

Beyond voting: Youth political participation and civic engagement in eight European countries



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LLAKES CENTRE CONFERENCE 2018 Young Adults, Inequality and the Generational Divide:
Learning and Life Chances in an Era of Uncertainty **15-16 November 2018** London, UK

Beyond voting: Youth political participation and civic engagement in eight European countries



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Abstract



Youth political participation and civic engagement has significant implications for the democratic functioning of modern societies as well as for developing individuals. It is also a controversial issue in light of recent multiple challenges faced by the EU. This paper presents data from the Horizon project Catch-EyoU, an interdisciplinary consortium for the study of European youth active citizenship. The sample consisted of 9,752 adolescents and young adults, aged 14-30, 59% female, from eight European countries, i.e., Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, and UK. The survey administered to participants focused, in addition to voting and other traditional forms of active citizenship, on various other forms of participation, such as online participation, civic engagement, and civic values. Potential correlates of participation, such as individual attributes (civic and political participation, life satisfaction, self-efficacy, political efficacy), social position variables (gender, parental education, household income), and contextual factors (family warmth, family norms, friends' norms, classroom climate, and sense of community) were also examined. Results revealed that youth from different European countries differ significantly in the degree to which, and way in which, they are civically and politically engaged. In spite of these mean-level differences, the links between contextual factors and participation do not significantly differ between countries. These findings suggest the need to broaden our conceptualizations in order to capture new and emerging forms of participation and to account for its multilevel correlates in historical social context.

Constructing Active Citizenship with European Youth: POLICIES, PRACTICES, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS



- Funded by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 Programme (GA number: 649538; 2015-2018; PI: Elvira Cicognani, University of Bologna, Italy)
- An interdisciplinary consortium that aims to identify the factors, located at different levels (psychological, developmental, contextual and macro-social) influencing the different forms of youth active engagement in Europe.
- Collaborating institutions: Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, Italy; Örebro University, Sweden; Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, Germany; National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece; Universidade do Porto, Portugal; Masaryk University, Czech Republic; London School of Economics and Political Science, UK; Tartu Ülikool, Estonia; Forum Nazionale dei Giovani, Italy.



INTRODUCTION



Civic and political participation



- **Active citizenship** is conceptualized as civic engagement and political participation, although terminologies vary considerably across disciplines and epistemological approaches.
- **Civic engagement** refers to how an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future (Adler & Goggin, 2005).
- **Political participation** is a behavioral expression of engagement consisting of political interest, attention, knowledge, opinions and feelings, which focus on political institutions, processes and decision making (Ekman & Amnå, 2012).

Civic and political participation



- Different operationalizations make comparison across studies difficult.
- A comprehensive typology is proposed by Ekman & Amna (2012):

	Non-participation		Civil participation		Political participation		
Individual	Active	Passive	Social Involvement	Civic engagement	Formal	Activism	
Collective						Extra-parliamentary	Illegal

- Critical scientists question the view of the ‘good citizen’ with responsibilities and rights and bring notions such as ideology, social justice, minorities and conflict into the centre of attention (e.g., Banaji, 2008; Bee & Guerrina, 2014).

Civic and political participation



Representational/institutionalized

- Working for a political party
- Contacting a politician or public official
- Donating money to support a political group

Expressive participation online

- Sharing news or music or videos with social or political content
- Discussing social or political issues on the internet

Protest participation

- Signing a petition
- Taking part in a demonstration or strike

Expressive participation offline

- Wearing a badge, ribbon or a t-shirt with a political message

Economic participation

- Boycotting or buying certain products
- Donating money to a social cause

Community-oriented participation

- Volunteering
- Working for a social/community cause

- Normative vs. non-normative (sometimes illegal)

