SENSE OF COMMUNITY, EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL ACTION
An analysis across political orientations

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RESUMEN	ABSTRACT
La literatura previa indica que la orientación política de los individuos es probable que marque diferencias entre sí en muchos aspectos (por ejemplo, los valores y la personalidad). Este estudio analiza las diferencias entre votantes de derecha y de izquierda en función del sentido de comunidad y el empoderamiento socio-político. En concreto, nuestro objetivo principal fue identificar las formas políticamente orientadas a la participación civil y política, así como a la desconexión. Se realizó una encuesta a 680 votantes en una elección primaria local. Los resultados mostraron que los simpatizantes de izquierda estuvieron más social y políticamente comprometidos que los de derechas. Ambos emprendieron caminos diferentes a la participación. Los resultados muestran que el sentido de comunidad juega un papel más relevante entre los simpatizantes de izquierdas (vs. los de derecha) y produjo más de un efecto en los procesos de movilización (vs. participación). Además indicaron que la relación entre el empoderamiento y la participación varió de acuerdo a los componentes del primero, la orientación política de los individuos, y el tipo de acción participativa considerado.	Previous literature has indicated that the political orientation of individuals is likely to make them differ from one another in many respects (e.g., values and personality). This study explored the differences between right-wing and left-wing voters in sense of community and socio-political empowerment. Our principal aim was to identify politically oriented paths to civil and political participation, as well as to disengagement. A survey of 680 voters in a local primary election was carried out. The results showed that left-wing sympathisers were more socially and politically engaged and that left- and right-wing sympathisers undertook different paths to participation. The findings highlighted that a sense of community played a more relevant role among left-wing (vs. right wing) sympathisers and produced more of an effect in the mobilisation (vs. participation) processes. Finally, the results indicated that the relationship between empowerment and participation varied according to the components of empowerment, political orientation of the individuals, and the type of participatory action considered.

Key words: sense of community, empowerment, political orientation and participation, mobilisation
[sentido de comunidad, empowerment, la orientación y participación política, la movilización]

Mobilisation and participation

The notion of mobilisation is used extensively in the social movement literature and collective action theory and is typically evoked when the scrutinised phenomenon is a protest. Walgrave and Klandermans (2010, p.

169) recently noted that "mobilisation is the process that gets the movement going". Mobilisation is the initial step of a more stable and long-term behaviour, which is participation in collective action. Specifically, Klandermans (1988) proposed to distinguish between two types of mobilisation that correspond with two phases of the mobilisation process: *consensus mobilisation*, which refers to the ability of the protest movement to gain a consensus of ideas and goals and therefore aims to enlarge the audience of sympathisers, and *action mobilisation*, which refers to the transformation of sympathisers into active participants. The process of mobilisation can also occur in circumstances in which individuals, groups and communities do not take action to protest against an unfavourable event, decision or adversary, but rather to invoke a change or sustain a vision. Moreover, mobilisation does not always entail the presence of a high-structured organisation to serve as a catalyst and instead can occur with minimal organisation, typically through virtual networks or social media (Van Stekelenburg, Klandermans, in press).

Participation is described as a pool of nearly stable and repeated patterns of behaviours across contexts and time. There is an ongoing debate on the need to distinguish and separately analyse the participatory behaviours of individuals involved in a variety of organisational settings (Dalton, 2006; Norris, 1997; Mannarini, Talò, *under review*) and to develop new, comprehensive and convincing typologies. Among the typologies, it is worth mentioning Ekman and Amnå's (2009) recent proposal that identifies three main categories of participation that can take either an individual or a collective form: (manifest) *political participation*, *civil participation* (also named latent participation) and *non-participation* (or disengagement). The three categories each include two subtypes. Political participation is either formal political participation (e.g., being a member of a political organisation, voting, running for public office, etc.) or activism (also labelled extraparliamentary political participation, e.g., signing petitions, boycotting, demonstrating, etc.). Activism in turn can be legal, as in the examples mentioned above, or illegal (e.g., civil disobedience, sabotage, violent demonstrations, etc.). Civil participation includes social involvement (or attention, e.g., taking interest in politics and society, identifying with an ideology, participating in an engaged lifestyle, etc.) and civic engagement (or action, e.g., recycling, reading newspapers, volunteering in social work and community organisations, etc.). Non-participation includes active or antipolitical forms (e.g., non-voting, non-political lifestyles, etc.) and passive or apolitical forms (e.g., political passivity, non-reflected non-political lifestyles, etc.).

