

# gesis

Leibniz Institute  
for the Social Sciences



## Motivators, facilitators, and inhibitors of young adults' societal and political engagement: The impact of immediate living conditions and the larger societal context

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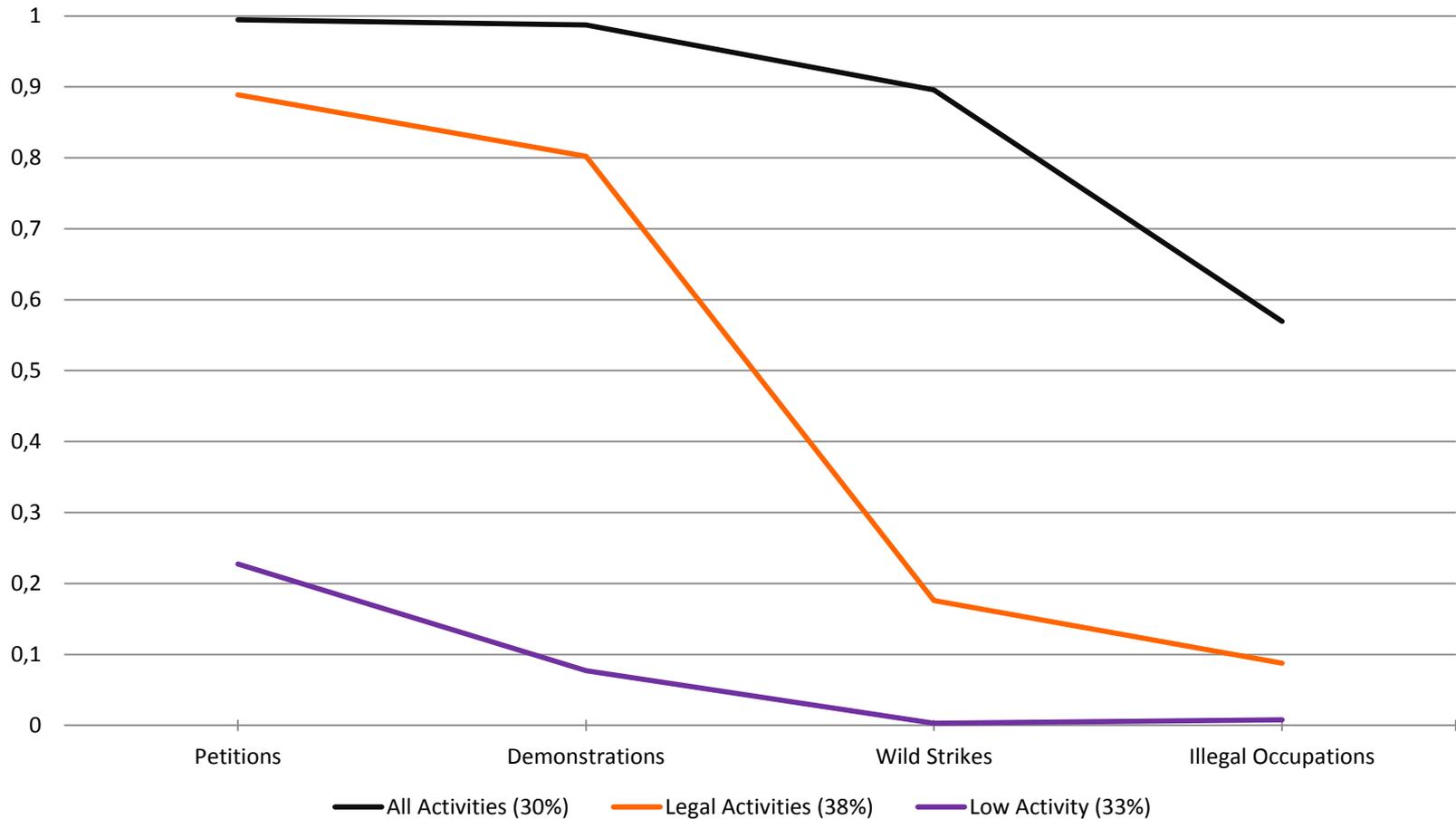
# Introduction

