Contributions to Political Science

Marius Harring *Editor*

# Growing Up in Times of Crisis

## Political Socialization of Youth in the Global East

Springer

# Contributions to Political Science

The series Contributions to Political Science contains publications in all areas of political science, such as public policy and administration, political economy, comparative politics, European politics and European integration, electoral systems and voting behavior, international relations and others. Publications are primarily monographs and multiple author works containing new research results, but conference and congress reports are also considered. The series covers both theoretical and empirical aspects and is addressed to researchers and policy makers. All titles in this series are peer-reviewed. This book series is indexed in Scopus.

Marius Harring
Editor

# Growing Up in Times of Crisis

## Political Socialization of Youth in the Global East

Springer

*Editor*
Marius Harring
Johannes Gutenberg-University of Mainz
Mainz, Germany

ISSN 2198-7289 ISSN 2198-7297 (electronic)
Contributions to Political Science
ISBN 978-3-031-58625-5 ISBN 978-3-031-58626-2 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58626-2



This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

# Contents

# Coping with Crises in Youth

**Marius Harring**

**Contents**



According to unanimous scientific findings, youth can be regarded as a "key phase"—a decisive phase that shapes the further course of people's lives. The reasons for this lie in the defining significance of youth in the human biography: its importance for the development of identity, its own unique quality, and its difference from preceding and subsequent stages of life. Accordingly, adolescence is not merely one of many transitional phases, but the central phase of life that shapes the subsequent life paths and biographies of adolescents. However, the developmental processes that take place during this time are not free of conflict. The opposite is the case: adolescence is always characterized by crises, by irritations of life-world routines accompanied by a mostly temporary overload caused by the intensification of conflicts brought to the young person from inside and outside.

## 1 Inner Crises

According to Erikson's stage model of psychosocial development, inner crises in particular are constitutive of the life phase of youth (Erikson, 1968). Adolescents go through a series of cognitive conflicts. Their knowledge of self in relation to the social environment, hitherto firmly entrenched, is now shaken to its foundations. Seemingly universal principles that have manifested themselves since infancy are called into question. This becomes particularly clear in the course of the process of detachment from the parental home (e.g., Kruse & Walper, 2008; Youniss & Smollar,

M. Harring (✉)
University of Mainz, Mainz, Germany
e-mail: harring@uni-mainz.de



M. Harring (ed.), *Growing Up in Times of Crisis*, Contributions to Political Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58626-2_1

1985; Ingoglia et al., 2011). The opinions, attitudes, preferences, and behavioral patterns of one's parents are subjected to increasingly critical scrutiny, and the family's established values are no longer espoused as a matter of course. Taking a counter-position coupled with the development of one's own, distinctive (life)style becomes a central developmental task. These are crises that are not only visible externally, e.g., in behavior or style of dress, but are also accompanied by internal, often emotional conflicts, inner turmoil, feelings of guilt, or the feeling of being misunderstood. All this is exacerbated by the asynchronous nature of the gaining of independence and detachment from the parental home and by the increasing chronological divergence of individual steps toward independence. Tension arises between cultural and psychological maturity on the one hand and material and spatial autonomy on the other.

This is accompanied by an increasing tendency toward individualization throughout Europe, not least due to globalization and educational expansion. Accordingly, the life situations of today's young people are pluralized. The youth phase is characterized by many asynchronies and asynchronous developments; it is understood as a phase of multiple partial transitions; different legal, political, and cultural dates of maturity; and different partial maturities in sexual, political, and social terms (Ferchhoff, 2011). King (2013) paraphrases this development as status inconsistency, which is steadily becoming a structural feature of youth. Thus, compared to previous generations, adolescents must increasingly come to terms with these conditions, align forms of interaction and communication accordingly, learn to deal with sometimes contradictory social expectations, accept crises, and develop concrete coping strategies (Hurrelmann et al., 2014). According to Erikson, however, it is explicitly these crises that facilitate identity development, transformation, and educational processes in adolescents. Uncertainties, irritation, and the experience of crises also have the potential for producing something new. Overcoming these crises can be seen as the basis for new and autonomous ways of life, new perspectives on oneself and the world, and new attitudes and stances (Erikson, 1968).

## 2 External Crises

These states of crisis irritate old routines and automatisms established in childhood, which were hitherto held dear as reliable constants, and also bring about new cognitive "orders" in young people. While such crisis states take place primarily within the human psyche, they are also accompanied by external events. Accordingly, growing up today is also influenced by social, economic, political, and global social developments, and the influence is such that the changes not only manifest as background events with an incidental effect on the reality of life but also enter the consciousness on a daily basis through media and social confrontation, and permanently confront young people at a previously unprecedented and increasing pace and in forms that are scarcely controllable. Metaphors such as the financial crisis, the

refugee crisis, the democracy crisis, the climate crisis, the Covid crisis, the energy crisis, and the war in Ukraine are examples of the diagnosis of a permanent social crisis.

In addition, many crisis-ridden countries around the world are beset by protracted economic and political uncertainties that develop over generations and directly confront adolescents with multiple challenges, including but not limited to social exclusion, unequal access to education, high youth unemployment, and existential fears. The political starting conditions vary, ranging from democratization efforts in Arab states on the one hand and repressive tendencies on the other, to national financial crises in Southern Europe and the emerging disenchantment with the European Union as a result of unfulfilled expectations in Southeastern Europe and countries of the former Soviet Union. Post-Soviet countries in particular have undergone ongoing social transformation processes (Roberts, 2009) since their declarations of independence in the early 1990s; these processes generate tensions and occasionally ambivalences which range from transition and opening on the one hand and the communist past on the other, a legacy that is deeply inscribed in people's everyday lives as well as their attitudes and actions (Roberts et al., 2000).

## 3 Youth Moratorium?

Against the background of the crises described here, especially the external crises that impact young people, the question arises to what extent youth can still be understood as a phase of psychosocial moratorium, as Erikson (1959, 1998) postulated in the mid-1950s. He argues that the moratorium represents a space of respite, a social consensus that releases people from certain social obligations for a limited period and offers them free time as a "grace period" for experimentation, education, and the independent development of identity. These fields of experimentation provide the possibility of practicing and trying out different situations without incurring long-term consequences for transgressing social norms (Zinnecker, 1991; Reinders, 2006; Hurrelmann & Quenzel, 2022).

If we look at the development described above, it is quite obvious that, while adolescents today are offered scope for choice and experimentation, they are simultaneously placed under an obligation to make decisions (Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). For example, young people not only have the opportunity to obtain higher school qualifications, but they are virtually compelled to do so in order to obtain a favorable starting position for their vocational placement process.

Consequently, what was originally intended as a protected space for experimentation is now disintegrating into diverse and individually shaped lifeworlds that are not always accompanied by a sense of safety and risk-free experimentation. While it is true that "youth" can still be seen through a "societal lens" as a phase of life that allows for testing and trying out rules and boundaries, the subjective experience of young people is also characterized by pressure to perform and by the need to make decisions. As this can often be very stressful, it should come as no surprise that not

all young people today benefit from positive tendencies toward individualization, from the consequences of educational expansion, or from a psychosocial moratorium.

In this context, we should note the inherent ambivalence of the adolescent phase of life, in which opportunities stand side by side with decision-making constraints, autonomy goes hand in hand with anomie, and individualization competes with social determination (King, 2013). We should also ask what further effects the increasing orientation toward utility and efficiency may have on the life phase of youth, which is exposed to constantly growing pressure to perform, selection processes, and external determination. A pragmatism focused on the present can be observed as a possible reaction among at least part of the youth generation in Europe (Harring et al., 2023; cf. also Cammaerts et al., 2014). This group of young people, faced with a seemingly hopeless "struggle" against societal problems—such as war or environmental destruction—and perpetual ambivalences, adopts a proximity-centered attitude in which traditional values, such as diligence, order, and security, provide clear orientation. However, this is only one of the ways in which young people may react to these complex contexts, which diverge not least against the background of different regional and social situations.

This is the point of departure for the present volume, which discusses the living conditions and resulting political attitudes and participation patterns of young people, especially in the countries of North Africa and the "Global East"—regions of the world that have so far received little public attention—and which subjects growing up in these countries to an in-depth analysis. The empirical data basis of the individual articles is provided by current country-specific youth studies.

The volume is divided into three parts: In the first, *Baris Ertugrul, Marc Grimm,* and *Ullrich Bauer* provide a theoretical classification of the term "crisis" by proposing a systematization of crisis research and by discussing the relationship between childhood and youth research and crisis research as well as how the two fields could be interlinked. The authors also show the fundamental effects crises can have on the living conditions and attitudes of children and adolescents.

The second part focuses on the economic and political situation and social commitment of young people in selected countries. *Marius Harring, Daniela Lamby,* and *Julia Peitz* provide an international comparison of the way young people grow up in Central and Eastern European countries, with special emphasis on Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. The empirical basis for this study is a recent representative survey of 6000 young people aged 15–29 in these four countries. The aim of this chapter is to provide insights into the attitudes, values, and aspirations of this post-Soviet generation and to illustrate their current situations in a culture between tradition and modernity and between a new dawn and stagnation, using three areas of life—education, work, and family—as examples. The second contribution of this section deals with the social reality of young people in Hungary. *András Bíró-Nagy* and *Andrea Szabó* use empirical findings from a broad-based youth study to show the specific nature of the situation of young Hungarians compared to other regions as well as its consequences for their political attitudes. In the next contribution to this section, *Elena Sánchez-Montijano* and *Gerardo Maldonado* discuss the upheavals in Arab-Mediterranean societies, seeking to present an

up-to-date picture of young people's political participation in the Arab Mediterranean countries of Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia by examining electoral participation as well as involvement in institutional and informal political and social organizations and alternative channels. The political attitudes and political involvement of young people in Poland are the focus of the chapter by *Justyna Kajta* and *Adam Mrozowicki*. They explore the conditions and forms of political participation that can be observed among young people in Poland and examine the current shift to the left among the younger generation. The empirical basis is a representative survey of 1500 young people between the ages of 18 and 29 using a standardized questionnaire. This is followed by the contribution by *Pavol Baboš* and *Aneta Világi* on "Voting before Blogging: Political Participation of Youth in Slovakia." The authors of the study analyze the extent to which young people in Slovakia are willing to participate in politics and to what extent this correlates with their trust in political institutions. As a theoretical explanatory model, they draw on the concept of political ego identity. Baboš and Világi argue that it is not the type of participation or the level of political trust that matters, but rather the perceived importance and knowledge of politics. Next, *Marius Harring* scrutinizes the political expressions of young people and examines the question of whether, as a result of a series of global, regional, and national crises, it is possible to identify tendencies toward radicalization, anti-democratic attitudes, and disintegration among the next generation of young people in Eastern Europe. Based on a representative survey of 9900 young people between the ages of 14 and 29, conducted in 2021 in a total of seven countries in Central Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, the study shows how and where young people in these countries are politically situated, what their trust in political institutions is like, how they view the EU, and what their fundamental attitudes are toward democracy as a form of government. Harring focuses in particular on nation-state attitudes and xenophobia and examines the extent to which intolerance toward social, ethnic, and religious minorities prevails in an international comparison. The concept of group-focused enmity serves as a theoretical framework, on the basis of which the findings show that a pejorative attitude toward certain minority groups among the next generation of young people in Central Eastern Europe and, in general, also in the Baltic states is a phenomenon that should not be neglected and that is not limited to "political fringe groups," but rather penetrates the center of society—even if, viewed as a whole, a crisis of democracy should by no means be assumed. The last contribution in this section is devoted to young people growing up in Ukraine. *Daniela Lamby* discusses the meaning of economic prosperity, transformation, and war from the perspective of Ukrainian youth. Based on empirical-quantitative data collected before the Russian war of aggression, she uses cluster analysis to develop a typology of adolescents living in Ukraine, which provides differentiated findings on attitudes toward the state and society, political activities, trust in political authorities, and core values.

The third and final part of the book deals with the reactions of young people to the situation in their home countries. The contribution by *Daniela Lamby* and *Marius Harring* shows that young people regard migration as a possible and often-used way of breaking out of imponderable structures and as an individual solution

to the crisis situation. The authors focus on young people in Kyrgyzstan. Unlike in the Arab countries, the motives for and the structures of migration in this post-Soviet country within the Russian sphere of influence, with all its historical entanglements, are completely different. The authors investigate this issue based on a representative survey of 1000 Kyrgyz young people, shedding light on their attitudes toward migration and highlighting the connection between work and migration, and conclude by developing perspectives on the basis of these findings. The last chapter deals with satisfaction with democracy among post-Yugoslav youth since 2008. *Andrej Kirbiš* and *Maruša Lubej* ask, among other things, how young people evaluate the functioning of existing democratic institutions. They empirically identify a negative trend and argue that this trend will intensify with generational change, which is why the question of the future of democracy is an urgent one, especially in the turbulent region of the former Yugoslavia—and that it has a geopolitical dimension.

In closing, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the authors for their international and interdisciplinary discussion in this book about the social, structural, and societal conditions of growing up in times of crises in regions of the world that—from a global perspective—are often neglected. In ten individual contributions, they bring their expertise to bear on the data to develop a differentiated view of the facets of youth, young people's living conditions in different constellations of crises, the resulting patterns of political attitudes and participation, and the mechanisms, logics, and coping strategies associated with them. I should also like to thank Raphaela Jaksch for her excellent editing and careful translation of all the texts. Finally, I am deeply grateful to Lorraine Klimowich, Krishnakumar Pandurangan, Ben Ingraham, Gulsunnoorfurr Adamshah K, and Maria David at Springer Nature, who provided excellent support and patience in every aspect of the publication of this volume.

## References

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a new modernity*. Sage.

Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). *Individualization: Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences* (Vol. 13). Sage.

Cammaerts, B., Bruter, M., & BanajiS., Harrison, S. & Anstead, N. (2014). The myth of youth apathy: Young Europeans' critical attitudes toward democratic life. *American Behavioral Scientist, 58*(5), 645–664.

Erikson, E. H. (1959). *Identity and the life cycle*. International Universities Press.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. W.W. Norton Company.

Erikson, E. H. (1998). *Der vollständige Lebenszyklus* (4. Aufl.). Suhrkamp Verlag.

Ferchhoff, W. (2011). *Jugend und Jugendkulturen im 21. Jahrhundert. Lebensformen und Lebensstile*. Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Harring, M., Bíró-Nagy, A., Lamby, D., Peitz, J., & Szabó, A. (2023). *Personal optimism, national pessimism, trust in Europe. A comparison of values, attitudes and plans of young people in The Czech Republic*. FES.

Hurrelmann, K., & Quenzel, G. (2022). *Lebensphase Jugend. Eine Einführung in die sozialwissenschaftliche Jugendforschung*. BeltzJuventa.

Hurrelmann K., Harring M., & Rohlfs C. (2014). Veränderte Bedingungen des Aufwachsens: Jugendliche zwischen Moratorien, Belastungen und Bewältigungsstrategien. In C. Rohlfs, M. Harring, & C. Palentien (Hrsg.), *Kompetenz-Bildung: Soziale, emotionale und kommunikative Kompetenzen von Kindern und Jugendlichen* (S. 61–81). 2., überarbeitete und aktualisierte Auflage. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Ingoglia, S., Lo Coco, A., Liga, F., & Lo Cricchio, M. G. (2011). Emotional separation and detachment as two distinct dimensions of parent-adolescent relationships. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 35*, 271–281.

King, V. (2013). *Die Entstehung des Neuen in der Adoleszenz. Individuation, Generativität und Geschlecht in modernisierten Gesellschaften*. Springer.

Kruse, J., & Walper, S. (2008). Types of individuation in relation to parents: Predictors and outcomes. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 32*(5), 390–400.

Reinders, H. (2006). *Jugendtypen zwischen Bildung und Freizeit. Theoretische Präzisierung und empirische Prüfung einer differenzierten Theorie der Adoleszenz*. Waxmann.

Roberts, K. (2009). *Youth in transition. Eastern Europe and the West*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Roberts, K., Clarke, S., Fagan, C., & Tholen, J. (2000). *Surviving post communism: Young people in the former Soviet Union*. Edward Elgar.

Youniss, J., & Smollar, J. (1985). *Adolescent relations with mothers, fathers, and friends*. University of Chicago Press.

Zinnecker, J. (1991). Jugend als Bildungsmoratorium. Zur Theorie des Wandels der Jugendphase in west- und osteuropäischen Gesellschaften. In W. Melzer, W. Heitmeyer, L. Liegle, & J. Zinnecker (Eds.), *Osteuropäische Jugend im Wandel. Ergebnisse vergleichender Jugendforschung in der Sowjetunion, Polen, Ungarn und der ehemaligen DDR* (pp. 9–25). Juventa Verlag.

# Part I
# Crisis Research – A Theoretical Consideration

# The Impact of Crises in Europe in the Past Decade: A Systematisation of Empirical Findings from the 2010s and Perspectives for a Childhood- and Adolescent-Oriented Crisis Research


**Barış Ertuğrul, Marc Grimm, and Ullrich Bauer**

## Contents



From the economy through migration to democracy in general, using crisis as a kind of diagnostic criterion for our time has become a widespread practice. However, this trend is not accompanied by efforts to reflect the wider meaning of *crisis*. In analysing empirical data, no attention is paid to synchronicities of developments and empirical differences, and few attempts are made to develop a theory and definition of crisis. Hence, crisis remains a vague term that is used very generally to describe the deviation from a norm, and it is used without further explanation in most of the literature.

The following chapter aims to classify key trends in academic as well as media discourse. Since the various types of crisis research remain separate and unrelated, we seek to portray and structure the diversity of debates about crises and their effects that were prominent in the past decade[1] and keep continuing in current

[1] This time frame is based on (a) the significance of the financial crisis from 2007/2008 in Europe, which, as will be shown, has had an considerable impact on key areas of the society in the long term. Furthermore, (b) the pandemic crisis that began in early 2020 overshadowed the accumulated crises of migration, climate change, or other political crises, of course, without dissolving them. They are "immunised" now and are even more visible in their *longe durée*. The chapter was pre-

B. Ertuğrul (✉) · M. Grimm · U. Bauer
University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany
e-mail: baris.ertugrul@uni-bielefeld.de; marc.grimm@uni-bielefeld.de; ullrich.bauer@uni-bielefeld.de



M. Harring (ed.), *Growing Up in Times of Crisis*, Contributions to Political Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58626-2_2

discourses. We will take a detached view of crisis research, examine the research discourses step by step, and conclude by submitting a proposal for critical crisis research.

Therefore, we will pursue a dual objective. One main focus of our chapter is the study of the relationship between childhood and adolescent research and crisis research, in the course of which we will examine the possibilities of systematically correlating these research fields. We will also address the concrete effects of crisis on the living conditions of children and adolescents and focus on the impact of the ubiquitous crisis discourse on the attitudes of children and adolescents, i.e. their subjective dynamics. The second main focus of our chapter is the systematisation of the field of crisis research, which is very heterogeneous and inconsistent and which leaves a number of questions open. It is necessary to discuss the design-related conditions of crisis diagnoses and to outline future aspects of crisis research at various levels of analysis. The model we propose for a structured crisis discussion developed out of the debate about crisis research that reflects its typical weaknesses.

This outline refers to empirical data on the effects of European crises—for the most part triggered by economic factors—in the fields of health, education, work, migration, and attitudes towards democracy, with a special focus on the effects of crisis on children and adolescents (Sect. 1). In this context, we take crisis to be simultaneously material and discursively construed (Sect. 2). In view of the empirical evidence that reveals the heterogeneity of crisis research and allows us to identify its weaknesses and pitfalls, we propose a four-level model of crisis analysis: we distinguish between the effects of crises (level I), the government responses to crises (level II), the subjective processing (level III), and the semantic creation of crises (level IV). Finally, we identify open questions in the field of childhood and adolescence-centred crisis research.

## 1 The European Crisis and Its Impact on the Fields of Health, Education, Work, and Attitudes to Democracy

Diagnosing a general situation of crisis seems to have little meaning in the context of complex phenomena such as crises triggered by economic factors. In order to understand complex and paradoxical developments, a concrete definition of the crisis and its effects on the living conditions and contexts of the affected population groups is required. While youth unemployment declined in Germany, it rose rapidly in all other European countries (Möller, 2015, p. 204). The same is true of GDP and other productivity indicators. While the economic downturn in the prosperous economies of the Northern and Central European countries (especially Germany)

pared as part of the project "Children and Adolescents in Times of Crises" (see also Grimm et al. (2018) for the key findings presented) and has been slightly expanded and adjusted in the contextualisation of the empirical findings in early 2024.

was only marginal and short-lived, a long-term negative trend was expected for the Southern and Eastern European peripheral countries, which were hardest hit by the 2007/2008 financial crisis. An analogous variation can be perceived in the impact of crises in the fields of environmental destruction, forced migration, or parliamentary democracy. Although a broader discussion has already begun, there is little differentiation between those responsible and those affected. There is rarely a differentiated discussion of certain crisis phenomena, for example, an elaborate debate on the threat to liberal democracies in Hungary, Poland, Turkey, France, and the United States, as well as in Germany.

Only a few studies analyse the impact of the financial and other crises in a consistent, integrative and differential approach, particularly with a focus on young people. In the following, we attempt a systematisation that provides insights into the interactions of different crises, state responses, and impacts on specific groups. This also includes data on the effects of the crisis on health, youth unemployment, poverty, and education in the context of economic and austerity policies. To this end, the effects of the economic crisis on health will also be focused on.

## *1.1 Crisis and Health*

The economic crisis of 2007/2008, which is defined here as an economic recession, has already been widely discussed in the research literature. In view of the effects, it seems necessary not to adopt a generalist perspective. It can be seen that crises had no direct impact on the living conditions and health of the population. The effects can only be understood if they are viewed in the light of economic and social policy measures.

Austerity measures imposed by the European states most severely affected by the financial crisis produce manifest effects on the living conditions of the population, and in particular for the young generation. The 2014 UNICEF report "Children of the recession. The impact of the economic crisis on child well-being in rich countries" (Fanjul, 2014) displays a variety of findings which show how the well-being of young people is affected by crisis. This is indicated by a reduced parents' ability to work, reduction of income, an increase in deprivation and poverty rates, poor nutrition and health, lack of influence on educational opportunities and access to education, rising youth unemployment, and young people postponing or abandoning their plans to start their own families. The UNICEF report concludes that there is "a strong and multifaceted relationship between the impact of Great recessions on national economies and a decline in children's well being since 2008. Children are suffering most, and will bear the consequences longest […]" (Fanjul, 2014, p. 2).

There are still only few data available, in the field of health and elsewhere, that would permit a concrete analysis of the impact of crisis-induced changes on the living conditions of children and adolescents, their well-being, their future expectations, their health, or their educational opportunities. There is evidence of effects such as increased suicidality and reduced utilisation of the health care system by

families belonging to vulnerable population groups. In a systematic review (Rajmil et al., 2014), the *International Network for Research in Inequalities in Child Health* (INRICH) presented IOC data indicating an increase in child mortality and stillbirth rates in states affected by the crisis, rising prices for healthy food, and an increasing prevalence of unhealthy lifestyles (nutrition, etc.) and child abuse within the family. It becomes clear that the negative impact on living conditions and chances is particularly serious for marginalised groups with less resources (Kentikelenis et al., 2011; Economou et al., 2014). In a regional study for Portugal with data from the *European Union Statistics for Income and Living Conditions* (EU-SILC), Legido-Quigley et al. (2016) show that the austerity policies prescribed by the troika (the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank) have resulted in declines in the number of people seeking medical care, particularly in disadvantaged population groups, because of the imposition of prohibitive co-payments. Substantiated by a systematic literature review, Karanikolos et al. (cf. Karanikolos et al., 2013) also established that the social costs of economic scarcity have direct effects on health and the provision of health care even in high-income Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. These effects can be seen in the increasing rate of psychological disorders, in access to medical care, and in the consumption of legal and illegal drugs. After analysing existing research, Van Gool and Pearson conclude that the relationship between social insecurity engendered by the crisis and the increase of infectious diseases and psychological disorders can be considered an established fact (Pearson & van Gool, 2014). In the case of Spain, Fernandez-Rivas and Gonzalez-Torres show that the cuts in social services are accompanied by an increase in poverty and social insecurity. However, the lack of data means that they can only assume that there are also negative health effects (Fernandez-Rivas & Gonzalez-Torres, 2013). For Greece, Economou et al. offer an overview of existing studies which examine the impacts of crisis on health. In the field of mental health, they identify a slight increase in psychological disorders and a jump in suicides (+45 percent) and attempted suicides (+ 36 percent) during the period investigated (Economou et al., 2014). They emphasise the relationship between the psychological stress of the crisis and psychological disorders.

It is particularly worth mentioning that crisis-related declines in health can produce unforeseeable long-term effects, such as low birth weight, which increases the probability of developmental problems in children (Economou et al., 2014, p. 31). In a similar vein, Harper et al. draw attention to the long-term impact and "irreversible effects" of economic crises on children and adolescents (Harper et al., 2009, p. 1). The crisis-induced increase in child mortality and morbidity, child poverty, abuse (in families), and neglect mainly affects households that already belong to low-income groups (cf. Harper et al., 2009, p. 3). Employment relationships and their impact on health also show that adolescents are an especially vulnerable group. Adolescents who are neither in employment nor in education or training (not in education, employment, or training = NEET) are much more likely to suffer from

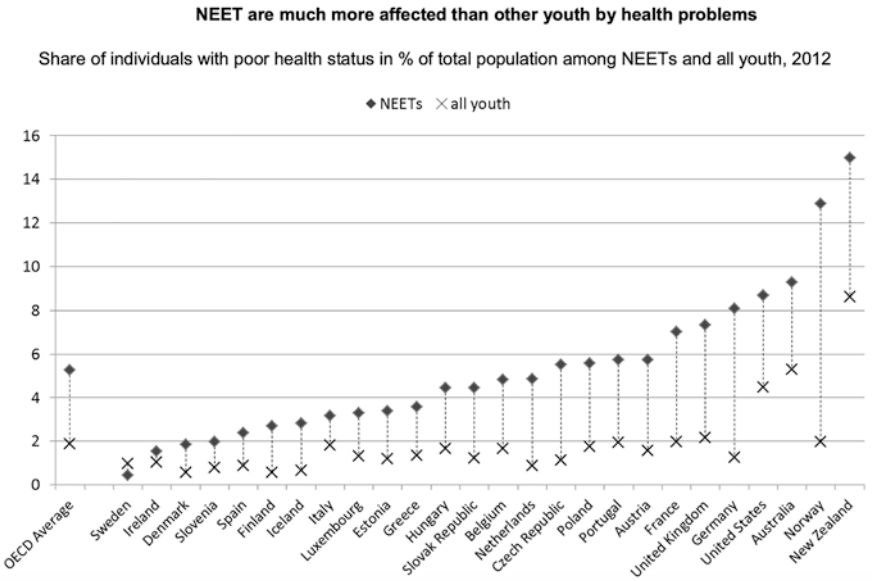



**Fig. 1** Source: Carcillo et al. (2015), p. 24

health problems than adolescents who are integrated into the job market.[2] In Germany, Norway, and the Netherlands, a distinction can also be made based on the NEET's group. The number of these young people who reported health problems should be six times higher than those who are in education, training, or employment (Carcillo et al., 2015, p. 24). In turn, poor health has negative effects on the employment prospects of adolescents and impedes access to the job market, especially for NEETs (Carcillo et al., 2015, p. 23).

We know from a broader research discussion that children who grow up in poverty are disproportionately affected by illness in adulthood (see Fig. 1), become offenders more frequently, and have a lower level of formal education. Holzer et al. calculate that the cost of long-term effects of child poverty in the United States is 500 billion dollars per year, i.e. about 4% of the gross domestic product (Holzer et al., 2008; Harper et al., 2009, p. 4).

[2] The same pattern can also be observed during the pandemic, cf. Ravens-Sieberer et al. (2006) for children's mental health in Germany. It, moreover, highlights that also "democratically" distributed crises like a pandemic (or climate catastrophe) appear insensitive for social structure, but their effect are in fact not contingent.

## *1.2 Crisis, Employment, and Education*

The effects of the crisis in the hardest-hit countries have short-term and long-term consequences. In Greece, one of the consequences that occurred relatively quickly was the emigration of highly qualified labour (brain drain). Due to the effects of the austerity measures on the Greek health care system, doctors emigrated to Great Britain, Sweden, and Germany, where medical specialists were most urgently needed (Anastasiadou, 2016, p. 114).

There are significant differences with regard to youth unemployment. The number of employed adolescents (ages 15/16 to 29) decreased by 7.5 million in the OECD countries between 2007 and 2012. Thus, the number of NEETs in the OECD countries amounts to 16 percent of the youth population (Carcillo et al., 2015, p. 8). The proportion of uneducated young people in this group was particularly high. Although there are differences between the individual OECD countries, the probability of belonging to the NEET group is negatively correlated with the education level of both the adolescents and their parents (Carcillo et al., 2015, pp. 21, 24). The crisis of 2007/2008 once again made the importance of educational qualifications for employment opportunities very clear (OECD, 2013, p. 1).

The research discourse on youth employment has long referred to the fact that adolescents are particularly affected by crisis-related risks in the employment sector (cf. Möller, 2015, p. 203). As a "buffer for economic risks […] adolescents and young adults often carry the main burden of adjustment when there is an economic downturn" (Möller, 2015, p. 203). Similarly, the increase in youth unemployment in Europe during (and after) the years 2007/2008 reveals that this group is more strongly affected by the negative effects of economic fluctuation than the average population. Möller concludes that youth unemployment constitutes the main problem of the European economy, with potentially serious consequences for economic development and social cohesion (Möller, 2015, p. 214).

Damme et al. show that education spending remained stable during the crisis and that the demand for additional education programmes increased after the crisis (Damme & Kärkkäinen, 2011, p. 4). Instead of cutting back on education, most of the OECD countries increased education spending. There are two reasons for this: First, the increase in education spending had been decided before the crisis. Second, the increase in expenditure was intended to compensate for the effects of the financial crisis. Education spending increased (2009–2010), but in over half the states, the proportion of total public spending devoted to education remained constant (OECD, 2013, p. 2).

## *1.3 Neoliberalism, Welfare Politics, and Government Responses to the Financial Crisis*

A broader perspective emerges when institutionalised decision-making structures are included in the analysis. However, government responses to the crisis present a diffuse picture. The defaults on mortgage payments in the United States, the so-called real estate crisis in 2009 led to a reduction of GDP in Europe—with the exception of Poland—and increased unemployment in some European countries (cf. Karanikolos et al., 2013, p. 1323). Rising state spending and falling revenues should result in countries making significant cuts to their state spending and investments. The bail-out payments to Greece, Portugal, and Ireland followed the conditions imposed by the Troika "and promoted several structural reforms including labour flexibility, protection of employment, and increase of competitiveness" (Koutroukis & Roukanas, 2016, p. 78). These measures were not negotiated in accordance with the social dialogue established in Europe and Greece. "In other words, international or European institutions (EU, ECB, and IMF)—as represented by the Troika—as well as the Greek government shaped the agenda of reforms without social partners' participation" (Koutroukis & Roukanas, 2016, pp. 78, 81). At the structural level, the measures enforced by the Troika led to a liberalisation of the job market and the termination of collective wage agreements, which will result in an increase in the number of individual contracts. It is doubtful whether the unequal negotiations between the Troika and the Greek government would have led to a different result if the Greek social partners had been involved. For the analysis of crises and crisis-related policies, however, the perspective of the negotiation modalities illustrates the unequal power potentials of the negotiating parties, which are also reflected by the elimination or redefinition of established negotiation processes.

At the EU level, the Fiscal Compact signed by all EU member states in 2012 led to changes that open up a new field of conflict resolution. "Thus, it reinforces the budget discipline of the EU member states and the European Union in regard to the national budgets: If Germany actually had to fulfil its obligation to consolidate the budget, this could—in the framework of compensatory budgetary measures—also lead to considerable cuts in the subsidies to the statutory health insurance or to health research" (Kunkel, 2013, p. 155). Thus, one possible scenario would be that EU member states agree to this consolidation under pressure from other states. Since, in times of crisis, health expenditures remain constant while the overall volume of public services tends to be reduced, the services that are no longer financed by the state are transferred to service providers in the market economy, thereby privatising health spending. Thus, the shift of competences to Brussels provides the possibility to force privatisation of the health care sector and hold political forces at the EU level accountable for the reforms.

The policies enforced by the Troika, which were based on austerity measures, deregulation, and privatisation, led to a greater financial burden for the population as well as increased competition in the job market (cf. Koutroukis & Roukanas, 2016, p. 81). It is not by coincidence that crisis diagnosis plays an essential role in

the *Working Papers* published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The policies of the IMF are shaped by its research; thus, it should be noted that Blanchard and Leigh, two IMF economists, had to correct prior assessments of the relationship between budgetary consolidation measures and economic growth forecasts. The positive effect of budgetary consolidation measures failed to materialise, and countries like Germany that responded to the crisis by launching investment programmes were the first to recover from the economic downturn. This shifted the focus not only to the miscalculations but also to the political dimension and the effects of the austerity measures imposed on Greece, for which the IMF was also responsible (cf. IMF, 2012; Blanchard & Leigh, 2013). The state's crisis response in Greece is regarded in academic literature as a neoliberal form of action. Neoliberalism here describes a practical structure and dispositive oriented towards competitive relationships and the competitive behaviour of individuals, which is supported and promoted by the state (Brown, 2005). Current research projects try to use such diagnoses from a neo-liberalist perspective to explain the crisis of liberal democracies and the rise of authoritarian models of political rule, for example, in Turkey and Serbia (Günay & Dzihic, 2016). Using the youth policy of the Turkish AKP as an example, Lüküslü shows that the party is beginning to replace the ideal of a nation-serving youth with a devoted Islamic avant-garde united against Christianity. This youth policy goes hand in hand with the neoliberal restructuring of Turkish society in which the costs of child education and care for the elderly are increasingly being shifted onto the families. In the educational sector, secular schools are more often shunned in favour of religious institutions. This mixture of neoliberalism, conservatism, and promotion of Islam as an integrative ideology is leading to the deliberalisation of Turkish society (Lüküslü, 2016).

Van Hooren et al. (2014) reflect on the political instrumentalisation of economic policies, examining government reactions to crises and determining that states do not use crisis-induced shock to implement disagreeable and profound changes, but instead routinely react by applying established crisis policies. In addition to such articles taking a critical view of ideology, a number of authors examine the political and economic factors of the 2007/2008 crisis in a narrower sense and compare them with the crisis-related discourses of legitimisation (Blyth, 2013; Streeck, 2013; Turner, 2016). Farkas compares welfare policies and models of capitalism in Central Europe and in an expanded EU model and focuses on the successful crisis management of the Nordic countries (Farkas, 2016). Demirović et al. emphasise that it is important to examine not only the economic crisis but also its interactions with other segments of society and to criticise those crisis policies that mainly affect the public sector and the social security systems (Demirović et al., 2011). The historical and political development of European states is an example of these relations. Navarro et al. recall that the period of fascism in Europe did not end with the Second World War, but with the end of the autocratic regimes in Spain, Portugal, and

Greece,[3] which did not become democracies until the mid- to late 1970s. Until this time, these countries were "underdeveloped welfare states with very low public transfer and poor public services, and had the most unequal income distribution of the countries under investigation" (Navarro et al., 2006, p. 1034). Since then, these states have massively expanded their social security systems, particularly under the government of Social Democratic parties. This shows that, in practice, parties with egalitarian sociopolitical objectives implement redistributive policies and count on the integration of women in the job market (Navarro et al., 2006, p. 1035 f.). Deviations from this goal are definitely relevant for the analysis of the social processes of crisis. Austria, for instance, has a relatively low female employment rate, compared to other countries ruled by socio-democratics in Europe. Religion, tradition, and established family concepts play an important role in social policies. Women's care work (of children and the elderly) goes hand in hand with policies that aim at the reduction of social spending. Conservative or reactionary family policies and neoliberal privatisation policies are therefore not contradictory but are virtually conditional upon each other (Lüküslü, 2016, p. 641). Thus, the differentiation between the various paths of welfare state development also seems to make sense in this regard (Esping-Andersen, 1989). This relationship is sometimes very clear: the states with a long history of Social Democratic rule are those with the lowest child poverty and mortality rates. In countries that have been mainly governed by Christian Democrats (Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands, France, Italy, and Switzerland), the rates are consistently higher. We find the highest rates in Greece, Spain, and Portugal, which were democratised later. In 1980, child mortality in these three countries was twice as high as in countries governed by Social Democrats (Navarro & Shi, 2001, p. 488).

## *1.4 The Crisis of Confidence in the Political System, Migration, and Right-Wing Populism*

It is possible to identify a relationship between the impact and perception of crises and citizens' confidence in the political system. Roth et al. analyse the influence of the fiscal crisis on citizens' political satisfaction in the 27 EU countries. Nevertheless, the evident general decline in trust in the EU is not very reliable, as trust levels vary greatly between EU member states (Roth et al., 2013). In Spain, Greece, Portugal, and Ireland, citizens' trust in the national parliaments, the government, the EU Parliament, and the EU Commission has fallen considerably, whereas trust in the European institutions in France and Germany has fallen just marginally, while trust in the national institutions has actually risen (Roth et al., 2013, p. 9 f.;19 f.). The Eurobarometer studies also show that citizens' attitudes towards the EU are

[3] From 1967 until 1974, Greece was governed by a military regime that only collapsed with the occupation of Northern Cyprus by Turkey.

diverging. The EU has lost support, especially in Greece, Cyprus, and Slovakia (European Commission, 2012, p. 77). Those countries maintained the level of dissatisfaction until the end of the decade, as well as others increased (Parlemeter, 2019, p. 16).

Merkel and Krause (2015) contrast empirical results for the OECD countries on subjective assessments and objective quality indices and use this as a basis to examine the question of whether there is a current crisis of democracy. The Democracy Barometer shows that, apart from differences between countries, there is "no overall decline in the quality of democracy" (Merkel & Krause, 2015, p. 53) or that it cannot be empirically mapped (notwithstanding all methodological measurement difficulties). The diagnosis of a democratic crisis or even a transformation to a post-democratic form of society is therefore rejected on empirical grounds (Merkel & Krause, 2015, p. 64). Conversely, the wave of right-wing populist parties and their electoral successes in Europe can be seen as an unmissable indication that democracies are "stressed" by nativist, conspiracy ideological, authoritarian, and therefore anti-democratic forces (Müller, 2016). This correlates strongly with the refugee movements since 2015 (and its xenophobic discourses) and still is a crucial reference point of populist politics to express general dissatisfaction with the way democracy works. Merkel further points to the paradoxical finding that shifts in the levels of confidence in majoritarian and non-majoritarian institutions have taken place subjectively. While parliaments, governments, and parties—institutions elected and determined by citizens—register a decline in confidence, institutions which cannot be influenced or determined by citizens (military, police, and judiciary) enjoy a high level of confidence (cf. Merkel & Krause, 2015, p. 58).[4] This correlates with a steady decrease in voter turnout before the migration movements from 2015 crisis (cf. Merkel & Krause, 2015, p. 64),[5] as well as an increase in the following two elections, e.g. in Germany.

## *1.5 How Do Children and Adolescents Perceive Societal Crises?*

Investigations into crisis-induced effects on children and adolescents remain a desideratum in educational science. As shown above, empirical disciplines and, in particular, disciplines making "third-party observations" point out the manifest effects of crises on children and adolescents.

Socialisation in times of socio-economic crises binds adolescents to their living conditions. In addition to the material conditions of life contexts (especially the

[4] Cf. Roth et al. (2013) for a significant loss of confidence induced by the financial crisis, especially in Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland.

[5] Following a historically low turnout in 2009 for the German Bundestag and European elections, a slight increase was registered at both levels for the 2014 elections.

family), the subjective perception of crises is of particular importance. Without having insight into subjective processing, it is not possible to understand how children and adolescents perceive, interpret, and react to societal change. Although there have been no systematic and integrative crisis-related studies on the practices and perceptions of children and young people to date, the findings presented here have provided important indications and impulses for a complex analysis. In their sociological observations on the relationship between youth and politics, according to Gerdes and Bittlingmayer, the relationship between young people and politics shows that both young people and adults are "turning away from traditional forms of political participation (voting, membership and involvement in political parties) in large numbers" (Gerdes & Bittlingmayer, 2016, p. 51). Maschke and Stecher examine young people's future expectations further, referring to the prominent Shell youth studies between 1981 and 2006. They show that there has been a discrepancy between social and personal expectations of the future since the turn of the millennium: a rising number of young people have a negative view of society's future, but a positive view of their own perspectives (Maschke & Stecher, 2009, p. 163). 163), which could indicate that the social dynamics of individualisation lead to a greater belief in oneself than in societal opportunities (Maschke & Stecher, 2009, p. 168). Meanwhile, by the end of the last decade (and with the accumulation of new major crises), another youth study from 2019 shows that the expectations of a better life compared to those of their parents' generations have become significantly more negative in many European countries (TUI, 2019a, p. 9). Moreover, a differentiated European comparative perspective (see Fig. 2) shows that unemployement remains the problem most commonly addressed by young people in the countries that were most affected by the financial crisis (e.g. Greece and Italy). What all young people questioned in Europe share is that migration and refugee movements are seen as the most important problem in their own country.

In contrast, climate protection issues are regarded less crucial, particulary in those countries that were hit hardest by the financial crisis. It is notable that the topic of climate change, often discussed in terms of crisis, is mentioned in youth studies prominently (cf. Albert et al., 2015; Sinus Studies, 2016). In both studies, adolescents express their doubts about the credibility of the findings on climate change. The Sinus Study finds that "a large proportion of youth, including the more highly educated, express doubts on whether it is possible to accurately predict climate change, whether the circumstances and contexts are correctly described, and whether the impending changes are not an exaggerated threat. This assessment is also shared to a certain extent by adolescents who admit they follow the topic closely. Adolescents also question here (as in other areas, such as the financial crisis) whether the media and schools do not strongly exaggerate current events and those which may happen in the future" (Maschke & Stecher, 2009, p. 34). The Sinus Study does not examine or explain this observation in more detail. However, the fact that in Germany adolescents choose precisely the highly disputed subject of climate change and the environmental legislation connected with it as an example of the (lack of) credibility of scientific research shows that these debates are now taking place on a global scale. Based on their limited comprehensiveness, these findings

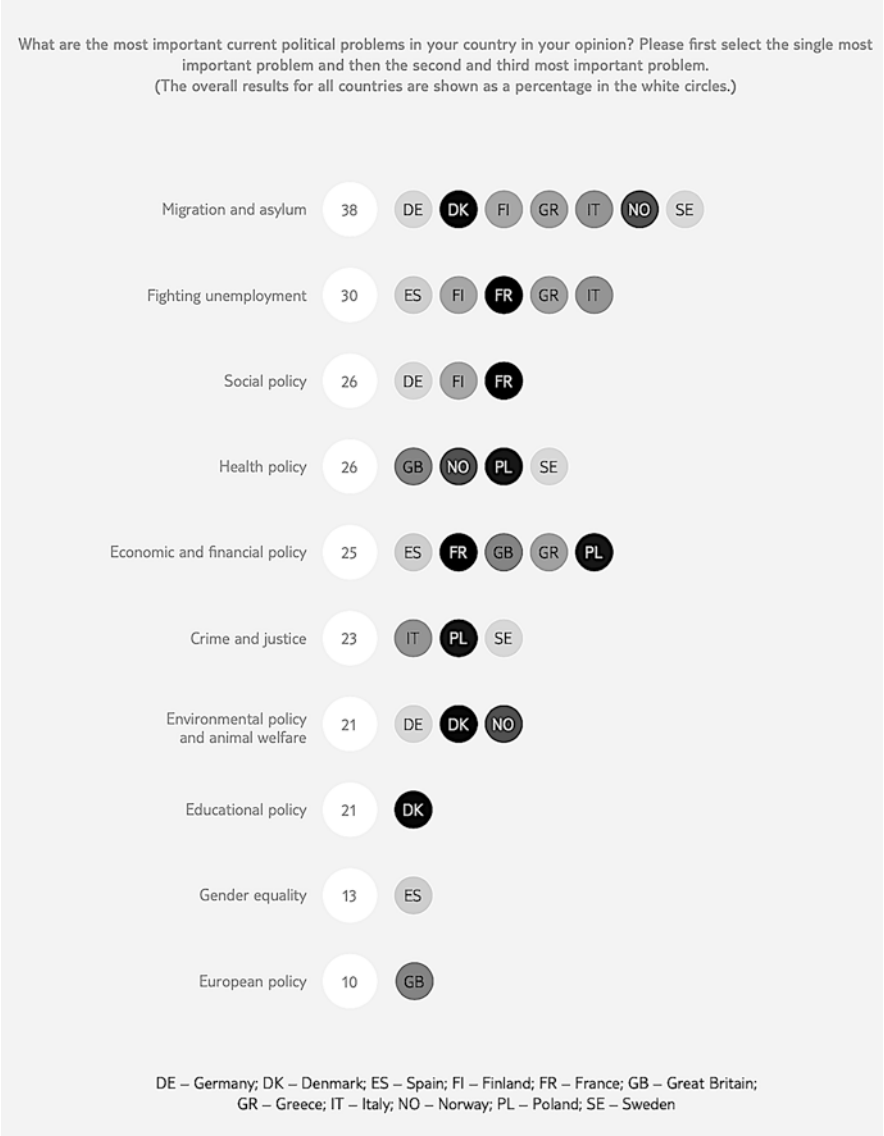



**Fig. 2** Source: TUI Stiftung (2019b), p. 17

should be treated as impressions that can be explained in various ways. First, as a defence mechanism: the controversies in climate research are taken as interest-driven political disputes, not as objective debates. When information on climate change is not objectively scientific, but rather political—so the reasoning goes—it simply represents vested interests and attempts to influence public opinion. Scientific debates lose their claim to truth when they are perceived only as conflicts between

stakeholders. Scepticism about scientific research and/or its dissemination through the media and educational institutions is often publicly criticised and leads to a fundamental questioning (of the objectivity) of science. Second, the findings can also be interpreted in a different light, i.e. that adolescents deliberately address the complexities of climate change and criticise not the research itself, but rather the reduction of its complexity by the media and educational institutions. Taken in this light, their critique of the media and educational institutions would become an expression of maturity, since it would indicate that adolescents are consciously seeking out the confrontation with inevitably complex explanations. And a last, third, aspect must also be taken into account: there is not a unified "Generation Greta" (Hurrelmann & Albrecht, 2020), but a differentiated picture, also with regard to climate concerns (cf. Bauer, 2023, p. 157). Socialisation processes (through socio-economic differences; see Ertugrul & Isenberg Lima (2024) Lima with data up to 2019) then take on a special significance for the perception of this crisis. This also applies to the findings on right-wing populist attitudes such as voting behaviour. They also indicate social selectivity, for example, through the aforementioned (Fig. 2) fears of unemployment (see also Zagórski et al., 2019). The trust to the political form of coexistence is volatile, and young people are being described as "apathetic" or "anthipathetic" towards representative democracy (Foa & Mounk, 2019). In any case—whether it is the criticism of older people's inertia towards transformation in climate politics or xenophobic attitudes towards refugees—there is a societal (and empirical) uncertainty, making various *populisms* in times of crises plausible, also in the very centre of society (cf. Zick et al., 2020). Further, differentiated studies on the subjective processing of crises and crisis discourses are necessary in order to understand how crises are perceived and handled.

## 2 A Four-Level Model for Crisis Research

So far, our summary paints a widely ramified and disparate picture of existing crisis research. This is due to the variety of ways in which connections are made between crisis diagnoses and such events as climate change, the financial crash, or the refugee debate, but also because the notion of crisis is subject to historic conditions (cf. Koselleck, 2006, p. 203). Its omnipresence in media as well as in expert debates is unquestionable and is demonstrated by the empirical data available. At the beginning of the millennium, the Social Citation Index recorded 200 results in the sociological discipline containing the term "crisis"; just a few years later, the number rose to almost 1200 in 2010 (Preunkert, 2011, p. 433) and raised even more after the (so-called) refugee crisis 2015 and the pandemic. However, this increasing interest is not growing synchronously with theoretical or theory-based discussions about crises. Even more, the discursive production of crises and the instrumentalisation of crisis rhetoric in academic research is often overlooked, just as its (political) impact in public discourse. This raises the question of how objective and discoursive components of crisis are related. In any case, crisis cannot be seen as an unquestioned

fact, but also as a frame (Wehling, 2016, p. 72) that contains implications for perception and action—and its analysis must be integrated into social conditions that are described as crisis. Starke et al. argue that instead of crisis, one could also speak of *change*, since the terms are almost synonymous (Starke et al., 2013). Whereas the concept of change, though, denotes a long-term and latent change that can be assessed or managed, the concept of crisis has a different sense: a serious deviation from a factual (or perhaps no longer existing) norm that requires an urgent, considerable and—due to its effects—invasive (political) decision in order to avoid an imminent scenario of disastrous consequences.

It is clear that this difference in meaning is not only interesting for agenda setting, but crises then also become an instrument for asserting interests. For (critical) social research, it therefore appears to be an important task to question what is done by whom, how, for what purpose, and with what implicit or explicit solution strategies in order to overcome crises.

Even if it is necessary to determine the interests of the stakeholders, it carries risks: every concept of crisis is position dependent, and the risk of adopting its inherent narratives is high. There is prompt talk of the "lack of alternatives" to certain political decisions. However, they must always be analysed and reflected in the context of societal conditions, also with regard to conflicts of interest and objectives—in order to identify "alternatives". Crises can also exist subjectively where no crises can be identified by objective criteria. This can also lead to social conflicts. "Affective polarisation" as an important aspect and consequence of subjective crisis perception can occur, even if the "objective", empirical findings do not cover this (Mau et al., 2023, p. 322ff.). The above remarks on trust in democracy therefore also show that trust in democracy remains at a high level over the long term, but that the legitimacy of political order, understood as citizens' support for the political system, nevertheless, loses favour (Merkel & Krause, 2015, p. 45f). In this respect, the subjective construction of its objectivity is just as important as the objective effects when defining the concept of crisis. Ultimately, this enables a utopian moment to be inserted: The vague concept of crisis has incorporated a possibility of positive change, transformation, and reorganisation in each specific socio-historical constellation. Therefore, crises of must also possess a critical quality in which a different society becomes visible and possible (cf. Horkheimer, 1968).

## *2.1 Facets of Crisis Research*

What does the above mean for crisis research focusing on children and adolescents? One thing is certain: although a discussion of crises must be anchored in academic discourse and reflect the constructive character of what we experience as crisis, crisis phenomena cannot be disputed per se. To make crisis research possible at these diverse levels, we propose a model for the analysis of crisis effects which attempts to discriminate between the various ways of looking at crises. Four different references or, more precisely, analytical levels will be used. We will distinguish

between crisis effects (level I) and political reactions to the crisis (level II), the reception of the crisis and how it relates to a specific kind of subjectivity (level III), and the discursive construction of crisis (level IV) (cf. also Bauer, 2023).

The effects of crisis and the political measures introduced as consequence (cf. level II) on societal conditions (poverty, health, education, etc.) will be examined at the *impact level* (level I). The effects of crisis can only be analysed in connection with the discursive production of crisis (cf. level IV). Their analysis is therefore complicated by a number of challenging tasks. First, the economic order framed within a crisis rhetoric must be deconstructed and evaluated. Next, the political practice and rhetoric in reaction to the crisis must be analysed in order to assess the appropriateness of the means used for the achievement of objectives and to indicate possible alternatives.

Concrete political reactions (policies) to crisis diagnoses will be considered at the *policy level* (level II). This ensures that the effects of crisis are not discussed as immediate, no-alternative consequences which lead to a certain crisis rhetoric. Of special interest is the close interaction of the *discursive level* (level IV) and the policy level, because the notion of crisis virtually demands dramatic, far-reaching changes, and policies framed in terms of crisis rhetoric (are intended to) legitimise unpopular political measures. This relationship between discourse and policy is not simply a causal link; rather, discourse and policies mutually influence one another. Crisis-related policies demonstrate decision-making ability and power and seek specifically to gain trust and popularity in order to stave off or prevent potential citizen reactions to a given crisis (panic buying, purchasing restraint, and election of extremist parties).

The diverse and persistent crisis diagnoses must finally be examined with respect to their *processing by the subjects* (level III). This means that the subjects' perception of society and societal crises must be emphasised against the background of a subjectivity that is changing only slowly. The question here is how crisis rhetoric (level IV) *and* the effects of crisis (level I) are processed by the subjects, or, put another way, how the debates in the hotly contested field of crisis discourse are reflected in the apparatus, or dispositive, of the subjects. The subjects' perception cannot be considered in isolation without taking into account the economic development, political ramifications, and discursive production of the crisis, its effects, and the interdependence of these levels.

The narrative-semantic production of crises is examined on the discursive level (level IV). This aspect is oriented towards the following questions, among others: Which discursive fields does the respective concept of crisis produce at all, which orders are called into question, how does the crisis discourse dock onto the established order, and which crisis-related interpretations of the situation and options for managing it are explicitly and implicitly offered to states, institutions, and subjects? How is knowledge about the crisis generated and what effects on the formation of political opinion are intended (see level III)? Thus, the question of crisis production implies the question of the deliberate strategies of social actors as well as the question of how crisis rhetoric attaches itself to established patterns of interpretation and how it utilises these as amplifiers while simultaneously validating their legitimacy.

## 2.2 The Future Shape of Childhood and Adolescent-Oriented Crisis Research

Research that is explicitly dedicated to the perception of societal crises by children and adolescents does not exist as required by empirical evidence in light of growing conflicts, wars, and generalised uncertainty. This is surprising because the living conditions of the upcoming generation are determined by the respective crisis. Very few research studies indicate crisis effects in the analysis of childhood living conditions (Grimm et al., 2019). However, there are veritable references in past debates. Glen Elder, a pioneer of social psychology research with regard to the effects of crisis on individual biographies, looks into the effects of deprivation within the context of prior experiences and individual dispositions. This perspective, with which Elder (1974) was first able to prove in a reconstructive cohort study the differentiated influence of crises (in this case, of the Great Depression of 1929 in the United States) regardless of the age group and living conditions, is still regarded as groundbreaking in crisis and transformation research today. Interestingly, Pierre Bourdieu also opened up a perspective on social crises and transformations, very early in his academic work. In the 1950s, in French-colonial Algeria, he observed the clash between traditional and capitalist logic of way of life, which subsequently triggered a crisis in society and the habitus (Bourdieu, 1992). The interaction of colonially induced transformation forcing and the inertia of habitus showed how different habitus react to the changing demands of living conditions. These analyses are not only groundbreaking with regard to Bourdieu's social theory but also appear promising for crisis-related childhood and youth research. With its perspective on the effects of structural change, it takes on a lot of complexity like few other works (cf. Schultheis & Schulz, 2005). What's more, this perspective allows us to focus not only on diagnoses of decline and anomie (Bauer et al., 2014) but also to develop a general perspective on the effects of social change, focusing on the influence of crisis states (in the sense of a crisis impact), to focus on living conditions or on the processing and coping patterns of children and young people. Crises and crisis research are complex, in demand, yet undertheorised and contested. Nevertheless, given the empirical relevance, there is a need to structure the discourse and empirical findings. The term "crisis" is trendy and should be systematised in this chapter with a focus on growing up. The need for this seemed vague at the beginning of the 2010s, but is now essential. Critical social research that remains empirically and theoretically complex and makes contradictions and ambivalences visible, not least with regard to young people, can then help to better understand these ubiquitous transformations.

## References


Albert, M., Hurrelmann, K., & Quenzel, G. (2015). *Jugend 2015. Shell-Jugendstudie; 17*. Orig.-Ausg. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl.

Anastasiadou, S. (2016). Economic crisis in Greece and the consequential "brain drain". In A. Karasavvoglu et al. (Eds.), *The first decade of living with the global crisis. Economic and social developments in the Balkans and Eastern Europe* (pp. 113–123). Springer International Publishing.

Bauer, U. (2023). Krisensozialisation. In B. Ertugrul & U. Bauer (Eds.), *Sozialisation und gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt* (pp. 147–173). Campus.

Bauer, U., Bittlingmayer, U., Keller, C., & Schultheis, F. (Eds.). (2014). *Bourdieu und die Frankfurter Schule*. Bielefeld.

Blanchard, O. J., & Leigh, D. (2013). Growth forecast errors and fiscal multipliers. *American Economic Review, American Economic Association, 103*(3), 117–120.

Blyth, M. (2013). *Austerity: The history of a dangerous idea*. Oxford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1992). *The logic of practice*. Stanford University Press.

Brown, W. (2005). *Edgework: Critical essays on knowledge and politics*. Princeton University Press.

Carcillo, S., Fernández, R., Königs, S., & Minea, A. (2015). *NEET youth in the aftermath of the crisis: Challenges and policies.* OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 164, OECD Publishing.

Damme, D., & Kärkkäinen, K. (2011). *OECD education today crisis survey 2010: The impact of the economic recession and fiscal crisis on education in OECD countries*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 56, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Demirović, A., Dück, J., Becker, F., & Bader, P. (Eds.). (2011). *VielfachKrise. Im finanzmarktdominierten Kapitalismus. Wissenschaftlicher Beirat von Attac*. VSA-Verlag.

