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Political Participation of young Europeans: The Role of liberal values and democratic context

Abstract: When discussing politics and the youth, three conclusions are often taken for granted. First, that young people are insufficiently interested in politics. Second, that they are increasingly disengaged from conventional politics. And third, that they have created new spaces, through new forms and channels of participation, where they can express their views and interests. Although new forms of youth political participation have been extensively studied, their association with ideological self-understanding and attitudes towards minorities is only partially understood. However, increased activism, although normatively desirable, may be a double-edged sword if it is found disproportionately among youth with a questionable commitment to democracy and tolerance. The main question this article will try to answer is “Who is active among young people in Europe?” The analysis is based on the European Social Survey (ESS) data round IX (2018). Focusing on the participatory practices of young Europeans, the chapter explores associations of ideological orientations and attitudes related to minority groups and indicators of social context with different forms of political activism. Respondents’ more positive attitudes about LGBT rights, as well as liberal attitudes towards immigrants, are associated with greater participation in *almost all forms of political participation*. Democratic political context matters as well. Young people in more democratically developed countries relatively more often participate in campaigns, activities of civic society organizations, are politically active online, and boycott products.

Keywords: Young people, political participation, ideological orientations, liberal values, Europe, democracy, European Social Survey

Introduction

“... the notion of political participation is at the center of the concept of the democratic state” (Kaase and Marsh 1979: 28),

Youth political participation is a popular research topic in political science and sociological literature. At the same time, it is a topic that can hardly be exhausted, the perennial questions being: is the contemporary youth becoming politically more or less enlightened/corrupt/passive/active, or, to be concise, different from the more mature generations? Hence, the general consensus on what characterizes young people in the political field is not likely to occur simply because times are (forever) a-changing, to quote the recent Nobel prize for literature winner.

The recent literature indeed reports observations of certain changes/specificities in the youth political outlook. For instance, although the second half of the twentieth century saw a decline in electoral turnout in the general population (Macedo et al. 2005; Blais 2007) this trend was more pronounced among young people (Fieldhouse et al., 2007). In line with these findings, young people appeared as increasingly unwilling to get involved in other conventional forms of participation, such as being active in political parties, participate in political campaigns, contact politicians directly, or join labor unions (Norris, 2003; Furlong, Cartmel 2012; Henn and Foard 2014).

On the other side, other authors report that in the last two decades, the turnout of those who vote in elections has been stable and relatively high among young people in Europe and that they consider this form of participation to be the most important form of engagement in democratic societies (Pilkington, Pollock, 2015.)

Whether or not youth participation in conventional forms of political participation has been declining, some studies show that young people are disproportionately increasingly involved in unconventional forms of participation: protest, boycott, online activism, petitions, and citizens' associations (e.g., Marsh, O'Tool & Jones, 2007; Loader, Vromen, and Xenos 2014; Renström, Aspernäs & Bäck, 2020, Norris, 2003; Furlong, Cartmel 2012; Henn and Foard 2014; Fieldhouse et al., 2007). However, there is no consensus among researchers here either. For instance, Pilkington and Pollock (2015) report no significant increase in youth's unconventional participation, and Fox (2015) concludes that British Millennials are a generation characterized by apathy and political alienation, both from conventional and unconventional forms of participation.

Theoretical framework

While the bulk of research continues to compare younger and older generations in terms of average levels of participation, the question of determinants of youth political participation is at least as much important. Whether or not the level of youth political participation is changing and differing from the older generations, the obvious fact is that there are large differences within the young generations. Some youth is politically active; some is passive.

Moreover, the empirical research shows the heterogeneity of the findings – studies from different periods and countries often show inconsistent results. In other words, not many relationships are consistently documented in different contexts. The opposite corresponds better to the observations: various relationships vary across different contexts. For example, there is a significant role of macro / contextual variables in, say, explaining the variations in protest activity (see Dalton et al., 2009; Dalton et al., 2010).

All this suggests that it is important to study youth political participation *continually*, as earlier findings can quickly become obsolete, and to study it taking the social and political *context* into account. Hence, the relevant research question is not anymore just whether 'the youth' is more or less active in various forms of participation. But, rather under what conditions and in what spheres can youth become more or less active?

In this paper, we are concerned with factors that account for individual differences in various conventional and unconventional forms of political participation. At the individual level, we focus on several relevant variables that proved to be relevant in explaining various forms of conventional and unconventional participation, such as age, gender, educational and income level, and ideological orientations (Burns, Schlozman, Verba, 2001; Dalton et al., 2010; Dauphinais, Barkan, Cohn, 1992; Oni et al., 2017).

Although the role of the basic socio-economic indicators is relatively well studied, we include those variables as the control variables, but also for substantive reasons. These variables are often regarded as constituting the ‘basic model’ of participation (e.g., Verba & Nie, 1972, Brady et al. 1995), and it is important to control for their effects in order to demonstrate the additional explanatory value that other variables might have.

However, our main research focus concerning the individual-level predictors is on the role of ideological orientations. Some studies (Kirbis, 2013; Dalton et al., 2009; Welzel, Deutsch, 2012) indicate that certain ideological orientations are associated with different levels of democratic participation. A long line of research suggests that the abstract dimension of authoritarianism versus libertarianism (or liberalism in some studies) have a consistent and strong influence on political attitudes, including participation (from Adorno et al., 1950, to Inglehart 1990, Flanagan & Lee 2003, Kriesi, 1998, Van der Waal et al., 2007, 2010; Kirbiš, 2013). Kirbiš, for instance, concludes that, in Europe, ““authoritarians” are less likely to be politically active” (2013, abstr.).

Further back in history, the seminal *Political Action* study (Barnes, Kaase, 1979) found that support for protest participation is closely related to support for democratic values (the opposite of authoritarian). A shift to more direct, non-institutionalized, and weakly coordinated forms of participation, towards *elite-challenging* and away from *elite-oriented* political participation is also claimed to be rooted in a shift in values from materialist to post-materialist (Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005), which is seen as equivalent to authoritarian-libertarian dimension (Flanagan, 1987, Flanagan & Lee, 2003, Achterberg, 2006).

