

ȘTIINȚE POLITICE ȘI ADMINISTRATIVE

THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF LOW YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRACIES

CONSECINȚELE POLITICE ALE PARTICIPĂRII SCĂZUTE A TINERILOR ÎN DEMOCRAȚIILE CONTEMPORANE

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Încredințăm altora o parte din viața noastră în fiecare zi. Încredințăm educația copiilor noștri pedagogilor, propria noastră sănătate medicilor și chiar weekend-urile noastre canalului meteo. Motivul pentru aceasta este că deseori nu suntem capabili să facem aceste sarcini sau să obținem singuri cunoștințele relevante. Din aceleași motive încredințăm politicianilor o parte semnificativă din viitorul nostru prin alegeri democratice. Sistemul democrației reprezentative este construit pe această interacțiune ca o metodă strict definită de a alege indivizi care pot conduce de către cei care nu sunt capabili să se conducă ei înșiși. Prin urmare, natura reprezentării politice este de a îmbina aspectele democratice și nedemocratice în procesul decizional. Democrațiile reprezentative au o dificultate de bază – potrivirea nesatisfăcătoare între aspectele democratice competitive și reprezentative.

***Cuvinte-cheie,** participare, alegeri, democrație, angajament civic, reprezentare, partide politice*

Modern democracies cannot run without citizen participation, which is why it is so important (Verba, 2003). Participation in democratic politics should also be regarded normatively and broadly as the equal chance for everyone who may be affected by a choice to influence that decision. This is true even if we are advocating for a minimum notion of democracy, which claims that every citizen has an equal right to participate and be heard in the competitive contest for power distribution (Schumpeter, 2013). Just because people have the right to participate doesn't mean they will participate, even if that is what they choose to do. According to the Fuchs et al. 1995, “distance between rulers and rule. it is representational institutions that produce this “distance,” while democratic institutions attempt to close this gap.

According to Franklin (2004), a shift in voter turnout may be attributed to the fact that new voter cohorts are more likely to turn out than their predecessors, resulting in an increase in turnout. A more plausible argument would be that inequalities in turnout between the genders are simply a result of the period effects, which have a lasting impact on the voting behavior of specific generations (Franklin, 2004).

Finally, a more recent and possibly more positive line of study does not consider the youth's lack of traditional involvement as a sign of a democratic sickness.

Political involvement inequities based on variations in age, education, gender, wealth and race have been primarily documented in the United States. For a long time, it was assumed that socioeconomic status had little influence on differences in voting participation in Europe (Verba, 2003). According to some analyses, this was mostly owing to the effective mobilization techniques of labor unions and mass party organizations aimed at the lower classes (Gray and Caul, 2000). Recent studies, however, have shown substantial evidence that participation inequalities, particularly those connected to age and education, are increasing in European democracies. For the lack of research in Europe on the repercussions of a lack of involvement, this study will focus on the probable spillover effects on political representation of age-based participation discrepancies in European nations.

Political engagement has a critical role to play in the evolution of democracy, both in developing its institutions and in embedding and legitimizing them socially, in light of this larger context. An important factor in the growth of democratic politics has been a desire for the participation of a wide range of people. Pressure from a wide range of social interest groups, including women's organizations, the working class, ethnic minorities, and environmentalists, eventually led to their inclusion in democratic politics and the creation of institutional channels to accommodate an ever-increasing range of social pluralism. Democracy's potential for institutional change and adjustment may be seen in this development, which displays its extraordinary flexibility. Democracy, as defined in scholarly and popular discourse, has evolved from a concept based on a collection of institutions to one based on a set of procedures, in which people's involvement is a fundamental component.

But it has to be seen if this widening of democratic politics has resulted in stronger engagement in democracy, as evidenced by the challenges of social support and legitimacy for democracy and its institutions that were described above. As has been pointed out several times, these issues appear to be inherent in the process of institutionalization. Social involvement is uncomplicated as long as a particular group or interest is excluded from democratic politics. Participation in democratic politics, however, dwindles as soon as the group or interest in question is incorporated into democratic politics via one or more institutional mechanisms. Thus, institutionalization tends to limit participation and weakens social anchoring, which, over time, diminishes democratic institutions' credibility. Institutions and citizens alike have the challenge of reversing this trend by offering and participating in democratic participation.

