

Youth Civic and Political Engagement

Edited by Martyn Barrett and Dimitra Pachi

First published 2019

ISBN 13: 978-1-84872-161-6 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-84872-162-3 (pbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-429-02557-0 (ebk)

Chapter 4

Macro Contextual Factors Linked to Youth Civic and Political Engagement

Martyn Barrett and Dimitra Pachi

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

4

MACRO CONTEXTUAL FACTORS LINKED TO YOUTH CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

The previous two chapters have explored the psychological, social and demographic factors that are linked to youth civic and political engagement. By contrast, the present chapter focuses on macro factors. By macro factors, we mean the large-scale factors that together define the broader societal and institutional context within which an individual lives. These factors include historical, cultural, economic, political, legal, policy and technological factors.

This chapter examines a wide range of macro factors including: the broad patterns of political and civic engagement that occur among adults within a country; the historical, cultural, economic, institutional and legal characteristics of a country; public policies on young people's active citizenship; the legally specified minimum age for voting; the provision of youth organisations; the availability of a youth parliament within a country; the education policies and regulations that determine the quality of the formal education that young people receive within a country; the role that digital technology, the Internet and social media play in youth civic and political engagement; and youth mobilisation by politicians and political parties.

The relevance of adults' civic and political engagement to young people's civic and political engagement

Adults' patterns of civic and political engagement within a country are important for understanding patterns of youth engagement because the patterns of engagement that are displayed by adults are typically mirrored in the patterns displayed by young people living within the same country. This finding emerged clearly from a study by Sloam (2016). Analysing the patterns of political participation exhibited by 15- to 24-year-olds in 15 European countries, he found widespread differences in these patterns from one country to another. Interestingly,

however, the rate of participation among youth was proportional to the rate of participation among adults living within the same country. Thus, the three countries with the highest rate of voting among adults (Belgium, Denmark and Sweden) were also the three countries that had the highest rates of youth voting, while those countries with the lowest rates of voting among adults also had the lowest rates of youth voting (Luxembourg, Ireland and the UK). Exactly the same applied to the other forms of participation that were examined (displaying a badge or sticker, signing petitions, joining boycotts and participating in a demonstration) – the extent to which youth engaged in each individual practice was proportional to the extent to which adults living in the same country engaged in that practice. In short, youth political and civic engagement was directly proportional to the broader political-civic participatory culture among adults in the country where they lived. This finding is not surprising, given that adult behaviour often functions as a powerful role model for young people, particularly in relationship to their prosocial and civic behaviour (Eisenberg, Spinrad & Knafo-Noam, 2015).

It is also noteworthy that the political-civic participatory culture of adults within a country is itself systematically related to a wide range of macro factors. Thus, the participatory culture of adults may well mediate the effects of macro factors on youth civic and political engagement. There are numerous macro factors that have been found to be systematically linked to adults' patterns of participation, including characteristics of the electoral, political and legal institutions that are used to govern the country, the level of economic development of the country and the recent political history of the country.

For example, the likelihood of adults turning out to vote in elections is related to various characteristics of the electoral system (Geys, 2006). More adults are likely to vote when:

- A proportional representation system is used rather than a first-past-the-post system
- Voter registration processes are simple rather than cumbersome
- When voting takes place on a rest day rather than a working day
- Voting is compulsory rather than optional

Voter turnout in elections is also related to certain broad characteristics of a country's population. Turnout is higher when the electorate is small, the population is stable (in terms of the length of time that individuals have resided in specific locations) and the ethnic minority share of the total population is small (Geys, 2006).

In addition, the structure of political institutions within a country shapes the particular forms of non-electoral political participation that are used by adults. For example, in countries where political institutions provide many opportunities for citizens and civil society organisations to influence policy (e.g., Switzerland), there are high levels of moderate forms of action such as signing

petitions and participating in campaigns. By contrast, in countries where there are relatively few such opportunities (e.g., France), there are high levels of more extreme forms of action such as demonstrations and strikes (Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak & Giugni, 1995). Likewise, it has been found that adults are more likely to engage in non-conventional political and civic participation in countries that have decentralised political, administrative and fiscal systems (Vráblíková, 2014; Vráblíková & Císař, 2015).

That said, PIDOP found that all forms of participation (apart from voting) are higher among adults in countries in which there is a high level of government accountability. In other words, participation is higher in countries where the government is held to account for its actions by a free press and at periodic elections, financial contributions to political parties are openly disclosed, freedom of the press is guaranteed and corruption is controlled (Brunton-Smith, 2011; Brunton-Smith & Barrett, 2015).

PIDOP also discovered that the forms of participation used by adults are related to the human rights and legal institutions of the country in which they are living. Three features are especially important here: rule of law (i.e., the presence of an independent judiciary, impartial courts and legal protection for minorities), human rights record (i.e., women's rights, minority rights and legal prohibitions on the use of torture) and civil liberties (i.e., freedom of expression and protest, freedom to form professional organisations and trade unions, and religious tolerance). Adults are more likely to participate using civic and conventional political means in countries that are high on the rule of law and on their human rights record; however, they are more likely to participate using non-conventional means in countries that are high on civil liberties (Brunton-Smith, 2011; Brunton-Smith & Barrett, 2015).

In addition, PIDOP confirmed that the economy of a country is a further relevant macro factor: all forms of participation other than voting are higher in countries that have a well-performing economy. In other words, participation is higher in countries where GDP growth and GDP per capita are high, gross domestic savings as a proportion of GDP are high, foreign direct investment is high, unemployment is low and effective tax collection takes place (Brunton-Smith, 2011; Brunton-Smith & Barrett, 2015).

Adults' patterns of political and civic participation are also linked to the recent history of the country in which they live. For example, in the 1990s, adults living in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe had lower levels of participation than those living in Western European countries that had a longstanding history of democracy. This gap widened further between 1990 and 1999, with the proportion of people who took part in non-conventional forms of participation in Western Europe rising by 7% while the proportion in Eastern Europe fell by 9%. However, participation levels remained high during this period in those particular Eastern European countries where collective popular action had contributed to bringing down the communist regime (Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Poland); participation only declined in those countries where the transition from

communism had been driven by political elites (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia) (Bernhagen & Marsh, 2007).

Finally, the cultural characteristics of countries are also linked to adults' patterns of political and civic participation. For example, in countries that have predominantly Catholic traditions, women have lower levels of political interest, political knowledge and political participation compared to women in countries that have predominantly Protestant traditions (Galligan, 2012; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). The availability of associations, organisations and social networks within a country is also related to higher levels of participation among adults (Putnam, 2000). Associations and organisations are important because they provide contexts in which individuals acquire the skills that are needed for political participation and provide individuals with opportunities to engage in political discussions and to become civically and politically active.

