

### Engaged and critical? The young generation's political participation in EU countries

Kiisel, Maie; Seppel, Külliki; Leppik, Marianne

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Kiisel, M., Seppel, . K., & Leppik, M. (2015). Engaged and critical? The young generation's political participation in EU countries. *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, 7(3), 52-66. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-464445>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

# Engaged and Critical? The Young Generation's Political Participation in EU Countries

Maie Kiisel, Marianne Leppik & Külliki Seppel\*

## Abstract

Within Europe, there is a clear difference in the strength of political activism between old and new member states. Taking Dalton's differentiation between old and new types of participation, 'duty' and 'engaged' citizenship, as a point of departure, the article explores the major predictors for the new, network-based and horizontal political practices among young people. The article uses data from the 2006 and 2012 rounds of the European Social Survey to explore country and age group differences within the EU to seek out structural reasons for the trends in duty and engaged citizenship. The results show that duty citizenship is decreasing and engaged citizenship increasing, but the changes are small and not only among youth. Both types of political participation are related to strong evaluations of the performance of democracy. While there are significant differences in value orientations between adult engaged and duty citizens, these differences are less marked in the case of young people.

**Keywords:** political participation, young people, duty citizenship, engaged citizenship, European Union.

## Introduction

While participation in elections has been experiencing an accelerating decline in recent decades, it has been claimed that young people have become especially disaffected and disengaged. Recent research on the political participation of the young generation shows a more nuanced picture. Young people are found to hold firm beliefs in the idea of democracy, but they are critical of the real functioning of representative democracy, which has also caused lower participation in its traditional forms. At the same time, we can see a rise in alternative forms of democratic participation, a change that Russell Dalton (2008) explains as a shift from 'duty citizenship' to 'engaged citizenship'. This has raised the question of whether the traditional indicators used for studying political participation and attitudes are still able to capture the wider picture.

In the article, we use the data from the European Social Survey (ESS) to see if there is empirical proof of the aforementioned trends in Europe. ESS data has been used to study political participation before: in the context of social inequality (Gallego, 2008), institutional trust (Marien & Christensen, 2013), different political regimes (Hooghe & Quintelier, 2013), age groups (Quintelier, 2007), and ethnic and linguistic minorities (Sandovici & Listhaug, 2010). The specific focus of our analysis is the political participation of the young in relation to their attitudes towards democracy.

The study had two major aims: first, we tried to trace the shift in political participation from the dominant model of duty citizenship to that of engaged citizenship among European youth in comparison to older generations and explored the main predictors for the two types of political participation. We also examined how political engagement differs between different EU countries.

\* E-mail address of the corresponding author: kulliki.seppel@ut.ee

Second, we tried to evaluate to what extent the adherence to alternative types of political engagement could be explained by the perception of the functioning of political institutions or by more personal indicators.

We analysed data from ESS surveys conducted in 2006 and 2012. We compared the responses about political and civic participation of young people (15-24) and adults to questions related to estimations of the functioning of democracy in their own countries and to personal values.

## Theoretical background

Recent literature on the political participation of the young generation has focused on two key issues. First, it has been claimed that a contradiction exists between young people's belief in democratic values and the whole conception of democracy, on the one hand, and their own low actual practice of representative democracy, paired with critical assessments of relevant possibilities, on the other (the 'democratic paradox') (Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison, & Anstead, 2014; Norris, 2002; Rossi, 2009; Sloam, 2013). Second, recent decades have witnessed a decline in the traditional forms of democratic participation (duty citizenship) and a rise in the involvement in non-electoral, temporary, network-based, partly intertwined forms of political and civic activity (engaged citizenship) (Dalton, 2008).

### Democratic paradox

It has been claimed that the distancing of political agenda from young people's practical life experience has increased their criticism of and withdrawal from traditional political participation (Niemi & Klingler, 2012; Henn, Weinstein, & Forrest, 2005). Qualitative studies have indicated that young people in Europe in general see democracy as a fair and healthy principle for organising society (as opposed to authoritarian forms of governance), and generally favour the traditional conception of democracy centred on the founding role of elections and the will of the people (Cammaerts et al., 2014). But young people "tend to be more radical, less diplomatic and very interested in ensuring that how things are done is explicitly detailed and in accordance with their interests and/or principles" (Rossi, 2009, p. 491). They express the contradiction between the ideal and real life by outlining the limitations, impossibility, fragility, rarity and contradictions involved in actual practice, e.g. the rare use of the referendum as a form of direct democracy and the few opportunities to participate in political decision making (Cammaerts et al., 2014; Bruter & Harrison, 2009). At the same time, their own immediate experience of participation (in schools and in their families) is often ignored or is not relevant. The contradiction between critical attitudes and high ideals is called the 'democratic paradox' (Pattie, Seyd, & Whiteley, 2004). On the basis of high ideals, there is an increase in disillusionment in 'real politics' (Norris, 1999; Torcal & Montero, 2006), which leads young people to search for new forms of participation and self-expression. Thus, the contradictory approach of youth towards representative democracy does not indicate the young generation's disinterest in politics as a whole, but rather in its classical institutional organisations and political establishments, and it shows their preference for other ways of being politically engaged (Norris, 2002; Rossi, 2009; Sloam, 2013; Cammaerts et al., 2014).

