production and problematic silo effects in article publishing, limiting their scope and visibility. Based on these insights, we argue for studying participation outcomes more, using more complex methodologies, especially causal inference and comparative designs.

Among the main findings is that the scientific output regarding political participation has increased in this period, particularly articles focusing on unconventional and innovative modes of participation and those studying youth

participation. We relate these developments to the much-featured topic of disengagement from conventional institutions of participation, which could have deep roots in the influence of informal institutions and networks in the region. We also elaborate on a question from the literature about how much participation contributes to democratization, especially how participatory innovations fall along these lines.

In the following sections, we will first describe the method of our scoping review, the search strategy, the parameters of inclusion and exclusion of articles and the coding procedure. In the second part, we deal with the meta-findings about producing academic knowledge on participation. We examine the temporal and geographic variations of article publishing, the patterns of author affiliations, methods used in the articles, frequencies of different modes of participation investigated, and the types of populations under study. In the third part of the chapter, we review the main findings from the literature. We do this by dividing the literature based on two criteria: antecedents and outcome on one side and by mode of participation (conventional, unconventional and innovative). We also explore the subtopics that emerge in these six categories. We close the chapter by discussing the main findings and proposals for new research.

Methods

This chapter explores and describes key trends in the recent academic literature on political participation in SEE. Following Fink (2005: 3), we conducted a literature review as a form of a systematic, explicit and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded works produced by researchers, scholars and practitioners. We opted for a scoping review after considering different types of systematic literature reviews (Booth et al. 2016). A scoping review was well suited for exploring the literature of a broad topic, aiming to map the existing body of work and provide a descriptive summary covering a wide range of study designs (Pham et al. 2014). In contrast to systematic reviews, a scoping review does not attempt a quality assessment of the evidence but instead offers a snapshot of a topic (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). We aim to describe the patterns of knowledge production, highlight significant findings and organize this extensive body of knowledge into coherent categories. Compared to a typical scoping review, ours uses scientometric data to make meaningful insights and trace the structural relationships and changing foci of scientific knowledge (Sooryamoorthy 2021).

Search Strategy

We employed a keyword search in the Core Collection of the Web of Science (WoS) to identify pertinent articles for this review. While no single indexing database can provide an exhaustive list of relevant material, and all have

different biases, we chose the WoS database due to its wide use in research syntheses, comparatively extensive coverage and relative absence of non-journal sources (Denyer and Tranfield 2009; Jano 2022; Lutz, Hoffmann and Meckel 2014; Martín-Martín et al. 2018; Mongeon and Paul-Hus 2016).

We applied the following keywords to the studies' titles, abstracts, and keywords: (political participation OR citizen participation OR civic participation OR political engagement OR citizen engagement OR civic engagement OR democratic innovation OR deliberation) AND (Southeast Europe OR Balkans OR Albania OR Bosnia OR Bulgaria OR Croatia OR Hungary OR Kosovo OR Macedonia OR Montenegro OR Romania OR Serbia OR Slovenia). The former eight keywords aimed to reflect the range of terms used to examine various forms of political participation. At the same time, the latter 12 focused the search on the region of interest.

To further refine our search, we included only (1) peer-reviewed articles (2) published in English (3) between 2010 and 2022. We formulated these additional inclusion criteria to focus our search on mainstream academic knowledge that had undergone the established peer-review process and to broader accessibility to a global research audience, as English is more universally understood and accessible compared to multiple local languages used in the region. We took 2010 as the starting year for our review, as it is commonly taken as the start of autocratization in the region following the global recession (Ágh 2022; Bochsler and Juon 2020). This narrowed our search to 368 entries. Both authors then independently screened all articles, excluding those deemed irrelevant, meaning those that only briefly mentioned political participation as contextual background, did not refer to the target countries or focused on broader, nonpolitical forms of prosocial behaviors, such as helping strangers. The authors initially disagreed on 19 articles but resolved the discrepancies through discussion. This process ultimately led to the inclusion of 149 articles for analysis.

Coding Procedure

To provide a concise overview of the selected research, we developed coding categories in line with the study objective. We began by recording each article's title, abstract, publishing journal, year of publication and authors' names and affiliations. We further determined whether the article employed a single-country or comparative perspective and identified which target countries were included in the analysis.

Next, we assessed the form(s) of political participation analyzed in the article. We understand political participation as any form of citizen engagement that aims to influence the authorities' decisions or policies. While there is no universally accepted classification of political participation (e.g., Ekman and Amnå 2012), following Kaim (2021), we maintained the division between the conventional and unconventional modes of participation. Still, we also introduced a third mode of innovative participation. While voting is considered a

cornerstone of conventional participation, protests are the most typical unconventional mode. Besides voting, conventional participation encompasses all forms of citizens' political activities that engage institutions of representative democracy, such as attending political meetings, donating to and participating in political parties and participating in formal policy- and decision-making processes. On the other hand, unconventional participation includes various legal and illegal extra-institutional political activities, including civic activism or any politically driven consumption (boycotts and buycotts). Still, there is no agreement in the literature on which forms of participation fall neatly into one of the two categories. Some forms, such as petitions, we understand as conventional or unconventional depending on the context of the article.

The third mode is innovative participation, which, following Geissel (2013: 10), includes “procedures consciously and purposefully introduced to mend current democratic malaises and improve the quality of democracy” in a country. As long as these procedures are introduced as novel in a country and aiming at improving participation, we call it innovation, irrespective of whether it has already been tried in some other country. Innovative participation, therefore, encompasses modes of political participation devised to address the crisis of representative democracy and empower citizens to take a more active role in political life. Examples include deliberative institutions, participatory budgeting and other participatory consultations and decision-making forms.