In short, adults' patterns of civic and political participation are systematically related to a wide range of macro factors, including: characteristics of the electoral system; the structure of political institutions; government accountability; the country's record on rule of law, human rights and civil liberties; the country's level of economic development; the recent political history of the country; and the cultural characteristics of the country. Insofar as adults' patterns of participation are mirrored in patterns of youth participation (Sloam, 2016), the latter are similarly related to these various macro factors.

Direct evidence of the relationship between macro factors and youth engagement

Additional, more direct, evidence on the relationship between macro factors and youth engagement was obtained in CIVED (Torney-Purta et al., 2001), ICCS 2009 (Schulz et al., 2010) and ICCS 2016 (Schulz et al., 2017). All of these studies also found significant cross-national differences in 14-year-olds' political and civic knowledge, attitudes and engagement. These differences were not random but were systematically related to particular characteristics of the countries in which these teenagers were living.

For example, CIVED found differences in levels of trust in political and legal institutions among the 14-year-olds according to whether their country had more or less than 40 years of continuous democracy: higher levels of trust were found among those who lived in countries with longstanding democratic traditions. However, the importance which they attributed to conventional citizenship practices such as voting and joining a political party tended to be *lower* in countries in which there were longstanding democratic traditions, and higher in countries in which conventional political institutions and forms of participation had been strengthened in the previous 30 years (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

CIVED also uncovered significant differences in levels of political knowledge across countries. Youngsters living in ten countries (including Finland, Hong Kong and the United States) had scores that were significantly higher than the

international average, while those living in eight countries (including Romania, Chile and Colombia) had scores that were significantly lower than the international average. The levels of political knowledge among the 14-year-olds were significantly correlated with the levels of economic development (indexed in terms of gross national product per capita) of the country in which they lived (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Likewise, both ICCS 2009 and ICCS 2016 found differences in 14-year-olds' political knowledge across countries. In both cases, these differences were significantly associated with their country's score on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI is a composite index that captures the extent to which the people living within a given country have long and healthy lives, are knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living – in other words, the HDI reflects the level of health, educational and economic development of a country. Both ICCS studies found a strong positive association between the level of political knowledge among 14-year-olds and the HDI of the country in which they lived (Schulz et al., 2010; Schulz et al., 2017).

Further evidence concerning the relationship between macro factors and patterns of civic and political engagement among youth comes from PIDOP (Brunton-Smith, 2011; Brunton-Smith & Barrett, 2015). As noted already, these analyses revealed that, among adults, all forms of participation other than voting are higher in countries that score well on economic performance, government accountability, rule of law and human rights. Exactly the same relationships between levels of participation and these four macro factors were also found among 15- to 24-year-old youth. In other words, these relationships were present irrespective of age – not only adults but also youth displayed these relationships, consistent with the findings of Sloam (2016).

Explaining the influence of macro factors on youth engagement

The causal relationships through which many of these macro factors impact on youth engagement are almost certainly indirect and mediated by demographic and social factors (see Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1). For example, the economic characteristics of a country are most likely to impact on youth engagement in two main ways. First, they are likely to influence the socio-economic situation of youth and hence their ability to acquire the material resources and the civic skills that are required for political activity (Brady et al., 1995). Second, they are likely to impact on national expenditure on educational provision (IES, 2015), with the quality of that provision being the more immediate proximal social factor that affects young people's experiences at school (education being a significant source of influence on young people's civic and political engagement – see Chapter 3).

Social mediators are presumably also responsible for the effects of historical, cultural and political macro factors on youth engagement. Indeed, it seems highly

likely that it is adults in youths' social environments, especially their parents and teachers, who are the critical mediators between macro factors and youth civic and political engagement. This is because macro factors provide the background against which parents and teachers position themselves ideologically, politically and socially. Their positioning will influence their beliefs, attitudes, values, discourses and practices. Youth are then exposed to the discourses and practices of these individuals (rather than to the macro factors *per se*), with it being these more proximal discourses and practices in their immediate social environment that actually influence their patterns of engagement and participation. In short, it is likely that very few macro factors operate independently of social and demographic factors. Instead, it is much more likely that macro, demographic and social factors are intertwined in complex causal pathways. These pathways have not been investigated in any great depth to date. This is a task which research in the future will need to tackle.

National policies on migrant integration and naturalisation

In the case of youth who migrate to another country either on their own or with their families, a major constraint on, or facilitator of, their political participation is the set of legal, institutional and educational arrangements for migrants that are in place in the country to which they have migrated. These arrangements vary considerably from one country to another. They can also vary within individual countries according to migrants' national or ethnic origins (e.g., depending on whether there are former colonial links to their country of origin). Some countries also allow naturalisation based on the individual having lived within the country of residence for a certain number of years, being descended from a citizen of the country, or being married to a citizen of the country. The extent to which a country facilitates or impedes migrants' access to naturalisation, grants or denies voting rights to migrants, ensures or blocks the representation of migrants' interests in the political system, and establishes or fails to establish formal consultative bodies through which migrant communities can communicate their views to local and national government can all have a significant impact on migrants' political engagement (Ireland, 1994; Martiniello, 2005; Penninx, Martiniello & Vertovec, 2004). The legal rules for naturalisation are especially important insofar as acquiring the citizenship of the country bestows full voting rights on those who are above the legal minimum voting age.

Of course, whether or not immigrants and their offspring actually take up the opportunities for participation that are provided by the institutional framework depends on a wide range of factors. These include, for example, their own political values, interest and attitudes; their knowledge of the country's political system; their levels of previous political engagement in their country of origin; whether or not they perceive their presence in their country of residence as being permanent; their sense of belonging to the country of residence; and the availability of migrant associations and organisations within the country of residence

(Martiniello, 2005). Importantly, there are many opportunities for participation available to migrant youth beyond electoral participation. For example, migrant youth who are not naturalised can nevertheless still participate legally in both civic and political actions – they can participate through community organisations, trade unions and pressure groups such as anti-racist, human rights or environmental organisations. They can also engage in a wide variety of civic and non-conventional political actions, including consumer activism, fund-raising and charitable activity, writing letters to politicians and public officials, signing petitions and participating in political demonstrations.

Further macro factors that can facilitate or hinder the civic and political engagement of migrant youth stem from the education system into which these youth are enrolled in their new country of residence. Various structural features of the education system may lead to low educational achievement by migrant students, which, as we saw in Chapter 3, can have significant consequences for their civic and political engagement. For example, educational systems that sort students into different ability tracks at an early age often lead to lower educational achievement by migrant students; achievement among migrants tends to be higher in comprehensive education systems which operate a late selection of students into different ability tracks (NESSE, 2008). In addition, migrant students benefit if their schools offer support for their language needs when their mother tongue is not the official language of instruction. The amount of time that schools devote to teaching immigrant pupils the language of instruction varies substantially across countries. For example, in one European survey, it was found that the figure ranged from two to 14 hours per week depending on the country (Eurydice, 2009). Hence, in countries where late selection and extensive linguistic tuition is available, the level of educational achievement by migrant students tends to be higher, and as a consequence the civic and political engagement of those students is also likely to be higher.

