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Broadening political participation: The impact of socialising practices on young people's action repertoires

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Abstract

This study builds on the well-known civic voluntarism model of political participation. By doing this, we contribute to a political sociology of participation by refining the role of socialisation in political engagement. We suggest that the action repertoires of young people engaging in politics can be narrower or broader owing to their previous embeddedness in certain social settings, which act as spheres of socialising practices. We focus more specifically on three socialising spheres: educational (schools), recreational (social clubs), and civic (community organizations). Our analysis, covering nine European countries, largely confirms our expectations. We find that active engagement in these spheres of socialising practices leads to a broader range of political activities in young people's action repertoires. This holds in particular for the civic sphere. The findings provide a fresh look at the role played by socialising spheres, shifting the focus from the dichotomy between participation versus non-participation to an analysis of the breadth of participation.

Keywords

European countries, political participation, socialising practices, youth, civic voluntarism model

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Introduction

About a quarter of a century ago, the civic voluntarism model stressed the role of civic skills as favouring political participation (Brady et al., 1995; Verba et al., 1995). In this model, communication and organizational skills were seen as a crucial type of resource, facilitating effective political engagement (Brady et al., 1995: 271). Such skills are acquired in a variety of non-political institutional settings, such as the workplace, organizations of various sorts, and churches. Although research has focused on the impact of organizations in political participation (Brady et al., 1995; Miller, 1982; Putnam, 2000),

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limited attention has been paid to assessing the impact and the importance of each of these settings.

In this article, we follow the path traced by Brady, Schlozman, and Verba, who have highlighted the role of the civic skills learned outside the political institutional setting, but following a different approach. First, instead of looking at citizens' participation in general, we focus on a specific population, namely, young adults. Scholars have paid increasing attention to young people's political engagement in recent years (Garcia Albacete, 2014; Grasso, 2016; Pickard, 2019; Pickard and Bessant, 2017), perhaps also spurred in part by the prevailing discourse about the supposed political apathy of the youngest sectors of the population. Yet, we still know little about the impact of non-political institutional settings on the political activities of this specific group of citizens. Young people come across a variety of social settings, which serve as 'schools of democracy', and where they are socialised to political life (Putnam, 2000). The democratic experiences made by younger people in various social spheres are considered as an important predictor of future political engagement (Maurissen, 2018). Young people who participate more actively in various socialising spheres learn how democracy works and understand how and by which means they can be heard. As the literature on civic culture shows, citizens who engage politically create ties between each other as well as with the political institutions, and build civic values and feelings of efficacy about their political engagement (Almond and Verba, 1963; Putnam, 1993, 2000). Moreover, the more time someone spends on political engagement, the more he or she feels entitled to actively take part in the construction of a democratic society (Putnam, 1993, 2000). However, since younger citizens are politically less experienced and suffer from a deficit of legitimacy to speak up and to be listened to, they are often excluded from the political arenas, as compared with older generations.

Second, in our study, we examine three social settings that we expect to have an impact on youth participation: schools, social clubs, and community organizations. These three social settings translate the expected role of three socialising spheres and related practices: the educational, the recreational, and the civic spheres. To be sure, there are many other activities and places where socialisation to participation can take place and have an impact on political engagement. As we said earlier, Brady et al. (1995) stress in particular the workplace, voluntary organizations, and churches. In this article, we do not look at the impact of the workplace or religious associations. We take for granted that they are source of civic engagement. However, we believe that the declining participation in religious associations has made them less important, while non-religious ones have become more relevant as a source of political participation (Vermeer et al., 2016). Moreover, we consider a place of worship as a proxy for community engagement. Finally, as we are studying young people, there are higher chances that they are still in school and not in workplaces.

Third, we start from the assumption that not all young people participate equally. While this is quite an obvious assumption, which also points to the existence of political inequality, scholarship on political participation has often ignored it. Young adults' paths to political participation are different as they experience specific challenges and obstacles they need to overcome depending on gender (Albanesi et al., 2012; Cicognani et al., 2012; Gordon, 2008; Norris et al., 2004), migration background (Just, 2017; Pachi and Barrett, 2014; Seif, 2010), and socio-economic status (Gaby, 2017; Quintelier and Hooghe, 2013). As a result, some young adults participate occasionally while others are more strongly committed, displaying a broader range of political

activities. We explore the ways in which the three social spheres mentioned earlier lead young people to participate, and the extent of such participation. To do so, we disentangle the social and political contexts in which youth were socialised. Previous research has mostly focused on the impact of socialisation on participation as opposed to non-participation. Here, we aim to make a step further by examining how different socialising spheres affect the breadth of political practices carried out by young people. We maintain that the experiences made by young people in a variety of socialising spheres can be a powerful transformation effect by changing young people's political consciousness and enhancing their political knowledge and skills. This can lead young people to opt for a broader range of political activities. Thus, our research question is the following: to what extent do the variety and range of political activities of young people depend on their previous embeddedness and, above all, active engagement in different socialising spheres?