Finally, we sought to explore the diverse approaches to studying political participation. To do this, we examined how political participation was positioned within each study, i.e., whether the focus was on determinants, characteristics or consequences of participation. We also coded the research methods and the populations to which the analyzed participation pertained. We recorded the most notable findings of each study as reported by the authors in the abstract or concluding section.

Main Findings

Production of Academic Knowledge

Between 2010 and 2022, academic knowledge production on political participation in SEE has gradually increased. On average, 11.5 articles were published yearly, around one monthly article. The early half of this period saw relatively modest numbers, with the annual publications remaining in single digits and dropping to a low of just four articles in 2010 and 2013. However, subsequent years, particularly from 2020 to 2022, experienced a more pronounced increase, peaking at 24 published papers in 2022 (Figure 4.2). This increasing trend might signal growing academic interest, possibly spurred by declining regional political participation.

A total of 326 authors contributed to these articles. Most (178, 55%) had affiliations with institutions within SEE, while 148, or 45%, had affiliations outside the region. Within the region, authors affiliated with Romania (58

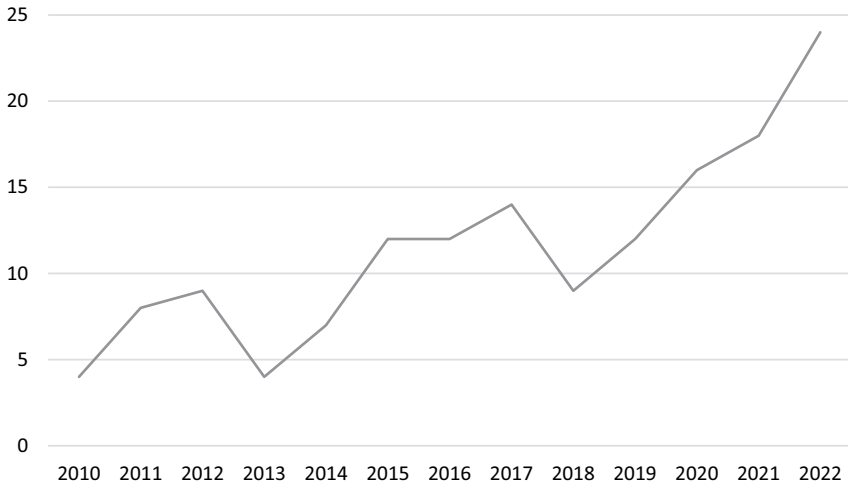


Figure 4.2 The number of articles about participation in SEE per year.

authors), Serbia (33), Croatia (24) and Hungary (24) were the most represented. In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina (9 authors), Albania (6), North Macedonia (4), Kosovo (2) and particularly Bulgaria (1) had notably fewer contributors. No authors were affiliated with institutions from Montenegro. While there is an observable correlation between a country’s population size and the number of contributing authors’ affiliations, the disparity between Bulgaria and Serbia, with their similar population sizes, is intriguing.³ Other factors, such as differing research priorities, might be at play.

Turning our attention beyond SEE, 29 authors had affiliations with the United Kingdom and 29 with US institutions. Germany and Italy were represented by 12 authors each. The remaining affiliations were spread across 22 other countries, highlighting the global academic interest in SEE’s political participation and a clear dominance of the UK and US academic institutions in shaping the knowledge about the region.

We were also interested in patterns of cooperation in producing the articles. Most articles were written by multiple authors (94 or 63%), while a minority (55 or 37%) were single-authored. Of the articles with multiple affiliations, 49 were by authors affiliated with academic institutions within the region, 23 were affiliated with institutions out of the region, and 22 involved authors from the region and the outside. However, a striking picture emerges regarding articles authored by persons with affiliations in different countries. While cooperation of authors affiliated with institutions from different countries from outside the region is common and found in 16 articles, only 3 articles involved authors affiliated with institutions from more than one country in the region. This points to a pattern in the production of knowledge where researchers from within the

region only partially benefit from the insights and contextual knowledge made by their peers across the border.

We additionally analyzed the cooperation of authors within or between countries in the region and outside of the region. We found a significant effect on where the articles can be published and how visible these results can be. Articles from authors from outside the region are published in higher-ranking journals than those with affiliations from the region only. However, this effect is absent in the articles where authors with affiliations from the region and beyond the region cooperate. These articles are published in journals whose rankings are not significantly different from the highest-ranking ones.⁴

Geographical Focus

In the analyzed articles, 114 focused on political participation within a single country, while 35 undertook a multicountry approach. Consistent with the trend in authors' affiliations, Romania was the most frequently researched country, featuring in 38 articles⁵; it was followed by Serbia (28 articles), Hungary (25), Croatia (23), Bosnia and Herzegovina (22) and Slovenia (19). Interestingly, while Bulgaria had a sparse representation of authors' affiliations, it was the subject of 13 articles. On the other hand, Montenegro was the least studied, appearing in just five pieces (Table 4.1).

This distribution holds a similar pattern for single-country studies: Romania (30), Serbia (18) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (14) together account for almost half of these articles. When looking at studies that included multiple countries, Croatia and Hungary were the most commonly included countries in 12 articles in this subset. Serbia and Slovenia appeared in ten articles, while Montenegro and Albania were featured the least, each appearing in only four.

