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Political Participation Patterns of the Emerging Middle Classes in Peru and the Philippines

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Abstract

The growing middle classes in middle-income countries may play a key role in current trends of democratic backsliding, online activism and lifestyle politics**.** This contribution uncovers which modes of political participation are prevalent among the middle classes in Peru and the Philippines, including new forms of online participation and lifestyle politics for sustainability. Drawing on household surveys conducted in 2018, we use latent class analysis and logit regressions to analyse, first, the characteristics of online vs offline participation, and second, the role of political consumption and online activism for political participation dynamics. The latter analysis contributes to the gateway/getaway debate of lifestyle politics. In both countries, we find four comparable classes: a substantial disengaged class that is not engaging in any political participation, an all-round activist class, an online activist class and a class that mostly engages in civil society activities. Further classes with specific participation patterns and socio-demographic characteristics could be identified for each country. Although the online activists in both countries are unlikely to engage in any other form of political participation, a clear empirical case for lifestyle politics as a separate mode of participation only exists among young Peruvians with a steady job. In the Philippines, political consumption as a form of lifestyle politics blends in with other types of political participation.

Keywords

Political participation, online activism, lifestyle politics, political consumption, latent class analysis, middle class, democratic backsliding

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Abbreviations

AIC	Akaike information criterion
BIC	Bayesian information criterion
LCA	latent class analysis
LLH	logistical local hyperplane
OFW	overseas Filipino worker

1 Introduction

In the past five years, a global trend of democratic backsliding and political instability has begun to put previous success stories of political participation in many middle-income countries at jeopardy. Democratic backsliding means the incremental erosion of the democratic characteristics of political institutions, rules and norms resulting from actions of duly elected governments (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021). In Peru, for example, the erosion of the political party system and the constant conflicts between legislative and executive – weakening and disregarding any democratic procedures – count as signs of democratic backsliding (Carter, 2018; Munoz, 2021). In the Philippines, in contrast, media and opposition repression and systematic rent-seeking of political elites present examples of democratic backsliding (Lorch, 2021). Both countries have experienced resurging left and right populism in recent years.

In parallel, a second global trend towards more individualised political participation, such as online activism and lifestyle politics, can be witnessed. Examples of individualised participation include online campaigns around the Arab Spring, #MeToo, climate change and avoiding single-use plastics (Heidbreder, Lange, & Reese, 2021; Howard & Hussain, 2013). Online participation can be simply defined as political participation that happens in the online sphere by creating, sharing, reading or responding to online political content (Ruess, Hoffmann, Boulianne, & Heger, 2021). Lifestyle politics means "the politicisation of everyday life choices, including ethically, morally or politically inspired decisions about, for example, consumption, transportation or modes of living" (de Moor, 2017). Political consumption (of material goods) is thus part of lifestyle politics. Online activism and lifestyle politics may function as a gateway, that is, as motivation, or getaway, for example reducing engagement in demonstrations on the streets, for other forms of institutionalised participation (de Moor & Verhaegen, 2020).

As an important voter group, the growing middle classes in middle-income countries play a key role in both global trends, possibly merging online and offline participation and connecting it to lifestyle politics on sustainability. The middle classes merit particular focus for several reasons. First, in contrast to the middle classes that emerged during industrialisation in Europe, the rising middle classes in question may not be as supportive of democratic development per se as initially suggested (Cheeseman, 2014). The implications for political participation are still largely unclear. Furthermore, as they are consumer groups with some income to spend beyond immediate livelihood needs, they are also more likely to have the means to access online media and to purchase costlier products for lifestyle reasons.

Moreover, as Schlogl (2022) found for Indonesia, the emerging middle classes' political participation patterns can clearly differ from other sections of the population. For the Indonesian middle classes, online political participation and collective action create a form of digital self-expression, which they use to position themselves in a struggle within a socio-economically heterogeneous, aspiring class that alternates between materialist and post-materialist values (Schlogl, 2022). Other empirical research has also shown that the emerging middle classes are a rather heterogeneous group of actors – not one single class has a collective identity (Neubert & Stoll, 2015; Schotte, 2021). Given the ambiguous role of the emerging middle classes for democracy and their socio-economic heterogeneity, an empirical analysis of their political participation patterns is timely.

In Europe and the United States, different modes of participation and their evolvement over time have been conceptually and empirically analysed, including online forms and political consumption (Anduiza, Gallego, & Cantijoch 2010; Copeland & Boulianne, 2022; Ekman & Amna, 2012; Ruess et al., 2021; Theocharis & van Deth, 2018; van Deth, 2014; Vissers & Stolle, 2013). Several studies have confirmed that online and offline participation complement each other (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020; Dennis, 2019; Gibson & Cantijoch, 2013; Lane, Kim, & Lee, 2017). For non-Western, non-industrialised countries, it is still largely unclear whether the same participation patterns exist.

This contribution uncovers which modes of political participation are prevalent among the middle classes in Peru and the Philippines, including new forms of online participation and lifestyle politics for sustainability. First, we are interested in analysing middle classes' "participation repertoires" (Oser, 2021) and which socio-economic factors characterise the individuals behind these patterns. Second, we explore the role of political consumption and online activism for environmental reasons as factors supporting a gateway or getaway for political participation in a specific issue area. Political consumption, which we define as material consumption of buying or boycotting specific products for political reasons, is largely being discussed under the umbrella of lifestyle politics. The line between lifestyle politics as a blended form of everyday activism and a mode of political participation in its own right has empirically not been clearly drawn yet (de Moor, 2017). Our main contribution to these debates lies in the provision of much needed empirical data for theoretical concept-building in various socio-political contexts.

Due to recent changes in participation and democratic development, the middle-income countries the Philippines and Peru are particularly interesting for an empirical analysis. Both countries democratised during the Third Wave, count as rather weak democracies today and have long-standing, vibrant civil societies. Peru has become politically very instable and polarised in the past five years, as it has experienced corruption scandals – including members of the legislative and executive – the constitutional succession or removals of three presidents in 2020 and took a populist turn in 2021 (Munoz, 2021). Still, the country scored substantially higher in V-Dem's participatory democracy index (0.59) in 2018 than the Philippines (0.33) (V-Dem Institute, s.a.).

The key challenges in Peru's political system today are the dilution of power in the executive (Barrenechea & Vergara, 2023) due to numerous, rapid changes in leadership, and a very personalised, fragmented political party system (Carter, 2018). In recent years, continuous conflicts between the legislative and executive have led to seven processes aimed at removing presidents from office. A rural–urban divide additionally affects political protest and other participation patterns.