### Traditional and new forms of democratic participation

Young people have become less interested in participating in the system of representative democracy and tend to prefer non-electoral forms of political engagement, such as participation in demonstrations, signing petitions, consumer boycotts and joining political online forums (Dalton, 2008, 2009; Norris,

2002; McCaffrie & MaMarchrsh, 2013; Martin, 2012; Wicks, LeBlanc, Wicks, Maxwell, & Schulte, 2014). Their political activity has changed in form: from long-term ideological allegiances through such well-established organisations as parties and trade unions, to new forms of political engagement based on 'personally meaningful causes', which are much less stable, have horizontal structures and offer flexible forms of involvement (Rossi, 2009; Martin, 2012; Sloam, 2013). New types of political actions include attempts to influence the behaviour of multinational corporations and international organisations, blurring the line between 'political' and 'social' action (Norris, 2002, pp. 192-193 see McCaffrie & March 2013, p. 115).

Russell Dalton has suggested a shift in the whole idea of political citizenship: the earlier model of 'duty citizens' is being replaced by the idea of 'engaged citizens'. While duty citizens regard citizenship as a duty-based norm, involving participation in elections, traditional forms of allegiance and generally abiding by the rules of social order, the idea of engaged citizenship sees citizenship as primarily involving engagement in society expressed via solidaristic support for the worse-off, political independence and activity both politically and in civil society (Dalton, 2008, pp. 80-84).

Gaiser and Rijke (2010, p. 38) have similarly distinguished three types of civic and political engagement:

- a) long-term participation in (large) instrumental interest organisations,
- b) involvement in informal groups, self-supporting networks and citizen initiatives that have been labelled 'new social movements' since the 1970s, and
- c) temporary and concrete political actions, which serve the purpose of supporting or articulating political goals.

Participation in traditional and 'new social movement' types of organisations has become rather formalised, the free spirit of NGOs is increasingly being replaced by technocratism and formalism, and NGOs have become bureaucratised and practise neo-liberal management styles, which has led to the compartmentalisation and reproduction of the political establishment instead of opposition (Cumming, 2008; Choudry & Shragge, 2011; Kohler-Koch & Quittkat, 2013).

Gaiser and Rijke's third type, which echoes Dalton's idea of engaged citizenship, seems to be especially attractive to young people (Juris & Pleyers, 2009). This includes less formal, temporary and horizontally (self-) organised forms of civic and political participation, which serve the purpose of supporting or articulating political goals. These movements, which have found contextualisation in scientific literature, such as the Occupy movement and 'Indignados' in Spain, differ from 'social movements' (e.g. women's rights or environmental movements of the 1960s) in that they are considered expressions of disappointment with the political system and social order in general (Sloam, 2013). Seemingly sudden outbursts are deeply rooted in the long-term unanswered needs of young people (Ó Beacháin & Polese, 2010). These protest movements have little rational and functional basis from the point of view of political integration.

Young people associate traditional political involvement with the top-down type of communication that assumes the target group to be passive information seekers whose main possibility of shaping political processes is to be knowledgeable about candidates and make rational decisions (Wicks et al., 2014, p. 627). The more participatory forms of political communication via social media networks are less acknowledged as political activism (op cit), and are hence also less studied in traditional surveys of political activism. However, Internet-mediated civic and political engagement characterises the young generation and also shapes the general political culture. Intensive use of social networks moves young people towards political engagement (e.g. Bode, 2012; Conroy, Feezell, & Guerrero, 2012; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). The manner in which young people interact in social networks significantly contributes to the construction of their own, independent political identities. Rainie and Wellman (2012) have proposed a model of 'networked individualism', which accommodates individual values, political attitudes (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Inglehart, 1990) and self-actualisation (Bennett, Wells

and Rank, 2009) with the communication patterns of online media. Networking young citizens are less likely to be members of such traditional political organisations as parties or trade unions, instead participating in non-hierarchical and project initiatives and reflexively engaging in the lifestyle politics (Bang, 2004; Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011) characteristic to the model of engaged citizenship.

The change in the form of political participation, however, can lead to an increase in the polarisation of young citizens and marginalisation along the lines of both political and civic participation (Dalton, Scarrow, & Cain, 2004; Sloam, 2013; Martin, 2012). Political participation also correlates strongly with education and household income in its traditional form (Verba, 2004). But while 'duty citizenship' supports wide-scale social participation, the 'engaged citizen' type requires stronger political independence and more resource demanding habits of political engagement. This can result in less educated and socio-economically less well-off people dropping out of democratic practices altogether. However, there are contradictory opinions: Gallego's (2008, p. 22) analysis of ESS 2004 data on various types of political participation showed that while higher social and educational status had an impact on voting, working for a party and boycotting certain products, its impact was less evident in participating in demonstrations (a key feature of engaged citizenship). Thus, the evidence for the growing polarising effect of engaged citizenship is contradictory and needs further exploration.

It is not completely clear whether young people's propensity for new types of engagement is age-related (i.e. whether they will turn back to traditional forms of political participation as they get older), or whether we are witnessing an irreversible transformation of political culture in the late modern, individualised risk society (Rossi, 2009; Beck, 1992). Quintelier (2007) claims that although life-cycle effects account for many of the differences in voter turnout, they can only explain minor differences in broader political participation: younger people are not less active, but just have different practices. Belonging to an ethnic minority group is also a controversial predictor of political participation (Gallego, 2008; Sandovici & Listhaug, 2010). Ethnic minorities may face the risk of political marginalisation because of their low levels of political interest and the majority's cultural supremacy, but this can also serve as a potential for political mobilisation.

Starting from these theoretical premises, we constructed two indices of political participation (duty and engaged citizenship) and we looked for the major factors that contributed to belonging to either type among the young and adult populations.

## Methodology

### Sample

For the empirical inquiry, we used the European Social Survey data from the 2006 and 2012 rounds (European ..., 2006; European ..., 2012), whose survey questions best matched our research interests. The main advantage of ESS is the possibility of comparing the patterns of development of different European countries. ESS data make it possible to analyse different social processes, institutional developments and relations between people's attitudes and behaviour. As the intention of the ESS is to guarantee interstate comparison and high quality of data, all survey procedures are standardised for the participating countries.

