

# gesis

Leibniz Institute  
for the Social Sciences



## *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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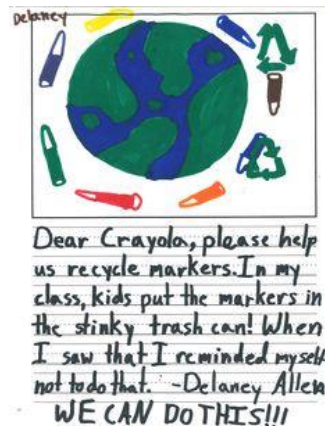
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## Social engagement as youth agency

- 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)



## 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

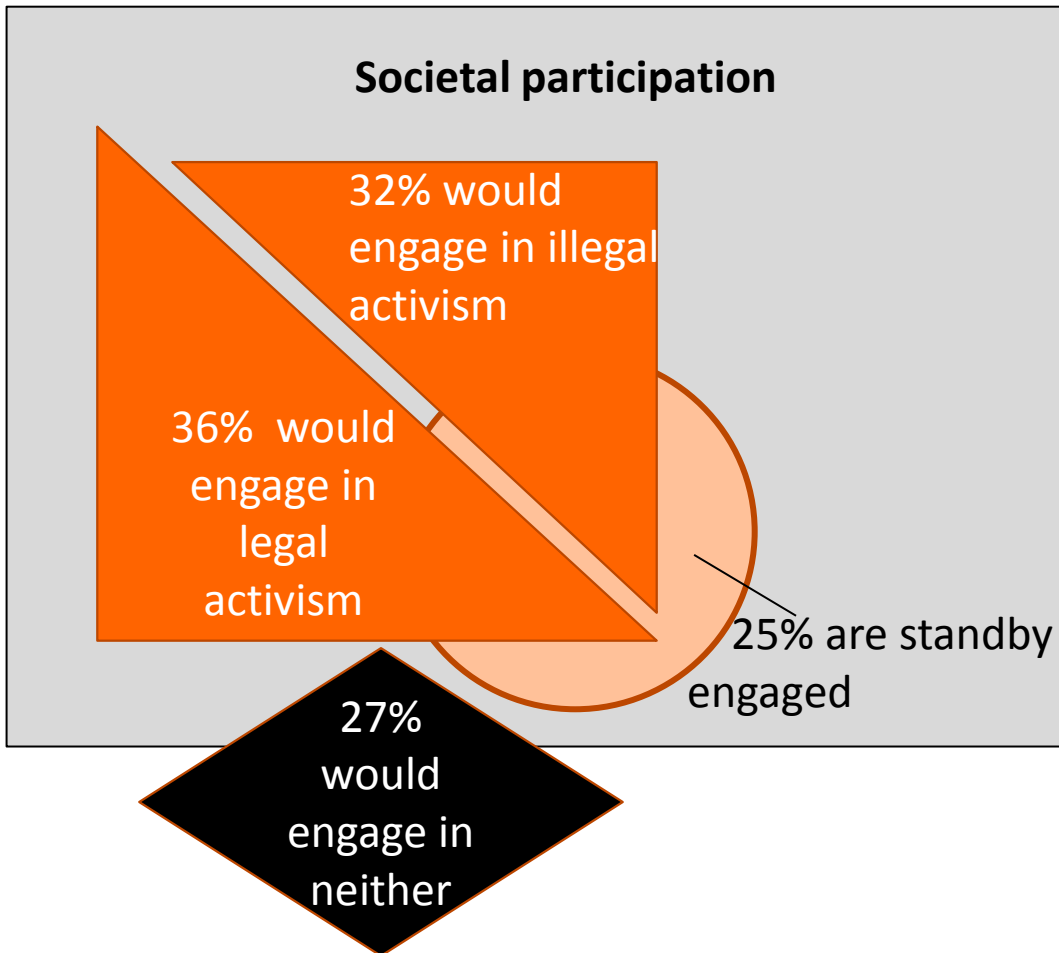
- ➔ How does bounded agency translate into restricted youth political and social participation?
- Q1: How high is the degree of education-based participatory inequality among youth in Europe?
- Q2: Which role does the socio-economic status play for social engagement and activism among youth? Which other 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%.