In 2016, the Philippines experienced an authoritarian as the Duterte government further centralised power. As part of Duterte's anti-drug policy, extrajudicial killings were broadly tolerated, especially by the middle and upper classes (Garrido, 2021). The socio-economic structures within society largely support the resilient oligarchic state that has been adapting to current political contours over time (Teehankee & Calimbahin, 2020). State–economy relations are intertwined in embedded autonomy with a tendency towards domination through economic interests. Similar to Peru, political parties are personalised vehicles for elections rather than programmatic entities for participation. In the 2016 elections in which Duterte came to power, social media activities were already playing an important role (Singpeng, Guergoiev, & Arugay, 2020). Filipinos are the most intensive users of social media in the world, with an average usage time of four hours per day (We Are Social, 2018). This may lower the barriers to online activism. The different trajectories of democratic backsliding in Peru and the Philippines make a comparison of the middle classes' participation patterns particularly interesting.

To analyse middle-class participation behaviour, we draw on household surveys conducted with approximately 900 middle-class households in each of the capital cities – Lima (Peru) and Manila (Philippines) – in November and December 2018. We run a latent class analysis for each country sample with a range of offline and online participation questions. Subsequently, we run logistic regressions to predict class membership and to zoom into political consumption and lifestyle politics.

The findings of this paper provide an empirical grounding to the ongoing debate around participation modes and lifestyle politics. Furthermore, our findings clarify the role of middle classes in participation dynamics and democratic backsliding trajectories as well as prospects for online activism and political consumption more generally.

2 New participation modes: Literature review and hypotheses

Political participation presents a constantly changing concept that today clearly encompasses more than narrow traditional participation modes, such as voting or contacting a political representative. In the last two decades, a range of new online opportunities has fuelled the question of what counts as activism, slacktivism (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2013; Morozov, 2011), political participation mode or other forms of collective action (see Ruess et al., 2021 for an overview). Political consumption and lifestyle politics have added another realm of previously non-existent and/or uncaptured political participation. A large part of the literature on political participation today uses overlapping concepts or terms that are, in the end, empirically very similar (e.g. participation mode, form, category, type, pattern, repertoire). Furthermore, as Ruess et al. (2021) argue, empirically driven analyses of online participation do not always match theoretical developments, resulting in competing definitions and measurements. Rather than diving into the fine-grained differences in this (conceptual) debate, we focus on the basic consensus in the literature.

In spite of the conceptual fluency, there seems to be a basic agreement in the literature that new modes of political participation require a) a minimum of activity with a direct or indirect political goal, and b) this activity needs to be vertically or horizontally targeted at either political institutions/policy-makers or at mobilising others to become active (de Moor, 2017; Theocharis, de Moor, & van Deth, 2021; van Deth, 2014). Without these boundaries, the concept of political participation becomes diluted beyond any real use (van Deth, 2001). Several actions can be expressions of the same mode of political participation, that is, working for a political party and donating to a political party are both expressions of institutional political participation.

Thus far, online and offline participation remain somewhat different modes in many countries, as not all traditional, offline political participation options are available online as well. In many lower- and middle-income countries, for example, the pending full digitalisation of administration is mirrored by a pending digitalisation of all population segments. Some actions such as voting may only be possible offline, whereas others are only available in the digital realm, for example hashtag activism (Zulli, 2020). Online participation can fulfil complementary functions for reaching specific political goals, enhance outreach or transfer offline activisms to another realm, for instance signing online petitions instead of paper-based petitions (Hirzalla & Zoonen, 2011; Oser, Hooghe, & Marien, 2013). As fully digitalised network politics, online participation can be completely technology-driven and fully oriented towards raising awareness and mobilising networks via social media (Theocharis et al., 2021). In European countries, digitally networked politics seems to uniquely attract young people (Theocharis et al., 2021). In spite of the “hundreds” (Ruess et al., 2021) of empirical studies on online participation in its various forms, there is still a lack of understanding of online participation and its relation to offline opportunities, political systems and cultural predispositions beyond established Western democracies (Ruess et al., 2021). In Peru, freedom of individual expression and media freedom are generally high, also digitally. In the Philippines, in contrast, misinformation and media restrictions occur more frequently, both digitally and offline.[1] In both countries, a digital divide between urban and rural populations exists. The middle classes in both countries primarily live in urban areas.

We know from Garrido’s (2021) ethnographic work that the Filipino middle classes have an ambivalent relation to democracy: strongly supporting the values of democracy per se, but also wishing for a strong state where freedom has boundaries. What this means for their own political participation in general – and online participation in particular – is unclear. Moreover, Garrido’s data is from 2010, thus likely outdated.

1 See Freedom House Country reports for Peru and the Philippines, various years (Freedom House, s.a.).

Due to the status of digitalisation and potential constraints on online activism, we expect online/offline participation among the middle classes to slowly follow patterns in Western democracies. We expect to find complementary modes but not separate, fully digitalised network politics just yet:

Hypothesis 1: Online political participation is more likely to complement than replace offline participation among the emerging middle classes.

Political consumption and lifestyle politics are concerned with the politicisation of individual decisions in the private sphere, such as buying specific products and boycotting others, with the aim of motivating others or making a public political statement. Although some authors argue that it could be associated with online activism as a form of individualised political participation, empirical evidence thus far speaks against this, indicating a separate participation mode (de Moor & Verhaegen, 2020; Theocharis et al., 2021). Boundaries between lifestyle politics and online participation may be blurry. Digital media use is key to lifestyle politics, as information about product origins, labels and company responsibilities are found and shared online. As Copeland and Boulianne (2022) summarise: “Lifestyle politics treats digital media use as a key predictor to political participation.” For both political consumption and other expressions of lifestyle politics (e.g. using public transport instead of own vehicle), the political participation criteria of targeting political institutions, policy-makers or mobilising others sometimes remain somewhat unclear. The qualification as political participation may depend on individual attitudes and the reasoning behind choices. As initial studies show, individuals’ beliefs about political efficacy via political consumption do not differ much from other modes of participation (Ackermann & Gundelach, 2022). The vast majority of empirical studies on political consumption and lifestyle politics draw on evidence from European and North American countries; empirical evidence from low- and middle-income countries is largely missing.

The current debate on political consumption and lifestyle politics revolves around the “gateway/getaway” hypotheses (de Moor & Verhaegen, 2020). Empirical evidence in European countries exists for both. The gateway hypothesis proposes that lifestyle politics may boost motivation to take part in other forms of political participation; motivation then mobilises resources (Berglund & Matti, 2006; Wejryd, 2018). In contrast, proponents of the getaway hypothesis argue that lifestyle politics takes resources away from other forms of political participation, satisfies individual’s goal attainment easily (which then leads to inaction on other participation forms) and that lifestyle movement organisations actually isolate people from other political organisations (Baumann, Engman, & Johnston, 2015; de Moor & Verhaegen, 2020). Given the mixed empirical evidence, the debate is still not conclusive, especially on the wider implications of political consumption for democracy and economic development (Boström, Micheletti, & Oosterveer, 2019; Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). Additionally, issue-specific political mobilisation and participation can be witnessed that blurs the boundary between lifestyle and political participation, such as climate and sustainability actions in many European countries. These could be an expression of lifestyle (politics) or fundamental participation based on contestation.