For the analysis of 2012 data, all 21 participating European Union countries were included in the sample. For the comparison between 2006 and 2012, only those 18 countries were used that participated in both rounds: Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom (total sample 32,602).

## Indices

Based on the theoretical premises, we created three original indices: two for political participation (engaged and duty citizens) and one for the performance of democracy.

**Indices of engaged and duty-oriented citizenship.** The composition of the relevant index variables measured individuals' relations with political parties and other forms of social mobilisation that have political outputs. The index variable 'duty citizenship' was composed of variables that describe personal affiliation with the political public sphere, as well as participation in the legitimisation of political power and practice. Due to the age limits on voting, we didn't use the most typical indicator – participation in voting – in the composition. To compose the index, we first created binary variables to match the scales (1=yes, 0=all other values). The variables used are the following: *How interested would you say you are in politics?* (1=very/quite interested, 0=other); *Have you worked in a political party or action group?* (1=yes, 0=other); *Is there a particular political party you feel closer to than all the other parties?* (1=yes, 0=other).

The index variable 'engaged citizenship' was composed of four single variables that included questions about taking part in voluntary organisations, as well as questions about more flexible forms of social mobilisation. Similarly, for all variables used, binary scales were created. The variables that formed the index were the following: *In the past 12 months, how often did you get involved in work for voluntary or charitable organisations?* (1—at least once a week/once a month/once every three months/once every six months, 0=other); *Have you boycotted certain products?* (1=yes, 0=other); *Have you taken part in a lawful public demonstration in the last 12 months?* (1=yes, 0=other); *Have you signed a petition in the last 12 months?* (1=yes, 0=other). Since both citizen indices are self-constructed, we used principal component analysis in order to assess the compatibility of the constituent variables. We also carried out a reliability analysis by using Cronbach alpha and Guttman lambda, but due to the small number of variables used and the nature of the scales (binary), the results were only fair (for both indices, the value of alpha was between 0.42-0.50).

According to the frequency of each constructed index, the values 'absent', 'low' and 'high' were determined. The value 'absent' indicates absent values of initial index, 1=low and 2-4=high values. In the data analysis, individuals who scored 'high' on the index were defined as belonging to the group of duty and engaged citizens, respectively.

**Index of the perceived performance of democratic principles.** The index 'performance of democracy' measures how people rated the functioning of the different principles of democracy in their home countries. The variables used to assess the performance of democracy were different elements of the question: *To what extent do you think each of the following statements applies in [country]* (0=does not apply at all, 1=applies completely):

- that national elections are free and fair;
- that opposition parties are free to criticise the government;
- that the media are free to criticise the government;
- that governing parties are punished in elections when they have done a bad job;
- that the rights of minority groups are protected;
- that the courts are able to stop the government from acting beyond its authority.

In order to make sure of the reliability of the index 'performance of democracy', a reliability analysis using Cronbach alpha was carried out. The value of Cronbach alpha was 0.82, and this was sufficient to consider the index reliable. The 'Importance of democracy' index (which is used in the second regression) is constructed from the same six elements of the question *How important do you think it is for democracy in general?* (0—not at all important, 10—Extremely important for democracy).

To investigate the characteristics of duty and engaged citizens, multinomial logistic regression was used. High index values were used as dependent variables and compared to absent and low index values. Socio-demographic variables and self-positioning on the social scale were independent variables in the models political participation. For the democratic attitudes, values of different agency-related variables were defined as independent. To assess the goodness of fit of a model, the log likelihood function ( $-2LL$ ) was used.

## Results

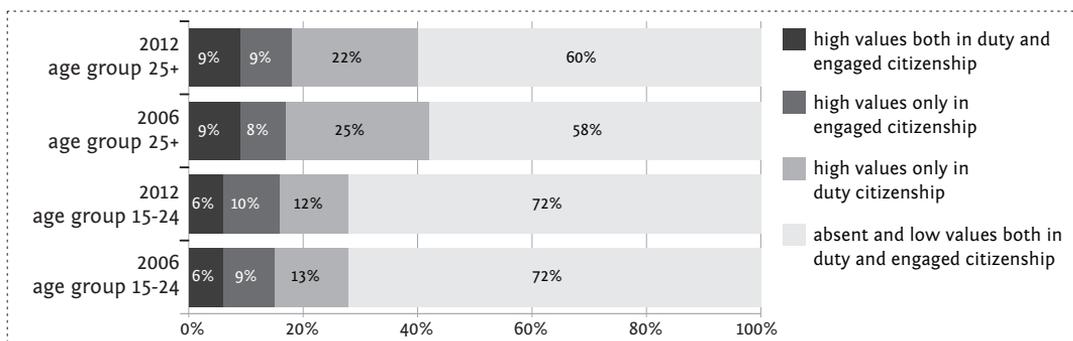
### Characteristics of duty and engaged citizens

To study the typical characteristics of duty and engaged citizens, we ran a regression analysis on a cross-section of socio-demographic variables (see Table 1). The analysis revealed mostly expected outcomes: the likelihood of a male respondent being a duty citizen was much higher than that of a female respondent, although a bit lower for a young male respondent. Compared to the representatives of the 65+ generation, the younger age group was five times less likely to belong to the duty citizen group, but there was no significant difference between the 25-64 and younger age groups. The likelihood of belonging to the engaged type of political participation does not differ between men and women or between the age groups 15-24 and 25-64.