The antecedents of mobilisation/participation

In regard to the factors facilitating mobilisation (and participation in general), Oegema and Klandermans (1987) highlighted the importance of motivation, or reducing the costs and increasing the benefits for mobilisation. In an integrative perspective, Van Stekelenburg, Klandermans and van Dijk (2009; 2011) proposed a model in which three fundamental motives to participate are taken into consideration: instrumental, identification, and ideological motivations. In addition to collective action studies, research in community psychology has also addressed issues concerning the antecedents of citizen mobilisation and participation in local communities. This approach highlighted that the intrapsychic and psychosocial variables that drive human behaviour must be considered in their societal context. Specifically, while there are personality variables that can be influenced by external conditions but are deeply rooted in the individual, there are also psychological variables that vary according to how individuals perceive their social and political environment. Sense of community falls into this category of psychological variables. Finally, there are also multilayered variables, such as empowerment, that include both a personality component – perceived control – and a contextual component (Zimmerman, 1990).

Sense of community and participation

Sense of community is a multidimensional construct that has become a core subject in community psychology since it was proposed by Sarason (1974), who defined it as the feeling of being a member of a larger community supported by interpersonal sharing and an emotional connection. The relevance of this construct has been shown by a large number of studies addressing the relationship between sense of community and other constructs, among which is community participation. Specifically, many studies observed that sense of community is positively related to either social participation (Berry, Portney, Thomson, 1993; Brodsky, O'Campo, Aronson, 1999; Chavis, Wandersman, 1990; Cicognani, Pirini, Keyes, Joshanloo, Rostami, Nosratabadi, 2008; Florin and Wandersman, 1984; Kingston, Mitchell, Florin, Stevenson, 1999; Wandersman, Giamartino, 1980), political participation (Davidson, Cotter, 1989; Xu, Perkins, Chow, 2010) or both (Mannarini, Fedi, 2009). Despite the large number of studies on sense of community, two aspects still need support from further evidence: the direction of the relationship between sense of community and participation, which is likely to be circular (i.e., participation leads to a greater sense of community, which in turn leads to more participation, see Levine, Perkins, 1987), and the effect of sense of community on different

types of participatory behaviours. Rollero, Tartaglia, De Piccoli, Ceccarini (2009) noted that when participation is operationalised in different terms (e.g., indirect involvement or direct political action, both related to "political participation"), the findings are difficult to compare and the general framework remains unclear. Moreover, sense of community has not been analysed in relation to the political orientation of individuals.

Empowerment and participation

Psychological empowerment is another factor that contributes to the motivation to participate. According to Zimmerman (1995), psychological empowerment includes three components: intrapersonal (i.e., an individual's competence, efficacy, and mastery), interactional (i.e., a critical awareness and understanding of the socio-political environment), and behavioural (i.e., the actions intended to affect outcomes). In a political context, a core element of the intrapersonal component is socio-political control (Holden, Evans, Hinnant,, Messeri, 2005; Peterson, Lowe, Hughey, Reid, Zimmerman, Speer, 2006; Zimmerman, 1995; 2000; Zimmerman, Zahniser, 1991), which involves the subjective perception that one's actions may have an impact on political processes and influence policy decisions in a local community (Itzhaky, York, 2003). In a similar vein, Francescato and colleagues (2007) have proposed a measure of the personal socio-political empowerment that includes three components: (a) hopefulness, which is the belief that one can exert some control over the events and their future evolution; (b) perceived competence, i.e., the belief that one can set and pursue personal relevant goals in a variety of domains; and (c) socio-political awareness, defined as the willingness to gather information on political issues and events. The empirical findings for the relationship between psychological empowerment and mobilisation/participation processes are controversial and suggest that, similar to sense of community, the two variables may be linked circularly. Although Perkins, Brown and Taylor (1996) showed that a sense of personal mastery precedes participation, other studies (Itzhaky, York, 2000; Florin, Wandersman, 1984; Stone, Levine, 1985) indicated that being involved in social action increases one's sense of competence, control and self-efficacy.