In Peru and the Philippines, political consumption may be more difficult than in Western countries, as consumer labels are not as established, and reliable, independent testing agencies for the quality of products (such as the German “Stiftung Warentest”; see Stiftung Warentest, s.a.) do not yet exist. A higher amount of consumer information may be necessary to actually engage in political consumption, implying a fairly strong will to politically engage. For Peru and the Philippines, we therefore follow the gateway hypothesis, assuming a “reinforcement” (Oser et al., 2013) by such new modes of participation:

Hypothesis 2: Political consumption as an expression of lifestyle politics is more likely performed by middle-class members who also engage in several other modes of political participation.

Additionally, we are interested in the socio-economic characteristics of the people performing the different participation modes. Research on the effect of education on political participation has given mixed results thus far (Willeck & Mendelberg, 2022). In Western democracies, the positive effect of education levels has been demonstrated in a number of quantitative studies (Persson, 2015). It is, however, also clear by now that effects vary by types of education, population sub-group, time and type of political participation (Willeck & Mendelberg, 2022). Education and political consumption are systematically linked (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022). Some studies also propose a relation between social status and participation, especially of the income and education status of parents (Mendelberg, Mérola, Raychaudhuri, & Thal, 2020; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Thus, controlling for the effects of social mobility in the context of the emerging middle classes makes sense.

Furthermore, in Western democracies, younger people tend to use more online opportunities for political participation than older ones (di Gennaro & Dutton, 2006; Theocharis et al., 2021; Vitak et al., 2010). It is therefore useful to include the age aspect in a socio-economic profiling. In terms of the lifestyles of young, educated, middle-class members, qualitative research on the middle classes in the Philippines indicates strong aspirations to travel internationally, study or work abroad, and acquire aspects of Western lifestyles (Never & Albert, 2021). The same may apply to young urban Peruvians. An identification with global trends and challenges that are in line with globalisation is likely to lead to individual cosmopolitan values or even global ecological citizenship (Saíz, 2005). As a cosmopolitan orientation predicts various pro-environmental behaviours (Leung, Kohk, & Tam, 2015), the question arises as to how that may relate to political consumption and lifestyle politics. Cosmopolitan values are unlikely to be shared by all middle-class members. In the Philippines, the number of so-called overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) is high. These may not necessarily all be part of the middle classes or share cosmopolitan values, as work migration also occurs in order to escape poverty. Exploring the potential impacts of international experiences on both participation behaviour and lifestyle politics, especially for environmental topics, adds an interesting angle to the middle-class participation analysis. We assume that international exposure may create political interest and a desire for change and participation. The outlined socio-economic variables are used for further profiling (via regressions) based on the latent class analysis of political participation variables.

3 Methods

3.1 Latent class analysis

We analyse the political participation modes of middle classes in Peru and the Philippines by way of a latent class analysis (LCA). LCA aims at identifying qualitatively different subgroups within a sample. Those subgroups tend to share certain observable characteristics, such as behaviours or opinions: Thus, when carrying out an LCA, we assume that membership in unobserved, latent classes may be explained by patterns of scores across survey questions or other indicators of choice.

LCA can be understood as a type of person-oriented analysis[2] and assumes that class memberships (fully) justify the variation in observed survey scores and responses. Individuals are not assigned to a clear-cut class per se, but instead assigned according to the probability of class memberships based on survey pattern results. We draw on Weller's (2020) best practice procedures for the implementation of the following LCA. Similar analyses have been carried out by Oser et al. (2013) and Oser (2021) for US samples; however, to the authors' knowledge, there are no existing LCA publications regarding the context of middle-income countries.

2 This distinguishes LCA from general cluster analysis: Cluster analysis is a variable-centred approach that solely seeks relationships between variables.

To investigate determinants of class membership, we subsequently run regressions with several socio-demographic factors (age, gender, employment status, household wealth), in line with both resource-based models of participation (e.g. based on time, skills, financial means) and lifestyle politics (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022). As outlined in Section 2, we also introduce a variable capturing social mobility through the relative differences in parental and own education levels.[3] Furthermore, we measure international exposure via respondents' previous work experience overseas, excluding short-term stays for tourism.

Finally, we complement our discussion paper with an exploratory sub-set analysis of the online activist class to understand online participation and its relation to political consumption as a form of lifestyle politics. The political consumption variable presents an index of buying a product for environmental reasons and avoiding buying a product for environmental reasons (frequency in the past 12 months, 5-point Likert scale). Throughout this paper, the term "political consumption" always refers to this material form of consumption; the reading or receipt of political information will be termed as such.

3.2 Data

We draw on household survey data gathered in 2018 during the course of a larger project on emerging middle classes in Peru and the Philippines (Philippines: N = 800, Peru: N = 832). Respondents were middle-class adults (household head or spouse) living in the capital cities of the two countries; age and gender distribution approximated representativeness of the population in the respective country (for more information on sampling, see Never et al., 2020).

In order to facilitate the LCA, survey questions concerning political participation were re-coded: Potential response options were initially scaled on a 5-point Likert scale (e.g. "not at all", "sometimes", "often", "nearly always", etc.) and have been rescaled to a dummy variable if there has been any history of political participation (0 for "not at all", 1 for all other options). Thus, the re-coded variables can be understood as a general participation dummy that does not account for the frequency of political behaviour. This greatly simplified the setup of the LCA. Data rows with missing entries on policy actions were removed from the sample, reducing the sample to N = 797 for the Philippines, and N = 832 for Peru.