Education and social position predicted the likelihood of being both a duty and an engaged citizen in similar ways: higher index values increased the likelihood of being politically engaged. Differences in education and perceived social position were less differentiating in the case of the youngest age cohort, whereas the likelihood of being a duty citizen was more differentiating than being an engaged citizen. People belonging to ethnic minority groups were more likely to be duty citizens and less likely to be engaged citizens. Among people aged 15-24, belonging to a duty-citizen group was even more likely among minority groups than among the total sample.

Between 2006 and 2012 changes in political participation were not significant. The proportion of people with 'absent' values on the duty citizenship index and 'average/high' values on the engaged citizenship index increased slightly. The share of people with average/high scores on the engaged citizenship index increased more among the younger group than among the 25+ age group.

Nearly 60% of the older age group had absent or low index values on both indices (Figure 1); among the young, the share was yet 12 percentage points higher. The share of people with average and high values on both indices was relatively low. The share of engaged citizens (included those who were also



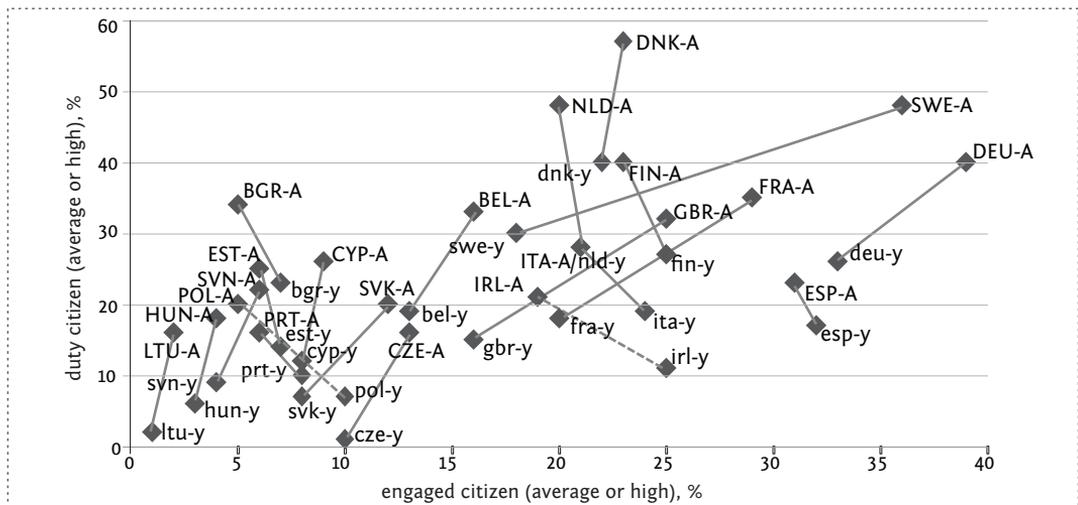
**Figure 1:** Types of political engagement among the youth and total sample in 2006 and 2012

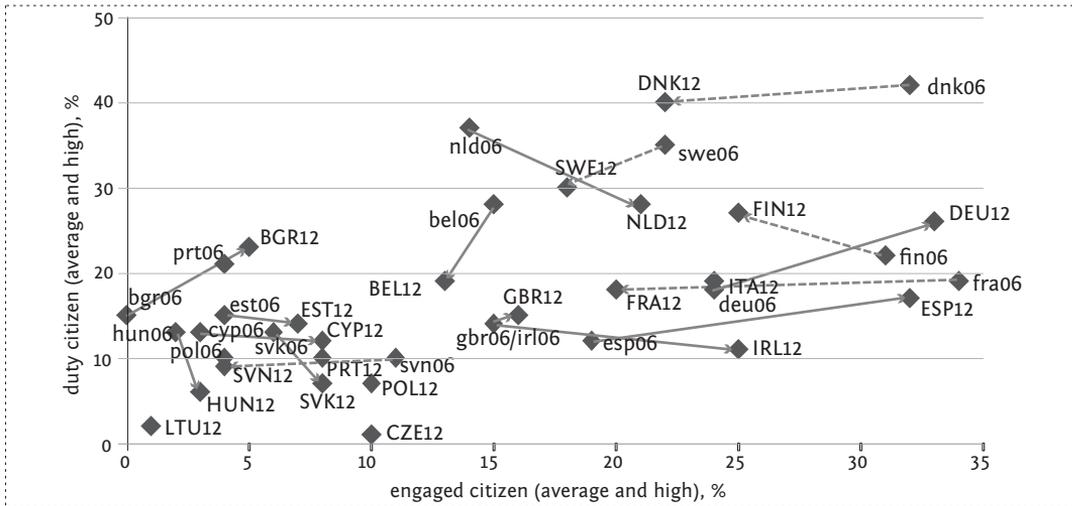
Source: authors' illustration based on ESS 2012 data

duty citizens) was quite similar among both age groups and did not change over the period. The main difference between age groups was the share of ‘pure’ duty citizens, i.e. people who scored high only on the duty citizenship index, which decreased a bit and was much higher among older age groups.

### Duty and engaged citizenship in different European Union countries

Younger people are always less interested in political participation than older ones. The most significant differences in the scores on the duty citizenship index between young and older generations seemed to be in old democratic countries, such as France, the Netherlands, the UK and Sweden (Figure 2). The differences between age groups were less noticeable in Southern European countries, such as Spain, Portugal and Italy. Differences in engaged citizenship did not form a clear pattern, and bigger differences between age groups in engaged citizenship occurred in old democracies: Sweden, France and the UK. It is surprising that only in two countries – Ireland and Poland – the older age group had considerably lower scores (5% and more) in engaged citizenship than the younger group.





**Figure 3:** Change in shares of duty and engaged citizenship among the youth population in 2006-2012, by countries

Source: authors' compilation based on ESS 2006 and 2012 data

Western countries were more variable (Figure 3). For example, the number of young people who had high scores on the engaged citizen index decreased in France by 14 percentage points, in Denmark by 10, and in Finland by 6 percentage points. Still, there were no countries where young people scored remarkably lower on both indices compared to 2006.