Civic and political participation



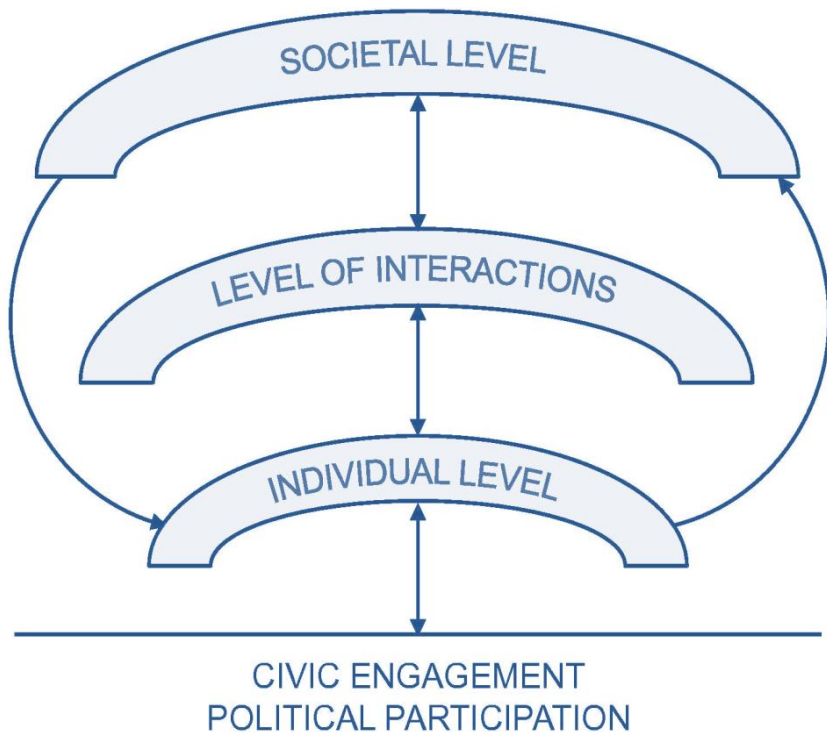
- Research on active citizenship has yielded some alarming findings:
 - There is widely expressed concern about the decline in youth voting rate and other traditional forms of political action (Putnam, 2000).
 - Critical scientists point to the elitist character of established citizenship leading certain groups –such as immigrants and young people– to political and social exclusion (Cammaerts et al., 2014).
- Modern societies undergo deep changes that challenge the legitimacy of established political institutions. These include, among others, the rise of far right populism, radicalization, immigration, recession and growing inequalities (e.g., Hatton, 2016; Kuhn et al., 2016; Maricut, 2017).

Group and individual differences in youth civic participation



- To describe and understand group and individual differences in youth's civic and political behavior we need to take into account, among other things:
 - Youth are developing individuals. Their civic and political engagement needs to be examined in developmental context. Civic Engagement is a core developmental task from adolescence on.
 - Their lives are nested in contexts. The characteristics of societal and proximal contexts are important influences on their behavior.
 - Their own characteristics contribute to how, and how much, they will be civically and politically engaged.

An integrative conceptual model of youth civic participation



political system, cultural and ethnic mix, country's wealth, distribution of power, structural barriers, human rights, attitudes towards minorities, media

active civic involvement at school, mobilizing youth in community life, parental warmth and civic engagement

personality, motivation, self-regulation, political interest and knowledge, empowerment, adaptive history with respect to other developmental tasks

(Motti-Stefanidi & Cicognani, 2018)

Youth civic participation in context



- To understand cross-country differences we need to examine civic participation in historical context. Four relevant parameters are:
 - Young Europeans are the first generation of native EU citizens.
 - Adolescents are growing and young adults have come of age during a period of economic recession, which has affected some countries more than others (UNICEF, 2014). This has led to a “lost generation” of European youth.
 - Reaction to forces of globalization, nationalism, Euroscepticism, Brexit.
 - East-European countries in the post-communist era.

Research questions



We examined:

- whether level and change in civic participation differ by participants' social position and demographic variables, i.e., gender, age, SES, and country;
- whether and how individual-level and contextual (school, family, community) factors predict individual differences in level and change in civic participation;
- whether country moderates the above links.
- We used an overall index of civic and political participation, as well as more concrete measures focusing on online participation, civic engagement, and civic values.

METHOD



Participants



- Two waves of data collection, one year interval (2016-2017)
- $N = 9,752$ at wave 1; attrition at wave 2 = 50% (approx.)
- 8 countries (CZE, EST, GER, GRE, ITA, POR, SWE, UK)
- Between 860 to 1,725 participants per country
- 59% females
- Ages 14 to 30 years old (mean = 19.6 years, $SD = 3.48$)
- Two age groups: 14-19 and 20-30 years
- Mean parental education = 3,00 (on a 4-point Likert scale; $SD = .79$)
- Mean estimated family income = 3,34 (on a 4-point Likert scale, $SD = .76$)

Measures of participation



- **Overall civic and political participation**

18 items, 5-point Likert scale, $\alpha = .81-.90$

Activities over the past 12 months, e.g., *Signed a petition; Worked for a political party*

- **Online participation**

3 items, 5-point Likert scale, $\alpha = .59-.75$

e.g., *Discussed social or political issues on the internet*

- **Civic engagement**

5 items, 5-point Likert scale, $\alpha = .69-.80$

e.g., *Volunteered or worked for a social cause*

- **Civic values**

3 items, 5-point Likert scale, $\alpha = .74-.83$

e.g., *It is important to help improve the lives of people in my community*

Individual predictors of participation



- **Self-efficacy**

5 items, 5-point Likert scale, $\alpha = .75-.86$

e.g., *When I am confronted with a problem I can find several solutions*

- **Political efficacy**

7 items, 5-point Likert scale, $\alpha = .78-.83$

e.g., *I think that by working together young people can change things for the better*

- **Life satisfaction**

Single item measure, 5-point Likert scale

On the whole, how satisfied are you with the life you lead?