However, it is not only young migrants attending school who can benefit from receiving instruction in the language of the host country. Migrants who are beyond school leaving age can also benefit from such instruction. Indeed, there are a large number of measures that can be taken to aid the integration of migrants into the country of residence and boost their civic and political participation (Council of Europe, 2016a). These include:

- Giving migrants who have limited proficiency in the language of their country of residence access to language instruction
- Providing integration programmes that focus on opening doors to the local community, so that migrants meet local organisations, services and mentors who are open to diversity and interested to support their integration
- Requiring that staff who deliver migrant integration and language programmes work with volunteers from the local community and promote intercultural activities such as conversation tandems where migrants and non-migrants can learn about each other's culture and way of life

- Creating grants to support migrant-run associations and support the setting up of mainstream civic and political organisations to mentor migrants
- Recruiting residents of migrant background to local consultative bodies of all types
- Granting the right to vote and stand in local and regional elections to migrants after a minimum period of legal residence (e.g., five years)
- Granting an entitlement to citizenship for first-generation migrants after a minimum period of legal residence (e.g., ten years)
- Granting an entitlement to citizenship for migrants' children who have been educated or born in the country

In short, many different policies and institutional arrangements on migrant integration, naturalisation and the education of migrant youth can have significant effects on the civic and political activity of migrant youth. Depending on their configuration, these legal and institutional arrangements can either facilitate or hinder these youths' civic and political engagement.

Youth policies

Youth policies also form an important part of the institutional macro context within which youth civic and political engagement occurs. These policies may be developed at different levels of governance, for example at local, regional or national level (and, in the case of European countries, at European level as well). Youth policies are important because they contribute to framing public debates and discussions about youth engagement. Policies that are formulated by national governments are especially important in this respect because they not only help to frame public discussion and debate but also delineate official expectations of young people's civic and political engagement and help to shape government spending priorities and the allocation of resources to support youth engagement, for example, through the provision of funding for youth organisations.

For this reason, PIDOP examined national governments' policies on active citizenship and participation among youth in seven European countries: Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Turkey and the UK (Bee & Guerrina, 2014; Guerrina & Bee, 2012). Official government policy documents published between 2004 and 2009 were analysed to identify the government discourses that were used about youth engagement in these countries.

It was discovered that these documents contained several common emphases across countries. For example, most national governments emphasised the importance of encouraging the active participation of young people and of strengthening tolerance, respect for diversity, democracy, justice and human rights. In addition, in the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy and Turkey, there was an emphasis on the need to enhance and promote intercultural dialogue among young people.

However, some notable differences across countries were also found. For example, the Portuguese policy documents drew attention to the need to empower youth organisations by encouraging and supporting their activities, to ensure the representation of youth organisations at the municipal level, and to promote the discussion of issues related to the aspirations and needs of young people. The need for youth councils and organisations to be accepted and included as equal partners in dialogue was also emphasised in Germany, while in the Czech Republic the need to contribute to the development of organisations that support the activities of young people was also identified as a key objective. However, a very different orientation was present in the UK policies, which instead focused on youth justice and social justice, the objective being to enhance the government's understanding of the needs of young people who commit offences, so that these needs can be properly addressed, and to ensure that the voices of children and young people are able to shape and influence safeguarding policies and practices. Consistent with other UK government policies at that time, the UK documents also stressed the need for policies to support youth activities that help to enhance community cohesion and foster a sense of social solidarity at the local level. In Turkey, by contrast, the official documents that were analysed emphasised the role of social services as a tool for remedying social problems and enhancing life standards, the importance of improving protective and preventive measures in social services and the need to provide social services for those who are in need regardless of class, language, religion and region.

In a subsequent analysis, Bozkurt, Çok and Şener (2015) examined a more recent Turkish government document which contained the first comprehensive statement of policy strategies related to youth in Turkey – the National Youth and Sports Policy Document. This document was published by the Turkish Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2013. Bozkurt et al. found that, despite the existence of government discourse promoting youth participation in the document, there were also signs that the government viewed youth as a segment of the population that needed to be shaped, controlled and protected, rather than as active citizens who should be involved in the decision-making processes that affect themselves and society more generally. For example, there were references in this policy document to the vulnerability of youth, the need to protect youth from bad habits and the need to prevent youths' alienation from national and moral values. Commenting on another document published in 2012 by the conservative ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Bozkurt et al. note that the main mission ascribed to youth by the party in this document is to be virtuous and exemplary. Bozkurt et al. argue that there is a tension within the Turkish government's view between, on the one hand, the engagement of youth in civic and political life (which encourages civic activism among youth) and, on the other hand, the AKP's avowal of conservative values (which discourages such activism). They argue that this tension erupted during the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul in 2013, when youth willingly took on the role of civic activists but in doing so were brutally attacked by the police under the control of the government.

In another study of youth policies within an individual country, Villano and Bertocchi (2014) examined 32 Italian national and regional documents in order to identify their underlying assumptions. The Italian Ministry for Youth, which was established in 2008, is mandated to deal with, among other issues, the rights of young people to freedom of speech and forms of association, their needs and interests and their right to take part in public life. However, the delivery of this agenda is delegated to the regions of Italy. Examining the documents from the region of Emilia Romagna, Villano and Bertocchi note that the region places high value on the participation of youth in civil and social life, on the promotion of active citizenship and on intergenerational, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue to support the cohesion and the growth of the community. This is coupled to practical support and funding for various forms of youth association aimed at youth activities as well as support for the involvement of young people in decision-making processes by means of the practices of e-democracy. In short, at the official level, there are attempts to promote the civic and political participation of young people by supporting the creation and development of youth associations and organisations.

However, in addition to examining these policy documents, Villano and Bertocchi conducted interviews with politicians and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that promote projects for young people. The interviews revealed that, in practice, attention to the active participation of young people has not been very widespread to date, with there being many gaps in the implementation of the official policy agenda. It was noted that there were missed opportunities offered by the European Union to promote young people's participation and also a widespread failure to take advantage of available funding opportunities. This has been accompanied by cuts to public funding for training and a failure to invest sufficiently in research, universities and schools, which has further exacerbated the problems in the implementation of the youth policies. In addition, the interviewees reported that many young people are much more orientated towards non-conventional and indirect forms of participation rather than the traditional forms of conventional participation such as voting, which makes the encouragement of the latter much harder to achieve. In other words, what emerges from this study is a gap between what may be very well-intentioned policies and their actual implementation on the ground.

