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# *An Introduction into the Civic Dimension of Social Exclusion: The Case of Romanian Youth*

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## *Abstract*

A considerable part of the Romanian society does not have the necessary means to support a decent living standard that would allow people to be socially integrated. Among the multiple facets of integration, youth is particularly affected by the civic dimension of social exclusion. The paper tries to find out the possible explanations for the occurrence of this phenomenon. We first present the way in which a poor material situation can impact negatively upon a young person's chances to be included in society. Then we underline the importance of education, the macro economic factors and also the values of youth. In the study we have performed quantitative analyses, on available youth databases. The results show that the material and social resources may encourage civic participation when the situation is better, and when it is worse, will increase the potential for civic protest. Also, the education and the view on important issues, such as fight against corruption, are important factors that increase civic participation. However, youth have a low level of political socialization that is a possible explanation of their low level of civic involvement.

*Keywords:* social exclusion, civic participation, youth participation, factors of social exclusion, empirical analysis

## *Introduction*

Social exclusion is an important problem as it affects a significant part of the society, many social groups being more vulnerable in certain times and in specific domains (United Nations, 2016). Young people are more exposed at the risk of social exclusion (Eurostat, 2016) for example. Social exclusion is a complex phenomenon, having several dimensions (Apăteanu, 2016). One of these is civic participation, which could empower individuals to fulfil their aspirations. People have several ways to express their voice, such as voting in elections, protesting, joining a group or by taking part in voluntary activities (Levitas, 20006). Voting in national or local elections is considered a measure of the degree in which citizens take part, broadly speaking, in the decision-making processes in a society (Burchardt, LeGrand and Piachaud, 2002). Young people tend to have a lower civic participation, hence they are less able to communicate their needs (Eurostat, 2016). Consequently, it is relevant to find out the obstacles that prevent youth to have a higher participation in society.

## *Social exclusion*

Some of the possible definitions of the social exclusion are the inability to participate effectively in the economic, social, political and cultural life, as well as some degree of alienation and distance from the mainstream society (Duffy, 1995). Other authors point out the continuous and gradual exclusion from full participation in the social life (Steinert & Pilgram, 2003) or highlight that social exclusion is multidimensional, including social, political

and material dimensions, it is dynamic, including future options and opportunities, and it is relational, as it is influenced by a specific context (Millar, 2007).

A more detailed conception, belonging to Levitas et al. (2006) pinpoints the civic dimension of social exclusion, and develops several indicators of it such as electoral turnout, participation in voluntary activity, group membership, citizenship status and enfranchisement, civic efficacy. Voting in national or local elections is considered a measure of the degree to which citizens take part, broadly speaking, in the decision-making processes in a society (Burchardt, LeGrand and Piachaud, 2002), so in order to have an unbiased representation of interests it is important to have high electoral turnout and widespread and equal political participation more generally (Iătar, 2015). A recent UN report (2016) presents disparities in political participation on the basis of electoral turnout, several indicators of political activism, as well as membership in voluntary associations and levels of generalized trust as measures of participation in civic and cultural life. It also highlights issues of access to justice and rule of law, measured by confidence in police and courts. Political participation, through its various forms, might be conceived as a way to achieve social justice, where people can sanction those that did not fulfil their expectations and reward those who did. Next, we will analyse the barriers to achieving a high level of participation.

#### *Factors of exclusion from the civic dimension of social exclusion*

Levitas (2005) presents three types of discourses - RED (redistribution), MUD (moral underclass) and SID (social integration) that offers different standpoints on the causes of social exclusion – is it an consequence of lack of money, morals or work? The RED discourse points toward the poverty as the main source of social exclusion, MUD - has at its core moral and cultural values - similar with the “dangerous class” concept of Murray (1990), and SID – paid work is the most important way to integrate people in society. In *The Emerging British Underclass*, the author states his dilemma: how can the society take care of the deserving without encouraging people to become undeserving? How can it do good, but without encouraging vice? For example, how can fight unemployment without encouraging it?

Social exclusion is likely to be correlated with political disengagement, as people disadvantaged economically and socially are more likely to be excluded politically. For example they are less likely to vote or participate in non-electoral ways (IPPR, 2004). This is underlined also by Levitas (2006), who points toward the material/economic and social resources, education skills and health. However, some variables do not appear as risk variables: social class, religious affiliation, critical life events, such as death, marriage and divorce. Lack of access to material resources, including income, employment, land and housing, or to services, such as education and health care, are factors found also in an UN report (2016). People cannot make their voice heard or interact with each other, when their rights and dignity do not receive equal treatment; but also, a purely meritocratic society with equality of opportunity may trade off objectives such as social cohesion and solidarity. Social inclusion, that purports to combat exclusion, is defined as the process of improving the participation in society of people who are disadvantaged on basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

The importance of social conditions for young people and consequently of allocating the proper resources, in order that not to widen the gap between children of different social conditions is shown by the fact that their educational attainment at secondary school is largely determined by the child earlier development (IPPR, 2004). Schools with a more deprived intake of pupils have made less progress than schools with a less deprived intake. However, not only income and class is important, but also other factors such as ethnicity, as children from ethnic minorities perform less well than those from the majoritarian ethnic population, especially at the completion of school (Bhattacharyya et al 2003). The high percentage of exclusion of the ethnic minorities are caused by the fact they have multiple disadvantages (Backwith, 2015).