Study goals

This study had two intertwined goals. The initial goal was propaedeutic to the second goal and consisted of exploring the differences between right- and left-wing voters in the sense of community and socio-political empowerment indices and in the levels and types of mobilisation and participation.

Studies of voters in Italy and elsewhere have observed that leftists and rightists are likely to differ from one another in many respects, such as personality (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Zimbardo, 1999; 2002), values (Caprara, 2003; Evans, Heath, Lalljee, 1996), and political sophistication (Itanes, 2006). Based on these studies, voters were also expected to differ in the variables considered in the current study, although a precise hypothesis on the expected variations was not formulated at the study onset.

The second and principal goal of the study was to identify politically oriented paths to mobilisation and participation. Specifically, the aim was to explore the role played by sense of community and socio-political empowerment (in particular, its components, i.e., hopefulness, perceived control and socio-political awareness) in predicting the mobilisation and the participation of citizens (in the four variables: formal political participation, activism, civil participation and disengagement) with opposite political orientations (left vs. right).

The mobilisation process in the current study did not involve protesters and protest movements but rather a loose array of individuals and groups who were mobilised for an electoral campaign, specifically a local primary campaign, where they were called to support the candidate mayor who best represented them. The Italian left-wing coalition introduced primary elections nearly a decade ago to revitalise the involvement of and enable sympathisers to contribute to the individuation of future representatives. Analyses showed that the primary elections were successful in reducing the detachment and disenchantment of citizens towards politics, involving them in political issues, motivating them to vote, and fostering a more active role of people during the campaign (Caciagli, Di Virgilio, 2005; Diamanti, Bordignon, 2006). The detection of these mechanisms proves that both the processes of consensus and action mobilisation occur in local primary campaigns. Regarding participation processes, this study assumed Ekman and Amnå's (2009) typology illustrated above and focused on a variety of participatory behaviours, including disengagement, civil participation, activism, and formal political participation.

Method
Participants
Participants (N = 680, 51.7% female) were recruited among sympathisers who voted in the left- or right-wing coalition primary elections that chose the candidate mayor of their municipality. In total, 67.1% of participants were politically left-oriented and 32.9% were right-oriented. The average age of leftist participants was 47.3 years old (S.D. = 14.1) and 41.4

years old (S.D. = 17.1) for rightist participants (F [1, 648] = 21.6, sig. = .00). The majority of participants in the left-oriented subgroup were college graduates (62.3%), and the majority of participants in the right-oriented subgroup were high school graduates (56.7%).

Procedure
Participants were contacted at the polling stations and asked to complete a questionnaire immediately after voting in the primary elections for the candidate mayor of the city of Lecce (Italy). The left-wing coalition primaries occurred on January 22, 2012, and the right-wing coalition primaries occurred on February 26. Participants were informed that the survey investigated social and psychological issues that were relevant to politics. The questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Measures
Data were gathered using a self-report questionnaire that included multiple scales.
The Socio-political Empowerment Scale (EMPO) by Francescato, Mebane, Sorace, Vecchione and Tomai (2007) was used to measure individual empowerment. The 24-item scale is composed of three dimensions: *perceived control*, *hopefulness* and *socio-political awareness*. Items were rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
The short version of the Sense of Community Index (SCI) by Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman and Chavis (1990) was used to assess participants' sense of community. SCI is a one-dimensional scale composed of 12 items, rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items were adapted so that the city of residence was assumed as the community of reference.
To obtain an index of consensus mobilisation, an *ad hoc* scale was created consisting of 6 items rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Examples of the items for this scale included "Primaries provide an opportunity for people like you to be politically active" and "Primaries contribute to good politics".
An *ad hoc* 7-item scale was also created to rate action mobilisation. Participants were asked to indicate how often ("never", "rarely [1-2 times]", "more than a few times [3-5 times]" and "often") during the primary campaign they had undertaken a list of actions to support one of the candidates. Examples of the actions listed included organising meetings, funding, and distributing electoral materials.