Participation in unconventional political activities is found to be strongly related to the acceptance of pro-social, emancipatory, and democratic values (Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart, Welzel, 2005; Wezel, 2013; Welzel, Deutsch, 2011). These, on the other hand, seem to be more widespread among younger strata in virtually any society in the world (Inglehart, Welzel, 2005; Welzel, 2013).

Here, we opted for two specific attitudinal dimensions that could both be regarded as facets of the more general authoritarian-libertarian ideological dimension: LGBT rights and attitude towards refugees and immigrants. Importantly, they are two politically ‘hot’ issues: both topics have been highly salient in recent years across Europe, and they are widely present in mass media, so it is likely that majority of the population has an opinion on these matters, and it is likely that they are relevant for both conventional and unconventional forms of political participation - there are political parties representing distinct views on the matter, there are NGOs active in the field, the themes are present in online political space, as well as in street demonstrations.

The abstract liberal-authoritarian ideological dimension is operationalized in different manners in the literature, and these two attitudes are frequent among them. For example, the acceptance of homosexuality has been repeatedly used in the measurement of authoritarianism-liberalism orientation (De Regt et al., 2011; Pavlović et al., 2019). Tolerance of homosexuality is but one indicator of emancipative values, described as pro-civic and pro-liberal orientation (Welzel, 2013). Similarly, ethnocentrism and ethnic prejudice have been conceived as some of the central elements of authoritarianism since its conception (Adorno et al., 1950, Altemeyer, 1996).

Overall, we would expect that more liberal or libertarian-oriented youth is more politically active, in line with, among others, Kirbiš' conclusion that, in Europe, "pro-democratically oriented public was found to be more politically engaged than authoritarians" (2013, p. 243). While this hypothesis is less controversial concerning the anti-LGBT orientation, its applicability is more problematic concerning the anti-immigrant attitude.

The Migrant (or refugee) crisis has left one of the most striking marks on European societies during the last decade. In many countries, the political sphere became highly polarized on this issue, as demonstrated by, for instance, the emergence and success of numerous right-wing populist parties exploiting this crisis (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Not only that this issue has been highly politically salient, but it also affected the youth perhaps more than the older generations. For instance, it might induce a stronger feeling of competition for resources (jobs, social positions) since the youth is in the process of securing its own social position. At the same time, youth organizations were prominent and active in the pro-immigrant camp (e.g., Pisani, et al., 2018). Hence, it less obvious whether heightened, conventional or unconventional, participation is to be expected to be associated with the authoritarian position on this issue (stronger anti-immigrant/refugee orientation).

This ambiguity makes this research question all the more important and timelier. In any case, our choice of the two ideological orientations (LGBT and anti-immigrant attitudes) seems appropriate for the study of youth political participation.

Association of active participation with the authoritarian-liberal dimension might indicate the future ideological shifts in European politics. If youth with anti-immigrant attitudes is more active, it could lead to more anti-immigrant policies, for instance. Hence, the real-life implications of our study are worth keeping in mind.

As aforementioned, the context seems to be relevant for various forms of participation. For the political issues we study here and for studying youth participation, one contextual variable seems to be particularly relevant: the level of democratization of a country. The level of democratization (or quality of democracy) is obviously relevant for political participation (Inglehart, Welzel, 2005; Dalton et al., 2010; Dalton, Welzel, 2014; Welzel et al., 2005).

Political institutions, constituting the setting where political participation takes place, may be such that they do not readily allow for high levels of participation (Tarrow, 1996; McAdam, McCarthy, Zald, 1996). Hence, lower democratization may passivize citizens, especially concerning the conventional forms of participation.

In open and democratic political systems, conventional forms of participation are supposed to be more meaningful, which should motivate participation (in less democratic contexts, citizens may conclude that there is no point in casting votes). But democratic systems can also stimulate protest, demonstrations, civil disobedience, i.e., forms of unconventional participation (Dalton et al., 2010) because they are open, and citizens have less reason to fear repercussions. Thus, it may be that democracy asks for more democracy. For instance, political mobilization to support various underprivileged groups may become salient once a relatively high level of democracy in the mainstream society is secured.

In general, we would expect that a more democratic context should be positively associated with all forms of participation.

In accordance with the theoretical debates and previous research findings, this paper is based on the following research questions:

- Which forms of political participation are more or less popular among the youth (not comparing them with the adults)? We expect that the most formal form of participation – voting at elections – is the one most practiced.
- What are the main socio-demographic predictors of various forms of political participation? Following the literature, we predict that age and education should be the most significant predictors of higher participation.
- How are the attitudes of young people towards gay and lesbian rights and towards immigrants associated with various forms of political participation? We hypothesize that more liberal orientations are associated with increased participation.
- What is the relationship between the socio-political context (level of development of democratic institutions) and different forms of youth political participation? Our hypothesis is that a higher level of democratization is associated with more active participation, particularly concerning the unconventional forms.

Data and research design

To analyze the relationship between different types of youth political activism, values, and characteristics of the socio-political context, we used data from the 9th round of the European Social Survey (ESS). The ESS data enables the comparison of different European societies and contains a sufficient number of indicators to measure various aspects of political participation. The ESS IX data was collected on representative samples of populations in 29 European countries aged 15 and over in the period 2018-2020. For the purpose of the current study, we used the cohort aged 15-30 years old. For social context indicators, we used The Economist (2021) Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index.

Outcome Variables. Research on youth political participation often classifies forms of political participation as either conventional/formal/old or unconventional/informal/new.