Contextual predictors of participation



- **Family warmth**
3 items, $\alpha = .82-.90$, e.g., *My family shows they care for me with words and gestures*
- **Family norms**
3 items, $\alpha = .58-.79$, e.g., *My family would approve if I became politically active*
- **Friends' norms**
3 items, $\alpha = .57-.74$, e.g., *My friends encourage me to get involved in social issues*
- **Open school climate**
6 items, $\alpha = .74-.87$, e.g., *At our school, students' requests are taken seriously*
- **Sense of community**
4 items, $\alpha = .67-.79$, e.g., *In our neighbourhood, there are enough activities for young people*

Analytic method



- The cross-sectional and longitudinal scalar models of civic participation were measured using WLSMV estimator in Mplus and acceptable fit was established.
- Cross-nationally comparable scores of participation were estimated using multigroup CFA assuming scalar measurement invariance across countries (and time points).
- Mean levels (and change) of participation were compared using (repeated measures) factorial ANCOVA controlling for parental education.
- Predictors of participation were tested using multigroup path models.
- Overall civic participation was predicted by individual-level factors whereas domain-specific scores of participation were predicted by contextual factors.

RESULTS



Overall civic participation



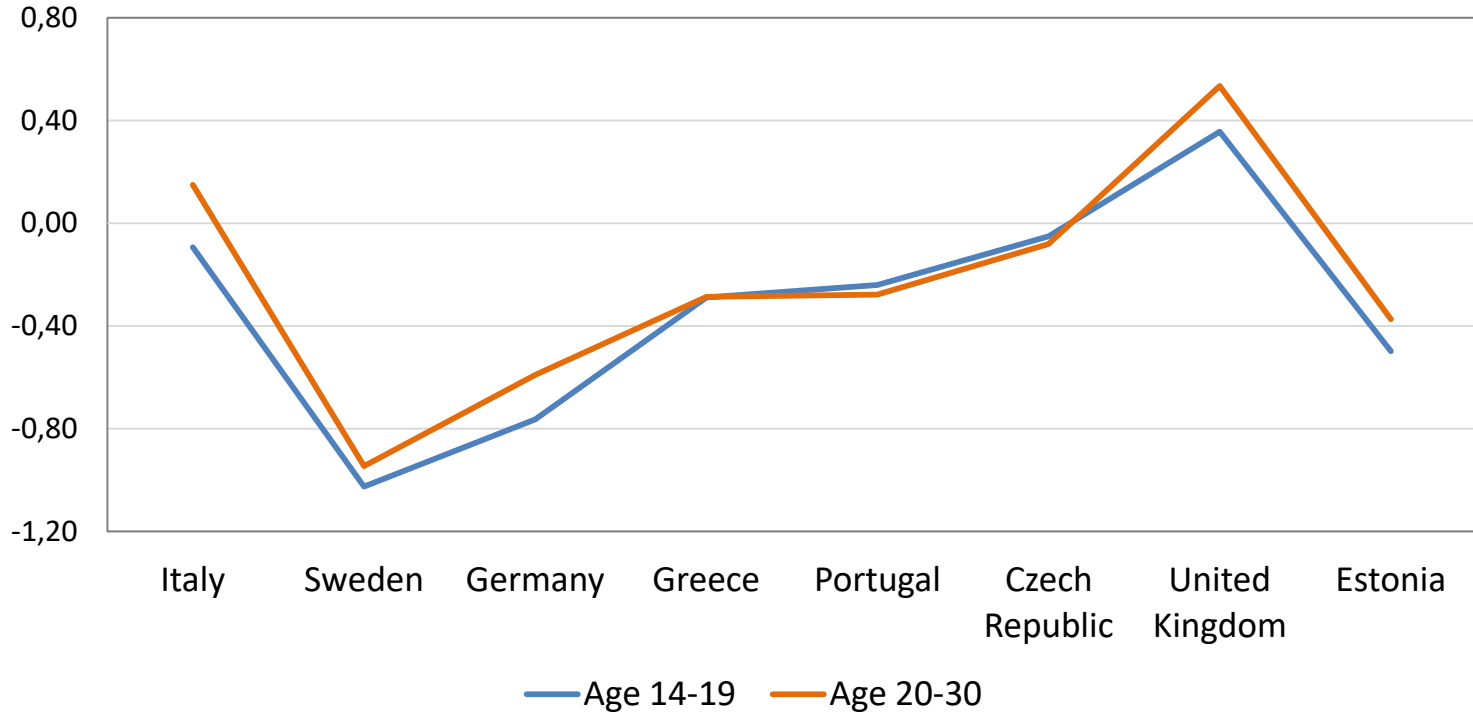
- Mean comparisons of overall civic participation as a function of country, gender, age group, household income, and parental education.
- Mean changes of civic participation across time points.
- Prediction of mean level and change in overall civic participation by individual-level factors (life satisfaction, self-efficacy, political efficacy).
- Moderation of country in predicting civic participation from the above individual-level factors.