Opportunities for youth civic engagement develop within settings in which children and youth participate and are not evenly distributed by social class or race and ethnicity (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Cross-generational accounts show that the socialist practices of supported engagement have not been transferred to the capitalist state, which had a strong impact for youth civic engagement. The generation from the transition period and the post socialist one, depicted this change by using words as “no activities” and “nothing to do”. They have considered that the barriers to participation, such as lack of transportation and a limited choice of activities in their local neighbourhoods provided by schools or communities, as being the most important in influencing youth civic participation. The type of neighbourhood can influence an individual, as some people are more prone to develop an antisocial behaviour if during childhood are exposed to deprivation or to a violent environment (Caspi, 2002). So the implication for policy, is that we are able to detect these environments and improve the services offered, in order to prevent the raise of antisocial behaviour.

Individual engagement became a recognized type of engagement among post-socialist generation; personal development and individual decisions became the main characteristics of youth civic engagement. While primary

schools have remained the most important promoters of children and youth participation, secondary schools were seen as not important in this regard. In the transition period, the intervention of state was replaced with the free choice and the market economy. Participation became strongly dependent on the family resources of the children (Dolan and Frost, 2017), so that the material condition influenced the chances of an individual to learn more, for example an additional foreign language or to improve required disciplines at school.

Education has a profound impact on intergenerational social mobility, higher levels of income, improved labour performance. Social mobility is the extent to which people move between social groups during their lifetime (IPPR, 2004). For example, in UK, after 1990, there has been a high increase in the number of people entering higher education, but most of them come from privileged social groups (IPPR, 2004). The 16-18 year olds, from higher social classes, were more likely to be in higher education and less likely to be in either full or part-time employment. Those from lower professional categories were more likely not to be in employment, employment or training. In Romania, the situation of the education shows a decline, as there is a decrease in performance in education compared to 2012, in pupils aged 15-16, according to the results of the PISA test in 2015 (OECD, 2016) and the degree of enrolment in education of the 15-18-year-olds has fallen steadily over the last 5 years, from 86.2% in 2010 to 78.2% in 2015 (INS, Tempo Online).

However, not all theories converge toward the importance of the education. Goldthorpe (2003) argues that education plays a lower role in determining social mobility compared to softer skills, such as ability to communicate effectively, or physical and psychological characteristics. This happens because employers find less use in formal education as an effective tool of selecting employees, and look for other proxies, such as motivation, perseverance or ability to learn quickly. The explanation is twofold, first on the demand-side, as employers create new types of jobs, especially in the service sector, where they do not need higher educated people, and the second one, on the supply-side, is that the higher education sector produces too many graduates in specialties that are not needed by the economic sector. Also, children of working-class origins are more "risk-averse" than children of more advantaged origins, as they prefer to start working sooner, not invest in education - and this might be rational, given reasons of financial security and prospects of income.

The links between educational achievement and parental income/social class have strengthened. A person's actual ability has become a poorer predictor of whether s/he would get a degree than was previously. The success or failure of individuals on the labour market became more closely connected to their parents' income, indicating a drop in intergenerational mobility over time (Machin and Vignoles, 2004).

Other explanations for social exclusion, beside material conditions and education, are the *macro-drivers*, such as homelessness, major trends in climate change, demographic change and globalization, people that live in rural areas or urban slums, technological change and ITC, residentially mobile population, institutionalized people, such as children in local authority care, disabled, hospitalized, in prison; ethnic minority groups, truancy, teenage pregnancy, poor housing, high crime environment, family breakdown, especially if these factors are combined (Levitas, 2006), problematic Internet use (Moreno, 2013), drug dependence (Malenka, 2009), youth emigration (Bleahu, 2004), increased mobility (Bădescu & Radu, 2010), ethnicity - Roma people, that have a legacy of slavery, as it has been legal until middle of 19th century in Moldova and Țara Românească (Legiurea, 1856), political bribery (Pande, 2011). An alternative way to study this population, that may be hard to reach in surveys, is using qualitative methods, such as individual interviews, case studies or administrative data. Social exclusion is caused by multiple factors when people are marginalized, and this can be a cumulative process, as it can worsen in time. The deprivation can occur in small areas having "neighbourhood effects" - affecting people that live in these areas (Backwith, 2015).