Table 4.1 The geographic focus of the articles about political participation in SEE 2010–2022

<i>Geographic Focus</i>	<i>Articles</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Single Country</i>	<i>Multiple Countries</i>	
Romania	30	8	38
Serbia	18	10	28
Hungary	13	12	25
Croatia	11	12	23
Bosnia and Herzegovina	14	8	22
Slovenia	9	10	19
Bulgaria	5	8	13
Kosovo	7	5	12
North Macedonia	3	6	9
Albania	3	4	7
Montenegro	1	4	5
Total	114	87	201

Modes of Political Participation

We found a very balanced ratio of conventional (67 studies or 41%) and unconventional (64 studies or 39%) modes of political participation researched. Innovative modes garnered considerably less attention, represented in only 33 studies (20%). Although numerous studies examined multiple political activities, these typically fell within the same mode of participation. A mere 15 of the 149 studies spanned across different modes.

The most prevalent forms of conventional political participation studied were electoral actions, such as voting in elections and referenda, and partisan activities encompassing party membership, donations and attending rallies. Additionally, several studies examined citizens' interactions with politicians, predominantly at the local level, highlighting involvement in working groups and similar bodies in policymaking processes. Protests and broader civic activism took center stage in the literature for unconventional modes. When it came to innovative modes of participation, there was a distinct focus on deliberative mechanisms like citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting and similar forms of deliberative decision-making. Also noteworthy was the exploration of online innovations designed to enhance citizen participation in political consultations and decision-making processes.

Our analysis suggested another notable trend: the latter seven years of our sample period saw a tripling in articles focusing on unconventional (from 15 to 49) and innovative (from 8 to 25) modes of participation. While the attention to conventional involvement did increase, the growth – from 26 to 41 studies – was less pronounced. This evolving trend might reflect the growing academic interest in unconventional participation mechanisms, which the literature suggested have proliferated recently. In contrast to countries such as Slovenia, where only one in ten articles dealt with unconventional participation, this was the case with more than half of the articles about Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which points to a possible connection to the crises of representation that has occurred in these countries lately.

Methods Used

We also found a balance of methodologies used in the analyzed articles. Quantitative research methods accounted for 47% ($n = 70$) of the examined articles, while qualitative methods comprised 44% ($n = 66$). The remaining studies were either based on mixed methods, constituting 5% ($n = 7$) or lacked empirical examination or a specified research method at 4% ($n = 6$). Surveys emerged as the predominant research method, featured in 63 studies. They were succeeded by in-depth interviews, participant observations and document analyses, represented in 28, 19 and 19 studies, respectively.

Survey studies predominantly probed the determinants of conventional and unconventional participation forms. Many of these studies employed large-N datasets, such as those derived from the European Social Survey (for instance, see

Backović and Petrović 2021; Nistor, Tirhaş and Ilut 2011; Pešić, Birešev and Trifunović 2021). Others utilized original instruments (e.g., Kostadinova and Kmetty 2019; Oana 2019; O’Brochta 2022). In contrast, employing qualitative methodologies was noted for altering prevailing perceptions of the region’s ostensibly passive citizens. This change was attributed to the in-depth examinations that unveiled modes of participation commonly overlooked in survey analyses (e.g., Pickering 2022). Intriguingly, among the nations sampled, only Serbia (with 18 qualitative studies against 9 quantitative ones) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (12 vs. 8) had a higher representation of qualitative research over quantitative.

Populations Under Study

In examining the populations in our sample, we identified five primary target groups: the general population (represented in 45% of the articles), the youth (25%), active citizens (16%), women and vulnerable groups (6%) and elites (3%). Another 5% (or seven articles) focused on various other groups. Studies scrutinizing political participation within the general population proved the most varied in terms of research methods, countries of focus and modes of participation explored.

One-fourth of the studies delved into the participation habits of varying youth demographics, reflecting prevalent concerns about diminishing youth participation. This encompassed adolescents (e.g., Srbijanko, Avramovska and Maleska 2012; Milošević-Đorđević and Žeželj 2017), university students (Burean and Badescu 2014; Marciniak et al. 2022) and young adults (Feischmidt 2020; Lep and Zupančič 2022). Notably, there was a discernible uptrend in studying youth participation; only 6 articles were published in the initial six years of our sample, in contrast to 31 in the subsequent seven years. Also, Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro are the only countries where more than half of all articles deal with youth.

Active citizens, including protesters and activists, were predominantly examined in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, each being the focus of seven studies. This emphasis is attributable to significant political events and movements in these countries that attracted the attention of scholars. Examples include the 2014 unrest in Bosnia (e.g., Lai 2016; Murtagh 2016) and the legacy of anti-war and anti-regime protests during Serbia’s authoritarian era in the 1990s (e.g., Fridman 2011; Nikolayenko 2013).

Sparse attention was given to other distinct groups. This category featured a modest number of studies on women’s political participation, primarily concerning anti-war activism (e.g., Bilić 2011; Chao 2020; Dimitrova 2017), and a few delving into the political participation of ethnic minorities (Bačlija and Haček 2012; Savić-Bojanić 2022). Finally, we found only five studies that investigated politicians, civil servants and experts (e.g., Mohmand and Mihajlovic 2014; Oross, Mátyáss and Gherghina 2021); this is a reminder that the supply side of political participation, alongside interactions between citizens and decision-makers, remains a comparatively uncharted domain.