While we think it would be inappropriate to reify these categories, as various formerly new forms of participation have become a part of the standard repertoire of political activism and are slowly losing the aura of the new and unconventional, we still adopted this distinction, as it seemed useful for cleared presentation of the results. Therefore, in this paper, we focus on nine specific forms of political participation. Among the 'conventional' forms of participation, we include:

1. voting in national elections,
2. wearing campaign badge,
3. contacting a politician,
4. being active in a political party or action group.

The 'unconventional political participation' groups include these activities:

5. online engagement,
6. participation in demonstrations,
7. signing petitions,
8. participation in the work of civic organizations ("Civic society organizations", CSO), and
9. boycotting products.

Each activity was measured by a specific question that included 'yes' and 'no' answers (and for voting, also ineligible to vote, which were excluded from the analysis). The question about participating in the elections was 1) "Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election?". The questions that measured other forms of participation were: "There are different ways of trying to improve things in

[country] or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? Have you”: 2) “worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker”, 3) “contacted a politician, government or local government official”, 4) “worked in a political party or action group”, and 5) “posted or shared anything about politics online, for example on blogs, via email or on social media such as Facebook or Twitter”, 6) “taken part in a lawful public demonstration”, 7) “signed a petition”, 8) “worked in another organization or association” and 9) “boycotted certain products”.

Predictor variables. As independent variables, we used two scales that express liberal or authoritarian/conservative attitudes towards the rights of the members of the two minority populations that are currently at the center of significant political and social debates: gay and lesbian people and immigrants.

The attitude toward gay and lesbians’ rights was measured over a scale made up of three questions: 1) “Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wish”, 2) “If a close family member was a gay man or a lesbian, I would feel ashamed”, 3) “Gay male and lesbian couples should have the same rights to adopt children as straight couples”. Answers to each question included five-point scales (1-5) of the Likert type. To form a composite scale (range 3-15), the scale of the second question is reversed so that all answers are in the same direction so that the *higher score expresses a lower degree of liberal attitudes* towards the gay and lesbian population. The reliability of the scale for the whole sample, Cronbach’s alpha is .83.

The scale of anti-immigrant orientation is formed on the basis of two questions: 1) “Would you say that [country’s] cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries”, and 2) “Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?” Responses were given using eleven-point scales (0-10). The total range of the scale is from 0 to 20, and a higher score implies a more positive, or liberal, attitude towards immigrants.

In order to describe the socio-political context, we used The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index, which consists of five dimensions: electoral process and political pluralism, the effectiveness of government, participation¹, political culture, and liberties. It covers a total of 60 indicators and represents a weighted average of experts’ judgments, public opinion polls, and population data. The range of scores for countries in the sample is 5.77 - 9.81.

Other Indicators. As control variables, we used the following socio-demographic indicators: respondent’s age, gender (male gender is the reference category), education (number of years spent in the education process), and the total household monthly income.

Method

For data analysis, we used multi-level random intercept binary logistic models with 29 countries in the sample. In this way, we were able to separate the effects of social context from individual characteristics of respondents and identify both individual and social factors that shape patterns of youth political behavior.

¹ The main contextual variable include, among other things, the measure of participation. Since we measured it as well a note is in place. Participation indicator covers various areas, such as voter turnout and readiness to take part in lawful demonstrations. But they are expressed as an average turnout in parliamentary elections since 2000 (expressed as above 70 % / 50-70% / below 50%) or as the low/moderate/high prearedness to take prat in demonstrations. As such, they are still aggregate or macro measures which justifies its treatment as contextual variable.

Poststratification weight involving design weights was used to weight the data, thus maintaining the relative uniformity of the size of individual samples and enabling the comparability of different social contexts.

Results

Descriptive analyses

Descriptive data about the participation variables and the democracy index are presented in Table 1.

There are significant variations in the degree of youth participation in the last national (parliamentary) elections held in European countries. Fewest of them voted in the Czech Republic (43.3%), France (43.1%), and Switzerland (43.7%), and the most in the Scandinavian countries – Sweden (86.6%), Iceland (72.9%), Denmark (82.7%), and Norway (79.1%). Working in various forms of citizens' associations vary from about 1% to 30%. It is lowest in Cyprus, Slovakia, Hungary, while it is most common among young people in the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands. Signing a petition is even more represented as a form of engagement and ranges around 5% among young people in Hungary and Cyprus to over 40% in the Scandinavian countries (Iceland, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden). Contacting politicians is relatively rare among young people and is least common in Bulgaria, Slovakia, Cyprus, Hungary and most common in Latvia, Belgium, Portugal, Norway, and Sweden. It is somewhat more common in the countries of Western and Northern Europe than in Eastern and Southern Europe. Participation in the work of political parties is at a very low level, and of all the forms of participation, it is definitely the least practiced. The countries with the lowest share of party activism among young people are Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy, and Lithuania, and with the highest Iceland, Montenegro, Spain, and Serbia. In the Balkans, this type of activism is probably the result of clientelistic networks that have monopolized resources, especially places in the public sector (Stanojević et al., 2016). There are large differences between practices of participating in campaigns and highlighting the features of the political option they support. It is least practiced in Hungary, Slovenia, and Cyprus, and most in the Scandinavian countries. Here, too, a certain pattern is recognized where this form of activism is more often present in the north and west and less often in the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe.