Lack of participation in political or civic processes implies limited voice in influencing the decisions that shape society. Bevelander and Pendakur (2011) argue that this can be mitigated by the impact of citizenship acquisition and having a citizen spouse, as these factors have a large effect on the probability of voting. The importance of participation in the political processes is underlined by Lenger and Schumacher (2015) as they argue that the inequality comes not mainly from foreign trade, financial organization, technological or educational changes, but from rent-seeking politics and the lobby of people with accumulated capital that are influencing political processes. In a similar vein, Pande (2011) argues that the relationship between education and electoral behaviour is less evident in developing countries because of institutional constraints such as bribing electors, violence, intimidation, limited information on electoral process. Still, new information about the electoral process is influential on the electoral score of candidates, hence the worse performing ones are being penalized. Overall the frequency of political discussion predicts political participation, however this is true for "safe discussions" – those with like-minded individuals, as "diverse discussions" – with an equal share of like-minded and people with opposed ideas, lead to a decreased participation (Eveland & Hively, 2009).

We can also take into consideration the causes in the youth values, where for example vote is considered a civic duty to a lower extent (Comșa, 2006), or lower political socialization of youth (Hatos, 2010), or the fact that

young people might have different priorities, such as continuing studies, establishing a family or finding a job, or they might have higher mobility, so they are less integrated in community and because they have a political socialization of non-participation (Tătar, 2012). Next, we will provide the modes of possible explanations for social exclusion.

#### *The study methodology and data analysis*

The independent variables are:

- material resources, by the prospective economic situation, as young people only began to work after they finish education and they did not have time to accumulate important resources – so it is more important to evaluate the future situation; parents' economic situation - as many young people depend on their parents' economic help even after they got a job, at least in the first years;

- social resources – relations with parents, friends

- the educational level

- political discussions

- problems in Romanian society: ex. corruption

The dependent variable, civic dimension is operationalized mainly through vote and civic protest.

#### *Univariate analysis*

We have analysed the database from the *Romanian youth* research (Sandu, Stoica & Umbreş, 2014), that studied people aged 15 – 29 years old. The research contained the following themes: religion, family and friends, concerns and aspirations, school and profession, democracy, governance and development. We start with the description of some sociodemographic variables, as the others, such as ethnicity or religion, are common with the general population. The highest educational level is: general education (maximum 10 years) – 28%, vocational school – 6%, high school – 41%, university – 12%, post-university – 4%. The current employment situation is full-time for 31%, part-time 3%, casual or seasonal 6%, no employment - 56%. Most frequent occupations are: professional/employee with a university degree – 23%, service worker – 22%, skilled worker in industry/constructions – 18%, unskilled worker – 12%.

Most of the young people believe that the economic situation of their parents remained the same, as compared to 5 years ago (36%) and 5 years from now (46%). However, there is a larger number (31%) who believe these prospects will improve, compared with those that think it will be worse (13%). Also, regarding their own economic situation, 56% consider that it will be better than now. Also as a comparison with parents' situation, youth said that 49% of their parents belong to the middle class and 33% to working class, while 59% of them belong to middle class 59% and 23% to the working class, so we can conclude youth perceive themselves in a higher social class position.

Regarding their friends, most of the young people - 75% - belong to a circle of friends or acquaintances in which everyone knows everyone and with whom they go out but 25% do not. 53% get along very well with their parents and 38% get along, although sometimes they have differences. When young people have been asked how often they discuss politics with people close to them (family, friends, colleagues), 9,9% said they discussed very often or often, 13,6% sometimes and 74,5% rarely or very rarely – so it seems that youth lack political socialization in a high degree.

In order to mobilise their support, it is useful to know what are the themes that they care the most; if they were asked to protest against or in favour, they would care about unemployment 29,4%, economic issues (wages, poverty) 25,2%, the situation of healthcare system 12,1%, corruption issues 9,8%. The most alarming problems in Romanian society, according to young people are: inefficient fight against corruption (65%), increase in poverty (63%), job insecurity (61%), unemployment (58%), the situation of state healthcare system (51%). It is evident from here that the interest of young people has a clear economic trait.

Many young people express their desire to leave Romania: very much 17%, much 23%, some 21% and 37% said they do not want to leave. As the destination countries, they prefer England 18%, Germany 17%, USA 11%, Spain 11% and Italy 10%. The main reason to move out of Romania was to improve their standard of living.