Our analysis is based on survey data covering nine European countries: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Such a broad coverage of different national realities ensures stronger external validity of our results. We should stress that we are analysing nine democratic countries in Europe, each with their specificities concerning the social settings in which young people are socialised, which vary in their structures, operating norms, and relationship to people's everyday experiences in different countries (Sapiro, 2004). We are not interested in understanding what young people have learned in these socialising spheres, but rather at the impact of such socialising settings and practices on their action repertoires. As such, we provide a fresh look at the role of socialising practices in non-political institutional settings for youth political participation.

Theory

Scholarship about youth political participation maintains that young people do participate, but often in a different way than older generations (Garcia Albacete, 2014; Mirra and Garcia, 2017; Pontes et al., 2019). Youth participation in non-institutional practices could be seen as a transition to adulthood, where they experiment and try to comprehend the 'right way' to participate (Garcia Albacete, 2014). In the specific, Verba and Nie (1972: 139) have argued that those individuals who have not yet achieved the age of maturity – that is, who have not yet a stable job, a home and perhaps children – still have to figure out their role in political life and therefore are more inclined to participate in politics passively or not participate at all. However, as Pickard (2019) points out, this supposes a threshold of maturity, beyond which lies "stability" and "adulthood". This life course is mostly applied to older generations and does not need to be true for younger people. Moreover, when talking about 'young people', she maintains, we should not consider 'youth' as a monolithic category with similar tastes and political practices that could fall into either institutional or non-institutional activities. In her view, young people can move away from 'immediate materialist priorities' and combine them with post-materialistic values engaging in what she calls DIO (Do-It-Ourselves) political participation. Young people's forms of identification and belonging are becoming less fixed than for other cohorts, as youth is more prone to experience precariousness and to move more frequently from one context to another. Therefore, their personal experience and life course may become more fragmented, which can lead to transient and variable participatory practices (Harris, 2010; Maurissen, 2018).

The literature on social capital research has traditionally focused on the role of voluntary associations for political participation (Stolle, 2007; van der Meer and van Ingen, 2009). However, there are diverse socialising settings that may have such a socialising effect. A socialising sphere is rich and characterized by resources and civic skills, where younger people can experience and learn different strategies to express themselves in the public sphere (Brady et al., 1995). Therefore, we refer to socialising spheres in a broader meaning, namely, both as physical places and non-material ones, as what matters are the experiences that youth come across (Schmid, 2008). As mentioned earlier, young people come across a variety of spheres throughout their lives. Each has its particularity: some, such as schools, are institutionalized, while others, such as the civic and recreational spheres, have a more horizontal structure encouraging civic and cooperation virtues (Putnam, 1993; Selle and Strømsnes, 2001). Here, we focus on three key social settings where young people can develop different kinds of civic skills: schools, social clubs, and community organizations. We argue that these social settings act as socialising spheres, particularly through the practices young people may experience and make therein. Such practices, in turn, influence young people's action repertoires.

Schools are a first kind of social setting that act as socialising spheres through the practices carried out in such a context. They represent the educational sphere. Although some maintain that membership in non-political school organizations has only a modest, positive effect on future political participation (Langton and Jennings, 1968), participating in student councils and voting for class representatives are considered to have a strong effect on adult participation, as these are probably the first real experiences students have with democratic governance and representative democracy (McFarland and Starmanns, 2009; Verba et al., 1995). In schools, pupils can be introduced to democratic values and society. In this vein, for some scholars, schools play a key role in strengthening and maintaining a democratic system, as they function as playgrounds for democracy, by giving students the opportunities to practice what it means to become a citizen (Claes, 2010; Dewey, 1916; Maurissen, 2018; Pickard, 2019). They make young people feel that they have a role in society and in their community, as in school classrooms students can learn about civic duties and civil rights (Pickard, 2019). For example, in schools where civic education is taught, students can experiment, build arguments, and listen to others' point of view (Gibson and Levine, 2003; Saavedra and Opfer, 2012). However, the literature is hardly consensual in this respect. On the one hand, a number of works show that classroom discussion increases civic knowledge (Campbell, 2008; Niemi and Junn, 1998; Persson, 2015) and democratic attitudes such as interest, tolerance, trust, and self-efficacy (Claes et al., 2012; Dassonneville et al., 2012; Martens and Gainous, 2013; Hahn, 1999; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Moreover, experience in higher education is likely to lead to exposure to forms of political socialisation not available to other young people (Henn and Foard, 2014). On the other hand, others argue that debating in school has little effect on civic knowledge and political trust (Finkel and Ernst, 2005) as well as on political interest and efficacy (Dassonneville et al., 2012). Moreover, the civic education learned in schools may make them believe that the only legitimate way to express themselves is through institutional channels (Dupuis-Déri, 2006). Similarly, school can teach the theoretical side of the importance for younger citizens to vote (Pickard, 2019). In this article, we consider schools as a social setting where students have been engaged in school activities such as being a member of a student council, having acted as a speaker for the class, attending a student meeting, or taking an active role in school. Even if the mere fact of attending school has an impact on future