The variables in question depict the individuals' behaviour concerning both on- and offline political participation as well as online environmental activism and societal engagement. Survey questions and categories of political participation draw on Theocharis and van Deth (2018) and Oser et al. (2013). We eliminated the item on voting in elections, as voting is compulsory in both Peru and the Philippines, rendering the item useless. Separate questions for online environmental engagement and general political engagement were asked to allow for an exploratory analysis of lifestyle politics in the field of environmental sustainability. The variables and their respective survey questions are as follows:

In the past twelve months, have you ..

traditional participation

- attended meeting: *.. attended a political meeting?*
- contacted politician: .. *contacted a politician for a personal reason?*
- donated party: .. *donated money to a political party?*
- worked party: .. *worked for a political party?*

3 For constructing the social mobility index, a numeric scale for educational achievements is introduced (1 – none; 10 – PhD). The social mobility index is defined as the numeric value of highest educational attainment of the respondent, divided by 0.5 times the sum of the highest educational attainments of mother and father.

extra-institutional participation

- signed petition: .. *signed a petition?*
- worked actiongroup: .. *worked for a political action group?*
- participated demo: .. *participated in a demonstration?*

civic participation

- worked comm: .. *worked or volunteered for a community project?*
- worked nonpol: .. *worked or volunteered for a non-political action group?*

environmental online engagement

- comment env sm: .. *commented on social media on environmental or energy-saving issues?*
- posted env sm: .. *posted or shared links on environmental or energy-saving issues?*
- encouraged env sm: .. *encouraged other people to take environmental or energy-saving actions using social media?*

political online engagement

- comment pol sm: .. *commented on political issues on social media?*
- posted pol sm: .. *posted or shared links on political issues on social media?*
- encouraged pol sm: .. *encouraged other people to take political issues on social media?*

3.3 Goodness of fit

The LCA was carried out in R with the *poLCA* package with 50 repetitions of log-likelihood model estimation. Three LCAs were performed and the countries were analysed separately.

Table 1: Goodness-of-fit statistics for the number of classes

N(classes)	AIC	BIC	χ2	LLH	LLH SAT.
Philippines					
2	8,112	8,257	2,427,411	-4,025	-2,965
3	7,739	7,959	1,700,230	-3,822	-2,965
4	7,437	7,732	30,147	-3,656	-2,965
5	7,305	7,675	**27,590**	-3,574	-2,965
6	7,230	7,674	31,254	-3,520	-2,965
7	7,176	7,695	37,664	-3,477	-2,965
Peru					
2	5,580	5,717	2.97E+11	-2,761	-2,117
3	5,056	5,263	8.13E+09	-2,484	-2,117
4	4,936	5,215	19,912	-2,409	-2,117
5	4,821	**5,171**	**3,194**	-2,337	-2,117
6	4,780	5,200	2,039	-2,301	-2,117
7	4,769	5,260	2,433	-2,280	-2,117

Source: Authors' calculations

Since the analysis follows an exploratory approach (Weller, 2020), several LCA models are fitted to several potential classes. Comparing statistical indicators hinting at the goodness of fit of the respective model, depicted in Table 1, we decided to follow the models with five classes. To reach this decision, different statistical indicators were considered for the choice of the number of classes for each country individually: the relative de-/ increase in AIC and LLH, respectively, when adding another potential class (aiming to find the *elbow*), the minima of BIC and $\chi 2$ statistics, and the LLH of the saturated model. Additionally, for each model of choice, a validity check with bootstrapping samples is carried out, according to the proposal of Zhang (2018): A bootstrap dataset with 10,000 observations is drawn, assuming the model of choice. Thereafter, a second latent class model is fitted with the bootstrap dataset. Finally, the class membership of the initial dataset is predicted with the new bootstrap LCA model and compared with its initial class membership in the original model. If the original model was a good fit, the bootstrap model would predict the equivalent class membership for a high share of data rows with a high probability.

Assuming that a data row is assigned to its individual class when it is associated with a probability of >50%, the bootstrapped model assigns 99% of all data rows from the Philippines correctly. Lowering the minimum probability of assigning individuals to 90%, still 82% of all data rows can be associated with their respective classes[4] (note that the residual 18% are not associated with any class in this case – they are not assigned to "false" classes). In the case of Peru, 100% of data rows are associated with their initial class, assuming a probability of >50%. Given >90% probability, 92% of all data rows can be associated with their initial category.

Thus, fit of the models of choice can be considered sufficient. The results of the LCA are discussed in the following section.

Our contribution also has some limitations. First, the dataset did not have a control variable for political interest, which may have contributed to a deeper understanding of the activist classes identified. Second, we were not able to use the most recently proposed measurement for political consumption and lifestyle politics (Gundelach, 2020), as these were published only after data collection. Finally, we did not include an elaborate measurement of other forms of lifestyle politics prevalent in industrialised countries (e.g. vegetarianism) due to space constraints in the household surveys.

4 Results

4.1 General findings

Four of the five individual classes are consistent across countries:

- A *disengaged* class, which is not likely to engage in any distinct political participation. In both countries, this class has the highest probability (>50%) of class membership throughout the sample.
- An *all-round activist* class, which is likely to engage in both offline and online political participation. However, the probability of class membership is low in both countries (≤ 8%).
- An *online activist* class, which is likely to engage in online participation (both for environmental and political motives); however, it is not likely to engage in offline participation (traditional and extra-institutional participation). The probability of its class membership ranges between 12% and 16%.

4 The residual 18% are not associated with any class in this case, since their class membership probability is <90% for all classes.

- A *helping hand* class, which is not likely to engage in any off- or online political engagement; however, it is very likely to engage in civic and societal participation. Probabilities of class membership range from 4% (Peru) to 17% (Philippines).

These findings support Hypothesis 1 that online participation opportunities generally complement rather than replace other participation modes for many middle-class members. For a particular group of middle-class members, however, online participation is the only option. For them, it may replace other participation modes – or these individuals may have been previously politically disengaged and are now motivated by online opportunities.

The remaining classes (one in each country) do not share a consistent behavioural pattern. Thus, the respective residual class is explained further in the following.

4.2 Philippines

Both class membership probabilities as well as intra-class action probabilities are depicted in Table 2. In the Philippines, the probability of membership of the *disengaged* class is 53%.

Members of the *all-round activist* class are rare: Probability of class membership accounts for only 4%. Furthermore, for members of the all-round activist class, online participation is overall more likely than offline participation. This finding speaks in favour of online participation complementing the participation repertoire (H1): People who engage in offline political activism also engage in online activism, both for environmental and political reasons. Furthermore, members of the all-round activist class are also very likely to have engaged in civic work.

The general probability of *online activist* class membership accounts for 13%. Class members are likely to politically participate online – however, interestingly, they are more likely to engage in online activism for environmental motives than for traditional political ones. This indicates issue-specific interests and behaviour. The online activists are not likely to engage in offline participation of any kind. This rather speaks against H1, unless we see a mobilisation effect of previously disengaged citizens here, which may, over time, also spillover to engagement in other types of political participation.