- Young people's engagement in current societies has become very complex, with new forms of participation emerging that are not directly state-directed but directed toward actors in the public, non-profit, and private sectors (de Moor 2016, Garcia-Albercete 2014).
- Not only the targets of political and social involvement, but also the agencies (message carriers) and channels (forms of engagement) changed for younger generations (Norris, 2002).
- ➔ These trends are blurring the simple dichotomy of engaged versus disengaged (Harris 2010, Ekman & Amna, 2012, Amna&Ekman 2014).
- ➔ Young people's participation in society is watched particularly closely, as a decline in engagement would be viewed as a threat to democracy

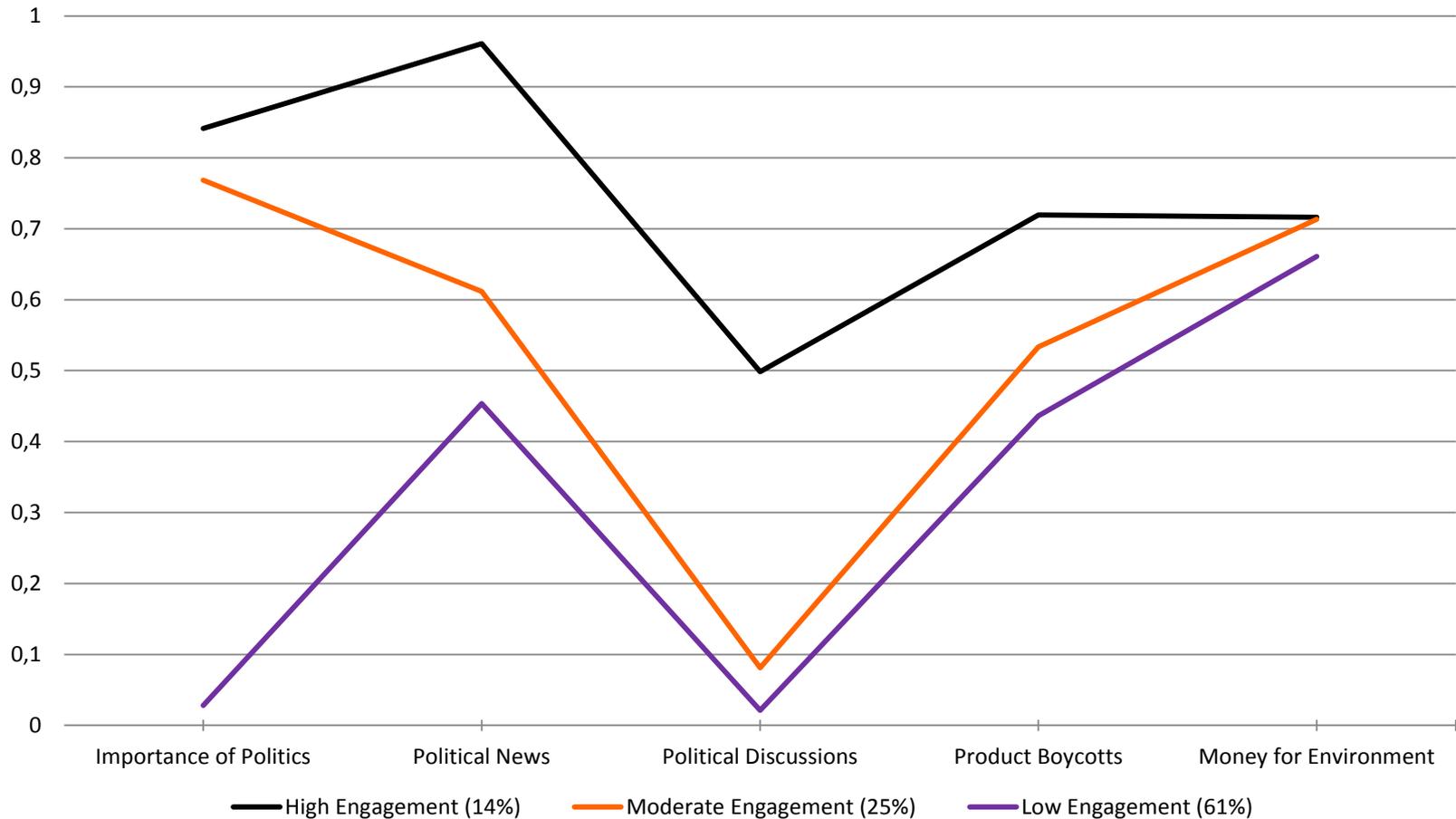
# Research questions

- In how far do country differences in activism and everyday engagement stem from different cultures/settings or from compositional effects (age, education and resources) of the young?
  - Which settings are related to more engaged life of youth?
  - What is the interrelation with personal political ideas (trust in government)?
- ➔ Identifying these differences will help us discern where interventions will be successful in facilitating social and political participation