Factors Influencing Political Participation

Most studies explored factors that promote or inhibit political participation ($n = 119, 80\%$). These articles predominantly focused on how individual characteristics influence political involvement. Such features encompass sociodemographic traits, psychological attributes, political attitudes, perceptions, norms and values. Other articles investigated contextual determinants. The factors that influence political participation are organized following the explained classification into conventional, unconventional and innovative modes of participation.

Antecedents of Conventional Participation

Most articles dealing with conventional participation investigated electoral and non-electoral formal modes of participation, either nationally or locally. Others dealt with phenomena such as disengagement and the entrenched informal practices that inhibit participation. The remaining articles investigated participation in the context of post-conflict societies or dealt with the participation of minorities.

A large portion of the articles were dedicated to studying voter behavior. Deimel et al. (2022) found that political knowledge and trust in political institutions explained variations in adolescents' electoral participation. The effect of political knowledge was partly mediated by trust, which was negatively associated with political knowledge in Bulgaria and Croatia. Robert, Oross and Szabó (2020) delved into the relationship between employment status and political participation in Hungary. Their results indicated that the unemployed were less likely to vote. At the same time, however, precarious employment did not influence electoral participation, and individuals with more autonomy in their jobs showed increased involvement in electoral and other forms of conventional political participation. Ančić, Baketa and Kovačić (2019) concluded after analyzing class membership in Croatia that it did not directly affect voter turnout. Still, it was mediated through political efficacy and interest in politics, as higher-class members showed greater interest in politics and better assessed their understanding of politics. Gheorghiuță (2015) studied the leader effects, the added value brought by leaders to the electoral performance of their parties, among Romanian voters, and found a significant influence of political knowledge and party identification on the leader effects. Considering the effect of political messaging on participation in Croatia during the electoral campaign, Babac and Podobnik (2018) found that political messages with positive emotions and a two-way and tolerant communication of political actors increased citizen engagement.

The post-conflict context frequently emerged in the literature, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Alacevich and Zejcirovic (2020) found that Bosnian municipalities that experienced more violence against civilians had lower voter turnout. Another study (Hadzic and Tavits 2019) used experimental design

and showed the interaction between the post-conflict setting and individual attributes. Priming participants to past violence in this study increased voting intent among men but had the reverse effect in women. Glaudić and Lesschaeve (2022) studied the effects of voters' communities' exposure to war violence in Croatia, showing that populations more exposed to war violence rewarded war veterans in elections but that in areas whose populations avoided destruction, they were penalized.

Most research on non-electoral participation focused on youth participation, especially the individual-level factors. In a comparative study, Angi, Badescu and Constantinescu (2022) determined that volunteering positively affected youth political participation. Lenzi et al. (2012) came to a similar conclusion regarding family affluence, democratic school climate and perceived neighborhood social capital in Romania. A study by Marciniak et al. (2022) compared student civic engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found no country-specific differences when examining students from Croatia, Lithuania and Poland. Instead, a recurring pattern emerged. Students' psychological well-being predicted civic engagement across the three nations, exemplified by factors like positive relations with others, personal growth and autonomy. The role of formal education was found to be more ambiguous. Persson et al. (2016) studied the effects of education on participation in Slovenia and three other countries out of the region. They found that an additional year of schooling had no detectable effect on political knowledge, democratic values or political participation. Similarly, Oana (2019) found that students' behavior in Hungary and Romania did not significantly differ from that of nonstudents, starkly contrasting with the college-effects model that argues that enrolling in higher education influences sociopolitical attitudes. They concluded that previously observed effects of student status on political participation and sociopolitical attitudes more generally might have been confounded with age or family background.

Other studies focused on contextual determinants of political participation. Botrić (2022) found that in Croatia, the size of a settlement shapes both the perceived participatory repertoires available to the youth and the kind of political activities toward which they gravitate. Specifically, she observed that smaller settlements foster participation in political organizations among the youth. Conversely, larger settlements see youth more inclined toward unconventional endeavors, such as protests. Others looked at the potential for civil society engagement. Pospieszna and Vráblíková (2022) found high mobilizing potential for culturally liberal issues in five postcommunist countries and a weak link between culturally conservative mobilizing potential and civil society engagement. Analyzing civil society assistance in Kosovo, Fagan (2011) found that receiving a European Union (EU) grant triggered a degree of network formation and, in some instances, engaged civil society organizations in knowledge formation and policy engagement, working with communities around identifying development priorities.

Several studies examined the supply side of political participation and the role of institutional designs. The study by Vodo and Stathopoulou (2015) compared the constitutions of Serbia and Albania regarding the space they provide for citizens to exercise their rights to initiate protests and referenda. The study concluded that while the two countries have distinct constitutional and historical trajectories, there was a common outcome: the space provided by the constitutions for participation is largely utilized by the opposition parties rather than ordinary citizens. Studying the broader region of Eastern Europe, Greskovits (2015) concluded that pure neoliberal capitalist regimes are more likely to undermine popular political participation than those that balance marketization with social protections.

In contrast to the national level, the difference in non-electoral engagement at the local level was also considered in some articles. For example, Koprić and Klarić (2015) found that citizens' initiatives, referenda and consultative meetings are not frequently used participatory mechanisms in Croatia. Citizens are more interested in the central than the local government in a highly centralized system. Several studies from Romania dealt with the problem of participation at the local level. Haruța and Radu (2010) found that politically elected officials in Romania control decision-making at the local level. Crețu et al. (2022) found significant differences in active citizen participation related to the size of the commune, with smaller communes seeing more engagement. Radu (2019) examined the low level of citizens' participation in the decision-making process's local consultation and deliberation stages and found that the chances to be included in final decisions were higher if they were voiced during Local Council meetings. Duțu and Diaconu (2017) found that satisfaction can be both an enhancer and an inhibitor of participation and that the highest level of satisfaction can inhibit the consultation process.