Mean comparisons of civic participation



- Large cross-country differences ($\eta^2 = .23$).
- No substantial gender differences ($\eta^2 = .00$).
- No substantial gender X country differences ($\eta^2 = .00$).
- Small but significant age differences ($\eta^2 = .01$).
- Small but significant age X country differences ($\eta^2 = .03$). Young adults tended to participate more than adolescents, esp. in Italy, Germany, and UK.
- Small effect of household income and parental education in all countries. Higher income and parental education predicted higher civic participation.

Mean levels of civic participation by country and age group



Mean changes in civic participation



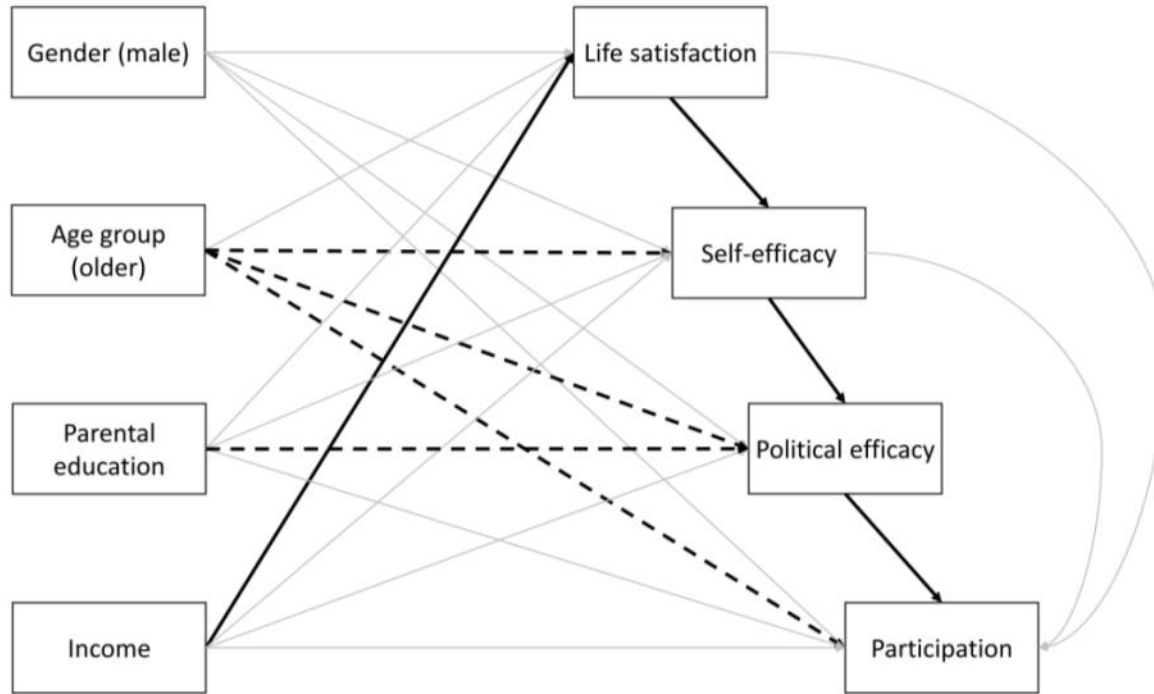
- Means of overall civic participation at the country level remained very stable over time.
- In few countries (Germany and, to a lesser degree, Greece and Italy) mean participation slightly decreased.
- Age and gender did not interact with change in civic participation.

Individual-level predictors of civic participation



- Political efficacy was the strongest predictor of participation, though its effect size differs across countries.
- Self-efficacy was the most important predictor of political efficacy. Life satisfaction was the most important predictor of self efficacy. Income was the most important predictor of life satisfaction.
- Therefore, the path was **from income to participation** through the **sequential mediation of life satisfaction, self-efficacy, and political efficacy**.
- The effect of age was moderated by country (in Italy, young adults participate more than adolescents).
- The effect of age on political efficacy was significant only in Italy and Germany (young adults had a greater sense of political efficacy than adolescents).