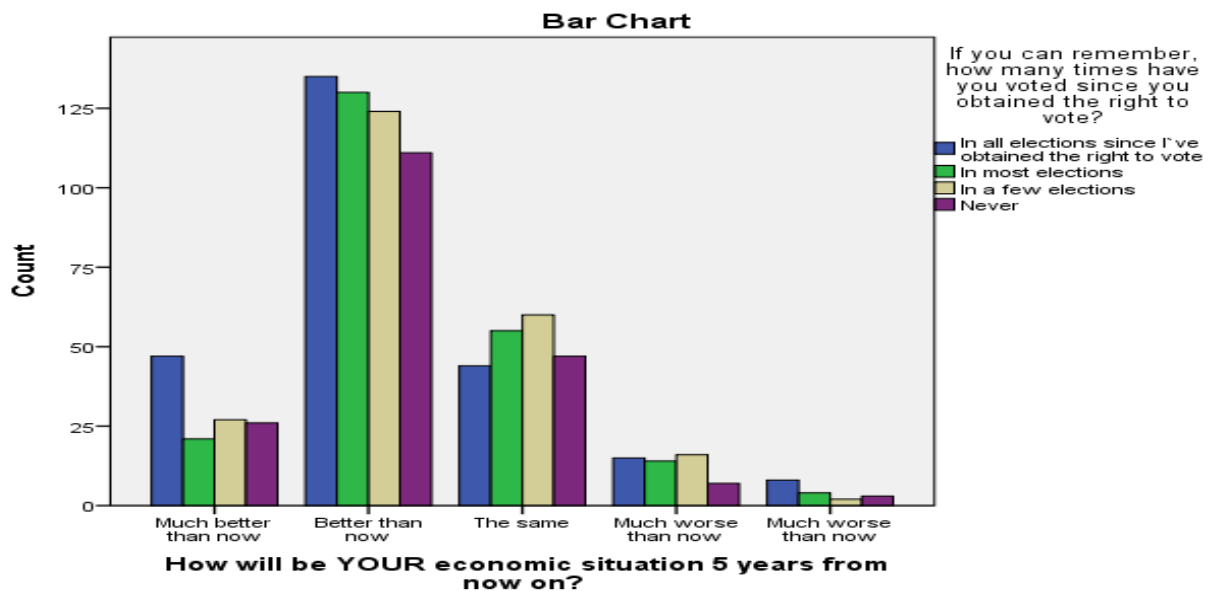
When young people were asked how often they have voted, we see that the electoral turnout of young people is quite low, as expected, as only 28,3% voted in all elections since they have obtained the right to vote, 24,5% in most elections, 24,8% in a few elections and 22,4% have never voted. It seems that youth protest participation has similar levels, because if within the next 12 months, protests would be held in favour of the issue they care the most about, 22,8% said they will participate for sure, 33,4% will likely take part, 18,2% probably will not and 25,6% will surely not participate - even if is an issue for which they care a lot. This tendency continues with voluntary activity, as 22,6% took part in it and 77,4% did not. Regarding the civic efficacy, when young people said how influent is their vote on national political institutions, only a few believe they can exert considerable influence: 8,9% a lot, 18,9% some, 39,5% a little, 32,8% none – situation very similar at the local level.

Hence, about a third of young people regularly vote and two in ten would take part surely in a civic protest or in a voluntary activity; however, these percentages could have been considerably higher if they would feel their opinion counts more, as only about a quarter believe their voice has a significant influence and also a quarter have regularly political discussions.