### Political engagement, disappointment in democracy and agency

Although there was no significant change in duty and engaged citizenship in the total sample, there were changes at the country level. The differences among young people between 2006 and 2012 had shifted more in the index of engaged citizenship (Figure 3) than in the index of duty citizenship, especially within older European countries. The differences between older and younger age groups were greater in the duty citizenship index (Figure 2). To explain this tendency, we set out to test how much these differences between different forms of political participation could be predicted by the respondents' disappointment in the performance of politicians and how much by personal beliefs about individual agency.

**Democratic performance.** When we compared the evaluations given by people on the performance of democracy, we saw that both age and adherence to either type of political participation played a role. In EU, the average score of the index 'performance of democracy' was 7.24 among adult duty citizens, 6.84 among adult engaged citizens, 6.72 among young duty citizens and 6.61 among young engaged citizens. All over the European Union young people were more critical of the performance of democracy in their own countries than were adults, with the exception of Estonia and the Czech Republic. At the same time, those with high scores on the engaged citizenship index were more critical than those characterised by more traditional forms of political participation; the difference was greater in the adult group. The evaluation of democracy was higher in 'old Europe', especially in the countries that tend to emerge at the top of different 'objective' democracy tables: the Nordic countries, the Netherlands and Germany. The Nordic countries stood out as having the largest gap between young people and adults, with the young generation being much more critical in their evaluation of the performance of democracy. The countries with lower scores were mostly Eastern

**Table 1:** Political participation (high index value compared to absent and low, 21 EU member states in 2012, logistic regression)

	Age 15-24		Age 25+		Total sample	
	Duty citizen	Engaged citizen	Duty citizen	Engaged citizen	Duty citizen	Engaged citizen
Male (ref: female)	1.6***	1.0	2.1***	1.0	2.0***	1.0
Aged 15 to 24 (ref: 65+)					0.2***	1.4***
Aged 25 to 64 (ref: 65+)					0.4***	1.4***
Primary education or less (ref: tertiary)	0.3***	0.6***	0.2***	0.3***	0.2***	0.3***
Secondary education (ref: tertiary)	0.6***	0.9	0.4***	0.5***	0.4***	0.5***
Social position low (ref: high)	0.5***	0.6**	0.3***	0.3***	0.3***	0.3***
Social position medium (ref: high)	0.8*	1.1	0.6***	0.6***	0.6***	0.6***
Belonging to a minority group (ref: not)	1.4*	0.9	1.0	0.5***	1.1	0.5***
-2LL	277.7	279.9	887.2	840.5	1200.2	1185.0

\*p < 0.10; \*\*p < 0.05; \*\*\*p < 0.01

Source: authors' compilation based on ESS 2012 data

European countries and Southern European countries recently hit by severe economic crises (Italy, Spain and Portugal).

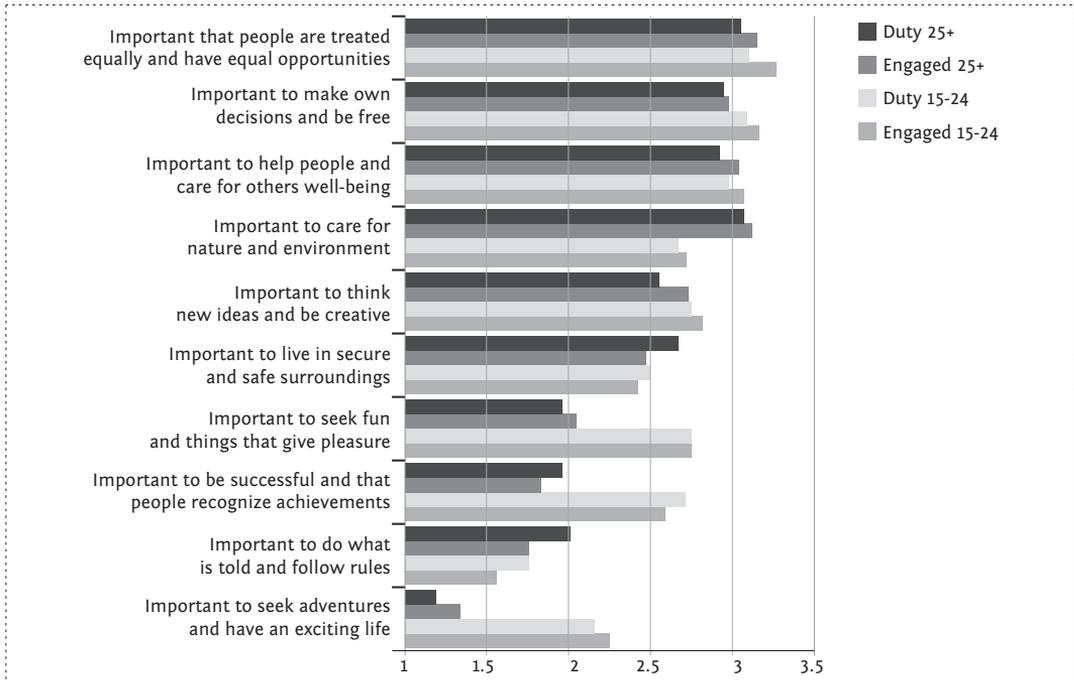
While among the adult population the duty citizens had systematically higher evaluations of democratic performance than engaged citizens, among the young satisfaction with the performance of democracy was a less reliable predictor of the type of political engagement. Especially in Eastern Europe, 'engaged' youngsters tended to evaluate democratic performance more highly than did their peers with more traditional forms of political engagement.