There can, of course, also be a further gap between the measures that are implemented and the perceptions of those measures and of government intentions by those who are the intended recipients and beneficiaries of the policies. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of concrete research into these sorts of issues in this area. Future research will need to elucidate not only the causal links that exist between government policies and youth engagement but also the mediating role that young people's perceptions of government policies are likely to play in the process. This is because, as we saw in Chapter 2, trust in government institutions, perceived institutional effectiveness and the emotions that are linked to the perceived fairness of those institutions are important psychological factors that are related to youth engagement and participation.

Voting age

One macro factor that obviously affects youth political participation is the legally specified minimum age of voting within the country in which young people live. The most common voting age around the world is 18 years, although some countries allow those aged 16 years and above to vote in national elections (e.g., Argentina, Austria and Brazil), while a few countries do not allow youth to vote in such elections until they are 21 years of age (e.g., Malaysia and Singapore). Even though the minimum age of voting in national elections may be 18 years, youth are sometimes allowed to vote from the age of 16 in certain types of elections (e.g., local or regional elections or referenda) in some countries. The extent to which young people actually vote once they have attained the minimum age for voting additionally depends on whether voting within the country is compulsory or optional – voting rates are higher when it is compulsory (Geys, 2006).

In recent years, there have been efforts in a number of countries to reduce the voting age from 18 to 16 years. The most common argument made against making such a change is that 16- and 17-year-olds lack sufficient political maturity in terms of their ability to consider the effects of their voting decisions on society, their country and themselves. This argument does not rule out the possibility that there may be some 16- and 17-year-olds who do possess the necessary level of political maturity; instead, it simply assumes that the likelihood of someone aged 18 years or older possessing political maturity is higher than the likelihood of someone aged 16 years possessing it, and that age 18 is a pragmatic cut-off point above which a sufficient proportion of citizens are likely to have the necessary political maturity to be able to vote in a meaningful manner.

Chan and Clayton (2006) have usefully evaluated the evidence on the political maturity of 16- and 17-year-olds. They define political maturity in terms of having an interest in politics, having knowledge of the political system, understanding the nature and significance of the issues that are the subject of public and political debate, possessing political convictions that are logically coherent and are not subject to whimsical revision, and appreciating the expected consequences of the political choices that one makes. Reviewing a wide range of evidence collected in British surveys, they show that 16- and 17-year-olds are indeed less mature politically than older people: they are less interested in politics, less knowledgeable about political facts, their attitudes are less coherent and their attitudes are less stable over time. For this reason, Chan and Clayton recommend that the voting age should not be lowered from 18 to 16.

However, a problem with Chan and Clayton's argument is that the data on 16- and 17-year-olds which they analyse are drawn from individuals who, as we saw in Chapter 1, often have considerable interest in a wide range of both local and global issues but feel excluded from the political process because they do not have the vote and think that politicians do not have any serious interest in their point of view. They therefore reject the conventional political arena and turn instead to single issue causes and use non-conventional political and civic

forms of participation instead. In other words, it may be precisely because they feel excluded from the conventional political arena that they disengage from it and exhibit lower levels of political maturity in relationship to that arena. It is possible that granting voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds may provide just the incentive that is required to encourage them to learn about conventional politics and to become more politically mature.

One way to test this argument is to examine data from countries in which the voting age has been reduced to 16 in order to see how this change has affected 16- and 17-year-olds' political interest and knowledge, and whether under these circumstances 16- and 17-year-olds' electoral behaviour differs from that of older youth and adults. Such data have been collected in Austria, where the voting age was lowered from 18 to 16 for participation in national elections in 2007. Analyses of Austrian data by Zeglovits and Zandonella (2013) reveal that political interest among 16- and 17-year-olds increased substantially between 2004 and 2008, as did following political news; importantly, political interest in 2008 was highest among those youth who talked to their teachers about politics and who engaged in citizenship activities at school, suggesting that citizenship education in schools can play a significant role in developing the political maturity of new young voters.

Wagner, Johann and Kritzinger (2012) also analysed Austrian data which were collected in 2009. They found that interest in politics was equally high among 16- and 17-year-olds as among 22- to 25-year-olds, and that those aged under 18 were equally motivated to take part in political life as older age groups. Furthermore, these youngest voters' trust in political institutions, and their satisfaction with national and European democracy, were both high, and these youth did not differ from those aged 18 and over in the extent to which they recognised that the national parliament had an important impact on them personally. Finally, Wagner et al. conducted a number of analyses to investigate whether the precise voting choices that were made by 16- and 17-year-olds and the quality of their decision-making were in any way less good than the decision-making of those aged over 18. They found very few differences between these younger voters and older voters. They conclude that 16- and 17-year-olds are both able and willing to participate effectively in politics, and that their voting choices are of no lesser quality than those of individuals aged 18 or older.

It is therefore plausible that, in countries where the voting age remains at 18, many 16- and 17-year-olds lack political maturity primarily because they are not permitted to vote and because they believe that politicians lack serious interest in their views. In addition, it is noteworthy that, given that many 16- and 17-year-olds are still in full-time education, if these youth were to be allowed to vote, they would be able to receive educational support for their political decision-making (e.g., by being encouraged to conduct research into political issues; to explore those issues from a range of different perspectives; to compare and contrast different perspectives; to engage in critical evaluations of perspectives, information and the sources from which information has been derived;

to think logically and coherently about political issues; and to draw reasoned conclusions). The available evidence is consistent with the view that, under such conditions, high levels of political interest would be generated, which could then have substantial benefits for the future political participation of the individuals concerned insofar as voting is known to be habit-forming, with individuals who have voted in the past being more likely to continue voting in the future (Geys, 2006). Allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote has the additional benefit of enabling them to seek political representation on matters that can deeply affect their lives. This will not only reinforce their levels of political internal efficacy but will also have an effect on the candidates who are elected, their political priorities and the extent to which the policies that they put forward take into account the concerns and views of youth.

The provision of youth organisations

As we saw in Chapter 3, another route that can be used to promote youth civic and political engagement is through the provision of youth organisations. Youth organisations can offer young people a wide range of opportunities to develop their civic and political skills and to become involved with civic and political issues. They help young people to encounter and explore new ways of perceiving social and political issues, to develop communication, public speaking and debating skills, to participate in group decision-making and to take on leadership, organisational and representative roles. The availability of youth organisations in a particular locale is therefore an important factor that can impact on youth engagement and participation within that locale.