Economou, C., Kaitelidou, D., Kentikelenes, A., Sissouras, A., & Maresso, A. (2014). *The impact of the financial crisis on the health system and health in Greece*, edited by WHO.

Elder, G. (1974). *Children of the great depression. Social change in life experience*. University of Chicago Press.

Ertugrul, B., & Isenberg Lima, P. (2024). *Konflikt oder Konzilianz zwischen Generationen? Jugendliche und‚ihr' Klimawandel*. In S. Dahmen, et al. (Eds.), *Politisierung von Jugend* (pp. 111–127). Beltz.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1989). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Wiley.

European Commission. (2012). *Standard Eurobarometer 78*, edited by European Commission, 2012.

Fanjul, G. (2014). *Children of the recession: The impact of the economic crisis on child well-being in rich countries.* Innocenti Report Card no. 12.

Fao, R. S., & Mounk, Y. (2019). Youth and the Populst wave. *Philosophy and Social Critism, 45*(9–10), 1013–1024.

Farkas, B. (2016). *Models of capitalism in the European Union. Post-crisis perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Fernandez-Rivas, A., & Gonzalez-Torres, M. A. (2013). The economic crisis in Spain and its impact on the mental health of children and adolescents. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 22*(9), 583–586.

Gerdes, J., & Bittlingmayer, U. (2016). Jugend und Politik. Soziologische Aspekte. In A. Gürlevik, K. Hurrelmann, & C. Palentien (Eds.), *Jugend und Politik. Politische Bildung und Beteiligung von Jugendlichen* (pp. 45–68). Springer VS.

Grimm, M., Ertugrul, B., & Bauer, U. (2018). Outlining the academic field of a children- and youth-oriented crisis-research. *Adolescent Research Review, 5*, 91–18.

Grimm, M., Ertugrul, B., & Bauer, U. (2019). *Children and adolescents in times of crises in Europe*. Springer International.

Günay, C., & Dzihic, V. (2016). Decoding the authoritarian code. Exercising 'legitimate' power politics through the ruling parties in Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 16*(4), 529–549.

Harper, C., et al. (2009). *Children in times of economic crisis: Past lessons, future policies*. Oversees Development Institute.

Holzer, H. J., et al. (2008). The economic costs of childhood poverty. *Journal of Children and Poverty, 14*(1), 41–61.

Horkheimer, M. (Eds) (1968). *"Traditionelle und kritische Theorie"*. Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung 2, (1937). (Cited after reprint). In: *Kritische Theorie* (Bd. 2). Fischer.

Hurrelmann, K., & Albrecht, E. (2020). *Generation Greta*. Beltz.

IMF. (2012). *World economic outlook October 2012. Coping with high debt and sluggish growth*.

Karanikolos, M., Mladovsky, P., Cylus, J., Thomson, S., Basu, S., Stuckler, D., Mackenbach, J. P., & McKee, M. (2013). Financial crisis, austerity, and health in Europe. *The Lancet, 381*(9874), 1323–1331.

Kentikelenis, A., Karanikolos, M., Papanicolas, I., Basu, S., McKee, M., & Stuckler, D. (2011). Health effects of financial crisis. Omens of a Greek tragedy. *The Lancet, 378*(9801), 1457–1458.

Koselleck, R. (2006 [first 1986]). Einige Fragen an die Begriffsgeschichte von "Krise". In R. Koselleck (Ed.), *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache.* Suhrkamp.

Koutroukis, T., & Roukanas, S. (2016). Social dialogue in the era of memoranda: The consequences of austerity and deregulation measures on the Greek social partnership. In A. Karasavvoglou, Z. Aranelovi, S. Marinkovi, & P. Polychronidou (Eds.), *The first decade of living with the global crisis. Economic and social develop-ments in the Balkans and Eastern Europe* (pp. 73–83). Springer International Publishing.

Kunkel, J. (2013). Auswirkungen der europäischen Finanzkrise auf die nationale Gesundheitspolitik. In M. Zens (Ed.), *Auswirkungen der Euro-Krise auf die nationale Gesundheitspolitik. 14. Euroforum* (pp. 153–157). GVG.

Legido-Quigley, H., et al. (2016). Effects of the financial crisis and Troika austerity measures on health and health care access in Portugal. *Health Policy, 120*(7), 833–839.

Lüküslü, D. (2016). Creating a pious generation: Youth and education policies of the AKP in Turkey. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 16*(4), 637–649.

Maschke, S., & Stecher, L. (2009). Perspektiven von Jugendlichen auf die gesellschaftliche und persönliche Zukunft. *Diskurs Kindheits- und Jugendforschung, 4*(2), 153–171.

Mau, S., Lux, T., & Westheuser, L. (2023). *Triggerpunkte*. Suhrkamp.

Merkel, W., & Krause, W. (2015). Krise der Demokratie? Ansichten von Experten und Bürgern. In W. Merkel (Ed.), *Demokratie und Krise* (pp. 45–66). Springer VS.

Möller, J. (2015). Reaktionen der EU auf die Jugendarbeitslosigkeit. In U. Alemann et al. (Eds.), *Ein soziales Europa ist möglich* (pp. 201–216). Springer VS.

Müller, J.-W. (2016). Was ist Populismus? *Zeitschrift für Politische Theorie, 7*(2), 187–201.

Navarro, V., & Shi, L. (2001). The political context of social inequalities and health. *Social Science and Medicine, 52*(3), 481–491.

Navarro, V., Muntaner, C., Borrell, C., Quiroga, A., Rodríguez-Sanz, M., Vergés, N., & Pasarín, M. I. (2006). Politics and health outcome. *The Lancet, 368*(9540), 1033–1037.

OECD. (2013). *Education at a glance OECD indicators*. OECD Publishing.

Parlemeter. (2019). *Heeding the call beyond the vote. A stronger parliament to listen to citizens Voinces*. European Parliament.

Pearson, M., & van Gool, K. (2014). *OECD health working papers* (76).

Preunkert, J. (2011). Die Krise in der Soziologie. *Soziologie, 40*, 432–442.

Rajmil, L., et al. (2014). Impact of the 2008 economic and financial crisis on child health: A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 11*(6), 6528–6546.

Ravens-Sieberer, U., Kaman, A., Devine, J., & Reiß, F. (2006). Die COVID-19 Pandemie—Wie hat sie die Kinderpsyche beeinflusst? *Monatsschrift Kinderheilkunde, 171*, 608–614.

Roth, F., Nowak-Lehmann, D., & Felicitas, O. T. (2013/2031). *Crisis and trust in national and European Union institutions: Panel evidence for the EU. 1999 to 2012.* RSCAS.

Schultheis, F., & Schulz, K. (Eds.). (2005). *Gesellschaft mit begrenzter Haftung*. UVK.

Sinus; BDKJ Diözesanverband Regensburg. (2016). *Wie ticken Jugendliche 2016—Kurzbroschüre*, https://www.bdkj.de/fileadmin/bdkj/Dokumente/Pressemitteilungen/2016/Broschuere_BDKJ_Sinus-Jugendstudie_2016.pdf

Starke, P., Kaasch, A., & van Hooren, F. (2013). *The welfare state as crisis manager. Explaining the diversity of policy responses to economic crisis*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Streeck, W. (2013). *Gekaufte Zeit. Die vertagte Krise des demokratischen Kapitalismus*. Suhrkamp.

TUI Stiftung. (2019a). *Young Europe 2019*. https://www.tui-stiftung.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019_Report_EN_TUI-Stiftung_Junges-Europa.pdf

TUI Stiftung. (2019b). *Young Europe 2019*. https://www.tui-stiftung.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/TUI-Stiftung-Jugendstudie-YOUNG-EUROPE-2019-EN-aktuell.pdf

Turner, A. (2016). *Between debt and the devil: Money, credit, and fixing global finance*. Princeton University Press.

Van Hooren, F., Kaasch, A., & Starke, P. (2014). The shock routine. Economic crisis and the nature of social policy responses. *Journal of European Public Policy, 21*(4), 605–623.

Wehling, E. (2016). *Politisches framing*. Halem.

Zagórski, P., Rama, J., & Guillermo, C. (2019). Young and temporary. Youth employment Insecurty and support for right-wing-populist-parties in Europe. *Government and Opposition, 56*(3), 405–426.

Zick, A., Berghan, W., & Mokros, N. (2020). Jung, feindselig, rechts? Menschenfeindliche und rechtspopulistische und -extreme Orientierungen im intergenerativen Vergleich. *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswisenschaft, 23*(6), 1149–1178.

# Part II
# The Economic and Political Status of Young People

# Between Tradition and Modernization, Between a New Dawn and Stagnation: Growing Up in Eastern Europe

**Marius Harring, Daniela Lamby, and Julia Peitz**

**Contents**



## 1 Introduction[1]

Today's youth is growing up in a climate of social disparity and heterogeneous living circumstances despite the increasing dissolution of borders, the advance of globalization, and the options offered by mobility. It follows that the possibilities provided by these factors, the seemingly greater range of opportunities for individual self-formation and processes of biographical advancement, do not figure in the lived reality of a large majority of young people growing up in Europe—at least not on a grand scale. Owing to economic dependencies and political uncertainties both on the individual and the societal levels, young people are confronted by a multiplicity of challenges as they seek to map out their lives between tradition and modernization, between a new dawn and stagnation.

[1] This chapter is modified from a previous version published as Harring, M., Bíró-Nagy, A., Lamby, D., Szabó, A. (2022): Growing up in Central Eastern Europe. An international comparison of the living conditions of young people in Czech Republic, Hungary Poland and Slovakia. Berlin: FES. Used with permission.

M. Harring (✉) · D. Lamby · J. Peitz
University of Mainz, Mainz, Germany
e-mail: harring@uni-mainz.de; daniela.lamby@uni-mainz.de; j.peitz@uni-mainz.de



M. Harring (ed.), *Growing Up in Times of Crisis*, Contributions to Political Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58626-2_3

The present study focuses explicitly on young people growing up in the countries of Eastern Central Europe, with a special emphasis on the "Visegrád states" of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. These countries have in common not only their post-Soviet history, the impact of which continues to make itself felt in young people's daily lives but also the Visegrád alliance, in which the four countries cooperate primarily in questions of European policies and which celebrated its 30th jubilee in 2021.[2] The activities of this open alliance show how ubiquitous the elements are that both divide and unite the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. In light of current events in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine starting in 2022, the motives that prompted the formation of the alliance seem more relevant than ever. In 1991, the objective of the Visegrád states was to safeguard their newly won sovereignty by acceding to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the EU. Today, this loose alliance provides funding for a variety of projects and scholarships and coordinates the policies of its member countries at the European level. While these agreements do not always result in a uniform consensus, they do form the foundation for close cooperation between the four countries (Beribes, 2021, p. 2f.) and affect the lifeworlds of young people.

Our investigation is based on a representative survey which was conducted in the four countries in 2021 among 6000 young people aged between 15 and 29 years and forms part of the broad-based, international youth studies commissioned and funded by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).

This chapter aims to provide insights into the attitudes, values, and aspirations of this generation and to illustrate its current situation using three spheres of life: (1) education, (2) work, and (3) family. In doing so, we will primarily perform regional comparative analyses, supplemented by explanations of specific national characteristics at significant points, in order to set out development processes and trends.

## 2 Methodology

The empirical basis for the study is supplied by a quantitative ex post facto survey in all four countries and a cross-sectional study design with one survey date. The purpose of the study is to capture the living conditions of young people in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia from their own perspective and through their eyes while drawing appropriate comparisons.

The interviews were conducted simultaneously from April to July 2021 in all four countries. Owing to the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic, they took the form of an online survey run by the market research company Ipsos.

[2] The heads of government of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia met in 1991 in the castle of Visegrád in Hungary. Since then, they have formed a close circle that consults and cooperates on numerous political issues (Lippert, 2020).

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a quantitative survey was developed consisting of an English-language standardized questionnaire predominantly employing closed responses. The questionnaire is based on a validated instrument that has previously been used in FES Youth Studies in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe as well as Central Asia, which was adapted to reflect conditions in Kyrgyzstan and enlarged with questions specific to Central and Eastern Europe. The approximately 120 questions of the overall questionnaire encompass roughly 500 items organized into eight thematic complexes. These were devoted to the following fields: *(1) values, religion, and trust; (2) family; (3) migration/mobility; (4) education; (5) employment;* and *(6) politics,* supplemented by *(7) sociodemographic questions* and *(8) a country-specific module*. This implementation of country-specific questions brings selected national interests and needs into focus. Most of the closed, predefined answers were constructed using 3- or 5-point Likert scales. The same standardized questionnaire, translated into the language of each country, was used in all four participating countries in order to facilitate regional and longitudinal comparisons. To ensure validity, the catalog of questions was translated and back-translated in a double-blind procedure before the field phase.[3]

The quantitative data was analyzed in the statistics program SPSS using univariate and bivariate analysis procedures and significance tests to examine statistically relevant correlations. Chi-square-based test procedures were applied for this purpose.

## 3 Sample

At the time of the study in 2021, the age cohort between 15 and 29 years comprised 10.36 million young people.[4] Poland is the most populous of the four countries with 37.86 million residents, while Slovakia (2.79 million) has the smallest population (see Fig. 1).

The proportion of young people relative to the total population is roughly equal in all participating countries and averages at 16% (±1%). For the quantitative study, we selected a representative sample of $n$ = 6000 young people (1500 from each country). Sociodemographic aspects such as age, sex, region of residence, and education played a key role in the composition of the sample. In what follows, we

[3] The questionnaire was translated from English into the various target languages and then translated back into English by another translator to verify the accuracy and unambiguity of the questions.

[4] Among the participating countries, young people account for the following shares of the overall population (rounded figures for 2020/21; figure in parentheses = proportion of overall population): 1.6 million (15%) in the Czech Republic (Czech Statistical Office, 2021); 1.57 million (16%) in Hungary (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2020); 6.26 million (16.5%) in Poland (Statistical Offices Poland, 2020); and 0.93 million (17%) in Slovakia (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2021).

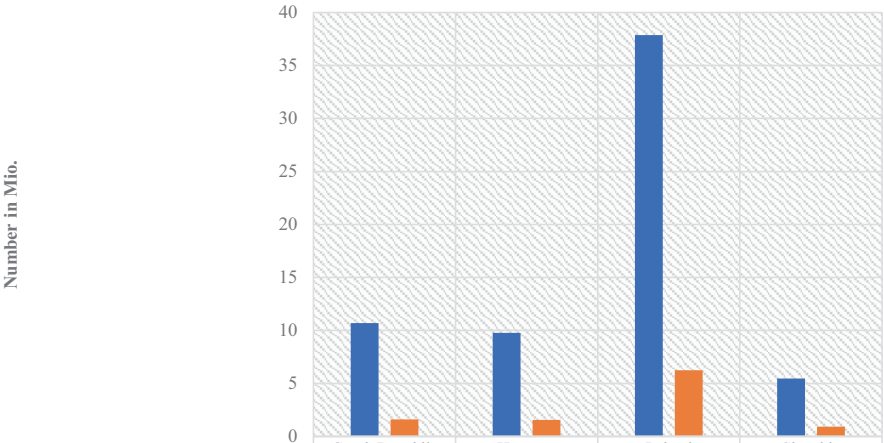



**Fig. 1** Total population and proportion of young people by country. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 6000$; figures in millions

will discuss the crucial characteristics of the sample as summarized in Table 1, touching on some of the concomitant phenomena and trends in the overall population. Many of these sociodemographic factors affect the well-being of young people and their scope for action.

## *3.1 The Ageing Society*

In the first phase, the sample takes into account the age structure of the population. Thus, a total of 1258 (21.0%) of young people aged between 15 and 18 years, 2445 (40.8%) aged between 19 and 24 years, and 2297 (38.3%) aged between 25 and 29 years were included in the study (see Table 1). These young people are representative of the 16% of the overall population. The share of young people in the overall population will continue to decline in the future as it has in the past—this is confirmed by the calculations of the European Commission.[5] The aging of the population thus represents a relevant demographic trend in all participating countries, and the de facto status of young people in society as a whole is that of a minority. This status affects their situation in the health system and their social insurance status and could result in decreased representation of their needs and interests in society.

[5] According to the European Union's prognosis for population development in member countries from 2016 to 2080, the population of all four countries is expected to decline. The following changes are predicted between 2019 and 2080: Czech Republic: −7.2%; Hungary: −11.8%; Poland: −23.6%; and Slovakia: −13.0% (Loew, 2019, p. 11).

**Table 1** Breakdown of the sample by sociodemographic characteristics and nationality. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 6000$; figures in absolute numbers and percent

| Sociodemographic criteria | Countries (Absolute frequency. Percentage figures in parentheses refer to the country in question) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Czech Republic | Hungary | Poland | Slovakia | Total |
| **Total** | 1500 | 1500 | 1500 | 1500 | 6000 |
| **Age** | | | | | |
| 15–18 years | 399 (26.6%) | 283 (18.9%) | 336 (22.4%) | 240 (16.0%) | 1.258 (21.0%) |
| 19–24 years | 617 (41.1%) | 647 (43.1%) | 568 (37.9%) | 613 (40.9%) | 2445 (40.8%) |
| 25–29 years | 484 (32.3%) | 570 (38.0%) | 596 (39.7%) | 647 (39.3%) | 2297 (38.3%) |
| **Highest educational level** | | | | | |
| Low education[a] | 411 (27.4%) | 274 (18.3%) | 316 (21.1%) | 214 (14.3%) | 1215 (20.3%) |
| Medium education[b] | 764 (50.9%) | 834 (55.6%) | 845 (56.3%) | 800 (53.3%) | 3243 (54.1%) |
| High education[c] | 325 (21.7%) | 392 (26.1%) | 339 (22.6%) | 486 (32.4%) | 1542 (25.7%) |
| **Sex of the respondents** | | | | | |
| Female | 807 (53.7%) | 792 (52.8%) | 728 (48.5) | 805 (53.7%) | 2868 (47.8%) |
| Male | 693 (46.2%) | 708 (47.2%) | 772 (51.5%) | 695 (46.3%) | 3132 (52.2%) |
| **Type of settlement** | | | | | |
| Urban[d] | 861 (57.4%) | 853 (56.9%) | 863 (57.5%) | 636 (42.4%) | 1959 (32.7%) |
| In between | 182 (12.1%) | 195 (13.0%) | 225 (15.0%) | 226 (15.1%) | 828 (13.8%) |
| Rural[e] | 457 (30.5%) | 452 (30.1%) | 412 (27.5%) | 638 (42.5%) | 3213 (53.6%) |
| **Economic situation** | | | | | |
| We do not have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating, etc.) and food | 15 (1.0%) | 77 (5.1%) | 42 (2.8%) | 55 (3.7%) | 189 (3.2%) |
| We have enough money for basic bills, but not for clothes and shoes | 83 (5.5%) | 176 (11.7%) | 195 (13.0%) | 111 (7.4%) | 565 (9.4%) |
| We have enough money for food, clothes, and shoes, but not enough for more expensive things (fridge, TV set, etc.) | 296 (19.7%) | 527 (35.1%) | 430 (28.7%) | 407 (27.1%) | 1.660 (27.7%) |
| We can afford to buy some more expensive things, but not as expensive as a car or an apartment, for instance | 813 (54.2%) | 609 (40.6%) | 605 (40.3%) | 660 (44.0%) | 2687 (44.8%) |

(continued)

**Table 1** (continued)

| Sociodemographic criteria | Countries (Absolute frequency. Percentage figures in parentheses refer to the country in question) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Czech Republic | Hungary | Poland | Slovakia | Total |
| We can afford whatever we need for a good standard of living | 293 (19.5%) | 111 (7.4%) | 228 (15.2%) | 267 (17.8%) | 899 (15.0%) |

[a]Low education: no formal education or primary education
[b]Medium education: vocational, technical secondary, or secondary education
[c]High education: BA degree or higher (Master's/Ph.D.)
[d]Urban = young people who describe their place of residence as "urban" or "more urban than rural."
[e]Rural = young people who describe their place of residence as "rural (village)" or "more rural than urban."

## 3.2 *Precarization Through Cross-Generationally Low Cultural Capital*

The standardized interview succeeded in tracing the differences in access to education among young people. One-fifth (20.3%) have no school diploma at all or have only completed primary school. Of this group with low education, over one-quarter (28.3%) are 19 years old or older, and it may be assumed that the highest qualification they achieved on leaving the educational system is a primary school certificate. The lower the young people's educational qualifications, the greater the likelihood that they live in a rural setting.[6] The economic situation of this group is significantly worse,[7] and the educational attainment of their mothers[8] and fathers[9] is markedly lower. Young people from educationally alienated backgrounds thus have a higher probability of acquiring lower cultural capital of their own and being affected by poverty as a result.

## 3.3 *Interdependence of Urbanization and National Origins*

As a rule, young people increasingly live their lives in urban spaces. Over half (53.6%) of the participants have their main place of residence in urban settlements. However, the percentage of young people aged 25–29 living in cities, at 58.2%, is

[6] Almost half (48.1%) of young people with low education live in rural areas. The share of young people living in urban areas rises proportionally to their educational level; 60.4% of young people with high education say that they live in cities.

[7] 15.7% of young people with low education do not have enough money to buy clothing or shoes, while the same is true of only 6.7% of young people with high education. $Chi^2 = 111{,}430$; df = 8; p = 0,000 (educational attainment/economic situation).

[8] $Chi^2 = 441{,}707$; df = 14; p = 0,000 (own educational attainment/mother's educational attainment).

[9] $Chi^2 = 189{,}425$; df = 14; p = 0,000 (own educational attainment/father's educational attainment).

significantly[10] higher than that of those aged between 15 and 18 (49.7%). This confirms the assumption of many studies that young people gravitate toward urban areas as they grow older, especially for the purposes of work and higher education.

The exact proportion varies significantly from country to country. In the Czech Republic, the proportion of young people living in urban areas is even higher overall (57.4%) and rises to almost two-thirds (66.1%) among those aged between 25 and 29. In Slovakia, in contrast, the distribution of young people in urban and rural areas is roughly equal and independent of age, with approximately 42% living in cities and roughly another 42% in the country.

## *3.4 Experiences of Poverty Caused by the State of the National Economy*

In order to determine economic status and possible conditions of poverty, young people were asked what they and their families could afford to buy; 189 respondents (3.2%) fall below the absolute poverty line[11] and are unable to afford adequate food, heating, or electricity. Almost 10% lack the financial means to buy clothes or shoes. A majority of just under 60% (59.8%) is economically comfortable and has sufficient purchasing power to afford luxury goods. Although the number of people falling below the poverty line is decreasing (Pillòk, 2021; Dezenter, 2022), the overall economic situation is the decisive factor in young people's financial situations. In Hungary, the country with the second lowest per capita GDP in the study,[12] 16.8% of young people state that they cannot afford clothing or shoes (average across all countries: 12.6%); 40.7% of the young people in the study who fall below the absolute poverty line live in Hungary. Pillòk (2021, p. 101) corroborates this picture with his note that over two-thirds of the Hungarian population have experienced an inability to afford necessary items in the past. The Czech Republic, which has the strongest economy of all the countries in the study, confirms the assumption that the financial situation of young people and the economic performance of their country are interdependent: only 1% of Czech young people cannot afford adequate food or electricity, while almost three-quarters (73.7%) have access to luxury goods (average across all countries = 59.8%). In Hungary, the quota is 48%.

[10] $Chi^2$ = 37,639; df = 4; p = 0,000 (age/settlement type).

[11] Absolute poverty is defined as follows: "Absolute poverty denotes a state in which people cannot afford to provide for their basic economic and social needs. Relative poverty denotes poverty compared to people's social environment." (translated from: Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, 2022).

[12] Per capita GDP in euros according to Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg, 2022: Czech Republic: 20,640; Hungary: 14,700; Poland: 13,370; Slovakia: 17,270.

# 4 Attitudes, Values, and Wishes

## *4.1 Satisfaction*

### Young People's Life Satisfaction in Various Countries

The majority of Central European youth are satisfied with their lives. This general satisfaction was expressed by almost two-thirds of young people in the study (62.9%), independent of age, gender, and region of residence. At the same time, however, more than one in five say that this is not always the case, and one in seven is fundamentally dissatisfied with their current life situation.

Among the nationalities in the study (see Fig. 2), Slovakians report a particularly high level of satisfaction, with over two-thirds (68.9%) saying they are very or mostly satisfied with their lives. Slovakians also have the smallest proportion of respondents who report ambivalent attitudes or being very or mostly dissatisfied. In Hungary, in contrast, the situation of today's young people tends to be different. They are significantly more critical of their current life situation, with only a little over half (56.9%) saying they are satisfied with their lives. This is the lowest proportion compared to the other four countries. Additionally, the share of young people who are either very or mostly dissatisfied is 15.9%, higher than in any of the other Visegrád states.

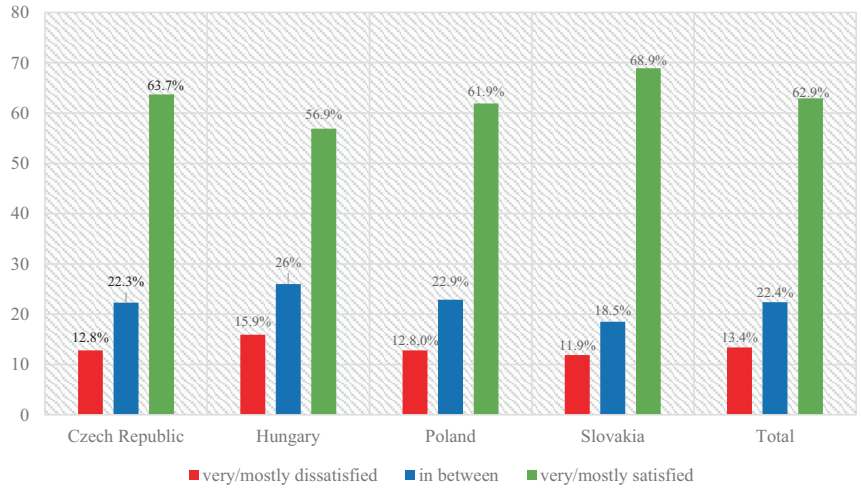



**Fig. 2** General satisfaction with own life. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 6000$; figures in percent

### Factors Determining Life Satisfaction in Young People

What are the factors on which general satisfaction with life depends? To answer this question, the analysis built upon the theoretical construct of Bourdieu (1974, 1982, 1983, and 1992) and distinguished between social, cultural, and economic capital, using step-by-step regression models to test how the three types of capital impact young people's general life satisfaction while adjusting for sociodemographic criteria. Social capital was measured in terms of satisfaction with (a) the interviewees' own families and (b) their circles of friends. Cultural capital was measured in terms of satisfaction with their education, while economic capital was derived from the current financial situation of the interviewees' families of origin.

The analyses reveal two core findings. First, it emerges that all three types of capital available to young people significantly determine their life satisfaction even when taken individually. In other words, subjective well-being depends on how comfortable they feel within their families and circles of friends, how satisfied they are with their own education, and what financial resources are at their disposal. Additionally, the various capitals have reciprocal relationships with one another and are mutually dependent. Second, the impact of the three types of capital differs in intensity. The influence of social and cultural capital on general life satisfaction is higher than that of economic capital, meaning that life satisfaction is determined less by the socioeconomic conditions in which young people grow up than by the stability, reliability, and harmony of their social relationships in the family and the peer group. A positive self-assessment of their overall educational status has a greater effect on life satisfaction whether they live in affluence and financial security or in conditions of poverty.

## *4.2 Prognoses for the Future, Ambitions, and Moral Values*

### Positive Predictions for Own Future Versus Skepticism for Society in General

The current young generation of Central Eastern Europe is generally optimistic about the future—at least when it comes to their own individual opportunities. Three-quarters (74.6%) believe that their personal situation will be better 10 years from now than it is today. Only 4.8% think that the situation will deteriorate, while one in ten believes that things will remain unchanged.

In all the countries in the study, young women consistently give more positive prognoses than their male peers (see Fig. 3). This is particularly true of Hungary, where more than eight in ten young women (83.1%) are optimistic about their futures. There is significantly more pessimism in Poland, where "only" two-thirds of young women (65.3%) report an optimistic prognosis. This is the lowest value among youth in the Visegrád states. This discrepancy is especially interesting in light of the political developments and upheavals experienced by the two countries

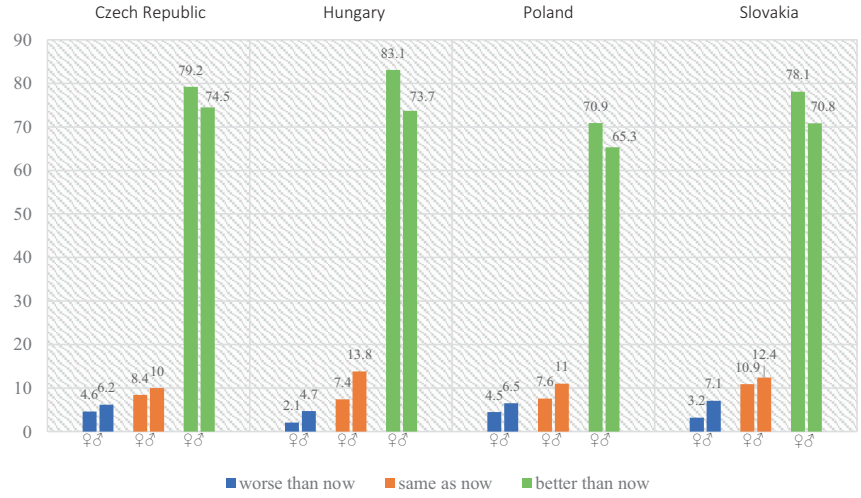



**Fig. 3** Own future 10 years from now, by gender. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 6000$; figures in percent

in recent years, from which young people have evidently drawn different conclusions concerning their personal prospects.

A very different picture emerges when one moves from the individual to the macro level and looks at the development of society as a whole from the perspective of today's youth. While a clear majority of Central Eastern European youth is optimistic about their personal prospects, their views about the future of society in their own countries have become more pessimistic in recent times (see Fig. 4). A relative majority of 37.4% of 15–29-year-olds in all four countries believes that society is tending to drift apart and that developments will be unfavorable. Over one in four (26.5%) predicts no changes, while one-quarter (24.0%) assumes that social developments in their own country will be positive. There are no discernible statistically relevant differences between the various countries. Rather, young people in all four states have arrived at similar assessments and prognoses with respect to the future of the social fabric. What stands out, however, is that one in four young people in Poland (20.1%)—twice as many as in the other three countries—does not feel confident in predicting the direction in which their society will move from today's perspective. This can be taken as a sign that the perceived political changes which Poland has embarked upon in the recent past—such as the law on abortion or the concentration of political power and tighter controls on the judiciary and the media—have resulted in a dynamic situation in which at least parts of Polish youth feel unable to formulate prognoses about whether and how society is likely to change.

Additionally, young Polish women aged between 15 and 29 take a markedly more critical view of society and its potential development than their male contemporaries: 40.7% of young women believe that society will experience a negative

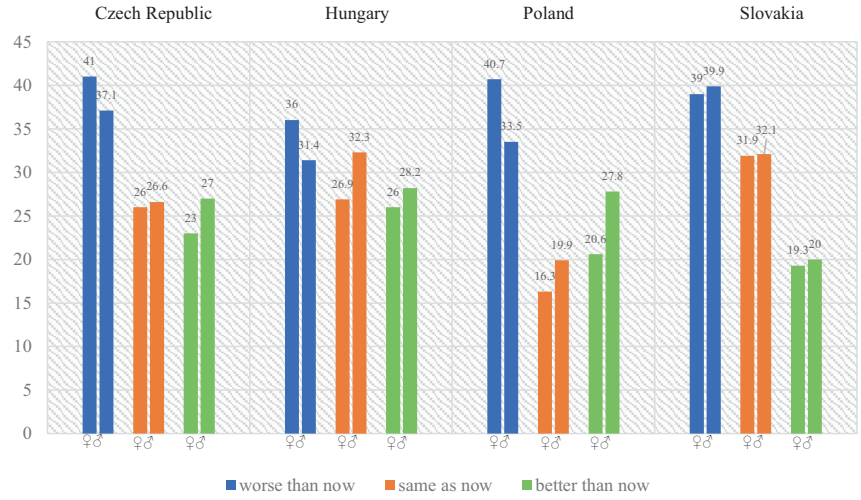



**Fig. 4** Future of society in own country, by gender. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 6000$; figures in percent

trend in the coming years compared to the present day, while only one in three (33.5%) of their male counterparts share this view. Comparable assessments are shared by young women in the Czech Republic and Hungary, whereas no significant difference between the sexes can be observed on this issue in Slovakia.

## Attempts at Individualization

The data reveals clear tendencies regarding the values and the specific goals which young people want to attain in their lives (Table 2).

The current young generation in Central Eastern Europe exhibits clear tendencies toward individualization, with self-actualization and careers taking center stage in their life plans. These goals are flanked by the desire for a good life and personal well-being. Marriage and family planning are secondary priorities, with only one in two young people in the Visegrád states naming them as goals. Collective and sociopolitical activities are explicitly less important for the majority. These trends can be observed in all four countries in the study, notwithstanding that a more detailed look at each state does reveal some differences in young people's attitudes. For example, while the tendency toward individual self-actualization and attaining professional and private stability is firmly entrenched throughout the young generation of Central Eastern Europe, it seems to manifest most strongly among Polish youth. In particular, being independent (85.9%), assuming responsibility (87.4%), and building a successful career (84.5%) are important for a large majority there, and the difference between Polish youth and their contemporaries in the other countries is conspicuous. Similarly, being or becoming rich is important or very important for

**Table 2** Significant values and goals in young people's lives. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 6000$; "very/mostly important" answers; figures in percent

| | Country | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Opinions and attitudes | Czech Republic | Hungary | Poland | Slovakia | Total |
| **Self-development** | | | | | |
| Taking responsibility | 76.7*** | 82.3 | 87.4*** | 78.8* | 81.3 |
| Being independent | 79.1 | 73.0*** | 85.9*** | 77.6 | 78.9 |
| Having a successful career | 71.4*** | 78.2 | 84.5*** | 70.1*** | 76.1 |
| **Traditional markers of transition into adulthood** | | | | | |
| Graduating from university | 51.9* | 47.2*** | 57.6*** | 56.0* | 53.2 |
| Getting/being married | 54.9 | 53.5 | 55.3 | 57.8* | 55.4 |
| Having children | 65.1*** | 60.4 | 50.2*** | 61.1 | 59.2 |
| **Well-being** | | | | | |
| Looking good | 59.4 | 69.0*** | 74.6*** | 44.4*** | 61.9 |
| Doing sports | 62.6 | 62.1 | 66.5*** | 57.1*** | 62.1 |
| Healthy eating | 62.7*** | 70.4* | 68.8 | 64.5* | 66.6 |
| **Materialistic approach** | | | | | |
| Wearing branded clothes | 14.9 | 22.1*** | 20.4 | 10.6*** | 17.0 |
| Getting/being rich | 46.5*** | 56.3*** | 62.8*** | 35.0*** | 50.1 |
| **Sociopolitical activity** | | | | | |
| Participating in civic actions/initiatives | 24.5*** | 30.7** | 39.7*** | 21.2*** | 29.0 |
| Being active in politics | 26.1*** | 18.1 | 22.8*** | 10.4*** | 19.4 |

Significance level: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

two-thirds of all young people in Poland. For comparison, this goal is articulated by only about one-third (35.0%) of the youth in Slovakia. It is also less widespread among Czech youth, with 46.5% describing wealth as very important. However, it may be that young people in different countries have very different starting positions in terms of affluence, in which case their different attitudes may simply reflect the possibilities and opportunities available to them and may reflect a rational assessment of their options.

Interestingly, alongside explicitly individualized perspectives and an emphasis on the interviewees' own lives, Poland also exhibits the strongest patterns of collective participation and sociopolitical engagement. The two thus appear to go hand in hand; 39.7% of young Poles say it is important or very important to participate in citizens' action groups or political initiatives. This is the highest proportion among all the Visegrád states. Almost one-quarter (22.8%) of young people in Poland also say that political participation is an important fundamental aspect of life. Only the Czech youth gives this answer more frequently—over one-quarter (26.1%) of young people in the Czech Republic share this view. In Slovakia, in contrast, political involvement is highly relevant to only one in ten (10.4%).

# 5 Selected Life Contexts of Young People

## *5.1 Education*

### High Educational Levels Among the Young Generation

The qualifications obtainable through formal education rank highest in the eyes of young people as the core point of departure for planning their biographies. Education is both a resource and a ticket not only into the world of work but also to social, societal, and cultural integration and participation (see, e.g., Harring et al., 2023). This is true of the young generation throughout Europe. Accordingly, a trend toward higher formal education can be observed among young people in Central Eastern Europe and elsewhere (OECD, 2022; OECD/UNESCO, 2021; UNESCO, 2015). High educational aspirations were also observed among the young people interviewed for the present representative study. Within the overall population, one in four young people (25.7%) has a high educational level,[13] while more than one in two (54.1%) has a medium educational level and one in five (20.3%) has a low educational level or no certificate at all.

This trend becomes even clearer when one controls for age and takes into account the fact that university degrees, in general, cannot be attained until the end of youth and the transition to adulthood (Fig. 5).

Almost one in two participants between the ages of 25 and 29 (45.5%) has a very high educational level. Only a very small proportion of 5.5% has no school certificate at all. It may therefore be assumed that the young generation of the Visegrád states is highly qualified and regards education as an important good—a classical form of capital according to Bourdieu (1982), an investment in one's personal future that, ideally, holds out the promise of social advancement. This would be an optimistic interpretation. Viewed realistically, what we are seeing is "merely" a reaction to the demands of the job market. Viewed pessimistically, it is a symptom of massive economic competition and displacement which demands high qualifications from the young generation simply to maintain the standard of living enjoyed by their birth family.

At the same time—and this is another trend—young women have markedly outpaced their male contemporaries in terms of their educational attainments; 53.0% of young women aged 25–29 have a university degree, while the proportion of young male graduates in this age group is significantly lower at 38.4%.

However, the educational advancement of young women does not necessarily carry over into their occupational status, and gender-specific inequalities are discernible especially at the point of transition from school or university education into

[13] As the four countries have structurally different educational systems, we grouped the various educational certificates into three broad levels to facilitate comparisons. A low educational level denotes no school certificate or completion of primary schooling only. A medium educational level denotes completion of secondary school and/or vocational training. A high educational level denotes university degrees (bachelor's, master's, and doctorate).

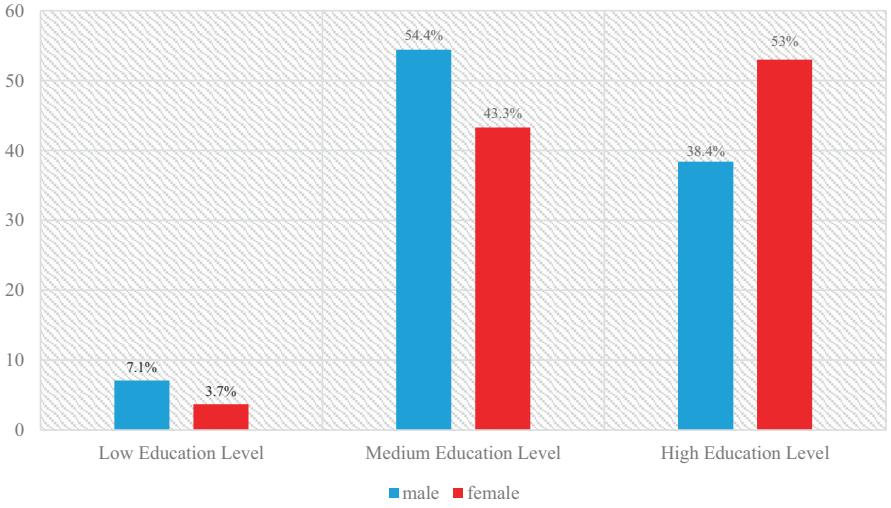



**Fig. 5** Educational level of 25–29-year-olds by gender. Young people aged between 25 and 29 years, $n = 2297$; figures in percent

the job market. Young men entering working life still have a clear competitive advantage (for more details, see the chapter on working).

## Social Inequality and Educational Success or Failure

Not all young people benefit equally from the expansion of education in Central Eastern Europe. Rather, access to education and educational attainment are unequally distributed and primarily determined by the social status of the birth family. Thus, educational decisions are less the result of rational consideration than of a cross-generational process of socialization which exhibits primary and secondary effects of origin (Boudon, 1974). Whether or not young people aspire to and attain higher educational qualifications is fundamentally dependent on (a) the financial scope of the parents and (b) the educational level of both parents. The mother's educational attainment is particularly significant.

In order to realistically record the effects of origin, only the age group of 25–29 years was included in the calculation, since this is the only group that reaches tertiary educational levels and can hold a university degree. The resulting picture is unambiguous and confirms that the findings of previous broad international school performance studies, such as PISA and IGLU, also hold true for the Visegrád states; 72.4% of young people aged 25–29 whose mothers hold university degrees were able to reach this high educational level themselves. Only 3.3% from educated backgrounds did not gain a school certificate. In contrast, only one-quarter (25.9%) of young people whose mothers have no school certificate succeeded in entering university. Another quarter (25.0%) exhibit a "hereditary" educational level. Thus,

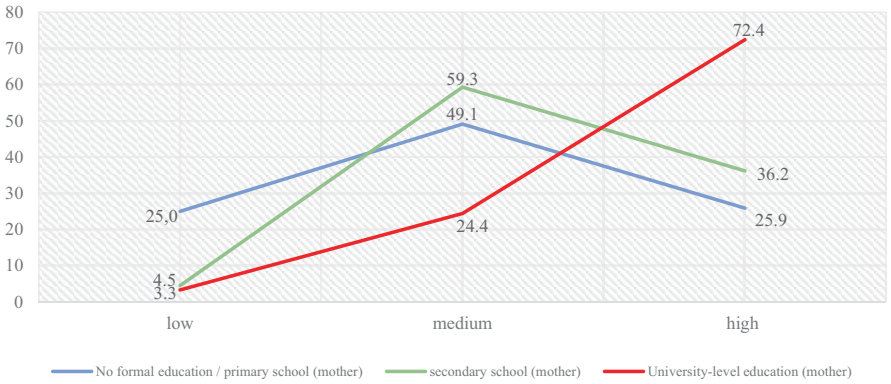



**Fig. 6** Effects of origin on education: educational levels of young people and mother's educational attainment. Young people aged between 25 and 29 years, $n = 2206$; figures in percent

the risk of failing to gain a school certificate is especially high for young people from uneducated families. Almost half of these young people (49.1%), however, do attain a secondary or vocational qualification.

Therefore, while processes of educational advancement between the parent and child generations can be identified in the curves of Fig. 6, they are relatively moderate in scope and primarily affect the medium educational level. Access to the tertiary level in particular is often impossible for young people from uneducated families and families with a medium educational level. In other words, the probability that a child whose parents have attended and graduated from university will likewise reach the highest educational level is three times as high as that of a child growing up with parents who have no school certificate.

The results of these multiple self-recruiting effects in education can be observed in all four countries in the study, although they manifest in different ways.

Figure 7 shows a comparison between the four countries. The effects of origin are shown in terms of the relationship between the educational status of the mother and the educational attainment of the 25–29-year-olds in the study on the national level. It appears that the Slovakian educational system is particularly selective in terms of the educational status of the students' birth families. Eight out of ten young people from educated families in which at least the mother (and, in most cases, the father as well) has an academic degree will enter university and take a degree themselves. It follows that the probability of this group of young Slovaks choosing other educational careers is extremely low. By comparison, the relationship between educational background and personal educational attainment appears to be rather less automatic in Hungary. This must be viewed in perspective, however, since educational success in Hungary does also appear to be significantly dependent on social origins. These effects can likewise be seen in the figures for upward educational mobility (see Fig. 8).

Looking at young people growing up in uneducated families, we see that upward educational mobility between the generations, along with comparative permeability

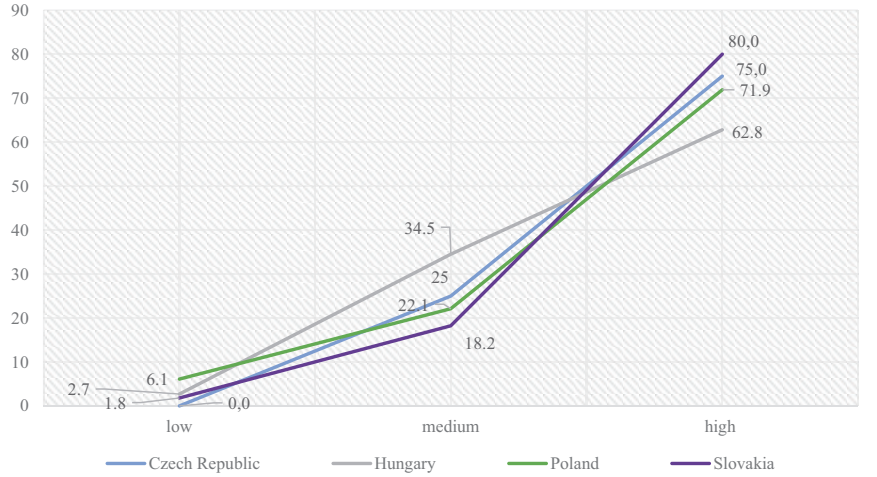



**Fig. 7** Effects of origin on education in the four countries expressed in the relationship between mother's high educational level and educational achievement of 25–29-year-olds. Young people aged between 25 and 29 years, $n = 2206$; figures in percent

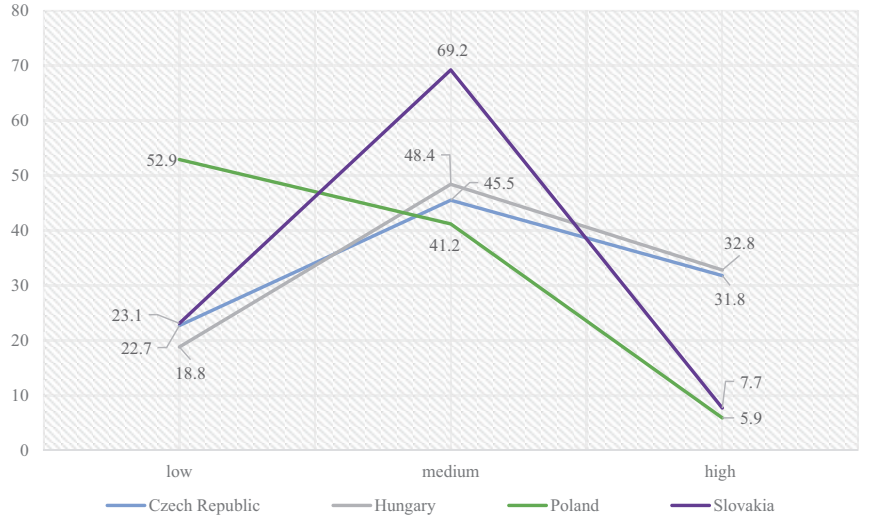



**Fig. 8** Upward educational mobility in the four countries expressed in the relationship between mother's low educational level and educational achievement of 25–29-year-olds. Young people aged between 25 and 29 years, $n = 2206$; figures in percent

in the educational system—if such a thing exists at all—can be observed only in the Czech Republic and Hungary. In contrast, Poland seems to be dominated by a significantly higher degree of selection by origin, and the educational success—or, in this case, lack thereof—of young people, along with their educational careers and their entire biographies, is largely predetermined by the educational success of their parents. These young people seem to have an especially difficult time breaking free from existing structures and defying social inequality.

## (Dis)satisfaction with the Educational System

Against the background of the multiple selection processes described above, it is hardly surprising that young people in Central Eastern Europe regard the educational systems of their countries with a certain skepticism. In Hungary in particular, almost one in two (47.5%) is dissatisfied with the quality of the educational system, while one-third (33.8%) is ambivalent. Fewer than one in five young Hungarians (18.7%) are entirely or at least mostly satisfied with educational opportunities in their own country. The situation is only marginally different in Poland and Slovakia, where the prevalent attitude to the quality of education is likewise one of dissatisfaction (Fig. 9).

In contrast, the attitude of young people in the Czech Republic is very different. A majority takes a positive view of the educational institutions in their country: 39.7% are mostly or very satisfied with the educational system, while "only" one-quarter (27.3%) is dissatisfied.

The dissatisfaction reported by a majority of the Central Eastern European youth, however, is further underscored by low trust in the educational institutions and their actors (Fig. 10).

Almost one in two young people in Eastern Central Europe (47.2%) assumes that corruption is widespread in their country's educational system. This attitude is

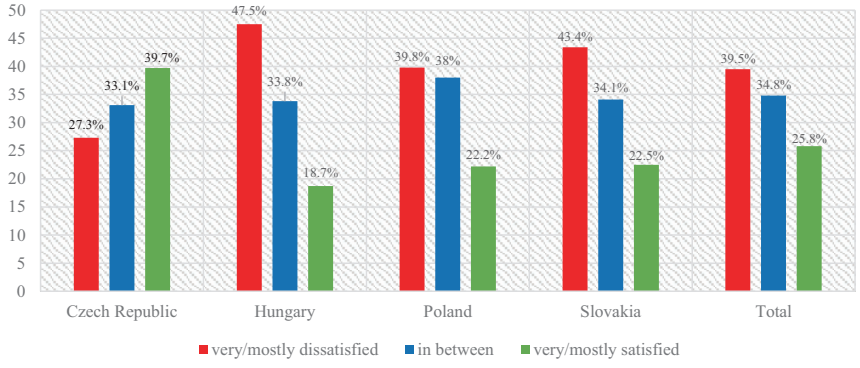



**Fig. 9** Satisfaction with the quality of the educational system by country. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 5850$; figures in percent

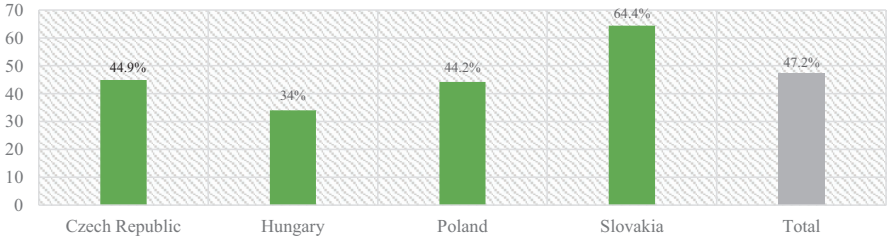



**Fig. 10** Corruption in the educational system by country. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 5261$; "very/mostly" answers; figures in percent

particularly widespread in Slovakia, where it corresponds with the findings on social inequality in education at the national level. Two out of three young people (64.4%) express the suspicion that final examinations and good grades are regularly purchased for money. Irrespective of how realistic or unrealistic and how close to or remote from the truth this assumption may be, what is crucial is the subjective perception that foments collective distrust within society and thus creates a need for action.

## *5.2 Work*

### General Insights into the Economy and the Job Market

Despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it may be assumed that the general level of prosperity in the four Visegrád states will increase. The GDP growth rate of all four countries is higher than the EU average of 1.6% (Busch, 2021).[14] Nevertheless, insolvencies, rising inflation, increased transport costs, and concerns about supply chains and energy supplies as a result, initially, of the pandemic and now of the war in Ukraine are severely impacting the people's economic situation (Dezenter, 2022; Plòciennik, 2020). This emerges from the accounts of Plòciennik (2020), who emphasizes the precarious situation of self-employed people and short-term workers. Jobs like these typically have a higher proportion of adolescent and young adult workers. These insecurities are exacerbated by the increase in international export and import trade. A comparison of transformation indicators such as monetary and fiscal stability, socioeconomic development levels, and sustainability among Central and Eastern European countries reveals that the Czech Republic and Slovakia are in an exposed position. In contrast, Hungary occupies the last place in all categories. Poland ranks in the midfield in this comparison of indicators (Busch, 2021, p. 53). Other reforms and enactments with far-reaching effects on society and the economy

[14] Changes in average annual real GDP from 1999 to 2919 in percent: Poland: 3.8%; Slovakia: 2.4%; Czech Republic: 2.9%; Hungary: 2.6%. EU-28 (2013–2010): 1.6%.

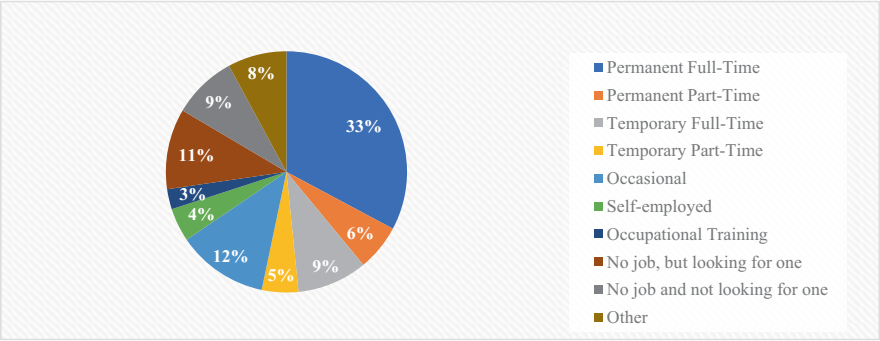



**Fig. 11** Current employment. Young people aged between 19 and 29 years, $n$ = 4742; figures in percent

can be observed in Hungary and Poland in particular. In Poland, for example, the "Prawo i Sprawiedliwość" (PiS) program of law and justice focuses on the expansion of centralized state power by remodeling the state and the economy (Richter, 2021). In Hungary, general corruption and authoritarianism are increasing in Orbán's machinery of power (Dalos, 2020, pp. 230ff). Young people who have yet to integrate themselves into the world of work are especially sensitive to such economic changes.

## Precarization of Specific Groups of Young People in the World of Work

A look at the employment relationships of young people in the countries in the study reveals a nuanced picture (see Fig. 11).[15]

In the following analysis, each participant in the study is assigned to one of three groups: (I) Young people in permanent employment; (II) young people in temporary employment or self-employment; and (III) unemployed young people.[16] A comparison reveals significant differences, especially with respect to education and gender.

### The Exposed Position of Well-Educated Male Young People in Permanent Employment

This first group of those in permanent full- or part-time employment comprises 39% of all young people on average. Looking at individual countries, Hungarian young people can most frequently be found in permanent employment (45.8%), while only

[15] The following observations of current employment situations focus on young people between 19 and 29 years of age, since the overwhelming majority of young people aged 15–18 are still in school or vocational training.

[16] A small proportion (8%) of young people is on maternity leave, receives a pension, or is otherwise occupied and cannot be assigned to one of the three groups.

one-third (33.0%) of young people in the Czech Republic are similarly employed. In all countries, those in permanent employment are much more likely to be male and with significantly higher educational qualifications than the other two groups of temporarily and self-employed people and the unemployed; 40% of them state that they have a BA or higher degree, while fewer than one in five (18.9%) of the unemployed have completed higher education. The presence of well-educated employees in permanent jobs is facilitated by the fact that education generally improves employees' prospects on the job market. This is corroborated by the young people themselves when asked about the factors they regard as relevant for job hunting. Expertise (76.8%) and educational level (69.1%) are the attributes they deem most important, followed by personal contacts in the private sphere (62.7%) and people in positions of power (51.0%).[17] Additionally, higher educational levels also increase the probability of finding a job that fits their qualifications. Two-thirds (67.8%) of those aged 19–29 with high qualifications state that they have a job within their professional field or a closely related one, whereas this is true of only 43.7% of their contemporaries with low qualifications.

### A Nuanced Picture in the Case of Young People in Temporary and Self-Employment

One-third (33.7%) of young people are in temporary employment, self-employed, in occasional employment, or in vocational training. The proportion of young people in these more precarious situations is particularly high in the Czech Republic, where the share is 43.9% compared to only 22.4% in Hungary. Additionally, the congruence of training and job is lower in this group. While over half (56.3%) of 19–29-year-olds in permanent employment state that they are employed within their professional field or a very closely related field, the same is true of only 42.7% of those in temporary employment and the self-employed.

### The Gender Gap Among Unemployed Young People

Almost one-fifth (19.3%) of the young people in the study are unemployed. In contrast, the unemployment rate of the overall population is less than 4%.[18] On closer examination, these young people, referred to as NEETs[19] in the international context, illustrate the fact that unemployment is a particularly high and much more frequently occurring stress factor for young people. Figure 12 additionally shows

[17] Percentages concerning factors relevant for job hunting were calculated by combining the "very important" and "mostly important" answers.

[18] Unemployment rates for overall population in all four countries: Czech Republic: 2.1%; Hungary: 3.7%; Poland: 2.9%; and Slovakia: 6.4% (Statistica, 2020).

[19] NEET = not in employment, education, or training.