Table 2: LCA results Philippines – class membership and conditional participation probabilities

		Disengaged	*All-round activists*	*Online activists*	*Helping hands*	*Partial activists*
Class membership probabilities		**53%**	**4%**	**13%**	**17%**	**14%**
Conditional participation probabilities						
Traditional participation	attended meeting	9%	95%	13%	49%	49%
	contacted politician	2%	80%	7%	16%	21%
	donated party	2%	46%	0%	3%	6%
	worked party	4%	82%	6%	35%	44%
Extra-institutional participation	signed petition	0%	67%	1%	1%	6%
	worked actiongroup	1%	62%	0%	15%	9%
	participated demo	0%	56%	0%	5%	1%
Civic participation	worked comm	6%	87%	9%	85%	89%
	worked nonpol	0%	91%	0%	65%	73%
Environ-mental online engagement	comment env sm	1%	100%	79%	1%	83%
	posted env sm	2%	100%	82%	3%	88%
	encouraged env sm	0%	92%	57%	4%	76%
Political online engagement	comment pol sm	7%	93%	59%	6%	65%
	posted pol sm	4%	92%	56%	6%	48%
	encouraged pol sm	0%	96%	14%	1%	17%

Source: Authors' calculations

The *helping hands* account for 17% of class membership probability: Members of this class are very likely to have participated in civic engagements (community projects, non-political action

groups), but not very likely to have engaged in other political off- or online activism (having worked for a party and for an action group are exceptions that should be mentioned – class members are moderately likely to have engaged in those as well).

The fifth residual class specific to the Philippines can be called *partial activists*, accounting for 14% probability of class membership. Class members are likely to engage in online participation (especially for environmental motives), likely to engage in civic participation and in some offline political engagements as well (such as having worked for a party, or having attended political meetings). This result also supports H1 on the complementarity of participation modes.

When running sub-sample logit regressions on the class memberships of the respective classes (=1) vice versa a reference class (here: “disengaged”, =0), the distinctive characteristics of class members can be elaborated upon. The dependent variable is equal to 1 if the individual in the sample is predicted to belong to a certain class, vice versa equal to 0 if the individual is predicted to belong to the disengaged class. Regression results are displayed in Table 3.

As predictors, we consider a gender dummy, a logarithmised age variable, the logarithmised social mobility index, the logarithmised numeric educational attainment variable (0 – no educational attainments, 10 – PhD), a dummy indicating a steady wage inflow representing stable working conditions, a dummy variable indicating if the individual has worked overseas in their life and an index representing the individual’s wealth (the construction of the wealth index is documented in Never et al., 2020).

The members of the all-round activist class tend to be younger than the ones in the disengaged class, at a 10% significance level. Furthermore, being female has a negative impact on all-round activist class membership, significant at a 5% level: Men tend to be more likely to be associated with the all-round activist class. Furthermore, working a job with a steady wage makes membership in the all-round activist class more likely as well, at a 5% significance level.

The members of the online activist class tend to be younger than in the reference class, significant at a 1% level. Furthermore, a higher education level of the individual makes class membership more likely, at a 5% significance level. This is in line with the existing literature on online participation in Western, industrialised democracies (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022).

Concerning the helping hands class, the only characteristic that has a significant effect on class membership in the regression is gender: Again, being female makes class membership considerably less likely, at a 1% significance level. As females are thus less likely to be members of two of the participation groups identified in this analysis, the question arises whether females in the Philippines are generally less prone to politically participate. We discuss this in Section 5.

Partial activists tend to be younger than the disengaged class, significant at a 5% level. Furthermore, partial activists tend to be wealthier than the ones in the disengaged class, significant at a 10% level. In general, the socio-economic status variables play less of a role for middle classes’ political engagement than what might have been expected.

Comparing the members of the all-round activist and the online activist class, interestingly members are not significantly distinguishable by age. The only characteristic significant at a 10% level is a steady wage: All-round activists are more likely to work a steady job, allowing for offline activism.

Table 3: Class membership LOGIT regression results – the Philippines

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	allround_activists	online_activists	helping_hands	partial_activists	allround_v_online
main					
gender (female=1)	**-0.871****	0.0385	**-0.664*****	-0.0993	-0.738
	(0.393)	(0.304)	(0.248)	(0.294)	(0.462)
log_age	**-1.209***	**-1.422*****	0.239	**-0.928*****	0.171
	(0.635)	(0.345)	(0.353)	(0.355)	(0.765)
log_soc_mob	-1.071	-0.595	-0.0913	-0.277	-0.943
	(0.740)	(0.407)	(0.393)	(0.403)	(0.987)
log_educ_self	1.356	**1.421****	-0.180	0.613	0.190
	(1.059)	(0.676)	(0.566)	(0.644)	(1.162)
steady_wage	**1.034****	0.301	0.176	0.181	**0.963***
	(0.420)	(0.231)	(0.216)	(0.235)	(0.510)
dummy_worked_overseas	0.313	-0.136	-0.290	0.00784	0.580
	(0.612)	(0.444)	(0.418)	(0.407)	(0.701)
wealth_index	0.158	0.0620	0.0375	**0.125***	0.176
	(0.114)	(0.0750)	(0.0730)	(0.0730)	(0.164)
Constant	-0.610	1.160	-1.409	0.875	-2.298
	(3.499)	(1.887)	(1.880)	(1.950)	(3.821)
Observations	465	545	553	539	138
Pseudo R^2	0.125	0.059	0.019	0.030	0.092

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses

Except for (5), all regressions are run on a dummy of class membership (=1), vice versa the reference class "disengaged" (=0). For (5), the reference class is "online activists".

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: Authors' calculations

4.3 Peru

LCA results are presented in Table 4. In Peru, probability of the *disengaged* class membership accounts for 54%.

Table 4: LCA results Peru – class membership and conditional participation probabilities

		Disengaged	*All-round activists*	*Online activists*	*Helping hands*	*Online political activists*
Class membership probabilities		**54%**	**1%**	**12%**	**4%**	**30%**
Conditional participation probabilities						
Traditional participation	attended meeting	4%	100%	4%	3%	13%
	contacted politician	0%	60%	0%	0%	0%
	donated party	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	worked party	0%	80%	0%	0%	0%
Extra-institutional participation	signed petition	0%	100%	2%	3%	0%
	worked actiongroup	0%	60%	0%	3%	0%
	participated demo	0%	100%	8%	3%	5%
Civic participation	worked comm	6%	40%	26%	100%	6%
	worked nonpol	1%	60%	25%	100%	1%
Environmental online engagement	comment env sm	1%	40%	91%	0%	11%
	posted env sm	0%	40%	98%	0%	3%
	encouraged env sm	1%	20%	75%	6%	1%
Political online engagement	comment pol sm	3%	100%	68%	17%	99%
	posted pol sm	0%	80%	69%	5%	80%
	encouraged pol sm	0%	100%	42%	0%	16%

Source: Authors' calculations

All-round activists are rare: Class membership probability derives only at 1%. It should be noted that no one in the whole survey sample had donated to a political party during the prior 12 months. This matches the ongoing erosion of the political party system in Peru and the general dissatisfaction of the population with the ruling elites. The all-round activists are likely to engage in both off- and online political behaviour. In Peru, all-round activists are more likely to engage in online political activism with a traditional political background than with an environmental background. This supports H1, but only for a very small minority among the middle classes.