A survey of youth organisations in Europe by the European Youth Forum (2016) revealed that these organisations are often founded on a common vision of building a just and fair society. Their missions frequently focus on the empowerment of youth, the mobilisation of youth to contribute to the building of more just and inclusive societies, the encouragement of youth to become autonomous active citizens and the enhancement of young people's participation in decision-making processes and democratic structures. It was found that a common general aim is to make young people agents of change in their own communities – key words that often appear in the strategic plans of youth organisations are 'participation', 'engagement', 'empowerment' and 'change'.

Many youth organisations therefore aim explicitly to function as incubators for active citizenship. In pursuing this goal, they provide not only the space for raising awareness of civic and political issues and for discussing these issues, but also the structures and opportunities that may be needed to translate young people's views and ideas into practice. Furthermore, because many youth organisations are youth-led, they often have their own internal participatory and decision-making processes, which means that democracy and participation can be intrinsic to their culture (European Youth Forum, 2016). In other words, by participating in these organisations, young people engage in

activities and actions that enable them to experience the principles and practice of democracy first hand.

Of course, youth organisations provide a very wide range of different programmes, projects and activities, the nature of which are determined by each organisation's own particular mandate, the context within which it operates, and the particular membership group to which it is dedicated. They also vary in terms of how effective they are in boosting youth civic and political engagement (see Chapter 3 for a review). However, an advantage of youth organisations over schools and universities as incubators of citizenship is that they can reach out to all youth, including disadvantaged youth and those alienated from school, early school leavers and educational dropouts, as well as young people who are not in employment, education or training.

Unfortunately, however, youth organisations are not always available to young people. Their presence within a locale is often crucially dependent on local, regional or national government funding to support their operation (which in turn links back to public youth policies). If public funding is not available, these organisations can operate only through the good will of dedicated volunteers, through religious or other private associations or through private donations. In locations where there is a paucity of youth facilities and organisations, young people can experience a sense of frustration, feel a lack of power in their own communities and express antipathy towards local authorities. It is noteworthy that, when Weller (2007) asked a group of alienated 13- to 16-year-old English teenagers what they would like to change about where they lived, most called for more facilities such as youth clubs and for 'more say over what happens'. If public authorities genuinely wish to equip young people with a sense of civic purpose and community involvement, then one of the most effective actions they can take to bring about these outcomes is to support the provision of suitable youth organisations through targeted funding.

Youth parliaments

Another action that public authorities can take to support and encourage young people's engagement with politics is to operate a youth parliament. A survey of 128 countries conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2016 revealed that youth parliaments exist in about half of the countries that were surveyed. The structure and mode of operation of these parliaments vary considerably from one country to another. Some but not all youth parliaments have a formal relationship to the national parliament, and in some cases the national parliament building is also used for meetings, with parliamentarians and parliamentary staff being involved in their operation. The majority of youth parliaments involve teenagers, although a few involve children aged 7 or 8 years upwards, while others involve youth from the voting age of 16 or 18 years up to the age of 30 or 35 years. Youth parliaments vary in terms of how their participants are selected. Sometimes school-based elections take place; in other cases, there is an application process;

occasionally, there are open public elections or public-speaking competitions. The frequency with which youth parliaments meet also varies across countries. Some meet only once per year, following a period in which the participants are prepared for the meeting either by their schools or by youth organisations; others meet more frequently, sometimes every two months. Meetings may be either plenary-based or committee-based. Length of tenure in office lasts anywhere between one day and two years (Shephard & Patrikos, 2013).

Youth parliaments usually have several objectives (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016). First, they typically aim to give young people the chance to express their views to those in power and to contribute to the youth agenda in the development of public policies. Allied to this, some youth parliaments try to create ongoing links between youth and government and parliamentary officials. Second, youth parliaments aim to empower young people politically by arousing their interest in public affairs, equipping them with debating and leadership skills and providing them with personal experience of participatory democracy. Third, youth parliaments commonly seek to raise awareness of political and parliamentary processes among youth by giving them an understanding of how, for example, bills are drafted, laws are passed through parliament, and the various ways in which members of parliament conduct constituency work and liaise and interact with the media.

While all of these aims are eminently praiseworthy, youth parliaments have been criticised on a number of counts. First, there is the common criticism that there is little direct evidence of any meaningful impact of youth parliaments on government policy (although a few notable exceptions do exist, such as the Scottish Youth Parliament). At best, it has been suggested, most youth parliaments have a more general indirect effect of keeping particular issues or points of view in the political arena (Shephard & Patrikos, 2013). For this reason, it has been argued that, as a minimum requirement, governments should be formally obliged to issue responses explaining why they support or oppose proposals that have been made by the youth parliament so that youth can feel that their views are being taken seriously and are being considered by those in power (Kyranakis & Nurvala, 2013).

Second, it is often officially maintained that involvement in youth parliaments enhances young people's public speaking, debating, collaborative, leadership and organisational skills, and increases their levels of political engagement. However, there is a notable lack of research into the effects of youth parliaments on young people and therefore very little research evidence to support these claims. Indeed, it actually seems much more plausible that it is youth who already possess these kinds of skills, and who are already politically engaged, who are the most likely to become members of youth parliaments in the first place. That said, the skills and knowledge of these individuals are likely to be further enhanced as a consequence of the experience that they acquire through the youth parliament. Indeed, in a rare study into the effects of participation in a youth parliament (in Brazil), Fuks and Avila Casalecchi (2012) found that the participants, who were

high school students, showed a substantial increase in trust and confidence in the State Assembly as a consequence of their participation in the youth parliament, and that this increase was associated with the acquisition of knowledge about the Assembly. More research into the effects of youth parliaments on their participants is needed.

Third, it has been argued that youth parliaments favour select groups of youth, in particular those who are from more affluent backgrounds, those who happen to attend particular schools or youth organisations, and those who have a particular interest in politics (Wall & Dar, 2011). And indeed, young people from vulnerable or marginalised groups, such as ethnic minority youth, disabled youth, youth in care and homeless youth, tend not to be involved in youth parliaments (Turkie, 2010). Barriers to participation in a youth parliament include: the informal requirement for youth to be highly motivated, articulate and ambitious in order to become a member of a youth parliament; the cost in terms of time, effort and financial resources to reach out to marginalised youth in order to draw them into a youth parliament; and the perception that quotas that could be used in principle to ensure the involvement of marginalised youth are usually unworkable, tokenistic or patronising in practice (Turkie, 2010).

Despite these reservations, it is nevertheless the case that the availability of a youth parliament within a country does at least provide a further additional channel through which youth can be engaged with political and policy processes. That said, if such an institution is to command broad respect among youth in general, rather than only among a relatively small number of advantaged youth, then the processes used to recruit youth to the parliament need to be sufficiently robust so that it is not exclusive to those who are socio-economically and educationally privileged. In addition, the formal link between the youth parliament and the national parliament and policymakers needs to be sufficiently strong to ensure that the youth parliament is not perceived by young people as being politically powerless and irrelevant.

