

Q1-1: Is the problem lack of political engagement or lack of civic engagement?

I shared the revisited project plan with Huw, who gave me a beautiful series of critical questions to refine it further. There are 12 questions, so I will try to answer to them in this blog (hopefully) this week.

Question 1: Is the problem lack of political engagement or lack of civic engagement? What's the difference?

Before answering this question, it is important to clarify the definitions of political engagement and civic engagement, using Ekman and Amnå's literature (2012) that appears to point out the history and problems with these definitions.

Short summary

There is no clear definition of civic engagement and a number of limited or broad definitions exist, including from volunteering in the local communities to electoral activities such as voting. On the other hand, the definition of political participation refers to actions that can directly influence the behaviour of political actors. The difference between civic and political participation could be said to be whether the object of influence is clear or not.

Ekman and Amnå are aware of the ambiguity of the definition of civic engagement, and the narrow definition of political participation. They say that the degree of civic participation in society is too difficult to measure, and that political participation is too narrowly defined and there are behaviours that are overlooked.

They say that civic engagement can be a necessary condition for political participation (but not sufficient). For example, recycling does not directly influence the political actors, but it could foster citizens' environmental awareness, which could lead them to vote for the politicians who say they respect addressing environmental issues, or to participate in protests for environmental protection.

It is also argued that there is an 'involvement' that precedes action. Citing Martín and van Deth (2007), they say involvement is defined as an interest in political and social issues and a recognition that politics is important.

They conclude the literature by stating that the authentic question is how civic involvement and engagement can lead to the political participation. They also claim that current mass-research often focuses only on manifest political participation, it means whether citizens are really disengaged from politics is not properly assessed.

Thoughts after reading

– In Japan, many medias have alerted that our political engagement is in crisis, considering the results, such as the declining voter turnout or the survey showing that “young people are not interested in politics”.

– What is the current situation in my country really like? Generally, many Japanese people are said to be “not interested in politics” or “have an aversion to politics”, but if I actually go and look at the potential indicators, isn't the situation actually not as bad as it is reported in the media?

– Can I find hope for society by focusing on those who are participating in politics, or the other activities called as “civic engagement” ? Or should I still focus on investigating the actual situation because no one have investigated the authentic situation in the first place?

– I will find out if there is any literature or research that dig into the level of potential political participation in Japan and write the next blog post.

Reference

Ekman, J. and Amnå, E. (2012) 'Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new typology', *Human Affairs*, 22(3), pp. 283–300. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2478/s13374-012-0024-1>.