



Young adults' societal engagement in Europe: The role of socio-economic background and the larger societal context

Panel: Alternative forms of social participation

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Social engagement as youth agency

- Social and political engagement refers to “activities by ordinary citizens intended to influence circumstances in society that are of relevance to others” (Ekman and Amnå, 2012)
- According to Adler & Goggin (2005) they stretch from:
private (individual) action ← → *to public (collective) action*
- Can be said to include also *standby engagement* (Amna & Ekman 2014)



Dear Crayola, please help us recycle markers. In my class, kids put the markers in the stinky trash can! When I saw that I reminded myself not to do that. -Delaney Allen
WE CAN DO THIS!!!



Standby engagement

- Amna & Eckman 2014: “People stay alert by maintaining their political knowledge and nurturing their political interest in order to get involved when needed.”
 - To bring up political issues with family members, peers, schoolmates, and Internet friends is a way for young people to be politically active in private spheres, thereby also preparing themselves (and others) for future public actions.
- ➔ Building up upon the **Cognitive mobilization model**: Individuals with higher levels of political interest /information will be more likely to become dissatisfied + inclined to protest (Norris 1999, Dalton 2008)

Political inequality among and within young adults

- Youth differs! Very different trajectories are followed by youth based on their opportunities structure (social and economic capital → Raffo & Reeves, 2000) and their imaged future (Evans, 2002)
- Youth leading an accelerated adulthood do not have the same possibilities as those with an emerging adulthood to engage as they face different challenges → bounded agency
 - ▶ Different forms of engagement lead to different forms of representation (Busse et al., 2015)
 - ▶ Social disparities among youth and between youth and older population seem to translate into political inequality (Schneider & Makszin, 2014).

The influence of the political setting

- ▶ Institutional setting (e.g. McAdam, 1996, Meyer 2004, de Moor 2016) → political opportunity structures
- ▶ Normative setting (Schwanitz 2017)
- ▶ Socio-economic setting: Youth-specific welfare state context (Lee, 2004, Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011, Soler-i-Martí, 2015, Chévalier, 2016) influencing
 - Life chances (trajectories of young people's lives)
 - Agency (relationship between individual-level variables and efficacy beliefs)

Research questions

- How does bounded agency translate into restricted youth political and social participation?
- Q1: How high is the degree of education-based participatory inequality among youth in Europe?
- Q2: Which role does the socio-economic status play for social engagement and activism among youth? Which other individual characteristics matter?
- Q3: Which settings enable youth to participate?