Education policies and regulations on citizenship education

As we saw in Chapter 3, both the citizenship education courses which young people receive at school and the educational practices that are used by teachers in schools can have a significant impact on their civic and political engagement. In particular, engagement is enhanced when schools provide citizenship education courses that require students to pay attention to national issues, government and politics, and to think about political issues in relationship to contemporary events, and when schools provide training in civic skills. Further enhancement of their engagement occurs when schools have an open classroom climate, operate student councils or parliaments and provide high-quality service learning for students.

A critical issue here is the particular type of citizen that citizenship education should aim to foster. Should it produce citizens who are knowledgeable

about current political institutions and processes, who use official political processes and who feel an obligation to participate through these means? Or should it produce citizens who engage in critical reflection, direct participation and community-based action and who utilise interactive information technology to learn and to exchange views about civic and political issues? The former has been called dutiful or duty-based citizenship, while the latter has been called engaged or actualising citizenship (Bennett, 2007; Dalton, 2008). The key question is whether citizenship education should aim to promote just one of these two types of citizen, or whether both forms should be promoted, which is arguably the ideal.

Whether or not optimal curricula, pedagogies and school practices are in place to foster this ideal form of citizenship depends to a large extent on the education policies, regulations and recommendations that are provided by the relevant educational authorities (whether these be at the national, regional or local level) and on the provision of suitable levels of funding and resources for implementing those policies, regulations and recommendations. Two aspects of the education system are particularly important in this respect: policies and regulations to ensure that an appropriate and effective citizenship education curriculum is provided by schools, and the provision of suitable teacher education and training to ensure that teachers are competent in the practices and pedagogies that need to be applied for delivering high-quality citizenship education.

In order to examine these issues, Eurydice (2017) conducted a review of national policies on citizenship education across Europe. The review covered 37 countries in total, including the 28 members of the European Union as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey. Because some countries have more than a single education system (e.g., Belgium and the UK), the review focused its attention on the formal requirements for citizenship education as it is delivered in public sector schools in 42 education systems.

The review revealed that all 42 systems had curricula in place which were aimed at developing the abilities of students to interact effectively and constructively with others, to act in a socially responsible manner, to act democratically and to think critically. Students' interpersonal interactions were usually targeted at primary school level, critical thinking at lower secondary level, and learning how to act democratically at upper secondary level. Three main approaches were used for implementing citizenship education in the curriculum: as a separate school subject, integrated into a broader learning area such as the social sciences, or as a cross-curricular theme for delivery by all teachers. Most systems used either the integrated or cross-curricular approach (and both were frequently used together), meaning that a substantial proportion of teachers were expected to be involved in citizenship education. Citizenship education was less often implemented as a compulsory separate subject; in those systems where this approach was adopted, it tended to be used at secondary rather than primary school level.

Almost all education systems had recommendations in place for schools to operate student councils at secondary level. However, there were significantly fewer recommendations on organising participation through student councils at primary level. Very few education systems provided recommendations on encouraging students to interact with political authorities. Twenty-nine education systems provided recommendations on the provision of extra-curricular opportunities to support citizenship education, but these recommendations were made most frequently in relationship to lower and upper secondary education rather than primary education. The most common recommendations on extra-curricular activities that were made were for environmental activities, followed closely by activities to raise awareness of political life, while recommendations on providing opportunities for voluntary work were the least common (particularly at primary and at lower secondary levels).

Regulations and recommendations on assessment in citizenship education were a further problem identified by the Eurydice review. While many education systems provided teachers with official guidelines on classroom assessment in citizenship education for the purposes of teaching and learning, national tests aimed at summarising students' achievements at the end of a period of learning (for the purpose of either awarding certificates or making decisions about student progression) were only available in 17 out of the 42 education systems. Furthermore, only eight used summative assessment for evaluating the effectiveness of schools and of the education system in achieving the intended learning outcomes. Given the fact that teachers commonly 'teach to the test', that is, focus their teaching on what is going to be assessed at the end of a course of study (Black, 1998; Spratt, 2005; Stobart, 2008), the general lack of summative assessment means that citizenship education may well receive low priority from both teachers and students, especially when the curriculum is overloaded.

Teacher education and training was a further problem identified by the Eurydice review. Only six education systems allowed new teachers to specialise during their initial teacher training in citizenship education. In addition, a further seven trained prospective teachers to become semi-specialists in citizenship education (i.e., to specialise in citizenship education and up to three other subjects). In all of these cases, the main content of initial teacher training was knowledge of what needs to be taught, the capacity to plan relevant learning activities, and the social skills required for engaging with students, parents, peers and the local community. Few education systems provided training in the competences that teachers need to evaluate and improve their own teaching practices. In addition, it is noteworthy that out of the 36 education systems where all teachers had a formal responsibility for delivering citizenship education because it was delivered using a cross-curricular approach, only 13 specified the competences that secondary school teachers need to acquire for teaching citizenship education. Finally, in the case of continuing professional development for practising teachers, about two-thirds of education systems provided programmes in citizenship

education for teachers, although similar programmes for school principals were only available in 14 systems.

In short, the Eurydice review implies that citizenship education in Europe is less than optimal. Although all countries do have curricula in citizenship education, it is clear that several improvements need to be made at the macro level in order to boost the effectiveness of citizenship education for promoting young people's civic and political engagement. In particular:

- Citizenship education should be fully incorporated not just into the secondary school curriculum but also the primary school curriculum, with the contents of the curriculum being adapted to the educational level of the students
- Student councils at both primary and secondary school levels should be made mandatory
- Opportunities for service learning, voluntary work and extra-curricular activities in the community should be expanded considerably, for example, in collaboration with community-based organisations, youth organisations and other NGOs, and service learning should be made mandatory
- Summative assessments in citizenship education should be made mandatory
- Initial teacher training in citizenship education should be made mandatory for all prospective teachers
- Initial teacher training should focus much more directly on the specific pedagogies that are known to be effective in promoting youth engagement, and on the specific competences that teachers require for reflecting on, evaluating and improving their own teaching practices
- Where they are not yet available, continuing professional development courses for school principals should be introduced on how to implement citizenship education within their schools

The role of the Internet and social media

Another important factor that is highly relevant to youth engagement is, of course, digital technology. In one sense, we could have reviewed the research that has been conducted into the influence of the Internet and social media on youth engagement in Chapter 3, alongside our review of the influence of traditional mass media. However, because the Internet and social media involve technologies that have only been developed very recently, they provide a fascinating opportunity through which to explore how technological developments at the macro level impact on patterns of youth engagement. For this reason, we have chosen to review the role that is played by digital technology in the current chapter on macro factors instead.