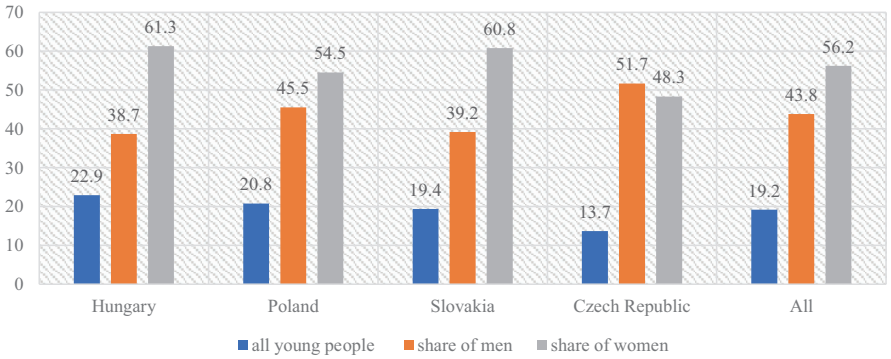



**Fig. 12** NEETs, by country. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 916$; figures in percent per country. Absolute number of young NEETs: Poland: 242; Slovakia: 245; Czech Republic: 151; and Hungary: 279

that unemployment is not only a problem specific to youth, but that young women are particularly affected.

The Czech Republic is the clear exception among the Visegrád states. As the country with the strongest economy and a per capita GDP of €20.640 (State Center for Political Education Baden-Württemberg, 2022), it not only has a NEET quota of 13.7%, far below the average, but also exhibits almost exact parity between men and women among the unemployed. In contrast, Poland (GDP €13.730) and Hungary (GDP €14.700), the countries with the weakest economies, have the highest unemployment rates and a much more pronounced gender gap among the unemployed. Thus, economic strength goes hand in hand with comparatively low unemployment rates among young people and the empowerment of women in the world of work.

## *5.3 Family*

### Satisfaction with the Family

For most young people in the Visegrád states, the family represents security, continuity, and stability. The overwhelming majority of young people expresses high satisfaction with their own family: two-thirds (66.8%) state that they are very or mostly satisfied with their family lives. The majority also reports participative decision processes at home. However, this is not true of all young people. Those for whom the family does not represent a safe haven describe their relationships with family members as complicated or even confrontational; 18.5% of young people state that they have an ambivalent attitude to their families, while one in eight (13.6%) is very or mostly dissatisfied with their current life within the family. The differences between the genders are minor but statistically significant: young men

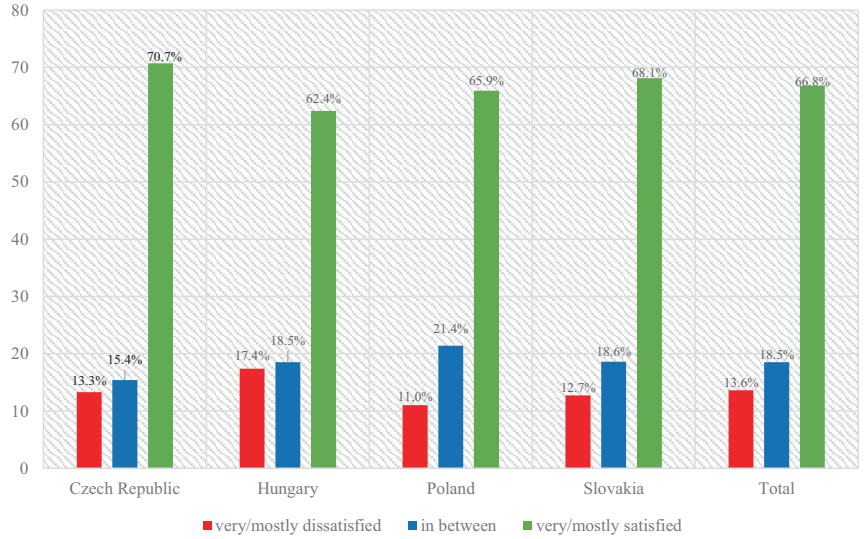



**Fig. 13** Satisfaction with family life, by country. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 6000$; figures in percent

tend to be more dissatisfied (15.4%) with their families than their female contemporaries (11.9%) (Fig. 13).

In contrast, neither age nor region of residence plays a significant role in young people's evaluation of their family lives, and the figures remain constant across all age groups and between young people growing up in urban vs. rural environments.

However, comparing the youth of the different countries reveals differences that are at times blatant and statistically relevant. Young people in the Czech Republic express the highest satisfaction with their family lives; 70.7% of young Czechs are happy with their family situation, whereas the approval rate in Hungary, at 62.4%, is significantly lower—the lowest of all the four countries. Additionally, Poland has a disproportionately high share of young people whose attitude to their families is ambivalent. More than one in five of young Poles state that while their family lives do offer harmonious and positive experiences, they also have to deal repeatedly with tension and confrontational negotiation processes in the family context.

It should be noted that well-being is dependent on social status in all four countries in the study; thus, the young people's socioeconomic situation substantially influences their assessment of their families. The trend is always clear (Fig. 14):

The more precarious the family's financial situation, the more young people report strained relationships with their parents. Young people living in poverty or at risk of poverty appear to have a higher probability of experiencing conflicts and differences of opinion within the family in their day-to-day lives. In contrast, young people growing up with a high standard of wealth also have a higher sense of satisfaction with their families. This relationship is especially conspicuous in Slovakia.

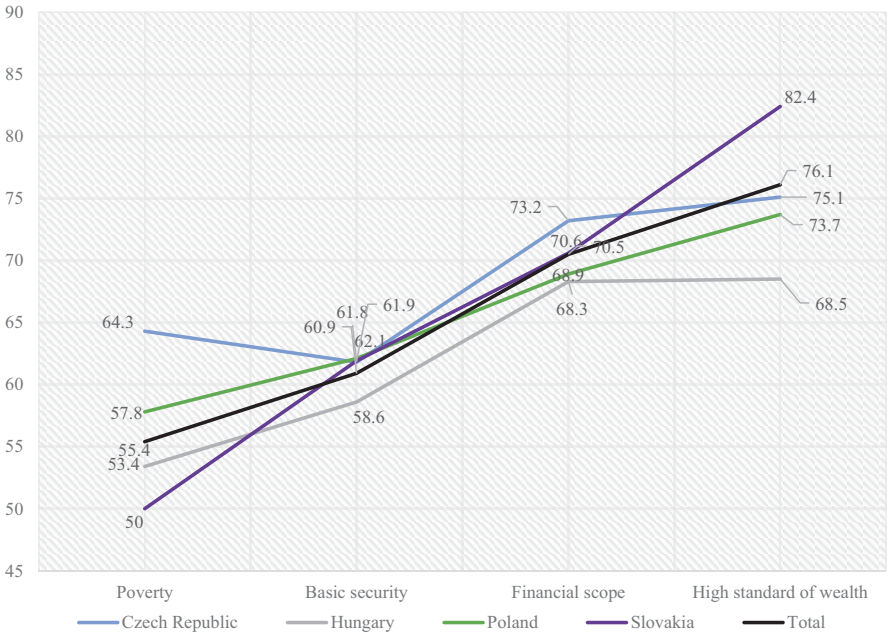



**Fig. 14** Satisfaction with family life dependent on financial situation, by country. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 6000$; "very/mostly satisfied" answers; figures in percent
Financial situation (young people's self-assessment): Poverty = "We don't have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating, etc.) and food"/"We have enough money for basic bills and food, but not for clothes and shoes"; basic security = "We have enough money for food, clothes, and shoes but not enough for more expensive things (fridge, TV set, etc.)"; financial scope ="We can afford to buy some more expensive things but not as expensive as car or a flat, for instance"; high standard of wealth = "We can afford to buy whatever we need for a good living standard"

No other country exhibits such a clear gap between rich and poor in terms of assessments of family life. The differences are also present, albeit in a much more moderate form, in the Czech Republic. The correlations differ from country to country in degree and clarity. While agreement rates in the Czech Republic are comparatively high, at 64.4%, even among young people from precarious economic backgrounds, only one in two young people in Hungary (53.2%) and Slovakia (50.0%) gets along well with their parents. Additionally, Hungary has a disproportionately large share of young people (17.4%) who state that they generally do not get along with their parents or that they often fight and have recurrent differences of opinion with them. The problems may have different facets and may arise from a strained financial situation, cramped living conditions, and lack of support, all of which increase the probability of tension and conflict.

## Family Constellations

Growing up in Central Eastern Europe typically involves growing up in a family. Notwithstanding the processes of pluralization, individualization, and globalization that have permeated and shaped people's lives in the Visegrád states as elsewhere, the classical nuclear family consisting of mother, father, and child(ren) remains the dominant constellation in which young people grow up. Before leaving the parental home, a large majority of 73.5% of young people in all four countries live together with both parents. However, a closer examination reveals clear regional variations (Fig. 15).

While three out of four young people still living at home in Poland (76.6%), Slovakia (75.7%), and the Czech Republic (74.1%) state that they live together with both mother and father, in Hungary it is only two out of three (66.9%) who share a home with both parents.

The exact figures naturally vary according to the young people's age, and a gradual process of detachment from the parents can be observed in all four countries in the study. Whereas 83.9% of young people under the age of 18 still live with their parents, the same is true of only slightly more than half of those aged 19–24 (59.8%). Less than one-third (30.2%) of young people aged between 25 and 29 still live in a joint household with their parents. At the same time, the number of young people moving in with their own partner increases with age.

Interestingly, young people in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland seem to leave home at an earlier age than those in Slovakia. Among those aged 25–29, 21.9% of young people in the Czech Republic state that they live with their parents. This share is slightly higher in Hungary (25.6%) and Poland (28.9%). In contrast, 41.6% of young people in this age group in Slovakia are still living at home. Convenience is not one of their main reasons for doing so; rather, almost two-thirds (60.4%) say that they are prevented from moving out by financial considerations. Only about one in five young people in Slovakia (22.3%) states that living with their parents is the simplest and most convenient solution. In the other Central Eastern European countries, inadequate financial resources similarly represent a crucial

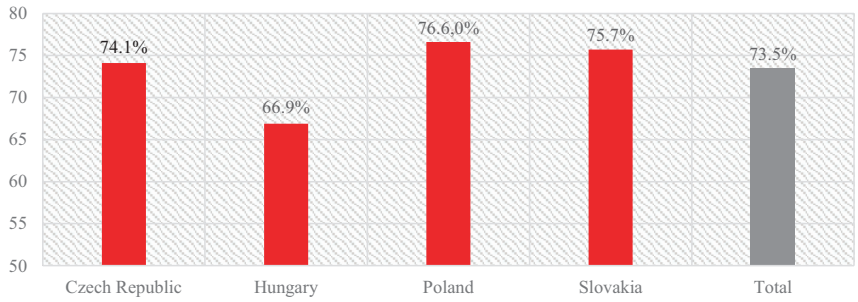



**Fig. 15** Frequency of mother-father-child(ren) families, by country. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 3209$; figures in percent

barrier to an independent live for the age group between 25 and 29 years. Four out of ten young people in Poland (41.5%) and the Czech Republic (41.0%) and almost half in Hungary (47.2%) state that they would prefer to live alone if their financial situation permitted.

## Starting a Family

The high significance of family in young people's lives is illustrated by the fact that, notwithstanding their efforts to individualize and build careers, starting a family of their own is always part of their biographical planning and their vision of their future (Fig. 16).

Starting a family is important for a large majority of young interviewees throughout all the countries in the study. The dominant vision of the family corresponds to classical, traditional values: over half the respondents (58.7%) say that their future holds a combination of marriage and children. Looking at both of these aspects separately, however, a more nuanced picture emerges of young people's plans for the future when it comes to starting a family of their own. Having children is regarded as more important than getting married: while roughly half of all young people (55.4%) state that they want to marry at some point in the future, six out of ten (59.2%) regard having children as an important or very important goal. The difference is particularly pronounced among the Czech youth, while the situation in Poland is almost the opposite. In this country, with its strong tradition of Christianity and the Catholic Church, marriage (55.3%) ranks ahead of the desire for children (50.2%). Poland is unique among the Visegrád states when it comes to this priority in young people's plans for their own family. However, this order of priorities is not

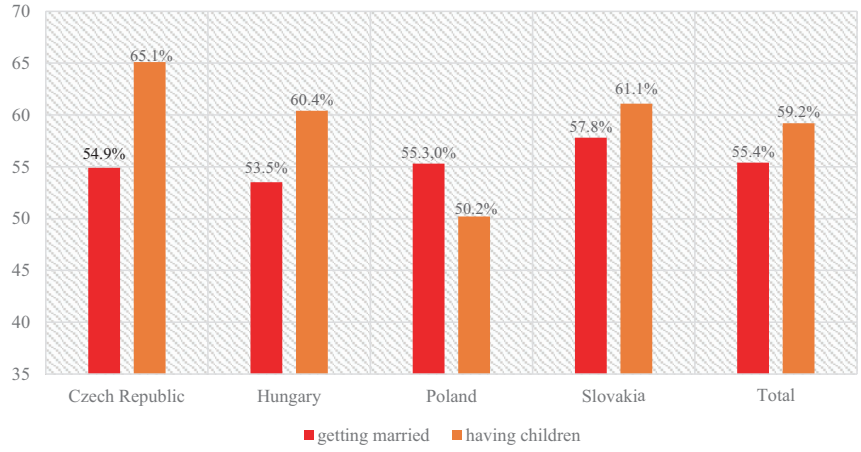



**Fig. 16** Marriage and desire for children, by country. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 6000$; "very important/important" answers; figures in percent

exclusively attributable to the high relevance of marriage in Poland. It is intensified by the fact that the desire to have children is articulated less frequently. More than one-fifth of Polish young people (21.8%) do not plan to have children of their own, irrespective of whether they have a partner. A large proportion (19.7%) is undecided and not fully committed to having children. All in all, Poland is the Visegrád state in which young people are most likely to deprioritize having children.

All four countries exhibit a significant urban-rural gap in the matter of starting a family. Marriage and children are significantly less likely to represent a central biographical goal of urban youth than among their contemporaries in rural areas. Additionally, young people's views on marriage and the desire to have children are determined by subjective satisfaction with the birth family in which they are growing up (Table 3).

In all four countries, young people who express high satisfaction with their birth families are far more open to the idea of getting married; 61.5% of those who give positive evaluations of their birth families say that getting married in the future is an important or a very important goal. In contrast, only one-third of those who experience recurring conflicts in their birth families give the same answer. The discrepancy is even more obvious with reference to the desire to have children.

Thus, the commitment to classical family values can be regarded as a core characteristic of the current young generation in the Visegrád states—a characteristic that is handed down through the generations through processes of familial socialization. In other words, when young people perceive their birth family as a place where they experience affection, support, security, continuity, and stability and where participative processes of negotiation and decision-making are possible in everyday communications with parents and other family members, there is an increasing probability that they will start a family of their own at a later stage.

The process of following through on this intention appears increasingly to be delayed—a development that has been observed in the countries of Western Europe for several decades. The reasons are primarily financial in nature, coupled with efforts at individualization, such as educational ambitions and career planning. The average age at which young people start their families across all the countries in the study—the age when they intend to have their first child—is 28 years.

The distribution of age groups in the various countries corroborates the initial impression while also affording a more nuanced view: for example, young people in Poland are prepared to start their families somewhat earlier than their contemporaries in other countries. Over one-quarter (27.3%) plan to have their first child before they turn 25. In Hungary, in contrast, this event is expected relatively late, with almost one-third (29.4%) expecting to become parents at the age of 29 or 30 and almost another 15% planning to delay parenthood until after their 30th birthday. In both cases, these figures are disproportionately high compared to other countries.

**Table 3** Family planning and satisfaction with birth family. Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, $n = 6000$; figures in percent

| | | Marriage | | | Having children | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Satisfaction with birth family | Important/very important | Somewhat important | Unimportant/very unimportant | Important/very important | Somewhat important | Unimportant/very unimportant |
| Mostly/very satisfied | 61.5 | 19.0 | 16.2 | 65.6 | 15.7 | 14.1 |
| Somewhat satisfied | 44.4 | 26.4 | 24.5 | 47.7 | 24.3 | 22.8 |
| Mostly/very dissatisfied | 42.5 | 21.7 | 32.9 | 46.4 | 18.2 | 30.9 |

## 6 Conclusion

The available data reveals that growing up in Central Eastern Europe today is characterized by heterogeneous life situations and nonlinear biographies—determined partly by the pluralization and individualization of lifestyles in an increasingly complex postmodern society—and is simultaneously determined by the unequal distribution of opportunities.

In summary, we may note three fundamental factors governing the lives of Central Eastern European youth:

I. The precarization of certain groups through cross-generationally low cultural capital.
II. Experiences of poverty in youth owing to the state of the national economies and the precarization of certain groups of young people in the working world, exemplified by the gender gap in unemployment.

Efforts at individualization that confer agency and societal developments that prevent agency. These are exemplified by young people's positive predictions for their future vs. their skepticism for society in general. They are corroborated by the fact that young people retain family ties and take it for granted that they will start a family of their own. Living and dealing with contradictions is part of the developmental phase of youth. On the one hand, young people in the Eastern European regions are confronted with social and economic developments that seem to convey a sense of powerlessness coupled with great uncertainties about the future of their countries. On the other hand, young people exhibit a strategy of responding to the social experience of lack of agency with strong tendencies of individualization. Since they regard their chances of achieving these personal goals as realistic, this focus gives them a degree of agency and can be understood as compensation for their incapacity to act at the macro level.

However, in addition to being offered scope for decision-making and experimentation, young people also face the requirement to make decisions, both in determining the time of becoming financially and spatially independent of their parents and in choosing a workplace or accessing education. Seeming degrees of freedom become blurred against the background of social disparities which affect the young generation's educational opportunities and their concomitant potentials on the job market while also determining their values and attitudes. Their present life situation and its subjective qualities thus immediately affect their future engagement. For many people, therefore, youth is by no means a sheltered, secure phase of life during which it is possible to experiment without risk. Rather, there appears to be an increasingly wide gap between different groups of young people within the same generation. While some experience this time of life as a privilege that comes with all the potentials for personal development, for others it is increasingly becoming a period of pressure accompanied by an awareness, beginning at an early age and increasing over the years, of marking time and being unable to tap into opportunities for social advancement. This is clearly evident in the precarization of certain groups

of young people—those with low cultural and/or financial capital—and manifests itself in the gender gap in unemployment. Current global crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the war on the European continent with all their consequences, economic and otherwise, carry the risk of increasing uncertainty and division. The long-term consequences are as yet almost impossible to fathom. It is therefore necessary to focus not only on the obvious, clearly visible trouble spots in the world, but also on the regions that barely register geopolitically and in the public awareness. The young generations growing up in these regions are the Europe of tomorrow. Noticing them, acknowledging their needs, and giving them support are a necessary investment in the future of Europe.

## References


Beribes, A. (2021). *Die Missverstandenen? Die Visegràd-Staaten und die Konferenz zur Zukunft Europas*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: https://www.kas.de/de/analysen-und-argumente/detail/-/content/die-missverstandenen-die-visegrad-staaten-und-die-konferenz-zur-zukunft-europas.

Boudon, R. (1974). *Education, opportunity, and social inequality. Changing prospects in western society*. Wiley.

Bourdieu, P. (1974). *Zur Soziologie der symbolischen Formen*. Suhrkamp.

Bourdieu, P. (1982). *Die feinen Unterschiede. Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft*. Suhrkamp.

Bourdieu, P. (1983). *Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital.* In R. Kreckel (Hrsg.): Soziale Ungleichheiten. (Soziale Welt/Sonderband 2) (S. 183–198). Göttingen, Schwarz & Co.

Bourdieu, P. (1992). *Die verborgenen Mechanismen der Macht*. Schriften zu Politik & Kultur 1. Hamburg: VSA.

Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung. (2022). *Armut*: https://www.bmz.de/de/service/lexikon/armut-14038.

Busch, B. (2021). *IW-Analysen 144. Die mittel- und osteuropäischen Staaten in der EU.* Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft. Köln: Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln Medien GmbH.

Czech Statistical Office. (2021). *Population:* https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/population.

Dalos, G. (2020). *Ungarn in der Nußschale*. Verlag C.H. Beck.

Dezenter, M. (2022). *Ungarn forever?* Im Fokus: Länder und Devisen: https://www.helaba.de/blueprint/servlet/resource/blob/docs/582394/0fc1e8b58a9560226aada8475efbdba3/laenderfokus-ungarn-20220407-data.pdf.

Harring, M., Rohlfs, C., & Palentien, C. (2023). Die Sicht von Schülerinnen und Schülern auf Schule. In T. Hascher, W. Helsper, & T.-S. Idel (Hrsg.), *Handbuch Schulforschung*. 3. Auflage. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Hungarian Central Statistical Office. (2020). *Population and vital events*: https://www.ksh.hu/population-and-vital-events.

Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg. (2022). *Infoportal östliches Europa:* https://osteuropa.lpb-bw.de/osteuropa-uebersicht.

Lippert, B. (2020). *Visegrád-Staaten*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung: https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/lexika/das-europalexikon/177352/visegrad-staaten/.

Loew, P. O. (2019). *Die demographische Entwicklung Polens: Herausforderungen und Konsequenzen*. (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde). Polen-Analysen: https://www.laender-analysen.de/polen-analysen/231/PolenAnalysen231.pdf.

OECD. (2022). *Trends shaping education 2022*. OECD Publishing.

OECD/UNICEF. (2021). *Education in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Findings from PISA*. OECD Publishing.

Pillòk, P. (2021). Die aktuelle Zusammensetzung der ungarischen Gesellschaft. In Z. Szalai, & O. Balàzs (Hrsg.), *Der ungarische Staat. Ein interdisziplinärer Überblick* (S. 95–112). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Plòciennik, S. (2020). *Die politische Wirtschaft in der Corona-Krise*. Polen-Analysen: https://www.laender-analysen.de/polen-analysen/254/.

Richter, M. (2021). *Konsum, Konservatismus und Staats-Kapitalismus—die PiS beschließt die sozio-ökonomische "Polnische Ordnung"*. (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde et al.). Polen-Analysen: https://www.laender-analysen.de/polen-analysen/284/.

Statista. (2022). *Europäische Union: Arbeitslosenquoten in den Mitgliedstaaten im Januar 2022*: https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/160142/umfrage/arbeitslosenquote-in-den-eu-laendern/.

Statistica. (2020). *Europäische Union: Durchschnittsalter der Bevölkerung in den Mitgliedsstaaten im Jahr 2020:* https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/248994/umfrage/durchschnittsalter-der-bevoelkerung-in-den-eu-laendern/.

Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. (2021). *Population and migration*: https://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/portal/ext/themes/demography/population/news/!ut/p/z1/jZFNbsMgFITPkhMwgGOcJXZlgoJSYwpN2VReRJGl1M0iinL8WjRdFuftEPPNxkSyYHEabiNpE6fk_DeX5_xPLTCl3VNZWo6sCgxb6nO2vVjhbkPQla1zG5KVTz0r-20G8Nq5wpGUBJzHyr8sE3Sm4LYYDKqDW03Pp-YzmH.

Statistical Offices Poland. (2020). *Structure of the population:* https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/population/population/structure-of-the-population,7,1.html.

UNESCO. (2015). *Education for all global monitoring report 2010. Reginal overview: Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.* Paris*:* UNESCO.

# From Dissatisfaction to Passivity: Young Hungarians in 2021


**András Bíró-Nagy and Andrea Szabó**

**Contents**



## 1 Introduction

In this chapter, we present three phenomena related to the social situation of young people and their attitudes towards politics, in which Hungarian young people are unique in a regional comparison among the Visegrád countries. Young Hungarians are distinctly dissatisfied not only with their life conditions and economic situation but also with education and the state of democracy. Rather than spurring them to become more politically active, however, this deep sense of crisis affecting their personal situations and their perception of public life results in a deep apathy, making Hungarian youth the most passive youth in the Central European region. The consequence of this passivity is that Hungarian youth turnout in elections is low by regional standards. There are no serious signs of rebellion either in public life or within the family: Hungarian youth are also characterized by conformity, and they are more strongly in agreement with their parents on political issues than the youth of any other country in the region.

In the following, we back up these three observations with empirical results from a large-scale regional opinion poll. In the spring and summer of 2021, with the

A. Bíró-Nagy (✉) · A. Szabó
HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Institute for Political Science, Budapest, Hungary
e-mail: Biro-Nagy.Andras@tk.hu; Szabo.Andrea@tk.hu



M. Harring (ed.), *Growing Up in Times of Crisis*, Contributions to Political Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58626-2_4

support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, a study employing a number of sociological methods was conducted among 15–29-year-olds in the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia. When analysing the results of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Youth Study in Hungary, we specifically sought to take advantage of the exceptional opportunities for regional comparability: we analysed the Hungarian data in the context of the other Visegrád countries.

What makes the Hungarian situation unique is that the political socialization of the age group in question took place largely or entirely under the post-2010 Orbán[1] governments. The public awareness of the younger cohorts in the 15–29-year age group developed entirely under the regime still in power in 2021, while those in the second half of their 20 s also said that they spent their entire adulthoods under Fidesz[2] governments. In light of this, we considered it particularly important to supplement the shared regional questionnaire with additional, specifically Hungarian questions about the Orbán regime[3] in order to learn the opinions of young Hungarians concerning the domestic version of democracy.

## 2 Dissatisfaction Among Young Hungarians

### *2.1 The Financial Situation of Young Hungarians*

Within the framework of the FES Youth Studies, we examined the respondents' subjective assessment of their financial situations. Young people could characterize the financial situation of their household on a verbal scale, with five categories.[4]

A relative majority of the young Hungarians in the sample, or about 40%, say that the household in which they live is not experiencing major financial problems. Most have enough for all essentials, although their income does not stretch to such larger purchases as a new car or flat. The proportion of those in a particularly good financial situation is 7%, which means that, overall, the proportion of those who chose categories four and five is 48%.

According to our research, 5% of Hungarians aged 15–29 live in households that struggle to cover everyday necessities, whilst another 12% can pay their utility bills and buy basic foodstuffs, yet cannot afford clothing, entertainment, or cultural

[1] Viktor Orbán has been the Prime Minister of Hungary since 2010.

[2] Fidesz is the populist right-wing governing party.

[3] Fidesz has won the Hungarian parliamentary elections four times and has held a two-thirds majority in parliament since 2010.

[4] These five categories are the following: (1) We don't have enough money for basic utilities (electricity, heating, etc.) and food. (2) We have enough money for basic utilities and food but not for clothing and shoes. (3) We have enough money for food, clothing, and shoes, but not for more expensive things (a refrigerator, a TV, etc.). (4) We can afford to buy more expensive things but not so expensive as, for instance, a car or an apartment. (5) We can afford to buy whatever we need for a good standard of living.

expenses. The proportion of those in unfavorable financial situations is particularly acute among those living in villages: more than one-tenth of these respondents indicated that even the most basic expenditures are difficult to afford on the family budget. By contrast, young people who claimed to be able to afford any financial expenditure are more likely to live in an urban setting (39%).

If we do not evaluate the Hungarian data in isolation, but also compare the opinions of young people in other V4 countries, we note some very unfavourable tendencies. In comparison with other V4 states, the subjective income perception of young Hungarians is the least favorable. In Hungary, the proportion of people living in a particularly disadvantageous financial situation is the highest, while the proportion of those who report living in very good conditions is just half or even one third of the rates among young people in the Czech Republic, Poland, or Slovakia.

## *2.2 Satisfaction with the Quality of Education*

Young Hungarians were also asked to rate the overall standard of education from one to five (the same way students themselves are graded). Only 2% were entirely satisfied with the quality of the Hungarian school system, and 17% gave a "good" rating, meaning four out of five. On the other hand, 45% rated the general quality of the Hungarian educational system as either a one or a two (the average of the 1–5 scale was 2.54). It is noteworthy that whether or not someone is still a student or has already left the educational system has no statistical influence on their opinion about the quality of education (though MA and PhD students have the highest opinion of the system, giving an average score of 2.79). Thus, regardless of their social affiliation, young people aged 15–29 have a broadly uniform assessment of the Hungarian educational system. A person's assessment of the quality of Hungarian education is more accurately predicted by ideology and political affiliation.

Young Hungarians are critical of the quality of the education system, and their views are informed by ideological and political attitudes. One result of political polarization is that young people who support the opposition have very different opinions from pro-government young people regarding the quality of education.

The opinions of young Hungarians are also unfavorable in comparison with the other V4 countries. While the proportion of those who gave a rating of 4 or 5 was not fundamentally different from those of a similar age in other countries—especially in Poland and Slovakia—proportionally more young Hungarians expressed a clearly or moderately negative opinion. It is striking that far fewer young Czech youngsters chose values 1 and 2, whereas far more of them chose values 4 and 5.

## 2.3 *Satisfaction with Their Lives*

Although the majority of young Hungarians are mostly or very satisfied with their lives (57%), this proportion lags behind the other V4 countries (Fig. 1). However, four fifths of young Hungarians are optimistic in terms of personal expectations, which is the highest rate within the V4. It is a regional trend that the proportion of young people optimistic about the future of the country lag significantly behind positive personal expectations. The majority of young Hungarians are pessimistic about the country's future; however, rates of pessimism regarding the nation's future are even higher in the other V4 countries.

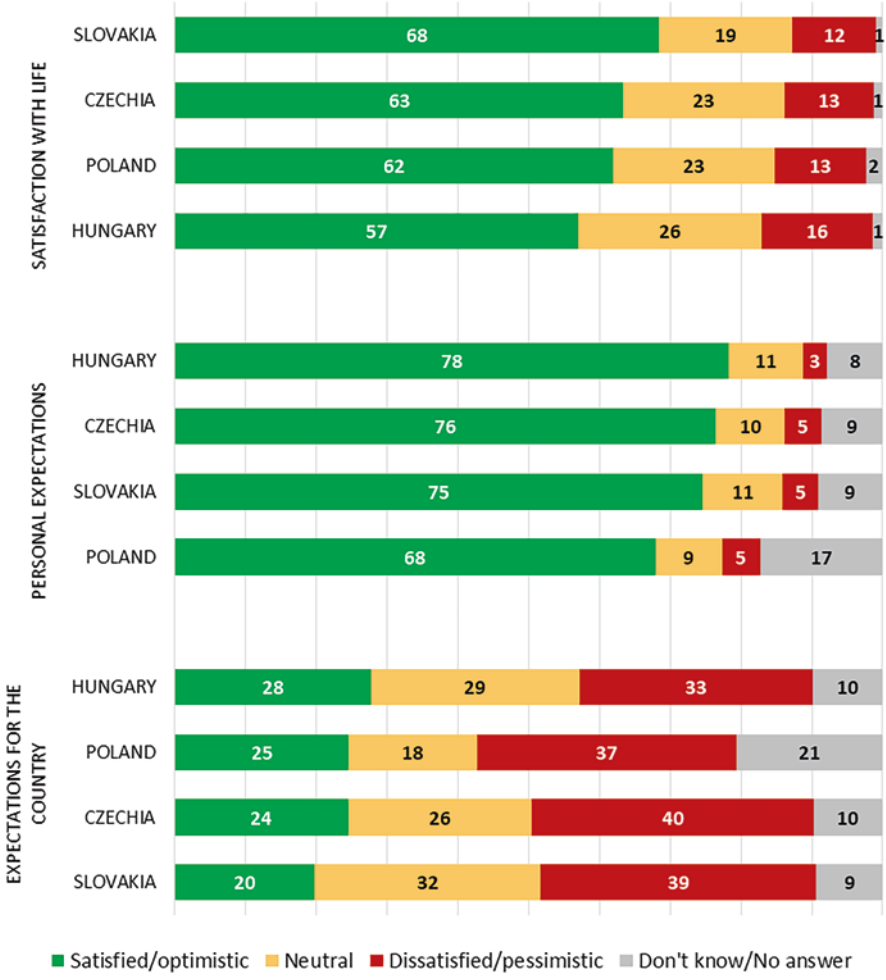



**Fig. 1** Life satisfaction and expectations for the future in V4 countries (%)
Source: FES Youth Study Central and Eastern Europe 2021

The differences between the various age subcategories of young Hungarians are moderate, but do surpass the margin of error: personal dissatisfaction and pessimism about the country's future both increase with age. Those aged 15 to 18 are more satisfied with their lives (61%) than 25–29-year-olds (54%). They are also more optimistic about the future of the country (33%) than those aged 19 to 24 or 25 to 29 (26% in both cohorts). The majority of young Hungarians have similar rates of satisfaction with their family life (62%), their circle of friends (59%), and their education (55%), as with life in general.

According to data from the European Social Survey, it is generally the case in most European countries that supporters of the government are happier than opposition voters (Patkós & Farkas, 2020). The Hungarian data from our research, when broken down along political lines, also supports this conclusion. Among young people who support the government, significantly more are satisfied with their lives (65%) than among opposition supporters (56%) or undecided voters (54%). The difference is somewhat smaller as regards personal expectations, as optimism predominates among all political persuasions (pro-government 82%, opposition 79%, and undecided 76%). In contrast, pessimism about the future of Hungary is characteristic mainly of young people who support the opposition (43%) or are undecided (31%) but is much less frequent among young supporters of the government (17%).

## *2.4 The Fears of Young Hungarians*

As in the other countries of the region, climate change is the overriding fear among young people in Hungary (only in Poland has climate change been pushed into second place). Though it is considered a serious threat by a majority in all education categories, this fear is even more prevalent among those with higher levels of education. Young people with higher levels of education are also more concerned about problems of social justice and corruption. The former was one of the key issues in all V4 countries, but corruption is of concern to significantly more young people in Hungary than in the other V4 countries.

Young Hungarians predominantly articulate post-material fears (climate crisis, social injustice, and corruption), while they are least afraid of crime, immigration, and terrorism. Among those with lower education levels, somewhat more are worried about unemployment and physical threats, whilst a striking proportion of graduates are worried about climate change, inequality, and corruption.

By mid-2021, the public health and economic crises caused by the Covid-19 pandemic had no more than a moderate impact on the fears of young Hungarians. Only approximately one third of respondents feared serious illness or unemployment, which correlated with results across the region, though significantly more respondents in Poland and Slovakia specifically feared serious illness. At the same time, it is important to note that unemployment is of less concern to young Hungarian graduates. This is in line with the fact that the economic crisis caused by the

Covid-19 pandemic has had a less severe impact on young Hungarians with high levels of education (Köllő & Reizer, 2021; Bíró-Nagy & Szászi, 2021).

The issue of immigration dominated the Hungarian political agenda until 2018, when the government, through an intensive anti-migration electoral campaign, decisively turned public opinion against immigration. Among other factors, this was one of the reasons for its success in the 2018 elections (Bíró-Nagy, 2021). However, the impact of this seems to have diminished significantly by 2021. In all countries in the region, only one-fifth of young people report a particular concern about immigration or terrorism. Worries related to other physical threats (violent assault and falling victim to robbery) are also among the least commonly reported in Hungary, as they are in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. At the same time, these fears related to feelings of physical security are more common among young Hungarians with lower levels of education.

## *2.5 The Problem Map of Young Hungarians*

The problem map among young Hungarians is dominated by the issues of low wages and pensions: four in ten named these among the three most important long-term challenges (Fig. 2). The picture then begins to fragment: poverty and

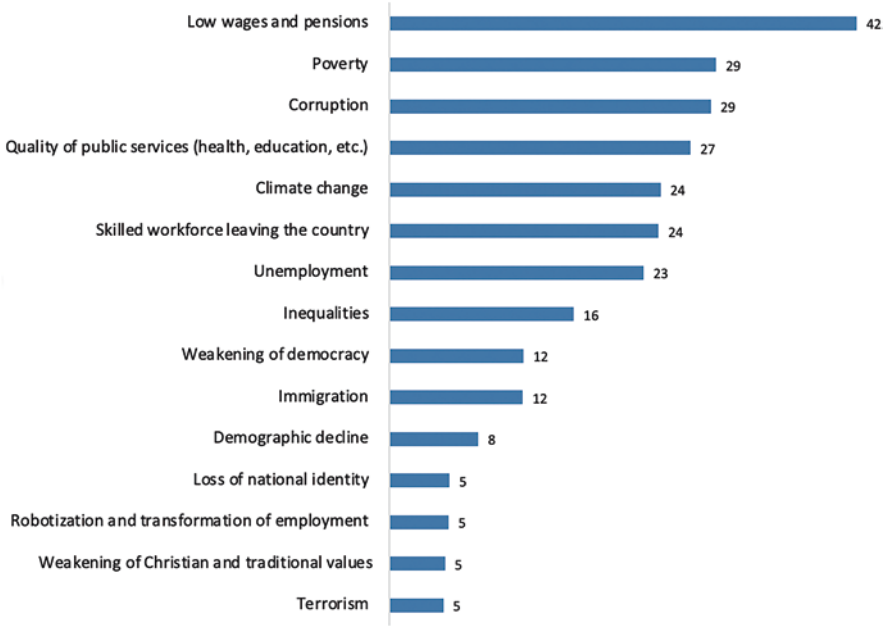



**Fig. 2** The most important challenges of the next decade according to young Hungarians
Source: FES Youth Study Central and Eastern Europe 2021

corruption were each singled out by 29%. Similarly, many young people are concerned about the poor quality of public services, including education and health systems. In addition to other material issues (poverty, quality of public services, workforce emigration, and unemployment), corruption and climate change are also seen by many as major problems.

The Policy Solutions FES study from March 2021 shows a similar picture for the whole of Hungarian society, although the question asked was not the same as in our study (Bíró-Nagy et al., 2020). According to the survey cited, Hungarians consider the high cost of living, low salaries, and low standard of health care to be the country's most pressing problems. In other words, young people's perception of the problems, like that of Hungarian society as a whole, is dominated by material issues, with the difference that, based on the present research, issues of corruption, emigration, and climate change are more pressing for young people.

In Hungary, young people under the age of 30 are almost exclusively the driving force behind political activism on climate change (Mikecz, 2020). Despite this, one-quarter of respondents listed climate change as among the three most important problems (it ranked in fifth place overall on the list of problems). This is also a relatively low rate compared with other V4 countries. Climate change is the most frequently cited issue in the Czech Republic (38%), the second most frequent in Slovakia (34%), and the third most frequent in Poland (29%).

Young Hungarians cited work-related issues as a major threat to the country in a similar proportion to climate change: these include the emigration of skilled labor (24%) and the problem of unemployment (23%). With the exception of corruption, the standard topics of debate between the Hungarian opposition and the ruling party were cited by few as being among the defining problems of the next 10 years. Inequality, which is a particularly important issue for the left, was considered one of the most important problems by just 16%, whereas only 12% cited the weakening of democracy in Hungary, which is the key driver of the opposition coalition. Immigration was mentioned by only 12% and terrorism by only 5%, though both young people and Hungarian society as a whole decisively reject immigration.

The positive worldview communicated by the Hungarian governing parties is based on the preservation of the country's national and Christian values and the concept of Christian democracy. However, these are not important topics for young people, and only one in twenty cited a possible loss of national identity and the weakening of Christian and traditional values as being among the main problems. As yet, very few young people appear to consider the Fourth Industrial Revolution to be a serious threat: automation and the robotization of workplaces were likewise listed as among the most pressing problems by only 5% of respondents.

## 2.6 Satisfaction with the Governance and Democracy

The Hungary-specific questions in our research show that there is significant dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the current state of governance and democracy (Fig. 3). A majority of respondents (56%) believe that one needs good contacts with the government to succeed in Hungary. According to one third of young Hungarians (33%), Fidesz can only be removed from power by force. Only one in five young people think that elections are free and fair (22%), that reliable information is available to the public (19%), and that the system of checks and balances works (18%).

The literature on the apolitical nature of young Hungarians draws attention not only to the negative connotations attached to politics but also to the fact that the exclusionary behavior of the political elite and the lack of avenues for young people to engage politically (Oross, 2013) may also be contributory factors. If they feel that their interests are left unrepresented and do not see anyone standing up for the values of the young, they will obviously take little interest in public issues. This, however, is a vicious circle, because the more apolitical they are, the less "interest" and importance they will have for those in the political world. Perceiving this, meanwhile, young people are likely simply to withdraw still further from this sphere. According to the results of our survey, an absolute majority of young Hungarians in the sample (51%) feel that their interests are not represented in national politics, and only 14% have the opposite opinion.

Comparing the opinions of Central European contemporaries with this data, it appears that in no country are respondents particularly positive about their political representation. In each country, around 1–2% feel that the interests of young people are represented very well in politics, yet in none of the other countries are opinions as negative as among Hungarians. The opinions of young Czechs aged 15–29 are the least negative (2.52 points on a scale of 1–5) and, as indicated, the opinions of the Hungarians are the most negative (2.38 average points).

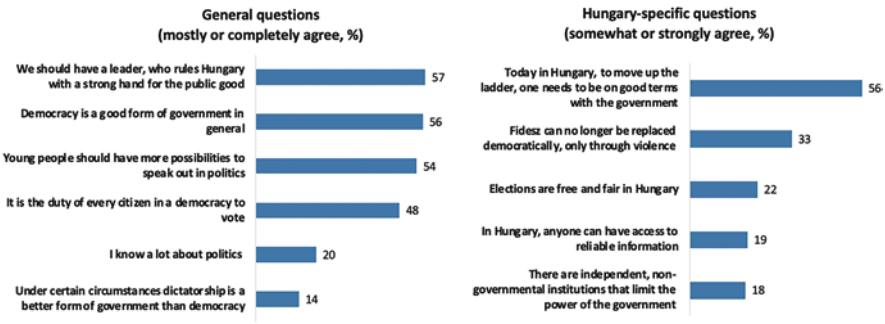



**Fig. 3** Assessing the concept of democracy and its current state in Hungary
Source: FES Youth Study Central and Eastern Europe 2021

## 3 Political Passivity

Albert O. Hirschman (1970) published his classic book, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, more than 50 years ago. In his analysis, Hirschman formulates two conflicting options, exit and voice, to which he adds the concept of loyalty. Hirschman uses the term "exit" about market conditions, whereas he applies the term "voice" to the world of politics. In both cases, he aims to show that people have several means of fulfilling their desires, validating their opinions, or expressing dissatisfaction with a system. According to his hypothesis, when someone chooses to exit, they lose the possibility to protest (Szabó et al., 2015). Naturally, there is always a large group in any society that any of these options cannot describe. Concerning this group, Hirschman speaks of loyalty, while some of his critics speak of neglect or conformity. Our data clearly show that—mainly for reasons related to political socialization—young Hungarian people choose to exit and be passive/conforming instead of protesting.

### *3.1 Low Levels of Civic Participation*

The declining rates of citizens' political participation worldwide are considered by many social scientists to be part of a more general negative trend in which traditional forms of civic engagement (church attendance, trade union membership, and integration into traditional communities) are increasingly being marginalized (Dalton & Klingermann, 2013). In Hungary, on the other hand, political and civic activities are markedly divergent: whilst electoral turnout is traditionally high, civic activity is low by regional standards (Mikecz, 2020).

This statement is to some extent contradicted by the comparison of youth volunteer activity across the V4 countries: the Hungarian data does not stand out from the other V4 countries. The proportion of respondents who participate in volunteer activities is low in all four states: 28% in Hungary, 30% in Poland, 32% in the Czech Republic, and only 23% in Slovakia. Furthermore, rates of volunteering decrease significantly with age: whereas 38% of Hungarians aged 15–18 volunteered during the last year, only 29% of those aged 19–24 and 21% of those aged 25–29 did so. This represents a difference of 17% between the youngest and oldest age groups, while the difference is even larger in Poland (23%) and slightly smaller in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (9 and 6%, respectively). It should be emphasized that since January 1, 2016, only those who have completed at least 50 hours of community work during their high school years can graduate in Hungary. This rule has remained in force throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to Robert Putnam (2000), reasons for declining civic activity include the weakening of traditional social institutions, urbanization, increasing television watching, and the integration of women into the labour market. However, based on the age trend presented in this research, we may conclude that communities based

around educational institutions, as well as compulsory secondary-school volunteer work, can somewhat counterbalance this trend—at least so long as participation in education continues. This is also confirmed by the fact that young Hungarians generally volunteered in some form of school or university organization (29% of volunteers).

In addition, many also took part in some form of civic initiative (28%) or association (for example, sports club or band—19%). Less common forms of volunteering include participation in the work of an ambulance or fire brigade service (9%), youth organization (9%), NGO (6%), political party (3%), or trade union (3%).

By contrast, forms of collective action (political and civic activity) and the wearing of brand label clothing are least important to young Hungarians. The most and least important values were the same in the other V4 countries. Individualism and low rates of political activity among young people reflect global trends. According to some studies, young people's disengagement from politics does not stem from their personal value choices, but from the fact that they consider the existing political system to be inadequate (Cammaerts et al., 2014). This is supported by other studies, based on Eurobarometer data, which indicates that young people show higher levels of political and civic participation in more mature, well-established democracies (Kitanova, 2018). In light of these findings, it is not surprising that public engagement is less important to young people of the region, whereas according to our data, this is accompanied by an emphasis on individual, self-centered goals.

## *3.2 Political participation*

We also examined different forms of political activity that require individual involvement and resources. Electoral activity (past and upcoming elections), seeking political office, and various forms of democratic civic participation, from the signing of a petition through participation in the work of parties and NGOs, to taking part in demonstrations, which are given different names by different authors (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017).

The main reason for this is that of the four countries, Hungary has the highest proportion of people who explicitly decline to vote (18%), but there are also higher rates of indecision than among their peers in other V4 countries.

Among young Hungarians, the willingness to participate is lower than average among those attending secondary (and possibly primary) educational institutions, as well as among those who have already left education, those aged 19–24, and the children of mothers with only 8 years of primary education. Although, with the exception of Poland, in the other V4 countries there is a statistically significant correlation between the mother's increasing educational attainment and an increased willingness to vote, in Hungary, this variable is especially pronounced, given the very low rates of participation among those with low levels of education and high rates among those with a university degree.

Traditional forms of political participation include seeking a political function. The probability of this is low in all countries, and there is little difference between responses. Currently, 1% of Hungarian young people have some form of political function, and another 9% would be happy to accept such an opportunity, whilst one-third categorically reject the possibility and a further quarter reject it somewhat less vehemently. There is a clear gender gap in the acceptance and rejection of political roles in all four countries studied. This is because men are much more open to political functions than female respondents. In Hungary, 44% of women and 27% of men who answered the question indicated that they would not take on any political role whatsoever, whereas 7% and 12%, respectively, indicated a hypothetical willingness.

As already mentioned, a number of articles have been written in recent years about the apolitical, apathetic, and passive political character of young Hungarians. These analyses, based on empirical data, have consistently indicated that young Hungarians are among the least politically active in Europe and that this characteristic has not changed substantially over time.

Our research examined participation and intention to participate in six forms of democratic activity.[5]

As a result of the pandemic, from early 2020, it was almost impossible to organize street demonstrations or even collect signatures, so this study did not restrict the time frame to the otherwise usual "in the last 12 months". Whatever form of participation we examine, our data clearly indicates that political participation and intention to participate among Hungarian 15–29-year-olds lag far behind that of their peers in the other V4 countries (Fig. 4).

Some 12% of young Hungarians indicated that they had signed a petition, and another 26% said that although they had not yet signed a political petition, they might do so in the future. Some 19% had attended a demonstration, and a further 17% said they planned to do something of that nature in the future. About one-fifth indicated activity in a non-governmental organization, and about the same number would be willing to do such work in the future. About one in seven had assisted in the work of a political party, but only 6% wished to do so in the future. Around 16% had boycotted a product for a political or environmental reason, and the second highest proportion (23%) would consider doing so in the future. Finally, one in seven had participated in some form of online policy initiative, and another 11% might do so in the future.

It is worth putting this data into context. There is no form of political activity in which rates of actual and potential participation would not be lowest among young Hungarians. If we add up all forms of participation, one-third of Hungarians aged

[5] These are as follows: signing a letter of protest, political statement/signing an online petition (petitions); participating in a demonstration (demonstrations); volunteering for or participating in the activities of non-governmental organizations, associations, and foundations (civil activism); active involvement in a political party or other political organizations (party work); refusing to buy a product or service for political or environmental reasons (boycott); participating in an online policy initiative/group (online activity).

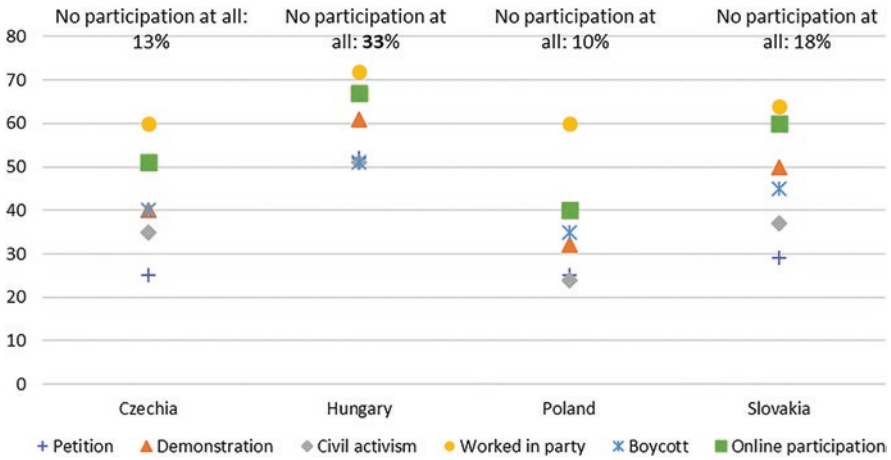



**Fig. 4** Lack of political participation among young people in V4 countries
(There are different ways to get involved in politics. Have you done or would you do any of the following activities?)
(Distribution of "not involved" category, %)
Source: FES Youth Study Central and Eastern Europe 2021

15–29 were not engaged in any form of political activity, whereas in other countries, rates of political passivity vary between 10 and 18%.

## *3.3 Exit—Emigration*

According to Eurobarometer data, mobility decreases significantly with age, and in general an absolute majority who would consider working abroad (56%) is found only in the 15–24 age group (Lulle et al., 2019). One quarter of young Hungarians (26%) have a strong or very strong desire to leave the country for a period of at least 6 months. Nearly half of young people have a weak-to-moderate desire to emigrate (45%), whereas one-third (33%) are sure they do not want to move abroad. With age, the proportion of those who are sure they want to emigrate decreases: 32% of 15–18-year-olds, 26% of 19–24-year-olds, and just 23% of 25–29-year-olds. Among those in the wealthiest economic category, a remarkable number said they would almost certainly leave the country (34%, or 5–11% higher than in the other groups).

Among young Hungarians, just 15% have already been abroad for educational purposes. Studying abroad is even less common among high school students (7%), but it is much more common among those over the age of 18 (17–18%), partly due to Erasmus scholarships. It is interesting that among young Hungarians, twice as many men (20%) as women (9%) have studied abroad. The proportion of people with educational experience abroad is similar in Slovakia and the Czech Republic

(18 and 19%, respectively), whereas the proportion of young Poles who have studied abroad is almost twice as high (28%) as among Hungarians.

In Hungary, the most significant differences in willingness to emigrate are found between political groups. Just 12% of Fidesz supporters expressed a strong or very strong desire to emigrate, while more (37%) declared a clear preference to stay in Hungary. This ratio is reversed (36 and 17%) among opposition supporters and is evenly balanced (24 and 27%) among the undecided. In all V4 countries, opposition supporters express a greater willingness to leave the country permanently than do government supporters, but in the entire region, willingness to emigrate is highest among young Hungarian opposition supporters.

The primary destination for young Hungarians is Germany (21% of those intending to emigrate), followed by Austria (15%), the United Kingdom (9%), the United States (8%), and Spain (7%). In terms of destination countries, there was considerable overlap with the top-five lists of young people in the other V4 countries. Germany and the United States were among the top destinations in all four countries. The United Kingdom and Spain made it to the top five in the Czech Republic and Poland, and Austria was at fourth place on the list of young Slovaks.

## 4 Conformity

Research results from the past 20 years show that young Hungarians have consistently professed politically conformist views, and the signs of generational rebellion could be detected only within narrow sub-strata (Szabó & Oross, 2021).

Some 12% of young Hungarians strongly agree with their parents, and a further 29% broadly share the same political views. Young Hungarians agree with their parents to the greatest extent among the V4 countries (Fig. 5).

Some 8% of Hungarians aged 15–29 reported a fundamental disagreement with their parents on political issues, whilst 10% somewhat disagreed with them. Compared with their Czech, Polish, and Slovak peers, Hungary shows the lowest rates of nonconformity. Still, perhaps the most interesting statistic is how many Hungarian young people do not know their parents' political views and beliefs (17%) compared to young people in other countries (11% in each of them). This is obviously related to lower political interest and lower levels of political communication.

Women, the youngest age groups, those who live in an urban environment, those who judge their financial situation more favorably, and young Hungarians with higher levels of cultural capital all show an increased tendency to agree with their parents on political issues.

Various youth sociological studies conducted in recent years have shown that communication about politics within the family is quite sporadic in Hungary (Oross & Szabó, 2019a; Oross & Szabó, 2019b). If parents and their children do have conversations about political issues, these usually take the form of interactions within negative contexts, whereas politics itself is chiefly associated with exceptionally

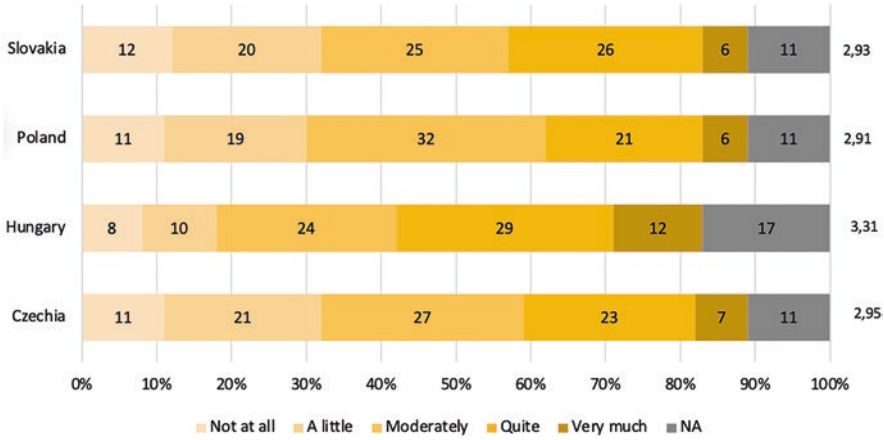



**Fig. 5** Political conformity among young people in the V4 countries
(To what extent are your policy views and beliefs in line with your parents' views?)
(Distributions and averages on a scale of 1–5)
Source: FES Youth Study Central and Eastern Europe 2021

negative narratives, including lying and corruption (Szabó and Oross 2018, Szabó 2019). The Hungarian Youth Research 2020 survey also recorded some changes in this area, including a slight increase in discussions on political topics.

Some 16% of Hungarians aged 15–29 talk often or very often with their parents or direct acquaintances about political issues. By contrast, 15% never talk about such topics and a further 35% do so only rarely.

Overall, on the 5-point scale, the average rate of political conversation of Hungarian young people stands at 2.52 points, which is the lowest among the V4 countries. Hungary does not lag behind in terms of those who frequently discuss politics but rather in the high proportion of people who either never or only seldom talk about such topics compared with rates among young people in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.

A very strong ($r = 0.699$) correlation can be observed between the level of political interest and the frequency of political conversations. That is, high levels of interest are generally accompanied by frequent conversations on the topic and low levels of interest with infrequent political discussions. This correlation can be found in all Central European countries but is most pronounced in Hungary (and lowest, in relative terms, in Poland $r = 0.532$).

## 5 Conclusion

If the world view and thinking of Hungarians aged 15–29 were to be described in three simple terms, the most applicable might be *dissatisfaction, passivity, and conformity*, which is eerily similar to Albert O. Hirschman's conceptual triad of *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (1970).

### *5.1 Dissatisfaction*

Among the young people of the V4 countries, Hungarians are the most dissatisfied with their personal relationships, as well as with their wider environment. They judge their current life circumstances, quality of life, and income situation unfavorably, but are also dissatisfied with the quality of the school system and vocational training. As for the wider political environment, it can be shown that they feel that no one represents their interests in national politics, and on a presumably related note they also strongly criticize the Hungarian version of democracy.

Attitudes towards the functioning of democracy and the political system are likewise extremely polarized. The vast majority of respondents, including supporters of the opposition, believe that good government connections are a prerequisite for success in Hungary. According to one-third of young Hungarians (33%) and more than half of opposition supporters, Fidesz can only be removed by force. Whereas nearly six in ten young supporters of the government say that elections are free and fair in Hungary, the proportion of young opposition supporters who say the same is only around 10%. The same picture of Hungarian young people as extremely divided is found in response to questions concerning public access to reliable information and concerning the system of checks and balances.

### *5.2 Passivity*

However, a critical attitude is not linked to political action. Whatever form of participation we examine—electoral participation or offline and online political activity—young Hungarians are by far the most passive in the region. However, it is worth noting—and this complicates the impression of passivity—that, in line with the results of the previous large-scale youth survey conducted in Hungary in 2020, an increase in political interest was recorded. Compared with previous surveys, young Hungarians have become more interested in the events of the wider world, yet they remain the least interested in public affairs by Central European comparison. At the same time, however, there is a narrow segment of politically active individuals, largely comprising students or graduates from the larger cities, drawn from among the politically dissatisfied.

