



Trends in forms of civic involvement in the Netherlands between 2008 and 2020

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Dutch civil society is seen as exemplary due to its high level of civic involvement. The article shows **how civic involvement (membership, donating money, participating in an organization, and volunteering) in the Netherlands has developed between 2008 and 2020.**

The study is based on high-quality survey data derived from the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences, a household panel aimed to represent the general Dutch population.

The research question was: to what extent have forms of Dutch civic involvement in different organizations changed in the years 2008–2020?

The study helps to map trends in civic engagement for many types of organizations over a long period. Philanthropy professionals must understand how civic involvement changes and adopt appropriate strategies. An overview of historical trends in civic involvement is missing in many countries.

There are slow declines in civic engagement, not affected by societal events. It could be due to the process of cohort replacement and changes in organizations.

[#civicinvolvement](#) [#Netherlands](#) [#philanthropytrends](#) [#civilsocietyadaptation](#)

Background & Context



- The authors consider **three causes for trends in Dutch civic involvement: (1) individualization, (2) traditionalization, and (3) the role of major societal events.**
- Progressing (1) **individualization** may alienate people from organizations. There is some evidence for a decrease in (people who) donate money, volunteer, and have organizational membership in the Netherlands. According to the individualization thesis, it **may gradually and slowly erode civic engagement.**
- Process of (2) **traditionalization** is a counter-reaction of a willingness to keep or to reintroduce 'old' traditions in society. After a period of erosion of civil society due to individualization, civil society is re-institutionalized. Individualization and traditionalization can coexist. It **could cause stability in civic engagement.**
- The role of **major societal events** (3), such as the economic, refugee, and COVID crises, **may periodically affect people and undermine or boost civil society.**

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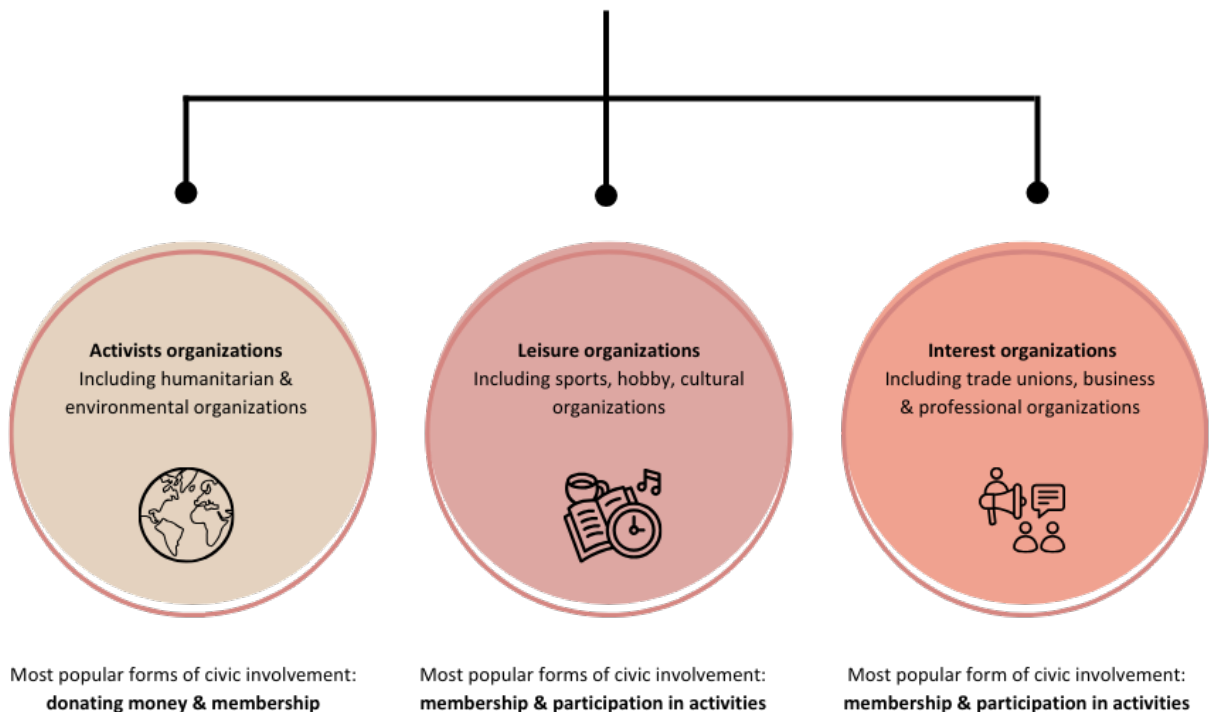
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Take aways & Learnings



- **Dutch civic landscape is slowly but significantly eroding** over time.
- Decreases in most forms of involvement support the perspective of individualization but indicate no support for the traditionalization perspective.
- **The economic and refugee crises did not considerably change civic engagement in Dutch civil society.** Since declines are unaffected by periodic societal events, the cohort effects might be responsible for it: **younger, less engaged citizens replace older, more involved citizens.** Younger cohorts may be active in new, not-studied forms of civic engagement. An alternative explanation is that **organizations invested less or became less effective in mobilizing citizens.**
- **Membership is losing popularity in all types of organizations.** It should be especially worrying for typical membership-based organizations (e.g., leisure and interest organizations). **Civil society organizations should invent strategies and policies for binding and recruiting members.**
- A positive exception is the growing popularity of participation in and volunteering for environmental organizations.

Figure 1. Types of organizations studied



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