Table 1 Country-level distribution of political participation key variables

	Elector al turnout	Contacte d politician	Party or action group	Campaig n badge	CSO?	Petition	Demonst ration	Boycott	Post
Austria	73.9	13.3	4.9	5.3	14.0	32.2	12.0	28.6	27.0
Belgium	69.2	15.7	2.9	7.7	17.8	25.5	5.0	13.8	27.9
Bulgaria	62.0	1.5	1.5	3.2	2.0	7.7	7.9	5.2	7.4
Croatia	49.3	5.1	3.8	4.6	9.0	34.4	9.5	8.7	10.5
Cyprus	49.2	3.6	2.6	2.0	1.0	7.7	5.1	6.6	8.7
The Czech Republic	43.3	8.5	2.7	11.0	5.0	24.1	14.3	15.0	22.2
Denmark	82.7	12.8	3.3	12.8	25.9	42.9	11.1	27.7	30.2
Estonia	48.8	10.3	3.3	7.7	4.3	14.6	2.9	9.1	23.0
Finland	71.8	8.5	2.3	22.1	26.5	43.5	7.3	42.2	27.6
France	43.1	7.7	5.9	14.5	13.8	37.7	16.5	30.0	30.5
Germany	76.9	10.6	2.2	8.8	24.6	36.3	12.9	34.2	28.2
Hungary	57.9	4.0	0.0	1.2	1.4	4.1	4.1	3.2	6.4
Iceland	72.9	14.3	11.1	39.3	28.7	43.2	25.8	38.8	24.6
Ireland	49.0	11.1	3.8	15.3	9.2	29.7	14.3	13.5	22.7
Italy	76.2	7.0	1.5	7.7	5.5	14.0	9.7	5.6	21.7
Latvia	65.2	19.0	2.9	8.8	12.7	14.5	5.2	4.6	29.1
Lithuania	45.6	6.3	1.7	3.5	3.0	19.6	6.9	5.2	17.4
Monteneg ro	70.7	10.3	10.9	7.6	8.8	19.6	7.9	6.7	10.0
Netherlan ds	76.1	12.3	2.7	6.2	30.2	26.3	4.9	9.6	17.3
Norway	79.1	15.3	6.3	47.0	22.1	45.1	18.1	29.0	33.1
Poland	55.5	5.9	2.8	8.1	6.9	13.1	4.4	5.6	8.8
Portugal	54.7	15.6	5.2	8.5	21.7	35.1	10.8	8.1	27.8
Serbia	57.4	7.0	7.0	2.8	17.9	23.8	8.6	11.8	19.3
Slovakia	45.7	2.3	1.8	3.2	1.4	29.9	6.3	3.6	7.7
Slovenia	49.2	10.7	2.4	2.0	8.7	13.6	4.0	7.9	15.8
Spain	70.5	12.3	7.4	12.3	20.4	24.3	25.3	13.7	34.7
Sweden	86.6	14.7	2.8	17.2	28.6	47.7	14.7	47.4	42.3
Switzerla nd	43.7	7.2	3.7	6.9	12.4	29.1	6.9	19.6	15.7
United Kingdom	55.2	7.3	3.1	8.8	7.2	40.5	6.3	14.8	28.9

Note: CSO – Being active in civil society organizations.

Lawful public demonstration as a form of youth activism is significantly present in some countries, such as Spain and Iceland, to a lesser extent in Norway, France, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Ireland, and least in Slovenia, Hungary, Estonia, and Poland. The participation of young people who are politically active online is approximately the same, given that between 6% and 42% of them have posted or shared anything about politics online.

Overall, two features of the presented data seem obvious. There are wide variations in the levels of political participation across countries. And there are clear regional differences: the average levels of political participation tend to be lower in the regions of Eastern Europe or post-communist countries, similarly as in Kirbiš (2013).

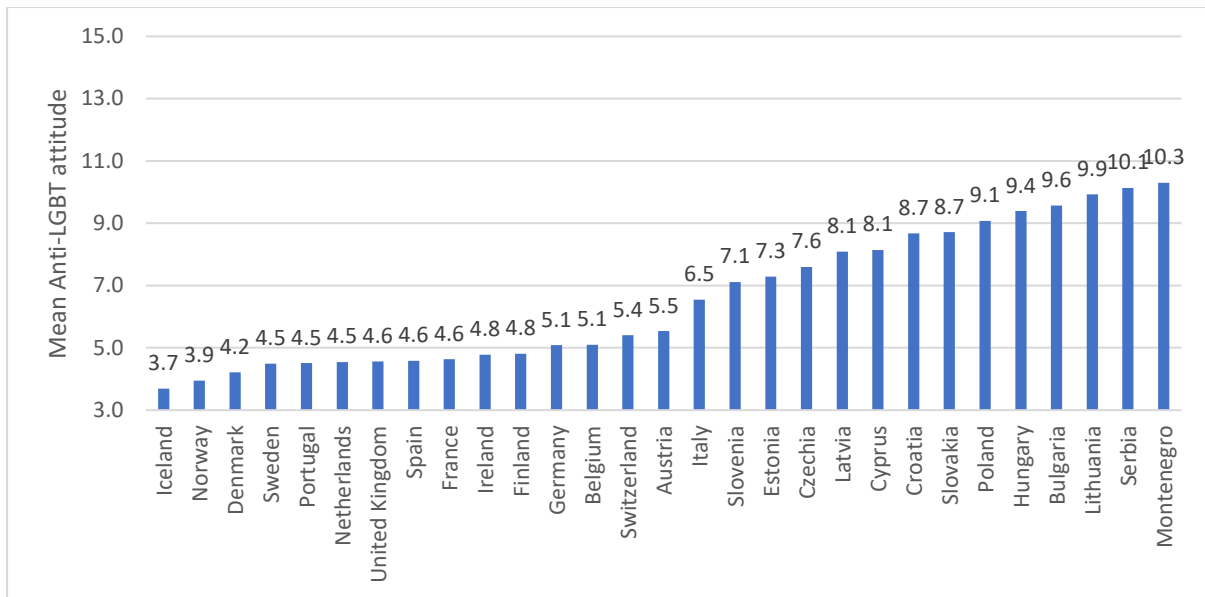


Figure 1 Mean Anti-LGBT attitude in different European countries among youth

The average levels of the attitudes toward gay and lesbian persons also show significant variations between countries. Young people in Scandinavian and Western European countries on average express less anti-LGBT views compared to the young people in Eastern Europe (ex-socialist countries). Obviously, Eastern European countries have a less positive attitude toward the gay and lesbian population and their rights. Various reasons could account for this, such as the post-socialist legacy, economic underdevelopment, traditionalist and authoritarian political culture, and so on. But, full testing the role of these factors is beyond the scope of this paper.