Individual-level predictors of civic participation



solid line: standardized effects > .15 and significant in all countries

dashed line: standardized effects > .15 and significant in some countries

Domain-specific participation and civic values



- Mean comparisons of online participation, civic engagement, and civic values as a function of country and gender.
- Prediction of mean level and change in online participation, civic engagement, and civic values by contextual factors (family warmth, family norms, friends' norms, open classroom climate, and sense of community).
- Moderation of country in predicting domain-specific participation from the above contextual factors.

Domain-specific participation and civic values



- **Online participation**

- Considerable cross-country mean differences ($\eta^2 = .13$).

- No overall gender differences ($\eta^2 = .00$).

- Small but significant interaction of country X gender ($\eta^2 = .01$).

- **Civic engagement**

- Considerable cross-country mean differences ($\eta^2 = .10$).

- Females participate slightly more than males ($\eta^2 = .01$).

- No interaction of country X gender ($\eta^2 = .00$).

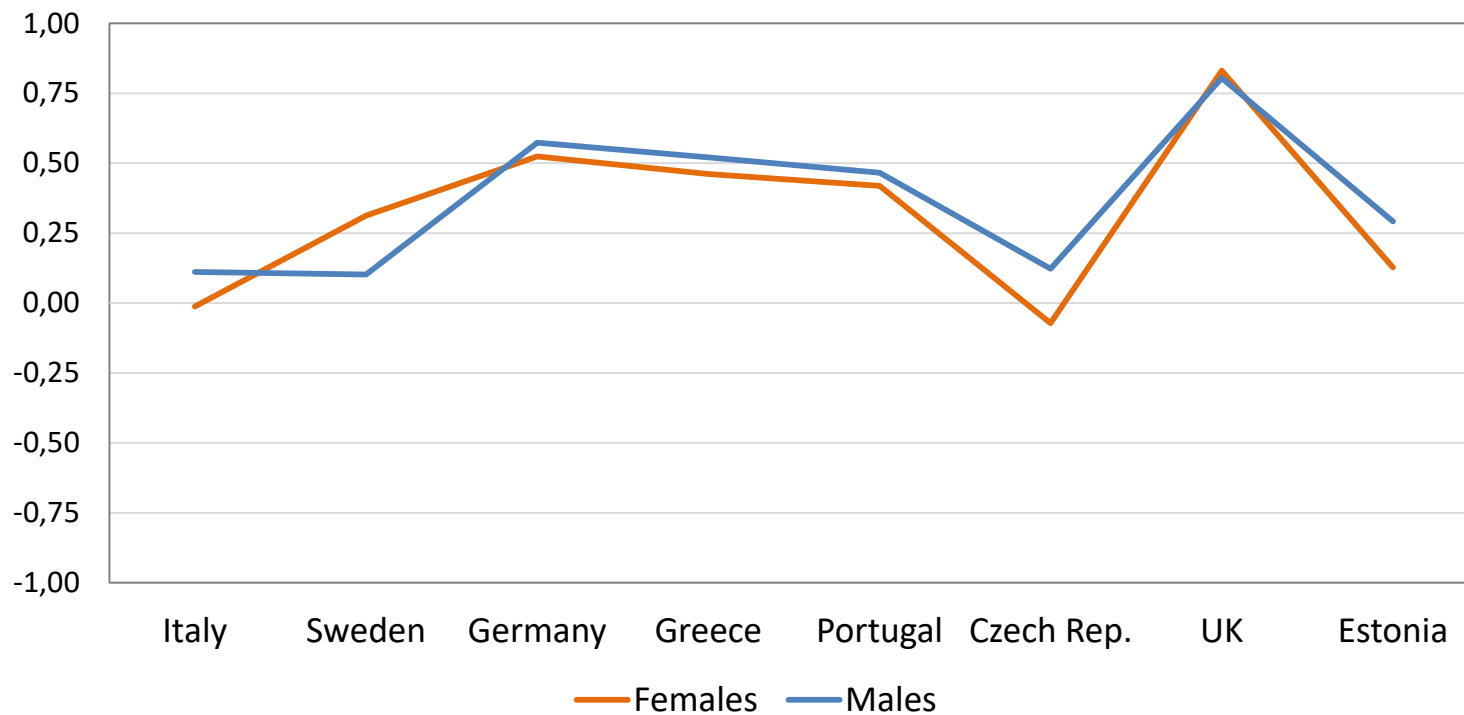
- **Civic values**

- Considerable cross-country mean differences ($\eta^2 = .14$).

