

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP

The relationship between democracy and citizenship is not merely institutional but **deeply normative and participatory**. Democracy is sustained not only through constitutional structures but through the **active moral and political agency of citizens**. Citizenship, therefore, is not a passive legal status; it is a **dynamic practice of rights-claiming and responsibility-bearing**.

At its core, democracy presupposes what Robert A. Dahl calls “*enlightened understanding*” and “*effective participation*”. These are not possible unless citizens internalize both **rights and responsibilities**.

A. Rights–Responsibility Nexus:

(a) Liberal Emphasis on Rights

Modern liberal democracies, drawing from thinkers like John Locke, prioritize **individual rights**—life, liberty, and property. These rights are:

- Protected against state intrusion
- Institutionalized through constitutions and courts
- Viewed as foundational to individual autonomy

However, this creates what critics call “**passive citizenship**”—citizens become **consumers of rights rather than participants in democracy**.

(b) The Responsibility Deficit

As noted by Dahl, democracy requires:

- Respect for others’ rights
- Engagement in deliberation
- Commitment to public reasoning

Without these, rights become **atomistic claims**, leading to:

- Social fragmentation
- Erosion of civic trust
- Weak democratic culture

This critique aligns with communitarian thinkers like Michael Sandel, who argue that excessive individualism undermines **civic virtue**.

B. Active and Passive Participation

1. Conceptual Entry: Participation as the Core of Democratic Citizenship

Political participation is the **operative mechanism through which citizenship becomes meaningful**. Democracy, in its substantive sense, is not merely a system of elections but a **continuous process of citizen engagement**.

Two foundational democratic ideals emerge:

- **Political Participation** → involvement in decision-making
- **Political Equality** → equal capacity to influence outcomes

However, as the text indicates, **formal equality often coexists with unequal participation**, producing what can be called “**participatory inequality**”—a central paradox of modern democracies.

Dimension	Active Participation	Passive Participation
Nature	Continuous, engaged	Periodic, minimal
Form	Debates, protests, civic action, policy influence	Voting only
Political Awareness	High	Limited
Democratic Impact	Strengthens accountability	Weakens responsiveness
Citizen Role	Co-creator of democracy	Consumer of governance

3. Classical Foundations of Active Participation

(a) Aristotle: Citizenship as Ethical Activity

Aristotle viewed humans as “*zoon politikon*” (political animals):

- Full human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) requires participation
- Citizenship is **not status but activity**

(b) J. S. Mill: Participation as Self-Development

John Stuart Mill argued:

- Participation cultivates **intelligence and moral development**
- It prevents **elite domination and bureaucratic stagnation**

(c) Rousseau: Legitimacy through Participation

Jean-Jacques Rousseau emphasized:

- Laws gain legitimacy when citizens **participate in their formation**
- Participation creates **collective identity and general will**

(d) John Dewey: Democracy as a Way of Life

John Dewey extended participation beyond politics:

- Democracy is embedded in **everyday social interactions**
- Participation fosters **collective intelligence**

4. Participation and Legitimacy: A Structural Link

Participation contributes to legitimacy in three ways:

1. **Accountability Mechanism** : Citizens monitor and constrain state power
2. **Information Flow** : Enhances awareness of policies and governance
3. **Consent Formation** : Laws are accepted because people feel represented

Without participation, democracy risks sliding into **procedural minimalism or authoritarian drift**.

5. The Crisis of Passive Citizenship in Representative Democracies

Modern democracies have witnessed a shift from:

- **Direct participation (ancient Greece)** →
- **Representative delegation (modern states)**

This has produced:

- Decline in civic engagement
- Rise of **“electoral democracy” (vote once in 5 years)**
- Weakening of democratic accountability

As noted, passive citizens can be:

- Easily manipulated
- Politically disengaged
- Vulnerable to populism and misinformation

6. Structural Barriers: Why Participation is Unequal

Despite formal equality, participation is shaped by:

- Socio-economic inequality
- Education and political awareness
- Cultural and identity-based exclusions

C. B. Macpherson's Conditions for Participatory Democracy

C. B. Macpherson proposes:

1. **Reduction of social and economic inequality**
2. Citizens must see themselves as:
 - **Agents of development**, not passive recipients

This aligns with the idea of "**developmental democracy**".