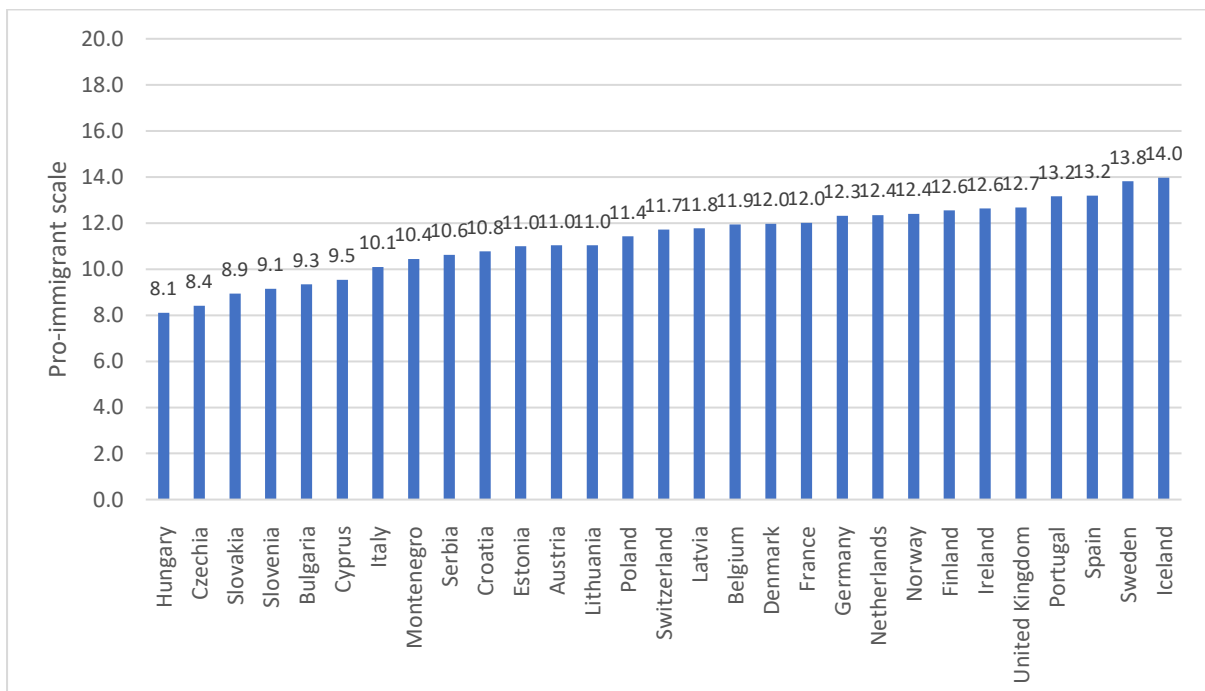


Figure 2 Mean scores on the pro-immigrant scale in different countries among youth

Regarding the attitude toward refugees and immigrants, young people in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Bulgaria, on average, are less positive about immigrants compared to their peers in Iceland, Sweden, Spain, and Portugal. In general, the ordering of countries is similar along both previous dimensions. Eastern European former communist countries demonstrate more authoritarian attitudes.

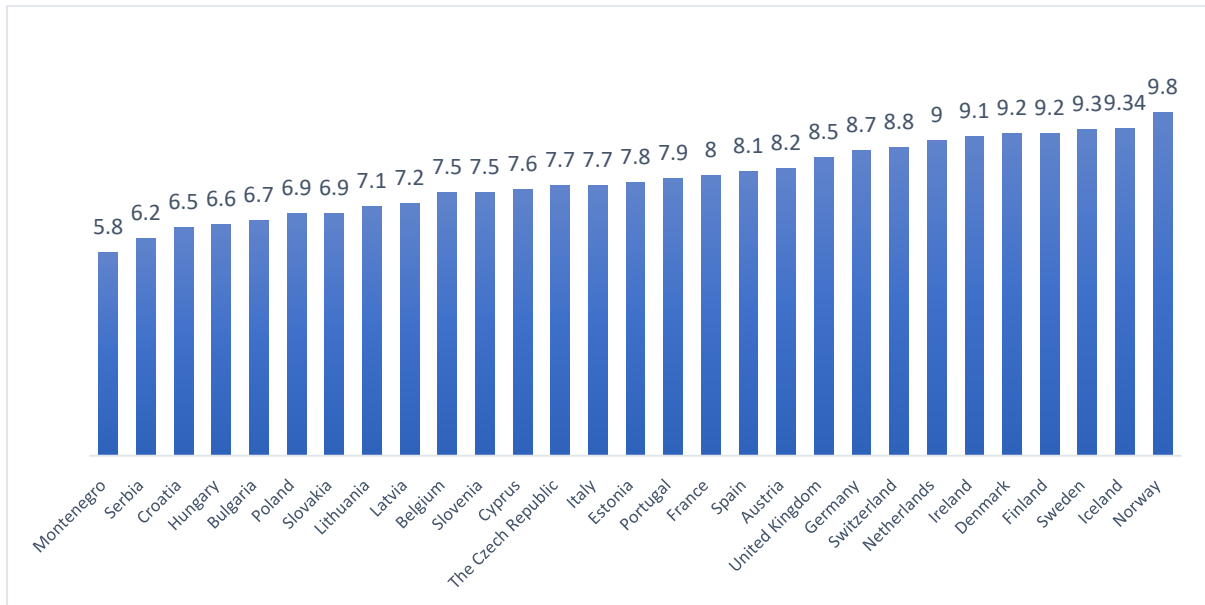


Figure 3 Mean scores on The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index

Figure 3 shows that young democracies, the former socialist countries, have the lowest scores on the democracy index, that the countries of Central, Southern, and Western Europe are in the middle, and that the Scandinavian countries record the highest scores. At this point, possible associations between the social context and individual characteristics ideological orientations and behaviors in the political field can be recognized.