### Personal values

We also compared both age groups and types of political participation in terms of what they considered important in life and society (Figure 4).

The data showed that the differences between the two types of political engagement were the greatest on the questions related to following rules and adherence to safety and security, where the duty citizens scored significantly higher than the engaged citizens did. Also, being recognised for success was more important to duty citizens in both age groups. At the same time, engaged citizens scored higher on values that emphasise free-mindedness (adventures, exciting life and creativity). Interestingly, among the young equality was valued much more highly by the engaged than by the duty citizens, while among the adults the difference was small. On questions of independence (making one's own decisions) and caring for others, which are considered typical characteristics of engaged citizenship (Dalton, 2008, pp. 80-84), the differences were very small and these seemed to indicate rather general social activity (as scores for the politically not-engaged were much lower for this variable).

Comparing the young generation and adults, predictably young people valued excitement and pleasure, along with independence and creativity, more highly while being more sceptical of rules and obligations. Young people's drive for success and recognition was also considerably higher than among adults. While scoring at the same level as adults on caring for other people, youngsters showed less regard for the natural environment, which is also well-known in the research on environmental attitudes (Eurobarometer ..., 2008; Kalmus, Keller, & Kiisel, 2009). To compare the relative importance of democratic attitudes and personal values in predicting the type of political engagement, we ran a regression analysis on the young and adult duty and engaged citizens (Table 2).



**Figure 4:** The evaluation of what was considered important by the respondents among young and older age groups 2012. Answer to the question: *Now I will briefly describe some people. Please listen to each description and tell me how much each person is or is not like you (1—not like me at all, 6—very much like me)*

Source: authors' illustration based on ESS 2012 data

The analysis showed that the link between the evaluations of democracy and either type of citizenship was strong: those who rated the need to follow democratic principles by political institutions more highly and those who rated the actual functioning of those principles more highly were more likely to be politically involved. People who considered democratic principles to be very relevant were three times more likely to be duty and engaged citizens than were those who considered these not important at all or weakly important. Similarly, people who evaluated the performance of democratic principles most highly were twice as likely to be duty citizens than those who evaluated the performance of democracy at the medium level (the ability of the performance of the democracy index to predict engaged citizenship was a bit lower). It is noteworthy that the rather abstract question about the importance of the democratic functioning of political institutions had a higher likelihood of predicting belonging to the politically active groups than more contextualised questions about how they actually performed. At the same time, there was no differentiation between the two participation types. Among both adults and youngsters, people who scored higher on the importance of democracy index were more likely to be politically active, either as duty or engaged citizens. People with stronger opinions about democratic performance (who scored high or low on the index) were more likely to be engaged and duty citizens, compared to those in between (with average index values). This raises the question of whether the differences in political action were actually tied to acknowledged dissatisfaction with politics. However, those who rated the performance of democracy most critically were 50% more likely to be both duty and engaged citizens than those with medium ratings. Therefore, political action was defined by both strong criticism and strong trust.

**Table 2:** Political participation and democratic attitudes and values in different age groups in 2012, (logistic regression analysis for the indices 'high')

	Age 15-24		Age 25+	
	Duty citizen	Engaged citizen	Duty citizen	Engaged citizen
Importance of democracy low* (ref: high)	0.31***	0.32***	0.28***	0.37***
Importance of democracy average (ref. high)	0.67***	0.66***	0.55***	0.56***
Performance of democracy low (ref. high)	0.68***	0.91	0.62***	0.84***
Performance of democracy average (ref. high)	0.39***	0.68***	0.40***	0.63***
Important to make own decisions: low (ref. high)	0.69	0.90	0.79***	0.79***
Important to make own decisions: average (ref. high)	0.86	0.67***	0.74***	0.77***
Important to think of new ideas: low (ref. high)	0.92	0.50***	0.62***	0.28***
Important to think of new ideas: average (ref. high)	0.81**	0.70***	0.83***	0.57***
Important to live in safe surroundings: low (ref. high)	1.80***	1.64***	2.25***	3.04
Important to live in safe surroundings: average (ref. high)	1.59***	1.51***	1.50***	1.76***
Important to be successful: low (ref. high)	0.55***	0.85	1.07	1.61***
Important to be successful: average (ref. high)	0.91	1.06	1.12***	1.21***
Important to follow rules: low (ref. high)	1.14	1.75***	0.98	1.67***
Important to follow rules: average (ref. high)	0.95	1.16	0.84***	1.12***
-2LL	2524.59	2524.56	8047.81	7522.97

\* p < 0.10; \*\* p < 0.05; \*\*\* p < 0.01

\* Respondents were divided into three groups according to the scores on the 'importance of democracy' and 'performance of democracy': high (8-10), average (4-7) and low (0-3)

Source: authors' compilation based on ESS 2012 data

As the perceived dissatisfaction with the performance of democracy ('disillusionment') didn't explain why the young were politically less active, we looked for explanations at a more individual level. To estimate the likelihood of the characteristics of personal values predicting an individual's political orientation, we asked questions about what kind of person the respondent thought he resembled.

Among the estimations of what kind of people they were, the best predictor of being politically active was the rating of personal safety: politically active people were less concerned with safety and more risk-prone, especially in the case of engaged citizens and older age groups. Those people who did not like to follow rules were at least twice more likely to be engaged citizens; there was not much difference between duty citizens and age groups in terms of the evaluation of rule following.