Several other studies also dealt with disengagement and barriers to participation from the citizens' perspective. Pascaru and Butiu (2010) explained these barriers as ranging from citizens' indifference to the fear inculcated during the communist regime in Romania. Srbijanko, Avramovska and Maleska's (2012) findings concur with the former, identifying signs of high apathy, early resignation and detachment from the community among Macedonian youth. Neaga (2014) pointed to patriarchal constraints that profoundly affect the capacity of women representatives in Romania to promote gender interests. Tworzecki and Semetko (2012) explored the information environment, particularly how engagement with varied news outlets in the new democracies of Hungary, Czechia and Poland might foster or deter political involvement. They found a positive effect of exposure to broadsheet newspapers and news magazines on political participation. The Serbian case was studied thoroughly, including the causes and consequences of disengagement. Matić (2012) looked at the perceptions of the opportunities offered by the structure of the political system to participate in democratization processes in Serbia. She found that the public perceives democracy as a desirable aim, while on the other hand, citizens are highly dissatisfied with the performance of the political elite. Pešić, Birešev and

Trifunović (2021) researched structural inequalities and found that Serbian citizens exhibit one of the highest levels of internal political inefficacy but that this sense does not correspond to the levels of political participation. Answering a similar puzzle, Greenberg (2010) pointed out that nonparticipation should be centered as a useful critical lens in democracy scholarship, as nonparticipation in conventional politics can be understood not as an absence but as a presence of moral, political and cultural engagements. Addressing the common perception of widespread political passivity, Petrović and Stanojević (2020) found that Serbian citizens are more inclined to pursue unconventional or newer forms of political activism, such as ethical and political consumption and petition signing, than conventional modes of political participation.

The influence of informal institutions, primarily through clientelism and patronage, has also been examined, especially the links between informal and formal participation. Mohmand and Mihajlovic (2014) argued that citizen participation in the Western Balkans was not weakly institutionalized but rather informally institutionalized. Lantos and Kende (2015) pointed to the political socialization perspective in Hungary. The informal socialization agents, such as family and peer influences, played an important role in political socialization, while the influence of formal agents, such as school, was missing. On the institutional level, the informality was seen as an obstacle to democratic reforms in the region. Lyon (2015) argued that the advocates of decentralization in North Macedonia have failed to sufficiently appreciate the extent to which the pervasiveness of patronage-based politics and overdominance of political parties, which lack internal democracy, undermine the reform's potential benefits. Iancu and Soare (2016) analyzed the postsocialist party organizational adaptation of the Bulgarian and Romanian socialist parties. They found that informal reward structures explain the high variation in the patterns of party organization. Drishti, Kopliku and Imami (2022) explored the employment pathways under conditions of political clientelism. They found that entry-level jobs in Albania are used as an incentive for vote buying and political engagement of graduate students. Yet, the authors also found that this political engagement negatively affects life satisfaction and migration intentions.

Antecedents of Unconventional Participation

The factors affecting unconventional participation were primarily investigated regarding protests and civic activism, the embeddedness of individuals in wider social structures, the role of the post-conflict environment, and ethno-nationalist mobilization. The research topics of importance were also the exposure to news and social media and the political engagement of youth, as opposed to the general population.

Participation in protests and civic activism was explored in several articles through the embeddedness of individuals in broader structures. Dergić et al. (2022) considered the role of families and communities of belonging, which

affected the engagement of Croatian activists. Iguman, Mijatović and Nikolić (2022) analyzed a local initiative in Belgrade and found that even though it was politically potent, it did not have a strong foothold in the community and thus received only passive support. Susánszky, Kopper and Tóth (2016) studied the participants of demonstrations against and pro-government in Hungary and found that mobilization for the two demonstrations was radically different. The main difference, according to them, was in the nature of the embeddedness of participants in civil organizations and their media consumption habits. Rone and Junes (2021) studied the protest behavior of Bulgarian migrants in the EU. They determined a more complex scale of forms of protest organization and participation in which Bulgarian migrants participated, facilitated by social media and the freedom of movement within the EU.

Some authors pointed to the long-term legacies in the region that can help explain participation patterns. Rammelt (2015) compared regions in Romania that were parts of the Austro-Hungary and Ottoman Empire and found evidence of these historical legacies' impact on protest behavior in Romania. Cvetičanin, Popovikj and Jovanović (2019) explored the culture of informality in the countries of the Western Balkans and identified perceptions of the level of informality, lack of trust in institutions and readiness to justify informality as the strongest predictors of informal practices.

Several articles dealt with protest mobilization and activism in the post-conflict context. Among the works dealing with protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lai (2016) argued that they resembled the movements calling for social justice in the post-2008 crisis in Europe and, in that sense, had to be framed differently. Mujkić (2015) also analyzed the protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina and argued that citizen participation undermined the dominant ethno-nationalist ideological hegemony. Further, Pickering's (2022) study provided an illustrative example of the significance of societal norms and political perspectives on participation. This research highlighted that Bosnian citizens are driven by aiding those in need and addressing everyday problems to engage in unconventional participatory activities that span protests, boycotts and strikes. However, the same study revealed another dynamic where a minority of citizens with conservative values exhibited more robust mobilization than those who emphasized socioeconomic concerns. As opposed to protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina, protest behavior in postwar Kosovo remained significantly shaped by perceived ethnic grievances, and perceived ethnic discrimination was strongly associated with individual protest participation, according to Kelmendi and Skendaj (2022).