### *5.3 Conformity*

The third adjective that can be applied to Hungarian young people is conformism. There is no empirical evidence of general rebellion or open opposition to the views of parents in the attitudes of young people in the V4 countries, including Hungary. The continuous and unusually long period of forced coexistence sparked by the Covid-19 pandemic has not negatively affected intergenerational coexistence, nor has it put significant strain on the child–parent relationship within the family. Apart from the lack of a general revolt, the Hungarian and Central European data gives no particular indication of political revolt. The research experience of the past 20 years in Hungary is that a significant proportion of young people consistently express conformity with their families in terms of political views, regardless of the political period. Only 18% say they mostly or entirely disagree with their parents. Some 12% of young Hungarians strongly agree, and a further 29% broadly share the same political views as their parents. Hungarian young people agree with their parents to the greatest extent among the V4 countries.

## References

Bíró-Nagy, A. (2021). Orbán's political jackpot: Migration and the Hungarian electorate. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.; available at:*, 48*, 405. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1853905

Bíró-Nagy, A., & Szászi, Á. (2021). *Koronavírus és válságkezelés*. [COVID-19 and crisis management: How Hungarians experienced the past year. Executive summary]. Policy Solutions-FES.

Bíró-Nagy, A., Laki, G., & Szászi, Á. (2020). *A zöld baloldali politika lehetőségei Magyarországon*. [The prospects of green-left politics in Hungary]. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – Policy Solutions.

Cammaerts, B., Bruter, M., Banaji, S., Harrison, S., & Anstead, N. (2014). The myth of youth apathy: Young Europeans' critical attitudes toward democratic life. *American Behavioral Scientist, 58*(5), 645–664.

Dalton, R. J., & Klingermann, H.-D. (2013). Overview of political behavior: Political behavior and citizen politics. In R. Goodin (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of political science*. Available at: https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604456.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199604456-e-017

Hirschman, A. O. (1970). *Exit, voice, and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Harvard University Press.

Kitanova, M. (2018). Youth political participation in the EU: Evidence from a cross-national analysis. *Journal of Youth Studies, 23*(7), 819–836.

Köllő, J., & Reizer, B. (2021). A koronavírus-járvány első hullámának hatása a foglalkoztatásra és a vállalatok árbevételére [The effect of the coronavirus-pandemic's first wave on employment and corporations' sales revenue]. *Közgazdaságtani Szemle, 58*(April), 345–374.

Lulle, A., Hania, J., & Emilsson, H. (2019). Introduction to the special issue: European youth migration: Human capital outcomes, skills and competences. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47*(8), 1725–1739.

Mikecz, D. (2020). *Semmit rólunk nélkülünk* [Nothing about us without us]. Napvilág Kiadó.

Oross, D. (2013). Társadalmi közérzet, politikához való viszony [Social atmosphere, relationship to politics]. In *Magyar Ifjúság 2012. Tanulmánykötet* (pp. 283–313). Kutatópont.

Oross, D., & Szabó, A. (2019a). Aktív és fiatal = magyar egyetemista? [Active and young = Hungarian university student?]. In: Szabó, Andrea; Susánszky, Pál; Oross, Dániel (szerk.) *Mások vagy ugyanolyanok? A hallgatók politikai aktivitása, politikai orientációja Magyarországon* (pp. 35–66). Szeged, Magyarország, Budapest, Belvedere Meridionale, MTA Társadalomtudományi Kutatóközpont Politikatudományi Intézet 302 p.

Oross, D., & Szabó, A. (2019b). *A politika és a magyar fiatalok*. [Politics and Hungarian young people]. Kossuth Kiadó.

Patkós, V., & Farkas, E. (2020). Boldogok a kormánypártiak. A kormánypárthoz kötődés és a boldogság összefüggése Európában [Blessed are the incumbents. Happiness and party attachments in Europe]. *Társadalomtudományi Szemle, 10*(4), 1–22.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.

Szabó, A. (2018). *A magyar fiatalok politikához való viszonya* [The attitudes of Hungarian young people towards politics]. In L. Székely (Ed.), *Magyar fiatalok a Kárpát-medencében. Magyar Ifjúság Kutatás 2016*. Kutatópont.

Szabó, A. (2019). *Political integration of Hungarian students, 2019*. Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

Szabó, A., & Oross, D. (2021). Változó világ – állandó értékek" [Changing world – stable values]. A politikai érdeklődés és a politikai értékrend változása a Magyar Ifjúság 2020 kutatás adatainak tükrében. In: S. Levente (szerk.), *Magyar Ifjúság 2020 tanulmánykötet*. *Budapest.* Kutatópont. Megjelenés alatt.

Szabó, A., Oross, D., Kovács, T., & Róna, D. (Eds.). (2015). *Exit, voice, loyalty and neglect. Political attitudes of Hungarian university and college students*. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 102 p.

Theocharis, Y., & van Deth, J. W. (2017). *Political participation in a changing world. Conceptual and empirical challenges in the study of citizen engagement*. Routledge.

# Upheaval in Arab-Mediterranean Societies: Youth Participation in Politics


**Elena Sánchez-Montijano and Gerardo Maldonado**

**Contents**



## 1 Introduction

The body of literature analyzing the situation of young people in Arab countries has grown continually since 2011. Dozens of investigations have been carried out to explain the political role of young people in the uprisings of that year (Bayat, 2013; Murphy, 2012). In fact, some authors emphasize that today's Arab youth are different from previous cohorts and, indeed, are more mobilized than previous generations.

Nevertheless, a good part of the results obtained show, on the one hand, that the significance of the role of young people in the uprisings was attributable mainly to their important media visibility rather than to high political participation. On the other hand, young people sought alternative ways of participation outside of traditional channels (Sánchez García & Sánchez-Montijano, 2019), particularly using social networks (Herrera, 2012; Norris, 2015).

Abdelrahman (2013) highlights that the main explanation for young people's low participation and preference for new forms of mobilization during the uprisings of

E. Sánchez-Montijano (✉) · G. Maldonado
Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (CIDE) [Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas], Mexico City, Mexico
e-mail: elena.sanchez@cide.edu; gerardo.maldonado@cide.edu



M. Harring (ed.), *Growing Up in Times of Crisis*, Contributions to Political Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58626-2_5

2011 is the significant lack of organizations with sustainable structures. This means that there were no mechanisms that allowed young people to participate (Sánchez-Montijano & Sánchez García, 2019). Other authors (Schielke, 2015; Kurzman, 2012) point out that Arab society, and especially Arab youth, is highly fragmented; in other words, cohesive mobilization and the emergence of charismatic leaders are hindered by the significant heterogeneity of interests exhibited by this social group.

This chapter represents a contribution to the discussion of the participation of young people in Arab countries. From a representative database covering five Arab Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia), we will seek to examine, first, the electoral participation of young people, and second, the types of political participation in which they are involved, differentiating between institutional and noninstitutional participation. Third and lastly, given that the literature emphasizes that young people participate through alternative channels, we will review their participation in political and social organizations. Our objective is to take a recent picture of the political participation of young people in the Arab countries of the Mediterranean and provide an empirical contribution to the costs of youth political participation in Arab Mediterranean societies. These three sections represent the main body of the chapter; we will begin, however, with a short breakdown of the costs and opportunities inherent in youth political participation.

## 2 Young People's Political Participation: Costs and Opportunities

According to one of the first—and most consensual—definitions, political participation denotes "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (Verba & Nie, 1972, p. 2). Among the activities included in this definition are voting, campaign activities, contacting public officials, and communal activities. Later, other scholars stated that political participation does not necessarily have to address governments, but may also be directed at other institutions and organizations that play a role in public policymaking and implementation processes (Parry et al., 1992; Pattie et al., 2004). Based on this, we take up Brady's (1999, p. 737) broader definition of political participation: "action by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes." Thus, political participation could also include things like signing petitions and being a member of or donating to a party, union, or political movement. It is necessary to specify that all the activities listed above are of an institutional nature and are performed within the representative channels established by a political regime.

Parallel to this, some literature analyzes and explains citizens' actions such as protests, strikes, or petitions as activism. On the contrary, these activities occur in extra-representative channels; therefore, they have been classified in the literature as actions of a contentious nature. Although it is true that almost any political activities

imply some degree of dispute (contention), institutional political participation occurs in a routine and normalized manner within institutional schemes, and its purpose is to influence processes of political representation. In contrast, contentious political participation is an "episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of the claim, or party to the claim and (b) the claims could, if realized, affect the interest of any of the claimants or objects of claims" (Tarrow & Tilly, 2007, p. 437).

The meaning of the term "political participation" has steadily increased in breadth over the last 30 years. Van Deth (2014) would say that ever since the 1990s, the concept of political participation must include activities of a civic nature, i.e. activities that involve volunteering and social commitment. Parry et al. (1992) and Pattie et al. (2004) point out that political participation cannot be understood exclusively as activities involving direct interaction with governments, but must also include actions performed by other institutions and organizations. In this text, therefore, we also examine civil society organizations to analyze the political participation of young people in Arab countries.

The distinction between institutional and noninstitutional forms of participation is important not only because they each involve different structures of expression and influence but also because they imply different costs for individuals at the moment of participation. In institutional participation, the costs are determined by the time, money, and planning that the individual is willing to invest (Verba et al., 1995; Brady et al., 1995) as well as by the possible legal barriers to participation established by the political institutions themselves (Blais, 2000). In short, the institutions provide all the channels to facilitate participation, and the decision to participate is usually taken in a more individual and anonymous way. However, noninstitutional participation is much more expensive for the individual. In addition to the above costs, there are also the risks of openly confronting the government and its security forces as well as the need for collective coordination with various other individuals (Koopmans, 2003; Tarrow, 2011).

Analyzing this phenomenon among young people is especially relevant given that it is well known that participation levels among young people tend to be lower than among adults (Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008; Fieldhouse et al., 2007). Although this apathy can be observed in all types of political participation, several authors suggest that, on the one hand, this difference is greater in electoral participation in that young people do not perceive a direct benefit from voting (Highton & Wolfinger, 2001). On the other hand, given that they have fewer personal limitations (they do not have family responsibilities, stable work, etc.), the costs and risks of noninstitutional participation are much lower for them, and they can afford to participate in these activities to a much greater extent (McAdam, 1986; Earl et al., 2017). For both these reasons, we should expect young people to participate more frequently in noninstitutional than institutional settings.

Beyond the individual level, the opportunity costs vary significantly depending on the political regime. Whereas democracies are characterized by freedom of speech, association, and voting and by the free flow of and access to alternative sources of information (Dahl, 1971), authoritarianism implies the closure or

limitation of public space through control of sources of information[1] and the restriction of the freedom of expression and participation (Ezrow & Frantz, 2011; Schedler, 2010).[2] Thus, *democracies* provide an *open structure* of political opportunities that are permeable to the demands of citizens and offer more incentives for various forms of participation (Dahl, 1971; Sartori, 1987). Under authoritarianism, in contrast, the structure of political opportunities is *closed and hostile* to the demands of citizens in general, and there will be few reasons to assume the costs incurred by participation (Cheibub et al., 2010; Przeworski et al., 2000; Svolik, 2012, pp. 17–20).

In this theoretical framework, institutional participation by young people is expected to be higher than noninstitutional participation in less democratic countries, such as Egypt, given the high cost of the latter, while in more democratic countries, such as Tunisia and Western democracies, similar levels of participation can be expected in both types. The basis for this initial hypothesis is that, in less democratic countries, the cost of participation is remarkably high and there are hardly any participation mechanisms or organizations with sustainable structures (Abdelrahman, 2013).

## 3 Data and Variables

For this chapter, we used data from the SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 Dataset (Weber et al., 2021). This database is a cross-national survey carried out in five countries, with variation in political regimens (V-Dem Institute, 2017): Tunisia and Lebanon are liberal democracies; Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco are not. Conducted in 2015 and 2016, the survey focused on people aged 15–29 and aimed to reach a representative sample of 2000 citizens per country. The thematic axes around which the survey revolves are education, employment and social inclusion, political engagement, culture and values, international migration and mobility, and gender. The final data comprises 9860 individual observations and 842 variables (Weber et al., 2021).

Based on the previous definitions of forms of political participation, we distinguish between institutional participation (voting, institutional political actions, and political organizations) and noninstitutional participation (contentious participation and social organizations). On the one hand, to analyze institutional participation, we consider the following variables:

[1] "Wrong information and misinformation are essential features of authoritarianism. In order to minimize citizens' exposure to rival constructions of political reality, non-democratic rulers may impose limitations on the resources needed for communications, and on the media content and consumption" (Schedler, 2010, p. 140).

[2] In autocratic regimes, "there is no free press, no free public opinion, no open lobbying or party competition. Due to the closed nature typical of dictatorships, political information tends to be more difficult to obtain and government sources less reliable. Media outlets are often censored, government propaganda is widespread, and details of government administration are concealed" (Ezrow & Frantz, 2011, p. xiv).

1. Intention to vote in the next election.
2. Collecting signatures or signing a petition.
3. Participation in electoral campaigns.
4. Donation to a party or an association.
5. Participation in political party meetings or activities.
6. Faith-based political group.
7. Political movement that is not a political party.
8. Political party.
9. Union organizations.

On the other hand, to study noninstitutional participation, we use the following variables:

1. Joining a strike.
2. Participation in night watches to protect one's neighborhood.
3. Participating, attending, or helping in demonstrations.
4. Using forms of violent actions for social or political ends.
5. Political participation online.
6. Cultural associations.
7. Humanitarian or charity organizations.
8. Informal group seeking to provide services to the community.
9. Neighborhood association.
10. Religious association.
11. Women's association.
12. Youth club, sports club, or Scouts.

In the original survey, respondents were given different options in order to gather information about the frequency of participation. However, since not all the original response categories were the same, we decided to recode them to create dichotomous variables for all activities and thereby determine simply whether or not they had participated in the last 12 months.[3] Below we show the results of a descriptive analysis in order to illustrate the participation of young people in these five Arab countries.

## 4 Descriptive Analyses

Figure 1 illustrates that, on average, more than 68% of the youth of the Arab Mediterranean between the ages of 15 and 29 responded that they would vote in the next elections. But the proportion of those who intend to participate varies from country to country. The highest percentages of positive responses were recorded in Egypt (89%), Tunisia (75.4%), and Algeria (73%). In Morocco, the figure was lower, although over half (55%) of the respondents gave a positive answer. But Lebanese youth rank far below the average with only 48.8% of affirmative responses.

[3] We would like to thank Enrique López for his support in the analysis.

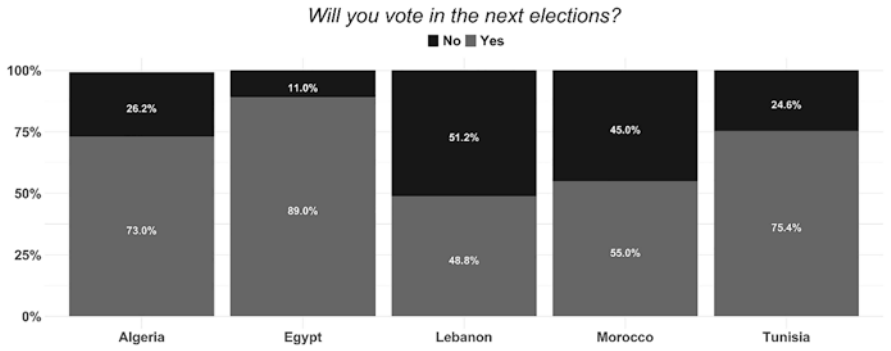



**Fig. 1** Electoral participation: intention to vote in the next election
Source: Own elaboration based on SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 Dataset (Weber et al., 2021)

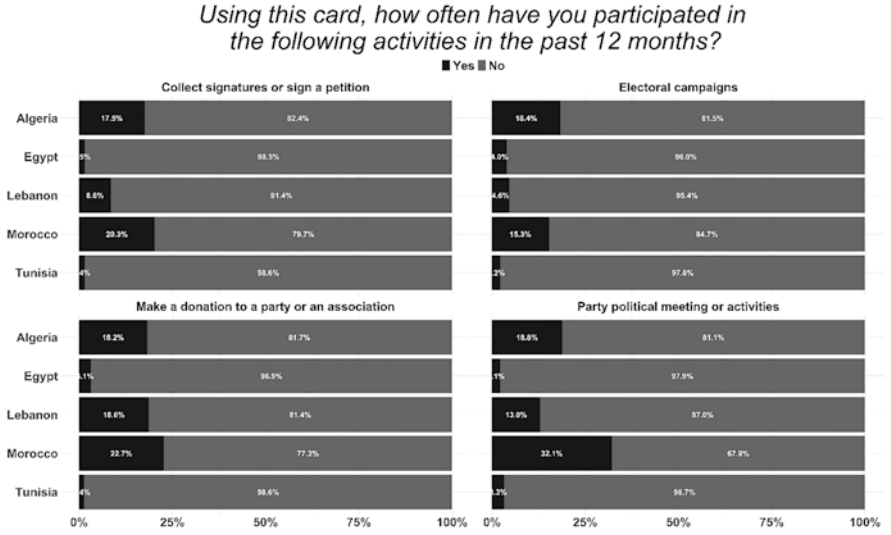



**Fig. 2** Institutional political activities
Source: Own elaboration based on SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 Dataset (Weber et al., 2021)

Figure 2 shows that the majority of the youth of the Arab Mediterranean responded that they generally do not participate politically through institutional channels (collecting signatures or signing a petition; taking part in electoral campaigns; making a donation to a party or association; and attending political party meetings or activities). Less than 25% of the respondents in each country participated in the last year by collecting signatures or signing a petition, being part of an electoral campaign, or making a donation to a party or association.

Although there is variation in the forms of institutional political actions across countries, the most intense involvement of youth in institutional settings can be observed in Algeria, Lebanon, and Morocco, where the highest percentage of youth

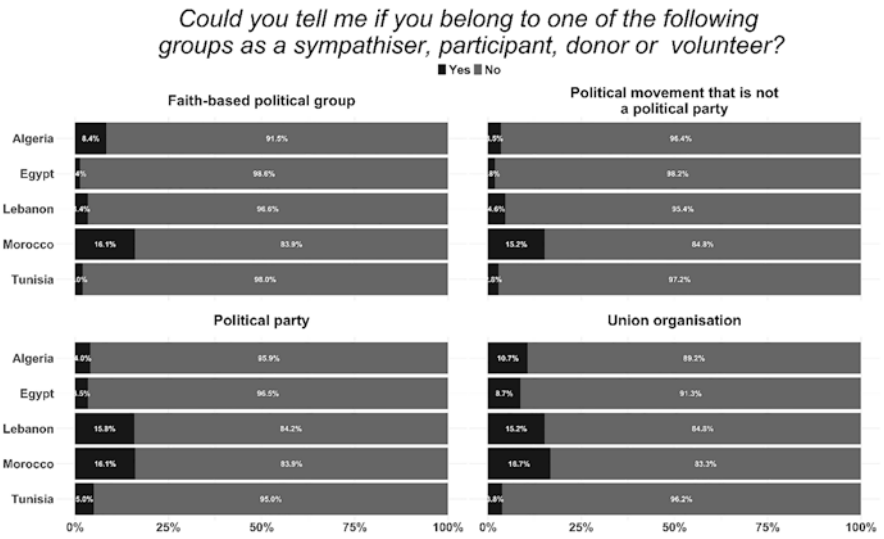



**Fig. 3** Participation in political organizations
Source: Own elaboration based on SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 Dataset (Weber et al., 2021)

participated in party meetings and activities in the past year. Interestingly, Moroccan young people engage most frequently in the four institutional forms of political participation. Egyptian and Tunisian youth have the lowest rates of institutional political activity. Overall, the data shows us that institutional political participation is not popular among young people.

Figure 3 shows that the youth in the five countries are most frequently politically organized in unions (11%), followed by political parties (8.8%), faith groups (5.8%), and, lastly, political movements (5.6%). Moroccan youth are the most politically organized of all, followed by the Lebanese and, in third place, Algerian youth. The lowest degree of political organization can be observed in Egypt and Tunisia. The data reveals that Algerian (10%), Egyptian (8%), and Moroccan (18%) youth participate primarily in unions, while Lebanese (15%) and Tunisian (5%) youth participate mostly in political parties.

While institutional political participation is not popular among young people, noninstitutional participation fares little better. Figure 4 shows that, in the last 12 months, less than 20% of the respondents participated in a strike, night-watch duty in their neighborhood, a demonstration, violent actions, or political activities online.

Algerian youth have one of the most consistent rates of involvement in any of the forms of contentious political participation, scoring between 17.1% and 20%. Similarly, Moroccan youth participate at a rate of 14.9% to 18.7%. The Lebanese youth rank in third place with fairly high rates of contentious participation. As in the case of conventional political participation, Egyptian and Tunisian youth rank lowest in contentious participation.

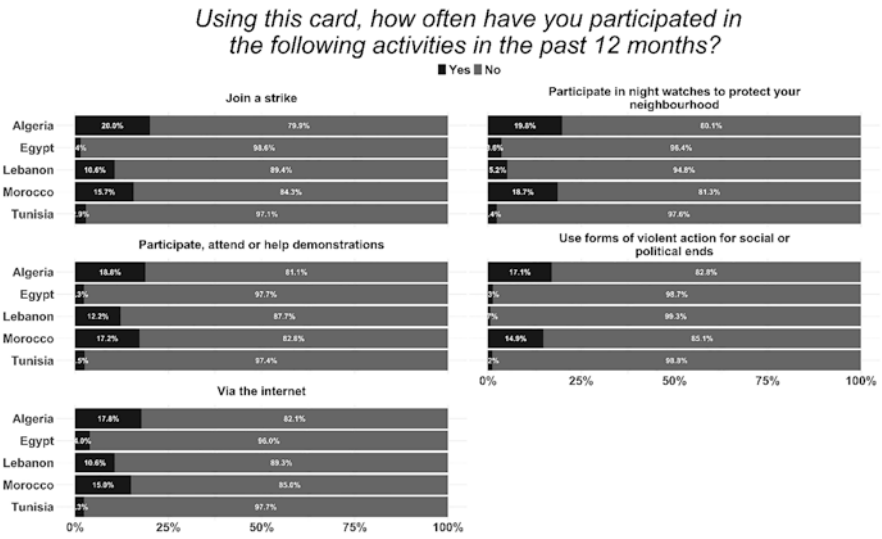



**Fig. 4** Contentious participation
Source: Own elaboration based on SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 Dataset (Weber et al., 2021)

Social organizations are more popular than political ones, and the social organizations in which most of the youth participate are devoted to sports and humanitarian or cultural purposes. This tell us that sports, cultural organizations, and helping others are important parts of their lives. Religious and neighborhood organizations are less popular among the youth.

Figure 5 shows that sports and scouts clubs have the highest levels of youth participation in Lebanon (28.6%), Morocco (20.4%), and Algeria (19.1%). In Tunisia (16.8%) and Egypt (12.3%), the respondents reported lower levels of participation. Moroccan (23.4%), Lebanese (22.8%), Algerian (18.8%), Egyptian (12%), and Tunisian (6.8%) youth have participated in a cultural association. As for humanitarian organizations, Lebanese (28.6%), Algerian (22.7%), and Moroccan (22.4%) youth are more frequently involved than young people in Egypt (15.7%) and Tunisia (8.7%). Involvement in groups devoted to providing informal services to the community is on a roughly equal level in Morocco (16.6%), Algeria (15.5%), Lebanon (15.3%), and Egypt (14.6%), but noticeably lower in Tunisia (3.6%).

Participation in neighborhood associations is more popular with the youth of Morocco (21.2%) and Algeria (19.8%) than in Lebanon (10.6%), Egypt (9.7%), and Tunisia (3.4%). The same is true of participation in religious organizations, which is higher in Morocco (16.6%) and Algeria (15.8%) than in Lebanon (11.8%), Egypt (8.6%), and Tunisia (0.8%). In the case of women's organizations, youth participation is higher in Morocco (19.7%), Lebanon (15.1%), and Algeria (10.5%) and low in Egypt (5.7%) and Tunisia (2.5%). Overall, the highest rates of youth participation cluster around sports as well as cultural and humanitarian organizations across the countries, followed by neighborhood, women's, and community associations. Religious organizations bring up the rear.

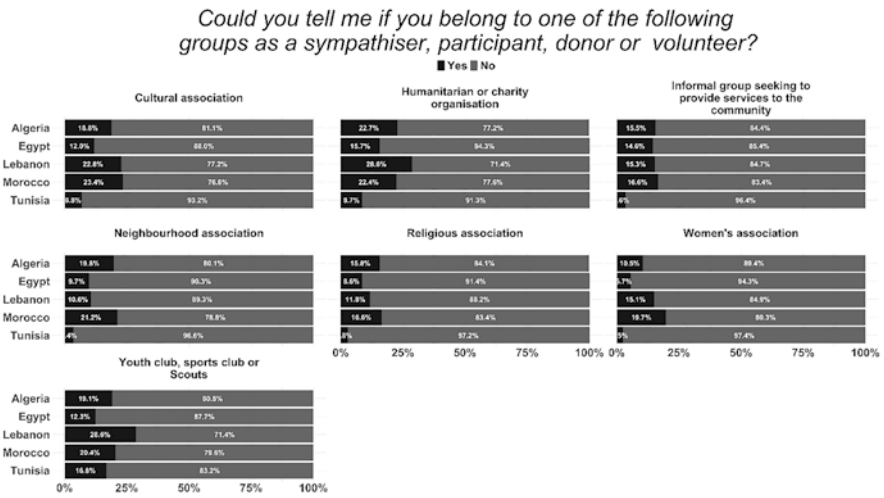



**Fig. 5** Participation in social organizations
Source: Own elaboration based on SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 Dataset (Weber et al., 2021)

**Table 1** Political participation by type and country, in percent

| | Electoral participation (intention) (%) | Institutional political actions (%) | Political organizations (%) | Contentious participation (%) | Social organizations (%) | Average (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Algeria | 73.0 | 18.2 | 6.6 | 18.7 | 17.5 | 15.2 |
| Egypt | 89.0 | 2.7 | 3.9 | 2.5 | 11.2 | 5.1 |
| Lebanon | 48.8 | 11.2 | 7.8 | 7.9 | 18.9 | 11.4 |
| Morocco | 55.0 | 22.6 | 15.6 | 16.3 | 20.0 | 18.6 |
| Tunisia | 75.4 | 2.1 | 3.4 | 3.5 | 6.4 | 3.8 |
| **Average** | 68.2 | 11.4 | 7.5 | 9.8 | 14.8 | |

Source: Own elaboration based on SAHWA Youth Survey 2016 Dataset (Weber et al., 2021)

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

Table 1 compiles the results presented above on the political participation of young people in the five Arab Mediterranean countries. What do these data tell us? As the literature on political participation points out, young people have low rates of political commitment (Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008; Fieldhouse et al., 2007) in terms of both institutional and noninstitutional participation. The data shows that youth political participation in all fields except electoral turnout is less than 23%.

Our analysis reveals some interesting differences between the types of participation in the various countries. Looking at the different types of political participation we see, as the literature (Blais, 2000; Dalton, 2008; Norris, 2002) would lead us to expect, voting in elections is the most popular form of participation. Young

Egyptians, Algerians, and Tunisians participate most frequently in elections. The high electoral turnout in Egypt could seem surprising, but is easily explained by the fact that voting is compulsory in this country. Lebanon represents another interesting case. Here too voting is compulsory, but 51.2% of the Lebanese youth nevertheless responded that they would not vote in the upcoming elections: this tells us that democratic representative institutions are weak and fragile in Lebanon and citizens' access to civil and political rights is poor. This correlates with the social protests that began in 2015 when the residents of the capital took to the streets.

After electoral participation, our results show that, also consistent with the literature about young people's political engagement (no individual cost; cf. Dalton, 2008; Norris, 2002), the second highest level of participation is observed with reference to civil society organizations, especially those that do not have a clear political goal, such as humanitarian and youth organizations. In fact, as Table 1 shows that political organizations exhibit the lowest rates of Arab youth involvement.

When we focus on countries, it is still surprising that the lowest participation rates of the five countries in the analysis can be found in Tunisia, the most democratic country, and in Egypt, the most authoritarian. The low level of political participation in Egypt confirms the theoretical frameworks previously developed, since participation—especially at the noninstitutional level—has a high cost (Tarrow & Tilly, 2007). Under this type of regime, contentious participation and participation in civil society organizations can involve a significant individual cost considering the strong repression brought to bear on society (Sánchez-Montijano & Sánchez García, 2019). In this framework, Tunisia ought to have a higher level of contentious participation (strikes and demonstrations), than the rest of the countries in the region, given its democratic characteristics; however, it has the lowest percentages after Egypt.

Participation in Morocco is similar to that observed in Algeria, and these two countries have the highest participation rates among the countries analyzed. These results could be related to the similarity between their regimes and political actors (political parties with traditions), as well as in their historical past and their constant relations—and, by implication, political ties—with democratic European countries and expatriate citizens.

In addition, there is a contextual temporal condition that could explain the differences between countries. While Tunisia and Egypt saw a strong mobilization during the Arab Spring of 2011 (which could result in a subsequent decrease in political participation), in the other three countries, the mobilization began later and, since it was less abrupt, they have had an extended mobilization over time.

According to previous literature, we should have expected to find, first, that young people exhibit higher (or similar) noninstitutional than institutional participation (Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008; Fieldhouse et al., 2007). Second, we should have observed higher institutional than noninstitutional participation in less democratic countries since the cost of dealing with a more closed system is higher (Ezrow & Frantz, 2011; Schedler, 2010; Svolik, 2012). However, the results do not strongly corroborate any of the possible theoretical implications. Thus, 14.8% of young people participate in social-type organizations, the highest percentage of all types of

participation, while 11.4% participate in institutional political actions. In this attempt to bring together both literatures, we find that in both institutional and non-institutional participation, the results show an obstacle, insofar as a good part of these theories comes from developed/Western countries and the two literatures have very different points of departure in that one reviews the individual condition (young people as a group of analysis) and the other the contextual (political regime).

In this framework of contradictions, we must go into a deeper analysis of young people in different contexts than the Western ones. Studies such as those of Abdelrahman (2013) can be enlightening about what is happening in the Mediterranean Arab countries when he points out that traditional ways of measuring political participation do not work in these countries given the distance between organizations and young people. This fact could be prompting young people to engage in new forms of participation, which may include music, art, or the use of social media (Sánchez García & Sánchez-Montijano, 2019).

## References

Abdelrahman, M. (2013). In praise of organization: Egypt between activism and revolution. *Development and Change, 44*, 569–585. https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12028

Bayat, A. (2013). *Life as politics: How ordinary people change the Middle East*. Amsterdam University Press.

Blais, A. (2000). *To vote or not to vote? The merits and limits of rational choice theory*. University of Pittsburg Press.

Brady, H. E. (1999). Political participation. In J. R. Robinson, P. R. Shaver, & L. S. Wrightsman (Eds.), *Measures of political attitudes*. Academic.

Brady, H. E., Verba, S., & Schlozman, K. L. (1995). Beyond SES: A resource model of political participation. *American Political Science Review, 89*, 271–294.

Cheibub, J. A., Gandhi, J., & Vreeland, J. R. (2010). Democracy and dictatorship revisited. *Public Choice, 1*, 67–101.

Dahl, R. (1971). *Poliarchy: Participation and opposition*. Yale University Press.

Dalton, R. (2008). *Citizen politics: Public opinion and political parties in advanced industrial democracies* (5th ed.). CQ Press.

Earl, J., Maher, T. V., & Elliott, T. (2017). Youth, activism, and social movements. *Sociology Compass, 11*. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12465

Ezrow, N., & Frantz, E. (2011). *Dictators and dictatorships. Understanding authoritarian regimes and their leaders*. Continnum.

Fieldhouse, E., Tranmer, M., & Russell, A. (2007). Something about young people or something about elections? Electoral participation of young people in Europe: evidence from a multilevel analysis of the European Social Survey. *European Journal of Political Research, 46*, 797–822. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2007.00713.x

Herrera, L. (2012). Youth and citizenship in the digital age: A view from Egypt. *Harvard Educational Review, 82*(3), 333–353.

Highton, B., & Wolfinger, R. E. (2001). The first seven years of the political life cycle. *American Journal of Political Science, 45*, 202–209. https://doi.org/10.2307/2669367

Hooghe, M., & Wilkenfeld, B. (2008). The stability of political attitudes and behaviors across adolescence and early adulthood: A comparison of survey data on adolescents and young adults in eight countries. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 37*, 155–167. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-007-9199-x

Koopmans, R. (2003). The dynamics of protest waves: West Germany, 1965 to 1989. *American Sociological Review, 58*, 637–658.

Kurzman, C. (2012). The Arab spring uncoiled. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly, 17*(4), 377–390. https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.17.4.10326742n0556v15

McAdam, D. (1986). Recruitment to high-risk activism: the case of freedom summer. *The American Journal of Sociology, 92*, 64–90. https://doi.org/10.1086/228463

Murphy, E. (2012). Introduction: Arab youth and politics. *Mediterranean Politics, 17*(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2012.655042

Norris, P. (2002). *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing political participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Norris, P. (2015). "Movilización política y redes sociales. El caso de la primavera árabe" en Infoamérica: Iberoamerican The Communication Review, n°. 9 (20 años que cambiaron el mundo), págs. 17-36.

Parry, G., Moyser, G., & Day, N. (1992). *Political participation and democracy in Britain*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511558726

Pattie, C., Seyd, P., & Whiteley, P. (2004). *Citizenship in Britain: Values, participation and democracy*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511490811

Przeworski, A., Alvarez, R. M., Alvarez, M. E., Cheibub, J. A., Limongi, F., & Papaterra Limongi, F. (2000). *Democracy and development: Political institutions and well-being in the world*. Cambridge University Press.

Sánchez García, J., & Sánchez-Montijano, E. (2019). Beyond the Nizam: Youth political practices in Egypt and Tunisia after the 2011 uprisings. In H. Cuervo & A. Miranda (Eds.), *Youth, Inequality and social change in the global South. Perspectives on children and young people* (Vol. 6). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3750-5_14

Sánchez-Montijano, E., & Sánchez García, J. (2019). Youth demarginalisation strategies in the Arab Mediterranean countries. In E. Sánchez-Montijano & J. Sánchez García (Eds.), *Youth at the margins: Perspectives on Arab Mediterranean youth* (pp. 222–240). Routledge.

Sartori, G. (1987). *The theory of democracy revisited*. CQ Press.

Schedler, A. (2010). *The politics of uncertainty: Sustaining and subverting electoral authoritarianism*. Oxford University Press.

Schielke, S. (2015). *Egypt in the future tense: Hope, frustration, and ambivalence before and after 2011*. Indiana University Press.

Svolik, M. (2012). *The politics of authoritarian rule*. Cambridge University Press.

Tarrow, S. (2011). *Power in movement. Social movements and contentious politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Tarrow, S., & Tilly, C. (2007). Contentious politics and social movements. In C. Boix & S. C. Stokes (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of comparative politics*. Oxford University Press.

van Deth, J. W. (2014). A conceptual map of political participation. *Acta Politica, 49*, 349–367. https://doi.org/10.1057/ap.2014.6

V-Dem Institute. (2017). *Democracy at dusk? V-Dem annual report 2017*. University of Gothenburg. Available at: https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/files/dr/dr_2017.pdf

Verba, S., & Nie, N. (1972). *Participation in America. Political democracy and social equality*. Harper and Row.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Harvard University Press.

Weber, W., Queralt I Sans, T., Bourekba, M., & Sanchez-Montijano, E. (2021). SAHWA youth survey 2016 dataset (2021) [Data set]. *Zenodo*. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5751501

# Political Engagement and Political Views of Young People in Poland

**Justyna Kajta and Adam Mrozowicki**

## Contents



## 1 Introduction[1]

The political participation and political views of young people have been the subject of debate in political, media, and academic circles for many years. This debate reflects opinions that are somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, research suggests that young people's engagement at the traditional level—voting in parliamentary elections and participation in political parties—has declined in many

[1] This research was supported by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung as a part of the European Youth Studies—a project by the FES which is conducted regularly in numerous countries on the continent. The key results of this research were published in the report *Young people in Poland. Between disappointment with the state and hope for a better life* (Kajta & Mrozowicki, 2022).

J. Kajta (✉)
Institute of Social Sciences, SWPS University, Warsaw, Poland
e-mail: jkajta@swps.edu.pl

A. Mrozowicki
Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Sociology, University of Wroclaw, Wrocław, Poland
e-mail: adam.mrozowicki@uwr.edu.pl



M. Harring (ed.), *Growing Up in Times of Crisis*, Contributions to Political Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58626-2_6

countries (Henn & Weinstein, 2006; Pazderski, 2018; Szafraniec et al., 2017). This decline is explained in part by generational factors (youth as a period in which views are formed), political circumstances (neglect of the youth as an important group of voters), and cultural changes, including a "silent revolution" in which young people are embracing post-material values (Côté, 2014; Inglehart, 2018; Messyasz, 2015). On the other hand, there is a growing body of studies on noninstitutional forms of political participation by young people, including volunteering, new protest movements, online activism, and lifestyle politics, such as boycotting products for political reasons (Cammaerts et al., 2015; Giugni & Grasso, 2021; Hurrelmann & Albrecht, 2021). In this context, it is argued that a broader understanding of political participation should be considered, including new channels of mobilization (e.g., online engagement), and diversification of agencies, repertoires of actions, and targets whom participants seek to influence (Côté, 2014; Norris, 2002).

This is the background against which the present chapter sets out to explore the political involvement and political views of young people in Poland. Poland is the Central and Eastern European country in which the scale of political withdrawal and criticism of political elites by young people has been particularly high compared to Western Europe (Szafraniec et al., 2017, p. 248). In this context, an increase in support for right-wing and anti-system political parties has been observed in the first two decades of the twenty-first century (Messyasz, 2015; Sińczuch et al., 2021; Szafraniec & Grygieńć, 2019). The right-wing turn has been reflected in the results of parliamentary elections in 2015 and 2019 which were won by the right-wing populist party, Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS). It acquired 25.8% of votes among people aged 18–30 in 2015 and 26.3% in 2019. Additionally, the so-called anti-system parties were backed by 19.9% (in the case of right-wing anti-systemic Kukiz' 15) and 16.8% (in the case of the Eurosceptic, libertarian KORWIN) of those aged 18 to 30 in 2015; in 2019, the right-wing nationalist Konfederacja (Confederation) gained 19.7% of young people's votes.[2]

Yet, the political preferences of young people have recently been changing. According to various opinion polls (Potocki & Machalica, 2022; Scovil, 2021) and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Youth Study 2021 (Kajta & Mrozowicki, 2022), the percentage of the youngest respondents (18–24) declaring right-wing views has clearly dropped and is now lower than in the general population of respondents, whereas left-wing beliefs are now being declared more often than before. Looking closer at the results of the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) surveys, 2020 was the first year (since 2003) when the percentage of young people claiming left-wing orientation was bigger than those with right-wing views. Compared to only 2019, there was a rise in left-wing identification from 17% to 30% (Scovil, 2021). This development is accompanied by a rise in general interests in politics among young Poles (aged 18–24). Compared to 2019, the percentage of young Poles declaring very high interest in political life has changed from 2% to 4%, whereas a high interest has grown from 9% to 14% (Scovil, 2021).

[2] All results according to IPSOS exit polls.

Taking into account the peculiarity of 2019 and 2020 in Poland (and elsewhere), we may assume that both the pandemic and women's strikes (mass protests of young people in response to the proposed tightening of antiabortion laws in the fall of 2020) significantly contributed to the changes in both interest in politics and political orientations. However, the existing studies also suggest that caution is advisable when assessing the political participation of the youth. Cammaerts et al. (2015, p. 198) remark that, in terms of their political attitudes, young people "are as diversified and fragmented as older adults are." Thus, the first goal of this chapter is to explore the conditions and diverse forms of political participation of young people in contemporary Poland. Second, acknowledging the "complexity and ambiguity" of the left-right divide (Kwiatkowska et al., 2016), the chapter seeks to investigate the main correlates of the identifications of young people in Poland with the "left" and "right" of the political spectrum, including the specific views on economy, society, and politics.

In this chapter, we address two research questions: what are the conditions and forms of political participation of young people in Poland and what is the meaning of the swing to the left among the youth? The empirical basis includes an original CATI survey on the representative sample of 1500 respondents aged 18–29 commissioned by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. It was carried out by IPSOS in 2021 and supplemented by three focus group interviews and ten in-depth interviews with young people in three locations in Poland (two large and one small city). We begin with a review of the literature on the political participation of young people and the left-right divide, followed by a brief methodological note. In the body of the chapter, we present selected results of the analysis. The chapter closes with a discussion and our conclusions.

## 2 Youth and Politics: A Growing Disappointment?

Much has been said in the literature about youth and political participation. On the one hand, there has been broad discussion of young people's political disengagement, but this discussion refers mostly to conventional politics, i.e., to limited participation in voting and political parties and to a low level of interest in politics (Henn & Weinstein, 2006; Sloam & Henn, 2019; Zielińska, 2015). On the other hand, the notion vision of a politically aloof youth is challenged by arguments taking into account a more complex picture of political participation. Although young people seem to be disappointed or uninterested in conventional, traditional forms of politics, this does not necessarily translate into general passivity. Some researchers refer to a phenomenon of "democratic paradox," which is defined as a situation in which young people disengage from institutionalized politics, but simultaneously exhibit idealist and ambitious notions about what democratic participation, including their own, should be like (Giugni & Grasso, 2021, p. 1). Against this backdrop, scholars note that young people can participate in politics in new ways and through different—less conventional and more alternative—modes, including attending

demonstrations or marches, signing petitions, volunteering, online engagement, consumerist boycotts, or activity in issue-based organizations (Cammaerts et al., 2015; Giugni & Grasso, 2021; Norris, 2002; Sloam & Henn, 2019).

Another important point concerns a definition of politics itself: it seems that because young people often present themselves as apolitical, this is how they are perceived. However, a declaration of an apolitical stance may be a result of using a narrow definition of politics (limited to parliamentary and party politics) and a sense of being disregarded by politicians (Côté, 2014). Against this backdrop, a general disappointment with the shape of the political scene or with politicians' attitudes can lead to the need to distance oneself from what is criticized and rejected. According to Messyasz (2015, p. 75), it can be argued that the self-identification of "political indifference" seems to be "a camouflaged political stance that combines both people who display a lack of political engagement in any form (political indifferentism) and people who manifest their negative attitude toward politics and politicians in this way (passive contestation)."[3] Thus, it is not only a lack of precise political views but also a certain rebellion against the parliamentary and party political scene that can result from a general aversion to politics.

Taking into account a growing disappointment with formal and institutionalized politics, it is important to explore the extent to which the traditional divisions of the political scene into a left and a right wing remain relevant to young people and to examine how it correlates with other aspects of their worldviews. In the ongoing scientific debates on the relevance of the left-right divide today, it is commonly agreed that its meaning is specific to historical, political, and cultural contexts (cf. Fuchs & Klingemann, 2014; Kwiatkowska et al., 2016; Mair, 2010). Despite the challenges concerning a clear division into left and right, it is also argued that the spectrum still remains central for the political identities of both individuals and parties. The divide "has formed a categorization of ideologies, an instrument of classification of the political positions of the different parties, a code of communication (between political forces, mass media and voters), and, finally, an instrument to orientate voters in the interpretation of political phenomena in the making of decisions" (Freire, 2006, p. 154). Moreover, the meaning of the left-right schema was considered a helpful instrument in defining "the basic conflicts of the specific social system. […]" (Fuchs & Klingemann, 2014, p. 207).

What other studies show is that "political polarization correlates with a stronger relationship between left-right self-placement and party choice, with party identification, with the ability of voters to see differences between parties and with the link between specific issue dimensions and left-right self-placement" (Otjes & Rekker, 2021, p. 2). In a politically polarized society such as Poland, marked by a deep divide between supporters of liberal and conservative values (Marody et al., 2019; Ruszkowski et al., 2020), we can therefore expect the division between left and right to retain its explanatory power with regard to sociopolitical awareness and to represent an important reference point by which individuals position themselves in

[3] All quotes from Polish were translated by Adam Mrozowicki and Justyna Kajta.

politics. Importantly, self-placement in the left-right schema might mean taking a political position and locating oneself in a current political conflict that need not be coherent with ideological self-identification (Fuchs & Klingemann, 2014, pp. 233–234). Moreover, as the left-right schema can be defined in both economic and cultural terms, different individuals may associate the concepts with different things: "Person A might think of economic policies, person B might have social policies in mind, and person C might think of environmental topics." (Bauer et al., 2017, p. 557). Therefore, instead of abandoning the left-right schema, it is useful to examine it in a more constructivist way and analyze how parties, groups, and individuals (Fuchs & Klingemann, 2014; Kwiatkowska et al., 2016; Szafraniec & Grygieńć, 2019) understand the left and right wings and how they juxtapose their political self-identification with their other political opinions.

Against this backdrop, a knowledge of the particular context in which individuals formulate their self-identifications or opinions is significant. In the case of Poland, a peculiarity of the left-right dimension has its roots in the country's history. In the words of Kwiatkowska et al. (Kwiatkowska et al., 2016, p. 98), "the left-right axis during the initial several post-transformation years referred decisively to sociocultural issues," e.g., attitudes toward abortion rights or the role of the Catholic church in politics. This could have been explained, inter alia, by the hegemony of neoliberal ideologies shared in the 1990s by both the post-communist left and the post-Solidarity political forces in the center and right of the scene. Additionally, political parties were reluctant to mobilize their electorates along economic or class lines, since it was feared that socioeconomic protests would disturb the neoliberal turn (Ost, 2005). Even though the relevance of the left-right identifications for explaining the economic attitudes of young individuals is less straightforward, the incoherence of their economic views (e.g., the combination of ultra-liberalism with the expectation of free public services) is common (Gardawski, 2021). Another important dimension of the left and right identifications in Poland is the stance on European integration, with those identifying with the right being more Eurosceptic (Kwiatkowska et al., 2016).

## 3 Methodological Note

In the rest of this chapter, we will explore the forms of young people's political participation and the correlations between identification with the left or right and selected political and economic principles. By political participation we mean, in line with Cammaerts et al. (2015, p. 4), "the way in which citizens engage in forming opinions and taking actions to bring about change in society." This covers not only involvement in formal political structures (e.g., voting) but also change-oriented activities in various voluntary organizations, social movements, and protests (Côté, 2014, p. 194).

Based on the earlier studies, several hypotheses were formulated. First, we expected young people's participation in new, noninstitutional contexts to

predominate over participation in traditional and formal political contexts (H1). Second, given the political mobilization of the youngest cohorts, and of women in particular, in the protests against restrictive abortion law and climate change (Hurrelmann & Albrecht, 2021), we anticipated more frequent and diversified forms of political participation among younger female respondents (H2). Simultaneously, we thought that the economically disadvantaged youth, including those in precarious employment (Bartkowski, 2022) would be less inclined to be politically active than those in stable employment (H3). They would also be more prone to declare more decisive views, either right or left, than to identify with the center (H4). We expected respondents identifying as right wing to be predominantly older rather than younger (H5a), male rather than female (H5b), and less educated rather than better educated (H5c) (Sińczuch et al., 2021, p. 252). At the economic level, we did not expect significant correlations between political identification and support for left-wing principles (egalitarianism, welfare guarantees, nationalization of industries, and universal basic income) (H6) given the dominance of meritocratic and pro-market ideologies among young people (Gardawski, 2021; Trappmann et al., 2021). Simultaneously, at the political level, we predicted that left-wing identification would be correlated with greater rejection of nationalist attitudes (H7a), stronger support for European integration (H7b), and greater support of democracy (H7c) (Sińczuch et al., 2021, p. 252). At the cultural level, we expected left-wingers to be more secular (less likely to state that they were members of a religious community, H8a) and more likely than right-wingers to support the acceptance of abortion (H8b) and homosexuality (H8c) (Kwiatkowska et al., 2016).

The empirical analysis is based on the data collected in Poland in the framework of a broader international Youth Study coordinated by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) in Central, Eastern European, and Baltic countries. The target population in Poland consisted of all citizens of Poland aged 15 to 29 who had access to the Internet and spoke Polish. Although the study was based primarily on a quantitative survey, qualitative fieldwork was conducted in the form of ten in-depth interviews and three focus-group interviews. Thus, this chapter presents the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data.

As for the CATI survey, it was carried out on nationally representative samples in the Czech Republic (N = 1500), Estonia (N = 1201), Hungary (N = 1501), Latvia (N = 1200), Lithuania (N = 1500), Poland (N = 1500), and Slovakia (N = 1500). For Poland, the sample of 1500 respondents was drawn from the Ipsos Online Access Panel. It was a quota sample according to age, gender, and region, to achieve a group representative of the target population. Data collection took place between June and July of 2021. The interviews were conducted online by the research company IPSOS. The questionnaire was based on earlier Youth Studies and discussed by the team of researchers employed by FES, including the authors of this chapter, and translated into Polish. By weighting, the structure of the sample was adjusted to the official data regarding age, gender, and region.

The focus groups were recruited according to respondents' ages to best display the relevant living circumstances. A mix of gender, living situation, and education/work status was taken into account during sampling. Young people were recruited

from three regions: the capital, Skarżysko, and Wrocław and its surrounding areas, representative of a smaller and poorer region. For the focus groups, local partners recommended focusing on one location per age group in order to represent regional differences. The qualitative fieldwork took place between March and April of 2021. All interviews and focus groups were conducted online via the MS Teams platform.

To answer our research questions and present the political orientations of young Poles, we will focus primarily on the questions regarding interest in politics, trust in institutions, participation in protests and noninstitutional politics, political self-identification on the left-right schema, opinions on democracy, European integration, nationalism and the welfare state, political choices in last parliamentary elections (in 2019), as well as opinions on religion, abortion, and homosexuality. In the case of political identifications, the main variable in the CATI survey was constructed based on the answers to the question: "When people talk about their political beliefs, they mostly speak about being left-wing or right-wing. How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?" The scale of 1–10, in which 1 meant far-left and 10 far-right, was recoded to three values: 1–3: left, 4–7: centrist, and 8–10: right. The statistical significance of correlations was measured by the means of chi-square tests ($\alpha = 0.001$, unless stated otherwise).

## 4 Young Poles and Growing Interest in Politics and Political Participation

Among young people in Central and Eastern European as well as Baltic countries, Poles (together with Czechs) turned out to have the highest interest in politics according to the CEE FES survey (Kajta & Mrozowicki, 2022). Almost 30% claimed to be very interested or mostly interested, whereas another 36.3% reported no interest or mostly no interest in politics. The remainder located themselves somewhere in between. At first glance, the fact that one-third of the young generation shares an interest in politics is not necessarily grounds for optimism. However, when we compare the data with previous studies, we observe an increase in interest in politics that began in 2014 and intensified between 2019 and 2021 (Scovil, 2021). According to a CBOS survey, the recent level of interest in politics among Poles aged 18 to 24 was the highest in the history of their research (ibid.). Another survey has shown that more than half of young respondents became more interested in politics during the COVID-19 pandemic (Pazderski, 2020). The reason may be that the pandemic caused young people to realize that there is a strong connection between governmental decisions and their everyday lives, that they could be suddenly locked up at home, transferred to remote education, or prevented from continuing their work. In addition, significantly more women than men (60% vs. 46%) have become more interested in politics (ibid.). This aspect of young people's recent politicization in Poland can be linked to massive women's protests in the pandemic context

(fall 2020) in response to stricter antiabortion laws. This was also reflected in young people's statements in the interviews:

> *It* [politics] *certainly has an oppressive effect (…) Well, various scandals. Well, for sure it certainly does not have a positive influence on my life. And I am also starting to be more interested in it, politics in general, because of... Because I am getting older and it concerns me more. (…)* (FGI, 25–29 years old).
>
> *Just like in my experience, everything I didn't want happened, like there were strikes about banning abortion and so on. That was me being there, trying to do something there, and also that one didn't work out. And this is once again, where a young person tries to make a difference, to speak up, and still it hasn't changed, yeah. Things that are important to me, for example, don't get changed.* (FGI, 15–18 years old).

Experiences like the Women's Strikes, which did not lead to any political consequences, seem to have further strengthened young people's feelings of being disappointed and unheard and may have fueled a growing sense of helplessness. The Polish government turned out to be the most distrusted institution of all countries surveyed: 43.4% of young Poles did not trust it at all, and 25.7% trusted it a little. Political parties and parliament did not enjoy a great deal of trust either. Like their peers in other CEE countries, almost half of young Poles (48%) did not think that their interests were represented by politics and felt rather detached from the political scene, which sometimes translates into declarations of being apolitical (cf. Messyasz, 2015):

> *I don't identify with any political group, that's what I mean by that, I'm apolitical, you can be anti-political or apolitical, well, I think you can tell the difference. Well, it's just a 'whatever approach.'* (FGI, 19–24 years old)

An increase in interest in and disappointment with politics may, but need not necessarily, translate into growing interest in political participation. However, both the FGIs and the survey showed that a certain number of young people became involved in politics and believed that young people should have a voice and an influence on what is happening in politics; 51% of respondents declared that they voted in the elections in 2019; 15.7% abstained from voting despite having the right to vote; and 27.1% were not eligible to vote. For comparison, according to IPSOS exit polls, 46% of young people took part in the last parliamentary elections in Poland in 2019, but during the presidential elections a year later, that number had already increased to 67%. Notably, 79.3% of respondents declared their intention to vote in the next parliamentary elections if they were eligible.

Simultaneously, 69.4% of informants had experience with at least one of five noninstitutional forms of political participation, such as signing political petitions (46.2%), participation in demonstrations (30.5%), NGOs or voluntary activities (38.9%), consumer boycotts (30.9%), and online political activities (23.8%). Thus, H1 was confirmed and noninstitutional channels were more often used to participate in political life than voting in elections. However, it is safe to say that the traditional ways of political participation do not therefore lose their importance for young people (Cammaerts et al., 2015).

With regard to the sociodemographic profile of political participation, voting was reported by slightly more men than women, those with higher educational levels

(even adjusting for age), and those with better economic conditions. In the case of voting intentions, the same correlations were observed except for gender: in all age categories, women were more likely to declare their intention to vote, which partially confirms H2 on the feminization of political participation. Contrary to H3, precarious employment had an inconclusive effect on voting: those in occasional jobs and the jobless were less likely than other categories to declare that they voted in 2019, but voting intentions remained comparable across all employment types. In accordance with H2, women participated more often than men in all forms of non-institutional political activity; 48.3% of women respondents volunteered or participated in activities run by civil society organizations (men: 29,8%); 53% signed a list with political requests (men: 39.6%); and 36.3% stopped buying things for political and environmental reasons (men: 25.9%). There is only one traditional category of participation in which young men are more often involved than women: working in a political party or group. Compared to 5.2% of young women, 10.1% of men have prior experience of this activity. Younger age groups (15–24 years) participated slightly more often than older (25–29 years) in at least one form of activity (72% and 65.8%, respectively). There was no correlation between employment forms, financial status, and the level of noninstitutional participation. Those with better education participated more often via noninstitutional channels, but the correlation was weak ($V = 0.07$, $p \leq 0.05$) (Fig. 1).

If we focus on participation in demonstrations, earlier results are confirmed once again; 43.9% of young Poles have such experience. On average, women participated in more types of protests than men ($V = 0.106$, $p \leq 0.001$), while older respondents participated in demonstrations more often than younger, which partially confirms and partially falsifies H2. No correlation with education was observed. Those in occasional jobs and the jobless joined protests the least often (H3 was partially confirmed). Young women more often took part in protests concerning

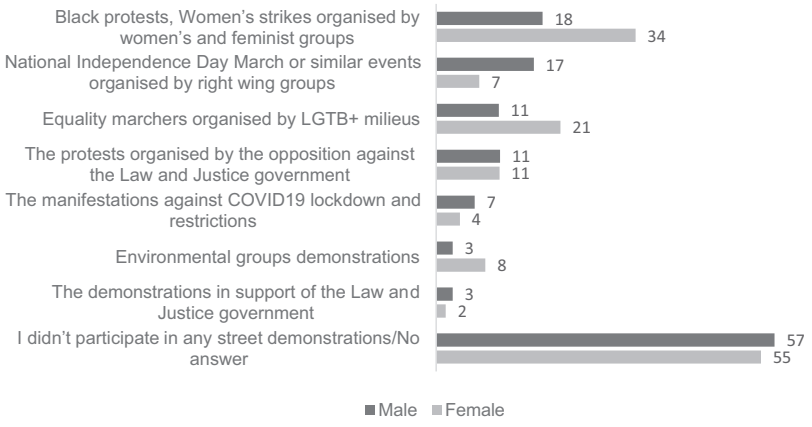



**Fig. 1** Participation in protests by gender. (Source: FES Youth Study 2021)

women's rights (Black Protest and Women's Strikes), equality marches, and demonstrations by environmental groups, whereas men's participation is more noticeable in National Independence Day Marches or other right-wing events as well as in manifestations against COVID lockdowns and restrictions. A similar percentage of men and women took part in some protests organized by the opposition against the actions of the governing party. Overall, gender constituted a significant factor differentiating political views and practices; higher education favored voting in parliamentary elections, but it played a minor role in noninstitutional channels of participation. Precarious employment went together with greater inactivity both in traditional and in noninstitutional channels.