Participants were additionally asked to complete a scale measuring a variety of non-exclusive participatory behaviours. Relying on the typology proposed by Ekman and Amnå (2009), a 28-item *ad hoc* scale was created, composed of the following subscales: *disengagement* (7 items, e.g., non-voting, and non-political lifestyles), *civil participation* (7 items, e.g., recycling, reading newspapers, volunteering in social work and community organisations, identifying with an ideology, and engaged lifestyles), *formal political participation* (7 items, e.g., being a member of a political organisation, voting, and running for public office) and *activism* (6 items, e.g., signing petitions, boycotting, and demonstrating).

Finally, participants were asked to provide demographic information (age, gender, education, and professional position).

Results

Initially, to include the different types of participatory (or non-participatory) behaviours in the analyses, the items of the participatory behaviours scale (Table 1) underwent a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the hypothesised structure.

Table 1
Participatory Behaviours Scale: Items

	Item	Subscale
1	Does not vote in local or national elections	Disengagement
6	Does not read newspapers or watch TV programs that address political issues	
7	Feels that politics is uninteresting and useless	
11	Refrains from talking about politics	
12	Is unconcerned with politics	
16	Is disgusted by politics	
19	Is disillusioned with politics	
2	Is interested in political issues and events	Civil participation
3	Writes to the newspaper editor	
8	Donates money to charity	
13	Discusses politics with friends and/or on the Internet	
17	Buys newspapers or watch TV programs that address political themes	

	Item	Subscale
20	Recycles or separately collects rubbish	
23	Volunteers in a social/civic/religious organisation	
28	Adopts a lifestyle with a clear social orientation (e.g., vegetarianism, anti-consumerism, punk subculture, etc.)	
4	Votes in elections or referenda	
9	Does not vote for protest or abstains from voting	
14	Contacts political representatives	
18	Runs for public office	Formal political participation
21	Donates money to a party or a political organisation	
24	Is a member of a party, syndicate or political organisation	
26	Undertakes activities in a party/syndicate/political group	
5	Boycotts products (for ethical or ideological reasons)	
10	Signs petitions	
15	Distributes political materials	
22	Writes political slogans or draws graffiti on the walls of buildings	Activism
25	Is active in a movement/forum	
27	Participates in strikes, protests, demonstrations	

The analyses indicated that the items saturated four first-order factors (disengagement, civil participation, formal political participation, and activism). Three of the first-order factors (civil participation, formal political participation and activism) saturated a second-order factor (participation), while the fourth factor (disengagement) was independent and negatively correlated to the second-order factor (participation). A subsequent CFA that tested different versions of the scale showed that the hypothesised model was confirmed for a 21-item scale.

Figure 1 shows the obtained model (χ^2 [680, 182] = 852.24; sig. = .00; Comparative Fit Index [CFI] = .89; Tucker Lewis Index [TLI] = .91; Root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .07 [.06; .08], sig. = .00; Standardised root mean square residual [SRMR] = .06). The model was tested separately for the left-wing subgroup (χ^2 [456, 182] = 647.53; sig. = .00; CFI = .92; TLI = .90; RMSEA = .07 [.06; .08], sig. = .00; SRMR = .06) and the right-wing subgroup (χ^2 [224, 182] = 644.64; sig. = .00; CFI =

.89; TLI = .90; RMSEA = .07 [.06; .10], sig. = .00; SRMR = .04) to vali-
date the structure and represented a good-fit index for both subgroups.