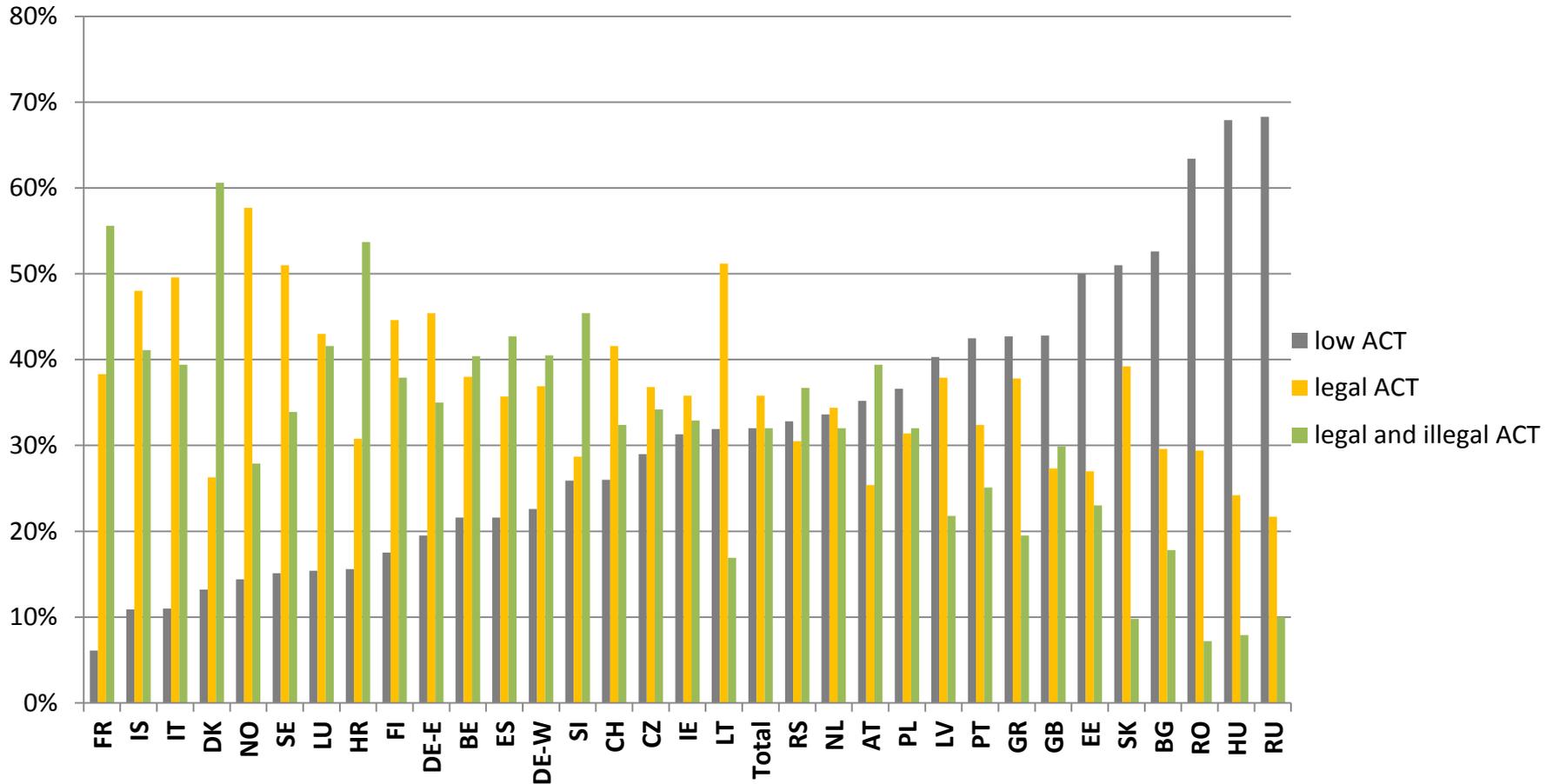
# Latent Class profile for activism items among the young in EVS 2008