## 5 When Nothing Goes Right, Go Left?

The growing political participation of young Poles goes hand in hand with shifts in their political identifications. Compared to other countries surveyed in the FES Youth Study, Poland had the highest percentage of young people declaring left-wing attitudes (22.6%). A majority of respondents reported being centrist (46.15), and the smallest percentage (13.1%) regarded themselves as right-wingers (Table 1). As the CBOS surveys demonstrate, the number of people identifying as centrists has decreased over the years (cf. Scovil, 2021). It emerges that young people began to situate themselves on the left-right spectrum more decisively than before, which may correspond with the general increase in interest in politics.

The results show that age and gender are the most important variables differentiating political views on the left-right scale. The youngest group (29.7%) and women (29.8%) most frequently declared support for left-wing ideas, while those aged 25 to 29 and men identified more often with the right wing. Among the youngest group, 37.1% of the youngest women and 17.6% of the youngest men saw themselves on the left-wing spectrum of the scale; 10.7% of the youngest men and only 4.9% of the youngest women declared that they were more on the right. In the case of other age groups, general tendencies regarding gender differences were similar. This confirms H5a and H5b. The correlation was weaker in the case of education, but in general the better educated were right wing. This falsified H5c. When controlled for age, however, the correlation between educational level and political identification ceased to be statistically significant. Financial status did not matter for political identification, but there was a statistically significant correlation between identification and employment types. Those in occasional jobs and the jobless (even adjusting for age) were more often left wing than right wing, and the right-wingers were most frequently found among those with permanent contracts. Thus, if employment precarity went together with any decisive views, they were more likely left wing than right wing. H4 proved to be only partially correct and would require refinement and further research.

Table 1 also includes correlations between political identification and political choices during the parliamentary elections of 2019. Those who identified as left

**Table 1** Political views by selected variables (%)

| | Left | Centrist | Right | Don't know/no answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 22.6 | 46.1 | 13.1 | 18.2 |
| **Gender**** | | | | |
| Men | 15.8 | 49.5 | 18.5 | 16.2 |
| Women | 29.8 | 42.6 | 7.3 | 20.3 |
| **Age**** | | | | |
| 15–18 | 29.7 | 40.7 | 7.1 | 22.6 |
| 19–24 | 23.8 | 47.6 | 13.4 | 15.2 |
| 25—29 | 17.4 | 47.8 | 16.2 | 18.6 |
| **Education*** | | | | |
| Basic or vocational | 25.1 | 42.9 | 10.2 | 21.9 |
| Secondary or postsecondary | 22.4 | 47.1 | 12.6 | 17.8 |
| Higher | 20.5 | 46.9 | 17.2 | 15.4 |
| **Employment status**** | | | | |
| Permanent contract | 16.7 | 48.2 | 18.1 | 16.9 |
| Temporary contract | 20.6 | 54.4 | 13.9 | 11.1 |
| Occasional jobs/training | 25.1 | 48.9 | 12.6 | 13.4 |
| Self-employed | 24.2 | 53 | 12.1 | 10.6 |
| No job | 30.4 | 40.3 | 8.4 | 20.8 |
| **Financial status** | | | | |
| Poorer | 21.5 | 45.1 | 15.2 | 18.1 |
| Medium | 20.9 | 51.3 | 13.7 | 14.2 |
| Richer | 23.8 | 43.6 | 12.2 | 20.4 |
| **Voting in parliamentary elections in 2019**** | | | | |
| Polish People's party (PSL) | 0.7 | 3.8 | 2.7 | 0.6 |
| Law and justice (PiS) | 6.3 | 14.8 | 34.2 | 5.6 |
| Left (SLD/Lewica) | 35.3 | 12.0 | 6.5 | 1.7 |
| Confederation (KWiN) | 4.7 | 19.3 | 34.2 | 10.7 |
| Civic Coalition (KO PO, N., Greens) | 12.7 | 15.3 | 6.0 | 4.5 |
| I didn't vote | 40.3 | 34.8 | 16.3 | 77.0 |

Source: FES Youth Study 2021
Note: Political views measured on a scale of 1–10, recoded: 1–3: left, 4–7: centrist, 8–10: right, statistical significance: * - $p \leq 0.05$, ** - $p \leq 0.001$

wing most frequently supported the Democratic Left Alliance—the Left (35.3%), but they were also among those who most frequently did not turn up at the ballot box (regardless of age), which might suggest that they have not seen a political force they could support. The preferences of those with centrist views were divided among the main parties/coalitions. Those who declared right-wing views most often supported the governing Law and Justice (PiS) (34.2%) and the Eurosceptic/nationalist Confederation (34.2%).

To further unpack what it means to have left-wing or right-wing leanings and to shed light on the nature of the most important conflicts today (Fuchs & Klingemann, 2014), we juxtaposed the answers on political self-identification with those on

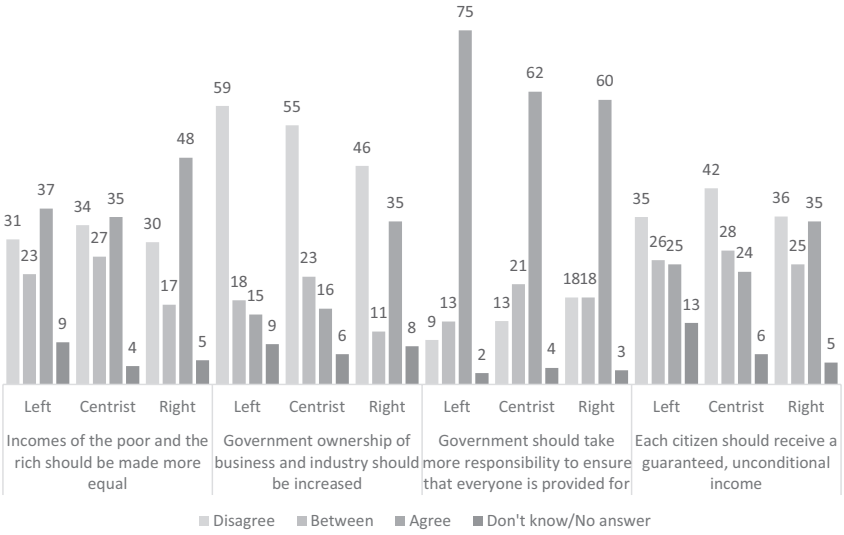



**Fig. 2** Economic views and declared political views (%)
Note: Don't know/no answer excluded in the case of political views ($p \leq 0.001$—for egalitarianism, protectionism, and welfare principles, $p \leq 0.01$ for universal income)
Source: FES Youth Study 2021

economic life, the nation, acceptance for abortion and homosexuals, and religiosity. We began by analyzing the questions concerning the welfare state, economic interventionism, egalitarianism, and universal basic income. As can be seen in Fig. 2, left-wing respondents did not necessarily support such postulates as increasing equality of income or the introduction of universal basic income. In both cases, right-wingers agreed with these ideas more often. Although the majority of young people did not support the idea of increasing government ownership of businesses and industries, once again right-wingers were those who supported this idea most frequently. Similarly, those identifying with the right wing were more in favor of a universal basic income than left-wingers. Those identifying with the left more often supported only one of four left-wing economic principles: three-quarters of them were in favor of government taking more responsibility for welfare provision, as compared to 60% of right-wingers. All of this indicates that H6 must be rejected: there are significant correlations between economic views and political identifications. Surprisingly, these are right-wing supporters who are in favor of some traditionally left-wing postulates more often than left-wingers.

Another relevant issue concerns attitudes toward the Polish nation and the openness of young people to migrants. Young people locating themselves more on the right were more often proud to be citizens of Poland (66%) than those in the center and on the left; they supported the need for non-Poles to adopt Polish customs and values when living in Poland (43.4%); they admitted that "it would be the best if

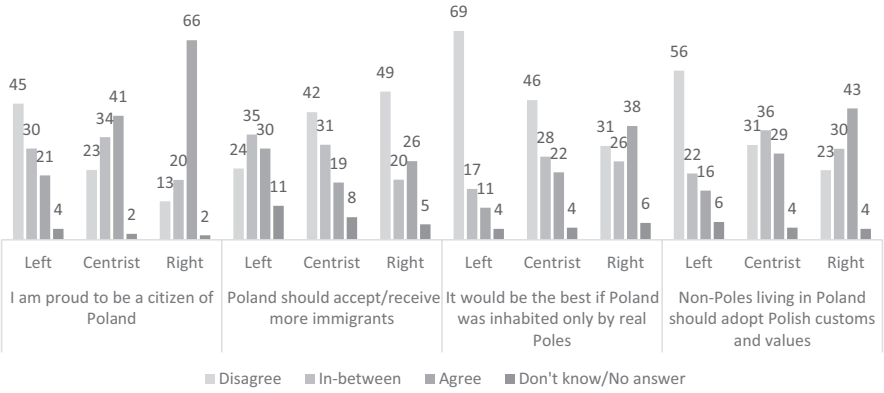



**Fig. 3** Nationalist attitudes by declared political views (%)
Note: Don't know/no answer excluded in the case of political views; all correlations $p \leq 0.001$
Source: FES Youth Study 2021

Poland were inhabited only by real Poles" (37.6%); and they disagreed that Poland should accept more immigrants (49%). Simultaneously, 69% of left-wingers disagreed with the idea of "Poland for Poles," 55.9% did not think that non-Poles should adopt Polish customs and values, and only 30.2% agreed that more immigrants should be accepted. All in all, H7a was confirmed (Fig. 3).

There is a statistically significant correlation between the opinion that Poland should leave the European Union and political identifications ($V = 0.261$, $p \leq 0.001$). It was supported by 16% of young Poles, including 38.5% of those with right-wing orientations, 15.6% of centrists, and only 6.5% of left-wingers. Thus, H7b was confirmed as well. Finally, a closer look at the principles describing support for democracy and anti-authoritarian attitudes confirms hypothesis H7c. Young respondents in Poland thought that democracy was a good form of government in general (58.2%), including 71.5% of those identifying with the left and 55.6% of those identifying with the right ($p \leq 0.001$). While only 24.1% of young people supported the idea that, under certain circumstances, dictatorship was a better form of government than democracy, 48% of right-wingers agreed with it compared to 25.7% of centrists and 13.3% of left-wingers ($p \leq 0.001$). Interestingly (and going beyond our hypotheses), 85.6% of left-wingers and only 62.4% of right-wingers thought that young people should have more opportunities to speak in politics ($p \leq 0.001$), which demonstrates that those with left-wing views felt more excluded.

The analysis so far suggests that the left-wing shift is not driven by support for a traditionally socialist and pro-welfare economic agenda, but rather by opposition to nationalism and Euroscepticism as well as by pro-democratic attitudes. Further analysis confirms its anti-conservative nature. We decided to look at sociocultural issues that are known as significant components of the left-right polarization in Poland (Kwiatkowska et al., 2016): religion and attitudes toward abortion and homosexuality. Half of the respondents reported that they belonged to the Roman Catholic church, whereas almost 30% stated that they did not belong to any

religious community. Compared to the European Value Survey from 2017 (EVS, 2021), we observe a significant increase (from 16%) of young people reporting no affiliation to a religious denomination, and a decrease in people belonging to the Roman Catholic church (from 81% in 2017 to 51% in 2021). Unsurprisingly, taking into account political self-identification, it was young people identifying as right wing who most frequently reported that they were Catholics (58.4%) and left-wingers who said that they were unaffiliated to a religious community (42%) ($V = 0.212$, $p \leq 0.001$). However, slightly fewer left-wingers identified themselves as Catholics (39.3%) and almost 24% of right-wingers reported no affiliation to a religious community; thus, H8a is only partially confirmed.

When asked about justified behaviors,[4] young people exhibited fairly high support for homosexuality (the mean, M, was 6.9 on a scale of 1 = never to 10 = always), and abortion (M = 6.4). Compared to earlier EVS results (EVS, 2021), this represents an increase in positive attitudes to abortion and homosexuality. In the FES Youth Study Poland, 24.2% of young respondents answered that abortion is always acceptable; the same answer ("always acceptable") was given for homosexuality by 38% of respondents. Again, this is likely a result of the restrictions in abortion laws in 2020, followed by the Women's Strikes. Unsurprisingly, right-wing identification went hand in hand with lower support for abortion and homosexuality. In the case of abortion, Spearman's rho was $-0.305$ ($p \leq 0.001$), for homosexuality it equaled $-0.369$ ($p \leq 0.001$), which confirmed hypotheses H8b and H8c.

## 6 Discussion and Conclusions

The chapter explored selected correlates of young people's political participation in Poland as well as the dynamics and interrelations between political identifications and views on economic issues, nationalism, democracy, European integration, and support of cultural openness (as measured by acceptance of abortion and homosexuality). All in all, the analysis adds to the critique of the thesis about the political withdrawal and depoliticization of the youth (Cammaerts et al., 2015; Giugni & Grasso, 2021; Hurrelmann & Albrecht, 2021; Norris, 2002). Juxtaposed with earlier studies (European Value Survey and the Public Opinion Research Centre data), the research confirms an increase in interest in politics, in particular among women, although those interested in it still represent just one-third of respondents. Almost two-thirds of young Poles surveyed had experience with noninstitutional forms of political participation, such as street protests, petitioning, and consumer boycotts, while, at the same time, half of them declared that they had voted in the 2019 elections and almost 80% said that they planned to do so in the next parliamentary elections. This confirms that both traditional and noninstitutional channels matter

[4] The authors do not consider homosexuality to be a behavior, as this would imply that it is an individual's decision. However, the question was adopted from the EVS surveys in order to facilitate comparisons.

(Cammaerts et al., 2015). Noninstitutional forms were supported by all ages and educational groups and clearly dominated by women. Based on focus group interviews and earlier studies (Pazderski, 2020), we can suggest that the pandemic, women's protests, and the feeling that young people's interests were not being represented in politics were important factors of the political animation of young people in contemporary Poland. Simultaneously, given a lesser degree of political activity among those in precarious employment and the unemployed, the study also confirms that precarity may be a factor preventing political participation (Bartkowski, 2022).

Our research demonstrated that a relatively high share of young people identified themselves with the left wing: 23% as compared to 13% of those positioning themselves at the right end of the spectrum. The left-wing shift of the youth, noted in earlier studies (Scovil, 2021), denotes a new trend compared to growing right-wing sympathies in the first two decades of the twenty-first century (Messyasz, 2015). Further analysis made it possible to reconstruct some of the meanings and correlates of young people's political identifications. The left-wing supporters were more often women, younger, in precarious employment, and voters of the left than the right-wing supporters, who were more often men, older, holding permanent jobs, and voting for the governing right-wing Law and Justice or the anti-systemic nationalist Confederation. Less coherence was observed in the case of economic views, since it was the right-wingers who appeared to be more egalitarian and more supportive of universal basic income and the nationalization of some industries. The analysis confirms and extends earlier observations (Kwiatkowska et al., 2016) that the left-right divide in Poland is shaped more by cultural and political factors than by economics. Those identifying with the left are greater supporters of democracy, membership of Poland in the EU, and cultural openness, and they oppose nationalism more strongly than those who favor the right. At the same time, they feel more abandoned by political elites and more distrustful and oppositional toward the right-wing government and institutions. Given the generational characteristics of left-wing supporters, our research can provide some clues about the development of youth and of anti-nationalist and pro-European countermovements against the right-wing government that was in power in 2015–2023. Our assumption of an ongoing liberal-left turn among young people was confirmed by the parliamentary elections in the fall of 2023, when the youngest voters voted most often for the Civic Coalition and the Left.

## References

Bartkowski, J. (2022). Prekaryjność a postawy społeczno-polityczne młodzieży. In J. Czarzasty (Ed.), *Niepewność Czyli Normalność? Studia Społeczno-Ekonomiczne Nad Młodymi Pracownikami Sprekaryzowanymi, Cześć II.2* (pp. 43–74). Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

Bauer, P. C., Barberá, P., Ackermann, K., & Venetz, A. (2017). Is the left-right scale a valid measure of ideology?: Individual-level variation in associations with "left" and "right" and left-right self-placement. *Political Behavior, 39*(3), 553–583.

Cammaerts, B., Bruter, M., Banaji, S., Harrison, S., & Anstead, N. (2015). *Youth participation in democratic life: Stories of hope and disillusion, youth participation in democratic life: Stories of hope and disillusion*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Côté, J. (2014). *Youth studies. Fundamental issues and debates*. Palgrave Macmillan.

EVS. (2021). EVS Trend File 1981–2017. *GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA7503 Data file Version 2.0.0*. https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13736.

Freire, A. (2006). Left-right ideological identities in new democracies. *Pôle Sud, 25*(2), 153–173.

Fuchs, D., & Klingemann, H.-D. (2014). The left-right schema. In K. M. Jennings & J. W. Van Deth (Eds.), *Continuities in political action* (pp. 203–234). De Gruyter.

Gardawski, J. (2021). Wizje Gospodarki Dobrze Urządzonej. *Od 'Robotników 1986' Do Polskich i Niemieckich Prekariuszy 2016–2017*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

Giugni, M., & Grasso, M. (2021). Youth and politics in times of increasing inequalities. In M. Giugni & M. Grasso (Eds.), *Youth and politics in times of increasing inequalities*. Springer.

Henn, M., & Weinstein, M. (2006). Young people and political (in)activism: Why don't young people vote? *Policy & Politics, Policy Press, 34*(3), 517–534.

Hurrelmann, K., & Albrecht, E. (2021). *Gen Z. Between climate crisis and coronavirus pandemic*. Routledge.

Inglehart, R. (2018). *Cultural evolution. People's motivations are changing, and reshaping the world*. Cambridge University Press.

Kajta, J., & Mrozowicki, A. (2022). *Young people in Poland: 2020/2021. Between disappointment with the state and hope for a better life*. Bonn. Available at: http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/19162.pdf

Kwiatkowska, A., Cześnik, M., Żerkowska-Balas, M., & Stanley, B. (2016). Ideologiczna treść wymiaru lewica-prawica w Polsce w latach 1997–2015. *Studia Socjologiczne, 4*(223), 97–124.

Mair, P. (2010). Orientacje lewicowe i prawicowe. In R. J. Dalton & H.-D. Klingemann (Eds.), *Zachowania Polityczne t. 1* (pp. 259–279). PWN.

Marody, M., Konieczna-Sałamatin, J., Sawicka, M., Mandes, S., Kacprowicz, G., Bulkowski, K., & Bartkowski, J. (2019). *Społeczeństwo na zakręcie. Zmiany postaw i wartości Polaków w latach 1990–2018*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

Messyasz, K. (2015). Postawy polityczne młodzieży polskiej w świetle badań empirycznych. *Władza Sądzenia, 7*, 56–79.

Norris, P. (2002). *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing political activism*. Cambridge University Press.

Ost, D. (2005). *The defeat of solidarity. Anger and politics in postcommunist Europe*. Cornell University Press.

Otjes, S., & Rekker, R. (2021). Socialised to think in terms of left and right? The acceptability of the left and the right among European voters. *Electoral Studies, Pergamon, 72*, 102365.

Pazderski, F. (2018). *Odlegli obserwatorzy, niezadowoleni konformiści czy poszukujący obywatele? Młodzi o demokracji i polityce w Polsce*, Warszawa, Available at: https://www.isp.org.pl/uploads/download/odlegli-obserwatorzy-niezadowoleni-konformisci-czy-poszukujacy-obywatele-postawy-mlodych-polek-i-polakow-wobec-demokracji-i-polityki_pl_1595249612.pdf

Pazderski, F. (2020). *Youth attitudes on politics and democracy in Poland., Warszawa*. Available at https://www.isp.org.pl/en/publications/youth-attitudes-on-politics-and-democracy-in-poland

Potocki, P., & Machalica, B. (2022). *Pęknięte pokolenie rewolucjonistów? Młodzi wobec sytuacji w Polsce w 2021 Roku*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Ruszkowski, P., Przestalski, A., & Maranowski, P. (2020). *Polaryzacja światopoglądowa społeczeństwa polskiego a klasy i warstwy społeczne*. Collegium Civitas Press.

Scovil, J. (2021). *Zainteresowanie polityką i poglądy polityczne młodych Polaków na tle ogółu badanych. Raport 16/2021*, Warszawa. Available at https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2021/K_016_21.PDF

Sińczuch, M., Michalski, P., & Piotrowski, M. (2021). *'Inequalities among youth and support for right-wing populism in Poland', Youth and politics in times of increasing inequalities* (pp. 231–257). Palgrave Macmillan.

Sloam, J., & Henn, M. (2019). *Youthquake 2017, Youthquake 2017*. Springer.
Szafraniec, K., & Grygieńć, J. (2019). Prawicowość młodych Polaków. Kontekst wyborów parlamentarnych z 2015 roku. *Studia Socjologiczne, 2*(233), 5–35.
Szafraniec, K., Domalewski, J., Wasilewski, K., Szymborski, P., & Wernerowicz, M. (2017). *Zmiana warty: Młode pokolenia a transformacje we Wschodniej Europie i Azji*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.
Trappmann, V., Seehaus, A., Mrozowicki, A., & Krasowska, A. (2021). The moral boundary drawing of class: Social inequality and young precarious workers in Poland and Germany. *Sociology, 55*(3), 451–468.
Zielińska, M. (2015). Polska młodzież w czasach nieufności. *Władza Sądzenia, 7*, 27–35.

# Voting Before Blogging: Political Participation of Youth in Slovakia


**Pavol Baboš and Aneta Világi**

**Contents**



## 1 Introduction

Conventional wisdom, which is borne out by empirical findings, suggests that young people have become less interested in politics over the last few decades (Bečević & Dahlstedt, 2022; Sloam, 2014; Putnam, 2000). Some scholars hold that low voter participation can be explained by low levels of political trust (Hooghe & Marien, 2013; Almond & Verba, 1963). This represents a potential threat to the quality of democracy, which depends on informed citizens interested in politics (Dahl, 1989; Diamond & Morlino, 2005). The normative theory of democracy presumes that young people become active citizens who participate in elections and engage in political life, which includes becoming involved with political parties. Should young people's interest in politics continue to

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under contract No. APVV-17-0464 (Improving Communication on Democracy and EU Deficits).

P. Baboš (✉) · A. Világi
Comenius University of Bratislava, Bratislava, Slovakia
e-mail: pavol.babos@uniba.sk; aneta.vilagi@uniba.sk



M. Harring (ed.), *Growing Up in Times of Crisis*, Contributions to Political Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58626-2_7

decrease and remain low as they mature, this would indicate a considerable decline in democratic quality in the future. Some scholars have already shown that low political participation during formative years may easily translate into low political mobilization during adulthood (Hooghe et al., 2004). Therefore, political scientists are rightly interested in studying the political involvement of youth in democracies.

Recent young generations in Europe have been affected by various crises—austerity, debt, environmental problems, the COVID-19 pandemic, and war refugees—that have impacted their everyday lives, trust in political institutions, and democratic participation. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that, in times of crisis and change, political trust plays a central role (Schraff, 2021; Ellinas & Lamprianou, 2014). Societies with higher levels of political trust have been more successful in getting their citizens to comply with restrictive governmental measures and resist the allure of populists as well as sustaining the level of political participation. The current young generation can be rightfully seen as the "crisis generation," having lived for the last decade (most of their mature time as citizens) in one crisis or another. Therefore, it could be extremely important to investigate how their maturing into citizenship under these conditions affects their participatory behavior and their construction of trustworthiness. As some studies have already shown, certain crises may have caused a temporary increase in interest in politics, which, however, soon drops off again (Baboš and Világi 2021).

Over the last decade, the demonstrations of "outraged youth" against political corruption, youth unemployment, and climate change became a major feature of European societies (Sloam, 2014). With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its concomitant restrictions on public life, young people were forced to shift their political activism from the streets to the online world. Thus, their lower turnout in elections and decreased level of engagement with political parties does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in politics. While young people may be less likely than older generations to participate in traditional political institutions, they may instead engage more often in noninstitutionalized forms of participation, such as political consumerism, demonstrations, and Internet activism (Marien et al., 2010).

This chapter focuses on youth participation in Slovakia. Based on a survey conducted among young people in 2021, the chapter provides insights into young people's perceptions of institutionalized and noninstitutionalized political participation and into the role played by political trust and the perceived importance of politics in people's lives. In the empirical part of this chapter, we map the extent to which young people are willing to engage in political participation and the extent to which this interplays with their trust in political institutions. We next employ the concept of political ego identity to offer an explanatory framework that helps us understand why certain young people are more willing to participate than others. We argue that it is not the type of participation or level of political trust that matters, but the perceived importance and knowledge of politics.

## 2 Theory: Political Participation of Youth at a Glance

Political participation is usually one of the basic aspects of democratic governance that are underestimated by youth worldwide, including in Europe. Pattie et al. (2004) pointed out an apolitical, apathetic, or even alienated generation in the United Kingdom, while Norris (2003) used international comparative surveys to prove declines in turnout at elections and in party membership. The waning interest of young people in participation via traditional political institutions was also recorded by Maggini (2017). More recently, Lieberkind and Bruun (2021) documented that the Nordic youth are still relatively passive with regard to political participation, while comparative research undertaken by Kitanova (2020) has shown that the same applies to young people in the EU countries. Thus, the empirical findings prove that young Europeans are increasingly detached from the political sphere and political activism, decreasingly attracted by traditional mobilization agencies like parties, and over time less interested in politics. At the same time, they feel that they are not fully represented by political institutions.

While there are various factors that may explain this trend among young generations during the last decades, two broad theories are worth exploring. The first points to an increase of individualism in societies. Ever since Putnam's seminal study *Bowling Alone* (2000), the weakening of societal bonding and increase of individualism (caused partly by the dominance of television in everyday life) have been discussed as a societal change influencing political engagement, including that of young people, especially with regard to party membership. A rival theory of youth apathy toward politics maintains that young people develop this apathy at a specific stage in their development in which politics strikes them as being alien to their everyday lives. Since, therefore, they perceive the cost of being politically active as being far higher than its benefit, abstaining from politics is a perfectly rational choice. Not until they reach adulthood do the benefits (effects of public policies like lower taxes or maternity payments, etc. of political engagement outweigh the cost of voting (Plutzer, 2002).

However, the notion that young people are "apathetic" with regard to politics has been seriously contested by scholars in recent years (Sloam et al., 2022; Sloam, 2014; Loader, 2007). The focus of research into youth participation has shifted from traditional types of participation like voting and party membership toward more nontraditional forms of engagement in politics. The literature usually refers to nontraditional or noninstitutionalized political activism such as signing online petitions, involvement in online political discussions, protest demonstrations, and other forms of indirect protests, including consumer boycotts. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) specifically stress the role of large-scale digital social networks that enable alternative modes of political participation. Cyberspace is used for both the repertoires (the actions used for political expression) and the agencies (the organizational structures used for engagement). Thus, contemporary youth political activism is fairly dynamic and largely horizontal in structure (Sloam & O'Loughlin, 2021; Pickard et al., 2020).

Some scholars argue that young people have not abandoned politics in general but have merely found other ways to express their interest in politics and social issues (Cammaerts et al., 2014; Marien et al., 2010; O'Toole et al., 2003). This would explain why we see declining numbers in regard to party membership and party politics accompanied by stable levels of interest in politics. Over the last two or three decades, young people may have opted for more individualized and fragmented forms of political participation that take advantage of contemporary technological opportunities. "Digitally networked actions" (Sloam, 2014) like online petitions, political comments and discussions on social media, and even mass demonstrations organized via the Internet have improved accessibility and facilitated youth participation.

In some ways, the increase of interest in easily accessible political actions online corroborates Putnam's (2000) remarks on a society individualized and spoiled by television. While institutionalized forms of political participation require active (physical) measures such as going to a polling station or attending meetings of political parties/NGOs, most noninstitutionalized online activities can be performed without leaving home. However, accessibility in the sense of an absence of physical barriers is only part of the allure that can stimulate the interest of young people in nontraditional political participation. Equally important is the accessibility of resources and the relatively low cost of organizing and promoting various activities via the Internet as "digitally networked actions." The decreasing importance of personal and financial resources facilitates a horizontal structure of participation that circumvents the gatekeeper role of political and civic organizations.

Pippa Norris (2002) supports this idea while focusing also on the shift of young generations toward post-materialist values. She argues that young people may participate more intensively in social or political issues focusing on a cause, such as identity politics, sexuality, or environmental matters. As she concludes, the pattern suggests a generational shift from traditional politics of loyalty toward contemporary politics of choice (Norris, 2002). While the political interest of young people may be redirected by issue salience and their instruments of political participation modified by new technological opportunities, their political engagement is not necessarily lower than that of previous generations.

As a consequence of multiple crises impacting Europe, the question of their effect on people's trust in political institutions and engagement in politics has arisen in academia (e.g., de Wilde, 2021; Caïs et al., 2021). One of the oldest lines of reasoning with regard to drivers of political participation goes back to the influential book *The Civic Culture* by Almond and Verba (1963), which deals with the interplay between political trust and political participation. The authors argued that, in order to participate in politics, citizens must have a positive attitude toward the political system. Negative attitudes and declining levels of political trust are associated with the rejection of conventional participation, including voting. In line with this, political trust drives citizens' interest and engagement in politics and increases voting turnout. However, Hooghe and Marien (2013) revised this theory by investigating the effects of political trust on various forms of participation. Their findings show that, while political trust is positively associated with institutionalized

participation, it is negatively associated with noninstitutionalized participation. Therefore, higher levels of political trust are associated with higher voting turnout and party membership, but not with various nontraditional forms of participation like boycotting products, grassroots protests, or political blogging.

In Slovakia, young people's political activism follows a pattern similar to that suggested by the literature mentioned above. In 1989, during the "Velvet Revolution" and again in 1998 in the "electoral revolution" (Bunce & Wolchik, 2006), young people played an important and active political role. Once revolutions succeeded in ousting an authoritarian regime (socialism) or a semi-authoritarian leader (Mečiar) in Slovakia, most young people remained aloof from politics and later began to express considerable distrust of politics in general and political leaders in particular. The question remains whether erosion of trust in traditional political institutions has an impact on political participation in its nontraditional forms, or whether there is another driver of participation that can aid our understanding.

## *2.1 Political Ego Identity*

The academic debate on drivers of political participation is extensive and has many layers. The dimension focusing on psychological drivers is particularly interesting and worthy of exploration. Specifically, we will adopt Gentry's concept of "political ego identity" (Gentry, 2018) to examine the factors which drive young people's civic and political participation. Borrowing from psychology, Gentry develops the concept of "political ego identity." The term "ego identity" refers to "the individual's development of self: how individuals conceptualize themselves […] Ego identity is inherently personal and involves the development of how individuals see themselves more specifically, how they come to think of themselves" (2018, p. 23).

As Gentry explains, a young person who has developed her political ego identity simply knows who she is politically. This means that the young person acknowledges the role of politics and the importance it plays in peoples' lives, she is clear about her own political and policy attitudes, and she knows how they fit into the political process. A person with a "fully developed" political ego identity is thus most likely to participate in the political arena, be it through voting or through other forms of political participation.

In developing the political ego identity, two dimensions are important. The first is the belief that politics plays an important part in one's life—the dimension of salience. Second, the person develops political commitment. This does not necessarily take the form of commitment to a political party (i.e., it need not be party affiliation or partisanship) but may also be a commitment to an ideology, public policies, or political ideas. According to Gentry, it is not important which ideology or what type of public policy one is committed to, but it is important that one realizes the commitment. A fully developed political ego identity thus requires both high commitment and high salience.

Obviously, not everybody reaches the state of fully developed political ego identity. Gentry introduces four types of people with varying degrees of development of their political ego identities. In addition to those with a fully developed identity, there are also people with a "somewhat developed" political ego identity. These people have a relatively high level of commitment to certain policies or political beliefs but exhibit a low level of salience. Gentry explains that this group of people usually draw their commitment from their immediate environment, such as family or close friends. However, due to the relatively low level of salience, discussions about politics are usually avoided.

The third type of political ego identity is the "explorers." Explorers have a low level of political commitment, but, as Gentry puts it, "this does not mean that they are not attempting to figure out who they are politically" (2018, p. 42). In other words, explorers show considerable interest in politics and acknowledge that politics plays an important role, i.e., they have a relatively high level of the salience dimension of the political ego identity. Based on qualitative research, Gentry holds that the most distinct feature of explorers is that, while they acknowledge that their political beliefs are not definite, they realize that politics plays a role important enough for them to remain interested.

The fourth group is labeled "diffused" and exhibits low levels of both commitment and salience. These people do not believe that politics is important for their lives, nor do they have strong or stable political opinions and preferences. Although the reasons for being diffused may vary, the consequence for political participation is clear—it is very low, definitely the lowest of all four types of political ego identities.

## 3 Data and Methodology

Our empirical analysis makes use of quantitative survey data from a large-scale international comparative study focused on young people. The data collection was sponsored by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), and the target population for Slovakia were all citizens of Slovakia aged 14 to 29 who have Internet access and speak the Slovak language. The sample of 1500 respondents was selected from Ipsos Online Access Panel. The sample choice was based on quotas broken down by age, gender, and region to build a sample that best reflects the target population based on the above characteristics. Although the sample was carefully compiled to reflect population layers in terms of age, gender, and region, some minor deviation from the optimum structure still occurred. By setting weights, the structure of the unweighted sample was adjusted to official data on age, gender, and region.

As for measuring political participation, we used questionnaire items that followed the World Value Surveys conventions for measuring political participation and that depart from the theoretical foundations laid above. We divide political participation into two types—traditional and nontraditional. The FES Youth Study dataset provides four measures for each type of political participation.

Departing from the literature, we included political trust in our analysis as a possible driver of political participation. We selected nine institutions that are traditionally included in the measurements of political and institutional trust: parliament, national and local government, political parties, police, judiciary, trade unions, the European Union, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Trust was measured on a 5-point Likert scale from "not at all" to "fully trust."

Next to political trust, we also give considerable attention to the concept of political ego identity. Following Gentry's approach and using the FES Youth Study data, we constructed a categorical variable with four political ego identity categories. For the salience dimension, we used two questions from the survey: (i) how much are you personally interested in politics and (ii) how often do you discuss politics with your family or acquaintances? The answers are on a 5-point Likert scale, and we recoded "don't know" answers as zero. As a result, the salience dimension runs from 0 to 10 points.

The commitment dimension uses four questions from the survey. These include left-right ideological self-positioning and three attitudinal questions on public policy issues: (i) incomes of the poor and the rich should be made more equal; (ii) government ownership of business and industry should be increased; (iii) government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for. We recoded the answers in such a way that "don't know" and "no answer" received 0 points, the attitude "in between" scored 1 point, a milder expression of attitude scored 2 points (rather agree/disagree), and a stronger expression of attitude scored 3 points (strongly agree/disagree). Left-right self-placement was also recoded so that no placement received zero points, positions between three and eight received 1 points, and strong ideological positions (at the extreme ends of the scale) received 2 points. The commitment dimension thus ranged from 0 to a maximum of 11 points. Based on these two dimensions, we then constructed four types of political ego identity: "fully developed" are people with higher commitment and higher salience, "somewhat developed" have higher commitment but lower salience, "explorers" have higher salience but lower commitment, and "diffused" have both low commitment and low salience.

## 4 Empirical Findings

### *4.1 Traditional Political Participation*

When it comes to willingness to engage in political participation, the young generation shows relatively high interest in some forms of traditional participation. More than four out of five young people (81.3%) are willing to take part in the next parliamentary election in Slovakia. This is very much in line with previous findings that revealed an almost identical voting behavior in 2019 and 2014 in Slovakia (European Commission, 2021).

Another part of traditional participation is holding a political office. In our survey data, a question on political office combined previous experience with the willingness to assume political office. Although actual experience is rather low throughout Central Europe (which is understandable, given the age limit of the sample), almost two-thirds (62%) of young Slovakians say that they would, with some degree of probability, take a political office. Only a negligible share of them state that they have held such an office in the past (0.7%); interestingly, however, only about one-third reject the idea (32.7%).

Participation in the activities of volunteer or civil society organizations is not rare in Slovakia. More than one-fifth of young people (22%) declare that they have engaged in such activities in the past, while another third (36%) say they would be willing to do so in the future. Only 42% of people reject this type of participation altogether.

The fourth type of traditional political participation we studied is experience with, or willingness to work for, a political party or political group. Out of all participation activities for which we have data, this is the most frequently rejected activity. In Slovakia, 72% of young people reject working for a political party or political group, and only 7% admit to having experience of doing so. This may not be so surprising, as the model of the mass party has not been present in modern Slovakia and political parties do not enjoy a very positive reputation.

## *4.2 Non-traditional Political Participation*

Turning from the exercise of active/passive voting rights to more nontraditional forms of political participation, we see clear differences among several activities in terms of how much young people engage or refuse to engage. We measured four types of nontraditional political participation and asked young people whether they (1) had already participated in such activities, (2) had not yet participated, but were willing to do so, or (3) would refuse to participate in such activities (which we simultaneously use as a rate of rejection).

The activities most frequently reported were supporting an online petition and signing a list of political requests. Almost half the young people state that they have done these things in the past, with more than another fifth willing to do so. However, moving to other activities on the list, levels of engagement fall off steeply: the action ranking second in the order of frequency—giving up buying things for environmental or political reasons—has in the past been taken by 27%, which is 70% less than those supporting online petitions. On the other hand, over 40% of youth reject the idea that they would stop buying things for political or environmental reasons.

Only about one-fifth of young people have participated in a demonstration in the past, which is not surprising as Slovakia has a long history of low attendance at protests and demonstrations. However, the fact that more than half of young people (57%) reject this idea even for the future is quite surprising and essentially means that a majority of young people cannot conceive of participating in a demonstration in the future.

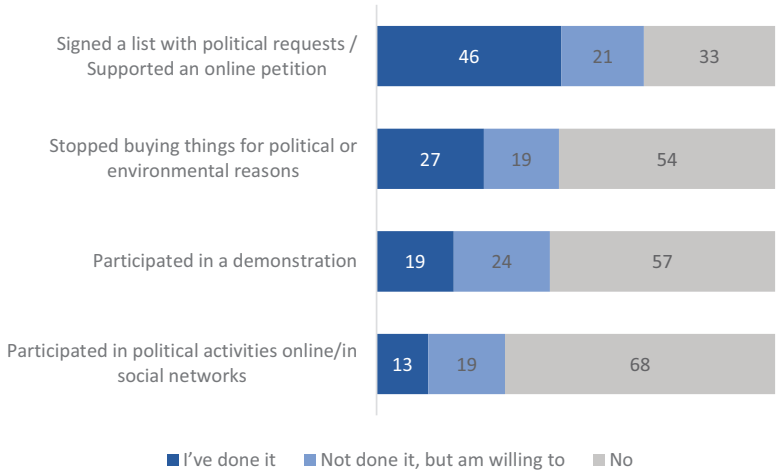



**Fig. 1** Non-traditional political participation of young Slovakians. (Source: FES Youth Study 2021)

Quite interestingly, the number of people who participated in political activities online and/or on social networks is the lowest of all. We find this interesting for the following reason. While one needs to be interested and knowledgeable to engage in any type of political participation, it is online activities that have the lowest costs attached to them. A young person may carry out an act of political participation from home or school, simply using her smartphone connected to a social network. Nevertheless, the number of young people who have done or are willing to do this is even lower than the number willing to participate in demonstrations or boycott consumer goods for political reasons (Fig. 1).

Another perspective on political participation is provided by the share of young people who reject the idea of the respective participatory activities. Signing a list with political requests or an online petition is rejected by about one-third of young people. However, more than half (54%) reject the idea of making consumer choices for political reasons. Moving further down the list in ascending order of rejection rate, participating in demonstrations is rejected by 57%, participating in political activities online and/or on social networks (by 68%, and, finally, working for a political party or a political group by 72%).

From this point of view, it seems that nontraditional types of political participation have considerably higher rejection rates than traditional forms of political participation (except for working for a political party). These figures thus contradict the hypothesis that young people are shifting from traditional to more nontraditional forms of political participation, at least in Slovakia.

### 4.3 Political Trust and Participation

Much of the research (e.g., Hooghe & Marien, 2013) highlights the link between trust in political institutions and political participation. We therefore examine political trust among young people in Slovakia in order to see whether this helps to explain young people's political participation. We find that young people's trust in selected political institutions is lower than that of the general population, where political trust in certain institutions is up to twice as high as among youth in Slovakia.

Comparing several political and international institutions, the European Union is the most trusted among young people in Slovakia. Almost 10% of Slovakian youth trust the EU fully, and more than an additional quarter trusts the EU quite a lot. Police and NATO are the second and third most trusted institutions, with around 30% of youth expressing a degree of trust in them.

Going further down the list, we find that institutions related to national politics are the least trusted (Fig. 2). The extent to which youth in Slovakia trust political parties, the national parliament, and the government is less than one-third of the trust expressed in the EU or NATO.

The low level of trust in national political institutions could be a reason for relatively low political participation. In order to see whether these issues are related, we performed a correlational analysis.

The results are somewhat surprising. Whether we look at traditional or nontraditional form of political participation, there is almost no association between nine indicators of political trust on the one hand and seven measures of political participation on the other. This finding holds true for both traditional and nontraditional forms of political participation. The majority of the correlation coefficients are very weak (below 0.1 in absolute value), which indicates an almost nonexistent relationship between trust and political participation. None of the correlation coefficients are even of medium strength (above 0.3 in absolute value), which would suggest at least a degree of relationship.

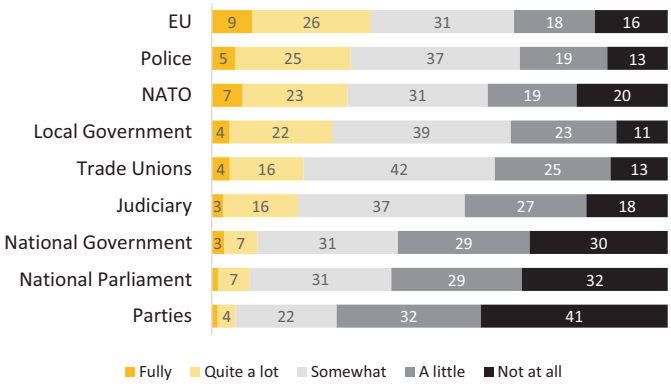



**Fig. 2** Trust in political institutions. (Source: FES Youth Study 2021)

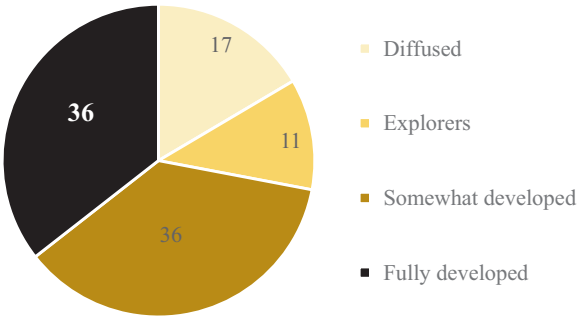



**Fig. 3** Share of political ego identity among Slovak youth (in percent). (Source: FES Youth Study 2021, Authors' calculations)

## *4.4 Political Ego Identity in Slovak Youth*

When examining political participation from the perspective of Bobbi Gentry (2018), we see there are various groups of people with distinct levels of both salience and commitment in regards to politics. On the one hand, almost one-fifth of young people have rather low levels of both salience and commitment and thus fall under the category "diffused." On the other hand, more than one-third of young people (36%) score higher than average for both dimensions and thus could be considered "fully developed." The rest of the population of young people (precisely 47%) score low for one of the dimensions and high for the other (Fig. 3).

The levels of salience and commitment can and most likely will change as young people mature. When we compare three age cohorts for which we have data, the pattern is rather clear. The share of people with low salience and low commitment—"diffused"—decreases as people grow older. While 21% of those aged 14 to 18 are categorized as "diffused," this share decreases to about 13% among those aged 25 to 29. On the other hand, the data also shows an increase in the share of people with a fully developed political ego identity from 31% in those aged 14 to 18 to 39% in the oldest group aged 25 to 29. This is in line with the European Commission's findings that interest in politics increases with age. Although the age categories reported in the Commission's report are different, the general trend is that interest in politics increases from the teenage years to the 20 s and 30 s and also continues to rise as people grow into their peak earning years (40 s and 50 s) (Fig. 4).

## *4.5 Political Ego Identity and Traditional Political Participation*

The theoretical assumption is that the more developed a person's political ego identity (PEI), the more willing they should be to engage in various forms of political participation. Looking at the voting intention, there is a clear pattern showing that people with fully developed PEI have the highest intention to vote (over 90%). On the other hand, the least developed group, "diffused," has the lowest intention to vote (65%: see Table 1 for details).

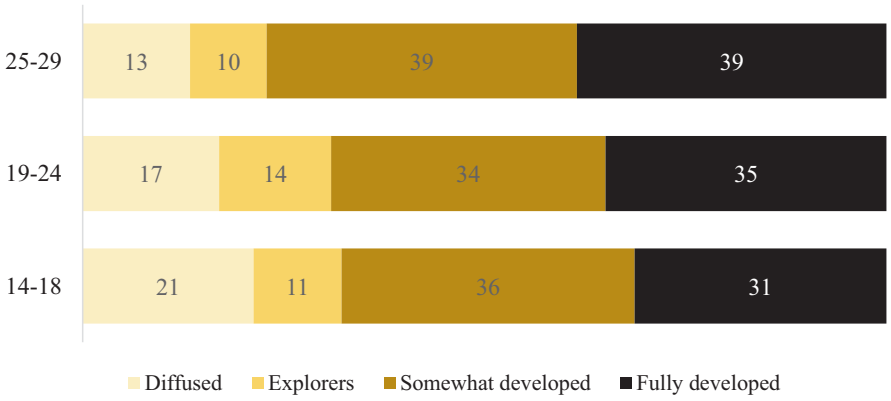



**Fig. 4** Composition of political ego identity in age cohorts. (Source: FES Youth Study 2021, Authors' calculations)

**Table 1** Vote intention by political ego identity

| PEI | Intend to vote (%) |
|---|---|
| Diffused | 65 |
| Explorers | 86 |
| Somewhat developed | 78 |
| Fully developed | 91 |

Source: FES Youth Study 2021, Authors' calculations

People with differently developed political ego identities have statistically significant differences in terms of their willingness to assume a political function. The least developed—"diffused"—have by far the lowest share of people who would fulfil such a function gladly (3%) or probably/maybe (36%), while simultaneously having the largest share of people rejecting the idea (50%). On the other hand, the "fully developed" have the highest share of people gladly willing to hold political office (21%; with another 54% saying maybe or probably). Again, "explorers" and "somewhat developed" occupy the intermediate ranks in that they are more likely to engage in political participation than the "diffused," but less likely than the "fully developed."

When it comes to working for a political party or political group, almost 72% of youth reject this idea on average. However, there are differences based on their political ego identity. Among the "diffused," about 2% state that they have worked in a party or political group before, while 9% of the "fully developed" have done so. On the other hand, while almost nine out of ten "diffused" reject this idea, the same is true of only 64% of the "fully developed." This supports the assumption that the participation rate increases as we move from the least to the most developed PEI.

A similar pattern can be found in relation to participation in volunteer activities or civil society organizations. Among the "fully developed," 26% report that they have engaged in this type of participation in the past, while the same is true of only

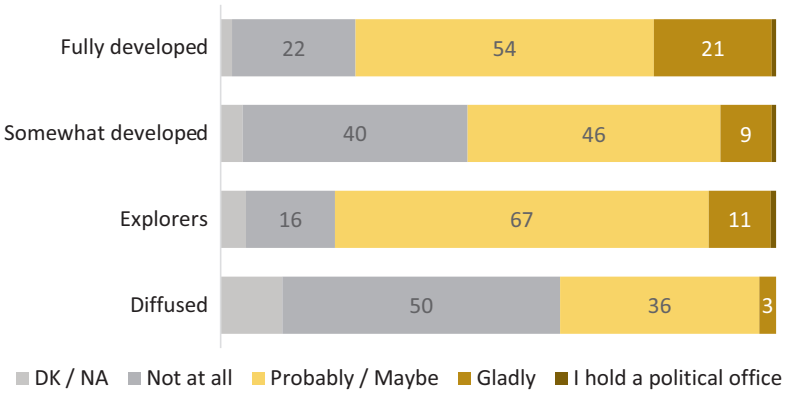



**Fig. 5** Willingness to hold political office, by PEI. (Source: FES Youth Study 2021, Authors' calculations)

16% among the "diffused." The rejection rate is 37% among the "fully developed," but over 50% among the "diffused."

In both activities shown in Fig. 6, we see that the participation rate of "explorers" is even higher than that of the "fully developed." While we found no explanation for this phenomenon in the data, it is another indication that the dimension of salience plays a greater role in Slovakia than the dimension of commitment in explaining young people's political participation. The same pattern also emerges when we look at voting intentions and willingness to hold political office (Fig. 5) among "explorers" (high salience and low commitment) and compare with the "somewhat developed" (low salience and high commitment). "Explorers" exhibit higher rates of engagement and lower rates of rejection of political participation than the "somewhat developed."

## *4.6 Political Ego Identity and Non-traditional Political Participation*

In the context of nontraditional political participation of young people, we measured four types of activities. In regard to political ego identity, the same pattern emerges in all four activities that we have already described for traditional forms of participation. The "fully developed" and the "explorers" have significantly higher participation rates (and lower rejection rates) compared to the "diffused." For the sake of conciseness, Fig. 6 shows the comparison of the "fully developed" and the "diffused" in all four nontraditional forms of political participation activities.

Signing a list of political demands or an online petition appears to be an activity that most of the "fully developed" have already engaged in. Almost another quarter (22%) of them are willing to engage in this activity, while about the same share of

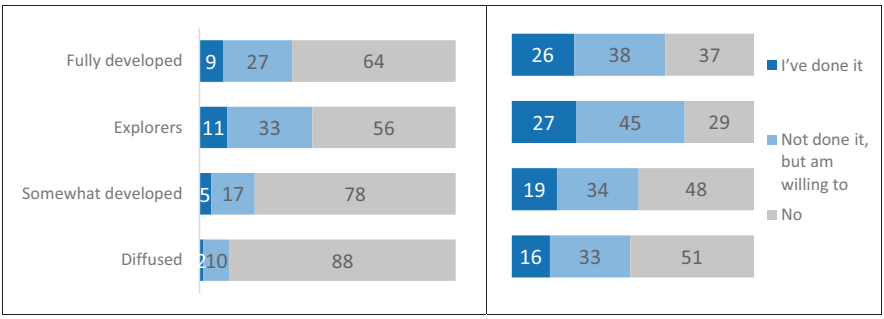



**Fig. 6** Traditional political participation among Slovakian youth. (**a**) Left: Have worked in a political party or political group. (**b**) Right: Have participated in volunteer or civil society organization activities. (Source: FES Youth Study 2021, Authors' calculations)

the "fully developed" reject it (23%). On the other hand, there are also people among the "diffused" who have already engaged in this activity, albeit to a considerably lesser extent (33%); however, half of them reject this form of participation (50%).

When it comes to making political consumer choices, over one-third of the "fully developed" state that they have already done this in the past, with another 17% of young people in this category willing to do so in the future. Among the "diffused," on the other hand, only less than one-fifth have done this (19%) and about the same share (18%) is willing to do so, which leaves a large majority that rejects it (63%).

Participating in demonstrations is a type of activity where differences between the "fully developed" and the "diffused" are even more marked. More than one-quarter (28%) of the "fully developed" claim to have done so in the past, and a similarly large share (27%) is willing to do so. This leaves less than half of the "fully developed" that reject this activity. In contrast, only 8% of the "diffused" have participated in a demonstration in the past, while 72% reject this form of participation.

Finally, we looked at online political participation, both in the context of social networks and on the Internet in general. Almost one-quarter of the "fully developed" have engaged in such activity in the past, while among the "diffused," only 6% have done so and their rejection rate is considerably higher, with more than four out of five (82%) rejecting this type of activity compared to 55% of the "fully developed."

We see that the overall trend within nontraditional political participation is quite similar for all types of political ego identities, meaning that the ranking order of activities is the same for all types in terms of the share of people who accept or reject them. In other words, no type of political ego identity deviates to an extraordinary extent in preferring or rejecting a particular activity (Fig. 7).

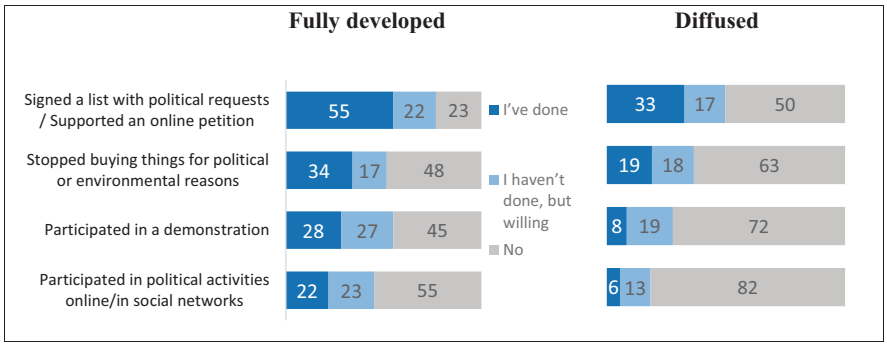



**Fig. 7** Non-traditional political participation by political ego identity. (Source: FES Youth Study 2021, Authors' calculations)

## 5 Conclusions

The academic literature has made persuasive claims about young people's engagement in politics being dependent on the type or form of participatory activity, arguing that they have less interest in formal means of participation, like voting and working for a political party, but relatively high interest in nontraditional political actions in the digital sphere (online petitions, protests orchestrated via social networks, etc.).

However, our research suggests otherwise. Our data refutes the claim that young people are more interested in nontraditional or online participation than in traditional political activities and voting. The Slovakian case suggests a relatively high popularity of electoral participation among young people combined with relatively low interest in other forms of political participatory activities. Thus, the introduction of modern, more "user-friendly" forms of political participation could not contribute to an increase in the level of engagement among young Slovaks. From the series of Youth Studies published by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Kajta & Mrozowicki, 2022; Kapranš et al., 2022; Bíró-Nagy & Szabó, 2022), we also know that young Slovakians are very similar to young people in other Central European countries. Thus, closer examination and critical review would be needed to provide more robust empirical evidence for the abovementioned theoretical assumptions on youth participation.

Our findings also challenge the well-established notion in the academic literature of beneficial consequences that are claimed to arise from trust within democratic regimes, particularly with regard to political participation. In the case of young people in Slovakia, it seems that proclaimed political trust does not correlate with political participation, whether traditional or nontraditional (see Appendix for all

correlation coefficients between trust in nine institutions on the one hand and seven participation measures on the other). Further research is needed in order to confirm that these findings also hold true for other countries or contexts, but should this be the case, it may have serious implications for efforts to increase political participation by building trust. If trust in political institutions has little or no impact on political participation, measures to increase political trust may not bring the expected results.

What seems to help us better understand the drivers of political participation, in both traditional and nontraditional forms, is the concept of political ego identity—the conscious acknowledgment by individual citizens of their personal political attitudes and of the importance of politics. Fully developed PEI drives the political participation of (not only) young people regardless of the type of participatory activity or other factors like gender, education, and ideological leanings.[1] It is also worth mentioning that of the two components of PEI, salience has a stronger predictive potential than commitment. In other words, young people who acknowledge the importance of politics in their everyday lives are more willing to participate in various forms of political activities despite the fact that they may not necessarily have strong or clear positions on various political issues.

Our findings support the emphasis which the literature on political participation (Fillieule & Neveu, 2019; Neundorf & Smets, 2017; Blanc et al., 2013; Gimpel et al., 2003) places on the prominent role of political socialization. PEI could be regarded primarily as a result of such socialization. However, we also acknowledge that there may be a lifecycle effect. We see in our data that the structure of PEI changes slightly between the age cohorts, with the "fully developed" group becoming larger as people grow older. Other data also support the assumption that the dimension of salience may be higher among older generations than among young people (European Commission, 2021). Leaving the discussion on agents of socialization for others to examine, our research findings underline that it is rather important for young people to learn about political behavioral patterns via interactions in their societal circles so that they can assume the important roles of active citizens.

[1] We conducted a logistic regression analysis for each of the eight political participation activities to test the effects.

## Appendix: Correlation Coefficients Between Political Trust and Political Participation

| Political institutions/ political participation | Willingness to assume political office | Signed a list with political requests/ supported an online petition | Participated in a demonstration | Participated in volunteer or civil society organization activities | Worked in a political party or political group | Stopped buying things for political or environmental reasons | Participated in political activities online/on social networks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parliament | 0.133 | 0.031 | 0.053 | 0.113 | 0.177 | 0.101 | 0.141 |
| Government | 0.116 | −0.018 | −0.018 | 0.080 | 0.154 | 0.073 | 0.089 |
| Political parties | 0.181 | 0.056 | 0.138 | 0.133 | 0.241 | 0.109 | 0.211 |
| Local government | 0.083 | 0.073 | 0.068 | 0.120 | 0.109 | 0.085 | 0.103 |
| Judiciary | 0.069 | 0.037 | 0.019 | 0.077 | 0.068 | 0.067 | 0.057 |
| Police | 0.062 | 0.008 | −0.056 | 0.035 | 0.045 | 0.047 | 0.016 |
| Trade Unions | 0.085 | 0.095 | 0.080 | 0.123 | 0.120 | 0.108 | 0.133 |
| EU | 0.071 | 0.073 | 0.100 | 0.091 | 0.061 | 0.158 | 0.110 |
| NATO | 0.083 | 0.069 | 0.068 | 0.084 | 0.067 | 0.122 | 0.097 |

Source: FES Youth Study 2021, Authors' calculation

## References


Almond, G., & Verba, S. (1963). *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton University Press.