Analysis

In the first step, we present the results pertaining to the conventional forms of political participation. Note that the analyses were performed on a subsample of respondents aged between 15 and 30, i.e., those who could be treated as 'the young', 'the youth', or 'emerging adults'.

The first variable presented in Table 2 concerns the voter turnout variable. Almost all coefficients associated with the individual-level variables reached the adopted level of statistical significance. On average, young men vote more often than young women. There is a positive association between voting and relatively higher socio-economic status, as indicated by the variables of education and household income. *Liberal* attitudes, both concerning LGBT rights and immigrants/refugees, are associated with higher turnout too. Those young Europeans who have more liberal attitudes towards gay and lesbian people, as well as those who have more positive attitudes towards immigrants, vote more often. The results also show that more or less democratic context in Europe does not significantly predict the voter turnout. It looks as if the most basic form of conventional participation is more a matter of individual resources and attitudes than of the socio-political context.

The second participation variable concerns contacting politicians or government officials. The probability of this activity increases with age, while young men take part in it more often

compared to young women. With each year of education, as well as with an increase in household income, the likelihood increases that young people will come into direct contact with some of the politicians or officials. As in the turnout model, this type of activity is more often practiced by those with more liberal attitudes towards both gay and lesbian people and immigrants/refugees. The contextual indicator did not show statistical significance, indicating that the already low variability of this phenomenon is not systematically related to the level of development of democratic institutions.

Working in a political party or action group is positively associated with gender: women relatively less frequently partake in this form of political activism as well. Concerning socio-economic status, only education is associated with activism in political parties (income is not). Again, more liberal attitudes towards immigrants/refugees are more frequently found among the politically more active. But, a more liberal view of the LGBT groups this time is not proved to be a significant predictor of this type of activity. Apparently, the socio-political context expressed by the quality of democracy does not explain individual differences in political party activism as well.

The last indicator of conventional participation, worn or displayed campaign badge or stickers, is not related to any of the included socio-demographic characteristics of young people. But it is statistically significantly related to their ideological orientations. Young people who are more liberal in terms of attitudes towards the gay and lesbian population and who have a more positive attitude towards immigrants are more willing to engage politically in this way. This activity is also associated with the degree of democracy of the country – the only variable from the conventional activism group. The more democratic a country is, the more young people are willing to be active during campaigns and to support political options by identifying publicly with them.

Table 2. Logistic regression models for conventional politics

	Voted in last elections		Contacted politicians		Active in a political party or action group		Campaign and badge	
	Coeff.	Exp. Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.	Coeff.
Intercept	-4.026***	0.018	-3.816***	0.022	-4.274***	0.014	-2.347***	0.096
Age	.107***	1.113	.034**	1.035	-0.02	0.98	-0.014	0.986
Female (ref. male)	-.123*	0.884	-.407***	0.666	-.261*	0.77	0.142	1.153
Education years	.138***	1.148	.050***	1.051	.105***	1.11	0.018	1.018
Income	.029*	1.029	.032*	1.033	0.021	1.021	-0.011	0.989
Ideological variables								
ALGBT scale	-.137**	0.872	-.232***	0.793	-0.049	0.953	-.227***	0.797
Pro-immigrant scale	.091*	1.095	.192***	1.211	.170*	1.184	.231***	1.260
Contextual variable								
Index of democracy	0.155	0.918	0.066	1.068	-0.083	0.924	.464***	1.591
ICC		0.086		0.027		0.072		0.078
N		5333		7072		7077		7077
N		29		29		29		29

Source: ESS 2020, youth (15-30), weighted by poststratification weight.

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05.

In Table 3, we present the results concerning the five unconventional forms of participation. In the first model, we analyzed participation in various organizations and associations. The results show that participation in CSO *decreases* with age, while men are significantly more engaged compared to women. Education is associated with this type of engagement so that more time spent in the educational process implies more frequent involvement in the work of CSOs. Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between liberal attitudes about gay and lesbian rights, positive attitudes about immigrants, and this type of activism, indicating that ideological orientations are very important conditions for involvement in NGOs and associations.

Concerning the macro-level variable, there is a positive relationship between the degree of democracy in the country and the degree of participation in the civil sector, so that in countries with more developed democratic institutions, young people are more involved in CSOs and associations.

The next model concerns the degree of participation in a *lawful public demonstration* over the previous 12 months. The results indicate that participation in demonstrations among the youth decreases with age, grows with each year of education, but does not show a connection with household income. Those who have a more *liberal* orientation are more willing to demonstrate. Differences in the degree of democracy of the country cannot explain the differences in participation in the protest.

In the third pair of columns, we analyzed the probabilities that someone signed a petition in the last 12 months. The results indicate that age, gender, and household income are not associated with this activity, while the growth of education also increases the probability of one signing a petition. Those who have more liberal attitudes are more likely to participate in these activities. This type of protest activity is well studied, and the data presented here are quite in line with previous findings (e.g., Welzel et al., 2005; Dalton et al., 2009; Dalton et al., 2010). As in the previous model, the coefficient for the contextual variable did not reach the level of statistical significance.

The fourth model analyses whether respondents posted or shared anything about politics online during the previous 12 months. The results indicate that young men are more politically active on the Internet than young women, that the level of education is positively associated with online activism, as well as liberal attitudes about gay and lesbian rights and a positive attitude towards immigrants/refugees. Finally, the probability of online engagement increases with the degree of democracy of the country.