Class membership of *online activists* accounts for 12% probability. Class members are very likely to engage in online political behaviour, especially those with an environmental background. Although this result does not seem to support H1 at first glimpse, the probability distribution of other political participation – although non-significant for group membership here – shows that civic political participation is relevant for some of the online activists as well.

The *helping hands* class membership probability accounts for 4%. Class members are very likely to engage in civic participation; however, they are not very likely to engage in other forms of political behaviour. This matches results for the Philippines and indicates a conceptual and empirical difference of middle class members who are interested in and engage in civic participation behaviour. Here, a follow-up qualitative analysis that deciphers the boundaries of political and social engagement, underlying attitudes and (perceived) participation impact would be interesting.

The fifth residual class specific to Peru can be called *online political activists*. Class membership probability accounts for 30%, thus a high share of the sample can be associated with this class. Class members are very likely to engage in online political behaviour, but solely on rather traditional political topics. They are not very likely to engage in online political behaviour with an environmental background or any other form of offline political or societal participation. This result is particularly interesting, both in terms of the group size and the specific content, which indicates particular political interests and goals. Given the basically non-existent probabilities for any other participation engagement, this result may point towards a replacement of offline participation modes with online participation for this sub-set of middle class members, which is not evidence for H1.

Table 5 shows the regression results on class membership.

All-round activists tend to have a higher education level than the disengaged survey participants, significant at a 5% level. This, by itself, is not a remarkable finding. It is interesting to note, however, that social mobility does not matter. A particular effect of the sub-set “climbers” among the middle classes on participation and democracy, as Schotte (2021) found for South Africa, cannot be seen here.

Members of the online activist class again are likely to be younger than the ones in the disengaged class (1% significance level), are more likely to have worked overseas (1% significance level), are more likely to have a higher education level (1% significance level) and are more likely to work a job with a steady wage (5% significance level) than the members of the disengaged class. This result indicates a potential cosmopolitan profile of young urban Peruvians.

The helping hand class members are more likely to be female (note that this is inverse to the Philippines), at a 5% significance level. Moreover, they are more likely to work a job with a steady wage and to have worked overseas. Furthermore, a better economic position (higher wealth index score) also has a positive effect on class membership (10% significance level).

The members of the online political activist class again tend to be younger in age, to have a higher education level and to be wealthier (all at a 1% significance level) than the ones in the disengaged class. Interestingly, personal international experience is not a relevant factor in this group, which sets it apart from the general online activists. This indicates that concrete values, attitudes and political interests that drive participation decisions may differ between these two online activist groups.

When comparing class members of the online political activists and the online activists (online political activists = 1, online activists = 0), it can be inferred that online political activists tend to be older (10% significance level) and wealthier (1% significance level) than the ones that are general online activists. Furthermore, they are less likely to work a job with a steady wage or to have worked overseas (both 1% significance level).

Comparing all-round activists to an aggregated group of online activists (all-round activists = 1, online activists and online political activists = 0), it can be inferred that the main characteristics distinguishing them is age: All-round activists tend to be older than online activists (both all-round and political ones; significant at a 10% level). Thus, a digital divide in participation patterns exists to some extent between younger and older Peruvian middle classes.

Table 5: Class membership LOGIT regression results – Peru

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	All-round activists	Online activists	Helping hands	onl_poli activits	onpolit_v_on	all-round_v_online
main						
gender	1.417	0.132	**0.871****	0.181	0.104	1.121
	(1.121)	(0.269)	(0.431)	(0.196)	(0.268)	(1.104)
log_age	-0.294	**-1.755*****	-0.841	**-1.394*****	**0.655***	**1.992***
	(1.346)	(0.352)	(0.613)	(0.292)	(0.395)	(1.112)
log_soc_mob	-0.518	0.530	0.773	0.495	-0.318	-0.448
	(2.941)	(0.575)	(0.821)	(0.394)	(0.622)	(1.979)
log_educ_self	**3.628****	**2.747*****	0.168	**2.515*****	-0.229	0.551
	(1.716)	(0.803)	(1.422)	(0.586)	(0.802)	(1.800)
steady_wage	0	**0.577****	**1.009****	-0.116	**-0.701*****	0
	(.)	(0.266)	(0.406)	(0.190)	(0.258)	(.)
dummy_worked_ overseas	2.169	**1.607*****	**1.904*****	-0.297	**-1.756*****	1.560
	(1.450)	(0.509)	(0.655)	(0.548)	(0.510)	(1.258)
wealth_index	0.225	0.122	**0.237***	**0.468*****	**0.293*****	-0.182
	(0.243)	(0.0827)	(0.132)	(0.0657)	(0.0903)	(0.222)
Constant	-9.609	-0.234	-0.957	0.125	-0.691	-12.57*****
	(5.844)	(2.019)	(3.681)	(1.611)	(2.242)	(4.190)
Observations	175	534	465	692	362	172
Pseudo R^2	0.145	0.161	0.094	0.170	0.099	0.085

Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses

Except for (5) and (6), all regressions are run on a dummy of class membership (=1), vice versa the reference class "disengaged" (=0). For (5), the reference class is "online activists". For (6), the reference class is both "online activists" and "online political activists".

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: Authors' calculations

In sum, our findings for both Peru and the Philippines mostly support Hypothesis 1 that online participation options complement middle classes' repertoires. However, a sub-set of people engage only in online participation, supporting the notion that online participation may replace other modes. As we lack time series data or qualitative data on our exact samples, this paper cannot determine for sure whether online participation replaces other actions or mobilises over time. In the following, we run two other additional analyses, zooming into lifestyle politics and a possibly special role of the online activists among the emerging middle classes.

4.4 Online environmental activism and lifestyle politics

This section addresses Hypothesis 2 on political consumption as a form of lifestyle politics. Additionally, it zooms into the identified groups of online activists and their engagement with environmental topics to explore the nature of the relation to potential lifestyle politics as a new mode of participation.

In the following analyses, political consumption variables serve as dependent variables. The behaviour variables are kept in Likert scales from 1 to 5 with increasing frequency of behaviour. In the first specification, we use predicted class membership of the individuals as a predictor of two forms of political consumption (buying/avoiding to buy a product for environmental reasons). We introduce the predicted class membership as a categorical variable and set the "disengaged" class as the default base level. We avoid introducing additional coefficients to avoid multi-collinearity issues.

4.4.1 Philippines

In the Philippines, we can observe a positive impact of predicted class membership in all classes relative to the disengaged class on political consumption. Potential members of the all-round activist class are likely to engage in political consumption as a potential form of lifestyle politics most frequently. Interestingly, being an online activist increases the probability of buying or avoiding products for environmental reasons by a smaller percentage than for all-round or partial activists. These results support Hypothesis 2 that those middle-class members who already engage in several other political participation modes also engage in political consumption. In turn, it speaks against the theoretical possibility of lifestyle politics as an own mode of participation comprised of online activism and political consumption (Theocharis et al., 2021).