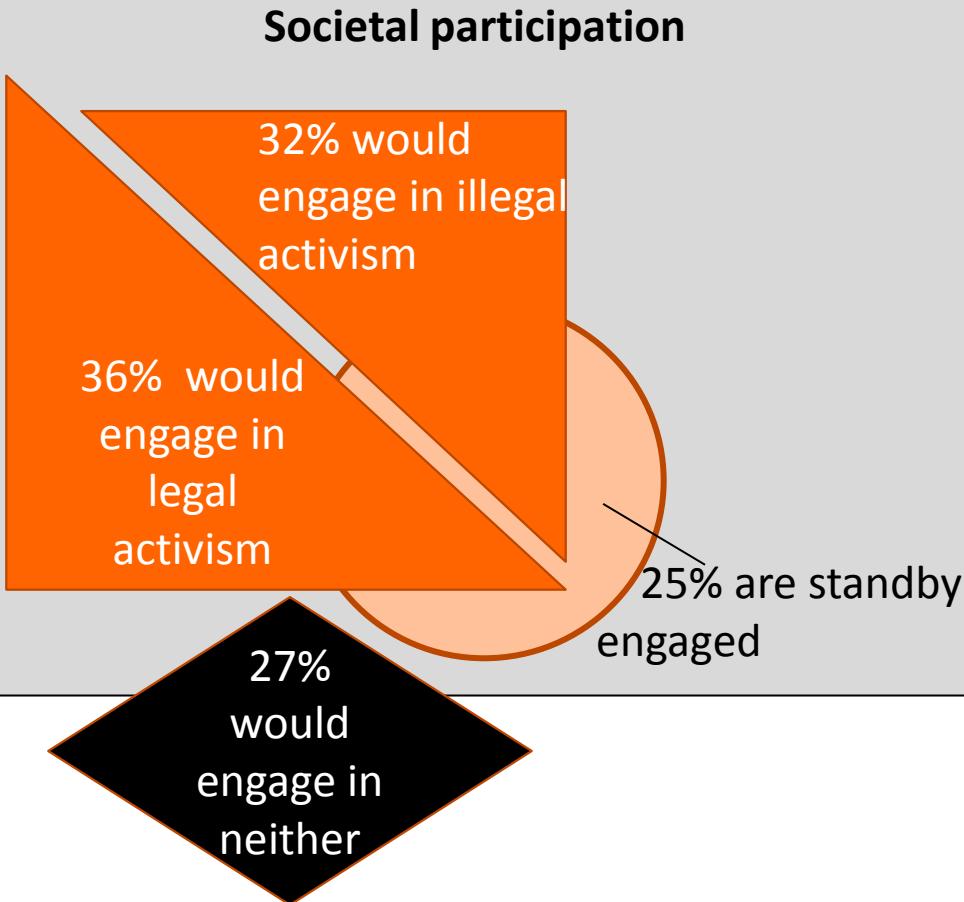


Methods

- Data: European Value Survey 2008 Cross-sectional data
- Sample: Young people from 18-29 years of age
- Latent Class Analysis used to differentiate typical behavioural profiles
 - without prior theoretical conceptualisation/fixation
- Multinomial multilevel analysis of 32 European countries

- Three different outcomes are analysed in-depth:
 - ▶ **Standby engagement:** discussion of politics with friends, following politics in the news, being interested in politics → divided into low/high engagement
 - ▶ **Activism:** joining unofficial strikes, occupy buildings or factories; attending lawful demonstrations; signing petitions → divides between low activism/ legal activism/ legal and illegal activities
 - ▶ **ACTIVE:** being either standby engaged or engaged in activism

How do activism and standby engagement link?



Standby engagement coined by Amna & Ekman (2014).

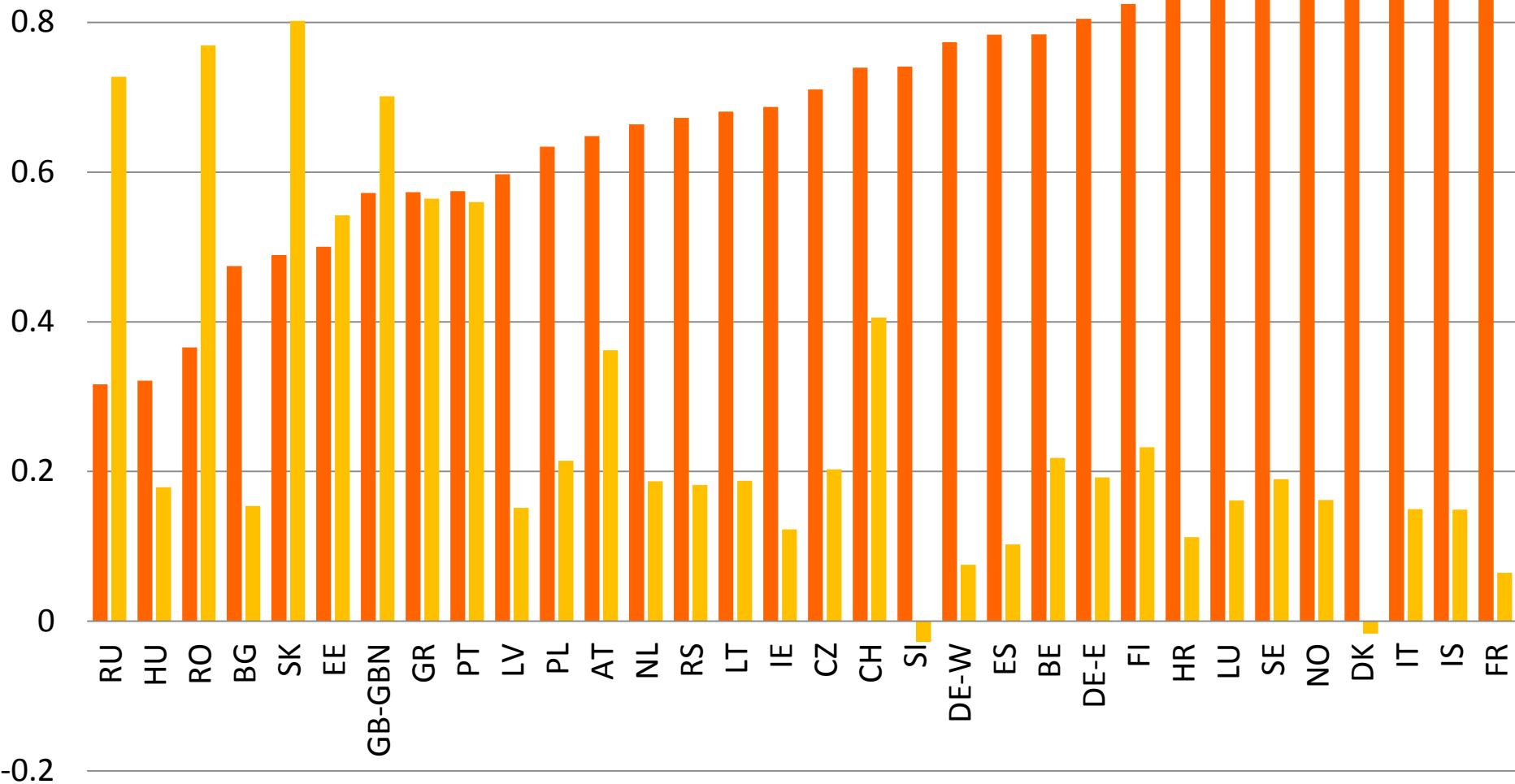
Of those standby engaged, 81% are engaged in activism.