The last model analyzes the factors associated with boycotting certain products (*buycotts*). The probability of boycotting increases with age, which is probably related to the increase in the purchasing power of young people as well as the development of consumer habits. With the increase of time spent in the process of education, the probability of boycotting certain products increase, i.e., purchasing decisions increasingly include considering the associated ideological and value connotations. Young people who have more liberal attitudes are more willing to use these political strategies to express a political attitude. Finally, the democratic context is statistically related to the boycott. In countries with a more democratic system, this activity is more widespread

Table 3. Logistic regression models for unconventional modes of political participation

	Participation in civil society organizations		Demonstrations		Signing petition		Posting or sharing content on the Internet		Boycotting a product	
	Coeff.	Exp. Coeff.	Coeff.	Exp. Coeff.	Coeff.	Exp. Coeff.	Coeff.	Exp. Coeff.	Coeff.	Exp. Coeff.
Intercept	-2.714***	0.066	-2.968***	0.051	-2.948***	0.052	-2.302***	0.1	-4.052***	0.017
Age	-.044***	0.957	-.021*	0.979	0.006	1.006	0.009	1.009	.026**	1.027
Gender: Female (ref. male)	-.307***	0.736	-.080	0.923	0.084	1.087	-.198**	0.821	0.003	1.003
Education years	.113***	1.120	.083***	1.087	.110***	1.116	.069***	1.071	.099***	1.105
Income	0.023	1.024	-0.025	0.975	0.018	1.018	-0.012	0.988	0.022	1.022
Ideological variables										
Anti-LGBT scale	-.194***	0.824	-.232***	0.793	-.377***	0.686	-.303***	0.739	-.278***	0.757
Pro-immigrant scale	.153***	1.165	.376***	1.456	.209***	1.232	0.009	1.009	.197***	1.218
Contextual variable										
Index of democracy	.444**	1.483	.142	1.152	0.233*	1.262	.205**	1.227	.537**	1.711
ICC		0.17		0.087		0.079		0.031		0.102
n		7080		7080		7071		7067		7067
N		29		29		29		29		29

Source: ESS 2020, youth (15-30), weighted by poststratification weight.

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05.

Discussion and conclusions

In order to analyze individual and contextual factors associated with different kinds of political participation among the European youth, we used the European Social Survey data IX round and applied a multi-level analytic approach. First, we observed that the repertoire of political participation among young Europeans is (a) diversified, and (b) there are significant differences between countries.

Descriptives

The European youth engages in different forms of political activism, but to varying degrees: each of the nine examined activities is practiced by some, but no activity is practiced by all. Expectedly, voting is by far the most popular form of participation. The highest level is observed in Sweden - 86.6% of the youth subsample voted in the previous election. Other relatively frequent activities are signing petitions, boycotting products, and posting some online content.

Cross-country differences are also notable, involving both formal and unconventional forms of participation. Youth, particularly in the North European region, seems to be above-average active in most regards, but variations are obvious within each region. However, the discussion of country differences is beyond the scope of this paper.

Controls and socio-demographics

The patterns of significant socio-demographic predictors of formal and informal modes of participation are mostly similar and can be discussed together.

The obtained results for the individual-level predictors generally conform to our expectations, with some exceptions. For instance, electoral turnout is predicted by older age (despite the sample being limited to the youth), male gender, education, and income. Each of these coefficients goes in the expected direction if we compare them with the results of Smets and Van Ham's (2013) meta-analysis of turnout predictors. A deviation in this regard is the activity of wearing a campaign badge, where no socio-economic variables proved to be significant predictors. The reason may be in the cultural specificity of this activity, as demonstrated by the large variation in the frequencies of these activities between countries. For instance, this activity is relatively common in Northern and Western European polities but rare in Eastern Europe. In Norway, nearly 47% of the youth practiced this, while in countries such as Serbia, Hungary, Slovakia, the figures are below 3%.

The age variable showed some unexpected results. Although "Young adults are notorious abstainers." (Smets & Van Ham, 2013, p. 348), the findings show that the age of the young people is positively correlated with voting in elections. Age is also associated with contacting politicians, and boycotting goods, it is *negatively* associated with involvement in CSOs and participation in protests. Age is one of the most stable predictors of turnout (Smets and Van Ham, 2013, Blais; Gidengil & Nevitte 2004), as it reflects gradual entry into conventional politics, and the need to form a habit of participation (e.g., of voting, Miller & Shanks 1996; Verba & Nie 1972).

Boycott, as an expression of political preferences, implies certain economic independence that comes with taking on roles of adults, i.e., completing education, entering the labor market, and financial independence. However, negative associations of age with participation in associations and demonstrations are more puzzling. It is possible that participation in demonstrations is less compatible with adult roles and responsibilities. But, it is not clear what

could account for the decreasing participation in CSEs with increasing age. In any case, it requires further research to determine if these are reliable findings.

The results for education suggest that it is of special relevance for political participation in general. Education is a key resource and facilitates political participation (e.g., Smets & van Ham, 2013, Persson 2015, Brady et al., 1995). It leads to a better understanding of the world of politics and society. Also, higher education level, and especially the college education, offers more options for involvement in various forms of associations and ad hoc actions, and as such represents a key reservoir and “recruitment framework” for youth activism (Flanagan et al, 2012; Persson 2015).

Although the ‘gender gap’ in participation has been reported in the literature (e.g., Paxton, Kunovich & Hughes 2007), among adults, gender is not a reliable predictor of electoral turnout (Smets and van Ham, 2013), according to the present results, young European men are more involved in several forms of participation compared to young European women. Males tend to vote more often, are more willing to contact politicians, participate in the work of political parties, but also other associations, and are more often active online. There is no form of participation where females would be more involved. The results thus support the thesis that specific socialization of women, but also systemic barriers in many countries, lead to less interest and involvement (e.g., Inglehart et al., 2003; Pfanzelt and Spies 2018, Milbrath & Goel 1977).

In general, the observed associations among the socio-economic and demographic variables support the ‘resource model’ of participation (e.g., Smets and Van Ham, 2013, Brady, Verba & Schlozman, 1995, Nygård, Söderberg, & Nyman-Kurkiala, 2016, Verba & Nie, 1972). The essence of the model is captured by Verba and Nye, for example, who conclude that in politics take part those who have the necessary skills, time, and money (Verba & Nie 1972, Brady et al. 1995).