political participation, here we stress their active role during the schooling years. Thus, we hypothesise that the socialising practices experienced in school lead young people to participate in a broader repertoire of political activities relative to young people who did not engage actively in this socialising sphere:

H1: Young people who have experienced socialising practices in the educational sphere are more likely to engage in a broader range of political activities.

Social clubs constitute a second important kind of social setting for the political socialisation of young people, representing the recreational sphere. A number of young people engage in social activities, namely within scout, sports, or other associations. The activities carried out in these associations also have a socialising effect, in addition to the education of young people, which can lead them to develop attitudes about their potentially positive role in society. These are the kind of organizations and activities that civic voluntarism (Brady et al., 1995; Verba et al., 1995) and social capital theorists (Putnam, 1993, 2000; Stolle, 2007) had in mind when stressing the role of voluntary associations for political engagement. Some scholars are more sceptical, maintaining that involvement with the community can also be minimal (Lenzi et al., 2012) and that activities that have a non-political goal have only a modest effect on future political participation (McFarland and Thomas, 2006). However, research has shown that young people who have participated in sport activities are indeed more engaged in civic activities than their peers who have not (Gould and Carson, 2008; Lopez and Moore, 2006). Furthermore, such activities can have a direct impact on the community, for example, through the organization of local public events. What distinguishes this socialising sphere from the educational sphere is that it is more bottom-up and allows young people to participate in different ways. Thus, we hypothesize that the socialising practices made in social clubs lead young people to display a broader action repertoire relative to young people who did not engage in such activities:

H2: Young people who have experienced socialising practices in the recreational sphere are more likely to engage in a broader range of political activities.

Community organizations form a third socialising sphere, one in which shared values and relations are built among members of a community. They represent the civic sphere. Involvement in community life may promote psychological and intellectual growth (Fredricks and Eccles, 2006; Johnson et al., 1998), leading young people to question their place in society (Erikson, 1968). Community-based and networked forms of engagement are also important for young people as they learn to express their interests and opinions, but also to face and solve practical problems. All these aspects imply knowledge and skills (Gould et al., 2013; Zukin et al. 2006), including the civil skills stressed by the civic voluntarism model (Brady et al., 1995; Verba et al., 1995). In addition, individuals who are building ties in their communities have stronger feelings of attachment and belonging towards their community, which lead to a higher level of institutional and social trust (Putnam, 2000). Research has shown that the perception of living in a neighbourhood where strong social ties are present and where young adults have the chance to take part and get involved in a variety of community activities is a strong predictor of civic and political engagement (Brown et al., 2003; Da Silva et al., 2004; Lenzi et al., 2012).

Moreover, young people are more willing to get involved and collaborate with each other, working to create a better place for their community as people tend to be more motivated to protect and fight for places that are meaningful to them (Albanesi et al., 2007; Flanagan et al., 2007; Lenzi et al., 2012).

However, there is a lack of consensus in the literature as to whether there is a positive effect of community organization. Youth today are increasingly mobile and often experience precariousness. Research shows that younger people are creating a 'new biography of citizenship' whereby identities are more dynamic and mobile (Garcia Albacete, 2014; Tate, 2012). Therefore, other types of community engagement can be conceptualized which go beyond the neighbourhood or the town and which rest on a variety of non-traditional channels such as online practices (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bennett, 2003; Harris, 2010; Tate, 2012). Questioning and remodelling what a citizen is and what rights and duties mean may reconfigure political practices, which turn into more personalized forms of engagement (Bang, 2005; Dalton, 2008). For this reason, it is important to test whether this third socialising sphere can still build strong ties and relationships between and among young people and whether it has an impact on their political participation, or whether the fragmented way to experience being part of a community negatively impacts youth political participation. Thus, we hypothesise that the socialising practices experienced in community organizations lead young people to participate through broader repertoires relative to young people who did not engage in such activities:

> *H3: Young people who have experienced socialising practices in the civic sphere are more likely to engage in a broader range of political activities.*

Finally, while we hypothesize that there is a positive effect of the three spheres on young people's political repertoires, leading them to participate in a broader range of political activities, when they do participate at all, we also expect the strength of this relationship to vary according to the type of sphere. Based on the literature, we maintain that each kind of social setting gives rise to a different level of civic engagement: lower when young people take part in social clubs such as sport or cultural associations, higher when they volunteer or participate in political activities in their community, and somewhere in-between when they participate in such practices in school. Depending on that, we expect their action repertoires to be broader or narrower.