*Bivariate analysis*

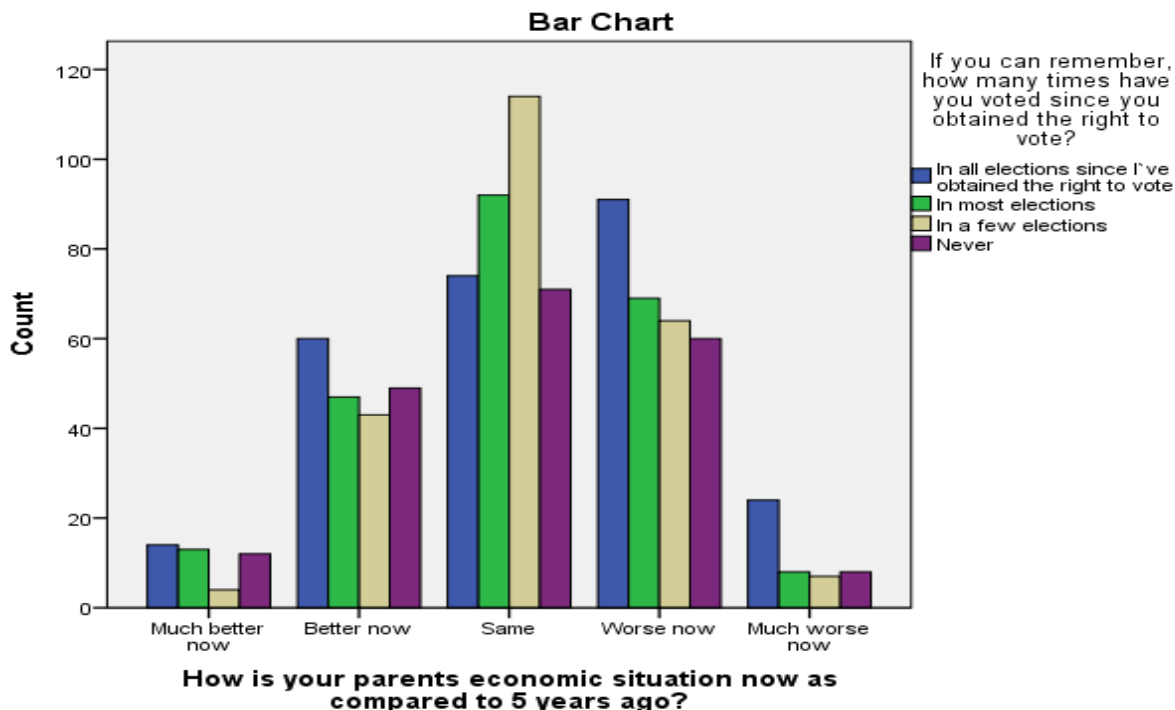
Next, we have performed a cross tabulation of the independent variables with the dependent one. It appears that the highly improved economic prospects of the youth themselves (Fig. no. 1) motivates them to vote, but not if there is only an improvement or if it is the same; this last category is the only one which is possibly statistically significant, as the others contains very few young people who voted. The Pearson chi square is statistically significant. Hence, it appears we can infer that there is a slight correlation between these variables. When we take into consideration the economic situation of their parents (Fig. no. 2), the fact that the economic situation is the same, is mostly correlated with an infrequent vote; this means that there is a possible dissatisfaction feeling, that explains why youth rarely vote. When their parents economic situation is worse, this mobilizes a part of the voters to "sanction" at the voting booth the ruling party.

Fig. no. 1 Cross tabulation of vote participation and personal economic situation



Source: authors own calculation based on *Romanian youth* data. Pearson chi square = 19,539; p = 0,07

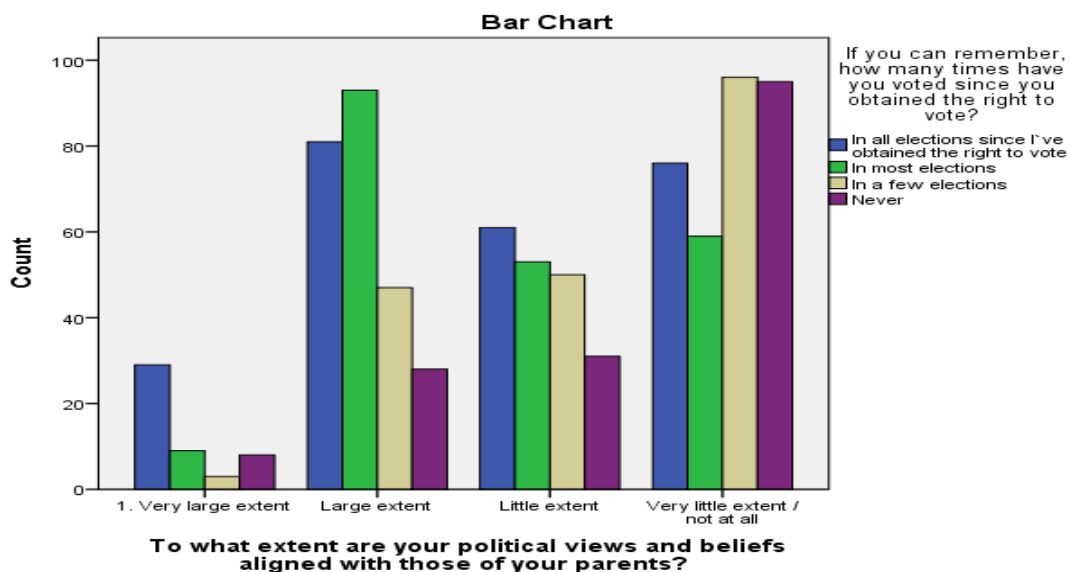
Fig. no. 2 Cross tabulation of vote participation and parents' economic situation



Source: authors own calculation based on *Romanian youth* data. Pearson chi square = 36,930; p = 0,000