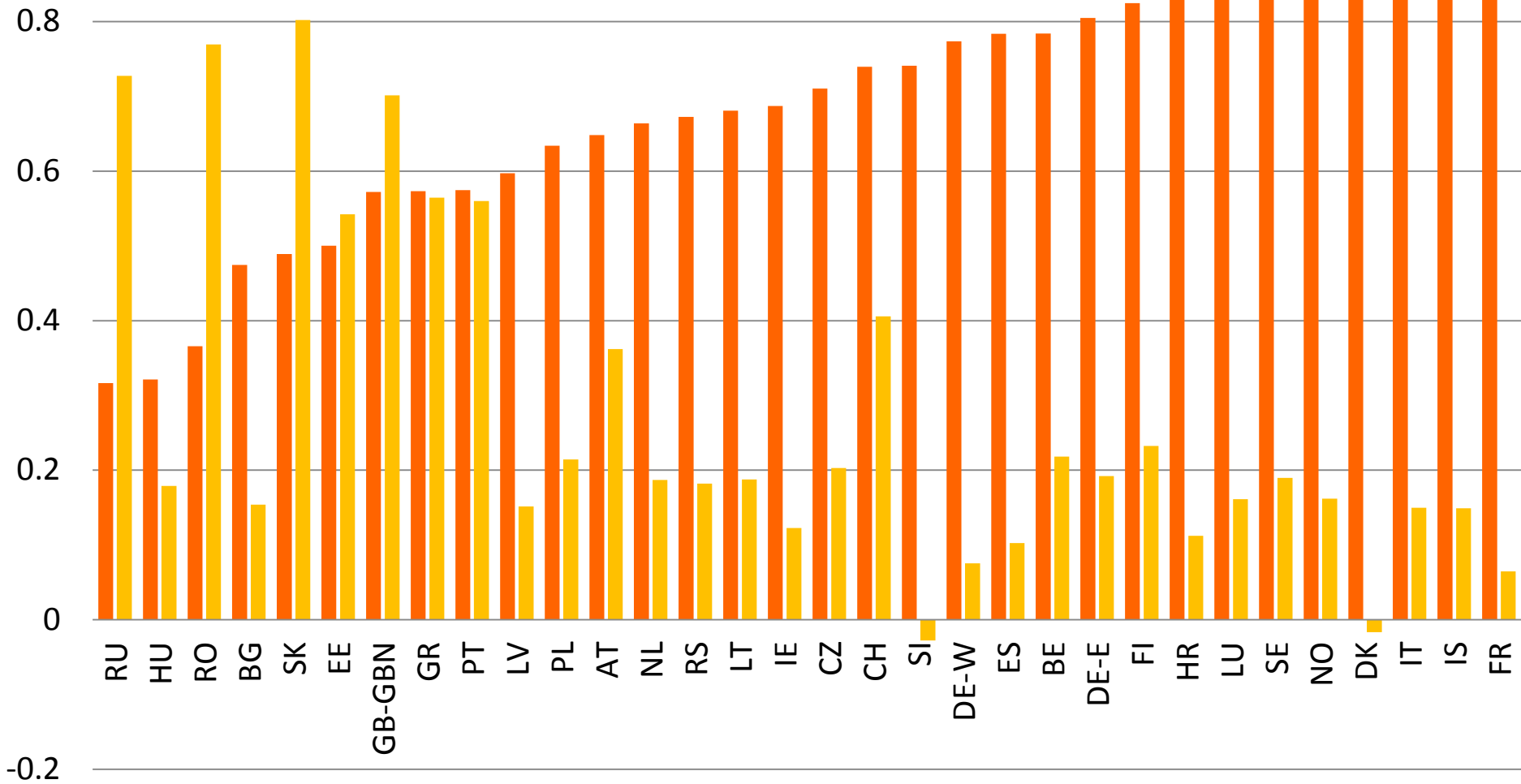
Standby engagement therefore seems to form one road towards activism but not the sole one.