Data and methods

The data used in the analyses consist in original survey data collected in 2018 in the context of the European Union (EU)-funded Horizon 2020 project, 'Reinventing Democracy in Europe: Youth Doing Politics in Times of Increasing Inequalities' (EURYKA) covering nine European countries: Germany, Greece, France, Italy, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The survey design consisted of nationally representative samples of the general population of each country in the consortium. Each country sample was designed to account for the country's regional distribution. The data set consists of a randomised sample covering a total population sample size of 27,446 individuals. In addition, the survey includes oversamples of young people aged 18–24 and 25–34 years old, using quotas for age, gender, region, and education.

Each country's age-group oversample consists of at least 1000 individuals. The full sample size in each country ranges between 3018 and 3080 individuals. Nevertheless, the present analysis is based on a subset of the full sample, namely, young people aged 18–34 years. The final sample used in the analyses consists of at least 2200 respondents in each country and a total pooled data set of 20,616 cases.

With respect to the data collection strategy, the survey was carried out by a subcontracted and specialised EU-polling institute during the first trimester of 2018. The survey was conducted in each country using the computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) method with online questionnaires. Weights for country and age groups were applied for all the analyses.

To test our hypotheses, we include the independent variables and controls in stepwise models, so to assess and examine underlying effects of the covariates. We run multilevel models to account for the nested structure of our nine-country data set. In addition, we fit multilevel linear regression models with restricted maximum likelihood (REML) to reduce the estimators' bias. The robust test with the REML sets linear contrasts that do not depend on the fixed effects of the beta coefficients but on the variance–covariance components estimated. Accurate multilevel estimation is possible even with small number of clusters size. Furthermore, Elff et al. (2020) demonstrated that REML estimation, combined with a t-distribution, resolves the main inferential deficiencies of the low clustering upper-level number. REML estimation approach corrects for the variance parameter estimator (Elff et al., 2020).

We operationalised the dependent variable (political participation) by combining a series of questions on various forms of political participation in which individuals declared to have engaged in the past 12 months. The variable is a 0–10 additive scale with a very high reliability between the components (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$). The scale includes the following political activities: attended demonstration, march, or rally; signed a petition, public letter, or campaign appeal (online or offline); boycotted certain products for political, ethical, or environment reasons (online or offline); deliberately bought product for political, ethical, or environment reasons (online or offline); attended a meeting of a political organization, party, or action group; contacted or visited a politician or government or local government official (online or offline); donated money to a political organization, party, or action group (online or offline); displayed or worn a political or campaign logo, badge, or sticker (online or offline); joined a strike; and joined an occupation, sit-in, or blockade. With respect to the dependent variable, we decided not to include voting into our analysis due to the national differences concerning this kind of political participation. First, we focused on individuals' political participation during the 12 months preceding the survey, which means that for various countries elections did not take place within that period of time. Second, because of their young age, some of the respondents could not participate in their country's most recent elections. Third, our country samples share important differences with respect to the administrative procedures concerning voting registration. Fourth, young people are often characterised by an important degree of international mobility when studying or working abroad, which adds an external source of complexity to engagement in their country of origin's elections (Theocharis and van Deth, 2018).

As key independent variables, we included measures of our three socialising spheres (educational, recreational, and civic). For each of these socialising spheres, we created a proxy that translates the engagement and participation in the three kinds of social setting (schools, social clubs, and community organizations) as socialising practices across our three spheres. Involvement in the educational sphere is captured by a dichotomous

variable that combines the following four forms of engagement in school activities. The Cronbach's $\alpha = .61$ suggests a good reliability in the school activities proxy. The components of school activities measure include the following: been a member of a student council (0 = no, 1 = yes), had a function as a speaker for the class (0 = no, 1 = yes), attended a student meeting (0 = no, 1 = yes), and taken an active role in such a school meeting (0 = no, 1 = yes). The dischotomoisation into a dummy variable translates into the following categories: none of the above = 0, at least engaged in one of the named activities = 1.

The recreational sphere is captured by a dichotomous variable that includes participation in social, sport, and cultural organizational activities, independently of the form engagement (e.g. volunteering, participation in activities and events, organizational membership, and/or donating money). The dummy variable translates into the following categories: no engagement in recreational activities = 0, at least engaged in one of the named recreational activities = 1.