Youth and political participation are of particular importance in all of these areas. The first is that young people have profited much from the growth of democratic politics. Specialized institutions catering to young people arose more frequently than for many other social groups, from youth groups to student councils, from youth wings in political parties, trade unions and other social organizations to networks on local and national

and European levels; from youth support programs to specialized sections in public administration. Whether or whether these current structures are in line with the interests and demands of young people, this institutionalization has clearly contributed greatly to the establishment and emancipation of youth as a unique and significant social category. There should be no misunderstanding that this evolution is not only a series of concessions made to young people by adults in politics and society. On the contrary, young people themselves have frequently been at the forefront of institutional innovation and growth, and examples of student, civil rights, environmental, and peace campaigners are just a few. A similar expectation may be made for the future development of democracy and its institutions from the perspective of today's young.

Not to be overlooked, however, is the importance of young people when it comes to establishing democratic legitimacy. Licensing institutions is more than just a matter of whether the public approves or disapproves of their performance, as we've shown above. When it comes to social media, though, it's all about the people who are using it and what they're saying about it. Political socialization produces these frames of reference. Thus, childhood, adolescence, and the early years of adulthood have long been recognized as the crucial formative years, following which major life changes are far less possible. Young people's political socialization now has a significant impact on their future democratic legitimacy. The question is whether the current ways of assisting young people in becoming citizens are sufficient to ensure their comprehension and support of democratic institutions, as well as their active participation in them.

Youth participation in European Parliament elections, local elections, and traditional institutions like political parties, trade unions, and even youth organizations in North-West or South-East Europe has declined over the past fifteen or twenty years, indicating a growing problem in the area of youth political participation. It is often seen as the decrease of social capital, the “de-politization” of young people, “social vulnerability,” “marginalization,” and “anomie” (Adsett 2003, Putnam 2000). Is this a long-term trend toward youth disengagement from politics and society, or an indication that these conventional forms of civic activity are being replaced by new patterns established by young people?

Evidence that kids aren't involved in politics is disputed, as are the studies that back it up. The increasing fragmentation and partiality of research viewpoints is one of the key factors for the varying visions of today's political engagement. Politicians clinging to 1960s ideals regret the loss of party membership, whereas international relations professors and communications specialists applaud the emergence of global civil society, according to Norris (2002). Inadequate comparative multi-country survey designs, as well as a lack of genuinely longitudinal data sets, lead to methodological errors contributing to this predicament. Young people's own understandings of politics and political involvement are often overlooked by these researchers. In some cases, they even push their own ideas of politics and political participation on respondents. A lack of understanding of the social environment in which political involvement takes

place might lead to a lack of understanding of the many types of political engagement.

Youth policy at the European level, on the other hand, is concerned and hopeful about the engagement of young people in politics. EC 2001 specifies young engagement in public life as a priority of EU and state youth programs, and the Commission's White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth" Along with the revised European Charter on Youth Active Citizenship (CE 2003), the follow-up document to the White Paper expresses a growing concern about threats to youth active citizenship while also reaffirming youth participation's critical role in the process of democracy and European integration. The prospect of young people's involvement in public life is immense, but what societal trends are encouraging or obstructing this endeavor?

Political science and youth studies combine to explore the evolution of the notion of participation. It then focuses on some of the major obstacles that young people face when it comes to participating in Europe's increasing context. Accordingly, new directions for study on young people's political engagement are sketched forth.

Understanding political involvement in terms of citizenship theory has significant implications. Citizenship is no longer seen as a passive transfer of social rights and obligations, but rather as an active participation by previously excluded groups in the exercise of their rights and duties. Citizenship is more than just a legal or civil status; it's about people's desire and capacity to engage meaningfully in society (Dwyer 2000). When people accept responsibility for their interactions with both private and governmental organizations, they are exercising their right to be a citizen create a notion of constructive social involvement based on a larger view of citizenship. Young people can "participate in their communities and influence policies and practices in the world around them" by engaging in a variety of social activities, including formal volunteer work, informal community networks, neighborliness, informal political action, awareness raising, altruistic acts, and caring work at home and in the community.