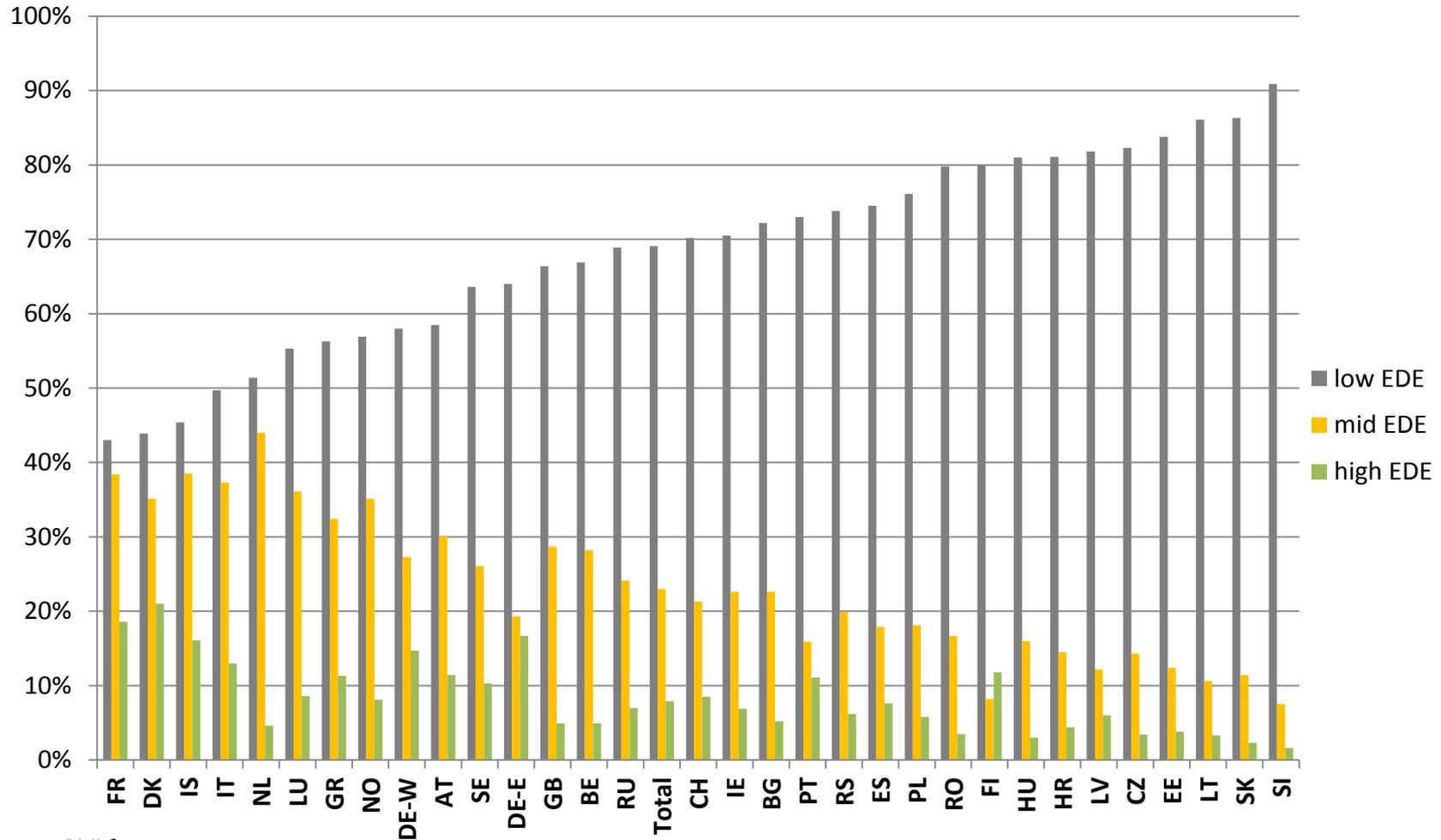
# Latent Class profile for everyday engagement among the young in EVS 2008