Of those engaged in activism, however, those standby engaged only form 30%.

Standby engagement therefore seems to form one road towards activism but not the sole one.

→ It is more important in societies where no general climate of social engagement prevails.

The prevalence of high activism profiles and the impact of standby engagement



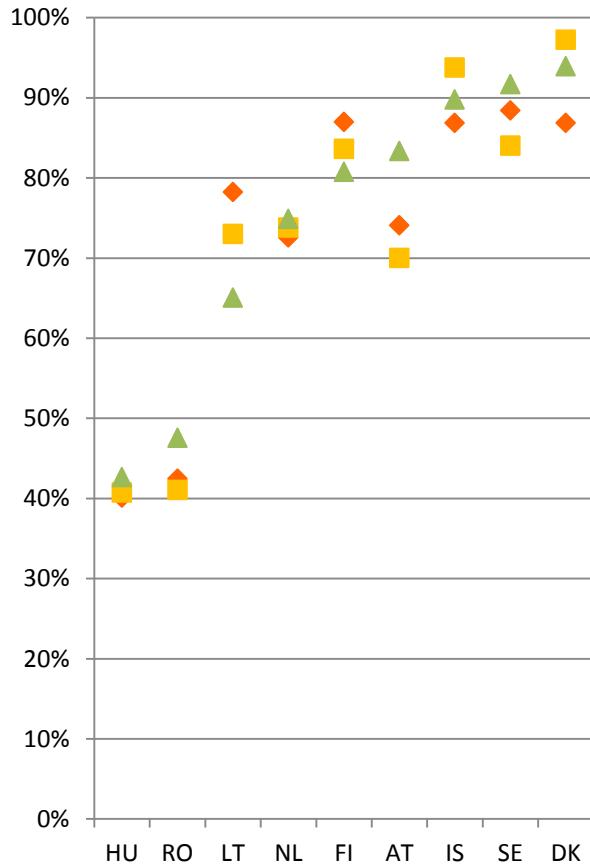
■ % of pop with a high activism profile ■ %diff due to standby engagement

- Q1: How high is the degree of education-based participatory inequality among youth in Europe?