European Steering Committee for Intergovernmental Cooperation in the Youth Field of the Council of Europe (CDEJ) developed a new pro-active understanding of youth participation in the 1990s, postulating that "participation is not an aim in itself but an approach to becoming an active citizen, [a means of] taking an active role both in the development of one's own environment and in European co-operation" (CDEJ 1997: 7). In the design of youth experiment studies in EU member states, such an approach was approved. According to Golubovic (1982), "power is based on the ability to exert influence on the ecological and social components of life in the wide community" is the operational definition employed in this research.

Youth engagement in communist eastern Europe in the 1980s was tied to the idea of "juventisation," a term used by youth researchers in communist Eastern Europe. It was Mitev (1982) who first proposed the idea of youth engagement as a two-way process of interaction rather than integration, and Mahler (1983) who first proposed the idea of yo-

uth as an engaged and committed group. Young people were seen from this perspective as the group that created new ideals and transformed society by actively participating in social life. Youth engagement resulted in social advancement. This notion was quickly subsumed into the official ideology in countries with one-party administrations, where it was left out and marginalized.

Youth research in post-communism shifted from “juventisation” to “youth citizenship” to break with the “great mission of youth” in constructing a classless communist society. Some scholars, following T.H. Marshall (1952), returned to the more passive idea of integration into pre-existing social structures when discussing participation. More pro-active thinkers, such as Machacek (2001), have linked it to engagement in associational life as a whole, and social capital in particular (Spanning et al. 2001). Kovacheva (2000a) found a proactive, problem-solving approach to youth engagement in her research of youth participation in Eastern Europe. She saw this as the active involvement of young people in their countries’ social change. Studying the implementation of youth participation projects, the researchers focused their attention on three major indicators: a well-defined problem situation (acute and unjust conditions in need of change); resources for participation (individuals, group structures, and influential allies); and outcomes (on individuals, organisations, community and society).

The three most common ways that young people become involved in politics are the subject of much of the study (Chisholm & Kovacheva 2002):

- Participation in institutional politics (elections, campaigns, and membership);
- protest actions (demonstrations and new social movements);
- civic engagement (associative life, community participation, voluntary work).

When it comes to the way young people engage in political campaigns and demonstrate in their communities and on a worldwide scale, there are new innovations that have been brought about by this generation. The third pattern, which broadens the definition of political engagement to include a broader range of concerns and contexts relevant to the aspirations of today’s youth, might provide significant new insights. These sorts of involvement are classified as “postmodern,” and include expressive and emotional types as well as aesthetic, informal, virtual, and digital types.

Youth studies adopt a more substantial concept of youth than political science does in order to understand young people’s civic participation. From this vantage point, young people don’t merely make up another demographic subgroup; they represent a distinct social position inside a given culture. There are at least three ways to think about youth in youth research: as a generation, as a period in life, and as a social group. Mannheim’s fundamental article (1952) inspired the first notion, which is comparable to the one used in political science. It is particularly pertinent at a time when Europe is experiencing significant societal upheaval (Becker 1992; Semenova 2002). The second method examines the values that form the conscientiousness of this life stage by starting from the social psychological peculiarity of this stage – the desire for self-identity (Cote 2002; Helve 1996). The third view sees young people as part of a population through a period of tran-

sition from a state of dependency to one of self-sufficiency, as they move from living at home with their parents to finding their own place to call home and starting families.

Heuristic understanding of political participation begins with an examination of the new formative experiences in a changing Europe at the bridge between two centuries, as well as the new points of identification in the globalizing world and the new social context in which youth transitions are made.

CONCLUSIONS

When one considers young people's engagement in contemporary European democracies, one rapidly encounters a dilemma. There are more possibilities than ever before for young people to get involved in politics and public life, yet few would argue that these options have resulted in widespread and effective participation by young people. Contrary to popular belief, many worry that younger generations are becoming less politically engaged, and data such as the reduction in youth engagement in elections, political parties, and conventional social groups supports this concern. The sad conclusion is that today's youth are compromising the future of democracy by rejecting democratic institutions. Other, more upbeat voices point out that the ways in which young people are getting involved in politics are shifting away from traditional democratic institutions and toward new ones. One way to look at it is that young people are creating new ways of expressing themselves and participating in society that are more enticing to them than the ones they acquired from their parents and grandparents. While the former position doubts the role of young people as democratic agents in current institutions, the latter points out the seeming insufficiency of conventional democratic structures for today's young people.

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