Figure 1
Confirmatory factor analysis of the items of the Participatory Behaviours Scale
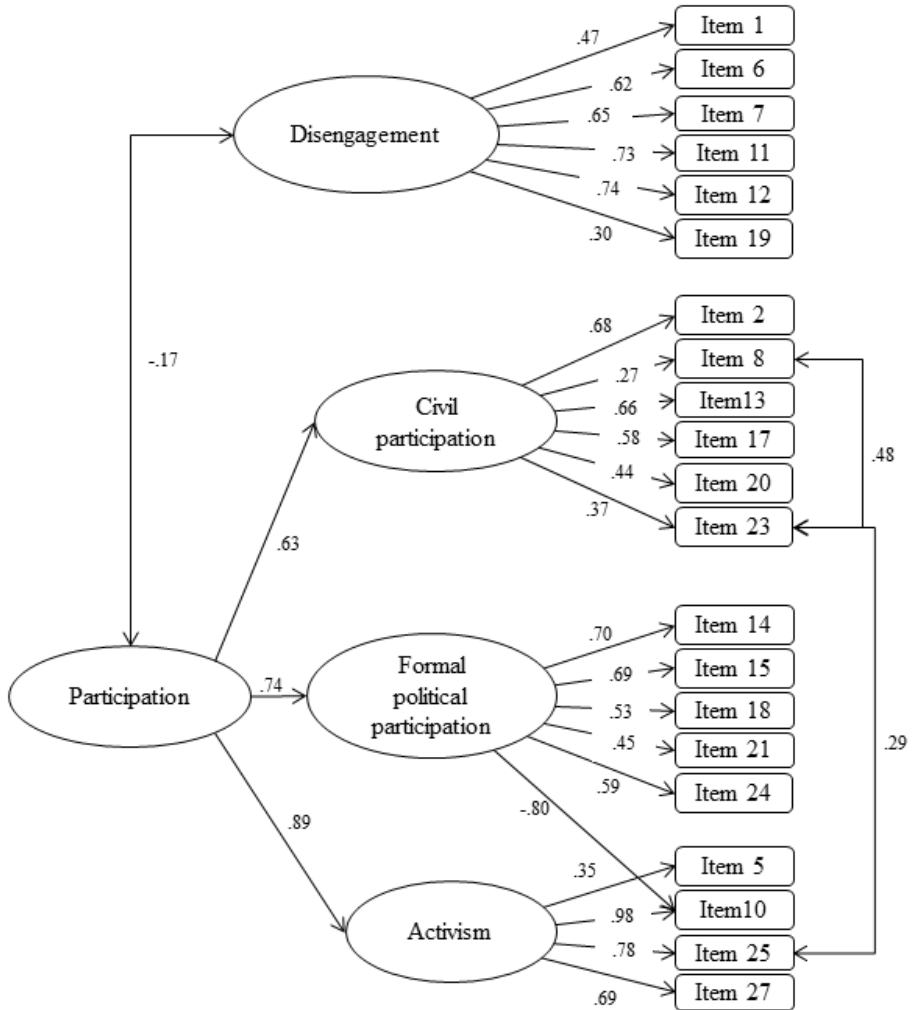
All of the measures yielded good reliability indices (Cronbach's α:
perceived control = .70, hopefulness = .76, socio-political awareness = .74,
sense of community = .75, consensus mobilisation = .71, action mobilisa-

tion = .86, disengagement = .77, civil participation = .68, formal political participation = .68, and activism = .70).

The correlation analyses (Table 2) highlighted a frame of mutual relationships between almost all of the variables examined, although the strength of such relationships was extremely variable.

Table 2.
Correlations between measures of perceived control, hopefulness, socio-political awareness, sense of community, consensus mobilization, action mobilization, disengagement, civil participation, formal political participation, activism and demographics (gender, age and left/right political orientation).

|	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
(1) Left/Right (0-1)	-												
(2) Age	-.18	-											
(3) Gender	.02	.08	-										
(4) Perceived Control	-.16	.08	.06	-									
(5) Hopefulness	-.03	.00	.04	.48	-								
(6) Sociopol. Awareness	-.24	.10	.00	.55	.19	-							
(7) Sense of community	.13	.12	.13	.10	.07	.09	-						
(8) Consensus Mobiliz.	-.23	.23	.02	.16	.09	.19	.28	-					
(9) Action Mobiliz.	.04	-.09	.08	.20	.00	.08	.11	.03	-				
(10) Disengagement	.13	-.14	.08	-.45	-.38	-.36	-.06	-.18	-.01	-			
(11) Civil participation	-.08	.03	.05	.35	.19	.37	.02	.17	.05	-.16	-		
(12) Form. pol. participation	-.10	-.06	.10	.33	.12	.28	.08	.08	.38	-.05	.36	-	
(13) Activism	-.27	-.06	.03	.42	.19	.37	-.07	.11	.19	-.09	.54	.53	-
Mean	.33	45.29	.48	32.52	16.23	19.45	36.63	18.81	12.27	10.94	19.69	13.16	11.29
Std. Dev.	.47	15.45	.50	5.30	4.81	3.58	5.90	3.43	5.03	4.29	4.61	5.25	3.95

Note: Bold-face values indicate correlations significant at the .05 level.