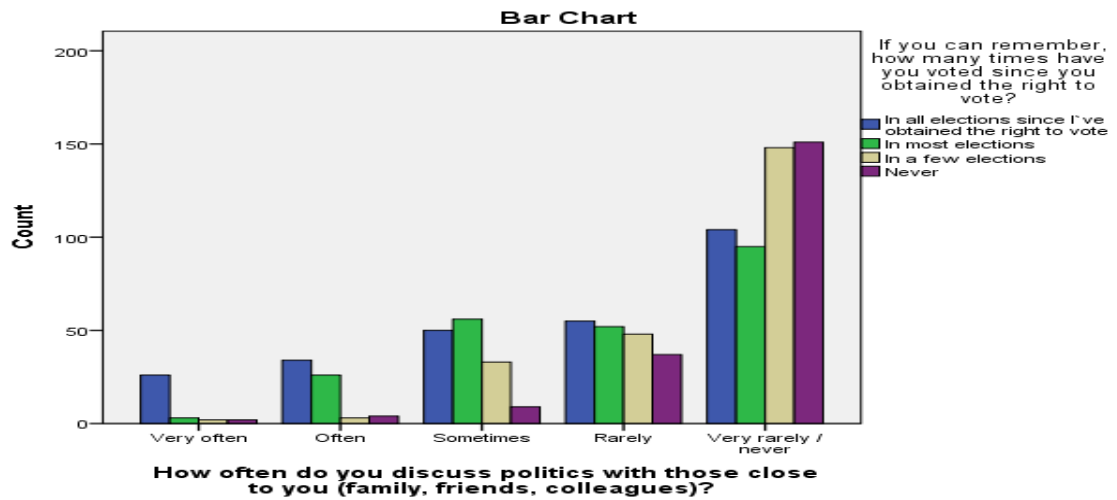
Beside the youth material resources, we should tap into their social resources. Where the political beliefs of a young people are similar to a large extent with his parents (Fig. no. 3), we can see that this is increasing the probability of voting, and when they are dissimilar, this leads correspondingly to a higher possibility of not voting. However, there is a serious lack of political socialization, as young people very rarely or never discuss politics with people close to them, family or friends, and this probably leads to voting only in a few elections or never having voted (Fig. no. 4).

Fig. no. 3 Cross tabulation of vote participation and parents political views



Source: authors own calculation based on *Romanian youth* data. Pearson chi square = 79,487; p 0,000

Fig. no. 4 Cross tabulation of vote participation and political discussions with close people



Source: authors own calculation based on *Romanian youth* data. Pearson chi square = 144,577; p=0,000

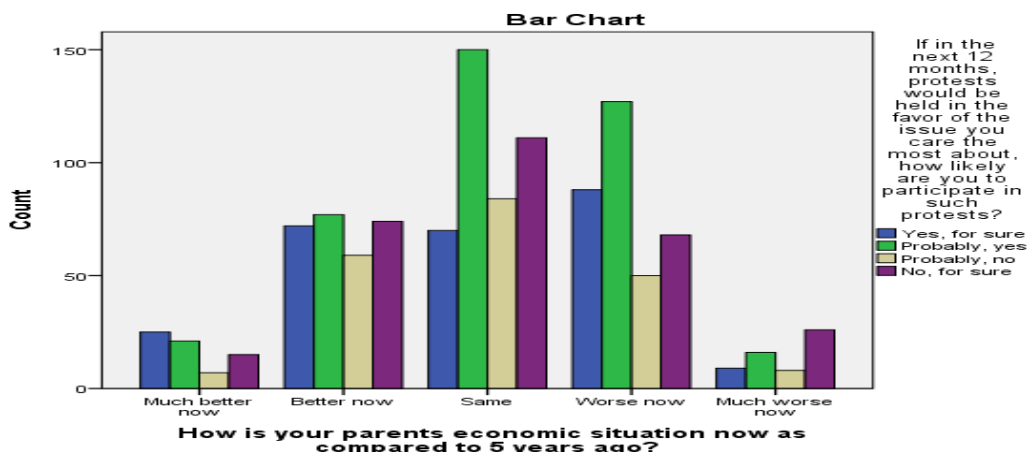
The education has the potential to raise the civic implication of young people, and we noticed that the educational level is correlated with the electoral turnout, with the Pearson chi square being statistically significant at a p value less than 0,005. When we compare young people who voted in all elections, we see the levels are similar for different educational levels: general education (maximum 10 years) – 25,2%, high school – 28,7%, university – 26,3%; however, when we compare voting in most elections, we do see the increase in educational level correlated with a higher probability of vote: general education - 10,7%, high school – 23,6% and university – 36,9% and for who never voted, we find there are 43,5% among those with general education, 24,2% with high school and 6,3% with university.

