

# The Changing Status of Protest Participation

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## Abstract

*One of the main evolutions entailed by the fall of the communist regimes in Central and South-Eastern Europe is the raise of a functional civil society aimed at influencing and holding the new political leadership accountable. The focus of this paper is on the citizen participation as a mean of interaction with the political system, and especially on the changing boundary between conventional and unconventional participation and on providing arguments in favour of separating the protest participation from the classical unconventional typology. I use two theoretical approaches, one comparative analysis of the various definitions and typologies of citizen participation and a second following the social changes theories that influenced the criteria of distinguishing between the participation forms: the social and cognitive mobilization processes, the postmodernization and postmaterialism theories and the mobilization strategies of social actors. My analysis is exploring the main characteristics of citizen participation in Romania as reflected in the types of associations and organizations the citizens adhere to, the activities they chose to develop within these social groups, the effective implication of the citizens in solving various problems and the perceived sense of efficacy attached to several ways of influencing the political system. The data source is the "Civil Society Development on the Black Sea: Social Involvement in the Republic of Moldova and Romania" project developed as part of the Black and Caspian Sea Collaborative Research Program. The main findings of my research support the separation of protest participation forms from the unconventional ways of participation and highlight the citizen participation changes drawn by the latest social change processes.*

**Key words:** citizen participation, conventional participation, unconventional participation, protest politics

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