The pattern of relationships between the three components of empowerment indicated that while perceived control was strongly correlated with both hopefulness (r = .48) and socio-political awareness (r = .55), the association between hopefulness and socio-political awareness was much weaker (r = .19). The different categories of participatory behaviours also appeared to be mutually connected: civil participation to formal political participation (r = .36) and activism (r = .54), and formal political participation to activism (r =. 53). On the contrary, there were moderate negative correlations between disengagement and all three types of participatory

behaviours (r values ranging from -.09 to -.16). Regarding the relationships between the empowerment components and sense of community with the mobilisation and participation variables, a correlation table shows that (a) perceived control and socio-political awareness (but not hopefulness) presented important and fairly similar correlation indices with activism (r = .42 and r = .37, respectively), formal political participation (r = .33 and r = .28, respectively), and civil participation (r = .37 and r = .35, respectively), whereas their association with the mobilisation variables, either in the consensus or the action variant, was modest (r values ranging from .08 to .20); (b) the only variable that all three empowerment components appeared importantly correlated with was disengagement (r = -.45, -.38 and -.36 for perceived control, hopefulness and socio-political awareness, respectively); and (c) a sense of community showed a relatively strong correlation with only consensus mobilisation (r = .28) with non-significant or low association indices of the other mobilisation/participation variables.

Figure 2.
Standardized group means for left-wing and right-wing voters: Perceived control, socio-political awareness, sense of community, consensus mobilization, disengagement, civil participation, formal political participation, and activism.
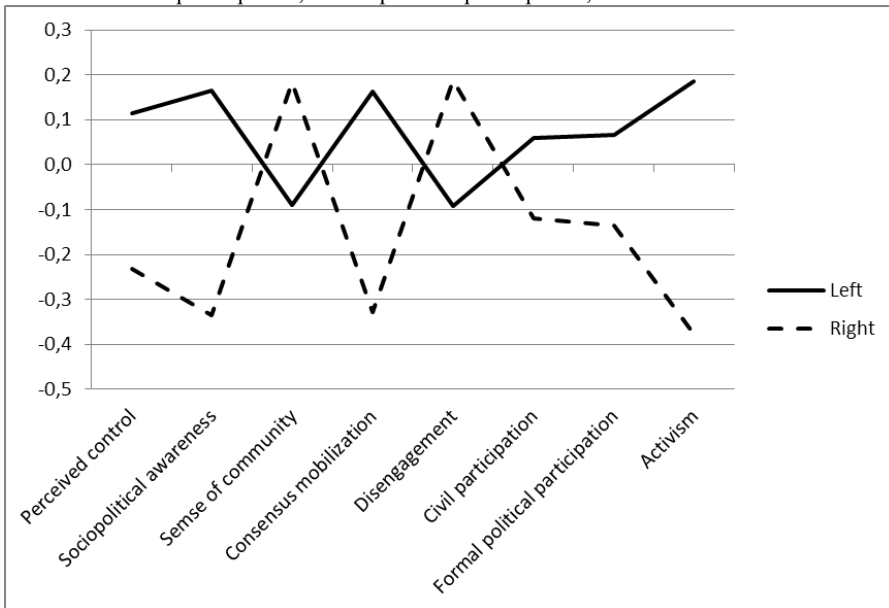
An analysis of variance was performed to explore the differences between right- and left-wing voters in sense of community, individual em-