Baboš, P., Vilagi, A. (2021). *Maturing prematurely: 2020/2021. A pandemic year the life of young people in Eastern Central Europe*. Bonn: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Bečević, Z., & Dahlstedt, M. (2022). On the margins of citizenship: youth participation and youth exclusion in times of neoliberal urbanism. *Journal of Youth Studies, 25*(3), 362–337.

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication and Society, 15*(5), 739–768.

Bíró-Nagy, A., & Szabó, A. (2022). *Youth study Hungary. Discontent. Polarisation, Pro-Europeanism*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e.V. ISBN 978-3-98628-068-0.

Blanc, A., Cavazza, N., Corbetta, P., Fournier, B., Galais, C., Garcìa-Albacete, G., et al. (2013). *Growing into politics: Contexts and timing of political socialisation*. ECPR Press.

Bunce, V. J., & Wolchik, S. L. (2006). Youth and Electoral Revolutions in Slovakia, Serbia, and Georgia. *The SAIS Review of International Affairs, Summer-Fall 2006, 26*(2), 55–65.

Caïs, J., Torrente, D., & Bolancé, C. (2021). The Effects of Economic Crisis on Trust: Paradoxes for Social Capital Theory. *Social Indicators Research, 153*, 173–192.

Cammaerts, B., Bruter, M., Banaji, S., Harrison, S., & Anstead, N. (2014). The myth of youth apathy: Young Europeans' critical attitudes toward democratic life. *American Behavioral Scientist, 58*(5), 645–664.

Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics*. Yale University Press.

de Wilde, P. (2021). Rebound? The short- and long-term effects of crises on public support and trust in European governance. In M. Riddervold, J. Trondal, & A. Newsome (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of EU crises. Palgrave studies in European union politics*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51791-5_39

Diamond, L. J., & Morlino, L. (2005). *Assessing the quality of democracy*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ellinas, A. A., & Lamprianou, I. (2014). Political trust in extremis. *Comparative Politics, 46*(2), 231–250. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43664100

European Commission. (2021). *The situation of young people in the European Union. Accompanying document to the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*. European Commission. Available on 15 June 2022 at: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/87755946-2cda-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1

Fillieule, O., & Neveu, E. (Eds.). (2019). *Activists forever?* Cambridge University Press.

Gentry, B. (2018). *Why youth vote. Identity, inspirational leaders and independence*. Springer.

Gimpel, J. G., Lay, C. J., & Schuknecht, J. E. (2003). *Cultivating democracy. Civic environments and political socialization in America*. Brooking Institute Press.

Hooghe, M., & Marien, S. (2013). A comparative analysis of the relation between political trust and forms of political participation in Europe. *European Societies, 15*(1), 131–152.

Hooghe, M., Stolle, D., & Stouthuysen, P. (2004). Head start in politics: The recruitment function of youth organizations of political parties in Belgium (Flanders). *Party Politics, 10*(2), 193–121.

Kajta, J., & Mrozowicki, A. (2022). *Young people in Poland. Between disappointment with the state and hope for a better life*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Kapraňš, M., Rämmer, A., Kulm, M. L., Labanauskas, L., & Rasnaca, L. (2022). *Youth study baltic countries*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Kitanova, M. (2020). Youth political participation in the EU: Evidence from a cross-national analysis. *Journal of Youth Studies, 23*(7), 819–836.

Lieberkind, J., & Bruun, J. (2021). The reserved young citizens of the Nordic countries. In H. Biseth, B. Hoskins, & L. Huang (Eds.), *Northern lights on civic and citizenship edu-*

*cation, a cross-national comparison of Nordic data from ICCS*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66788-7

Loader, B. (2007). *Young citizens in the digital age. Political engagement, young people and new media*. Routledge.

Maggini, N. (2017). *Young people's voting behaviour in Europe, A comparative perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Marien, S., Hooghe, M., & Quintelier, E. (2010). Inequalities in non- institutionalised forms of political participation: A multi-level analysis of 25 countries. *Political Studies, 58*, 187–213.

Neundorf, A., & Smets, K. (2017). *Political Socialisation and the Making of Citizens.* https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935307.013.98

Norris, P. (2002). *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. Cambridge University Press.

Norris, P. (2003). Young People and Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?. Paper presented to the council of Europe Symposium, 'Young people and democratic institutions: From disillusionment to participation', Strasbourg, November 27–28. Available on-line.: https://www.academia.edu/2748790/Young_people_and_political_activism

O'Toole, T., Lister, M., Marsh, D., Jones, S., & McDonagh, J. (2003). Tuning out or left out? *Participation and non-participation among young people, Contemporary Politics, 9*(1), 45–61.

Pattie, C., et al. (2004). *Citizenship in Britain: Values, participation and democracy*. Cambridge University Press.

Pickard, S., Bowman, B., & Arya, D. (2020). 'We are radical in our kindness': The political socialisation, motivations, demands and protest actions of young environmental activists in Britain. *Youth and Globalization, 2*(2), 251–280. https://doi.org/10.1163/25895745-02020007

Plutzer, E. (2002). Becoming a habitual voter: Inertia, resources, and growth in young adulthood. *The American Political Science Review, 96*(1), 41–56.

Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.

Schraff, D. (2021). Political trust during the Covid-19 pandemic: Rally around the flag or lockdown effects? *European Journal of Political Research, 60*, 1007–1017.

Sloam, J. (2014). 'The outraged young': Young Europeans, civic engagement and the new media in a time of crisis. *Information, Communication & Society, 17*(2), 217–231. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.868019

Sloam, J., & O'Loughlin, B. (2021). From waves of crisis to sustainable public policy: The everyday politics of young londoners. *Political Insight, 12*(3), 24–27.

Sloam, J., Pickard, S., & Henn, M. (2022). Young people and environmental activism: The transformation of democratic politics. *Journal of Youth Studies, 25*, 683. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2056678

# Young People's Forms of Political Expression: Radicalization, Hostility to Democracy, and Disintegration in Eastern Europe?

**Marius Harring**

**Contents**



## 1 Introduction

For several years now, Europe has been facing a range of social, (geo)political, and economic crises that interlock, overlap, and exacerbate preexisting problems such as poverty, social inequality, and educational disadvantage. This did not begin with the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis. Rather, its roots go back to the financial crisis of 2008, and it continued in the form of the 2015 refugee crisis, the Brexit crisis of 2016–2020, the climate crisis—which has increasingly become the focus of public awareness since the Fridays for Future movement was launched in 2018—and the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 with all its attendant consequences and uncertainties. At the same time, growing tendencies toward radicalization can be observed in parts of the population all over Europe. In Germany, for example, the Pegida movement, which opposes the perceived "Islamization of the Occident," has a mindset that is racist and ethnic popular at its core and includes significant proportions of right-wing extremist thought. Another example is the storming of the Bundestag by right-wing extremists together with so-called *Wutbürger* (enraged citizens) and *Querdenker* ("lateral thinkers"), which must be regarded as an attack

M. Harring (✉)
University of Mainz, Mainz, Germany
e-mail: harring@uni-mainz.de



M. Harring (ed.), *Growing Up in Times of Crisis*, Contributions to Political Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58626-2_8

on democratic institutions and which—albeit on a smaller scale—was driven by similar motives to the January 6 attack on the Capitol in Washington, DC. The most recent example is the suppression of the *Reichsbürgerbewegung* (*Reich* citizens' movement), which rejects the Federal Republic of Germany as a sovereign state and which was planning a coup and had already put together a shadow cabinet. In France, Marine le Pen, a right-wing populist candidate, only narrowly lost the last presidential elections. In contrast, Italy is now under the rule of a right-wing extremist party in the shape of Fratelli d'Italia, headed by President Giorgia Meloni. In Hungary, authoritarian and nationalist developments have been in evidence for several years, as is shown by the reelection of Viktor Orbán in 2010. Human rights are being systematically limited in Hungary, for example, by new laws against homosexuality and by a restrictive asylum policy. Additionally, the state of emergency imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic enables Viktor Orbán to rule by decree. Poland too has experienced a noticeable swing to the right. The right-wing conservative party PiS, elected in 2015, has not only effectively rescinded the right to abortion and penalized its practice but also implemented judicial reforms involving the passing of a number of laws that abolish the division of power and undermine the independence of the judiciary and the press in violation of principles of constitutionality (see also Bucholc & Komornik, 2019; Baczyńska, 2021). All these political developments may be read as expressions of growing social uncertainty and could ultimately suggest that democracy itself may be experiencing a crisis. Longitudinal studies on political socialization (Heitmeyer, 2002–2010) show that people in situations of uncertainty can tend to develop simplified, extreme values and orientations. The attitudes resulting from such a mindset are rooted in the feeling that they are losing control of their own values. This is all the more true when people are in danger of becoming isolated, when they have feelings of uncertainty about their personal goals, and when they feel helpless with respect to shaping their own future. The consequences of exclusion are demoralization, deprivation, and disintegration coupled with the subjective sense of being unable to control or influence the circumstances of one's life. Against the background of these political developments and scientific findings, questions arise about the extent to which democracy in Europe is experiencing a crisis and how young people—the future of Europe—relate to democracy, what their political stances are, and what possible disintegration tendencies they identify from their own perspective. This serves as the point of departure for the present chapter, which seeks to supply concrete answers to these questions based on a representative survey conducted in 2021 among 9900 young people between the ages of 14 and 29 in seven Central Eastern European states. The study forms part of the broad-based, international youth studies commissioned and funded by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES; for more details, see Harring et al., 2023).

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Against the background of this chapter's core question, we will begin by examining the questions of how to characterize democracy, what defines democracy, and how it might be endangered by disintegrative tendencies in the population. In so doing, we will reference the concept of group-focused enmity (see Heitmeyer, 2002–2010).

Democracy is a form of political organization built upon the sovereignty of the people. The authority of the state proceeds from the people, and the organs of the state are directly or indirectly legitimized by the people. This is based on the participation of all citizens in political decision-making in the form of regular free and secret elections (LpB BW, 2018). Modern liberal democracies also have additional core characteristics, including the division of legislative, executive, and judicial power, the rule of law, and guaranteed basic and human rights that serve to protect human dignity (see, for example, Vorländer, 2020). Thus, democracy is not only a form of government and political order, it also gives rise to principles for social coexistence, which are expressed, inter alia, in freedom of opinion and religion and have their roots in shared social values such as liberty, justice, solidarity, mutual respect, and the equality of all people (for a detailed examination of the term "democracy," see, e.g., Marschall, 2014; Buchstein et al., 2021; Vorländer, 2017, 2020). Accordingly, one primary measure of the quality of democracy is the treatment of minorities (BJK, 2017). Inequality of opportunity, prejudice, and intolerance of certain social, ethnic, and religious groups can be read as expressions of an antidemocratic mentality that may lead to denigration and discrimination and can culminate in an ideology of human devaluation. An ideology is defined by Heitmeyer (2008, p. 37) as "a system of concepts and related convictions that serve to assert power interests or preserve hierarchies and social superiority." To fulfill this function, social reality is reproduced in a distorted fashion, and social constructs are naturalized or biologized. The concept of group-focused enmity (see Heitmeyer 2002–2010; Zick et al. 2008; Zick et al., 2016) is employed to study both the sphere of behavior—specific derogatory or discriminatory acts—and negative attitudes and prejudices, many of them widespread, with respect to minorities. According to Zick et al. (2011, p. 42), prejudices not only serve "to justify de facto existing discrimination based on notions of inequality, they also contribute toward creating and sustaining discriminatory structures and thought patterns. Prejudices establish worldviews and create realities. Thus they are ultimately reflected in the distribution of power, influence, and wealth, in access to education and housing, in health, and in many other spheres" (see also Zick et al., 2010). Initial analyses of group-focused enmity focused primarily on six forms of denigration: racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, sexism, and homophobia. These initial analyses have been supplemented in more recent studies (e.g., Zick et al., 2016) by emphases on other issues, such as the denigration of transsexual, homeless, or disabled people. The authors of the study argue that group-focused enmity is a syndrome, citing empirical evidence that favors the assumption that persons who denigrate a specific group of people are highly likely to also express prejudices against other minorities within

their own society (Heitmeyer & Mansel, 2008, pp. 21ff.; Zick et al., 2008). The present study focused on homosexual people and couples, people belonging to the Jewish and Islamic faith groups, drug addicts, and the Sinti and Roma. Group-focused enmity was identified in a compressed format by ascertaining possible prejudices or negative attitudes toward these groups of people as hypothetical neighbors. We thus provide only an approximation of the complex construct of group-focused enmity, but then it was not the purpose of the study to take all its facets into account. The present data merely provides indications about possible prejudices, and, in any case, young people cannot yet be assumed to have a fully developed ideology of inequality. However, negative attitudes, prejudices, and intolerance can manifest in the structure of a personality in the long term and may mature into denigrating actions and, in extreme cases, even physical or psychological violence against minorities. Thus, it is important to reveal these potential tendencies.

## 3 Study Design

### *3.1 Methodology*

The empirical basis of the present study is supplied by a quantitative ex post-facto survey with a cross-sectional design and one survey date. The survey was subsequently augmented by means of qualitative interviews with young people in order to examine selected issues in greater depth. The purpose of the study was to capture the living conditions of young people in the Baltic and Central Europe—specifically, the Visegrád states—from their own perspective and to draw comparisons. The seven countries included in the study are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. A representative population sample was drawn from all seven countries as the basis of the survey.

The interviews were conducted simultaneously from April to July 2021 in all seven countries by the IPSOS Institute. On account of the Covid-19 pandemic, the survey was conducted online instead of face-to-face.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a quantitative survey was developed in the form of a standardized questionnaire consisting primarily of closed responses. The questionnaire is based on a previously validated instrument used for the FES youth studies in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe as well as Central Asia, which was adapted for living conditions in the Baltic states and the other four Central Eastern European countries and augmented by country-specific questions. The roughly 120 questions of the overall questionnaire comprise approximately 500 items grouped into eight thematic complexes: values, religion, and trust; family; migration/mobility; education; occupation; and politics. These thematic complexes are augmented by sociodemographic questions and a module specific to each country. The implementation of country-specific questions served to assess national interests and needs. In most cases, the closed responses were constructed using a

3- or 5-point Likert scale. The same standardized questionnaire was used in all seven participating countries in order to facilitate regional and longitudinal comparisons. To ensure validity, the catalog of questions was translated and back-translated in a double-blind procedure before the field phase. The questionnaire was translated from English into the various target languages and then translated back into English by another translator in order to verify the accuracy and unambiguity of the questions.

The quantitative data were analyzed in SPSS on the basis of the thematic focus of this chapter using univariate and bivariate analysis procedures and significance tests to examine statistically relevant correlations. Chi-square-based test procedures were applied for this purpose.

## *3.2 Population and Sample*

At the time of the study in 2021, the age cohort between 14 and 29 years comprised 11.32 million young people.[1] The most populous country in the study is Poland, with 37.86 million residents, while Estonia, with a population of 1.33 million, has the smallest population.

The proportion of young people relative to the total population is roughly equal in all participating countries and averages 16% (±1%). A representative sample of n = 9900 young people was drawn for the quantitative study. This sample enables conclusions to be drawn about the population. A sample of 1500 was compiled in all the countries except Estonia and Latvia, where the sample size was 1200 young people. Sociodemographic aspects such as age, sex, region of residence, and education played a key role in the composition of the sample. In what follows, we will discuss the crucial characteristics of the sample as summarized in Table 1, touching on some of the related phenomena and trends in the overall population. Many of these sociodemographic factors affect the well-being of young people and their scope for action.

The sample takes into account the age structure of the population. Thus, a total of 1860 (18.8%) young people aged between 14 and 18 years, 4149 (41.9%) aged between 19 and 24 years, and 3891 (39.3%) aged between 25 and 29 years were included in the study. The aging of the population represents a relevant demographic trend in all seven countries and implies numerous challenges for political

[1] Among the participating countries, young people account for the following shares of the overall population (rounded figures for 2020/21; number in parentheses = proportion of overall population): 6.26 million (16.5%) in Poland (Statistical Offices Poland, 2020); 1.6 million (15%) in the Czech Republic (Czech Statistical office, 2021); 1.57 million (16%) in Hungary (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2020); 0.93 million (17%) in Slovakia (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2022; 0.45 million (16%) in Lithuania (Official Statistics Portal Lithuania, 2021); 0.31 million (16%) in Latvia (Official Statistics of Latvia, 2020); 0.20 million (15.5%) in Estonia (Statistics Estonia, 2021).

**Table 1** Sample according to sociodemographic criteria, by country

| Sociodemographic criteria | Countries (Absolute frequency. Percentage figures in parentheses refer to the country in question) | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Estonia | Latvia | Lithuania | Czech Republic | Hungary | Poland | Slovakia | Total |
| *Total* | 1200 | 1200 | 1500 | 1500 | 1500 | 1500 | 1,00 | 9900 |
| *Age*[a] | | | | | | | | |
| 14/15–18 years | 171 (14.3%) | 152 (12.7%) | 279 (18.6%) | 399 (26.6%) | 283 (18.9%) | 336 (22.4%) | 240 (16.0%) | 1860 (18.8%) |
| 19–24 years | 552 (46.0%) | 536 (44.7%) | 616 (41.1%) | 617 (41.1%) | 647 (43.1%) | 568 (37.9%) | 613 (40.9%) | 4149 (41.9%) |
| 25–29 years | 477 (39.8%) | 512 (42.7%) | 605 (40.3%) | 484 (32.3%) | 570 (38.0%) | 596 (39.7%) | 647 (39.3%) | 3891 (39.3%) |
| *Educational level* | | | | | | | | |
| Low qualifications[b] | 268 (22.3%) | 222 (18.5%) | 371 (24.7%) | 411 (27.4%) | 274 (18.3%) | 316 (21.1%) | 214 (14.3%) | 2076 (21.0%) |
| Intermediate qualifications[c] | 556 (46.3%) | 558 (46.5%) | 526 (35.1%) | 764 (50.9%) | 834 (55.6%) | 845 (56.3%) | 800 (53.3%) | 4883 (49.3%) |
| High qualifications[d] | 376 (31.3%) | 420 (35.0%) | 603 (40.2%) | 325 (21.7%) | 392 (26.1%) | 339 (22.6%) | 486 (32.4%) | 2941 (29.7%) |
| *Gender* | | | | | | | | |
| Female | 758 (63.2%) | 738 (61.5%) | 909 (60.6%) | 807 (53.7%) | 792 (52.8%) | 728 (48.5) | 805 (53.7%) | 5537 (55.9%) |
| Male | 442 (36.8%) | 462 (38.5%) | 591 (39.4%) | 693 (46.2%) | 708 (47.2%) | 772 (51.5%) | 695 (46.3%) | 4363 (44.1%) |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Region of residence* | | | | | | | | |
| Urban | 709 (59.1%) | 757 (63.1%) | 982 (65.5%) | 861 (57.4%) | 853 (56.9%) | 863 (57.5%) | 636 (42.4%) | 5661 (57.2%) |
| Urban/rural | 182 (15.2%) | 182 (15.2%) | 249 (16.6%) | 182 (12.1%) | 195 (13.0%) | 225 (15.0%) | 226 (15.1%) | 1441 (14.6%) |
| Rural | 309 (25.8%) | 261 (21.8%) | 269 (17.9%) | 457 (30.5%) | 452 (30.1%) | 412 (27.5%) | 638 (42.5%) | 2798 (28.3%) |
| *Financial situation* | | | | | | | | |
| We don't have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating, etc.) and food | 34 (2.8%) | 45 (3.8%) | 63 (4.2%) | 15 (1.0%) | 77 (5.1%) | 42 (2.8%) | 55 (3.7%) | 331 (3.3%) |
| We have enough money for basic bills, but not for clothes and shoes | 130 (10.8%) | 126 (10.5%) | 174 (11.6%) | 83 (5.5%) | 176 (11.7%) | 195 (13.0%) | 111 (7.4%) | 995 (10.1%) |
| We have enough money for food, clothes, and shoes, but not enough for more expensive things (fridge, TV set, etc.) | 356 (29.7%) | 369 (30.8%) | 418 (27.9%) | 296 (19.7%) | 527 (35.1%) | 430 (28.7%) | 407 (27.1%) | 2803 (28.3%) |
| We can afford to buy some more expensive items, but not expensive things such as a car or an apartment. | 403 (33.6%) | 465 (38.8%) | 579 (38.6%) | 813 (54.2%) | 609 (40.6%) | 605 (40.3%) | 660 (44.0%) | 4134 (41.8%) |
| We can afford whatever we need for a good living standard | 277 (23.1%) | 195 (16.3%) | 266 (17.7%) | 293 (19.5%) | 111 (7.4%) | 228 (15.2%) | 267 (17.8%) | 1637 (16.5%) |

Young people aged between 15 and 29 years, n = 9900; figures in absolute numbers and percent
In Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the respondents were aged between 14 and 29 years. In all other countries, the age of the respondents was between 15 and 29 years
Low education: No formal education or primary education
Medium education: vocational, technical secondary, or secondary education
High education: Bachelor's degree or higher (Master's/PhD)

decision-makers, especially in the fields of health, social security, and old-age insurance. According to calculations by the European Commission, the proportion of young people among the overall population will continue to decline,[2] and as it does, so will representation of young people's interests and needs in society. The population increase that can be observed in some countries is due not to a higher birth rate but to migration.

The standardized interview also succeeded in tracing the differences in access to education among young people. More than one-fifth (21.0%) have no school diploma at all or have only completed primary school. Within this group with low education, approximately one-fifth (21.6%) are 19 years old or older and can be assumed to have left the educational system with no qualifications or with only a primary school certificate.

Additionally, young people with low educational qualifications are more likely to live in rural areas,[3] while their financial situation is significantly worse[4] and the educational levels of their mothers and fathers are significantly lower. Young women are significantly less numerous in this group than young men. The educational qualifications of study participants tend to be higher in Lithuania and Latvia and lower in the Czech Republic and Poland.

The gender ratio of 4363 (44.1%) male and 5537 (55.9%) female respondents in the cross-sectional study slightly favors the female side.

Around 5661 (57.2%) young people live in urban surroundings, while 2798 (28.3%) grow up in rural areas. Almost two-thirds (62.4%) of young people aged between 25 and 29 live in urban settlements, while the same is true of roughly half (51.2%) of those aged between 14 and 18. This confirms the assumption of many studies that young people increasingly gravitate toward urban areas as they grow older. Among the countries in the study, Slovakia has the highest proportion (42.5%) of young people living in rural areas, while the Baltic states have the highest proportion of young people growing up in urban settings: almost 60% in Estonia (59.1%) and almost two-thirds (65.5%) of respondents in Lithuania. In order to determine economic status, young people were asked what they and their families could afford to buy. In this way, it was possible to establish their different standards of living, categorized in terms of the definitions of relative and absolute poverty (Butterwegge, 2020, 2021; Böhnke et al., 2018), and draw conclusions about the young people's

[2] According to the European Union's predictions for population development in member countries from 2016 to 2080, the population of all seven countries is expected to decline. The following changes are predicted between 2019 and 2080: Czech Republic: −7.2%; Hungary: −11.8%; Slovakia: −13.0%; Estonia: −13.2%; Poland: −23.6%; Latvia: −35.3%; and Lithuania: −43.2% (see Loew, 2019, p. 11).

[3] 34.2% of young people with low education live in rural areas and 48.5% live in urban areas. In contrast, 20.7% of young people with high education live in rural areas and 67.1% live in urban areas.

[4] 20% of young people with low education do not have enough money to buy clothing or shoes, while the same is true of only 7.3% of young people with high education.

economic situations and possible conditions of poverty; 331 respondents (3.3%) fall below the absolute poverty line and are unable to afford adequate food, heating, or electricity, and 995 (just under 10%) lack the financial means to buy clothes or shoes. A majority of 5.771 (58.3%) are economically comfortable and—at least to some extent—have sufficient purchasing power to afford luxury goods. Hungary has the largest proportion (16.8%) of young people stating that they are unable to afford clothing and shoes (average across all countries: 13.4%). At the same time, Hungary also has the lowest proportion (48%) of young people stating that they can afford to purchase goods over and above their everyday needs (average across all countries: 58.3%). The situation in the Czech Republic is very different. Here the proportion of young people affected by poverty is the lowest of all at 6.5% (average across all countries: 13.4%), while almost three-quarters (73.7%) grow up in stable financial conditions (average across all countries: 58.3%). These figures reflect the real situation in the various countries. Thus, Hungary, after Poland, is the country with the lowest per capita GDP, while the Czech Republic has the highest per capita GDP after Estonia.

## 4 Core Findings

### *4.1 Political Stance and Trust in Political Institutions*

The current young generation in Central Eastern Europe and the Baltic displays a surprising level of political engagement and—at least on the face of it—a clear tendency to favor the political center (see Fig. 1).

Self-identification with political fringe groups—both on the left and the right of the spectrum—is rare and tends to be confined to a small minority of young people.

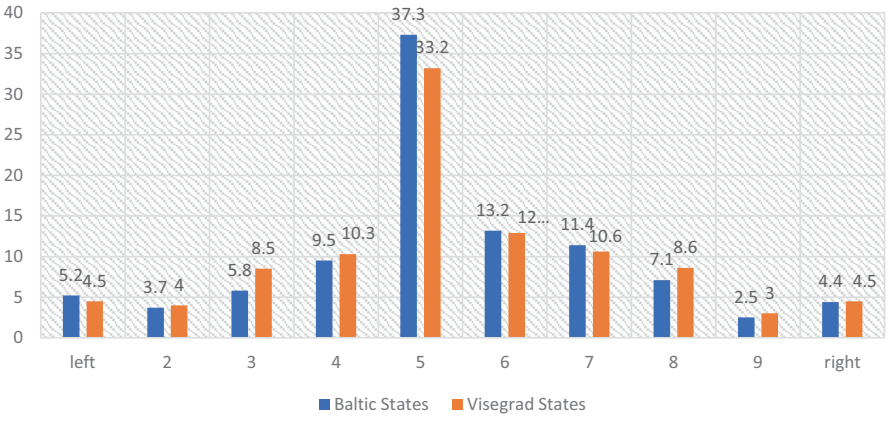



**Fig. 1** Ideological stanceYoung people aged between 14 and 29 years, n = 9900; figures in percent

The main factor in defining the extent to which young people gravitate toward the extremist poles seems to be the economic and political stability of their country (on this issue, see also Baboš & Világi, 2022). Additionally, attitudes in opposition to the current political majorities can be discerned that underscore young people's fundamentally critical attitudes and—at least in part—manifest themselves in the desire for political disassociation. Poland is a good example of this. Young Poles are displaying a certain shift to the left that can be regarded as a response to the political developments of recent years (see also Kajta & Mrozowicki, 2022; Pazderski, 2020). On the other hand, however, Hungary represents a good counterexample. Here, the current young generation has very evidently espoused conformity with the governing political class.

Independently of all political categorizations, one of the most important predictors of political stability or instability within a country is the trust of its people in political institutions (Devos et al., 2002; Rogge & Kittel, 2014). The available data suggests that trust may be more deeply entrenched among the Baltic youth than in the Central European countries in the study. In particular, the state's executive and judiciary organizations enjoy high levels of trust. The judiciary and the police have particularly high approval rates among young people in the Baltic states, where 40.2% have unlimited trust in the judiciary and 53.0% in the police. Approximately one-third also trust civil society organizations and local governments. This fundamental trust—far more overt than in Central Eastern Europe—points toward stable democratic conditions in the Baltic states and goes hand in hand with a high degree of subjectively perceived security (see also Beilmann et al., 2021; Kaprāns et al., 2022). In contrast, governments and parliaments at the national level, the national media, and the Church and other religious institutions meet with significantly more criticism. Political parties receive the lowest trust scores (Baltic states: 12.1%; CEE: 7.1%), while international alliances receive high levels of trust. The European Union is very popular with a majority (53.3%) of Baltic youth, and only 18.5% have a negative attitude toward the bloc (Fig. 2).

Similarly, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is accorded high trust by a clear majority of 55.8% of the Baltic population. The same is true of the armed forces of the Baltic states (54.0%). These figures are particularly interesting when one takes into account that the survey was conducted well before the outbreak of war in Ukraine. It appears that political and military organizations contribute to a sense of security among young people even in the absence of international crises. Against the background of current global threat levels, these trust levels are likely to have increased still more in the interim. The same is almost certainly true of the Central Eastern Europe youth as well, whose responses point to the prevalence of similar opinions as in the Baltic states. Trust levels in political institutions are similar, even though skepticism has recently increased and fewer respondents tend to express high trust.

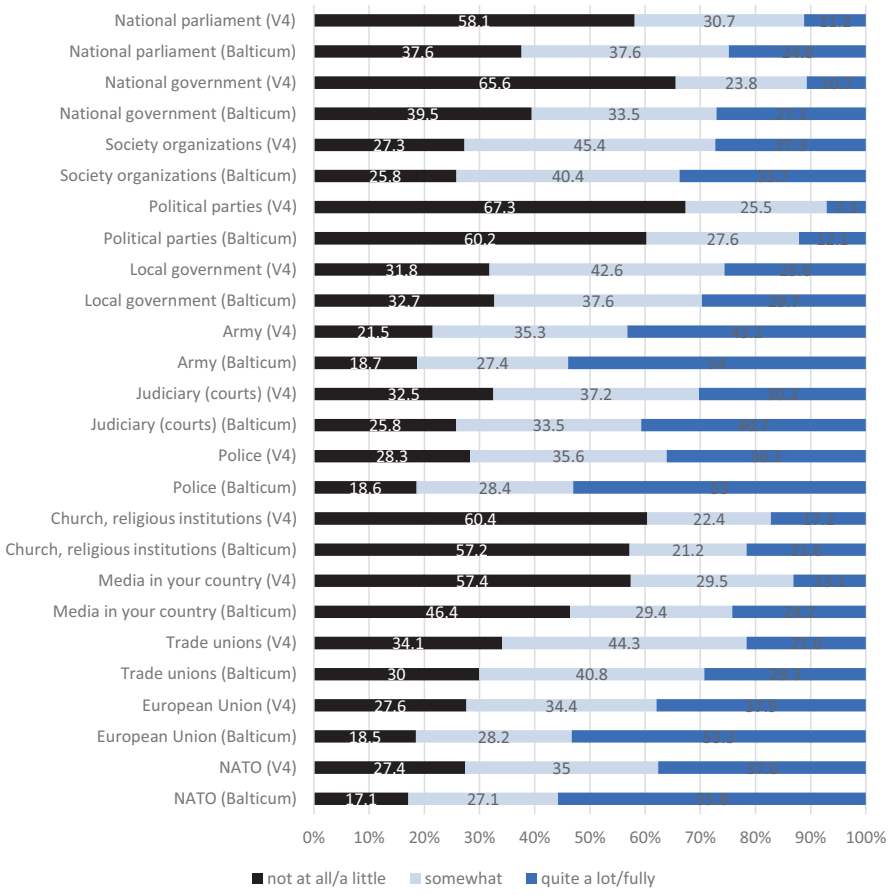



**Fig. 2** Trust in institutions in the Baltics and Central Eastern EuropeYoung people aged between 14 and 29 years, n = 9900; figures in percent

## *4.2 Views on Democracy*

Asked about their fundamental attitudes to different political systems, almost two-thirds of young people overall consider democracy to be a sound and favorable form of government (Baltic states: 65.7%; CEE: 63.9%). While this is a clear majority, one should not overlook the fact that one in ten (Baltic states: 9.5%; CEE: 9.7%) rejects democracy and one in four (Baltic states: 24.8%; CEE: 26.4%) has an ambivalent attitude to this form of sociopolitical commitment (see also Pazderski et al., 2018). One in five (Baltic states: 22.8%; CEE: 19.0%) regards dictatorship as the better form of government under certain circumstances. Consistent with this finding is the fact that one in two young people (50.2%) favors political leaders who rule with a strong hand for the good of the community. Attitudes such as this can be

shaped by fundamental political socialization processes. In other words, once people have internalized a mindfulness of democracy, the probability of their expressing support for authoritarian ideas decreases significantly. In numerical terms, this means that two-thirds of respondents (65.5%) who favor democracy categorically reject dictatorship as a form of government. These relationships can be observed throughout all the countries in the study, regardless of region. It is also primarily these young people who regard participation in elections as a civic duty; 61.7% of young people in the Baltic states and 54.0% in Central Eastern Europe agree with this statement either in principle or completely. Two-thirds (Baltic states: 66.5%; CEE: 67.3%) consider it important or very important to participate more actively in political processes, the more so as almost half the young people in the Baltic states (45.8%) and the Central Eastern European countries (47.3%) describe themselves as too ill-informed about politics at present. Only one in four young people in the Visegrád states (21.6%) and one in five in the Baltic states (23.4%) think that they have in-depth political knowledge (see also Deželan et al., 2021).

## *4.3 National Attitudes, Xenophobia, and Opinions About the EU*

Ever since the 2015 migration crisis, if not before, political campaigns in Central Eastern Europe have increasingly sought to place national interests front and center. In Hungary, in particular, a narrative opposing immigration has become established over the years (see Bíró-Nagy, 2021) that is evidently also being accepted by young people. Thus, almost two-thirds of young Hungarians (63%) believe that their country should not accept any more immigrants. Approximately one in three (29.2%) thinks it would be best if only Hungarians lived in Hungary. No other country in the study exhibits so explicit a nationalist attitude (see also Szabó & Bíró-Nagy, 2022), even if similar tendencies can also be observed among young people in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This attitude is generally accompanied by a highly developed national pride (see also Pazderski et al., 2018).

A more nuanced picture emerges when one examines the attitudes of young people in the Baltic states, where comparable nationalist tendencies cannot be observed. Rather, young people in these countries display a much more pronounced culture of welcome and less fear of strangers, coupled with a certain degree of national pride. In Lithuania, for example, only 29.1% of young people reject the admission of immigrants. No other country in the study has so pronounced a willingness to accept foreigners. Similar attitudes can be observed in the other two Baltic states, all of which have a significantly more open attitude than the Visegrád states. The same applies in the case of the opinion that only people of the same nationality should live in the country. Only one in six young people in the Baltic states shares this view, with young Lithuanians and Latvians in particular doing so significantly less frequently than their peers in Central Eastern Europe. They do, however, deem the

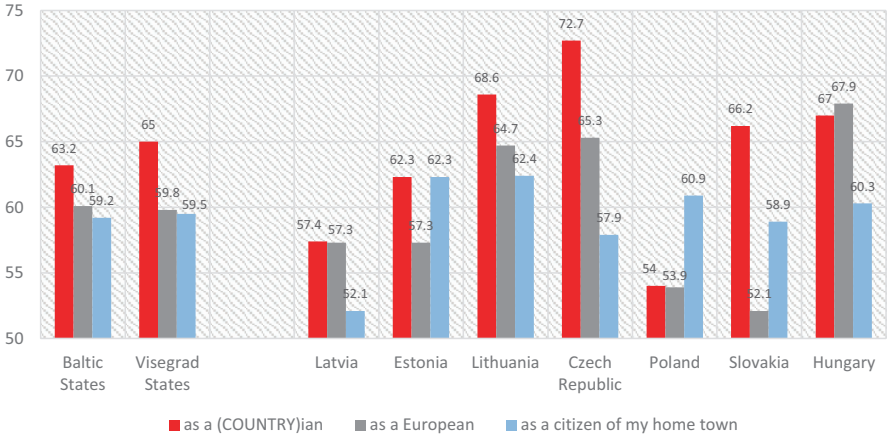



**Fig. 3** Sense of belonging/identificationYoung people aged between 14 and 29 years, n = 9900; responses: "very much/completely"; figures in percent

integration of people with immigrant backgrounds to be particularly important. On this issue, young people in the Baltic states favor a radical approach: over half of them—significantly more than among their peers in Central Eastern Europe—believe that immigrants should adopt the traditions and values of their host country (Estonia: 55.2%; Latvia: 52.0%; and Lithuania: 40.7%) (Fig. 3).

Additionally, a pronounced sense of national pride can be observed in Estonia in particular. Two-thirds of Estonians (64.5%) are proud to be citizens of their country, by far the highest proportion of any of the countries in the study. In contrast, the same is true of significantly fewer Lithuanians and Latvians.

That this attitude does not correlate either with disassociation or with concentration on one's own country emerges from the fact that young Estonians, along with their peers in Latvia and Poland, are least likely to identify in terms of their nationality or to regard themselves exclusively as citizens of their countries. Rather, it is regional identification that plays a key role in Estonia; 62.3% of Estonians identify as residents of their hometowns. Among the other countries, only Lithuania has similar levels of regional identification. However, this does not mean the absence of a European perspective; in fact, the opposite is the case. Pro-European attitudes can be observed on all significant issues, while over half (57.3%) simultaneously identify as Europeans. Leaving the EU is not a conceivable option for 72.6% of Estonians. This unequivocally positive attitude to the EU is most frequent in the Baltic states, where three-quarters of young people in the study (74.2%) clearly reject the notion of leaving the European Union. In contrast, "only" two-thirds of young people in the Central Eastern European countries share this attitude, while one in six (15.1%) is uncertain (see also Hahn-Laudenberg & Abs, 2020). The same is true of only one in ten in the Baltic states (10.7%).

### *4.4 Intolerance Toward Social, Ethnic, and Religious Groups*

To assess the attitudes of young people in Central Eastern Europe and the Baltic states to various social, ethnic, and religious population groups that represent sociodemographic minorities in the seven countries, the study asked them how they would feel about their neighbors if they displayed certain attributes. We asked the young people about five selected population groups: (a) homosexual people; adherence to (b) Jewish or (c) Islamic faith; (d) drug addicts; and (e) the Roma ethnic group.

Drug addicts are the subject of the highest degree of intolerance, with 8 out of 10 of those aged 14 to 29 expressing rejection of this group. The majority is also critical of living close to Roma families; 34.4% reject the idea out of hand, while another 37.5% express reservations (Table 2).

Clear disintegration tendencies can also be observed with respect to religious groups. Muslims in particular meet with low acceptance among young people in Central Eastern Europe, with approximately one-third (29.4%) rejecting them as potential neighbors. Another third (37.7%) has, at best, mixed feelings about this group. Negative attitudes toward members of the Islamic faith are stronger among young people in Slovakia and the Czech Republic in particular (see also Lavrič & Rutar, 2021).

While anti-Semitic tendencies are less widespread in comparison, they remain firmly entrenched among parts of the population. Almost one in two Poles (43.3%) and Slovaks (47.8%) has ambivalent feelings about potential Jewish neighbors, while 12.0% of Polish, 9.9% of Slovakian, and 15.1% of Hungarian young people find the idea of living next door to Jewish people entirely unthinkable.

Homophobic attitudes among Central Eastern European youth can be observed disproportionately often in Hungary and significantly less frequently in the Czech Republic.

Intolerance toward social, ethnic, and religious groups seems to be significantly stronger among Central Eastern European youth and comparatively less pronounced in the Baltic states—although one should not assume that the phenomenon is of negligible proportions among the Baltic youth.

## 5 Conclusion

Looking at the political attitudes of today's youth in the European countries in the study, it would be gravely mistaken to speak of a crisis in democracy. The overwhelming majority of young people regard values such as democratic awareness, tolerance, diversity of opinions, and respect for human rights as important pillars of social coexistence. At the same time, however, this should not obscure the fact that a small but not irrelevant proportion of the young generation espouses certain political attitudes that at least question democracy—whether directly or indirectly,

**Table 2** Intolerance toward social, ethnic, and religious groups

| | Country | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Opinion on Neighbors | Estonia | Latvia | Lithuania | Czech Republic | Hungary | Poland | Slovakia | Total |
| *Homosexual person or couple* | | | | | | | | |
| Bad/very bad | 14.2 | 16.2 | 17.4 | 7.5*** | 18.4*** | 12.4 | 17.4 | 14.8 |
| In between | 43.5*** | 25.3*** | 37.9*** | 18.2*** | 28.5 | 32.9 | 40.6*** | 32.3 |
| *Roma family* | | | | | | | | |
| Bad/very bad | 20.5*** | 30.9 | 27.5*** | 45.7*** | 45.0*** | 23.1*** | 44.3*** | 34.4 |
| In between | 42.6*** | 37.0 | 41.8** | 35.7 | 29.9*** | 40.3** | 36.1 | 37.5 |
| *Drug addicts* | | | | | | | | |
| Bad/very bad | 81.4 | 81.4 | 76.6* | 86.8*** | 81.7 | 64.5*** | 85.5*** | 79.6 |
| In between | 11.6 | 10.2 | 13.1 | 8.9*** | 9.3* | 21.1*** | 10.1 | 12.1 |
| *Jewish people* | | | | | | | | |
| Bad/very bad | 8.3 | 6.5*** | 7.3*** | 7.1*** | 15.1*** | 12.0 | 9.9 | 9.6 |
| In between | 56.3*** | 33.8*** | 45.1*** | 23.9*** | 33.3*** | 43.3* | 47.8*** | 40.2 |
| *Muslims* | | | | | | | | |
| Bad/very bad | 18.2*** | 17.4*** | 16.1*** | 35.3*** | 29.2*** | 22.7 | 30.4*** | 24.6 |
| In between | 51.5*** | 38.8 | 47.0*** | 33.3*** | 34.6*** | 40.5 | 42.3 | 40.9 |

Young people aged between 14 and 29 years, $n = 9.900$; figures in percent
Significance level: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

overtly, or covertly—and that even among those who clearly support democracy and its attendant values, there are some who act in contradiction of these values in everyday life. This is related to questions of inclusion and exclusion. In other words, whom do young people regard as belonging to society; who may receive certain privileges inherent in democracy; and who is perceived as competition for, or even as a threat to, their own existence? Group-focused enmity (see, for example, Heitmeyer, 2002–2010) among the young generation in Central Eastern Europe and, to a lesser extent, the Baltic states is a phenomenon that should not be underestimated and that is not confined to political fringe groups, but that can be observed in the center of society. Despite processes of liberalization and growing tolerance among the European population in recent decades, there is a need for sociopolitical efforts to further increase awareness of this issue and take specific measures to counteract it. Events such as the migration crisis of 2015 and the passing of laws ostracizing homosexuality, thereby fostering or even legitimizing homophobia in the population, show that there is still a breeding ground for intolerance and the spread and entrenchment of prejudices against social, ethnic, and religious minorities, even in the heart of Europe, and that these prejudices can be reawakened at any time (see also Kaunert et al., 2020; Koronaiou et al., 2015). Democracy and its associated values cannot be taken for granted. Rather, they require constant reactivation and vigilance.

## References

Baboš, P., & Világi, A. (2022). *Youth study Slovakia. Dissatisfied but not leaving*. FES.

Baczyńska, B. (2021). Zwischen Verfassung und Präsidentenwillen. Der Umbau des Justizsystems in Polen. *Polen-Analysen, 283*, 2–8.

Beilmann, M., Lilleoja, L., & Realo, A. (2021). Learning to trust: Trends in generalized social trust in the three Baltic countries from 1990 to 2018. In A. Almakaeva, A. Moreno, & R. Wilkes (Eds.), *Social capital and subjective well-being. Insights from cross-cultural studies* (pp. 19–43). Springer.

Bíró-Nagy, A. (2021). Orbán's political jackpot: migration and the Hungarian electorate. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1–20.

Böhnke, P., Dittmann, J. & Goebel, J. (Hrsg.) (2018). *Handbuch Armut. Ursachen, Trends, Maßnahmen*. Barbara Budrich.

Bucholc, M., & Komornik, M. (2019). Die Lage der Rechtsstaatlichkeit und der Justiz in Polen. *Polen-Analysen, 248*, 2–7.

Buchstein, H., Pohl, K. & Trimçev, R. (Hrsg.) (2021). *Demokratietheorien. Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*. Wochenschau.

Butterwegge, C. (2020). *Die zerrissene Republik. Wirtschaftliche, soziale und politische Ungleichheit in Deutschland*. BeltzJuventa.

Butterwegge, C. (2021). *Armut*. PapyRossa.

Czech Statistical Office. (2021). *Population*. https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/population [Stand: 10.02.2023].

Das Bundesjugendkuratorium [BJK]. (2017). *Demokratie braucht alle. Thesen zu aktuellen Herausforderungen und zur Notwendigkeit von Demokratiebildung*. DJI: München. https://bundesjugendkuratorium.de/data/pdf/press/BJK_Thesenpapier_Demokratie.pdf [Stand 20.02.2023].

Devos, T., Spini, D., & Schwartz, S. (2002). Conflicts among human values and trust in institutions. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 41*, 481–494.

Deželan, T., Sardoč, M., & Nacevski, K. (2021). Youth political participation, social engagement, and extremism. In T. Deželan & M. Lavrič (Eds.), *Youth 2020. The position of young people in Slovenia* (pp. 169–195). University Press.

Hahn-Laudenberg, K., & Abs, H. J. (2020). Schule als Kontext für die Entstehung von supranationaler politischer Unterstützung bei 14-Jährigen in Europa. *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft, Jg., 23*, 1125–1147.

Harring, M., Bíró-Nagy, A., Lamby, D., Peitz, J., & Szabó, A. (2023). *Personal optimism, national pessimism, trust in Europe. A comparison of values, attitudes and plans of young people in The Czech Republic*. FES.

Heitmeyer, W. (2002–2010). *Deutsche Zustände. Folge 1 bis 8*. Suhrkamp.

Heitmeyer, W. (2008). Die Ideologie der Ungleichwertigkeit. Der Kern der Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit. In Heitmeyer, W. (Hrsg.). *Deutsche Zustände. Folge 6* (S. 36–44). Suhrkamp.

Heitmeyer, W., & Mansel, J. (2008). Gesellschaftliche Entwicklung und Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit: Unübersichtliche Perspektiven. In Heitmeyer, W. (Hrsg.). *Deutsche Zustände. Folge 6* (S. 13–35). Suhrkamp.

Hungarian Central Statistical Office. (2020). *Population and vital events*. https://www.ksh.hu/population-and-vital-events [Stand 10.02.2023].

Kajta, J., & Mrozowicki, A. (2022). *Young people in Poland. Between disappointment with the state and hope for a better life*. FES.

Kaprāns, M., Rämmer, A., Külm, M., Labanauskas, L., & Rasnaca, L. (2022). *Youth study Baltic Countries*. FES.

Kaunert, C., de Deus Pereira, J., & Edwards, M. (2020). Thick Europe, ontological security and parochial Europe: the re-emergence of far-right extremism and terrorism after the refugee crisis of 2015. *European Politics and Society*, 42–61.

Koronaiou, A., Lagos, E., & Chiotaki-Poulou, I. (2015). Golden dawn, austerity and young people: The rise of fascist extremism among young people in contemporary Greek society. *The Sociological Review, 63*(2), 231–249.

Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg [LpB BW]. (2018). *Demokratie – (er-) leben – gestalten – entscheiden. Politik & Unterricht. Zeitschrift für die Praxis der politischen Bildung*. Villingen-Schwenningen.

Lavrič, M., & Rutar, T. (2021). General trends in young people's values and attitudes. In T. Deželan & M. Lavrič (Eds.), *Youth 2020. The position of young people in Slovenia* (pp. 37–77). University Press.

Loew, P. O. (2019). Die demographische Entwicklung Polens: Herausforderungen und Konsequenzen. *Polen-Analysen, 231*, 2–8.

Marschall, S. (2014). *Demokratie*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

Official statistics of Latvia. (2020). *Population by age and sex*. https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/population/population-number/2323-population-age-and-sex?themeCode=IR [Stand 10.02.2023].

Official Statistics Portal Lithuania. (2021). *Population and housing*. https://osp.stat.gov.lt/gyventoju-ir-bustu-surasymai1 [Stand 10.02.2023].

Pazderski, F. (2020). *Youth attitudes on politics and democracy in Poland*. Institute of Public Affairs (ISP).

Pazderski, F., Gyárfášova, O., Krekó, P., Molnár, C., & Wessenauer, V. (2018). *Central Europe – Youth, politics, democracy. Public opinion research in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia*. National Democratic Institute (NDI).

Rogge, J., & Kittel, B. (2014). Politisches Vertrauen in Europa. Das Zusammenwirken von Demokratiequalität und Korruption. *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Politikwissenschaft, 8*, 155–178.

Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. (2022). *The population change in the Slovak Republic. Demographic and social statistics*. https://slovak.statistics.sk [Stand 10.02.2023].
Statistical Offices Poland. (2020). *Structure of the population*. https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/population/population/structure-of-the-population,7,1.html [Stand: 10.02.2023].
Statistics Estonia. (2021). *Population*. https://www.stat.ee/en/avasta-statistikat/valdkonnad/rahvastik/population-figure [Stand 10.02.2023].
Szabó, & Bíró-Nagy. (2022). *Youth Study Hungary. Discontent, polarization, Pro-Europeanism*. FES.
Vorländer, H. (2017). *Demokratie. Informationen zur politischen Bildung, Nr. 332/2017*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.
Vorländer, H. (2020). *Demokratie. Geschichte, Formen, Theorien*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.
Zick, A., Wolf, C., Küpper, B., Davidov, E., Schmidt, P., & Heitmeyer, W. (2008). The syndrome of group-focused enmity: the interrelation of prejudices tested with multiple cross-sectional and panel data. *Journal of Social Issues, 64*(2), 363–383.
Zick, A., Küpper, B., & Heitmeyer, W. (2010). Prejudices and group-focused enmity – A socio-functional perspective. In A. Pelinka, K. Bischof, & K. Stögner (Eds.), *Handbook of prejudice* (pp. 273–302). Cambria Press.
Zick, A., Küpper, B., & Hövermann, A. (2011). *Die Abwertung der Anderen. Eine europäische Zustandsbeschreibung zu Intoleranz, Vorurteilen und Diskriminierung. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung*. Berlin/Bonn.
Zick, A., Küpper, B., & Krause, D. (2016). Gespaltene Mitte—Feindselige Zustände. In *Rechtsextreme Einstellungen in Deutschland 2016*. Dietz.

# Young People in Ukraine: The Significance of Economic Affluence, Transformation, War, and Disassociation from the State, Politics, and Social Groups

**Daniela Lamby**

**Contents**



## 1 Introduction

The war between Russia and Ukraine and related current developments have placed Ukraine front and center in media reporting. Military debates and strategies, men and women at the front, child refugees, and death and destruction dominate our image of the country today.

This chapter focuses on young people in Ukraine. Notwithstanding that the data underlying our observations were gathered before the war, it should be pointed out that war and, in particular, the fear of escalation were already part of young people's everyday lives before 2022. In the present study, almost 80% (79.4%) of young Ukrainians state that they are afraid of a war.

Alongside other factors such as the quest for economic affluence, the significance of transformation, and political values and participation, the following observations will also take into account young people's experiences of war. This approach allows us to include current events and reflect on the attitudes and expectations that were prevalent at the time of the survey.

D. Lamby (✉)
University of Mainz, Mainz, Germany
e-mail: daniela.lamby@uni-mainz.de



M. Harring (ed.), *Growing Up in Times of Crisis*, Contributions to Political Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58626-2_9

In Sect. 2, we identify the determinants of young people's everyday lives in Ukraine. In Sects. 3 and 4, we flesh out these determinants using data from a representative quantitative study of over 2000 young Ukrainians, focusing particularly on political participation. The UNICEF Ukraine Country Office (2010, pp. 9f.) lists three issues that decisively affect young people's satisfaction: work, education, and housing. These factors point toward a strong material focus on young people's value systems. The purpose of this chapter is to determine whether this is the case. In Sect. 5, we classify Ukrainian youth according to their attitudes toward the state and society, their own political activities, their trust in political institutions, and their core values. We conclude by putting our findings in perspective and commenting on the prospects of a young generation growing up in times of war.

## 2 Young People in Ukraine: An Overview

The core purpose of this section is to identify the determinants and possible relevance criteria of young people's lifeworlds in Ukraine. It should be noted that the majority of the sources generally refer to living conditions before the Russia-Ukraine war, although war was already an ubiquitous topic at that time. The purpose of this section is to summarize findings about the general living conditions of Ukrainian youth from various empirical studies.

### *Young People in Post-Soviet Countries*

It is often assumed that young people from post-Communist countries have greater freedoms than prior generations as well as more scope in their search for and development of identity (Roberts et al., 2000). While this is not wrong, and while the heritage of communism is ubiquitous in everyday life,[1] more in-depth analysis is needed (Roberts, 2009). Similarly, synonyms for transition and opening are often deemed to be of great importance for comprehending everyday life in post-Soviet countries. These terms for change and the dissolution of boundaries shape the Western perspective on youth in Eastern Europe, which is often colored by the assumption of disadvantage. To Western minds, communism was a time of privation, regimentation, and isolation, while the present time offers scope for renewal and convergence with the West:

[1] One example for the ubiquity of the Soviet past is worth mentioning here. Particularly in the context of Russian-Ukrainian relations and political and social reforms, Ukraine is currently (2019/2020) intensifying its policy of decommunization: "Among other things, there are plans to rename streets, squares, and other places and to tear down monuments to communist leaders who were responsible for political repression and the famine of 1932/33 in the Soviet Union" (Klymenko, 2019, p. 2).

> "Ukraine is a country in transition from an authoritarian, centralized administration to a more democratic and pluralist one […] the country has experienced rapid political and economic movement resulting in uncertainty and slow progress" (UNICEF Ukraine Country Office, 2010).

On the other hand, a brief comparison of current conditions is sufficient to show that, irrespective of where they live, young people are almost indistinguishable from one another in terms of their lifestyles, and that it is neither productive nor, in general, coherent to generalize and label Eastern European youth in terms of "cultural lag" (the delayed modernization of youth in Eastern Europe; see Zinnecker 1991, p. 17).

Nonetheless, it should not be overlooked that youth as a stage of life continues to exhibit lingering differences in Western and Eastern Europe and that these differences shape young people's lives. In general, Eastern Europe has a higher birth rate, a lower age at first parenthood and marriage, lower average income, simpler living conditions, and poorer life expectancy and medical care. Traditional family hierarchies still dominate, and the effects of far-reaching, swift privatization processes after the fall of the Soviet Union continue to be felt in an oligarchic society in which the wealthy elite enjoys power-political superiority. For Ukraine, this picture is confirmed by the Ukrainian Ptoukha Institute for Demography and Social Studies (2010). Roberts (2009, pp. 3–12) highlights new developments and factors that are characteristic of the everyday lives of young people in Eastern Europe today:

- A continuing trend to higher qualifications.
- Employment below the level of their qualifications.
- Part-time employment or unemployment owing to a dearth of employment opportunities.
- Withdrawal from public matters with the intention of solving private and personal problems.
- The phenomenon of *emerging adulthood*, which describes the dissolution of the boundary to youth and the expansion of youth as a phase of life.
- Actor status as a consumer in a global economy with consumption spending well below the Western average.
- A high migration rate, often involving circular migration, in search of better earnings while desiring not to abandon their home country.
- The general trend toward individualization and increasing pressure from an achievement-oriented society.
- The de-ideologization of young people after the communist era.

## 3 Methodology and Description of the Sample

The research presented here seeks to offer insights into the lifeworlds of young people in Ukraine from their own perspective, with special emphasis on their political participation and values. The question is to what extent young people's political participation and values interact and whether it is possible to identify specific

typologies among them. We begin this methodological section by describing the everyday lives of young people in Ukraine in terms of crucial demographic markers.

The data are supplied by a youth study conducted in Ukraine as part of a large-scale campaign by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung led by Marius Harring (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz). As in the Shell youth study in Germany (Shell Deutschland Holding, 2015), a comprehensive study on young people's lifeworlds on which this study is modeled, a total of 2016 young Ukrainians aged between 14 and 29 years were polled in 2017 by means of a standardized questionnaire about various aspects of everyday life. The sample is a representative random sample whose population parameters were derived from existing population distributions. While the sample is therefore free from systematic errors regarding gender, education, and religious and regional affiliation, other systematic and unsystematic errors cannot be categorically ruled out. The data were collected by the Ukrainian research institute New Europe Center in Kiev.

The parameters for the population can only be estimated, since the age limits for young people vary widely and the reference to the overall population is handled differently in comparable studies. This is attributable to the secession processes in the eastern parts of Ukraine, which, depending on which areas are no longer treated as Ukrainian territory, reduce the size of the overall Ukrainian population. It is difficult to obtain reliable numbers for these regions. This is a minor issue for the purpose of the present study since the sample did not include young people in the autonomous Republic of Crimea and the occupied areas of Donezk and Luhansk. The total population comprises approximately 44.658 million, of whom approximately 8.408 million, or roughly 19% of the population, are young people aged between 15 and 29 years.[2] The present study interviewed young people between the ages of 14 and 29. While this age range differs from the UN data by 1 year, we can assume an estimated population of roughly 9 million young people.

The questionnaire comprised a total of 481 items, a selection of which will be presented here. With very few exceptions, the questionnaire employed a closed question-and-answer format frequently involving rating scales. Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses of the results were conducted using SPSS. Our initial descriptive presentation of the data will be supplemented by a more in-depth examination using multivariate procedures in Sect. 5.