Considering making one's own decisions important somewhat differentiated political activists from their less active counterparts, but there was not much difference between age groups or citizen types. The engaged groups were much more differentiated by 'thinking of new ideas and being creative' than the duty groups were, whereas in both citizen types the differentiation was higher in older age groups (those who valued creativity were more likely to be politically active). Those young people who rated success highly were twice as likely to be duty citizens as those who did not rate it highly, whereas older people who rated success highly were 40% less likely to be engaged citizens than those who did not. Adherence to duty citizenship could be predicted by the need to become successful among young people, by less emphasis on safe surroundings (especially among the older age group), by high ratings of creativity (among the older age groups) and by strong negative evaluations of the functioning of political institutions. Adherence to engaged citizenship could be predicted by lower evaluations of rule following, success (among the older age group) and safe surroundings (especially among the older

group) and higher evaluations of creativity and new ideas (especially among the older age group). It can be assumed that young people who perceived themselves as successful had other routes and ways of realising success than worrying about collective issues. They probably used more individual strategies and were more self-centred than an average youth. Engaged citizens (especially the young) tended to be less respectful of rules. However, it is not clear how much they defied rules in real life (in both age groups). In general, the likelihood of a young person being either a duty or engaged citizen was less predicted by personal values than was the likelihood of the older age group (except in the valuing of success by duty citizens and slightly lower valuing of rules by engaged citizens).

## Discussion and conclusion

The study set out to pursue two aims: to empirically trace the shift from duty citizens to engaged citizens in Europe and to characterise the different types of political engagement. In addition, we attempted to determine to what extent these tendencies are related to the critical perception of democratic performance. The depth of the analysis was limited by the availability of relevant data, but the analysis allows us to conclude that while youngsters differ from adults in their political activity, this is not due to an increase in engaged citizens (Dalton's finding) but rather to a lower level of traditional political activism. Although in the total sample traditional political participation indeed slightly decreased and civic activism slightly increased, these changes were not age-group-specific and did not vary among different countries.

Within Europe, there is a clear difference in the strength of activism between old and new member states, with 'old Europeans' (the Nordic countries, the Benelux countries and Germany) scoring higher on both duty and engaged citizenship scales. Young people in 'old' Europe evaluated the performance of democracy in their countries more highly than did their peers in Eastern or Southern Europe. Between 2006 and 2012, the changes in political participation among the young people in Eastern Europe were more similar than in the older EU countries. In Eastern Europe, there was a moderate increase in engaged citizenship and a decrease in duty citizenship. In Western and Southern Europe, the changes were much more variable and had higher amplitudes. Similarly to Gallego's results, our data showed that the impact of education and social status (as well as gender and ethnic group) play a smaller role in the new type of political participation than in the traditional type. This casts doubt on the hypothesis of Dalton et al. (2004) that the new type of political activism has increased inequality in participation. On the contrary, it may actually have had a democratising effect.

In looking at the evaluations characterising the young and adult age groups and their political participation, we concluded that among the young the differences between engaged and duty citizens were less marked than among the adult population. While among the adult population engaged citizens were more critical of democratic performance than were duty citizens, among the young, who were in general more critical of the performance of democracy, it was a less reliable predictor of the type of political engagement. Especially in Eastern Europe, young engaged citizens tended to have more positive attitudes towards the performance of democracy in their own countries. Our data supported Dalton's claim that duty citizens are more rule-abiding, while there was no difference between the activism types in other traits he linked with engaged citizenship: solidarity with and caring for others, and independent-mindedness. Both of these traits seem to characterise politically and socially active people more generally. In terms of values, engaged citizens were characterised more by self-expressive values, such as creativity and the search for excitement, while duty-citizens scored higher on the need for success and recognition.

Although young engaged citizens were more critical of the democratic performance of their countries, disillusionment with politics did not necessarily lead to a rise in political participation. Political participation is related to both strong optimism and strong criticism, and this tendency was

a bit less differentiating among the young than among the adult group. The changes within countries were variable and critical evaluations of the performance of democracy do not explain these shifts in one direction or another.

The period of six years may not be enough to capture significant change, and the validity of the inquiry would be strengthened by looking at a longer time period or focussing on a less varied sample. To understand social change, questions need to focus more on activities and less on what respondents say. Our article focused on the two types of political participation; however, we did not focus much on the largest group: those who scored 'absent' on both scales. These people may have other practices that can be considered political, but are so far undefined in mainstream research in terms of political participation.

Based on this analysis, we suggest changing the questions in the European Social Survey in order to bring out respondents' agency (social activism, social relations, consumer conduct, experiences in decision-making, participation in continuing education, etc.) and thus capture the 'capitals' respondents possess to invest in political participation. The lower participation of young people in political action may be explained by the organically lower density of social relations that support active agency and a higher need to focus on personal success (plurality of choices, social expectations, and building up individual identity).

Disappointment in politics has various faces, and these need to be defined as well. For example, someone may appear to be a youngster from a minority group, whose ability to participate in politics is lower, but the likelihood of that person experiencing injustice is usually higher than of a person from a majority group. This may also be a civic activist, whose ability to notice injustice or unsolved social problems is sharpened by networking and social interaction.

In conclusion, the effects of these changes on political participation can be significant. It is possible that the new type of engagement may gradually overtake the meaning of 'political', although these new practices are not recognised as political by politicians. This raises the need for political parties to reposition their sources of legitimation, as well as their channels for information and dialogue. The findings show that there is also a need for researchers to take a fresh look at the 'political' in peoples' lives if they wish to include the practices of young people that are actually meaningful to them.

## References

- Bang, H. P. (2004). Culture governance: Governing self-reflexive modernity. *Public Administration*, 82(1), 157-190.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London, UK: Sage.
- Bennett, W. L., Wells, C., & Rank, A. (2009). Young citizens and civic learning: two paradigms of citizenship in the digital age. *Citizenship Studies*, 13(2), 105-120.
- Bennett, W. L., Wells, C., & Freelon, D. (2011). Communicating civic engagement: Contrasting models of citizenship in the youth web sphere. *Journal of Communication*, 61, 835-856.
- Bode, L. (2012). Facebooking it to the polls: A study in online social networking and political behavior. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*, 9(4), 352-369.
- Bruter, M., & Harrison, S. (2009). *The Future of our Democracies. Young Party Members in Europe*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.
- 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, 645-664.