The fight against corruption seems to be one of the issues that is important for youth. Among those that voted in all elections, 31,4% consider this problem very alarming, 23,7% to be alarming, 20,0% slightly alarming and 13,3% not alarming at all; there is a reversed trend for those who never voted, where 19,3% evaluated it as very alarming, 26,5% moderately alarming and 46,7% as not alarming at all.

Next to the vote, which is the most common way of political participation, we will also analyse the civic protest. When young people have been asked whether they would take part in a protest to favour an issue that they care most about, it does seem that a bad or same economic condition of their parents (Fig. no. 5) stimulate them to take part and express their discontent. However, a *better* personal economic situation correlates with civic protest (Fig. no. 6). It is possible that young people do not consider as enough only a moderate improvement, as they expect it to be a (very) large one, as we have already seen previously.

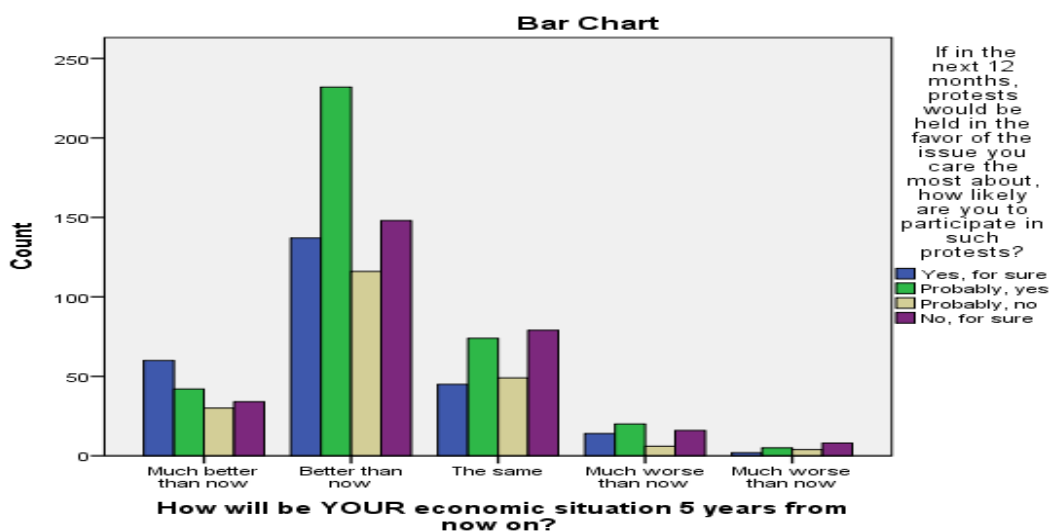


Fig. no. 5 Cross tabulation of civic protest and parents' economic situation



Source: authors own calculation based on *Romanian youth* data. Pearson chi square = 42,583 ; p = 0,000

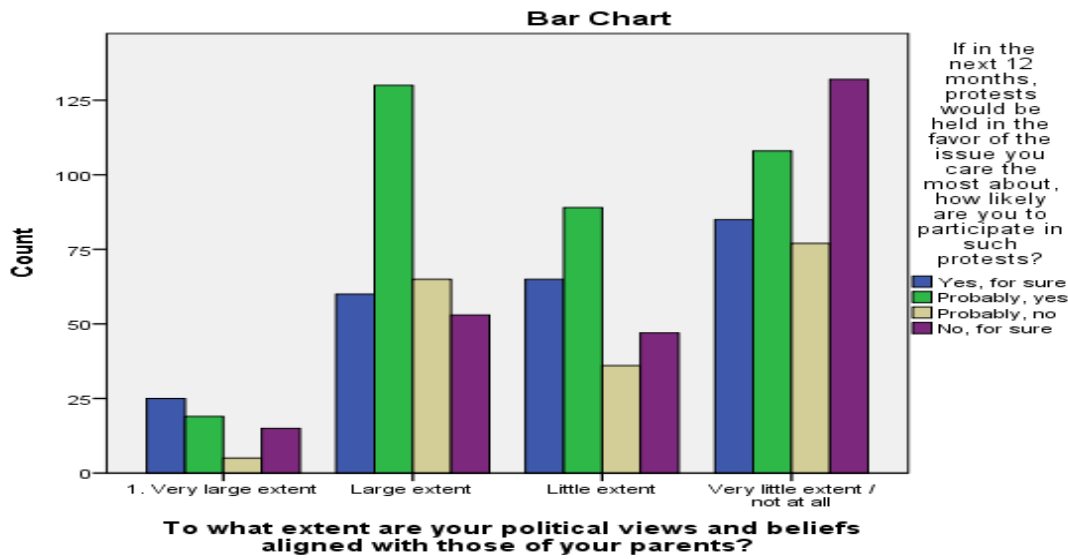
Fig. no. 6 Cross tabulation of civic protest and personal economic situation