Involvement in the civic sphere is captured by a dichotomous variable that combines three forms of engagement in community activities (Cronbach's $\alpha = .61$) suggesting a fairly good reliability for in the community activities proxy. The respondents have stated they engaged in the past 12 months: raised money for a charitable cause (0 = no, 1 = yes), participated in a community service or volunteer activity (0 = no, 1 = yes), and/or worked or cooperated with others to try to solve a problem affecting you or your city or community (0 = no, 1 = yes). The dischotomoisation into a dummy variable translates into the following categories: none of the above = 0, at least engaged in one of the named activities = 1.

In addition, the models include a number of controls: four categorical sociodemographic covariates (age, gender, migrant background, and social class), a proxy for social capital (frequency of social contacts with friends), three scale measures capturing political attitudes (political interest, internal political efficacy, and external political efficacy), and a value ideological orientation covariate (left-right). The ideological value orientation was measured as an additive index of positions linked to a unique factor's component ranging from 0 to 10, where 0 corresponds to the far-left and 10 to the far-right. All these variables have been shown to have an effect on political participation in previous research (Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Theocharis and van Deth, 2018). Tables A.1 and A.2. in the Online Appendix show, respectively, the coding and descriptive statistics of all the variables used in the analyses.

Findings

Our analysis illustrates interesting findings on the effect of three socialising spheres on young citizen's political repertoires across nine European countries. Table 1 gives an overview of the respondents' action repertoires and how they vary across countries. It shows the percentages of youth who have engaged between none and 10 activities. In addition, it illustrates these distributions separately for the full sample and by age group (18–24 and 25–34 years).

Half of all respondents – or nearly so – do not participate in any political activity, a much lower but still sizable amount have carried out a small number of activities, and only a modest share has done more than three or four different sorts of activities. More than half of the young people interviewed declared that they have been involved in political activity during the 12 months prior to the survey, 19% have done one activity, and a bit more than 12% have declared to do more than two activities. This kind of distribution

Table 1. Range of political activities by age group (percentages).

	Full sample	18–24	25–34
0 activity	49.29	46.72	51.71
1 activity	19.68	20.43	18.97
2 activities	12.80	13.28	12.35
3 activities	8.20	8.68	7.74
4 activities	4.34	4.53	4.15
5 activities	2.49	2.75	2.24
6 activities	1.35	1.55	1.16
7 activities	0.81	0.90	0.72
8 activities	0.53	0.65	0.42
9 activities	0.21	0.23	0.19
10 activities	0.32	0.28	0.35
N	20,616	10,013	10,603

does not change fundamentally across the two age groups, although the youngest (18–24) seem somewhat less often involved in politics than the less young (25–34). In brief, regardless of their age, only a small share of youth has a wide action repertoire of political participation. Most either do not do anything or are at best engaged in one or two kinds of activities.

Table 2 shows the results of a series of regression models aimed to test our hypotheses concerning the impact of socialising practices on youth action repertoires. Our approach progressively includes the three key variables of interest in subsequent models. The first three models test for the effect of the three socialising spheres independently from other variables: Model 1 only includes the effect of engagement in the civic sphere; Model 2 adds engagement in the recreational sphere; and Model 3 also adds engagement in the educational sphere. Models 4 to 8 add the control variables: Model 4 includes the sociodemographic controls and meeting with friends; Model 5 adds political interest; Model 6 adds left-right values but drops political interest to test for the effect of the former variable; Model 7 adds political trust but drops both political interest and left-right values to test for the effect of the former variable; and Model 8 adds both internal and external political efficacy but drops political interest, left-right values, and political trust to test for the effect of the former variables. Finally, Model 9 is the full model including all the variables. This approach allows us, first, to ascertain the presence of a differential effect and, second, to investigate the mechanisms explaining such an effect. The first aspect can be seen by analysing the coefficients of the three socialising spheres under consideration, while the second can be gauged by looking at subsequent models following a nested-models approach. At this stage, we can observe that from Model 4 to Model 9, age has not a stable effect through our models and it seems to be moderated by the social and political controls.

While research about the range of political activities – as opposed to a dichotomous distinction between participating and non-participating – is still sparse, it is worth referring to the existing literature when looking at the effect of the control variables on the range of political activities. To do so, we can focus on the full model in Table 2. All the coefficients for the control variables are statistically significant. These results support previous research that has focused on participation versus non-participation in the general population as well

Table 2. Effects of the three socialising spheres on political participation (multilevel linear regression models with REML estimation).