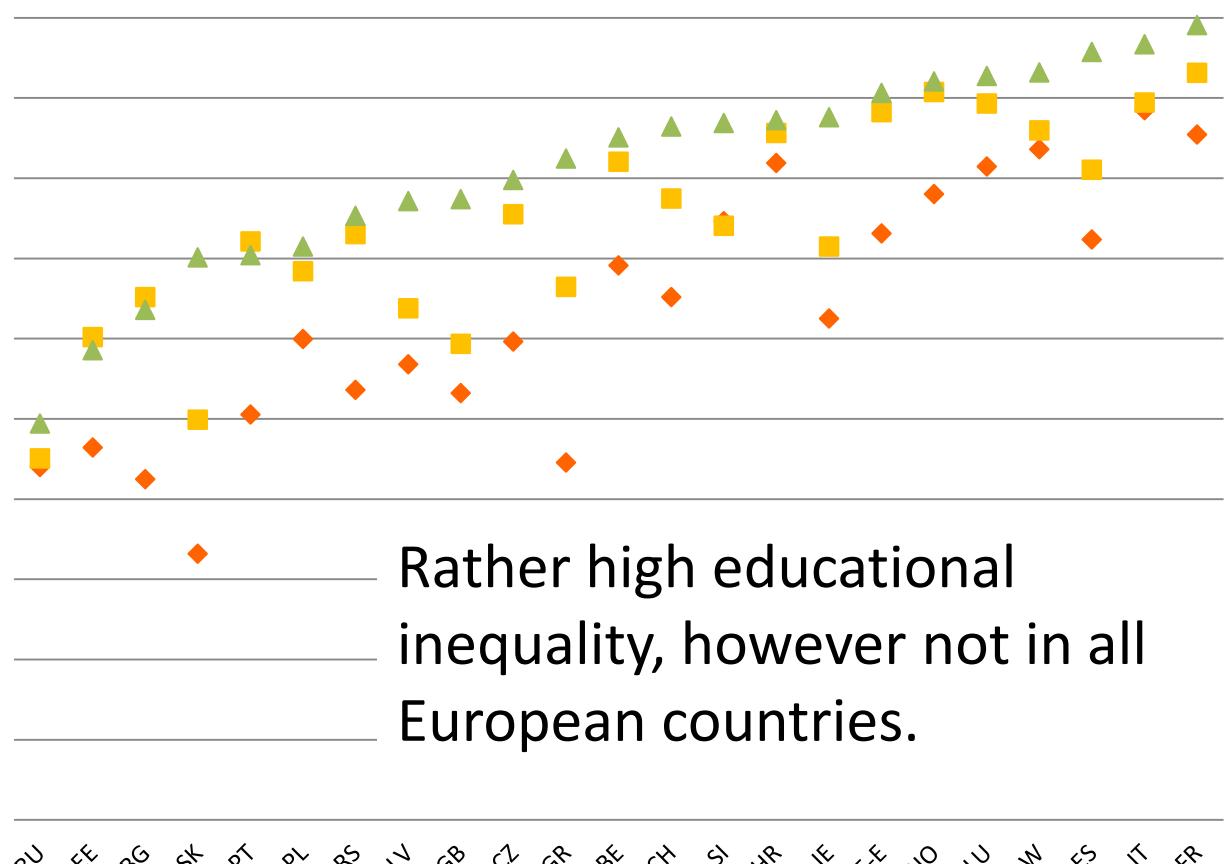


ACTIVE Youth (through standby engagement or activism)

No clear pattern



Clear educational pattern



Rather high educational
inequality, however not in all
European countries.