The age ranges in Table 1 serve as criteria for defining additional categories that are described in greater detail below: gender, regional affiliation, settlement type, financial status, and educational qualifications.

While the criterion of migrant status—possession of citizenship of a country other than the current country of residence—is frequently used in German studies, it is of minor importance in Ukraine, where 96.1% state that they are Ukrainian nationals. What is relevant for the national discourse is domestic migration; this,

[2] The reference for the population is taken from the figures of the UN for 2015, which can be regarded as reliable (United Nations 2019).

**Table 1** Breakdown of sample by sociodemographic criteria, subdivided by age of respondents

| Sociodemographic criteria | Age groups | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Early youth phase 14 to 17 | Middle youth phase 18 to 21 | Late youth phase I 22 to 25 | Late youth phase II 26 to 29 | |
| **Total = n** | *410 (20.3%)* | *519 (25.7%)* | *522 (25.9%)* | *565 (28.0%)* | *2.016 (100.0%)* |
| **Gender** | | | | | |
| *Male* | *217 (52.9%)* | *257 (49.5%)* | *270 (51.7%)* | *282 (50%)* | *1.027 (50.9%)* |
| *Female* | *193 (47.1%)* | *262 (50.5%)* | *252 (48.3%)* | *282 (50%)* | *989 (49.1%)* |
| **Regional affiliation**[a] | | | | | |
| *Kyiv* | *32 (7.8%)* | *50 (9.6%)* | *37 (7.1%)* | *45 (8%)* | *164 (8.1%)* |
| *North* | *57 (13.9%)* | *71 (13.7%)* | *64 (12.3%)* | *85 (15%)* | *277 (13.7%)* |
| *East* | *50 (12.2%)* | *58 (11.2%)* | *85 (16.3%)* | *68 (12%)* | *261 (12.9%)* |
| *South* | *66 (16.1%)* | *73 (14.1%)* | *91 (17.4%)* | *93 (16.5%)* | *323 (16%)* |
| *Center* | *86 (21%)* | *112 (21.6%)* | *106 (20.3%)* | *110 (19.5%)* | *414 (20.5%)* |
| *West* | *119 (29%)* | *155 (29.9%)* | *139 (26.6%)* | *164 (29%)* | *577 (28.6%)* |
| **Settlement structure** | | | | | |
| Rural regions ↓20.000 | *218 (53.2%)* | *237 (45.7%)* | *231 (44.3%)* | *262 (46.4%)* | *948 (47%)* |
| Small-town areas 20.000+ | *52 (12.7%)* | *72 (13.9%)* | *89 (17%)* | *73 (12.9%)* | *286 (14.2%)* |
| Urban regions 100.000+ | *61 (14.9%)* | *90 (17.3%)* | *84 (16.1%)* | *102 (18.1%)* | *337 (16.7%)* |
| Metropolitan areas 500.000+ | *79 (19.3%)* | *120 (23.1%)* | *118 (22.6%)* | *128 (22.7%)* | *445 (22.1%)* |
| **Financial situation** | | | | | |
| No money for food, electricity, etc. | *11 (3.0%)* | *18 (3.8%)* | *18 (3.8%)* | *22 (4.2%)* | *69 (3.8%)* |
| Money for food and electricity, but not for clothes and shoes | *78 (21.6%)* | *110 (23.4%)* | *106 (22.2%)* | *121 (23.0%)* | *415 (22.6%)* |
| Money for food/clothing, but not for TV/fridge | *207 (57.3%)* | *269 (57.2%)* | *270 (56.5%)* | *311 (59.0%)* | *1057 (57.6%)* |
| Money for food/clothing/ TV, but not for car/housing | *60 (16.6%)* | *68 (14.5%)* | *73 (15.3%)* | *66 (12.5%)* | *267 (14.5%)* |
| Enough money for an affluent lifestyle | *5 (1.4%)* | *5 (1.1%)* | *11 (2.3%)* | *7 (1.3%)* | *28 (1.5%)* |

(continued)

**Table 1** (continued)

| Sociodemographic criteria | Age groups | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Early youth phase 14 to 17 | Middle youth phase 18 to 21 | Late youth phase I 22 to 25 | Late youth phase II 26 to 29 | |
| **Highest educational qualifications** | | | | | |
| No education/primary school | *257 (70.4%)* | *46 (9.3%)* | *9 (1.8%)* | *7 (1.3%)* | *319 (16.6%)* |
| Secondary school | *108 (29.6%)* | *371 (75.4%)* | *290 (45.3%)* | *232 (41.6%)* | *941 (48.9%)* |
| *Bachelor* | / | *54 (11.0%)* | *139 (27.4%)* | *147 (26.3%)* | *340 (17.7%)* |
| *Master* | / | *21 (4.3%)* | *130 (25.6%)* | *170 (30.5%)* | *321 (16.7%)* |
| PhD | / | / | / | *2 (0.4%)* | *2 (0.1%)* |

[a]The subdivision of Ukraine into six regions that is used here follows the example of *Jugendstudie der Ukraine* (New Europe Center & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Eds.) 2017, p. 15.

however, is not covered in the present study and cannot be included in the young people's baseline data.

The sample of 2016 young people comprised 1027 (50.9%) male and 989 (49.1%) female respondents. Together with this information, Table 1 also contains the sample's core sociodemographic criteria.

## *3.1 Regional Affiliation and Degree of Urbanization*

One hundred sixty-four (8.1%) of the respondents live in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine; 277 (13.7%) in northern Ukraine bordering on Belarus and Russia; 261 (12.9%) in eastern Ukraine, which borders on Russian national territory and exhibits strong separatist movements; 323 (16%) in southern Ukraine, the border of which is largely defined by the Black Sea and abuts on Russia in the east and Moldova, Bulgaria, and Rumania in the west; 411 (20.5%) in central Ukraine, and 577 (28.6%) in western Ukraine, which borders on Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Rumania, and Moldova. The regional subdivision is based on the procedures of the Ukrainian Research Institute and is illustrated in detail in Fig. 1.

In terms of settlement structure, approximately equal proportions of young people live in rural and urban areas. The tendency for higher proportions of older young people to live in urban areas is not reflected in the sample to any great extent. Overall, 948 (47%) of respondents live in rural areas in settlements of less than 20,000 residents, while 286 (14.2%) live in medium-sized centers comprising between 20,000 and under 100,000 residents; 337 (16.7%) live in urban centers of

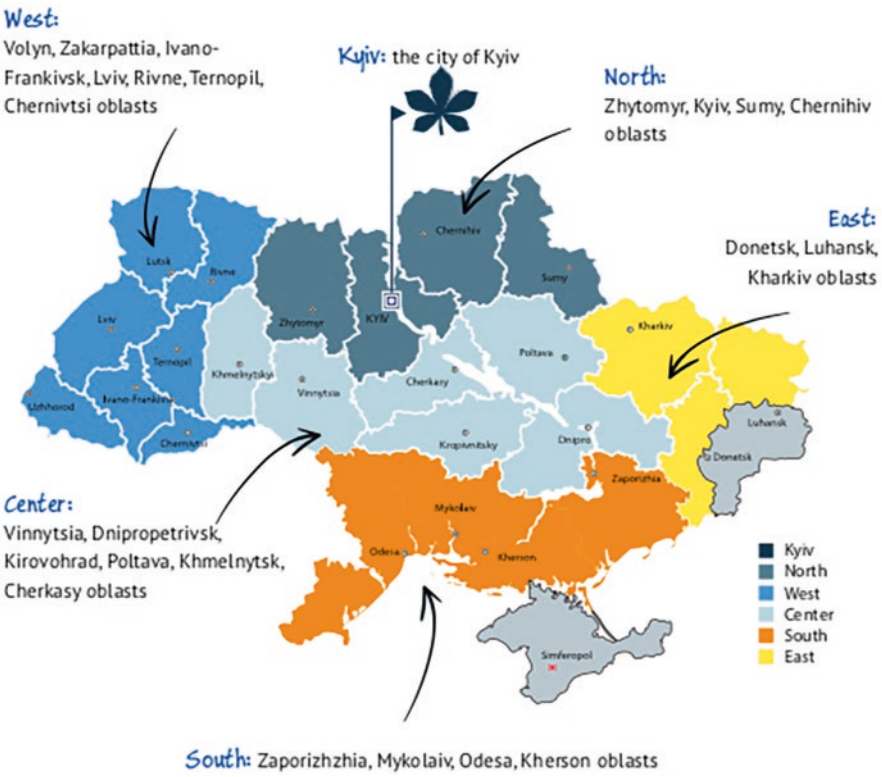



**Fig. 1** Regional affiliation. (New Europe Center & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Eds., 2017, p. 15)

over 100,000 residents and 444 (22.1%) live in metropolitan areas of over 500,000 people. These metropolitan areas include the regions around Lviv (pop. 729.038), Kyiv (pop. 2.868.702), Kharkiv (pop. 1.451.132), Dnepropetrovsk (pop. 993.094), Odessa (pop. 1.017.022), and Zaporizhzhia (pop. 766.268) (cf. Worldatlas 2022). Urban settlements like Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Odessa exhibit a comparatively better overall economic development and offer a variety of training and employment opportunities (Ptoukha Institute for Demography and Social Studies of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine, 2010, pp. 8–14).

## *3.2 Experiences with Poverty and Dependence on Family*

To assess their financial situation, the young people were asked which everyday necessities and special items they can afford to purchase. About one-quarter (26.4%) are unable to buy clothing or shoes. Almost 4% of these young people live in absolute poverty, without sufficient money for food, electricity, or heating. Only 1.5%

regard their financial situation as very good. Over three-quarters (78.7%) of respondents are afraid of rising poverty in society as a whole.

This desolate economic picture means that young people are forced to continue living with their parents. According to a study conducted by the Market Research Institute—Growth from Knowledge (GfK) Ukraine, the Ukraine Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the United Nations office in Ukraine (Volosevych et al., 2015, pp. 5–6), one-third of young people aged between 30 and 34 live with their parents. Almost half of these young people do not expect this situation to change in the next 5 years. The main reason is simply a lack of economic resources and a general and frequently also financial interdependence of the generations for securing their livelihood, as a result of which children remain dependent on their parents beyond adolescence. The fact that 84% of respondents in the present study say that they lack sufficient resources to pay for a fridge or a television set indicates that these young people are simply not in a position to set up a home of their own and also shows that they live in conditions of poverty. These findings are corroborated by the fact that Ukraine, after Moldova, is the second poorest country in Europe (Kappeler and Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2015, p. 17).

### *3.3 High Educational Qualifications and Precarious Job Market*

The final sociodemographic criterion listed in Table 1 is the highest formal educational qualifications attained at the time of the survey. Obviously, higher educational qualifications are more numerous among older young people. Nevertheless, one-eighth (12.4%) of those over 18 state that they have no educational qualifications at all or that they have only completed primary school. In general, however, educational levels are very high, and over half the young people aged between 22 and 25 already have a university degree. Ostrikova too describes the educational attainment of young Ukrainians as high, though it must be noted that many of them encounter precarious working conditions and job opportunities after completing their training. A shortage of jobs, dismissals, short-term contracts, and part-time employment are the main reasons for these bleak prospects for young people on the job market (Ostrikova, 2016, p. 13). The World Values Survey (World Values Survey Association, 2018) corroborates these findings.

Thirty percent of young people say that they choose their vocational training according to their subsequent earning potential rather than selecting a career based on their personal interests. Over three-quarters (76.9%) are at least somewhat afraid of being unable to find a job. According to the present study, the unemployment rate of young people between 22 and 29 is 22.4%. This is confirmed by the German Academic Exchange Service report (DAAD 2017, p. 9), which cites the World Bank and claims a youth unemployment rate of 21.3%. These developments are dramatically exacerbated by the Russia-Ukraine war.

## 4 Youth and Political Participation in Ukraine

Two factors are of particular relevance for the political participation of the youth cohort examined in this chapter.

For one thing, this is the first generation of young people who have lived their entire conscious lives in the post-Soviet era. Ukrainians are experiencing a considerable increase in liberal rights. High voter turnouts and recurring protest movements attest to high degrees of political involvement and potential in the population.

For another, corruption and severe violations can be observed at all political levels, including manipulation of media and public authorities as well as vote-buying. Thus, the newly won freedoms often culminate in dissatisfaction and powerlessness in the political system, which causes political participation to decline and political instability to increase (Segert, 2014, pp. 208). The circumstances under which political participation develops can be described by means of keywords such as "disappointed hopes of reform, general lack of orientation, and negative attitudes to the new political elites" (Malak-Minkiewicz, 1994, p. 110). In the early twenty-first century, the majority of Ukrainians feel that they live in an undemocratic system (Kutsenko, 2004). Almost 20 years later, Jarábik (2018, pp. 6) corroborates these statements. While he describes the restoration of political institutions, the prosecution of corruption and abuses of office, and the strengthening of national identity through the Euromaidan,[3] he also describes a system of corruption, abuse of power, impunity, endangerment of free reporting, and the immense costs of the association agreement with the EU. These developments exacerbate disillusionment and lack of identification with the political system and its actors: a disillusionment that is expressed not only in low voter turnout and protest, but also in passivity and disassociation from "dirty politics" (Klein, 2018, p. 8).

In particular, the poor performance of the economy, unemployment, and failure to integrate into a market economy represent major challenges, and antidemocratic, destabilizing tendencies pose a threat (Malak-Minkiewitz, 1994; Segert, 2014, pp. 217).

However, political participation is also hampered by domestic and bilateral crises. Current developments in Ukraine have a severe impact on the political participation of young people in the country, and the imposition of martial law in 2018 as a consequence of increasing tension in Russian-Ukrainian relations and various legislative amendments are contributing to the increasing erosion of freedom of opinion and assembly (Klein, 2018, pp. 7). Elections, the epitome of political participation, are in danger of being suspended owing to the exigencies of martial law. Young people growing up in annexed Crimea, for example, are voting for organs of the state in which neither the institutions nor the elections themselves are

[3] In brief, Euromaidan was a protest movement in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv in 2014. The protests, barricades, and violent altercations were concentrated around the Maidan, a central square in Kyiv. The political goal of the mass protests was fundamental regime change (Banakh, 2014).

recognized by international law.[4] In a statement on the humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine, the United Nations addressed the precarious everyday lives of families as early as 2017:

> As Ukraine enters its fourth year of conflict, many of the affected people have exhausted their savings and ability to cope. They are now forced to make impossible choices between food, medicine, shelter, heating, or their children's education. Millions of women, children and the elderly are daily at risk of shelling, intensive fighting, and other hostilities. Through only five operational checkpoints along the 457-kilometre 'contact line,' up to one million people cross every month to access basic services, pensions, social benefits, and maintain family networks. (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Ukraine, 2017)

Far from being limited to the youth living in the current crisis zones, this concern about war and conflicts represents a nationwide issue. The country's political weakness and inability to act is reflected by fear of war and terror, coupled with and exacerbating economic hardship, crime, and corruption, as well as by the failure to implement reforms (Volosevych et al., 2015, p. 57).

### *Between Newly Won Rights and Disappointed Hopes*

Thirty years after Ukrainian independence, one-fifth (19.6%) of Ukrainian young people in the present study still state that they have come to terms badly or very badly with the dissolution of Ukraine. Viewed separately, the figure for young people in eastern and southern Ukraine is higher than for Ukraine as a whole and comprises almost one-third of young people.

Over three-quarters (76.6%) of young people agree entirely or mostly that the state should assume more responsibility for the well-being of every individual.[5] Over two-thirds (69.3%) are entirely or mostly in favor of income convergence between rich and poor,[6] while more than half (58.3%) call for a higher proportion of public ownership in commerce and industry.[7] These statements are corroborated by a survey from the Pew Research Center (2009, p. 9), which found that 62% of respondents in Ukraine felt that their current living situation was worse than in the era of state socialism.

[4] For more information, see the remarks of Ostanina (2018, p. 4) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde et al. (2018, pp. 21ff.) as well as the ongoing analyses and reports by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde et al. published in the *Ukraine-Analysen* series.

[5] Five-point answer scale from 1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree; Mo = 5; Md = 5.00; M = 4.24; $s^2$= 0.827; s = 0.910.

[6] Five-point answer scale from 1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree; Mo = 5; Md = 4.00; M = 3.99; $s^2$= 1.170; s = 1.082.

[7] Five-point answer scale from 1: strongly disagree to 5: strongly agree; Mo = 5; Md = 4.00; M = 3.84; $s^2$= 1.176; s = 1.085.

The data also reflect the contradiction we touched upon above between newly won civil rights and liberties and increasing dissatisfaction with and distrust of political actors.

On the one hand, the proportion of young people who participate in national and local elections is very high by international standards (cf. World Values Survey Association, 2018), with over three-quarters turning out to vote and less than one-quarter (22.4%) saying that they did not vote in the most recent parliamentary elections despite being eligible to do so.

On the other hand, the country's political instability, distrust for politicians and the "new" organs of the state, and the inadequacy of political education and inclusion manifest themselves in increased distrust of the fundamental political institutions of the executive, legislative, and judiciary authorities, and the political parties. About two-thirds of respondents state that they have little or no trust in the president[8] (67.9%)[9] or the judiciary (67.6%),[10] while roughly three-quarters express high distrust for the national parliament (75.2%),[11] the government (73.3%),[12] and the parties (73.2%).[13] Less than 1% (0.4%) of young people are members of a party. We can thus assume that Ukrainian society exhibits a general lack of political activity and interest in political processes. The high distrust in the political system is also reflected in the number of young people with concerns about massive corruption in the country; 80.8% say that they are moderately to strongly anxious about corruption in Ukraine. The present study also indicates that less than one-tenth (9.6%) of respondents believe that national politics strongly or fully takes their interests into account, while almost half (49.7%) say that young people's interests are represented inadequately or not at all.[14]

## 5 Typology of Ukrainian Young People Based on Political Attitudes, Values, and Participation

The development of a personal system of standards and values during youth is crucial not only for personality development but also for the survival of society. Given the developments described in this chapter, we must ask to what extent young people can identify with the political system and what their definitive values are. This

[8] We use the masculine here and in the following because, to date, the President of Ukraine has always been male.

[9] Mo = 1; Md = 2; M = 2.03; $s^2$= 1.138; s = 1.067.

[10] Mo = 1; Md = 2; M = 2.01; $s^2$= 1.229; s = 1.109.

[11] Mo = 1; Md = 2; M = 1.83; $s^2$= 0.920; s = 0.959.

[12] Mo = 1; Md = 2; M = 1.90; $s^2$= 0.994; s = 0.997.

[13] Mo = 1; Md = 2; M = 1.87; $s^2$= 0.975; s = 0.987.

[14] Five-point answer scale from 1: not at all to 5: very good; Mo = 3; Md = 3; M = 2.42; $s^2$= 0.89; s = 0.944; For correlation of political interest and representation of youth interests in national politics: $Chi^2$= 146.366; df = 16; p = 0.000; r = 0.181.

section offers insights for an improved understanding of the interplay of values and political participation. Its purpose is to use the findings from the previous section as well as a multivariate evaluation of the data using factor and cluster analysis to construct a theoretical framework and a classification system. This classification identifies groups of people who favor not only fundamental values but also values in the field of political orientation and participation to different degrees. Additionally, when creating a typology, we always seek to integrate profoundly different individuals into a system. We therefore stress that the typologies make no claim to be comprehensive and that hybrid forms are the rule, while "pure types" are rarely to be found.

The typologies proceed from the question of which pairs of values are favored by young Ukrainians and how these groups differ from one another. Subsequently, we compare our findings with traditional theories by Inglehart (1977), Klages (1984), and Elbedour (1998) in order to identify trends and differences.

### *Contrasting Pairs of Values*

The first step, creating contrasting pairs of values, can be seen in Table 2, where the results of the factor and cluster analysis are used to create and refine a classification system. The table uses concepts like "strongest" and "highest." This evaluation is always performed in comparison or in contrast with the other two types.

The distinctions are reached through the issues of "Fundamental values," "Own political activity and trust in political entities," and additional fine-tuning at the level of "State and society." Three basic types can be distinguished: *type 1: "Politically critical, inactive nationalists"; type 2: "Individualists";* and *type 3: "Politically active liberalists."*

We should begin by noting that a comprehensive analysis was performed to identify differences based on age, gender, financial status, and education, but that these factors yielded no significant correlations or dependencies. This is an important initial finding. Groups that resemble one another based on their political convictions and values represent a heterogeneous group in their own right within which differentiations by gender, age, or education are of secondary importance. In the following, we will offer a detailed description of the typologies we identified.

### Type 1: "Politically Critical, Inactive Nationalists"

The first type to be discussed comprises *"politically critical, inactive nationalists."* The clear priority of this group is economic affluence and security along with the protection of human rights. Additionally, the cluster analysis and subsequent analyses revealed a seeming ambivalence inherent in this group. On the one hand, this is the group that expresses the strongest wish to improve the situation of young people and women and to advance the protection of human rights at the state level. On the

**Table 2** Classification of young people's values and political participation

| | Type 1: Politically critical, inactive nationalists | Type 2: Individualists | Type 3: Somewhat politically active liberalists |
|---|---|---|---|
| Results of cluster analysis | Strongest support for improving the situation of young people and women, for state activity to protect human rights and social security, and for fighting corruption and crime<br>Strongest support for increasing the proportion of state-owned businesses and industry and state insurance<br>Strongest rejection of social fringe groups such as refugees, drug addicts, and Roma | Lowest agreement with government interventions. In particular, this group expresses the lowest support for state ownership of businesses and industry and for more state responsibility for individual security | Highest acceptance of social fringe groups (refugees, Roma, etc.)<br>Also highest support for the protection of human rights, improving the position of young people and protecting safety and freedom |
| Fundamental values | Top 3: Economic affluence, security, human rights | Top 3: Economic affluence, human rights, security | Top 3: Economic affluence, work, human rights |
| Own political activity and trust in political entities | Highest distrust of political institutions (presidents[a], national government, parties)[b] | | Highest relevance of own political activity[c]<br>Greatest willingness to assume political office[d] and be politically active (online[e], boycotts, action groups, demonstrations[f], petitions)[g] |
| Attitudes to state and society | Greatest pride in being a Ukrainian citizen | Least pride in being a Ukrainian citizen[h,i] | Strongest rejection of the idea that, under certain circumstances, dictatorship may be a better form of government than democracy[j,k] |

[a] $Chi^2$= 64.231; df = 8; p = 0.000

[b] Comparison of the responses of clusters 1 to 3 to the question "How much do you trust the following institutions?" Answer categories shown: "not at all"➔ *cluster 1* (president: 49.5%; national government: 55.7%; parties: 57.8%); *cluster 2* (president: 37.1%; national government: 39.4%; parties: 39.6%); *cluster 3* (president: 26.9%; national government: 32.9%; parties: 38.6%)

[c] Comparison of the responses of clusters 1 to 3 to the question "How important do you think it is to play an active role in politics?" ➔ *Cluster 1* (important or very important: 17%); *cluster 2* (important or very important: 24%); *cluster 3* (important or very important: 36.4%)

[d] Comparison of the responses of clusters 1 to 3 to the question "Would you assume a political office?" ➔ *Cluster 1* (gladly/have held office: 4.2%); *cluster 2* (gladly/have held office: 4.2%); *cluster 3* (gladly/have held office: 8.4%)

[e] $Chi^2$= 16.698; df = 4; p = 0.002

[f] $Chi^2$= 24.488; df = 4; p = 0.000

[g] $Chi^2$= 25.203; df = 4; p = 0.000

[h] Comparison of answers of clusters 1 to 3 to the question "I am proud to be a citizen of Ukraine" (rating: 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree"). ➔ "Strongly agree" only: *cluster 1* (51.6%); *cluster 2* (28%); *cluster 3* (36.6%)

[i] $Chi^2$= 121.953; df = 8; p = 0.000

[j] Comparison of answers of clusters 1 to 3 to the question "Under certain circumstances, dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy" (rating: 1 "strongly agree" to 5 "strongly disagree") ➔ *cluster 1* (somewhat agree/strongly agree: 44.5%); *cluster 2* (somewhat agree/strongly agree: 43.7%); *cluster 3* (somewhat agree/strongly agree: 30.9%)

[k] $Chi^2$= 56.208; df = 8; p = 0.000

other hand, this group has stronger antipathies than any of the other two types for social fringe groups like refugees, drug addicts, and Roma families.

When it comes to identifying with their country, this group displays the highest degree of pride in possessing Ukrainian citizenship. These analyses tie in with the remarks of Sapper (1997), who outlines patterns of conflict and their causes in the context of European transformation processes after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Sapper's remarks, however, represent the second step in identifying possible explanations.

1. In the first step, it is of interest to establish fundamental explanations for phenomena within type 1. Possible solutions are clearly evident in the conflict theories of Kelman (1987), Lerner (1989), and Elbedour (1998). Although these theories originate in war and conflict studies, they lend themselves readily to transfer onto social conflicts and individual attitudinal patterns. The conviction or postulate that only one's own interests are important is typical of these people's actions and generally culminates in the escalation of a conflict situation. On the assumption that economic affluence and security is of paramount importance for this group, it is clear that the group's observable disassociation from refugees or Roma families conforms to this explanatory pattern of conflict research.

At the same time, it is common for the parties to a conflict to be convinced that their actions are "good," especially in the early stages of a conflict. This is shown in the present classification by the fact that the young people desire to improve the situation of women and youth in general and also highly value human rights. However, this and many other attitudes and orientations are always subject to the proviso of achieving economic affluence and security while excluding certain population groups. This hostile attitude generally favors the stereotyping of "the other," which in turn gives rise to further justifications for animosity and escalation. As a result, a persistent system of conflict, negative stereotyping, and behavioral patterns leaving little or no scope for otherness, transformation, and change is established (Elbedour, 1998, p. 541). In the context of values, these remarks and the application of the premises in question mean that it is possible for the individual to become less concerned with asserting certain values or with acting according to shared values and—in the language of conflict research—to regard the goal as being the "destruction" of "the other/others" in order to achieve the absolute objective of "victory" over "the others" (Elbedour, 1998, p. 540).

It should be noted, however, that the everyday socialization of young people in many regions takes place in a context of crisis and conflict. From childhood on, they grow up in an atmosphere of hostility and conflict which they experience as a kind of normality and as the example provided by institutions and agents of socialization such as parents, siblings, classmates, and friends (Elbedour, 1998, p. 542).

2. In the second phase of the analysis, following Sapper's theory (Sapper, 1997), type 1 ties in with the fundamental explanatory strategies of conflict research and contextualizes them within Ukraine. Ethnic identity is a significant element within

conflict research and one of the strongest drivers of group solidarity that influences the obligations that accompany such solidarity. The sense of ethnic affiliation also affects the individual's political attitudes and values. These attitude patterns are reinforced at the macro level by political and social discrimination, which can take the form of one's own ethnic group being preferentially or exclusively targeted for welfare measures while other population groups are denied political and civil rights. Sapper lists four elements that comprise this institutional and individual realization of ethnic conflicts (Sapper, 1997, pp. 327):

- The problem that countries in transformation must establish new constitutional conflict-solving mechanisms from scratch.
- The fact that the imbalance between ethnic groups is one of the main drivers of conflict.
- The fact that the historical determinants of ethnic conflict influence political and individual attitudes alike.
- The widespread lack of awareness in post-communist countries about the different attitudes, and the origins of those attitudes, held by the parties to the conflict.

The description of this group is completed by its high distrust of political institutions such as the president, the national government, and the parties. This distrust goes hand in hand with high political inactivity. Nevertheless, it is precisely this group that desires the strongest state intervention, increased nationalization of companies and industry, and state-provided security.

### Type 2: "Individualists"

Unlike the *"politically critical, inactive nationalists,"* "*individualists"* are the group that most strongly disapproves of state intervention. Most of them reject state ownership of companies and industry and are also against an increase in state interventions to provide individual security. These attitudes are paired with the lowest level of national pride of all the groups. Their top 3 values are the same as those of type 1—economic affluence, human rights, and security—with the exception that they rank human rights higher than security. Thus, the focus of type 2, similarly to type 1, is on pursuing their own economic interests. The other values, however, differ between the groups. The classical scenario of competition within the capital market justifies the assumption that cooperation between participants in the market is defined by competition, profit maximization, and the need to secure one's livelihood, and this is reflected in high degrees of hostility toward refugees, Roma families, drug addicts, and ex-convicts. However, this does not invariably imply the generalized stigmatization and stereotyping of other market participants; it may also indicate a focus on personal economic interests. These assumptions are based on Inglehart's theory of value change (Inglehart, 1977). Given that the primary concern

of individuals is to meet their economic needs—more so if they are experiencing or have previously experienced a severe want of material goods, according to Inglehart's scarcity hypothesis—material affluence and security represent leading value orientations. Not until a certain economic status has been reached and can be stably maintained do people's personal values, in Inglehart's view, shift toward a focus on immaterial needs and mindfulness of social coexistence. Notwithstanding that Inglehart was writing in the 1970s, his descriptions very aptly characterize type 2. The individual is the main priority, along with the individual striving for economic affluence. State-provided social security is an unattractive prospect against the background of many years of state mismanagement and an economy of scarcity which endures to this day and still immediately dominates the lives of large parts of the population. This state of affairs also negatively affects national pride.

### Type 3: "Somewhat Politically Active Liberalists"

Type 3, the *"somewhat politically active liberalists,"* introduces another new segment that facilitates the classification of young people based on political values. Young people who tend to conform to this type exhibit the highest acceptance for fringe groups such as refugees, Roma, and drug addicts. They support the protection of human rights, freedom, and security and call for improvements in the situation of young people. At the same time, dictatorship is rejected most strongly by this group. They are the liberalists whose watchword is freedom. Unlike in the case of the other two types, *security* does not feature in the top 3 of their core values; the quest for economic affluence is backed up by the desire for employment. Thus, the hierarchy of their top values consists of economic affluence, work, and human rights. We thus observe clear parallels to the remarks of Klages (1988) and Hagenaars et al. (2003). The people displaying these value orientations prioritize freedom and equality. The individual's values are oriented toward the maxims of emancipation, equal treatment, and self-actualization, albeit these maxims are always primarily geared toward the goal of economic affluence and work is the means of achieving this goal.

The main emphasis here is not on the subordination of certain social groups that are considered only as a collective and associated with stereotypical ascriptions, but on respect for individual interests and autonomy and on consideration for the common good that seeks to achieve economic affluence for all. At the same time, this group of young people is the most active of all three types in the political sphere, even though they are still a long way removed from very active political participation. This is why we describe them as "*somewhat politically active liberalists*" in order to make it clear that they are not *highly* active individuals. They do, however, exhibit the highest level of political activity compared to the other two groups: the highest willingness to assume political office and to become politically active, whether online or by participating in boycotts, citizens' action groups, demonstrations, or petitions. Type 3 comprises the more active youth in a political landscape in which political involvement is a rarity.

## 6 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to show that young people's values and political participation present a complex picture and that it is impossible to examine them without taking normative, cultural, historical, economic, and political aspects into account. In closing, three factors merit special mention that clearly show the priorities young Ukrainians share:

– Striving for economic affluence.
– Protecting human rights.
– Disassociating themselves from the state and from politics.

Notions about how to attain economic affluence and who participates in this common striving diverge widely. While some young people tend to favor giving the state more authority to generate economic affluence (type 1), others disagree that businesses and industry should be nationalized and that the state should be responsible for the social welfare of individuals (type 2).

The precarious situation in which the young people find themselves is also evident. While they yearn for economic affluence and are unequivocally committed to human rights, the question is how they will position themselves in the face of ongoing economic crisis and war.

Additionally, developments toward prodemocratic values can be observed. It should be noted that there is one type of attitude that *cannot* be observed: that which explicitly subordinates itself to state institutions. Although some young people do clearly and proudly identify with their nationality, this group simultaneously expresses the highest levels of distrust toward state institutions (type 1). Others likewise display clear signs of distrust in and disassociation from state institutions. This group has the lowest degree of identification with a kind of Ukrainian national pride and is more likely to oppose state interventions in companies and industry as well as state responsibility for individual social welfare (type 2). A third group exhibits the strongest rejection of political systems of subjection in addition to speaking out more frequently against dictatorship. This group is also most likely to play an active political role—including in the form of political protests or boycotts (type 3).

These classifications, together with the available data, may also identify an additional facet of young people's values that may give rise to solidarity. Alongside their undeniable material needs, one aspect that all young people have in common is that they never fully subordinate themselves to state institutions. This, together with high approval for democratic structures, can create a unifying basis for coexistence. Perhaps this is the democratic underpinning of social cooperation which Schubarth (2016) regards as a necessity in the face of the dialectic of different value preferences and the pluralism of values. The refusal to subordinate oneself to state institutions may also contain the potential to present a massive united front against the Russian invasion and march into battle together.

That aside, further study is of immense importance for deepening our understanding of youth with the goal of achieving a scientific reappraisal and research on multiple levels of a kind that has not been performed to date (see also Worschech, 2018). Both the long years of war and secession processes in eastern Ukraine and Crimea and the recurring protest movements represent reasons to study youth cultures, perform longitudinal comparisons, and identify new phenomena. At the same time, research may also serve to place the spotlight on current developments as a result of the war in Ukraine. An entire generation of young people is affected by war, and many of them have fled and continue to flee their home country. From a scientific perspective, this presents opportunities for studying possibilities for resocialization; for analyzing refugee movements and living conditions during and after flight and in war; for elucidating traumatization; and for many other fields of inquiry. In the face of the war and the vast refugee movements, it will also be necessary to broaden the scope of scientific observations to include Ukrainian youth living in Ukraine and abroad.

## References

Banakh, M. (2014). *Analyse: Die orange revolution 2004 und der Euromaidan 2013/2014. Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede*. (Bundeszentralte für politische Bildung (bpb)) Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von https://www.bpb.de/themen/europa/ukraine/179753/analyse-die-orange-revolution-2004-und-der-euromaidan-2013-2014/

DAAD-Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, Eds. (2017). *DAAD-Bildungssystemanalyse 2017 Ukraine.* Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von Ukraine. Daten & Analysen zum Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsstandort/2017: https://www.daad.de/medien/der-daad/analysen-studien/bildungssystemanalyse/ukraine_daad_bsa.pdf

Elbedour, S. (1998). Youth in crisis: The well-being of middle eastern youth and adolescents during war and peace. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence. A Multidisciplinary Research Publication, 27*(5), pp. 539–556.

Hagenaars, J., Halman, L., & Moors, G. (2003). Exploring Europe's basic values map. In W. Arts, J. Hagenaars, & L. Halman (Eds.), *The cultural diversity of Europen unity. Finding, explanations and Reflecitons from European value study* (pp. 23–58). Koninklrjke Brill N.V.

Inglehart, R. (1977). *The silent revolution. Changing values and political styles among western publics*. Princeton University Press.

Jarábik, B. (2018). *Fünf Jahre nach dem Euromaidan. Mehr Nation, weniger Staat.* Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von Ukraine-Analysen, No.209: http://laender-analysen.de/ukraine/pdf/UkraineAnalysen209.pdf?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Ukraine-Analysen+209&newsletter=Ukraine-Analysen+209

Kappeler, A., & Bundeszentale für politische Bildung. (2015). Die Ukraine—ein Land zwischen Ost und West. *Info aktuell. Informationen zur politischen Bildung* (28/2015).

Kelman, H. C. (1987). The political psychology of the Israeli-Palestinian sonflict: How can we overcome the barrier to a negotiated solution? Political Psychology. Vol. 8, pp. 347–363.

Klages, H. (1984). *Werteorientierungen im Wandel. Rückblick, Gegenwartsanalyse, Prognosen*. Campus Verlag GmbH.

Klages, H. (1988). *Wertedynamik. Über die Wandelbarkeit des Selbstverständlichen*. Edition Interfrom.

Klein, E. (2018). *Fünf Jahre Maidan -Weckruf an die Gesellschaft.* Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von Ukraine-Analysen, Nr.209: http://laender-analysen.de/ukraine/pdf/UkraineAnalysen209.pdf?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Ukraine-Analysen+209&newsletter=Ukraine-Analysen+209

Klymenko, T. (2019). *Die Politik der Umbenennung. Nationsbildung und Straßennamen in der Ukraine*. (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde et al.) Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von Ukraine-Analysen, No.214: https://www.laender-analysen.de/ukraine-analysen/214/

Kutsenko, O. (2004). The zigzags of political regime democratization in Ukraine. *Ukrainian Sociological Review, 5*, pp. 70–87.

Lerner, M. (1989). Psychological dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *Tikkun Magazine. Vol. 4*, pp. 41–49.

Malak-Minkiewicz, B. (1994). Grundwerte der Demokratie und der Transformationsprozeß in post-kommunistischen Ländern. *Grundwerte der Demokratie im internationalen Vergleich, 328*, pp. 106–111.

Ostanina, E. (2018). *Die Eskalation im Asowschen Meer aus internationaler Perspektive.* Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von Ukraine-Analysen, No.209: http://laender-analysen.de/ukraine/pdf/UkraineAnalysen209.pdf?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Ukraine-Analysen+209&newsletter=Ukraine-Analysen+209

Ostrikova, A. (2016). *Country sheet on youth policy in Ukraine.* Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262259/Ukraine_Country+sheet_2016.pdf/492169a9-0ba0-44ab-ae00-3d0a076d5864

Pew Research Center. (2009). *End of communism cheered but now with more reservations*. Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von http://www.pewglobal.org/2009/11/02/end-of-communism-cheered-but-now-with-more-reservations/

Ptoukha Institute for Demography and Social Studies of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine. (2010). *Youth and youth policy in Ukraine: Social and demographic aspects.* Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von https://www.idss.org.ua/public_en

Roberts, K. (2009). *Youth in transition. Eastern Europe and the west*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Roberts, K., Clarke, S., Fagan, C., & Tholen, J. (2000). *Surviving post communism: Young people in the former Soviet Union*. Edward Elgar.

Sapper, M. (1997). Konflikte in der Transformation Osteuropas: Zur Spezifik der Konfliktkonstellation und Konfliktkultur. In Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche Studien, Eds., *Der Osten Europas im Prozeß der Differenzierung. Fortschritte und Mißerfolge der Tansformation* (pp. 323–331). München & Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag.

Schubarth, W. (2016). Wertebildung in der Fachdebatte: Theoretische Grundlagen und pädagogische Konzepte. In Bertelsmann Stiftung (Eds.), *Werte lernen und leben. Theorie und Praxis der Wertebildung in Deutschland* (pp. 17–60). Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung.

Segert, D. (2014). *Transformationen in Osteuropa im 20. Jahrhundert* (Bd. 1475). Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Eds. Bonn & Wien: Facultas Verlags- und Buchhandels AG.

Shell Deutschland Holding, Eds. (2015). *Jugend 2015. Eine pragmatische Generation im Aufbruch.* Fischer Taschenbuch.

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs—Ukraine. (2017). *Humanitarian partners in Ukraine appeal for $187 million to assist 2.3 million people in need of assistance and protection.* Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/humanitarian-partners-ukraine-appeal-187-million-assist-23-million-people-need

UNICEF Ukraine Country Office. (2010). *"Youth Policy Review" Final Report.* Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Ukraine_2010_Youth_Policy_Review.pdf

Volosevych, I., Gerasymchuk, S., Kostiuchenko, T., & GfK Ukraine. (2015). *Youth of Ukraine—2015.* Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von https://www.gfk.com/fileadmin/user_upload/dyna_content/UA/Molod_Ukraine_2015_EN.pdf

Worldatlas. (2022). Major Cities In Ukraine. Abgerufen am 20. Juni 2022 von https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-ukraine.html

World Values Survey Association. (2018). *World values survey. Data & documentation*. Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp

Worschech, S. (2018). *Zivilgesellschaft nach dem Euromaidan: Vom Ehrenamt zu neuen Strukturen der Partizipation?* Abgerufen am 09. September 2022 von Ukraine-Analysen, No.202: http://www.laender-analysen.de/ukraine/pdf/UkraineAnalysen202.pdf

Zinnecker, J. (1991). Jugend als Bildungsmoratorium. Zur Theorie des Wandels der Jugendphase in west- und osteuropäischen Gesellschaften. In W. Melzer, W. Heitmeyer, L. Liegle, & J. Zinnecker (Eds.), *Osteuropäische Jugend im Wandel. Ergebnisse vergleichender Jugendforschung in der Sowjetunion, Polen, Ungarn und der ehemaligen DDR* (pp. 9–25). Weinheim und München: Juventa Verlag.

# Part III
# Young People's Responses to the Conditions in Their Home Countries

# Youth and Migration in Kyrgyzstan: Between Poverty Migration and Perspectives at Home


**Daniela Lamby and Marius Harring**

**Contents**



## 1 Introduction

Kyrgyzstan is a country of transition, continual progress, and young emergent democracy. While all three of these factors offer perspectives for young people to remain in the country, many other factors are responsible for the fact that young Kyrgyz people in particular can find themselves faced with the need to migrate.

Kyrgyzstan has a long tradition of migration. The 1990s were characterized by post-Soviet migration from all the central Asian states to Russia, especially in the context of the "policy of ethnicizing all spheres of life in favor of the 'titular nation'" (Abaschin, 2017, p. 3). The tendency for ethnic groups to migrate after becoming minorities was intensified by political and economic instability (Abaschin, 2017). From the turn of the millennium to the present day, migration tendencies have increased with the goals of finding jobs and securing income. Demand for labor in Russia, visa facilitation, and the sinking Kyrgyz economy were additional drivers of work migration (Abaschin, 2017).

Even today, migration is still motivated to a significant extent by the search for new perspectives and the quest to escape from poverty and conflict. The German Society for International Collaboration lists factors such as strong regional, ethnic,

D. Lamby (✉) · M. Harring
University of Mainz, Mainz, Germany
e-mail: daniela.lamby@uni-mainz.de; harring@uni-mainz.de



M. Harring (ed.), *Growing Up in Times of Crisis*, Contributions to Political Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58626-2_10

economic, and intergenerational controversies along with high poverty and high maternal and neonatal mortality rates as motives for migration (GIZ, 2022). UNICEF confirms these observations, particularly with respect to young people, and states that over 40% of young people are affected by poverty and unemployment, which are exacerbated by corruption and low levels of state assistance (UNICEF, 2022, p. 11). Coppenrath additionally points out the absence of attractive economic sectors and widespread corruption among civil servants (Coppenrath, 2020, p. 9).

All these conditions represent classical push factors that are reflected in the high numbers of migrants from Kyrgyzstan (KFW, 2022). According to official figures from the National State Migration service, almost one million of the country's 6,389,500 residents work abroad (Turmush, 2019). Their cumulative income accounts for over one-third of the national GDP, "… making Kyrgyzstan one of the remittance-dependent countries in the world" (The World Bank, 2022a). Another factor that should not be underestimated is domestic migration from rural to urban regions, chiefly to Bishkek and Osh. An estimated one million Kyrgyz people are domestic migrants (UNICEF, 2022, p. 11). Domestic migration is driven by better educational opportunities, the search for employment, and the drive to escape from conditions of poverty and backwardness: "In 2018, an average of just under 38 percent of all households throughout Kyrgyzstan had a permanent sewage hook-up compared to over 97 percent of households in Bishkek" (Coppenrath, 2020, p. 5). Data from a quantitative study of 1000 Kyrgyz youth confirms these impressions. Over 80% of young people state that they are highly likely to find a well-paid job abroad, while only 33.9% assume they could do so within Kyrgyzstan.

In a country where over 50% of the population is under 25 years old and where little is known about the impact of migration on youth (UNICEF, 2022, p. 11), it is crucial to establish young people's attitudes to migration. This chapter is devoted to addressing this question. In the following two sections, we begin by providing initial insights into the Kyrgyz youth study by setting out fundamental demographic parameters and the attitudes and expectations of young people with respect to migration in general. In the fourth section, we focus on the interdependence of work and migration before identifying new perspectives for young people in the context of work and migration.

## 2 Methodology and Description of the Sample

The following remarks are based on data from a Kyrgyz youth study which is part of a large-scale series of youth studies conducted in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe, Central Eastern Europe, and the Baltic by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Expert supervision of these studies is provided by a team headed by Marius Harring (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, Germany). Modeled on the youth study conducted by Shell in Germany (Shell Deutschland Holding 2015), this 2020 study interviewed 1000 Kyrgyz young people aged between 14 and 29 about various aspects of daily life using a standardized questionnaire. The

population parameters of this representative random sample reflected the distribution of the parameters within the national population. The questionnaire comprised 415 items and, with very few exceptions, employed a closed question-and-answer format frequently involving rating scales. Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses of the results were performed using SPSS.

The purpose of the research presented here is to shed light on selected aspects of young Kyrgyz people's lifeworlds from the perspective of the young people themselves. Special attention is paid to young people's attitudes to and personal experiences with migration.

The total population of Kyrgyzstan is approximately 6.5 million, over half of whom are under 25 years old. Kyrgyzstan is thus a very "young" country (National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan 2021). The present study interviewed young people between the ages of 14 and 29. The sample of 1000 young people comprised 491 (49.1%) female and 509 (50.9%) male respondents (Table 1).

**Table 1** Breakdown of sample by sociodemographic criteria, subdivided by age of respondents

| Sociodemographic criteria | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Early youth phase 14–19 | Middle youth phase 20 to 24 | Late youth phase I 25 to 29 | Total |
| **Total = n** | *346 (34.6%)* | *318 (31.8%)* | *336 (33.6%)* | *1.000 (100.0%)* |
| *Male* | *177 (51.2%)* | *162 (50.9%)* | *170 (50.6%)* | *509 (50.9%)* |
| *Female* | *169 (48.8%)* | *156 (49.1%)* | *166 (49.4%)* | *491 (49.1%)* |
| **Degree of urbanization** | | | | |
| Rural | *98 (28.3%)* | *92 (28.9%)* | *129 (38.4%)* | *319 (31.9%)* |
| Urban | *248 (71.7%)* | *226 (71.1%)* | *207 (61.6%)* | *681 (68.1%)* |
| **Financial situation** | | | | |
| No money for food, electricity, etc. | *7 (2.0%)* | *4 (1.3%)* | *6 (1.8%)* | *17 (1.7%)* |
| Money for food and electricity, but not for clothes and shoes | *27 (7.8%)* | *27 (8.5%)* | *37 (11.0%)* | *91 (9.1%)* |
| Money for food/clothing, but not for TV/fridge | *138 (39.9%)* | *126 (39.6%)* | *135 (40.2%)* | *399 (39.9%)* |
| Money for food/clothing/TV, but not for car/housing | *106 (30.6%)* | *109 (34.3%)* | *103 (30.7%)* | *318 (31.8%)* |
| Enough money for an affluent lifestyle | *56 (16.2%)* | *48 (15.1%)* | *52 (15.5%)* | *156 (15.6%)* |
| DK/NA | *12 (3.5%)* | *4 (1.3%)* | *3 (0.9%)* | *19 (1.9%)* |

(continued)

**Table 1** (continued)

| Sociodemographic criteria | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Early youth phase 14–19 | Middle youth phase 20 to 24 | Late youth phase I 25 to 29 | Total |
| **Educational qualifications** | | | | |
| No education/primary school | *250 (72.3%)* | *81 (25.4%)* | *79 (23.5%)* | *410 (41.0%)* |
| Secondary school | *93 (26.9%)* | *193 (60.7%)* | *141 (42.0%)* | *427 (42.7%)* |
| *Bachelor* | *2 (0.6%)* | *39 (12.3%)* | *81 (24.1%)* | *122 (12.2%)* |
| *Master* | */* | *5 (1.6%)* | *33 (9.8%)* | *38 (3.8%)* |
| DK/NA | *1 (0.3%)* | */* | *2 (0.6%)* | *3 (0.3%)* |

## *2.1 Degree of Urbanization*

In general, urban spaces offer more options for education, training, and work. These opportunities offer strong encouragement for young people—especially those currently in training or just entering the job market—to choose urban areas as their main place of residence. Their settlement patterns corroborate this assumption, with over two-thirds (68.1%) of young people living in urban areas. This proportion declines somewhat with increasing age.

## *2.2 Grave Economic Fears for the Future and Current Financial Situation*

Young Kyrgyz people are severely afraid of economic hardship. Almost two-thirds (64.7%) of respondents are afraid of rising poverty in society as a whole. Asked about their own current economic situation, about one-tenth (10.8%) state that they are unable to afford clothing or shoes. In contrast, just under one-sixth (15.6%) describe their financial position as good and say they can afford luxury goods.

## *2.3 Educational Qualifications and Unemployment*

The final sociodemographic criterion listed in Table 1 is the highest formal educational qualifications attained at the time of the survey. Obviously, higher educational qualifications are more frequent among older young people. Nevertheless, one-quarter (25.4%) of those aged between 20 and 24 state that they have no educational

qualifications at all or that they have only completed primary school. The same applies to a similar proportion of those aged over 25. Most of these young people with minimal schooling come from rural areas. Additionally, the true unemployment rate in the age cohort over 25 is significantly higher among those with low educational qualifications, with 60.8% of those over 25 with low education state that they are unemployed. In contrast, the unemployment rate of those over 25 with a master's degree is 27.2%.

## 3 Preliminary Insights into Youth and Migration in Kyrgyzstan

### *3.1 Low Interest in Migration Among Kyrgyz Youth*

Against the background of the multifaceted push factors for migration discussed above, it is worthwhile to examine the aspirations of individual young people with respect to migration. It can be assumed that the desire to escape poverty and conflicts by migrating would be especially high. A glance at the data, however, shows that relatively few young people desire to migrate. Over two-thirds (67.9%) of respondents state that they have no intention of migrating, while fewer than one-tenth (9.2%) have a strong or very strong desire to go abroad for more than six months. Willingness to migrate decreases in the older age groups, among whom the option of migrating is increasingly outweighed by the desire to start a family or by securing permanent employment.

### *3.2 Wanderlust Among Kyrgyz Youth*

When asked about their preferred destination, young Kyrgyz people often respond that they would like to go very far away. The United States is their no. 1 destination, followed by Russia, the EU, Canada, and Australia. The proportion of young people desiring to migrate to neighboring countries like Uzbekistan or Tajikistan, at under 1%, is extremely low. The reasons for the reluctance of young Kyrgyz people to migrate to neighboring countries are diverse and generally obvious. First, countries like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have a weaker economy and frequently offer even fewer options for education and employment than Kyrgyzstan. The shared history of the Central Asian states is both a unifying and a dividing factor. Taschtemchanowa and Medeubajewa (2017, p. 2) speak of "mistrust, suspicion, and hostility" and of "border lines between the Central Asian states [that] have still not been fully clarified." The results of these controversial border lines are exclaves, disputes about water and grazing, and armed conflict (Taschtemchanowa and Meteubajewa 2017). Nonetheless, the same authors also report about hopes for amicable settlements

especially by the political elites, which are approaching one another to lay the groundwork for future measures.

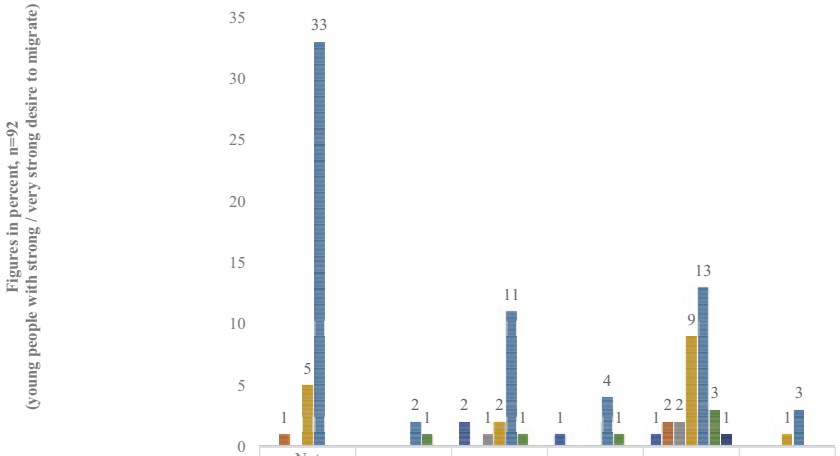
Close ties are still maintained with Russia, and this is reflected in the fact that almost one-quarter of respondents name Russia as their preferred migration destination. There are multiple reasons for this: geographical proximity; numerous economic and political agreements facilitating migration (such as recognition of educational qualifications and ease of registration); language; high remittances (about one-third of GDP is generated by migrant workers sending money home from Russia, cf. Ortmann, 2019, p. 3; Gast, 2018); and the countries' shared history are only some of the many pull factors. One specific, everyday manifestation of these ties is that Russian media are consumed by many people in Kyrgyzstan, thus creating a shared frame of reference (Ortmann, 2019). "One-fifth of the population are migrant workers in Russia" (Ortmann, 2019, p. 3).

### *3.3 The Phenomenon of Informal Migration*

The young people were also asked about their personal preparations for migrating. In the case of those who express a strong or very strong desire to migrate soon for a period of over 6 months, one might expect them to have begun making preparations. Their answers, however, reveal a very different picture. Two-thirds (66%) of those with a strong desire to migrate have done nothing at all to prepare for migration, while only 4% say that they have contacted the embassy and 3% have reached out to their potential employer or university/educational institution. Friends and family who might be able to help with migration are the most frequent people to be contacted (17%). This distribution is reflected in Fig. 1, which illustrates actual preparations for migration as well as the subjective feeling of being prepared for migration.

Figure 1 shows that, while slightly over half of the young people who have not made any preparations for migration also feel poorly or not at all prepared for migration, almost half of them feel moderately to well prepared for migration despite having made no preparations at all.

These observations bring us to the phenomenon of *informal migration*, which will be described in more detail in what follows. The low levels of preparation are evidence of informal migration, for which no official preparations are made and the only contacts that are leveraged (if at all) are private ones. This culture of the informal is a social phenomenon that pervades all parts of society and does not stop short of migration. Low commitment to qualifications (applications and language proficiency), the avoidance of formal barriers, and the generally low level of commitment show that migration does not necessarily entail major preparations and that informal contacts such as friends and family can suffice to enable it. Temporary labor migration, the predominant form of migration in Kyrgyzstan, can be achieved by these means. Additionally, thanks to agreements within the Eurasian Union, Kyrgyz people need only register at their place of residence and produce a work contract in order to be able to migrate to countries such as Russia (Abaschin, 2017,




| | Not prepared at all 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Very well prepared 5 | DK/NA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| has contacted embassy | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| has contacted potential employer | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| has contacted potential university / educational institution | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| has contacted friends / relatives | 5 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 9 | 1 |
| nothing | 33 | 2 | 11 | 4 | 13 | 3 |
| other | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| DK/NA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

**Fig. 1** Preparations for migration and the feeling of being prepared for migration

p. 4). Official registration, however, is a costly process, so that many people resort to illegal migration accompanied by personal contacts and corruption (Abaschin, 2017, p. 4).

## *3.4 The Influence of Gender on Migration*

Migration in Kyrgyzstan predominantly takes the form of circular migration with the primary goal of employment and earnings. Abaschin also offers evidence for this phenomenon of circular migration, saying that "Even those who only rarely return home regard their life situation as temporary" (Abaschin, 2017, p. 4). The temporary nature of migration is reinforced by the illegal status of many migrants, by the high costs of legalizing their status in Russia (the main destination for migrants), and by Russia's policy of punishing even minor infractions with deportation and reentry bans (Abaschin, 2017).

Since this study did not include young people who were abroad at the time, we asked the question: "Have you ever been away from your home country for over six months?" The responses reveal that slightly over one-sixth (17.5%) had been abroad for over 6 months in the past and that the proportion of young people answering in

the affirmative increases with increasing age. The gender distribution of those stating that they have been abroad is significant, with 63.2% of male and 37.7% of female young people reporting personal experience of migration. Young males from migrant backgrounds are especially likely to migrate themselves. We may note, then, that although aspirations to migrate are equally distributed between the sexes, young males are more likely to follow through on their aspirations. Motives and explanations include greater family commitments on the part of young women, who traditionally care for children and the home, and greater demand for labor in the agricultural and building sectors.

Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan is the exception among Central Asian countries with respect to female migration, since the number of women who migrate is approximately 40% higher there than in other countries (Abaschin, 2017, p. 4). This is attributable to more liberal laws and social norms governing women's rights as well as young Kyrgyz women attaining higher educational qualifications, which improve their chances of migrating successfully. Nevertheless, often it is also simply precarious economic conditions that cause migration to be regarded as the only option for either sex.

## 4 A New Generation of Optimistic and Satisfied Young People? The Interdependence of the Economy and Migration

The available data reveals that young Kyrgyz people are highly optimistic and highly satisfied in many respects. The highest degrees of satisfaction are reported with respect to family (96.6%), friends (85.6%), and education (83.5%). These high scores go hand in hand with high optimism for the future: 87.6% believe in a better future for themselves, while 81.6% believe in a better future for Kyrgyzstan as a whole. In contrast, only 48.3% of young people are satisfied with their current job situation. Even this cursory glance at young people's satisfaction offers scope for interpretation and leads to one central conclusion, which will be elaborated below: most young Kyrgyz people are tightly integrated into their families, well educated, and optimistic, although this fundamentally positive attitude is somewhat dampened by economic conditions.