Socialising practices	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8		Model 9	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Community activities	1.137***	0.03	1.048***	0.03	0.993***	0.03	0.950***	0.03	0.898***	0.03	0.936***	0.03	0.954***	0.03	0.895***	0.03	0.870***	0.02
Social club activities			0.396***	0.03	0.314***	0.03	0.295***	0.03	0.229***	0.03	0.313***	0.03	0.322***	0.03	0.242***	0.03	0.267***	0.03
School activities					0.351***	0.02	0.313***	0.02	0.221***	0.02	0.308***	0.02	0.324***	0.02	0.235***	0.02	0.208***	0.02
Sociodemographic controls																		
Age group (ref.: 18–24)																		
Age group (25–34)							–0.026	0.02	–0.0828***	0.02	–0.0046	0.02	–0.0342	0.02	–0.0744***	0.02	–0.0860***	0.02
Sex (ref. woman)							–0.162***	0.02	–0.262***	0.02	–0.102***	0.02	–0.157***	0.02	–0.265***	0.02	–0.233***	0.02
Migration background							–0.129***	0.03	–0.0981***	0.03	–0.101***	0.03	–0.130***	0.03	–0.103***	0.03	–0.0667*	0.03
Class (ref.: upper)																		
Class (middle/working)							–0.207***	0.03	–0.146***	0.03	–0.220***	0.03	–0.219***	0.03	–0.151***	0.03	–0.155***	0.03
Class (lower/working)							–0.214***	0.03	–0.135***	0.03	–0.229***	0.03	–0.231***	0.03	–0.132***	0.03	–0.142***	0.03
Social and political controls																		
Met with friends							0.329***	0.04	0.257***	0.04	0.372***	0.04	0.341***	0.04	0.267***	0.04	0.294***	0.04
Political interest									1.244***	0.04							0.864***	0.05
Left-right values											–1.577***	0.06					–1.485***	0.06
Political trust													–0.564***	0.08			–0.773***	0.08
Internal political efficacy															1.264***	0.05	0.816***	0.05
External political efficacy															0.185***	0.05	0.165**	0.05
Constant	0.893***	0.09	0.806***	0.09	0.655***	0.09	0.767***	0.10	0.185	0.10	1.563***	0.09	0.954***	0.11	0.152	0.11	0.953***	0.10
lns1_1_1																		
_cons	–1.321***	0.25	–1.307***	0.25	–1.298***	0.25	–1.264***	0.25	–1.302***	0.25	–1.473***	0.26	–1.209***	0.25	–1.267***	0.25	–1.414***	0.26
lnsig_e																		
_cons	0.486***	0.00	0.480***	0.00	0.474***	0.00	0.469***	0.00	0.447***	0.00	0.455***	0.00	0.468***	0.00	0.451***	0.00	0.426***	0.00
N	20,616		20,616		20,616		20,616		20,616		20,616		20,616		20,616		20,616	
Log restricted-likelihood	–39,284.2		–39,168		–39,061		–38,966		–38,513		–38,673		–38,941		–38,600		–38,081.93	

REML: restricted maximum likelihood; likelihood ratio test vs linear model: chibar2(01) = 391.46; Prob ⩾ chibar2 = 0.0000.
*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

as more recent scholarship that has looked at the determinants of the commitment to participate in politics (Da Silva et al., 2004; Garcia Albacete, 2014; Grasso, 2016) and more specifically in street demonstrations (Giugni and Grasso, 2019). As such, the explanation of the fact of participating – as opposed to non-participating – is not that much different from those pertaining to the range of political activities in which young people are engaged.

Concerning the individual characteristics of young citizens, we confirm previous research, showing that not all young people participate equally and that the sociodemographic characteristics are a key explanatory factor of political engagement. We find that young women and young adults from lower social strata have a more limited action repertoire than young men from upper social strata (Albanesi et al., 2012; Gaby, 2017; Gordon, 2008; Norris et al., 2004; Quintelier and Hooghe, 2013). Moreover, migration background plays a negative role on the range of political activities (Just, 2017; Pachi and Barrett, 2014; Seif, 2010). Finally, findings seem to illustrate that the youngest (18–24) are less active than their older peers (25–34), however, as mentioned above, the age covariate does not have a stable effect in all models.

Young people who meet more frequently with friends also engage in a wider range of political activities. This confirms results about the positive effect of social embeddedness in political engagement. In addition, we observe a number of effects of the political variables: young adults who are more interested in politics, with a leftist value orientation, with lower political trust, and stronger feeling of political efficacy – both internal and external – tend to have a wider action repertoire.

Moving on to our key focus, does the engagement in one or more spheres of socialising practices have an impact on young people's political participation and, more precisely, on the range of political activities they engage in? The findings provide a resolutely positive answer to this question. The coefficients for all three variables are statistically significant across all models. Thus, young people who have been involved in community activities in the past have a wider action repertoire than those who have not. Similarly, youth who are involved in social, sport, or cultural organizational activities have a wider repertoire than those who are not. Finally, young adults who have been engaged in school activities as-being a member of a student council, having acted as a speaker for the class, attending a student meeting, or taking an active role in a school meeting-have wider repertoires than those who have not done so.