As the literature proposes that lifestyle politics and online activism focussed on environmental topics may overlap, irrespective of the conceptual discussion on participation modes, we further zoom into the online activist class by running a sub-sample analysis. This allows us to assess the impact of potential determinants of lifestyle politics on a micro level, conditional on (LCA) class membership. Hence, results should not be interpreted as general findings, but as the determinants of lifestyle politics for respondents who would, due to their political behaviour, be viewed as online activists. This analysis comprises all online activist classes, and for Peru also the environmental and political activists due to the overlap in online participation.

We observe that both types of political consumption are over proportionally practiced on a frequent basis by those online activists who have a higher educational attainment level. Thus, economic factors tend to be less relevant for buying possibly more expensive environmental friendly products than factors connected to education, such as knowledge, information or the ability to process information.

In sum, for the Philippines, these results imply that, conceptually and empirically, lifestyle politics and online activism do not necessarily go hand in hand.

Table 6: Lifestyle politics by class membership – the Philippines

	(1) bought_envreason	(2) avoided_envreason
all-round activists	**1.205*****	**1.051*****
	(0.116)	(0.217)
disengaged	0	0
	(.)	(.)
helping hands	**0.232****	**0.286****
	(0.109)	(0.130)
online activists	**0.296****	**0.263****
	(0.120)	(0.125)
partial activists	**0.888*****	**0.918*****
	(0.111)	(0.127)
Constant	2.209***	2.053***
	(0.0516)	(0.0549)
Observations	797	797
R^2	0.098	0.078

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 7: Lifestyle politics by demographics, online activists – the Philippines

	(1) bought_envreason	(2) avoided_envreason
gender	0.155	-0.109
	(0.236)	(0.303)
log_age	-0.325	-0.0506
	(0.401)	(0.358)
log_soc_mob	-0.281	-0.346
	(0.393)	(0.397)
log_educ_self	**1.002***	**1.940*****
	(0.507)	(0.447)
steady_wage	-0.0954	**0.409***
	(0.237)	(0.230)
dummy_worked_overseas	-0.619	0.0799
	(0.433)	(0.506)
wealth_index	0.0340	0.0697
	(0.0840)	(0.0836)
Constant	1.909	-0.948
	(1.684)	(1.426)
Observations	109	109
R^2	0.072	0.206

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: Authors' calculations

4.4.2 Peru

In Peru, a similar pattern of class membership predicting political consumption as a form of lifestyle politics can be observed, providing additional empirical evidence for Hypothesis 2. All-round activists engage most frequently in political consumption. It is not surprising that online all-round activists and helping hands are also more engaged relative to the "disengaged" class. Interestingly, the lifestyle politics behaviour of online political activists is not significantly different from the "disengaged" class, reinforcing our previous interpretation that these people are only interested in more traditional political topics and do not engage with environmental sustainability topics.

Zooming into the online activist classes, we observe that younger online activists tend to engage in political consumption as lifestyle politics more frequently. Furthermore, a higher level of social mobility and a steady wage also increase the likelihood of Peruvian online activists to engage in political consumption.

Table 8: Lifestyle politics by class membership – Peru

	(1)	(2)
	bought_envreason	avoided_envreason
all-round activists	**1.776*****	**1.772*****
	(0.362)	(0.339)
disengaged	0	0
	(.)	(.)
helping hands	**0.721*****	**1.033*****
	(0.237)	(0.220)
online activists	**0.911*****	**0.727*****
	(0.121)	(0.120)
online polit. activists	0.118	0.0761
	(0.0741)	(0.0769)
Constant	1.824***	2.028***
	(0.0483)	(0.0501)
Observations	832	832
Pseudo R^2	0.099	0.088

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 9: Lifestyle politics by demographics, online activists – Peru

	(1) bought_envreason	(2) avoided_envreason
gender	0.0707	0.0886
	(0.107)	(0.110)
log_age	**-0.579*****	**-0.471*****
	(0.159)	(0.148)
log_soc_mob	**1.132*****	**0.668*****
	(0.233)	(0.224)
log_educ_self	-0.238	0.651**
	(0.326)	(0.315)
steady_wage	**0.332*****	**0.257****
	(0.107)	(0.108)
dummy_worked_overseas	0.257	-0.331
	(0.244)	(0.311)
wealth_index	-0.0572	-0.0879**
	(0.0379)	(0.0364)
Constant	4.275***	2.570***
	(0.875)	(0.794)
Observations	362	362
R^2	0.130	0.101

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: Authors' calculations

5 Discussion

The middle classes in Peru and the Philippines use different political participation repertoires in a complementary way (H1). In both countries, the evidence indicates that online activism actually reinforces all types of political participation for a small, very active minority class. These highly engaged individuals would probably engage in most available opportunities to take part in political life and voice their opinions. The identification of clear class(es) of online activists could count as support for the argument that online political participation mobilises previously disengaged citizens (mobilisation thesis), but the effect on other types of political participation over time cannot be analysed in this discussion paper. The greatest number of people in both countries, however, are politically disengaged (beyond mandatory voting). The size of these disengaged classes is comparable to those in the United States and Europe (Oser et al., 2013; Portos, Bosi, & Zamponi, 2020). Hence, the emerging middle classes are not more or less politically active than people elsewhere in the world.

In the Philippines, young males are more likely to politically participate especially online. This is somewhat surprising, as the local political culture is generally open to women in power. Well-known examples include female vice-presidents Sara Duterte, Leni Robredo and Gloria Arroyo, former secretary of environment and natural resources Gina Lopez and the prominent Maria Resa, leader of the government-critical media outlet Rappler. Women currently hold 28% of the seats in the Senate and House of Representatives. In 2018, the social media campaign #BabaeAko ("I am a woman") by female activists raised national and international attention about President Duterte's anti-feminist discourse (Alingasa & Ofreneo, 2021). It is possible that in the daily lives of the middle classes, traditional patriarchal culture still dominates – or that female middle-class members simply have less of an interest to engage politically. Unfortunately, our data does not allow us to analyse this further. With respect to online participation, our results are in line with a study on gender inequality regarding political participation among young Europeans (Grasso & Smith, 2022).

Furthermore, higher education levels predict a higher likelihood of political participation in various categories in Peru, but not in the Philippines. This is in line with the literature on the mixed relationship between education and political participation, and it confirms a previous study on the weak relationship between education levels and political participation in the Philippines (Espena, 2018).