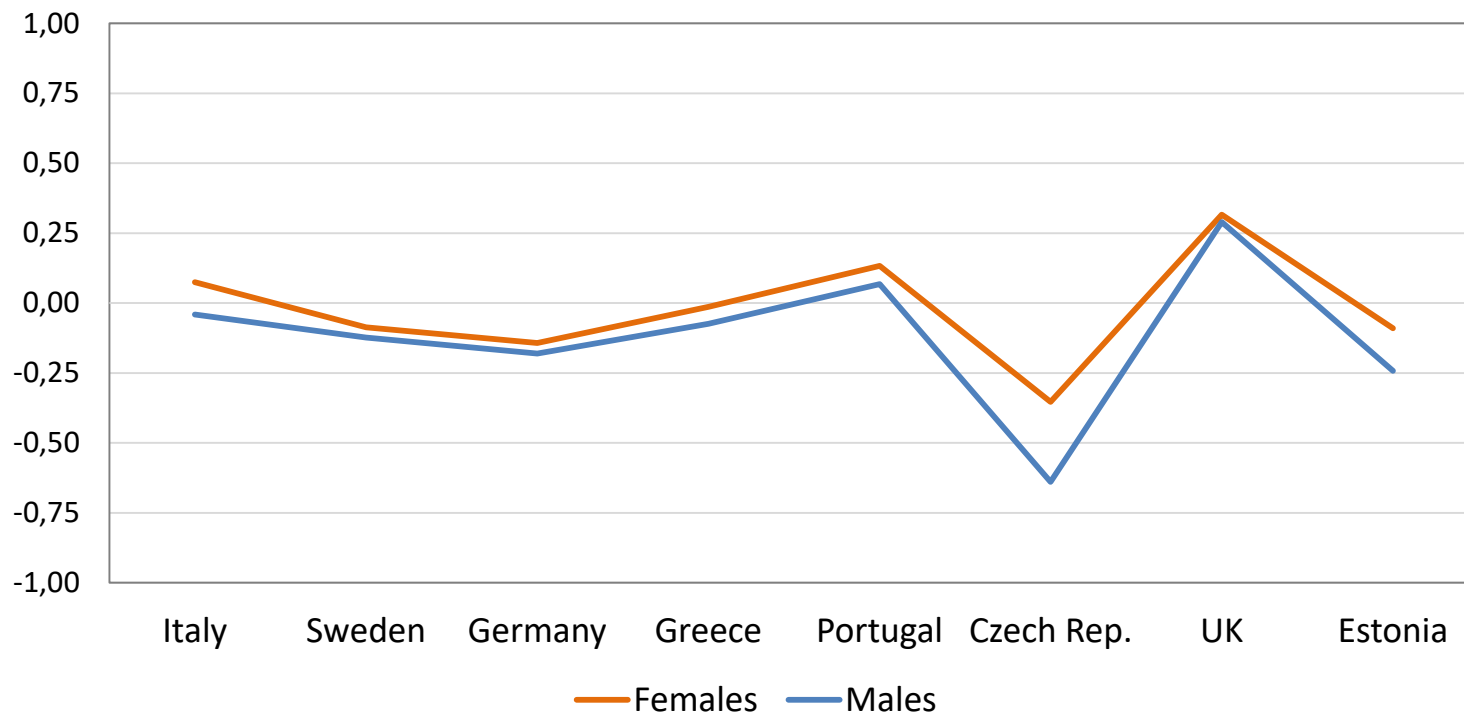
- Females express slightly stronger civic values than males ($\eta^2 = .00$).

- No clear interaction of country X gender ($\eta^2 = .01$).