Our argument, however, is not only that engagement in such social settings that act as socialising spheres lead to a wider repertoire of political activities, but also that some of these social settings have a more powerful effect on the latter. The results of our regression analysis show that the three socialising spheres have a positive and significant impact on youth action repertoires. All variables keep their statistical significance when assessed jointly in the same model. Specifically, the civic sphere has by far the strongest effect when comparing young individuals who have engaged in these forms of socialising practices with those who have not engaged in civic practices. This can also be observed by comparing the variable regression coefficients, both across the first three models and in subsequent models, including the full model. In contrast, differences between young people who have engaged in the recreational and educational spheres and those who have not done so are smaller in comparison with the one observed for the civic sphere.

To visualize the effects of the three socialising spheres on young people's action repertoires, we show graphically adjusted predictions with 95% confidence intervals. Figure 1 shows, respectively, the effects of the civic, recreational, and educational spheres. As we can see, the civic sphere has a very strong effect, as the linear prediction for those who

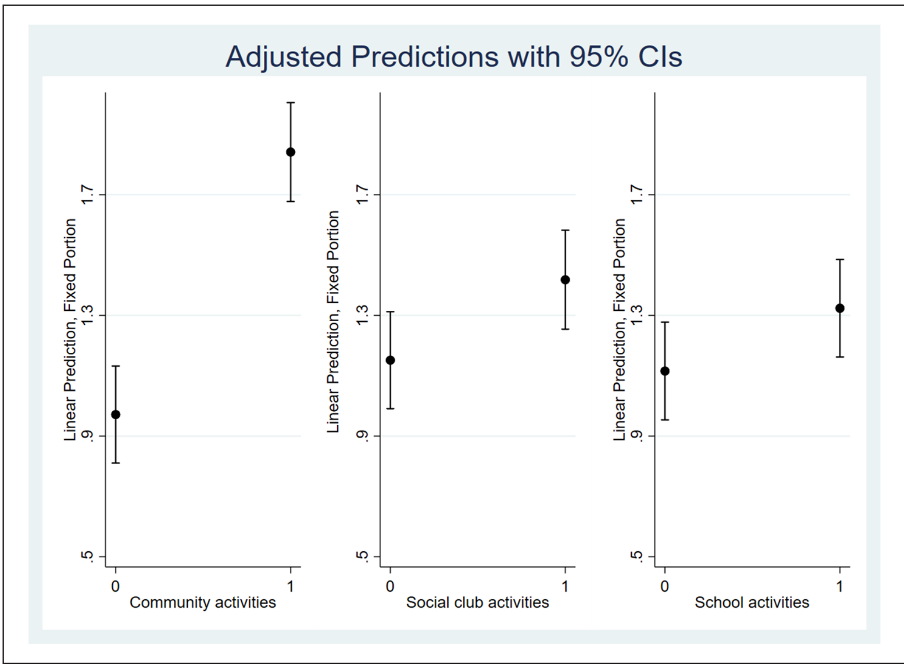

Figure 1. Effect of the three socialising spheres on political participation (adjusted predictions from Model 9 in Table 2).
CIs: confidence intervals.

have engaged in community activities is much higher than that of those who have not done so. Moreover, the confidence intervals of the two point estimates do not overlap. Effects are also clear-cut when it comes to the recreational and education spheres, although in this case the confidence intervals overlap to some extent. Yet, young people who are involved in social club activities have a wider repertoire of action than those who are not involved, just as those who did the activities mentioned earlier at school as compared with those who did not do so.

We now dig deeper into the mechanisms explaining the association between the three socialising spheres and the range of political activities. To do so, we can exploit our stepwise approach models and follow the effects of the three socialising spheres across the nine models. To start with the civic sphere, we can see that its effect is somewhat reduced once we include the other two social settings (Models 2 and 3, as compared with Model 1). This indicates that the three socialising spheres are to some extent related to each other and, more specifically, that involvement in social clubs and school activities partly accounts for engagement in the civic sphere.

The effect of the civic sphere also diminishes, albeit only to a limited extent, when we include the sociodemographic characteristics and the social control – met with friends – (Model 4, as compared with Model 3), suggesting that the effect of such practices on the action repertoire of young people is linked to their social position. Similarly, the effect diminishes once we include political interest (Model 5, as compared with Model 4), which is therefore something that may affect the relationship between community practices and the breadth of the action repertoire. Among the other political attitudes, we also observe a reduction in the size of the effect of the civic sphere when we include the two

measures of political efficacy (Model 8, as compared with Model 4). Thus, we argue that part of the effect of the civic sphere on the range of political activism of young people is associated with feelings of efficacy.