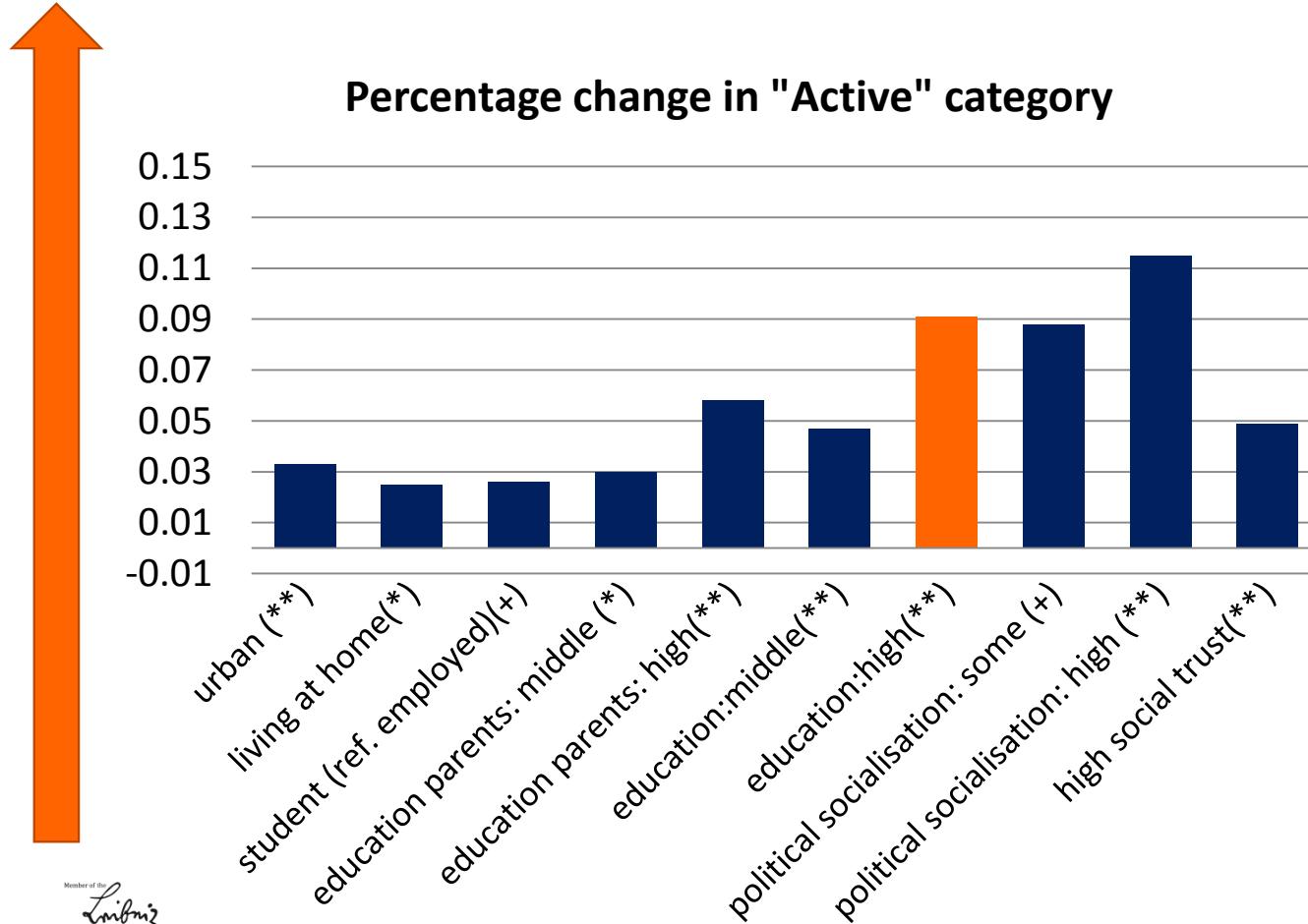
◆ Lower Education ■ Middle Education ▲ Upper Education

- Q2: Which role does the socio-economic status play for social engagement and activism among youth? Which other individual characteristics matter?



Engagement profiles: bottom-up explanations

■ Micro-level indicators



No significance of:

- Efficacy
- Unemployment
- Experience of unemployment

Different to stronger activity forms also no significance of:

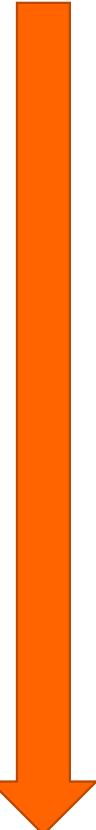
- Income
- Satisfaction with democracy
- Trust in government
- Trust in political parties

Q3: Which settings enable youth to participate?



Engagement profiles: top-down explanations

- Macro-level indicators
 - ▶ Freedom of the press (*)
 - ▶ Freedom of the press squared(**)
 - ▶ GDP (**)
 - ▶ Functioning of government (/)



Youth-specific:

- ▶ Youth transition regime(*) → index of youth employment opportunities, governmental youth support, educational quality
- ▶ Integration of disadvantaged youth(+) → educational inequality

Common contexts for social engagement

- Micro:

- Education is a key predictor of broad social engagement
- **Discussion about social topics at an early age** are however able to decrease low engagement even when resources are low
- More than trust in political institutions, it is **trust in other people** that is able to increase political and social engagement

- Macro:

- **A lack of sufficient resources** for activism can be one source of lower social involvement. Low engagement is mostly present in countries that have low material resources and/or give fewer resources to young people.

Policy recommendations

Which policy recommendations can be drawn?

- ▶ The influence of political discussions gives importance to the role of the school to strengthen political debate in the classroom and create a culture of participation
- ▶ The importance of social trust would speak for promoting community action that bridge the gap between younger and older generations
- ▶ The solution is not placing an even higher focus on education, but providing alternative systems next to the educational system that support a culture of participation (putting even more pressure, wont restore trust in society)

... if we don't hear youth, we forgo social change



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