Developments in society in general over the last few decades offer considerable scope for optimism, as the figures quoted above attest. Since the 1990s—after the fall of the Soviet Union and Kyrgyz independence—Kyrgyzstan has been experiencing continual change: a process of transition toward market economy and democracy accompanied by political and economic reforms. Additionally, the Chinese government's Road and Belt Initiative, while not devoid of problematic aspects, offers new economic possibilities and challenges. The improved infrastructure offered by this project could, according to Pomfret (2019), provide opportunities for Central Asian states while altering migration trends in the region. What is

more, the national poverty rate declined steadily from 39.9% in 2006 to 22.4% in 2018 (The World Bank, 2022b) while average income increased from 3260 Kyrgyzstani Som in 2006 to 16,427 Kyrgyzstani Som in 2018 (Кыргыз Республикасынын Улуттук статистика комитети, 2022).

Even though these developments are extremely hopeful, however, the de facto current economic circumstances of many young people remain precarious, and it is economic resources that determine their scope for action. These economic circumstances are the main drivers favoring young people's aspirations to migrate.

## *4.1 The Crux of Economic Dependency*

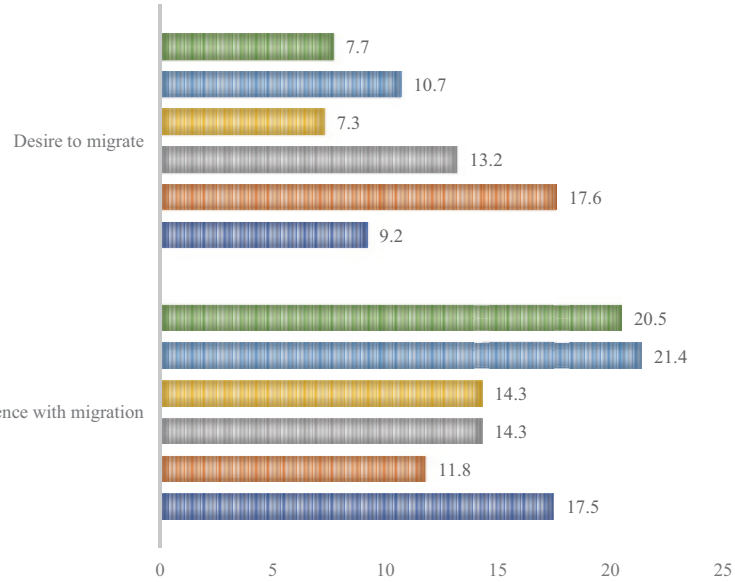
As we have noted, the desire of young people to migrate is generally low, with only 9.2% expressing a strong desire to migrate. These aspirations are significantly lower in young people from very strong financial backgrounds (see Fig. 2).

Only 7.7% of young people from very affluent families have a desire to migrate. The idea of migration is entertained by very few of those living under these circumstances, since there is no economic necessity for them to do so.

In contrast, 17.6% of young people from very poor backgrounds—significantly more than the average of 9.2%—aspire to migrate. The reasons for their high willingness to migrate are clearly identifiable as the conditions of poverty and financial hardship under which they are obliged to live.

However, financial dependencies and possibilities quickly catch up with the young people and invert the situation, so that, ultimately, 17.5% of the participants in the study have actual experience of migration. The figure is significantly lower (11.8%) among those who cannot even afford food and electricity. This can be explained by the fact that these young people simply lack the resources (obtaining visas, work permits, etc.) to put migration plans into action. In contrast, over 20% of young people from very affluent backgrounds state that they have already been abroad. These young people have the necessary resources to migrate.

These economic and financial dependencies permeate all aspects of migration. Almost one-third (29.3%) of young people state that their main motive for migrating would be to improve their standard of living, while 19.3% would migrate for the sake of a better education and an additional 15.6% would do so for better wages. Thus, the main motive for migration is work. Many young people assume that a sojourn abroad will improve their employment prospects. But the implications of economic migration are broader still; 92.2% assume that most of their earnings abroad will be invested in their family's everyday needs. Once again, therefore, there is no question of migration for personal pleasure, geared toward gaining experience, broadening horizons, or learning languages and getting to know different cultures. Rather, the purpose of migration is strategic and driven by economic motives. Its purpose is to optimize the migrant's living situation, to support the family remaining at home, and to maximize the probability of subsequent success on the domestic job market. Thus, more than one in two young people (56.8%) feel that returning migrants have an advantage on the job market.




| | Experience with migration | Desire to migrate |
|---|---|---|
| Enough money for an affluent lifestyle (n=156) | 20.5 | 7.7 |
| Enough money for many things, but not for car/apartment (n=318) | 21.4 | 10.7 |
| Enough money for food and clothing, but not for fridge/TV (n=399) | 14.3 | 7.3 |
| Enough money for electricity and food, but not for clothing and shoes (n=91) | 14.3 | 13.2 |
| Not enough money for electricity, heat, and food (n=17) | 11.8 | 17.6 |
| Total (N=1.000) | 17.5 | 9.2 |

**Fig. 2** Migration aspirations vs. migration experience in relation to financial situation

## *4.2 Continuation of Familial Migration History*

Experiences of migration typically begin in childhood in the shape of the migration of one or both parents. The children of domestic migrants on the outskirts of Bishkek and Osh often live under life-threatening conditions on the fringes of legality (UNICEF, 2022, pp. 11 f.). They are also victims of social stigmatization, exclusion, and psychological stress, according to the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) (FIDH, 2022). Many children and adolescents suffer from the fact that even mothers are increasingly embarking on labor migration in what has been termed the "feminization of migrant flows" (Eurasianet, 2013). Nevertheless, this familial migration history continues in the biographies of many young people even though the present study finds that young people with parents who migrated exhibit no heightened desire to migrate

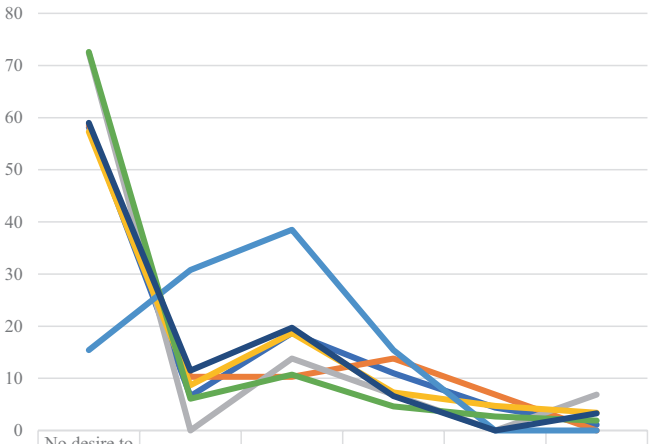
themselves. This can be taken as confirmation that experiences with migrating parents do not encourage them to embark on the same path. On the other hand, the probability of migration is higher for young people with a family history of migration.

## 4.3 *Poverty as Driver and Unemployment as Hindrance for Personal Aspirations to Migration*

As we have noted, the desire to migrate is comparatively high among those affected by poverty even though significantly fewer of these young people put their migration plans into practice than young people from affluent backgrounds.

A similar assumption might be made about the effect of employment vs. unemployment: it seems reasonable to expect unemployed young people to migrate in significantly higher numbers than those in permanent employment. A glance at Fig. 3, however, refutes this assumption.

It is predominantly the unemployed who do not intend to migrate (72.6%), while those with temporary employment contracts are most likely to have a strong or very strong desire to migrate (20.7%). This phenomenon may be explained by the widespread practice of temporary migration or by circular migration, in which migration is regarded as the gateway to advancement on the job market or as an opportunity to earn better wages than at home.




| | No desire to migrate | Weak | Moderate | strong | very strong | DK/NA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I have a permanent job | 58.2 | 6.6 | 18.7 | 11 | 4.4 | 1.1 |
| I have a temporary job | 58.6 | 10.3 | 10.3 | 13.8 | 6.9 | 0 |
| I have a seasonal/irregular job | 72.4 | 0 | 13.8 | 6.9 | 0 | 6.9 |
| I am self-employed | 57.3 | 8.7 | 18.7 | 7.3 | 4.7 | 3.4 |
| I am in training | 15.4 | 30.8 | 38.5 | 15.4 | 0 | 0 |
| I am unemployed | 72.6 | 6.1 | 10.7 | 4.6 | 2.7 | 1.9 |
| DK(NA | 59 | 11.5 | 19.7 | 6.6 | 0 | 3.3 |

**Fig. 3** Aspirations to migration and current employment situation

## 5 Conclusion

The responses of the young people in the study provide insights into a country in which almost one-sixth of the population are domestic migrants and almost another sixth have migrated abroad: a country poised between auspicious prospects as an island of democracy and economic growth on the one hand and the fear of growing poverty and unemployment on the other. The present data precisely reflects this dilemma confronting Kyrgyz youth. Many young people are debating whether to stay at home or leave their country. Factors in favor of remaining in the country are high satisfaction with family and friends as well as generally positive expectations for the near future and the desire not to migrate. Factors favoring domestic and foreign migration are high poverty and the fear of poverty.

Education is a crucial factor for successful entry into the job market and for opening up perspectives for remaining in the country. The unemployment rate is twice as high among young people with low qualifications than among people with a master's degree.

Nevertheless, one should not neglect the high unemployment rate among young people overall, which, at over 40%, is one of the main drivers of Kyrgyzstan's high rate of labor and poverty migration. Those young people who embark on migration frequently battle with the circumstances inherent in informal and frequently illegal migration.

Continued scientific research and reappraisal remain necessary for attaining a deeper understanding of Kyrgyz youth. Given that over half the population is under 25 years of age, youth studies in Kyrgyzstan, unlike in many European countries with a significantly lower, and declining, percentage of young people, also increases our understanding of the majority of the overall population.

## References

Abaschin, S. (2017). *Postsowejtische Migration aus Zentralasien nach Russland. Neue Akteure in globalen Migrationsprozessen.* Abgerufen am 01. November 2022 von Zentralasien-Analysen: https://www.laender-analysen.de/zentralasien-analysen/120/

Coppenrath, F. (2020). *Zwischen Nationalpopulismus und Neoliberalismus – die aktuellen Entwicklungen in Kirgisistan aus Sicht globaler politischer Trends.* Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von Zentralasien-Analysen: https://www.laender-analysen.de/zentralasien-analysen/144/

Eurasianet. (2013). *Kyrgyzstan: Labour Migrants Leave Behind "Social Orphants".* Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-labor-migrants-leave-behind-social-orphans

FIDH. (2022). *Kyrgyzstan. Women and children from Kyrgyzstan affected by migration. An exacerbated vulnerability*. Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_kyrgyzstan_uk-2-web2.pdf

Gast, A.-S. (2018). *Warum Kirgisistans Mitgliedschaft in der Eurasischen Wirtschaftsunion bisher kein Erfolg war.* Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von Zentralsien-Analysen: https://www.laender-analysen.de/zentralasien-analysen/123/

GIZ. (2022). *Kirgisistan.* Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von https://www.giz.de/de/weltweit/356.html

KFW. (2022). *Kirgisistan. Warten auf weitere Reformen.* Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/Internationale-Finanzierung/KfW-Entwicklungsbank/Weltweite-Präsenz/Asien/Kirgisistan/

Кыргыз Республикасынын Улуттук статистика комитети. (2022). *Орточо айлык эмгек акы*. Abgerufen am 01. November 2022 von: http://www.stat.kg/kg/opendata/category/112/

Ortmann, S. (2019). *Russlands Macht in Kirgisistan: Mythos und Verführung.* Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von Zentralasien-Analysen: https://www.laender-analysen.de/zentralasien-analysen/134/

Pomfret, R. (2019). *Der Festlandhandel zwischen China und der EU. Welche Möglichkeiten ergeben sich für Zentralsien?* Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von Zentralasien-Analysen: https://www.laender-analysen.de/zentralasien-analysen/137/

Taschtemchanowa, R., & Medeubajewa, D. (2017). *Ein Ende der "Kaltzeit". Positive Tendenzen in den Beziehungen zwischen den Staaten Zentralasiens.* Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von Zentralasien-Analysen: https://www.laender-analysen.de/zentralasien-analysen/115/

The World Bank. (2022a). *Personal remittances, received (% of GDP) – Kyrgyz Republic.* Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=KG

The World Bank. (2022b). *Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population) – Kyrgyz Republic*. Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC?locations=KG

Turmush. (2019). *Ошогу форум: Кыргызстандык мигранттар кайсы өлкөлөрдө көп?* Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von https://www.turmush.kg/news:383616/

UNICEF. (2022). *Kyrgyzstan. Adolescents and youth.* Abgerufen am 14. September 2022 von https://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/adolescents-youth

# "Yes to Democracy, But This Is Not What We Had in Mind!": Satisfaction with Democracy Among Post-Yugoslav Youth in the 2008–2018 Period

**Andrej Kirbiš and Maruša Lubej**

**Contents**



## 1 Introduction

Concerns about the "crisis of democracy" in late modern societies are driven by observable trends in citizens' attitudes and behaviors (Crozier et al., 1975; Bromley et al., 2004; Macedo et al., 2005; Petring & Merkel, 2012; Wagenaar, 2015). Citizen participation—activities by which citizens exercise their influence on decisions affecting life in their political community (Kaase & Marsh, 1979; Macedo et al., 2005; Zukin et al., 2006)—has been declining since the last several decades. This decline encompasses voter turnout, party membership, and membership in voluntary organizations, as evidenced by numerous studies (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; Katz et al., 1992; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Putnam, 1995, 2000; Wattenberg, 1998; Gray & Caul, 2000; Macedo et al., 2005; Dalton, 2006; Scarrow, 2007; Blais, 2007; Kostelka & Blais, 2021; Cameron, 2021). The decline in citizen participation correlates with citizens' diminishing trust in key democratic institutions, including decreasing levels of citizens' attachment to political parties (Schmitt & Holmberg, 1995; Dassonneville, 2022), declining trust in politicians (Holmberg, 1999; Dalton, 2017), and in state institutions (Crozier et al., 1975; Listhaug & Wiberg, 1995;

A. Kirbiš (✉) · M. Lubej
University of Maribor, Maribor, Slovenia
e-mail: andrej.kirbis@um.si



M. Harring (ed.), *Growing Up in Times of Crisis*, Contributions to Political Science, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58626-2_11

Citrin & Stoker, 2018; Brady & Kent, 2022). The ongoing decline in both citizen participation and trust in democratic institutions is a concerning trend that threatens the foundational principles of democratic societies, warranting further investigation.

Compared to adults, the younger generations show significantly lower levels of citizen participation and greater distrust in democratic institutions, trends that are intensifying over time (Wattenberg, 2002; Franklin, 2004; Zukin et al., 2006; Fieldhouse et al., 2007; Quintelier, 2007; Fahmy, 2006; Dalton, 2008; Szabó & Oross, 2018; Ambrosino et al., 2023). The expectation of these trends' intensification, mainly due to generational shifts, underscores the increasing urgency of addressing the future of democracy (e.g., Kaase & Newton, 1995). In Southeast Europe (SEE), trust among youth in civil society organizations, government, and political leaders is notably low. Additionally, a mere 63% of youth consider democracy a favorable form of government (Lavrič, 2019).

In the context of democratic consolidation in newer democracies, particularly in the volatile region of the former Yugoslavia, young people's perceptions of democracy emerge as a crucial issue. The main aim of the present chapter is to examine satisfaction with democracy among the post-Yugoslav youth. This chapter starts by discussing the literature on the relevance and recent trends of satisfaction with democracy. Subsequently, we conduct an empirical examination and comparison of youth satisfaction with democracy in the post-Yugoslav countries (2008–2018), followed by an analysis of the discrepancies between this satisfaction and the functioning of democratic institutions, and the relationship between satisfaction and support of democracy. In the last part of the chapter, we discuss our findings in terms of the future of democratic consolidation in the post-Yugoslav countries.

## 2 The Relevance of (Dis)satisfaction with Democracy

Ever since the seminal study on political culture by Almond and Verba (1963), it has been convincingly argued that a prodemocratic public is a necessary precondition for a functioning democracy. Klingemann et al. (2006) emphasize the necessity of widespread acceptance of democratic principles among citizens for the successful legitimation of democracy in a country. Extensive empirical examinations have convincingly corroborated this line of reasoning; in general, countries where citizens express a stronger democratic orientation also have more robust and better-functioning democratic institutions (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart & Welzel, 2007; Welzel, 2013).

Recently, scholars have emphasized the need to not only assess citizens' appreciation for democracy and adherence to its principles but also consider the public's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with democracy's performance in their country. This aspect becomes a crucial factor in democratic consolidation, as discontent may lead to pressure on the political system for change, promoting further consolidation (Klingemann et al., 2006; Klingemann, 2014; Štebe, 2000; Pavlović, 2014, 2016;

Dalton & Chull Shin, 2014; Masipa, 2018). Extended and widespread public dissatisfaction may threaten the democratic system by eroding its legitimacy and opening the door to nondemocratic alternatives (Štebe, 2000, 865; Dalton & Chull Shin, 2014; Vasilopoulou & Halikiopoulou, 2023). Understanding these dynamics is vital for safeguarding the future of democratic systems.

For these reasons, social scientists writing about political culture have been paying considerable attention to the concept of satisfaction with democracy in recent decades, especially since the third wave of democratization in Europe. Almond and Verba's (1963) concept suggests that public satisfaction with democracy correlates positively with the quality of democratic institutions, socioeconomic development, and citizens' quality of life. However, recent scholarship challenges this notion, proposing that democratic progress may paradoxically coincide with increased public skepticism. Dalton and Chull Shin (2014) highlight the "irony of modern democracy," where democratic advances often align with a growing skepticism and assertiveness among the public, despite improving conditions. In one of the more recent cross-national analyses of youth in the Western Balkan region, the results were mixed and partly in line with both perspectives. Examining FES youth survey data from the 2011 to 2015 period, Taleski et al. (2015) showed that among the post-Yugoslav countries, dissatisfaction with democracy was highest in Slovenia, the country with the highest socioeconomic and democratic development in the Western Balkan region in the observed period (Human Development Report, 2015; Freedom House, 2015; Nations in Transit, 2015). Conversely, Croatia and Kosovo, despite their differing development levels, reported the lowest dissatisfaction with democracy.

While prior evidence suggests that dissatisfaction with democracy did not substantially change between 2012/2015 and 2018 in Southeast European countries, satisfaction with democracy substantially decreased in Albania and Kosovo, whereas it substantially increased in Slovenia and Bulgaria (Lavrič, 2019). The scarcity of longitudinal studies examining post-Yugoslav youth's satisfaction with democracy, alongside objective data on democratic functioning and its relation to prodemocratic values, is notable.

The key issue for future democratic consolidation goes beyond citizens being dissatisfied with democracy. In established democracies, a substantial portion of the electorate consists of dissatisfied, rather than loyal, citizens, reflecting the complexity of democratic consolidation (Dalton & Chull Shin, 2014, 113). Scholars like Inglehart, Welzel, and others argue that increasing affluence accompanying social modernization prompts citizens to demand more from the political system, fostering a critical attitude, protest, and issue-oriented politics. This results in declining trust in political institutions and dissatisfaction with democracy, along with strong endorsements of democratic values (Inglehart, 1997; 1995; Inglehart & Welzel, 2007; Welzel, 2013; Dalton & Chull Shin, 2014; Klingemann, 2014). In essence, the public's distrust of political institutions and dissatisfaction with democracy may stem from citizens' high expectations and demands on political institutions and elites (Welzel & Alvarez, 2014). Viewed from this angle, citizens may be seen as "critical citizens" or "dissatisfied democrats," often justifiably frustrated by the

inefficiency of democratic institutions. Such "critical citizens" do not, however, represent an existential threat to democracy; rather, they are an essential element of democracy (Klingemann, 2014).

A pivotal question arises when examining satisfaction with democracy: to what extent does individual satisfaction correlate with core democratic values? In essence, satisfaction with democracy may be particularly relevant as an element of a "democratic [political] culture" (Norris, 2011: 99). Evidence indicates that satisfaction with democracy is positively linked to support for democracy (e.g., Canache et al., 2001). Yet, in Southeast European countries, satisfaction with democracy correlates with "support for a strong leader," a potential indicator of antidemocratic attitudes, contingent on the context (Ariely & Davidov, 2014). Viewing from a critical citizen perspective, a negative correlation is also plausible: heightened dissatisfaction may reflect elevated expectations of democratic performance.

In this chapter, we build and expand on the recent study on cross-national variations in the dissatisfaction of youth with democracy by Taleski et al. (2015) and the more recent FES 2019 study (Lavrič, 2019). Our approach involves (1) examining longitudinal trends in youth dissatisfaction with democracy (2008, 2012/2015, 2018) and (2) analyzing the discrepancy between youth satisfaction with democracy and democratic institutions' performance in post-Yugoslav states. Additionally, to understand the broader implications of democratic satisfaction, we (3) investigate how individual-level satisfaction with democracy correlates with core democratic values in the post-Yugoslav countries studied.

## 3 Results

Figure 1 compares dissatisfaction with democracy among post-Yugoslav youth between 2008, 2012/2015 (which is the time when the first wave of FES youth studies was carried out in post-Yugoslav states), and 2018 (the most recent FES survey; FES, 2018). It indicates several important findings.[1] First, between 2008 and 2018,

[1] We note several methodological caveats to our analyses. First, the 2008 data in Fig. 1 is from the European Values Study, where we show results for 15–29-year-olds; FES youth studies 2019 were conducted with the same age group, while the FES youth studies, 2012/2015 were conducted with 16–27-year-olds and FES youth studies 2019 were conducted with 14-29-year olds (FES Youth Studies, 2018/2019). Since our preliminary analyses of 16–27-year-olds using EVS data showed that the results are practically identical to the results of the EVS sample for 15–29-year-olds, we decided to perform our analyses on the larger, somewhat older sample of youth in the EVS in order to have a larger subsample to study. Second, the questions about satisfaction with democracy in EVS, 2008 and the FES youth studies do warrant comparisons, though they were not identical. Specifically, the EVS item asked: "On the whole are you very satisfied, rather satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy is developing in our country?" while the FES youth studies asked: "In general, how satisfied are you with the state of democracy in [your country]?". Third, the number of possible answers on each question was not identical in both studies. As we see, there were four possible valid answers in the EVS data (two indicating "satisfaction" and two "dissatisfaction"), while there were five possible answers in the FES youth studies,

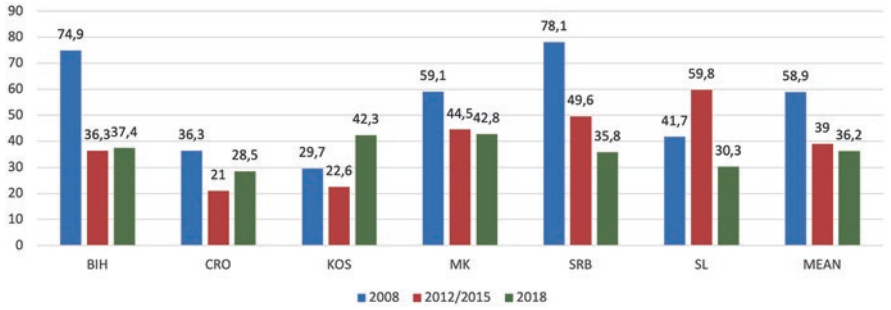



**Fig. 1** Dissatisfaction with democracy among post-Yugoslav youth in 2008, 2012/2015, and 2018
Sources: European Values Study, 2008 data (blue columns), 2012/2015 FES youth studies data (red columns), and 2018 FES youth studies data (green columns).
Notes: Values indicate percentages of youth dissatisfied with democracy

the mean value of dissatisfaction with democracy among the post-Yugoslav youth declined by slightly more than 20 percentage points at the total sample level (right columns in Fig. 1), with the most significant change occurring between 2008 and 2012/2015, i.e., in the first observed period. The average percentage of dissatisfied youth decreased from 58.9% in 2008 to 39% in the first period and then additionally slightly fell to 36.2% in the second examined period (2018).

Figure 1 also shows that, from 2008 to 2012/2015, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the decline in dissatisfaction was most pronounced, dropping from 74.9% to 36.3%, with a marginal increase thereafter. Serbia followed a similar pattern, with dissatisfaction decreasing from 78.1% to 49.6%, then slightly rising again. Contrastingly, Kosovo, which initially saw a minor decrease in dissatisfaction, saw a notable increase in dissatisfaction in 2018 reaching 42.3%. Similarly, Croatia saw a decline from 36.3% in 2008 to 21% in 2012/2015, before a slight increase to 28.5% in 2018. Slovenia presents an intriguing case: after an increase in dissatisfaction from 2008 to 2012/2015, it witnessed a decrease to 30.3% in 2018, well below the initial period.

From the "critical citizen" perspective, higher dissatisfaction might be expected in more developed countries, like Slovenia and Croatia. While this was somewhat evident in 2012/2015, particularly with Slovenia's increased dissatisfaction, it contrasts with the notable decrease of dissatisfaction in Slovenia in 2018.

According to the "critical citizen" perspective, youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia would be expected to be less dissatisfied than their Serbian

with three of them indicating "satisfaction," and two indicating "dissatisfaction," specifically: (1) very dissatisfied, (2) dissatisfied, (3) somewhat satisfied, (4) satisfied, (5) very satisfied. To deal with this methodological difference, we chose to compare only "dissatisfied" ("not very satisfied" and "not at all satisfied" in the EVS data, and "very dissatisfied" and "dissatisfied" in the FES data). This, in our assessment, ensures a reliable comparison. Nevertheless, it is possible that the decrease in "dissatisfaction" we detected from 2008 to 2018 is due to the difference in the wording of the EVS and FES studies, although this then would hold true for all countries to a similar extent, which means that the extent of the differences within each country between three time points can still be compared cross-nationally.

counterparts in 2008, a prediction confirmed by the data in Fig. 1, which shows the highest dissatisfaction among Serbian youth. In 2012/2015, the highest dissatisfaction was detected in Slovenia and Serbia (both ranking high on development scales such as the Human Development Index in the Human Development Report, 2015), while the lowest dissatisfaction was recorded in (also more developed) Croatia and Kosovo (lower on the HDI). However, our analysis of 2018 data introduces new complexities: Kosovo, despite being lower on socioeconomic and political development scales, saw a significant increase in dissatisfaction, possibly reflecting political challenges this country was and is still facing, such as the impact of ethnic tensions and government instability (Nowakowska-Krystman & Żakowska, 2015; Hehir, 2023). Furthermore, Croatia's initial decrease (from 2008 to 2012/2015) and overall decrease in dissatisfaction (from 2008 to 2018), despite its high development, suggest that factors other than just countries' developmental status are influencing youth attitudes.

What we can conclude from this analysis is that cross-national and longitudinal patterns of dissatisfaction cannot be consistently explained through the "critical citizen" perspective nor through the classical understanding of allegiant political culture (Almond & Verba, 1963; Dalton & Chull Shin, 2014; Kirbiš, 2017).

Let us turn now to the longitudinal trends in democratic development in post-Yugoslav countries. This analysis explores whether the observed decrease in dissatisfaction with democracy aligns with any longitudinal trends in democratic development from 2008 to 2018.

Figure 2 presents the longitudinal data on the democratic functioning of post-Yugoslav countries as measured by Freedom House. The data spans from the survey years 2008 to 2019 (each respective survey year analyzes the calendar year before, e.g., the survey 2019 analyzes the calendar year 2018) which was the time point of the FES 2018 youth survey.

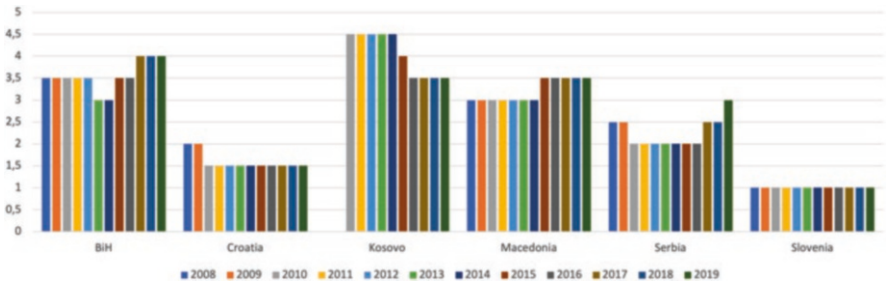



**Fig. 2** Democracy in post-Yugoslav countries (Freedom House scores 2008–2018)
Sources: Freedom House, 2024
Notes: Columns indicate calculated means for each post-Yugoslav country on two dimensions of democratic functioning: *political rights* and *civil liberties*. Freedom House assigns each country two ratings (from 1 to 7): one rating is for political rights and the other is for civil liberties. Two dimensions are calculated based on scores for numerous questions on political rights and civil liberties. A score of 1 represents the greatest degree of democratic freedom, while 7 indicates the smallest degree of freedom (for more details, see *Methodology* (Freedom House, 2015)).

Expectedly, Slovenia, being the most socioeconomically developed, exhibited the highest democratic functioning during the period. In the observed period, Kosovo generally ranked lowest on democratic functioning, though it showed signs of improvement over time and has caught up with Macedonia by 2016 and overtaken Bosnia and Herzegovina by 2017. Kosovo is also the youngest democracy with overall lowest levels of socioeconomic development in the observed years (although in 2018, Kosovo advanced to an upper-middle-income country, matching the economic status of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Serbia; World Bank, 2024). More importantly, Fig. 2 also indicates longitudinal increases in democratic functioning (with lower values indicating better democratic functioning) in Croatia and Kosovo. Following democratic improvement in the beginning of the observed period, Croatia's score remains largely consistent at 1.5, reflecting high quality of democratic governance. After initial democratic improvement, Serbia saw an increase in the score from 2 to 2.5 and, lastly, to 3, indicating democratic backsliding. Bosnia and Herzegovina, initially showing improvement after 2012, scored 4 from 2017 onward, indicating a halt in democratic progression and even democratic regression.

This analysis explores the alignment of institutional longitudinal patterns with subjective satisfaction with democracy in post-Yugoslav countries. Improvements in democratic functioning scores for Croatia, and to a lesser extent for Kosovo, saw divergent patterns in democratic dissatisfaction among the youth. Overall, dissatisfaction decreased in Croatia, while it increased in Kosovo by 2018. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Macedonia all experienced increases in their Freedom House scores (the worsening of democratic functioning) and a substantial decrease in democratic dissatisfaction among youth. Slovenia, with its consistently high democratic functioning also exhibited a decrease in democratic dissatisfaction, although in a nonlinear pattern, as youth dissatisfaction increased significantly by 2012/2015 before dropping substantially in 2018.

In summary, improvements in democratic functioning in Croatia have translated into reduced youth dissatisfaction. However, declines in democratic functioning in Serbia and Macedonia have also been accompanied by reduced dissatisfaction. Our findings do not fully align with the allegiant political culture theory of Almond and Verba (1963), nor with a "critical citizen" approach. Instead, the varied and nonlinear relationship between democratic functioning and youth democratic dissatisfaction in post-Yugoslav countries suggests a more complex mix of critical citizenship and allegiant political culture, diverging from earlier patterns observed in established Western democracies (e.g., Klingemann et al., 2006; Klingemann, 2014; Dalton & Chull Shin, 2014), although recent analysis also suggests variability in longitudinal patterns and cross-national differences not only across regions across the globe but also among countries which are similar with regard to democracy and economic development scores (Valgarðsson & Devine, 2021). The detected complexity in our findings underscores the unique trajectories of democratic consolidation in post-Yugoslav countries and the evolving nature of "critical" and "allegiant" citizen in these countries.

Finally, we examined the extent to which, at the individual level, satisfaction with democracy is linked to democratic values in post-Yugoslav samples, to understand its relevance as a democratic versus nondemocratic attitude. In the FES 2018 surveys, four specific prodemocratic attitudes were measured: "democracy is a good form of government in general," "a political opposition is necessary for a healthy democracy," "under certain circumstances, dictatorship is a better form of government than democracy," and "there are conflicts in every society, which can only be solved by violence" (1 = completely disagree; 5 = completely agree). We recoded the last two items and created a four-item index of "support for democracy" as a core democratic value orientation.

Our analysis showed a positive association between democratic satisfaction and support in the six-country sample ($r = 0.05$; $p < 0.01$). However, this positive correlation was observed in only three countries: Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, with respective correlations of $r = 0.19$, $r = 0.18$, and $r = 0.08$ (all $p < 0.05$). In the remaining three countries, the link was not statistically significant. These findings indicate that satisfaction with democracy may be regarded as a prodemocratic value (as regarded from a classical political culture perspective; see Norris, 2011: 99) in half of the analyzed post-Yugoslav countries. Our findings challenge the "critical citizen" perspective, as we found no evidence of a significant negative association between democratic dissatisfaction and support for democracy.

## 4 Discussion

Our analyses indicated that dissatisfaction with democracy has substantially decreased in five out of six post-Yugoslav countries from 2008 to 2012/2015. However, the findings show three mixed trends leading up to 2018. Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced a substantial decrease in dissatisfaction from 2008 to 2012/2015, albeit with a marginal increase thereafter. Kosovo experienced a similar trend in the first period; however, an initial decrease was followed by a notable rise in dissatisfaction in 2018. Second, Serbia's and Macedonia's pattern was different, with a decrease in dissatisfaction in both periods. Finally, Slovenia presented an intriguing case, showing an initial increase in dissatisfaction in 2012/2015, with a decrease in 2018. These findings indicate that while there is a general trend of decreasing dissatisfaction among the youth (in five out of six countries, with Kosovo being the only country with an overall increase in dissatisfaction), the dynamics vary across different post-Yugoslav states, reflecting the complex sociopolitical landscape in the region.

The overall decrease in dissatisfaction in more socioeconomically developed post-Yugoslav countries, such as Slovenia from 2008 to 2018, defies the expectations of the "critical citizen" theory. Our results suggest that higher development does not necessarily lead to greater dissatisfaction with democracy, even though there was an initial rise in dissatisfaction in 2012/2015. Additionally, the varied trends regarding dissatisfaction with democratic functioning in the remaining

countries highlight the influence of unique national circumstances in shaping democratic attitudes, such as socioeconomic factors, ethnic cleavages, and levels of political and institutional development. These factors may contribute to the varying degrees of public trust in democratic institutions and processes, impacting citizens' perceptions of democracy and its effectiveness in addressing their needs (Lajh & Krašovec, 2007). Thus, the "critical citizen" perspective, while useful, does not fully explain the complex dynamics at play in the post-Yugoslav states' democratic processes.

Slovenia, the only analyzed country with an initial rise in dissatisfaction with democracy in our cross-national sample, and traditionally viewed as a post-communist "success story" due to its economic development, educational advancement, and stable democratic institutions (OECD, 2023; Haček et al., 2022), presents an interesting case. Notably, despite its longstanding democratic consolidation as seen by Freedom House ratings since 2003 (Freedom House, 2023), and high socioeconomic development (as shown by Human Development Reports in the last the last three decades), Slovenia saw youth dissatisfaction initially increase but eventually decrease in 2018.

Slovenia's extended period of democratic consolidation distinguishes it from post-Yugoslav countries, providing more time to nurture and evolve its democratic institutions. The stability and effectiveness of Slovenia's democratic institutions are evident from Freedom House's, 2023 data, showing high democratic ratings with a peak score of 1 already in 2003, although minor setbacks occurred in 2021 (Freedom House, 2023). The extended period of democratic consolidation in Slovenia may have led citizens, particularly the youth, to develop high expectations and increased demands from their democratic system and political leaders.[2] The democratic consolidation in Slovenia has enabled its public, including the youth, to foster a more critical understanding of democracy's functioning, which, as our analysis indicates, may have decreased the Slovenian youth's satisfaction with democracy from 2008 to 2012/2015. In this period of democracy in Slovenia, the "critical citizen" perspective offers valuable insights for explaining the trend of youth satisfaction with democracy.

However, the subsequent decrease in democratic dissatisfaction among Slovenian youth's from 2012/2015 to 2018 suggests two possibilities: 1) during this period, potential additional improvements in government responsiveness, increased transparency, and effective governance (not detected by Freedom House) may have resulted in more positive perceptions of Slovenian youth or 2) the young generations have dropped (perhaps unrealistic) expectations of how a democratic system ought to work, thereby aligning their desires with actual functioning of Slovenian democratic institutions.

[2] There is, however, a de facto variability in democratic functioning at the maximum level of the Freedom House democracy rating, albeit one not reflected by the Freedom House score: for example, both Slovenia and Sweden have the maximum score for democracy although there is little doubt as to which country has the better functioning democratic institutions. Other democratic functioning scales confirm this point.

The "critical citizen" perspective can partly explain *lower* levels of (subjective) *dissatisfaction* with democracy in the post-Yugoslav countries in 2012/2015, which had (objectively) *lower quality democratic institutions* than Slovenia in that period. It cannot, however, explain some divergent trends in democratic dissatisfaction from 2008 to 2018. For example, both Croatia's and Kosovo's democratic rating improved in this period, yet dissatisfaction decreased among Croatian youth, but increased among Kosovo youth. Core democratic attitudes (e.g., increased support for democracy and concomitant higher demands by the citizens on democratic institutions and elites) evolve gradually, suggesting that enhancements in democratic institutions haven't necessarily led to heightened public scrutiny or increased demands on political elites among the youth in several post-Yugoslav countries. It seems that Slovenian youth, however, has gone through the process of increased dissatisfaction followed by a decline in dissatisfaction in the observed period.

This phase, which took place in Slovenia after 2008, may eventually occur in the remaining post-Yugoslav countries as well. Changes in satisfaction with democracy may only take place if they continue to consolidate. If democratic consolidation halts or reverses, dissatisfaction may rise. This could lead to the appeal of nondemocratic options, particularly among the youth, if democratic institutions and the economy fail to ensure citizens' well-being.

The factor with the greatest problematic potential is the economic situation in the post-Yugoslav countries, which strongly affects the youth. Even though, according to the Western Balkans Regular Economic Report (World Bank, 2023), recent unemployment rates in the region reached a historical low of 22.7% in mid-2023 for youth, they were still higher than 14.3% in the EU27. Additionally, inflation remained at historical highs throughout 2023 in the region (ibid.). We know that democracies are dependent on socioeconomic development (Inglehart & Welzel, 2007), largely because mass prodemocratic attitudes are founded on the ability of the states to provide stable economic conditions, which then increase the existential security of large segments of their citizens. Besides being dependent on objective macroeconomic conditions, subjective democratic attitudes also depend on the citizens' subjective evaluation of the economy and their perception of its prospects (Štebe, 2000; Pavlović, 2014, 2016). In the examined time frame, the expectations of the post-Yugoslav public for the future were predominantly pessimistic (Klanjšek, 2015, 2016). Persisting economic challenges and negative public sentiment may strain democratic institutions, potentially empowering critical citizens or those favoring radical changes, often supporting populist parties and leaders.

Another consequence of economic downturns is that they may also increase nationalism and populism in the region. Europe and the United States have already witnessed a rise in populism in recent years with the growing popularity of populist parties, political leaders, and attitudes, so populism has become an increasingly salient force in the political arena in Europe (Greven, 2016; Mount, 2016; Spruyt et al., 2016). Similarly, populism has shifted from a marginal to a mainstream force in the political systems of several post-Yugoslav and Central and Eastern European countries (Milivoj et al., 2021). Nationalism and populism, featuring neotraditionalism and ties with influential civil society groups like the Church, have

notably risen in Serbia, Croatia, Poland, Hungary, and Estonia (ibid.). Nationalistic orientations may be particularly problematic in the post-Yugoslav region, since historically, nationalism has been an especially potent force in the Balkans, including playing a major role in the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, the post-dissolution wars, and conflicts.

The third problem, which could intensify overnight, is the migration crisis. The economic challenges, coupled with increased migration via the Balkan route, may swiftly fuel populism and nationalism, threatening democratic consolidation in the post-Yugoslav countries.

Lastly, another key issue is core prodemocratic orientations among the post-Yugoslav public. As noted, for democracy to develop and consolidate, citizens must express prodemocratic attitudes (Almond & Verba, 1963; Inglehart & Welzel, 2007; Welzel, 2013; Klingemann, 2014). While our analyses focused on the youth's assessment of democratic functioning, we did not explore trends in core democratic attitudes, such as self-expression values. However, findings of the 2019 FES study indicate that even though young people in the region largely support welfare-oriented policies, their commitment to core democratic values appears to be moderate. For instance, 86% of youth in ten Southeast European countries agree that the government should take more responsibility to ensure everyone is provided for, and 77% believe that the incomes of the poor and the rich should be made more equal (Lavrič, 2019), indicating demands for greater equality. Though still the majority, a lower proportion (64%) of youth in the SEE region agree that political opposition is necessary for a healthy democracy, and 63% believe democracy is a good form of government in general (ibid.). These findings suggest that while there is overwhelming support for welfare state policies, there is a less robust endorsement of some core democratic principles, with around a third of youth not explicitly endorsing some core democratic principles.

A handful of studies on the democratic attitudes of the post-Yugoslav adult population indicate that from 1998 onward, the post-Yugoslav public have become less pro-democratically oriented, e.g., being less supportive of core democratic principles and values (see Kirbiš & Tavčar Krajnc, 2013; 2015; Kirbiš & Flere, 2017). The findings on the public's attitudes from other more recent studies, together with the ongoing economic and political situation in several post-Yugoslav countries, do not give much cause for a general prodemocratic optimism. The combination of these factors could significantly hinder further democratic consolidation, underscoring the need for attentive measures to support democratic values.

Finally, our findings on the link between satisfaction with democracy and prodemocratic orientation (e.g., support of democracy) show a positive link in only three out of six countries. These findings highlight that dissatisfaction with democracy should not be regarded as a prodemocratic value orientation across the Balkan region. In the post-Yugoslav region, at least, "dissatisfied democrats" may not be "democrats" at all.

## 5 Conclusion

Our study suggests that dissatisfaction with democracy among post-Yugoslav youth has decreased from 2008 to 2018 (except for Kosovo youth), but this trend has not been linear. In addition, our findings do not necessarily indicate a decrease in critical citizens. In fact, the "critical citizen" perspective, which posits that informed, engaged, and critical citizens are vital for a healthy democracy, partially explains the complex patterns of young citizens' democratic satisfaction and their evaluation of democratic processes. By 2018, we observed that critical citizens were not the predominant group in the most democratic post-Yugoslav countries, challenging the assumptions of the critical citizen perspective. The lowest numbers of "critical citizens" were observed in Slovenia and Croatia, aligning more with the classic political culture thesis, which associates democratic attitudes with the performance of democratic and economic institutions (Almond & Verba, 1963; Inglehart & Welzel, 2007; Norris, 2011). Finally, our findings challenge the "critical citizen" assumption that dissatisfaction with democracy is inherently a democratic attitude. Contrarily, in three countries, we found that satisfaction, rather than dissatisfaction, with democracy correlated with the democratic support index, while in the remaining three countries, we found no significant association.

The combination of economic downturns, migration crises, rising nationalism, populism, declining democratic attitudes before 2008, and attitudinal retraditionalization post-2008 emphasize the importance of focusing on democratic consolidation in post-Yugoslav countries. This serves as a reminder to policymakers and politicians not to overlook the ongoing challenge of democratic consolidation. A "*Yes to democracy*" is always contingent on how well democratic and economic systems function and on whether they provide basic democratic and existential freedoms for their citizens. To advance democratic consolidation, political elites in post-Yugoslav countries should strive to improve democracy both presently and for the future, particularly by ensuring political and economic stability for younger generations.

## References

Abramson, P. R., & Aldrich, J. H. (1982). Decline of electoral participation in America. *American Political Science Review, 76*, 502–521.

Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1963). *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations*. Princeton University Press.

Ambrosino, A., Cecchin Birk, S., Mingardi, C., Nikolou, G., Spielberger, L., Thevenin, E., & Trinkle, A. (2023). Youth and democracy: Digital opportunities for the future of participation. In G. Rouet & T. Côme (Eds.), *Participatory and digital democracy at the local level: European discourses and practices* (pp. 67–83). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20943-7_5

Ariely, G., & Davidov, E. (2014). Democratic attitudes measures: Cross-national equivalences. In A. C. Michalos (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_3707

Blais, A. (2007). Turnout in elections. In R. Dalton & H.-D. Klingemann (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of political behavior* (pp. 621–635). Oxford University Press.
Brady, H. E., & Kent, T. B. (2022). Fifty years of declining confidence & increasing polarization in trust in American institutions. *Daedalus, 151*(4), 43–66. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01943
Bromley, C., Curtice, J., & Seyd, B. (2004). *Is Britain facing a crisis of democracy?*. Constitution Unit/Centre for Research into Elections and Social Trends. Retrieved December 15, 2016. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/political-science/publications/unit-publications/112.pdf
Cameron, S. (2021). Civic engagement in times of economic crisis: A cross-national comparative study of voluntary association membership. *European Political Science Review, 13*(3), 265–283. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773921000060
Canache, D., Mondak, J. J., & Seligson, M. A. (2001). Meaning and measurement in cross-national research on satisfaction with democracy. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 65*(4), 506–528.
Citrin, J., & Stoker, L. (2018). Political trust in a cynical age. *Annual Review of Political Science, 21*(1), 49–70. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050316-092550
Crozier, M., Huntington, S. P., & Watnuki, J. (1975). *The crisis of democracy: Report on the governability of democracies to the Trilateral Commission*. New York University Press.
Dalton, R. J. (2006). Social modernization and the end of ideology debate: Patterns of ideological polarization. *Japanese Journal of Political Science, 7*, 1–22.
Dalton, R. J. (2008). *The good citizen: How a younger generation is reshaping American Politics*. CQ, Press.
Dalton, R. J. (2017). Political trust in North America. In *Handbook on political trust* (pp. 375–394). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://www.elgaronline.com/display/edcoll/9781782545101/9781782545101.00035.xml
Dalton, R. J., & Chull Shin, D. (2014). Reassessing the civic culture model. In R. Dalton & C. Welzel (Eds.), *The civic culture transformed* (pp. 91–115). Cambridge University Press.
Dassonneville, R. (2022). Have party attachments weakened? In R. Dassonneville (Ed.), *Voters under pressure: Group-based cross-pressure and electoral volatility* (p. 0). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192894137.003.0004
European Values Study. (2008). 4th wave, integrated dataset, provided by GESIS Data Archive (Cologne, Germany, 2010).
Fahmy, E. (2006). *Young citizens. Young people's involvement in politics and decision making*. Ashgate.
FES Youth Studies. (2012/2015). Accessed at http://projects.ff.uni-mb.si/cepss/index.php/youth-studies/ (09.12.2016).
FES Youth Studies. (2018/2019). Accessed at https://soe.fes.de/features/youth-studies (15.01.2024).
Fieldhouse, E., Tranmer, M., & Russell, A. (2007). Something about young people or something about elections? Electoral participation of young people in Europe: Evidence from a multilevel analysis of the European Social Survey. *European Journal of Political Research, 46*, 395–417. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2007.00710.x
Franklin, M. (2004). *Voter turnout and the dynamics of electoral competition in established democracies since 1945*. Cambridge University Press.
Freedom House. (2015). Freedom in the World 2015. Retrieved December 15, 2016 https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/01152015_FIW_2015_final.pdf.
Freedom House. (2023). *Slovenia: Freedom in the world 2023 country report*. Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/country/slovenia/freedom-world/2023
Freedom House. (2024). *Aggregate Category and Subcategory Scores, 2003–2023 [Data file]*. Retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/Aggregate_Category_and_Subcategory_Scores_FIW_2003-2023.xlsx
Gray, M., & Caul, M. (2000). Declining voter turnout in advanced industrial democracies, 1950 to 1997. The effects of declining group mobilization. *Comparative Political Studies, 33*, 1091–1122.

Greven, T. (2016). *The rise of right-wing populism in Europe and the United States: A comparative perspective*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
Haček, M., Pickel, S., & Brusis, M. (2022). *Slovenia report. Sustainable governance indicators*. Bertelsmann Stiftung. https://doi.org/10.11586/2022116
Hehir, A. (2023). The relationship between hope and societal stability in Kosovo. *East European Politics, 0*(0), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2023.2225047
Holmberg, S. (1999). Down and down we go: Political trust in Sweden. In P. Norris (Ed.), *Critical citizens: Global support for democratic government*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/0198295685.003.0005
Human Development Report. (2015). *Work for human development*. Unite Nations Development Programme.
Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and postmodernization: Cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies*. Princeton University Press.
Inglehart, R., & Welzel, C. (2007). *Modernization, cultural change, and democracy: The human development sequence*. Cambridge University Press.
Kaase, M., & Marsh, A. (1979). Political action. A theoretical perspective. In S. H. Barnes et al. (Eds.), *Political action: Mass participation in five western democracies* (pp. 27–56). Sage.
Kaase, M., & Newton, K. (1995). *Beliefs in government*. Oxford University Press.
Katz, R. S., et al. (1992). The membership of political parties in European democracies, 1960–1990. *European Journal of Political Research, 22*(3), 329–345.
Kirbiš, A. (2017). *Politična kultura v postjugoslovanskih družbah*. Kulturni center Maribor, Frontier. https://forms.gle/ZQTXUfwFs8mzU9Q36
Kirbiš, A., & Flere, S. (2017). Political culture in the Yugoslav successor states. In S. P. Ramet, C. M. Hassenstab, & O. Listhaug (Eds.), *Building democracy in the Yugoslav successor states: Accomplishments, setbacks, and challenges since 1990*. Cambridge University Press.
Kirbiš, A., & Tavčar Krajnc, M. (2013). Gender role attitudes in post-Yugoslav countries: A cross-national and longitudinal analysis. In S. Flere (Ed.), *20 years later: problems and prospects of countries of former Yugoslavia* (pp. 151–176). Center for the Study of Post-Yugoslav Societies, Faculty of Arts.
Kirbiš, A., Tavčar Krajnc, M. (2015). *Division of gender roles in households and the related attitudes* (pp. 51–66). SURVIVAL, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Faculty of Arts, Maribor.
Klanjšek, R. (2015). Household situation, structure and coping in Slovenia—A comparative view in a Balkan context. In M. Lavrič (Ed.), *Survival strategies of households in Slovenia: A comparative view* (pp. 33–50). SURVIVAL, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Faculty of Arts, Maribor.
Klanjšek, R. (2016). *Socioeconomic realities and trends in four SEE countries – From crisis to crisis. And beyond*. Paper presented at an International Conference "International conference "Surviving in Post-Socialism: Implications for Policy Makers", Ljubljana, Grand Hotel Union Business, November 25–26, 2016.
Klingemann, H.-D. (2014). Dissatisfied democrats: Democratic maturation in old and new democracies. In R. Dalton & C. Welzel (Eds.), *The civic culture transformed from allegiant to assertive citizens* (pp. 116–157). Cambridge University Press.
Klingemann, H.-D., Fuch, D., & Zielonka, J. (2006). Introduction: Support for democracy and autocracy in eastern Europe. In H.-D. Klingemann, D. Fuchs, & J. Zielonka (Eds.), *Democracy and political culture in Eastern Europe* (pp. 1–22). Routledge.
Kostelka, F., & Blais, A. (2021). The generational and institutional sources of the global decline in voter turnout. *World Politics, 73*(4), 629–667.
Lajh, D., & Krašovec, A. (2007). Post-Yugoslav region between democratisation and Europeanisation of party politics: Experiences from Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Politics in Central Europe, 3*(1+2), 71–91.
Lavrič, M. (2019). Basic world views of young people. In Youth study Southeast Europe: 2018/2019. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15274-20190408.pdf

Listhaug, O., & Wiberg, M. (1995). Confidence in political and private institutions. In H.-D. Klingemann & D. Fuchs (Eds.), *Citizens and the state* (pp. 298–322). Oxford University Press.

Macedo, S., Alex-Assensoh, Y., & Berry, J. M. (2005). *Democracy at risk: How political choices undermine citizen participation and what we can do about it*. Brookings Institution Press.

Masipa, T. (2018). South Africa's transition to democracy and democratic consolidation: A reflection on socio-economic challenges. *Journal of Public Affairs, 18*(4), e1713. https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.1713

Milivoj, B., Dajč, H., Ehin, P., Ajzenhamer, N. J., Kubik, J., Makarychev, A., Mole, R., Pantelić, N., Radulović, M., Styczyńska, N., Talving, L., & Vasiljevic, M. (2021). *Political populism from the fringe to the mainstream: A conceptual framework*. https://zenodo.org/records/4903513

Mount, I. (2016). *Why populist parties are booming across Europe*. Accessed at http://fortune.com/2016/04/04/populist-parties-europe/ (07.12.2016).

Nations in Transit. (2015). *Nations in transit 2015*. Freedom House. Retrieved December 15, 2016 https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_NIT2015_06.06.15_FINAL.pdf

Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic deficit: Critical citizens revisited*. Cambridge University Press.

Nowakowska-Krystman, A., & Żakowska, M. (2015). Conflict in Kosovo through the conceptual framework of stakeholders. *Connect, 14*(4), 69–82.

OECD. (2023). *Slovenia in development co-operation profile*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/e6f1ed3f-en

Pavlović, Z. (2014). Intrinsic or instrumental support for democracy in a post-communist society: The case of Serbia. *European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities EQPAM, 3*(1), 31–42.

Pavlović, Z. (2016). (Post)Materialism, satisfaction with democracy and support for democracy in Eastern Europe. *European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities EQPAM, 5*(3), 41–55.

Petring, A., & Merkel, W. (2012). *Toward the two-thirds democracy: Ways out of the participation crisis*. WZB reports, Issue 1, Winter 2012/2013. Retrieved December 15, 2016 https://www.google.si/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwih7o_7kvfQAhUHNVAKHdx7AEkQFggaMAA&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.wzb.eu%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fu29%2Fwmr1_einzel_25_ap-wm_tow ard_the_two-thirds_democracy.pdf&usg=AFQjCNFOxElrArtrN3JRVuqe8ab_lN6yAw&sig2 =_2bSlexB0TUh1YiE0xYFdw

Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy, 6*(1), 65–78.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.

Quintelier, E. (2007). *Differences in political participation between young and old people: A representative study of the differences in political participation between young and old people*. Paper prepared for presentation at the Belgian-Dutch Politicologenetmaal 2007, Antwerp, Belgium, 31 May–1 June 2007.

Rosenstone, S. J., & Hansen, J. M. (1993). *Mobilization, participation and democracy in America*. Macmillan.

Scarrow, S. E. (2007). Political activism and party members. In R. J. Dalton & H. Klingemann (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political behavior*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199270125.003.0034

Schmitt, H., & Holmberg, S. (1995). Political parties in decline? In H.-D. Klingemann & D. Fuchs (Eds.), *Citizens and the state* (pp. 95–133). Oxford University Press.

Spruyt, B., Keppens, G., & Van Droogenbroeck, F. (2016). Who supports populism and what attracts people to it? *Political Research Quarterly, 69*(2), 335–346.

Štebe, J. (2000). Zadovoljstvo z demokracijo v Sloveniji. *Deset let kasneje. Teorija in praksa, 37*(5), 864–883.

Szabó, A., & Oross, D. (2018). Youth democratic practices in four European countries. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education, 5*(3), 124–135.

Taleski, D., Reimbold, H., & Hurrelmann, K. (2015). Building democracies in South East Europe: Youth as an unwilling agent? In K. Hurrelmann & M. Weichert (Eds.), *Lost in democratic transition? Political challenges and perspectives for young people in South East Europe. Results of representative surveys in eight countries* (pp. 15–66). Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Valgarðsson, V. O., & Devine, D. (2021). What satisfaction with democracy? A global analysis of "Satisfaction with Democracy" measures. *Political Research Quarterly, 74*(3), 669–685. https://doi.org/10.1177/10659129211009605

Vasilopoulou, Sofia, and Halikiopoulou, Daphne. 2023. Democracy and discontent: Institutional trust and evaluations of system performance among core and peripheral far right voters. Journal of European Public Policy, 0(0), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2215816.

Wagenaar, H. (2015). *Is democracy in crisis? No, there's just a new type of emerging democracy*. Retrieved January 20, 2015 https://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/hendrik-wagenaar/is-democracy-in-crisis-no-there%E2%80%99s-just-new-type-of-emerging-democracy

Wattenberg, M. (1998). *Turnout decline in the U.S. and other advanced industrial democracies*. Center for the Study of Democracy (University of California, Irvine). Accessed at http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1kh6r88m (21.03.2010).

Wattenberg, M. (2002). *Where have all the voters gone?* Harvard University Press.

Welzel, C. (2013). *Freedom rising: Human empowerment and the quest for emancipation*. Cambridge University Press.

Welzel, C., & Alvarez, A. M. (2014). Enlightening people: The spark of emancipative values. In R. Dalton & C. Welzel (Eds.), *The civic culture transformed* (pp. 59–90). Cambridge University Press.

World Bank. (2023). *Western Balkans regular economic report*. World Bank. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099101623051741490/pdf/P50064801939bc0a00a0d2077a3883b52c9.pdf

World Bank. (2024). *Historical classification by income in XLSX format* [Data set]. World Bank Data Help Desk. https://datacatalogfiles.worldbank.org/ddh-published/0037712/DR0090754/OGHIST.xlsx

Zukin, C., Keeter, S., Andolina, M., Jenkins, K., Delli, M. X., & Carpini. (2006). *A new engagement? Political participation, civic life, and the changing American citizen*. Oxford University Press.