Ethno-nationalism as a prevailing framework for mobilization was examined regarding the general population and specific actors, such as women or youth. Analyzing activism in post-conflict societies, Bilić (2011) found Serbian and Croatian women activists could not evade the ethno-nationalist constraints of their surroundings, while Chao (2020) studied women's activism in Kosovo at the intersection of gender and nationhood. In a different setting, Feischmidt (2020) found that new forms of nationalism play a major role in the

radical right turn among the youth in Hungary. Feischmidt argued that this new form of nationalism is driven by a general sense of disempowerment and claims for collective dignity, framed in a hierarchical and mythical discourse about the nation.

Beyond the protests in post-conflict societies, the focus was also on protest framing and interactions within and between protests. Fairclough and Mădroane (2020) and Cmeciu and Coman (2016) highlighted how different framing strategies contributed to collective activation in ecological protests in Romania. Other authors looked at the interactions within and beyond social movements. Margarit and Rammelt (2020) attributed the lack of interaction between protests and trade unions in Romania to their incompatible mobilization frames. In the case of cooperation between different civic protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the pragmatic symbiosis between them was created based on the interests of separate groups but ultimately could not reconcile their views (Repovac-Nikšić et al. 2022).

Another focus on explaining protest and activist behavior was exposure to news and social media. A study set in Romania (Corbu et al. 2020) found that exposure to positively and negatively charged partisan news had a greater potential to motivate citizens to support the government online than exposure to disinformation and satire. Still, the effect was moderated by government approval. Further, Parent (2018) found that media coverage of refugees was an important motivating factor for first-time migration activists in Hungary, Serbia, North Macedonia and Greece. Burean and Badescu (2014) found that time spent online had a negative effect on the protest engagement of students in Romania, while gender, distrust in institutions and family income also influenced protest behavior. However, a later study by Mercea, Burean and Proteasa (2020) investigated the degree to which political information shared on public Facebook event pages during the Romanian #rezist protests influenced the participation of students and found that students are more likely to partake in demonstrations if they followed a page. Considering the widely documented extreme polarization of media landscapes in the region, the lack of media professionalism and growing anti-press hostility (e.g., Camaj 2023; Markov and Đorđević 2023; Markov and Min 2021, 2022; Polyák 2019; Stojarová 2021; Trifonova Price 2019), it came as a surprise that our sample did not include more studies reflecting on the impact of political information systems and audience–media relations on political participation.

The political engagement of youth, through activism or protests, was particularly interesting to the researchers. Petrović and Stanojević (2019) studied Serbian youth engagement from the perspective of value and instrumental motivations. They found that the motivation tends to vary between the different types of organizations, professional and grassroots. Engagement in professional organizations was more often instrumental and value-driven in grassroots organizations. Social capital had a positive and significant influence on the civic engagement of Croatian youth (Gvozdanović 2016), and youth protest engagement was positively linked to the pro-democratic and diversity-embracing

attitudes of students in Romania (Burean 2019). Regarding obstacles to the protest mobilization of youth, Susánszky (2020) dealt with the perception of risk in participating in demonstrations among university students in Hungary and found that almost half of students saw their participation in demonstrations as risky. Finally, Garic-Humphrey (2020) found generational differences among protesters in Bosnia and Herzegovina important when it came to opinions on the use of violence for creating political changes, reliance on existing political structures or creating new ones and whether power should be distributed horizontally or hierarchically.

Antecedents of Innovative Modes of Participation

A smaller portion of the articles dealt with factors that explain innovative participatory practices. This included participation in citizen assemblies, intraparty deliberation or participation in new policy areas, such as the environmental governance of urban planning.

What makes deliberation happen, and what makes it successful? Oross, Mátyáss and Gherghina (2021) explain why the Budapest Climate Assembly was organized and pointed to the local city government's commitment to deliberative decision-making tools. The commitment, in turn, was determined by a combination of election pledges, ideological matching, pursuit of economic interests and the desire to achieve environmental sustainability at the local level. Deliberative processes are increasingly used in engaging citizens in new policy areas. Sarlós and Fekete (2018) emphasized the need for the government to adapt communication strategies to engage disengaged citizens toward nuclear issues in Hungary. Peric and Miljus (2021) explored the role of moderators in the public deliberation procedure for regenerating military brownfields in Serbia. Intraparty deliberation was studied as a feature of new left-wing or progressive parties in Hungary in Romania (Oross and Tap 2021; Stoiciu and Gherghina 2021). Informal institutions and informal participatory activities are argued to have hindered participatory governance in Slovenia and Romania (Bergmans et al. 2015; Van Assche et al. 2011). Regarding participatory urban planning, some of the authors argued that there was a lack of democratization of planning or the overall state of democratic development in Hungary and Serbia (Bajmócy 2021; Perić 2020). On the other hand, in a study of Bucharest, Nae et al. (2019) pointed not to the lack of democracy in planning as much as to high engagement but the equally high fragmentation of civic initiatives.

Outcomes of Political Participation

A smaller portion of the articles (32 or 21%) examined the consequences of political participation. Like the articles that dealt with the antecedents, these articles also ranged from the changes in individual opinions or values following the participation to the effects at the more aggregated levels of analysis.