The recreational spheres also matter. In this case, the association between involvement in social club activities and the breadth of the action repertoire is subject to a sharp reduction once we include the measure for the educational sphere (Model 3, as compared with Model 2), again suggesting a relationship between the various spheres of socialising practices for the explanation of the range of political activities carried out by youth. Furthermore, the effect of social club activities diminishes when we include political interest (Model 5, as compared with Model 4) and the two measures of political efficacy (Model 8, as compared with Model 4), hence joining the results concerning the civic sphere.

As for the educational sphere, the association between involvement in school activities and the action repertoire shrinks to a limited extent once we include the sociodemographic characteristics and the social control – met with friends – (Model 4, as compared with Model 3) and in a more substantial fashion when we include political interest (Model 5, as compared with Model 4). Once again, it also diminishes once we include the two measures of political efficacy (Model 8, as compared with Model 4), showing that overall, we find a similar pattern accounting for the impact of the three spheres of socialising practices on the extent of the political participation by young people.

As way to check for the robustness of our findings, we have redone the analysis using a Bayesian linear multilevel random intercept model and a fixed effect linear model with a contextual variable for countries. The results confirm the findings of the REML multilevel model (see Tables A.3 and A.4 in the Online Appendix). The Bayesian linear multilevel random intercept model suggests that the three independent variables' posterior distribution have a positive effect on the range of young people political participation (see Figure A.1 in the Online Appendix).

Conclusion

Our study revisits the well-known civic voluntarism model of political participation (Brady et al., 1995; Verba et al., 1995). We have asked how young people can develop a passion for democracy and civic society spurring their involvement in politics and, more specifically, in a broader range of political activities. The concept of socialising spheres relates to normative expectations about how young citizens can relate to the current political landscape. These questions have important implications for future participation patterns of today's youth.

We showed that the action repertoires of young people engaging in politics can be narrower or broader owing to their previous embeddedness in a number of social settings. We examined, more specifically, the role of three such settings: schools, social clubs, and community organizations. This approach is somehow different from the current political participation debate, which often fails to link a theoretical conceptualisation of youth citizenship to political participation, as researchers usually focus mainly on the general population. Our analysis suggests that these social settings play an important socialising role for the political participation of young people. Specifically, we show that all three spheres – corresponding, respectively, to the educational, recreational and civic socialising spheres – matter for political engagement. Our findings, however, go beyond existing knowledge, namely that previous embeddedness in certain social settings spurs political participation. We showed that these spheres of socialising practices do not only account for the shift from passivity to active participation, but they help explaining why some young

people have a broader action repertoire – that is, they are engaged in a broader range of political activities – than others. Furthermore, we also showed that some social settings play a stronger role than others. Specifically, our analysis provides evidence for a stronger correlation with community activities as compared with both social club and school activities, with political participation.

Political participation continues to be characterised by unequal patterns. While the literature abounds of studies about the participation gap (Dalton, 2017), we focused on inequalities in terms of different exposures to socialising practices and how this reflects on the breadth of the repertoire of participation. Therefore, although we included gender, migration background, and socio-economic status as control variables rather than variables of interest, our findings support the evidence that young citizens do not participate equally. Specifically, young people's political engagement is challenged by their gender (Albanesi et al., 2012; Gordon, 2008; Norris et al., 2004), migration background (Just, 2017; Pachi and Barrett, 2014; Seif, 2010), and socio-economic status (Gaby, 2017; Quintelier and Hooghe, 2013). For example, there is a higher chance that a young man from an upper social stratum engages in a political activity, as compared with a young woman with migration background. The findings presented here are starting point to question inequality among young people, not only in terms of participating politically as opposed to political apathy, but also in terms of the breadth of participation.

To conclude, we need to warn about a limitation of our study. Since our analysis is based on cross-sectional data, it cannot rule out reverse causality, namely that participating in political activities may lead young people to engage in those very same practices that are supposed to push them to participate politically. Although we have shown that there is a relationship between spheres of socialising practices and political engagement, we cannot rule out the reverse causal pattern. This holds in particular for the civic and recreational spheres while the educational sphere does not have this problem due to the chronological ordering of observations. Thus, youth could engage in community activities because they are politically engaged rather than the other way around. Similarly, albeit perhaps to a lesser extent, young people could engage in social activities as a result of their stronger political involvement. Methodologically speaking, it is a hard to estimate the causal effect for the recreational and the civic spheres on political participation. With cross-sectional observations studies, the causal effect of these two spheres is hard to isolate (Persson, 2015). Randomized experiments and panel data are the gold standard for estimating causality.

Therefore, further research should investigate the relationship between these socialising practices and political participation by using a methodology allowing to make a stronger case for a causal effect of the former on the latter. Here, we simply suggested a path of analysis and tried to open up an avenue for further research on the role of socialising for political participation.

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Supplementary Information

Additional supplementary information may be found with the online version of this article.

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