Ideological orientations

The relationship between the ideological orientations and participation shows interesting connections. When looking at the youth population, respondents’ more positive attitudes about LGBT rights, as well as immigrants, are associated with greater involvement in *almost all forms of political participation*. Those who are more liberal on these two issues are more often politically and civically active. Being liberal implies giving more weight to human rights and freedoms, having more intense liberty aspirations, and valuing the utility of freedom more (e.g., Welzel, 2013). Thus, our starting hypothesis is confirmed.

This finding is quite in line with the emancipative and value-based view of causes of unconventional political activism. Questioning and challenging, instead of following and complying, are sometimes seen as the norms of democratic citizens today, but this can come from both sides of the political spectrum. Concerning voter turnout among adults, for instance, left-right ideology is not consistently associated with participation (Smets & Van Ham, 2013). But, ideology *can* become associated depending on a particular time and place. It seems that at the end of the second decade of the 21st century, it is the *liberal* youth that tends to be somewhat more politically active.

While we speculated that anti-immigrant orientation could turn out to be associated with increased activism, given the saliency of the recent migrant crisis that has been happening during the politically formative years of our youth samples, the results showed that, in fact, liberal positions on both ideological dimensions are characterized with higher average participation.

Nonetheless, it requires further research to see if this increased activism among the liberal youth is visible also with regard to other political issues (e.g., socio-economic left-right) or just to issues related to the libertarianism-authoritarianism dimension.

Context

Socio-political context, i.e., the level of polity democratization, is associated with variations in political participation in several interesting ways. First, the level of democratization seems to be more important for participating in unconventional activities (CSOs, boycott, posting on the Internet) than in the formal, more conventional ways (the only significant coefficient concerns the culturally specific wearing campaign badges and/or placing stickers).

It may be that within the European context, the basic democratic institutions are relatively well established and secure regardless if a polity is ranked relatively lower or higher according to the quality of democracy. Voting, contacting politicians, party activism are activities available to all in each included country, and therefore the overall level of democratization is not associated with these forms of participation. Perhaps, differences in the levels of democracy within Europe are not so large to allow the manifestation of the supposed passivizing effect of flawed democracy at least onto voting and similar conventional activities (referenca? mislim da ni jedna ne postoji!)

Young people in more democratically developed countries relatively more often participate in unconventional political activities, such as in CSO work, online posting, and boycotting products.

The association of participation in CSO is with the level of democracy is supporting the view that one of the basic prerequisites for the functioning of a democratic system is a developed civil society. Unlike voting, participation in CSO is self-selected, typically taking into account the ideological coloring of a CSO. While anti-LGBT-oriented youth may be more participating in churches (not accounted under CSO), youth liberal on gender views is slightly more frequent among CSO/s participants. This also indicates the importance of looking into specific forms of participation, rather than just conventional and unconventional ones.

The explanation of more frequent unconventional participation in more democratic contexts may be that young people in more democratically developed countries have more opportunities and established channels of participation, adequate infrastructure, more responsive institutions, and political socialization that enables them to engage in political processes compared to countries where democratic procedures are still being established, and the civic infrastructure is still being built. In other words, precisely because they live in such societies that allow them to do so. It is also possible that growing up in a more democratic society creates activist political culture and also democratic expectations and demands. This may reflect the tendency of people to “protest because they can” (Dalton et al., 2010: 72), i.e., not because they are deprived but because they are primarily motivated by the pursuit of more rights and freedoms (Barnes, Kaase, 1979; Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart, Welzel, 2005; Welzel, 2013; Norris, 2002; Dalton et al., 2010; Welzel, Deutsch, 2011; Verba et al., 1995). However, it requires further research to examine whether this means that societies show greater resistance to change in a liberal direction, which would then create demand for increased political activism.

Overall, our conclusions are clear. The socio-economic predictors of youth participation are basically the same as concerning the participation of the general population (e.g., for the summary concerning voting, see Smets and Van Ham, 2013). In particular, age and education are particularly consistent predictors of participation and gender to a lesser extent.

More interestingly, youth political participation does not seem to be ideologically neutral. Liberal positions on LGBT rights and on immigration are associated with higher activism across the board. Finally, the democratic political context is a macro variable that predicts some forms of activism, in particular the unconventional ones.

Can we say something about the future of European politics based on the obtained results? Not with certainty, but if overall political participation continues to be higher among the liberal sections of the public, the political picture of Europe in a couple of decades might look different

than the last several decades, characterized by the conservative turn of the 1980s (e.g., Ignazi, 1992) and cultural backlash of the 2000s (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Yet, if growing old and wise means also becoming more conservative², not much change in the political landscape is to be expected.

For future research, we would suggest examining the role of some other attitudinal and ideological dimensions besides those included in this study. For instance, the classical left-right dimension is worth looking at.

It would be important to examine the influence of additional macro-level variables and their interactions with the micro-level variables. For instance, adding indicators of the institutional inclusion of LGBT rights and freedoms could affect the role of the ALGBT ideological dimension.

While the ESS methodology uses the classical indicators of political participation, it would be worth considering other forms of participation and motivations of young people to engage in political life. For instance, digital participation, subcultural groupings, art performance, alternative use of public spaces, etc.

In addition to the frequency of participation, it is also important to pay attention to the motivation for participation. Participation, for instance, could be clientelistically motivated. Thus, democratic context may be related not only to manifestation but also to the underlying motivation.

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² As originally expressed by Batbie: “He who is not a républicain at twenty compels one to doubt the generosity of his heart; but he who, after thirty, persists, compels one to doubt the soundness of his mind.” Anselme Polycarpe Batbie (19th century French academic jurist, as quoted in Alpert (2016, p. 647).

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