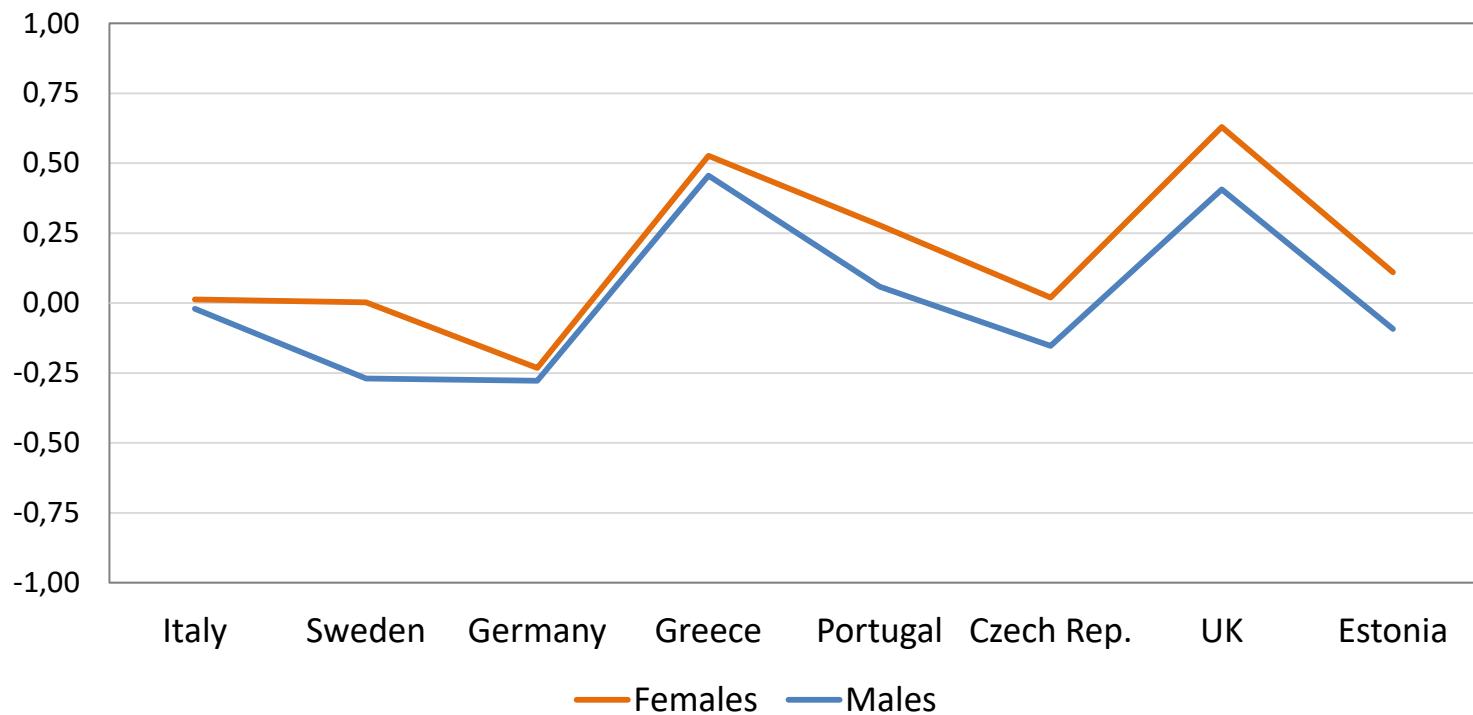
Mean levels of online participation by country and gender



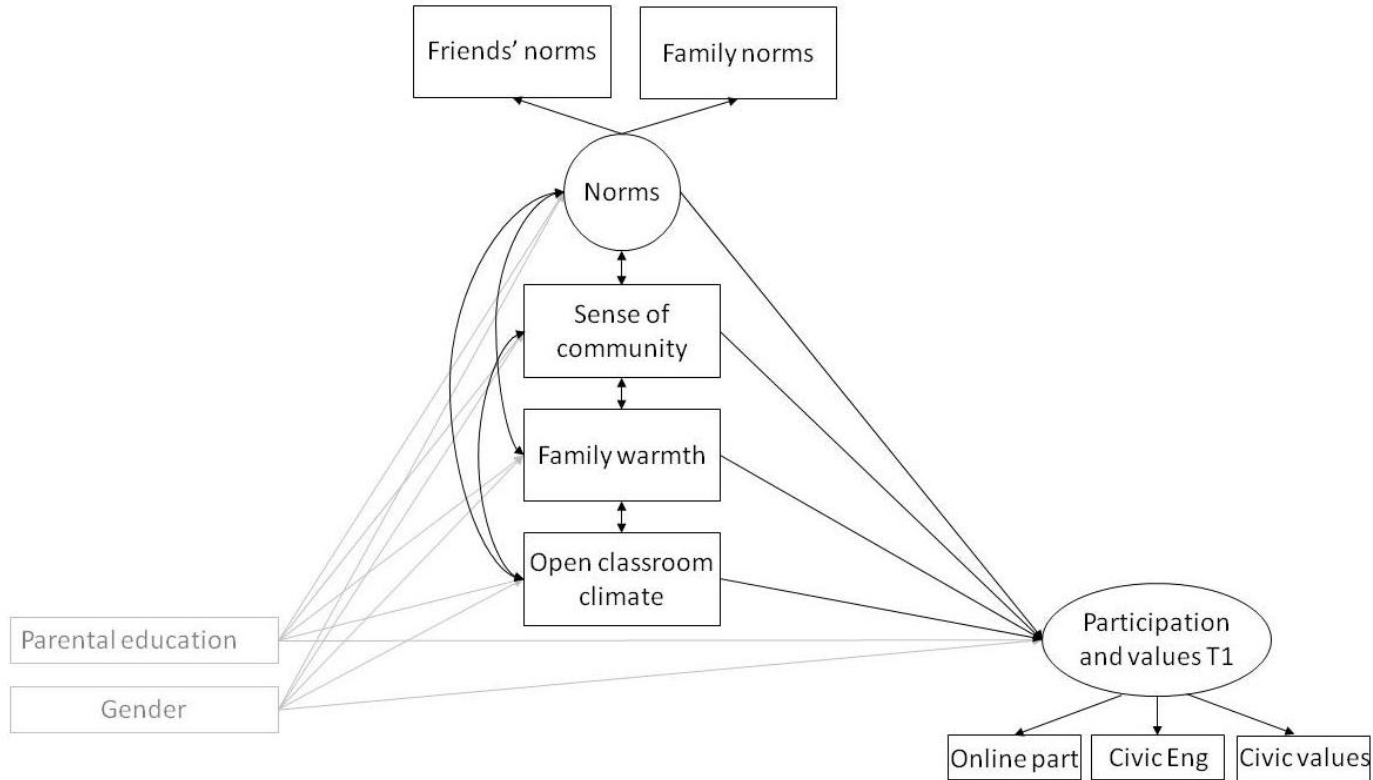
Mean levels of civic engagement by country and gender