# Activism profiles in Europe (EVS data 2008)



# Everyday engagement profiles in Europe (EVS data 2008)



# Theory behind different kinds of political and social engagement

- *'purposive action theory'* (Coleman 1986): citizens engage in collective and individual action because they expect positive effects (of whatever kind: emotional, moral, material, individual, collective)
  - Hirschman's (1970) *exit-voice-loyalty framework* states that citizens who are dissatisfied have three response choices:
    - ▶ exit (shown through a negation of the situation by withdrawal)
    - ▶ voice concern through complaints, protest or lobbying and other forms of engagement
    - ▶ remain loyal (accepting even unwanted change).
- ➔ Exit, but also loyalty, could be linked to low activism; both loyalty and voice to legal activism; and only voice to illegal activism.
- ➔ "Depending on the specific configuration of trust and involvement, political apathy, conventional political activity, or political protest will result" (Zmerli & Van Meer, 2017, p.229).

# Micro-level determinants

- Micro-level determinants:
  - ▶ Social background (economic, social and cultural capital)
  - ▶ Efficacy beliefs and agency
  - ▶ Values and political consciousness
  - ▶ Individual political beliefs (societal trust and trust in institutions)

Two groups more likely to engage:

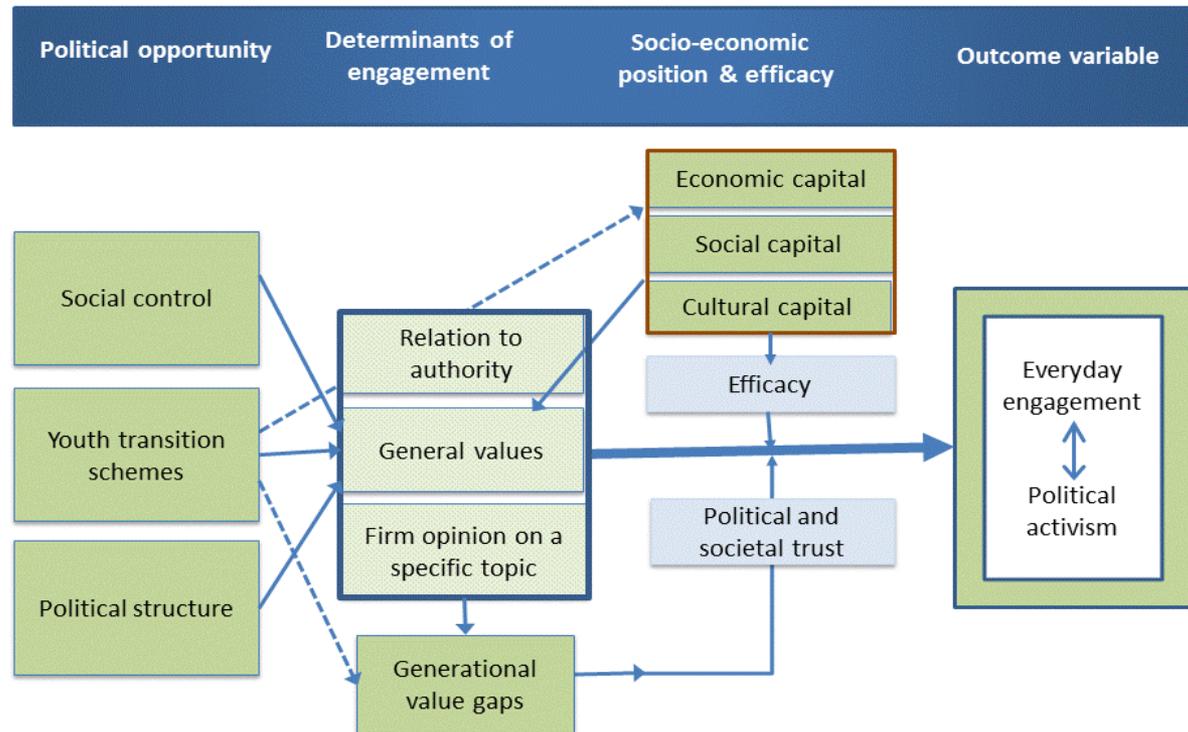
- ▶ social groups with originally poorer representation
  - ➔ those who can gain most (under the strong condition that they avail of the necessary resources)
- ▶ social groups who already have a good position, which they feel to be endangered in some way
  - ➔ for them the availability of action resources facilitate success