Indeed, over the past 20 years, there has been an extraordinary expansion both of the range of devices for accessing the Internet and of social media platforms for communicating and interacting with other people. Furthermore, the

scale of use by young people today is staggering: one recent UK report estimates that 12- to 15-year-olds now spend over 20 hours per week online and send over 140 text-based messages per week (Ofcom, 2016). Some have argued that young people nowadays are digital natives who, because they have grown up immersed in digital technology, relate to this technology in a qualitatively different way from those in older generations who only started to use this technology during the course of their adulthood (e.g., Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Prensky, 2001); others have argued that the concept of digital natives overstates these inter-generational differences (e.g., Kennedy, Judd & Dalgarno, 2010; Jones, Ramanau, Cross & Healing, 2010). Whatever the case, the reality is that by the time they start school, many children in the developed world have encountered a range of technologies, including mobile phones, games consoles, DVD players, MP3 players, desktops, laptops and tablets (Plowman, 2011). As a consequence, children and young people often have far higher levels of digital expertise than older generations, with the Internet being seamlessly integrated into their everyday lives (Mesch & Talmud, 2010; Thomas, 2011). Digital technology will clearly continue to feature within young people's lives on a significant scale in the future, and it is entirely possible that, with the emergence of new devices (e.g., Internet-connected watches and glasses), the impact of this technology on young people will continue to grow, especially as its cost continues to fall and its utilisation increases still further.

The potential of digital technology to transform civic and political engagement was enthusiastically championed in the early days of the Internet (Barlow, 1996; Hague & Loader, 1999; Loader, 1997). It was argued that the Internet, as a globally networked communications system, would allow everyone across the world to share information, to communicate with one another, to deliberate on political issues and to sidestep the control and authority of the state. It was further suggested that youth, who were the most enthusiastic to adopt the new technology and use it creatively, would have hugely expanded opportunities for undertaking civic and political action through the Internet.

However, research into the uptake and use of the Internet by young people during the early part of the new millennium suggested that youth were far more interested in using it for interacting and communicating with their friends, managing their social relations, organising their social activities, being entertained and staying in touch with current trends in popular culture and celebrity news, rather than for enhancing their civic and political understanding or participation (Livingstone, Couldry & Markham, 2007; Mesch & Coleman, 2007; Dahlgren & Olsson, 2007). These same studies did reveal, however, that in the case of young people who were already civically and politically engaged, the Internet did provide a useful additional tool which they were using to supplement their existing participatory activities. And there were also some indications that 18- to 25-year olds were more likely to use the Internet to access political information and news than those who were aged 26 and older (Mesch & Coleman, 2007). However, during this period, the Internet did not appear to induce or entice

other individuals who were not already actively engaged into civic or political activity (Livingstone et al., 2007). In addition, offline socio-economic, educational and gender differences in participation were found to be largely replicated online, with digital technology reinforcing rather than overcoming existing inequalities (McLeod, Shah, Hess & Lee, 2010; Mesch & Coleman, 2007).

This rather pessimistic picture of the role of digital technology in enhancing youth engagement was dramatically challenged by the events of the Arab Spring. These events began in December 2010 and continued through 2011 into 2012, and involved political protests on the streets of numerous cities in the Middle East and North Africa, including cities in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Bahrain (Haseeb, 2012). These protests, which involved large numbers of young people, deployed social media on a widespread scale and eventually led to significant political changes taking place in some of these countries (Herrera & Sakr, 2014). Facebook and Twitter, in particular, were used for organising protests, mobilising protestors, communicating the claims and demands being made by the protestors and reporting on the progress that was being made. In all of these countries, the Internet was used to create virtual spaces where the protestors could meet and communicate with one another without supervision or interference by the government, police or security forces. Furthermore, as the protestors established ways in which they could circumvent the official media and operate outside the existing political system, they started to devise and develop their own methods and spaces for acting as citizen journalists, for documenting and sharing news, for exchanging opinions and for crystallising their own views about the political situation. Interestingly, these online exchanges sometimes led to offline meetings in parks or coffee shops where serious and heated discussions would take place which nevertheless helped to build trust between the protestors, which contributed further to their mobilisation; this was an example of online activism leading directly to yet further offline activism in the streets (Herrera & Sakr, 2014; Sakr, 2014).

These findings have been replicated in studies of other mass protests such as the Indignados protests in Spain and Greece in 2011, the global Occupy protests from 2011 onwards and the Gezi Park protests in Turkey in 2013 (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Chrona & Bee, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2012; Juris, 2012; Sotiropoulos, 2017). In all of these cases, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have been used to communicate information about the protests, to invite other people to participate in the protests, to express solidarity with the protestors and to disseminate pictures and videos of the protests. These postings spread the messages well beyond the sites of the protests, creating global audiences and generating global solidarity. In other words, social media, in the hands of young people, have become an extremely powerful tool for mass protest organisation, information dissemination, communication and mobilisation.

There is, however, a complementary side to the role of social media in events such as these. The very nature of social media means that governments are able to develop methods to monitor, surveil and infiltrate the online spaces that are used by protestors and activists (Bajoghli, 2014; Tarkowski, Fathy & Melyantsou, 2011).

As a consequence, digital technologies and the Internet may not always lead to such significant changes to political institutions as they did during the Arab Spring. Indeed, traditional power relations may actually be consolidated through digital technology, as governments learn how to control and manipulate the virtual spaces that are used by protestors and activists for communication.

The Internet and social media can, of course, be used not only for organising mass protests on the streets and in city squares and parks but also for a variety of other political purposes. As has been noted already, young people below the age of 25 tend to use the Internet to access political information and news more frequently than older individuals (McLeod et al., 2010; Mesch & Coleman, 2007). They are also more likely than older people to use online platforms such as YouTube for watching political video clips such as speeches and interviews (Bennett, Freelon & Wells, 2010; Smith & Rainie, 2008). In addition, some young people themselves produce online political satires and parodies and upload them to YouTube or other platforms – if these become viral, they reduce the ability of political campaigns to manage their own messages (Gueorguieva, 2008). Other political uses of social media include joining political groups, receiving information about election candidates, and organising political events and meetings – in one study, nearly a third of American 18- to 29-year-olds were found to use social media for these kinds of political purposes (Smith & Rainie, 2008). Because the Internet and social media are so powerful and effective, both democratic and repressive regimes across the world that wish to minimise information dissemination and mass mobilisation during critical political times have banned or blocked their use within their countries, as has occurred, for example, in Egypt, Turkey and China (Howard, Agarwal & Hussain, 2011; King, Pan & Roberts, 2013; Roberts, 2016).