Mean levels of civic values by country and gender



Context-level predictors of domain-specific participation and values



Context-level predictors of domain-specific participation and values



	Online participation	Civic engagement	Civic values
Gender (male)	.09***	-.12***	-.10***
Parental education	-.04*	.04	-.06**
Sense of community	.05*	.11***	.16***
Open classroom climate	-.09***	-.03	.09***
Family warmth	-.12***	-.08**	.11***
Participatory norms	.39***	.35***	.25***

Constrained model: Unstandardized effects constrained to be the same across countries.
Cross-country mean standardized effects are presented.

Context-level predictors of domain-specific participation and values



- Moderation by country was not significant.
- Contextual variables did not predict change of civic and online participation.
- The aggregate of family and friends' norms was the strongest predictor of all three outcome variables.
- Higher family warmth was related to lower civic and online participation but higher civic values (significant but small link).
- Sense of community and open classroom climate showed (significant but small) expected links with the three outcomes.
- Boys were linked to more online participation, whereas girls were related to more civic engagement and higher civic values.

CONCLUSIONS



Individual-level predictors of overall civic participation



- Context matters!
 - Considerable mean differences between countries: historical dimension.
 - Effects of age stronger in some countries than in others.

- But...
 - A general predictive pathway, suggesting a link from perceived economic situation through life satisfaction, and a sense of general and political efficacy to participation, was remarkably robust across countries.

Context-level predictors of domain-specific participation and values



- Country differences at the mean level: Importance of historical context – again.
- Also, potential differences in opportunity structures within schools and neighborhoods.
- Communities and community organizations that have values, structures and support, e.g., sense of community, democratic school and classroom climate, promote civic engagement (Torney-Purta, 2002).
- Differences in income disparities at the country-level. Countries with higher levels of income inequality show lower levels of social trust and less civic engagement (Uslaner & Brown, 2005).

Context-level predictors of domain-specific participation and values



- Parent and peer influence: Both contribute to the initiation and sustainment of civic behaviors through similar processes, i.e., social influence, role models, interaction and discussion, transmission of values such as prosocial values relating to social justice and citizenship.
- Higher parental warmth was linked to lower civic and online participation and higher civic values – adolescent rebelliousness?
- Higher correspondence between parents and children with regard to dedication to causes than with regard to materialist values.
- Also, high degree of correspondence between young people's perception of their friends' moral values and their own values and behaviors.

(Pancer, 2015)

Limitations and future directions



- Self-report measures (common method bias).
- Samples were not stratified; need to be cautious in interpreting cross-country differences.
- Analyses on cross-sectional data: direction of effects is inconclusive.
- The end justifies the means? Need to disentangle the drives, content, and forms of political participation. Same types of action do not necessarily suggest similar causes.
- Also, need to indentify components of democratic participation, as opposed to extremism and radicalization.
- Beyond active and passive: Focus on “standby citizens” (Amnå & Ekman, 2014).



Thank you for your attention!

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