## Macro-level determinants

- State-related determinants:
  - ▶ **Political opportunity structure:** relative openness of the political system, stability of that broad set of political alignments typically, presence or absence of elite allies (McAdam, 1996)
  - ▶ **Social control:** state's capacity and propensity for repression (Meyer, 2004 )
  
- Youth-specific determinants
  - ▶ **Individual opportunities:** Youth transition schemes (Chévalier 2016, Soler-i-Martí and Ferrer-Fons 2015): resources provided to youth by the welfare → shows the centrality of youth in society
  
  - ▶ **Conflict:** Generational value gaps

# Research approach:

## Model of social and political engagement determinants



# Hypotheses

- H1: When trust in the functioning of the democratic institutions is very low, (conflictual) young people are more likely to use the exit option.
- H2: In countries with a higher political openness, youth will be more likely to adapt a more engaged (but mostly legal) activism profile.
- H3: In countries with a higher social control, youth will be more likely to adapt a more engaged activism profile, until a certain point when the cost of using illegal action becomes too high.
- H4: In countries with a more inclusive youth transition scheme, youth will be more engaged in legal and every-day engagement activities and less likely to adapt an illegal activism profile .

# Method

- A multilevel model for 32 countries (EU28, minus Cyprus and Malta, plus EFTA, Russia, Serbia) using the 2008 European Value Study (EVS) data for activism and everyday engagement
- Sample restricted to youth aged 18-29 years of age (131-640 cases per country), N: 8494.
- Multinomial model, as both our outcome variables show 3 unordered response options, using *gsem*, *mlogit* in Stata (multi-level structural equation framework)(Rabe-Hesketh, Skrondal & Pickles 2004)
- legal activism and medium engagement as the bases or reference categories, to understand the predictors explaining high engagement and withdrawal
- Conceptualisation:
  - ▶ Political opportunity structure: Functioning of government (accountability, openness and transparency) (Source: Freedom House)
  - ▶ Social control: Freedom of press (Source: Freedom House)
  - ▶ Societal conflict: Post-materialism gap between young and old (Source: EVS)
  - ▶ Youth transition regime (index of employment (NEET, youth unemployment), education (education quality and inequality (PISA)), length of youth transition (average age of grownup children (16-50) living with parents), welfare state (family expenditure, educational expenditure) (Sources: ILO, OECD, UNESCO)

# Analysis – micro level

**Table 5:** Individual-level interaction terms of personal political opinion

	Low ACT	All ACT	Low EDE	High EDE
	b (t)	b (t)	b (t)	b (t)
Sat. democracy * value gap	-0.216** (-8.09)	-0.018 (-0.68)	-0.177** (-6.76)	0.023 (0.52)
_cons	1.574** (85.47)		1.618** (71.51)	
Social trust * value gap	-0.101** (-6.80)	0.049** (3.28)	-0.049** (-3.33)	0.115** (4.56)
_cons	0.358** (34.93)		0.366** (28.70)	
Conf. in gov. * value gap	-0.180** (-6.54)	-0.032 (-1.15)	-0.321** (-11.93)	-0.047 (-1.02)
_cons	1.218** (64.00)		1.374** (59.04)	
Conf. in parties * value gap	-0.124** (-5.10)	0.053* (2.20)	-0.410** (-17.48)	-0.009 (-0.23)
_cons	0.969** (57.48)		1.229** (60.54)	

Displayed b's are logs of the relative-risk ratio (logs of the probability of the category divided by the probability of the base category). T-test in brackets: +p/z < 0.1; \*p/z < 0.05; \*\*p/z < 0.001. cons show the estimate for one category relative to base category when the predictor variables in the model are evaluated at zero.