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



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



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

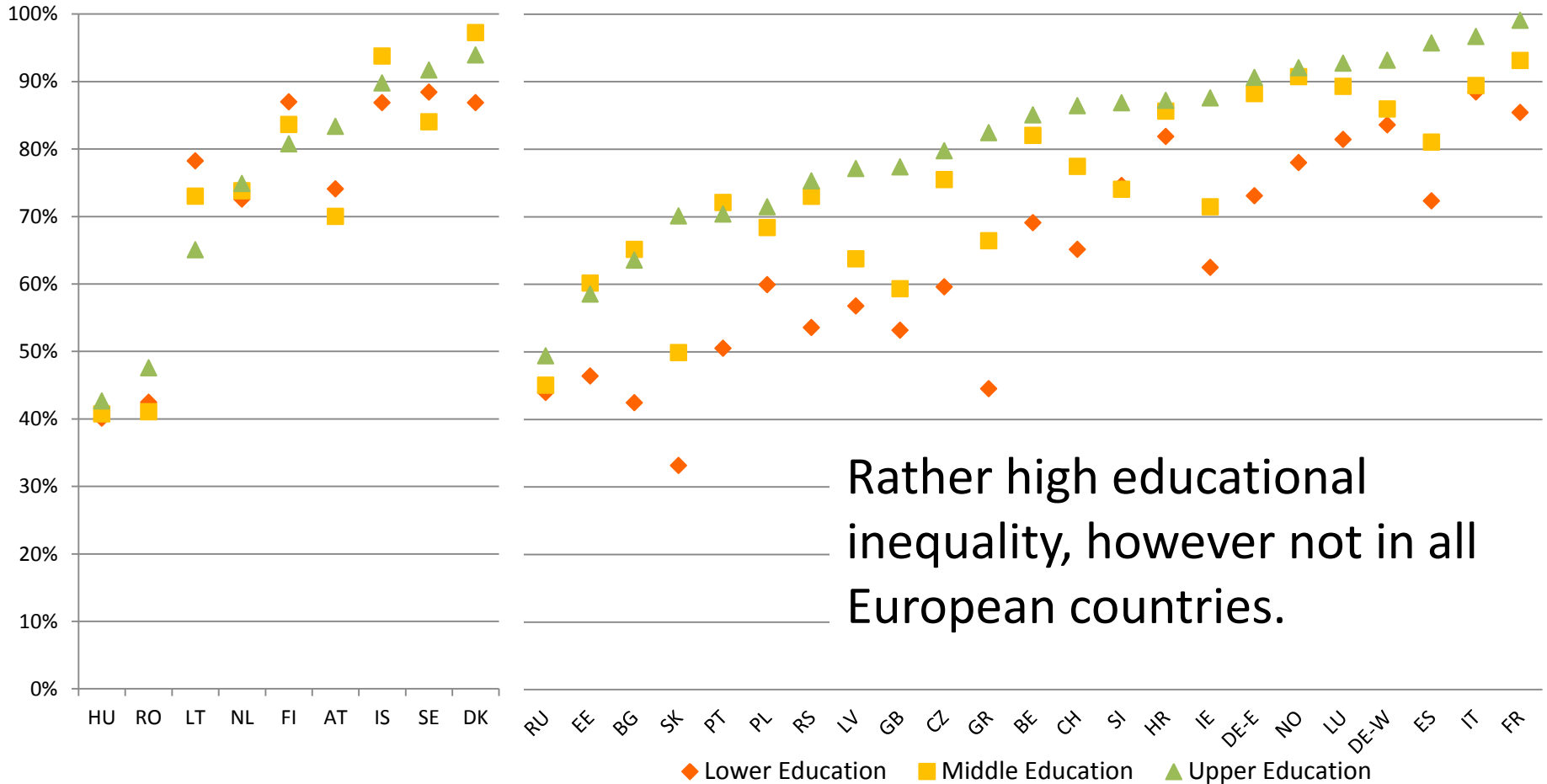
- Q1: How high is the degree of education-based participatory inequality among youth in Europe?