Outcomes of Conventional Participation

Most articles dealt with the effects of participation in electoral and policymaking processes. Electoral participation positively affected political interest in Romania (Gherghina and Bankov 2021) and increased motivation to pay taxes in Hungary (Dobos and Takács-György 2020). In a rare historical empirical study, Kouba (2021) determined that the introduction of compulsory voting in Austria-Hungary, despite boosting voter turnout, did not increase the support for parties representing the working classes. Two studies from Slovenia and Bulgaria concluded that including a broader scope of actors in the policymaking process improved the performances of local government (Nahtigal and Brezovšek 2011; Petrova 2011).

Some articles analyzed participation at a macro level. Greskovits (2015) pointed out that mass citizen participation before the 2009 crisis did not contribute to the subsequent resilience of democracies. Gora and de Wilde (2022) argued that liberal democratic backsliding in the region and declining participation are, in reality, separate processes.

Outcomes of Unconventional Participation

Studies of unconventional participation primarily focused on qualitative investigations of different forms, characteristics and effects of activism using context-rich approaches and qualitative methods. These studies included the formation of counterpublics in Serbia and Bulgaria (Dawson 2018), informal interactions in Romania (Nistor, Tîrhaş and Ilut 2011), everyday political talk in Bulgaria (Bakardjieva 2012), digital storytelling in Slovenia (Marshall, Staeheli and Čelebičić 2020) and digital activism in Croatia (Car 2014). Further, the studies examining the 2014 protests and plenum movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Agarin 2021; Murtagh 2016) highlighted the importance of studying the long-term effects of unconventional political participation. They found that the protest movement did not aim to enter formal politics and produce immediate political change. Instead, it strove to affect the political culture and civic consciousness in the long run, empowering citizens to recognize that they can influence political processes in their countries.

Outcomes of Innovative Modes of Participation

Studies also dealt with the effects of innovative participation, such as deliberative mini-publics. A comparative study set in Bulgaria and Australia found that intergroup contact through deliberative polling might increase support for policies benefiting minorities and improve intergroup relations (Kim, Fishkin and Luskin 2018). These findings are only partially consistent with those from Serbian studies examining citizens' assemblies, organized not by decision-makers but by academic actors and marked by the absence of policymakers. As a result, participating in a citizens' assembly led to increased political knowledge,

sophistication and willingness to engage in local decision-making (Janković 2022). Still, it did not increase institutional trust and further decreased participants' satisfaction with local democracy (Fiket, Ilić and Pudar Draško 2022).

Besides participation in deliberative mini-publics, articles investigated various other participatory mechanisms. A study from Albania (Dauti 2015) analyzed a top-down approach devised to promote participation at a local level. The study found that participating in a meeting with local decision-makers led to greater political knowledge, trust in institutions and satisfaction with the system. Milosavljević et al. (2020) analyzed participatory budgeting projects in Serbia and concluded that some political will for their implementation existed. The authors concluded that more effort is needed to promote this mechanism and ensure its sustainability. In Romania, Boc (2019) assessed participatory budgeting in Cluj-Napoca more favorably, emphasizing how these projects influenced the local administration's openness to more inclusive and collaborative forms of governance. Finally, some studies explored the effects of involving vulnerable groups in innovative practices. Vuksanović-Macura and Mišćević (2021) found that the involvement of a marginalized Roma community in consultations surrounding land-use plans for informal settlements helped build consensus among stakeholders in Serbia.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the academic literature published between the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. Our goal was to shed light on the nature and scope of research evidence concerning participation in SEE. To do that, we answered two main questions: if and how the research agenda of political participation has changed, and what can we learn about participatory practices in this period from the literature?

To the first question, regarding academic knowledge production, the analysis showed that, between 2010 and 2022, the scientific output on political participation in SEE steadily increased. We argue that this trend might suggest growing academic interest in political participation as an aspect of the declining or stagnating quality of democracy in most of the region. This view was further corroborated by another trend of an increasing number of articles focusing on unconventional and innovative modes of participation in contrast to conventional forms. We interpret it as reflecting the academic interest in the undergoing shift from conventional to alternative participatory mechanisms in the real world.

Concerning knowledge production, we found a strong positive correlation between a country's population size and the number of contributing authors' affiliations. Nevertheless, there was also a striking disparity between Serbia and Bulgaria and a complete absence of affiliations from Montenegro. These are some of the gaps in knowledge production we identified. More effort should be put into engaging the authors from these countries to get the research program of political participation underway. Another pattern we established is the

minimal cross/country cooperation of authors within the region. There simply is not sufficient interaction and exchange of perspectives, and we argued that this silo effect is hurting the visibility of the research output of regional authors. However, the authors from the region also publish articles with those from outside the region. We found this very useful for the visibility of research, as such cooperation led to articles being published in journals with higher impact.

Regarding the topics and methods of research, the vast majority of the articles, four out of five, explored the antecedents of political participation, which means that the research on the participation outcomes is still relatively unexplored. We found balanced methodological approaches, with quantitative and qualitative methods almost equally used. However, very few articles used more complex research designs, which would, for example, include mixed methods. These two elements of research design, studying participation outcomes and using more complex methodologies, seem lacking in the current state of the art.