powerment (i.e., perceived control, hopefulness, and socio-political aware-ness), mobilisation (i.e., consensus and action), participation (i.e., civil participation, formal political participation, and activism), and disengage-ment. The results showed significant differences between the groups for perceived control (F [1, 678] = 18.62, sig. = .00), socio-political awareness (F [1, 678] = 39.57, sig. = .00), sense of community (F [1, 678] = 11.42, sig. = .00), consensus mobilisation (F [1, 678] = 38.06, sig. = .00), disen-gagement (F [1, 678] = 11,97, sig. = .00), civil participation (F [1, 678] = 4.75, sig. = .03), formal political participation (F [1, 678] = 6.24, sig. = .01), and activism (F [1, 678] = 51.11, sig. = .00). No differences between the groups emerged for hopefulness or action mobilisation scores. As shown in Figure 2, left-wing participants reported higher scores in per-ceived control, socio-political awareness, consensus mobilisation, and all three forms of participation. Conversely, right-wing participants showed higher scores in sense of community and disengagement.

Finally, to test the influence of the empowerment components and sense of community on disengagement, mobilisation (consensus and ac-tion), and participatory behaviours (activism, formal political participation, and civil participation), six linear regression models were applied. To addi-tionally explore the differences between leftists and rightists, and thereby to identify politically oriented paths to mobilisation and participation, regres-sion models were performed on the two subgroups separately. Table 3 shows the coefficients of the regression analyses. For left-wing voters, per-ceived control negatively influenced disengagement (β = -.20), positively influenced all forms of participation – activism (β = .33), civil participation (β = .30) and formal political participation (β = .15) – and, to a lesser ex-tent, positively influenced consensus (β = .12) and action mobilisation (β = .19). Hopefulness had only a slight impact on disengagement (β = -.22) and a modest effect on civil participation (β = -.10). Similar to the perceived control results, socio-political awareness also negatively affected disen-gagement (β = -.14) and positively affected civil participation (β = .20), activism (β = -.19) and formal political participation (β = .17). Sense of community influenced the two mobilisation variables, and consensus (β = .26) was affected more than action (β = .11). For the forms of participation, only activism (β = -.14) was influenced by sense of community. For right-wing voters, perceived control strongly influenced formal political partici-pation (β = .55) and action mobilisation (β = .47) and moderately influ-enced activism (β = .21) and disengagement (β = -.32). Hopefulness nega-tively affected disengagement (β = -.20), action mobilisation (β = -.29), and formal political participation (β = -.16) but determined an increase in civil

participation (β = .27). Socio-political awareness had a negative impact on disengagement (β = -.18) and a positive effect on civil participation (β = .32), activism (β = -.19) and action mobilisation (β = -.19). Finally, sense of community influenced only consensus mobilisation (β = .38).

Table 3
Linear regression models. Independent variables:
Perceived control (PC), hopefulness (Hop), socio-political awareness (SPA),
sense of community (SoC)

	Disengagement	Civil participa-tion	Formal political participation	Activism	Consensus mobilization	Action mobilization
			Left-wing voters			
PC	**-.20**	**.30**	**.15**	**.33**	**.12***	**.19**
Hop.	**-.22**	**-.10***	.02	.05	.05	-.01
SPA	**-.14**	**.20**	**.17**	**.19**	.04	.06
SoC	.07	-.02	.08	**-.14**	**.26**	**.11**
R²	.17	.16	.08	.23	.09	.05
			Right-wing voters			
PC	**-.32**	-.01	**.55**	**.21**	-.10	**.47**
Hop.	**-.20**	**.27**	**-.16**	-.01	-.01	**-.29**
SPA	**-.18**	**.32**	.06	**.19**	.15	**.19**
SoC	-.07	-.02	-.06	-.01	**.38**	.04
R²	.35	.21	.23	.11	.14	.11

Note: Bold-face values are significant at the .05 level. Starred values are very close to the non- significance level

As indicated by the R^2 values for the two subgroups, such predictive models showed higher fit indices for the right-wing subgroup.

Discussion
This study intended to expand the knowledge of the relationship that links empowerment and sense of community to a variety of social action forms (defined as the wide range of activities that address societal issues, see Snyder, Omoto, 2007) and individual political orientations. A literature review suggests the existence of a circular relationship between empowerment and sense of community and mobilisation/participation behaviours, and a need for analyses that consider and compare specific forms of social action, which include political orientation as a variable that can moderate and modulate such relationships. In regard to the identification of the dif-

ferent social action forms, this study provided an operationalisation of a theoretical typology and tested the validity of a measure that has an application beyond the present investigation.