- Conroy, M., Feezell, J. T., & Guerrero, M. (2012). Facebook and political engagement: A study of online political group membership and offline political engagement, *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28, 1535-546.
- Choudry, A., & Shragge, E. (2011). Disciplining dissent: NGOs and community organizations, *Globalizations*, 8, 503-517.
- Cumming, G. (2008). French NGOs in the global era: Professionalization 'without borders'? *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 19, 372-394.
- Dalton, R., Scarrow, S., & Cain, B. (2004). Advanced Democracies and the New Politics. *Journal of Democracy*, 15, 124-138.
- Dalton, R. (2008). Citizenship Norms and the Expansion of Political Participation, *Political Studies*, 56, 76-98.
- Dalton, R. (2009). *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Eurobarometer: Attitudes of European citizens towards environment (2008). European Commission. Retrieved December 2014 from [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_295\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_295_en)
- European Social Survey Round 3 Data (2006). Data file edition 3.5. Norwegian Social Science Data services, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data.
- European Social Survey Round 6 Data (2012). Data file edition 2.1. Norwegian Social Science Data services, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data.
- Gaiser, W., & de Rijke, J. (2010). Trends in political participation of young people. Results for Germany and European member states. *Today's Children are Tomorrow's Parents*, 26, 35-48.
- Gallego, A. (2008). Unequal Political Participation in Europe. *International Journal of Sociology*, 37(4), 10-25.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-identity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 17, 319-336.
- Henn, M., Weinstein, M., & Forrest, S. (2005). Uninterested Youth? Young People's Attitudes towards Party Politics in Britain. *Political Studies*, 53, 556-578.
- Hooghe, M., & Quintelier, E. (2013). Political participation in European countries: The effect of authoritarian rule, corruption, lack of good governance and economic downturn. *Comparative European Politics*, 12, 209-232.
- Inglehart, R. (1990). *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Juris, J. S., & Pleyers, G. H. (2009). Alter-activism: emerging cultures of participation among young global justice activists. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 12(1), 57-75.
- Kalmus, V., Keller, M., & Kiisel, M. (2009). Emerging consumer types in a transition culture: consumption patterns of generational and ethnic groups in Estonia. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 40(1), 53-74.
- Kohler-Koch, B., & Quittkat, C. (2013). *De-mystification of participatory democracy: EU-governance and civil society*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Marien, S., & Christensen, H. S. (2013). Trust and openness: Prerequisites for democratic engagement? In K. N. Demetriou (Ed). *Democracy in Transition* (pp 109-134). Heidelberg: Springer.
- Martin, A. (2012). Political participation among the young in Australia: Testing Dalton's Good Citizen thesis. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 47, 211-226.
- McCaffrie, B., & Marsh, D. (2013). Beyond mainstream approaches to political participation: A response to Aaron Martin. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 48, 112-117.
- Niemi, R. G., & Klingler, J. D. (2012). The Development of Political Attitudes and Behavior Among Young Adults. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 47(1), 31-54.
- Norris, P. (1999) Introduction: the growth of critical citizens? In Norris, P (Ed). *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government* (pp. 1-27). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Norris, P. (2002). *Democratic phoenix: Reinventing political activism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ó Beacháin, D., & Poleseb, A. (2010). 'Rocking the vote': new forms of youth organisations in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13, 615-630.
- Pattie, C., Seyd, P., & Whiteley, P. (2004). *Citizenship in Britain*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Quintelier, E. (2007). Differences in political participation between young and old people. *Contemporary Politics*, 13(2), 165-180.
- Rainie, L., & Wellman, B. (2012). *Networked: The New Social Operating System*. Cambridge, MA MIT Press.
- Rossi, F. (2009). Youth political participation: Is this the end of generational cleavage? *International Sociology*, 24, 467-497.
- Sandovici, M. E., & Listhaug, L. (2010). Ethnic and linguistic minorities and political participation in Europe. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 51(1-2), 111-36.
- Sloam, J. (2013). 'Voice and Equality': Young People's Politics in the European Union. *West European Politics*, 36, 836-858.
- Torcal, M., & Montero, J. R. (2006). *Political Disaffection in Contemporary Democracies: Social Capital, Institutions and Politics*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Verba, S. (2004). Would the dream of political equality turn out to be a nightmare? *Perspectives on Politics*, 1, 663-679.
- Wicks, R., LeBlanc, J., Wicks, S., Maxwell, A., & Schulte, S. (2014). Correlates of political and civic engagement among youth during the 2012 presidential campaign. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58, 622-644.

**Maie Kiisel** (PhD) Maie Kiisel is a researcher of social communication at the Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia. Her research areas are environmental and risk communication, participation in decision-making, social movements and civic organisations, and the design of social change.

**Marianne Leppik** (MA) is a PhD student of media and communication at the Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia. Her research is focused on new wave immigrants in Estonia and she is investigating their media use, identity and adaptation to society.

**Külliki Seppel** (MA) is a lecturer of media studies at the Institute of Social Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia, with a focus on communication and social theory. She has published in the fields of nation-building, inter-ethnic relations and democracy, and social aspects of genetic research.

### Acknowledgements

The writing of the article has been funded by research grant ETF9017 from the Estonian Research Agency and by institutional research funding IUT (20-38) of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. We wish to thank Triin Vihalemm and Kristina Reinsalu for help at the early stages of the research and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on the previous versions of the article.