# ACTIVE Youth (through standby engagement or activism)

## No clear pattern

## Clear educational pattern



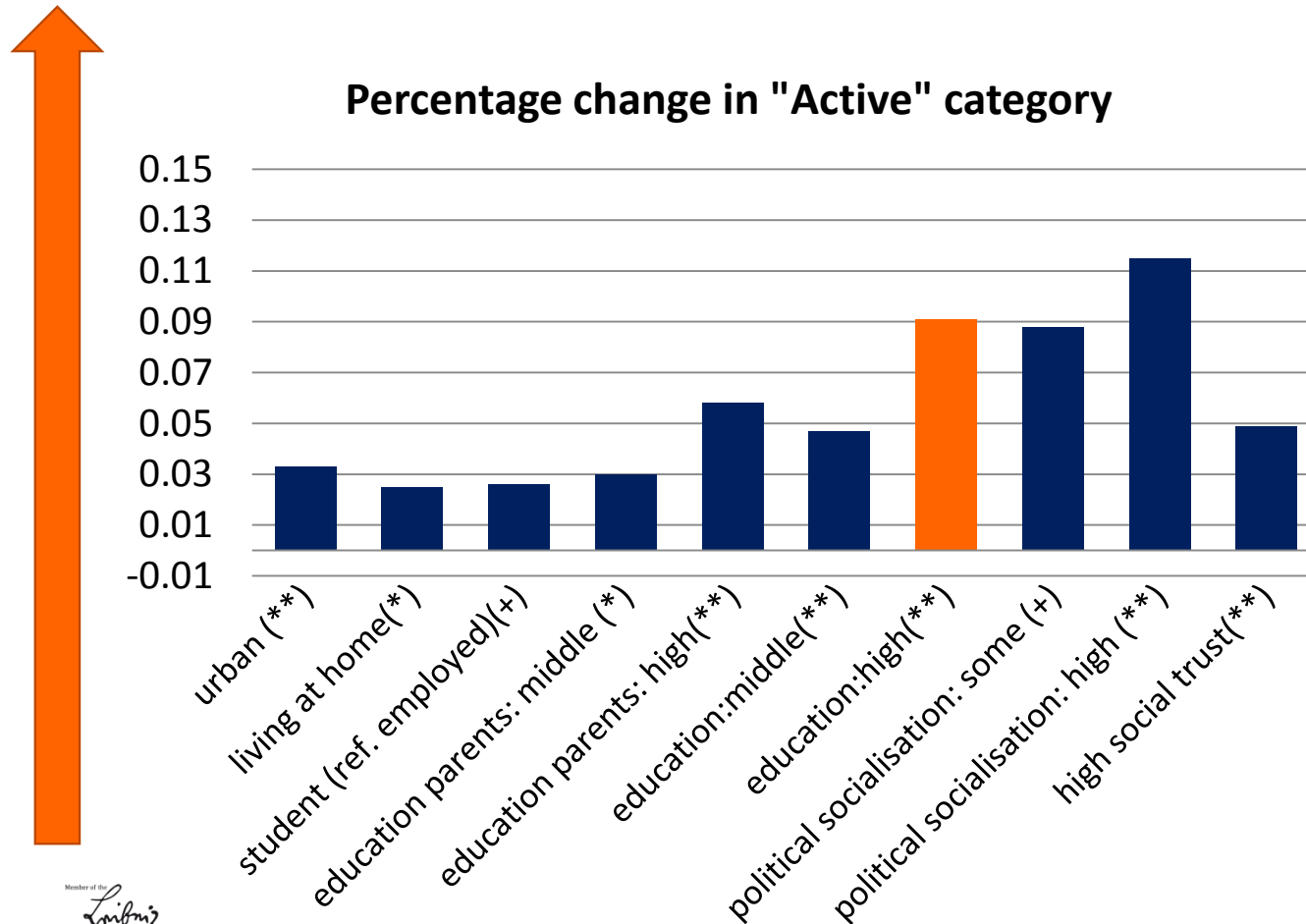
Rather high educational inequality, however not in all European countries.

- 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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