Even though most articles dealt with the general population, approximately one-fourth of all studies delved into the participation habits of varying youth demographics. This may reflect a prevalent concern about diminishing youth participation in the region. A discernible uptrend in studying youth participation developed parallel with the democratic backsliding in the region. In addition, we found very few studies dealing with interactions between citizens and representatives or decision-makers, even though this issue could be considered central to the current challenges to democracies in the region.

Some countries stood out by the frequency of specific topics, for example, Bosnia and Herzegovina with protests, Serbia with disengagement, Romania with voting behavior, Albania with youth or Slovenia with conventional participation. However, overall, we did not identify any of the main topics of actors as absent from a country or a group of countries. However, we have identified very few comparative designs, which seems like an approach that might yield interesting results.

What did the literature tell us about participatory practices in SEE? The findings about the antecedents of voting behavior mostly do not stand out from the expected in the general literature. However, non-electoral participation has particular dynamics in the region. Political participation has a low supply side, so disengagement and barriers to participation are widespread. Active participation features prominently only at the very local level. The roots of this disengagement from conventional participation could be in the persevering influence of informal institutions and networks, which, to some authors, seem more influential than formal ones. The embeddedness of individuals in broader societal structures is well described as a determinant of participation in protests and activism, where risks and commitment are higher than in voting behavior. Some authors pointed to the long-term legacies in the region that can help explain these participation patterns. However, the authors also argue that nonparticipation should not be observed as an absence but as a different form of institutionalization of political participation.

Regarding the outcomes of political participation, some studies point in the direction of improvement of the performances of institutions. However, other authors question how much participation contributes to democratization. These points might initially seem contradictory, but they might be understood in connection with the hybrid nature of political regimes where democratic institutions are maintained, while at the same time, power is centralized in the executive branch, and it is not willingly shared with the citizens. Participatory innovations fall along these same lines. They are primarily connected to a wish of progressive political actors to reinvigorate democracy, but otherwise, they exhibit mixed effects in an environment not supportive of participation.

In addition to the informality, a significant part of the participation puzzle can also be found in the complex effects of the legacies of violence. Citizen participation is still challenged and undermined by the competing ethno-nationalist ideological mobilization patterns. This is not a major topic in the body of literature we reviewed, but it is an unavoidable part of the explanation in the background.

Based on this scoping review, we could identify several possible directions for future research.

- For one, even though we made inferences about the connection between participation and the state of democracy, we still do not have sufficient evidence about the nature of relations between democratic backsliding in the region and declining participation.
- Second, even though studies deal with the longer-term effects of conventional participation and short-term outcomes of unconventional and innovative, we need to understand how the latter two modes of participation develop over more extended periods. We should study the long-term effects of protests, citizen engagement and participatory innovations, such as citizen assemblies or participatory planning. We particularly need to understand the question of the sustainability of these newer or more impermanent institutions.
- Very few of the studies dealt with the interactions of different actors or modes of participation. On the one hand, we do not know enough about how, for example, protest and voting participation interact, even though they are some of the most ubiquitous forms of political participation. However, we also found few studies dealing with interactions between citizens and elected representatives.
- The link between information environments and political participation, particularly how different media repertoires associate with participation, is ripe for comparative analysis of the region. In addition, how digital media promotes both the supply and demand side of participation is similarly under-researched.
- At the individual level, we should better understand generational differences and older adult political participation. A common assumption is that young people tend to be disengaged from formal politics; many studies thus

investigated youth participation, particularly in unconventional forms. Conversely, no study focused on older adults and considered generational differences in mechanisms driving participation. This is very unusual, considering all countries we analyzed are rapidly aging, and the proportion of the older generation is increasing.

- Special attention should be given to the spillover and backfire effects of democratic innovations. Innovative interventions sometimes fail to achieve desired outcomes, arguably more so in less democratic environments. How can these backfire effects be countered? Can innovative institutions motivate nonparticipants to engage?
- Finally, informal institutions and dark participation could explain the participation outcomes and disengagement from conventional institutions. Their toll on political participation should be researched, but it should be done through a lens of the culture of informality entrenched throughout the region.

Notes

- 1 For more on conceptualizations of political participation and criticisms of traditional participatory models, see Chapter 3 in this volume. For a discussion on how participation connects active citizenship, social movements and democratic innovations, see Chapter 2.
- 2 We acknowledge the ongoing conflict about the status of Kosovo. When discussing the political participation in Kosovo, we do not take a position regarding its status.
- 3 We performed a Pearson correlation coefficient and found a significant strong positive correlation between the number of article country affiliations and 2020 country population, $r(9) = .86, p = .001$. Population data source: UN Population Division Data Portal.
- 4 We conducted a one-way ANOVA between subjects to compare the effect of different patterns of authorships on Web of Science JCI (Journal Citation Indicator) scores of the articles in conditions in which the author or authors are only affiliated with the regional institutions, only affiliated with the institutions outside of the region or if the authors of the article are affiliated with both. We found a significant effect of authorship patterns on journal ratings at the $p < .05$ level for the three groups, $F(2,146) = 4.74, p = .01$. Tukey's post-hoc test showed that the mean JCI score for the articles with only regional affiliations ($M = .66, SD = .70$) was significantly different than the JCI score for the articles with affiliations from outside the region ($M = 1, SD = .55$). However, the articles that involved both regional and affiliations from outside the region ($M = .93, SD = .56$) did not significantly differ from the other two groups.
- 5 Here, too, the results of a Pearson correlation coefficient gave a significant strong positive correlation between the number of times a country appeared as a topic of an article and country's 2020 population, $r(9) = .82, p = .002$. Population data source: UN Population Division Data Portal.

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