Source: authors own calculation based on *Romanian youth* data. Pearson chi square = 34,614 ; p = 0,001

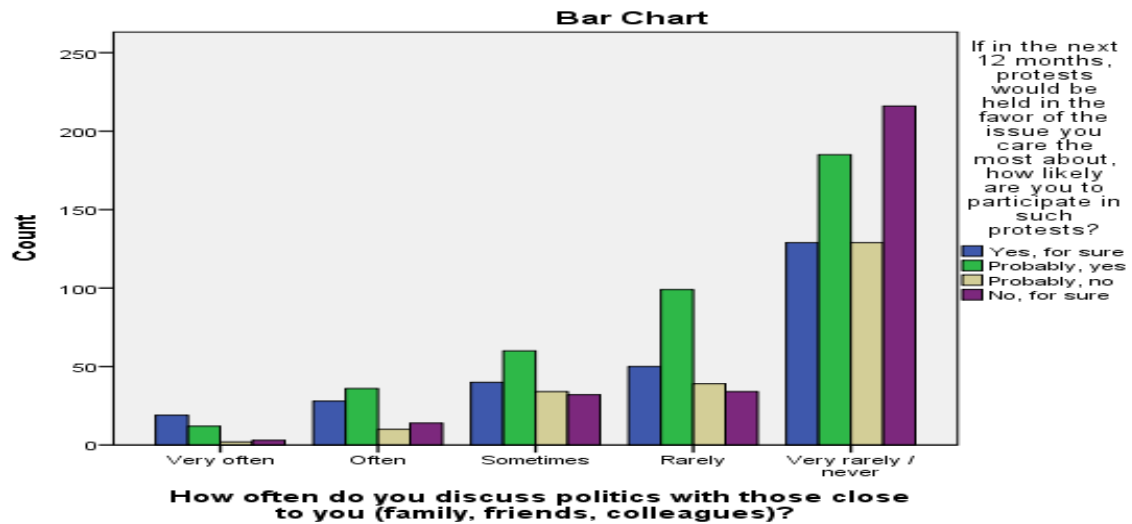
Also, we see that when youth political views are aligned with those of his parents (Fig. no. 7), it is more likely they will take part in a protest – so we can say family support / influence is important not only in case of electoral turnout, but also in protest participation. Participation to civic protest is influenced by the political discussions level (Fig. no. 8), as the less a person is involved in political talks, the less likely he will participate in an activity that shows his support for a civic cause, which shows again, as in the case of voting, a considerable lack of political socialization.

Fig no. 7 Cross tabulation of civic protest and parents political view influence



Source: authors own calculation based on *Romanian youth* data. Pearson chi square = 51,47 ; p = 0,000

Fig. no. 8 Cross tabulation of civic protest and political discussions



Source: authors own calculation based on *Romanian youth* data. Pearson chi square = 75,41 ; p = 0,000

The educational level is correlated with the civic protest, as among young people who intend to support their cause, the level raises along with the educational level: 31,3% have general education (maximum 10 years), 35,1% high school and 36,5% university studies – however, it is true that it is rather a small increase. It is possible that this can be explained as we can consider there is already an increased feeling of discontent among youth, as it is influenced by the political situation from 2014, when the ruling coalition has been terminated, as PNL exited from USL, and asked the resignation of Victor Ponta government. Against this backdrop, we see how young people view the fight against corruption as relevant; among those who considered the corruption issue as very alarming, 33,7%

said they would probably take part in a protest, and only 19,6% said they would not participate; these proportions are similar for categories moderately alarming and slightly alarming.

### *Conclusions*

We propose the concept *high expectations*: young people do not just expect an economic improvement, but a high one, so that they feel motivated to have a regular civic participation. The study shows that a much better economic situation will stimulate young people to have a higher electoral turnout, as vote may be seen an appreciation for the political activity of the candidates. In the same time, their better economic condition leads also to a higher civic protest, as probably this is a way to express their discontent towards the insufficient realization of their economic expectations. Another reason for the concept, is that many express the desire to leave the country, where they can fulfil their aspirations for their expected living standard.

Not only material resources are important, but also social ones. There is an influence from the parents' political view, as similar beliefs will lead to an increased participation. However, the level of this influence is reduced, by the fact that young people discuss rarely politics, with the people that are close to them, such as parents or friends, and this influence negatively their presence to vote or their involvement in actions that support a cause they believe in.

Another factor that increase the civic participation is the level of education, as we believe that better educated people understand the importance of actively involving in the community affairs. In the case when there is a political context that young people consider they should take attitude, and also when they take into consideration relevant issues for them, such as fight against the corruption, then it will be more probable that they will have a higher civic participation.

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