Surprisingly, there is no effect due to overseas work experience in the Philippines. The number of OFWs in the general Philippine population was 1.83 million in 2022 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022). The international influence on local lifestyles in urban centres is evident in daily life and reflected in the aspirations of the middle classes (Never & Albert, 2021). In line with some of these aspirations, it is likely that the returning OFWs who ascend to middle-class status focus first on acquiring property and investing in the education of family members, and put political-societal engagement aside. Besides, the strong backing of President Duterte by the middle classes and a long tradition of clientelism via family networks (Ravanilla, Davidson, & Hicken, 2022) may have made more active individual political participation irrelevant for many. Moreover, as Webb (2017) argues, the ambivalent attitude of the Philippine middle classes towards democracy – strongly supporting democratic values per se, but asking for a strong, almost authoritarian ruler because freedom has boundaries – is likely to express itself in their limited participation as well.

In Peru, in turn, gender is less of an influencing factor than in the Philippines. Here, international work experience matters a lot more. Young, well-educated Peruvians with international work experience are more likely to be politically active. Peru also has a large class of online activists among the middle classes, both on general political topics and more issue-specific ones concerning environmental sustainability. This is somewhat surprising when compared to the Philippines, given the much higher amount of time the average Filipino spends on social media. The recent turmoil in Peruvian politics may be at least partly responsible. Since 2015, the instable political party system and various incidents of large-scale corruption have led to recurring power struggles between the legislative and executive (Munoz, 2021). President Pedro Kuczynski's involvement in the Odebrecht corruption case forced him to resign in early 2018. Since then, six more presidents have taken office, but only one, Pedro Castillo, had been officially elected. The various events have been accompanied by repeated, partly violent pro-democracy demonstrations, especially by young Peruvians in Lima under the hashtag #SeMetieronConLaGeneraciónEquivocada. According to anecdotal evidence, many Peruvians endure the political struggles either by completely disengaging or by making political jokes – the latter especially via social media.

In terms of the debate on lifestyle politics and the gateway/getaway debates, our results support hypothesis H2 that political consumption is a complementary type of political participation in both countries, as political consumption happens across several activist classes. It presents, therefore, a gateway rather than a getaway. Unfortunately, we cannot causally determine the

gateway effect completely, as we do not have the required time series data to trace the middle classes' participation repertoires evolving over time. For Peru, the evidence is clearest that political consumption and online activism form a sort of lifestyle politics that particularly young Peruvians with stable jobs and higher education levels than their parents engage in. In the Philippines, political consumption rather complements the political participation repertoire. Political consumption may still be an expression of a blended lifestyle, but it is not clearly separate from other types of political participation. For both countries, more research on lifestyle politics is required that goes beyond simply stated behaviour and actually matches environmental product availability and costs with consumer choices, political participation and a sociological analysis of prevalent lifestyles.

Regarding the potential influence of the Peruvian and Filipino middle classes on the two global trends, democratic backsliding and more individualised participation, especially on environmental topics, our results imply the following: As overall political participation intensity does not substantially differ from Western, industrialised countries, democratic backsliding due to lower participation patterns can hardly be inferred from the numbers as such. Comparing Peru and the Philippines, the higher probability of Filipinos engaging in civic opportunities and a lower participation level of females compared to a higher degree of engagement by Peruvians in online participation could point towards less political interest in using and supporting democratic processes and values in the Philippines. It could, however, also indicate a higher degree of frustration, as people may assume a lack of self-efficacy, that is, that their participation might not matter. Differences, however, may also be due to the embeddedness of the middle classes in the oligarchic structure of the political system or the particular Filipino view on what democracy is and should deliver (see above). In both countries, people engage for specific political issues – as evident in our results on environmental topics, but also in the more recent protests in Peru. Democratic backsliding thus may continue, but it will be noticed and will likely spur reactions by the middle classes and other citizens. For the middle classes' overall impact on sustainability, more actions beyond political consumption and online environmental activism are required to actually lower carbon emissions (Never et al., 2020). Yet, in fully autocratic regimes, the possibilities of the middle classes may be limited.

In sum, the emerging middle classes do not have homogenous political participation behaviour. Different groups engage in various forms of participation – some combining online and offline activities, some focussing on online or civic opportunities only. Given the large group of disengaged individuals – who may only be mobilised for elections or under threat of their core values – and the very small group of all-round activists, the existence and use of online participation opportunities and lifestyle politics should be interpreted positively.

6 Conclusions

This discussion paper presents a unique contribution to current theory-building about political regimes, participation and new middle classes. The available knowledge on middle classes and democracy is outdated and does not apply to the emerging middle classes in middle-income countries. This paper therefore contributes towards closing a substantial research gap.

The political participation patterns of the middle classes in Peru and the Philippines reveal levels of civic and democratic engagement comparable to Europe or the United States. Roughly half of the surveyed population in each of the countries is disengaged from politics, while the other half splits into three or four classes of activists that engage in various modes of political participation. In general, issue-specific participation of the middle classes is more likely than continuous, broad-based political participation.

We were particularly interested in new modes of participation, such as online activism and lifestyle politics. Our findings, based on a LCA and logit regressions, support the notion that these new modes mostly work in a complementary way to traditional modes of participation. Furthermore, we find a distinct class of online activists in all three countries that is unlikely to engage in other forms of political participation. This supports the idea of online activism as an own mode of political participation for a particular type of citizen – young, urban, educated and, in Peru, potentially with cosmopolitan values and experiences. Regarding the gateway/getaway debate on lifestyle politics, our findings tend to support the gateway hypothesis, even though only time series data can give an in-depth answer to the sequence of participation activities people undertake. However, only among young Peruvians with steady employment and higher education levels than their parents, online participation and political consumption really seem to form a proper lifestyle, that is, supporting the idea of lifestyle politics as a concept in its own right. In the Philippines and for older Peruvians, political consumption blends in with other forms of political participation. It may still have a lifestyle element, but with our data we cannot extrapolate these fine-grained differences. More sociological research on local lifestyles would be required here.

In terms of country context, the most interesting differences in our empirical analysis are the influence of international work experience on particular types of political participation in Peru, but not in the Philippines; the higher level of engagement of male middle-class members in the Philippines compared to the degree of female political participation, which we did not find in Peru; and the strong prediction of higher education levels for being part of three of the four activist classes in Peru. A similar influence of this characteristic only exists for the likelihood of being online activists in the Philippines. These differences can at least be partly ascribed to different local socio-political cultures as well as various local political developments in recent years.

Future research on political participation in low- and middle-income countries could apply different measures of political consumption and lifestyle politics or address other sub-fields of lifestyle politics. Future studies could also dive deeper into potential differences between stated and revealed participation, into understanding what forms and drives politically motivated lifestyles and provide more qualitative in-depth work on explaining the complex results outlined for each country here.

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