One of the relevant findings of this study was that if leftist and rightists differ in personality and values (Knutsen, 1997; Van Deth, Geurts, 1989), they also differ in sense of community, empowerment levels and participatory patterns. Specifically, left-wing sympathisers were more globally empowered and more civic and politically engaged. Left-wing sympathisers were more likely to undertake social action, while right-wing sympathisers were more likely to disengage. This result suggests that leftists might have a more developed and relatively stable orientation towards social and political action taking, exhibited as the propensity to engage in activism (McAdam, 1989). Such a tendency is consistent with the emphasis that leftist political culture attributes to personal engagement and direct participation of individuals in public issues. Conversely, rightists showed a higher sense of community. Though the association between a conservative orientation and sense of community might be read in the light of a communitarian political framework, or at least be considered as evidence of a traditional perspective on local culture, there are no other data in this study to confirm this speculative hypothesis.

Politically oriented paths of participation emerged from the analyses, and the results also highlighted the co-presence of multiple routes within the left- and right-oriented groups of participants. More importantly, this study provided useful insights for the comprehension of the role played by sense of community and empowerment in promoting mobilisation processes and relatively stable participatory behaviours.

The results showed that the more people that were high in sense of community, the more likely they were to become a sensitive target of a mobilisation campaign, regardless of their political orientation. However, regarding action, the influence of sense of community was less robust and unevenly distributed. Sense of community was only a drive for leftists to become active participants. At the same time, sense of community also served as a deterrent for leftists to engage in relatively stable activities in non-traditional political groups or networks. Hence, leftist political engagement was not strengthened by a sense of identification and affiliation with the local community. It might be hypothesised that in these circumstances, other identities were more salient, for instance, the activist or political identity. Nevertheless, this negative association was not entirely surprising and indirectly aligns with studies, such as those by Mannarini and Fedi (2009), which highlight that not all individuals who actively partici-

pate in community life show high levels of sense of community, especially if they are politically engaged. In this perspective, a low sense of community can be an indicator of a critical view of the context individuals are embedded in.

In summary, while a sense of community increased mobilisation on local issues, regardless of political views, only left-wing sympathisers actively mobilised as a consequence of their sense of community. Nevertheless, when individuals undertook other types of social action, sense of community was either irrelevant (as for rightists) or an obstacle. Hence, we can conclude that the relationship between sense of community and *participation* varies according to both the political orientation of the individuals (sense of community had a more important role among left-wing sympathisers) and to the specific type of participatory action considered (sense of community had an increased effect in mobilisation processes).

Regarding empowerment, this study indicated that the lower the empowerment of the individual, the higher their disengagement. This trend was irrespective of their political view. Moreover, the results indicated that the empowerment components had a different weight in predicting the participation of left- vs. right-oriented participants. Perceived control and socio-political awareness explained all three forms of participation considered in the left-oriented group, while hopefulness was absent. In the right-oriented group, a defined relationship pattern was not detectable because the three components were alternatively and differently combined. For the role of hopefulness, the findings suggested that while left-wing oriented sympathisers take action *irrespective of* their feeling more or less hopeful, because left-wing oriented individuals are mostly driven by the cognitive components of empowerment, right-wing oriented individuals take action either *despite* their hopelessness or *by virtue* of their hopefulness. In the same line of reasoning adopted for the relationship between a low sense of community and participation, it can be argued that hopelessness is not automatically synonymous with passivity or resignation and can serve as a motivating device for taking action. Hence, some form of disempowerment can also sustain some form of participation.

Based on what was set forth above, it can be further concluded that disempowerment (intended as a combination of low control, low awareness, and hopelessness) generated disengagement, but the reverse was not completely true. The relationship between empowerment and participation varied according to the components of empowerment (the three dimensions rarely operated together and in the same direction), the political orientation of the individuals, and the specific category of participation considered.

Finally, this study showed that sense of community and empowerment were better predictors for the engagement and disengagement of individuals who were right-oriented, and for left-oriented individuals, it is likely that other variables come into play.

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