7. Debate: Limits of Participation

(a) Samuel P. Huntington: The Problem of "Too Much Democracy"

Samuel P. Huntington argues:

- Excessive demands overload political systems
- Leads to **governability crisis**
- Weakens state authority

(b) Giovanni Sartori: Vertical vs Horizontal Democracy

Giovanni Sartori critiques:

- Overemphasis on **horizontal participation (mass involvement)**
- Neglect of **vertical dimension (leadership, expertise)**

He advocates:

- **Informed and competent participation**
- Not mere numerical expansion

8. Participation Beyond Elections: The Democratic Cycle

True participation must extend across:

- **Pre-election** → awareness, debates
- **Election phase** → voting
- **Post-election** → monitoring, protests, civic action

C. Issues of Identity in the Democracy–Citizenship Relationship

Citizenship in a democracy performs a **dual function**:

- It creates a **shared political identity** (membership in a common polity)
- It accommodates **plural identities** (religion, ethnicity, language, culture)

Thus, democracy must constantly negotiate a fundamental tension:

Unity (common citizenship) vs Diversity (multiple identities)

A democratic polity succeeds only when citizens **recognize differences without fragmenting into exclusive identity blocs**.

1. The Core Problem: Identity vs Common Citizenship

The central debate is:

- Should citizenship emphasize **universal, equal rights (commonality)**?
- Or should it recognize **group-specific differences (particularity)**?

This tension produces two competing models:

Model	Basis of Citizenship Risk	
Universalist (Liberal)	Individual equality	Ignores cultural differences
Multicultural	Group recognition	Risk of fragmentation

2. Liberal Citizenship: The Universalist Framework

Classical liberalism (e.g., John Rawls):

- Emphasizes **equal rights for all individuals**
- Advocates **state neutrality** toward cultural identities
- Promotes **“difference-blind citizenship”**

Underlying Assumption

Citizens are treated as **abstract individuals**, not as members of groups.

Critique

- Ignores **structural disadvantages of minorities**
- Fails to recognize **cultural embeddedness of identity**

3. Multicultural Citizenship: Recognition of Difference

The multicultural critique challenges liberal neutrality by arguing:

Equality sometimes requires **differential treatment**.

Will Kymlicka's Intervention

Will Kymlicka (1995) in *Multicultural Citizenship* argues:

- Minority rights are **compatible with liberal democracy**
- Group-differentiated rights are necessary for **true equality**

Types of Minority Rights (Kymlicka)

- **Self-government rights** (for national minorities)
- **Polyethnic rights** (cultural accommodations)
- **Special representation rights**

4. The Liberal Anxiety: Threat to Unity

Some liberals argue:

- Democracy requires **uniform citizenship**
- Group rights may:
 - Undermine national unity
 - Encourage identity-based politics
 - Create inequality before law

This is often framed as:

"Equality vs Recognition dilemma"

5. Kymlicka's Counter-Argument: Recognition as Integration

Kymlicka provides a crucial corrective:

- Minority demands are not about **separateness**, but about **inclusion with dignity**
- Cultural accommodations enable minorities to:
 - Participate fully
 - Integrate into mainstream institutions

Illustrative Logic

- Example: Religious exemptions (e.g., dress codes)
- Purpose: **Enable participation**, not separation

Thus:

Recognition becomes a **condition of democratic inclusion**, not a threat.

6. Identity Politics and Democratic Fragmentation

Contemporary democracies face:

- Rise of **identity politics**
- Assertion of:
 - Ethnic identities
 - Religious identities
 - Linguistic and regional claims

Risks

- Citizens may prioritize **group identity over civic identity**
- Leads to:
 - Polarization
 - Communalism
 - Weakening of shared democratic norms

7. Beyond Liberalism and Multiculturalism: Deliberative Perspective

Jürgen Habermas offers a middle path:

- Advocates **constitutional patriotism**
- Citizens unite not by culture, but by:
 - Shared democratic values
 - Commitment to constitutional principles

Thus:

Identity is mediated through **public reasoning**, not imposed uniformity.

Can multicultural citizenship coexist with strong national identity, or does recognition of group rights inevitably lead to democratic fragmentation?
(Question for students)