**Further significant variables:**

For ACT + EDE: sex, nationality, activity status, experience of unemployment, living at home (engagement), income, parents with higher education, urban (engagement), post materialism index  
 Only for EDE: urban, living at home, age group

Social trust seems most highly related higher voicing of demands, reducing low activism and low everyday engagement and increasing legal and illegal ways of activism and high engagement alike. This fits a social capital interpretation of political engagement.

## Results - activism

	Youth transition schemes	Functioning of government	Social control	Social control squared	Value gap	*Youth transition -employ.	*Employment score
	b (t)	b (t)	b (t)	b (t)	b (t)	b (t)	b (t)
<b>Low activism</b>	-0.032* (-2.21)	-0.032 (-0.15)	-0.039 (-0.86)	0.001 (1.11)	-0.135 (-1.32)	-0.028* (-2.49)	-0.032 (-0.23)
<b>All activism</b>	0.023** (3.08)	0.303** (2.61)	0.100** (4.11)	-0.001** (-3.49)	0.011 (0.20)	0.019** (3.33)	0.067 (0.89)
<b>var(M1[country])</b>	0.052* (2.35)					0.049* (2.32)	
<b>bic</b>	253.604					253.620	
<b>ll</b>	-126.066					-126.065	

Displayed b's are logs of the relative-risk ratio (logs of the probability of the category divided by the probability of the base category).  
T-test in brackets: +p/z < 0.1; \*p/z < 0.05; \*\*p/z < 0.001.  
cons show the estimate for one category relative to base category when the predictor variables in the model are evaluated at zero.

Low activism seems strongly linked to the individual opportunities provided to the youth and the centrality of youth in society. The form of activism is rather linked to the political opportunity structure.

## Results - engagement

	Youth transition schemes	Functioning of government	Social control	Social control squared	Value gap	*Youth transition -employ.	*Employment score
	b (t)	b (t)	b (t)	b (t)	b (t)	b (t)	b (t)
<b>Low engagement</b>	-0.033*	-0.347+	-0.081+	0.000	0.065	-0.026*	-0.151
	(-2.44)	(-1.65)	(-1.90)	(1.11)	(0.68)	(-2.40)	(-1.11)
<b>High engagement</b>	0.019**	-0.096	0.027	-0.000	0.233**	0.018**	-0.054
	(2.76)	(-0.79)	(1.20)	(-1.55)	(4.16)	(3.39)	(-0.70)
<b>var(M1[country])</b>	0.052*					0.001	
	(2.35)					(0.20)	
<b>bic</b>	249.325					249.338	
<b>ll</b>	-123.927					-123.924	

Displayed b's are logs of the relative-risk ratio (logs of the probability of the category divided by the probability of the base category).

T-test in brackets: +p/z < 0.1; \*p/z < 0.05; \*\*p/z < 0.001.

cons show the estimate for one category relative to base category when the predictor variables in the model are evaluated at zero.

Also low engagement is only significantly associated to the youth transition schemes. They make the adoption of a high engagement profile more likely, as does a higher value gap.

# Discussion

- **Hypothesis 1: affirmed**
  - ➔ Youth with values further removed from the societal mainstream are more likely to engage in activism and everyday engagement to express their opinion when they have trust in society and government.
- **Hypothesis 2: partly affirmed**
  - ➔ In countries with a higher political openness, youth will be more likely to adapt a more engaged activism profile. The association with illegal activism is however stronger than expected.
- **Hypothesis 3: affirmed**
  - ➔ when freedom is lower all activism increases in a rebellious way. At some point, however, repression becomes so strong that it suffocates all activism. The same is not the case for engagement.
- **Hypothesis 4: affirmed**
  - ➔ In countries with a more inclusive youth transition scheme, youth will be more engaged in legal and every-day engagement activities. But they are also more likely to engage in stronger forms of protest

## Conclusion

- Personal political ideas are strong moderators of youth engagement. Conflictual youth engage in a similar way to all youth. They are however more likely to use all activism, also when the external efficacy is high (lower standing?)
  - Low social and political participation is systematically linked to the country setting and significantly reduced by youth transition regimes that place youth more centrally within society.
- ➔ If low engagement was on the rise among European youth, this exit would more plausibly be a complex expression of an objective lack of empowerment, than a simple shift in culture.

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