Another phenomenon based on digital technology that has been examined is that of game playing. Lenhart et al. (2008) found that 97% of American 12- to 17-year-olds play computer, web, portable or console games. They also found that for most of these teenagers, gaming was a social activity, with three-quarters of the respondents playing games with others rather than on their own, at least for some of the time. Lenhart et al. analysed the games that were played according to whether they provided ‘civic gaming experiences’, that is, experiences that involved simulations of civic actions, helping or guiding other players, participating in guilds or other groups associated with the game, learning about social issues or grappling with ethical issues. It was found that those youth that had encountered more of these civic experiences during gaming were also more engaged civically and politically. In particular, they were more likely to go online to get information about politics and current events, to give or raise money for charity, to stay informed about political issues or current events, to volunteer, to try to persuade others how to vote in an election, and to participate in a protest march or demonstration. In other words, it appeared that digital game playing that involved simulations of civic actions had helped to equip these teenagers with a wide range of civic and political skills and aptitudes that were being applied not just in the online world but in the offline world as well.

As noted already, in the mid-2000s, the patterns of use of social media for political purposes tended to reflect socio-economic, educational and gender differences in offline participation (McLeod et al., 2010; Mesch & Coleman, 2007). However, more recent research suggests that digital media may now be helping to reduce these inequalities. Indeed, fundamental changes may currently be occurring in political practices as youth take greater advantage of social media for political purposes. This conclusion emerges particularly clearly from a large-scale study conducted in the USA by Cohen, Kahne, Bowyer, Middaugh and Rogowski (2012; see also Bowyer & Kahne, 2016, and Luttig & Cohen, 2016). In 2011, they collected data from nearly 3,000 American youth aged between 15 and 25 years old, sampling not just white American youth but also black, Latino and Asian-American youth. Data were subsequently collected from subsets of the same respondents in 2013 and 2015.

Cohen et al. found that, in 2011, contrary to the traditional picture of a digital divide (i.e., a sharp divide between those who have ready access to digital technology and those who do not), 97% of the youth in their study had access to the Internet, while 78% used social media to send messages, share status updates or chat online at least once per week. The study also examined these youths' engagement in 'participatory politics'. This was defined as interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals or groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern. Examples of such acts include blogging, circulating political news, starting a new political group, creating petitions and mobilising one's social network on behalf of a cause. These acts need not occur online, although digital media do provide expanded opportunities for them. It was found that, in 2011, 41% of the youth had engaged in at least one act of participatory politics. Furthermore, participatory politics occurred in addition to more conventional forms of political engagement rather than replacing them: among young people who engaged in participatory politics, 90% had either voted or engaged in some other form of institutionalised politics.

Participatory politics was equitably distributed across the different ethnic groups in the study. In addition, it was found that young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to get their news from online media sources, while those from advantaged backgrounds were more likely to use traditional news sources instead. Those who obtained their news from more traditional sources were more likely to vote; by contrast, those who obtained their news through online media were more likely to protest business practices. This latter trend was most pronounced among the black, Latino and Asian-American youth who visited websites created by and for ethnic minority individuals. The data collected in 2015 further revealed that the young people who had increased their engagement in participatory politics the most between 2013 and 2015 were the ones who used social media for political purposes the most, and these were the minority groups and those who had the fewest socio-economic resources (Luttig & Cohen, 2016). In short, social media appeared to be mobilising young people for specific types of political activity, especially the most disadvantaged young people.

The same study also provided some clues about how social media were exerting this effect. In the survey, Cohen et al. asked their respondents about two distinct forms of online activity: friendship-driven activity and interest-driven activity. In the former, an individual uses social media for interacting with friends and family members (e.g., by posting status updates or tagging photos); in the latter, individuals engage online with their interests (e.g., by visiting websites about music, sports, fashion, etc. and communicating online with others who share those same interests). The survey found that 50% of young people engaged in friendship-driven activity every day, while 25% engaged in interest-driven activity every day. Bowyer and Kahne (2016) then examined how these two types of activity related to voting, offline political action and online political action. They found that friendship-driven activity in 2013 led to more online political activity in 2015. By contrast, interest-driven activity in 2013 led to more offline political activity in 2015 – those who participated in interest-driven activity in 2013 were more likely to have had someone online ask them to participate in politics, and those who had been asked to participate were then more likely to vote in the US elections that took place in 2014.

Despite these encouraging findings, there is still a debate about the value of digital acts of civic and political participation. Some authors (e.g., Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011) have argued that online participation only fosters low-cost, low-risk and low-impact activism – so-called ‘slacktivism’ or ‘clicktivism’ – which requires very little effort or cost, has little effect in the real world and lacks serious motivation but makes the person feel that they have engaged and made a contribution. Examples of such action include ‘liking’ or sharing political content on Facebook, signing online petitions, joining online organisations but without making any significant contribution to their activities, and using a slogan or avatar as a profile picture. The criticism is that such activities are not only ineffective in bringing about meaningful change but actually make individuals less likely to engage in other forms of civic and political activism that would be more effective. As we have seen, this last contention is probably incorrect. Bowyer and Kahne’s (2016) findings contradict it, as do the findings of a study by Ogilvy PR and Georgetown University’s Center for Social Impact Communication (2011): the latter found that those who support causes most often through social media (e.g., by joining a group dedicated to a cause on Facebook, blogging about a cause, or posting an icon on a social profile) in fact participate in more than twice as many civic and political activities (both online and offline) compared to people who do not use social media in this way.

Other criticisms that have been made of activism through social media are that:

- It encourages the oversimplification of complex issues
- It can lead to the uncritical acceptance of fake news and the insufficient vetting of information

- It encourages the ghettoization of discourse and the creation of ‘echo chambers’ or ‘filter bubbles’, with people only receiving information online that is consistent with their pre-existing beliefs
- The anonymity that can be used online makes it easy to insult, offend and even threaten other people

In the case of mass protests organised through social media, several additional criticisms have been made (see Tarkowski et al., 2011; Passini, 2012; and Kahne, Middaugh & Allen, 2014, for useful discussions of these). For example, it has been argued that:

- Such actions may be poorly coordinated due to the lack of formal organisers and leaders
- The lack of a traditional organisational hierarchy may also mean that there is little control of the forms of protest that are used and few constraints to prevent the hijacking of the protest by other groups
- Communications through social media rarely facilitate dialogue and the expression of minority ideas that do not conform to group norms, which can generate a false consensus
- Communications through social media do not adequately support meaningful negotiation and deliberation
- Social media communications may generate participation by people who have low motivation or commitment to the cause and who only have weak social links to other protestors

On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly clear that using social media does have many positive benefits for civic and political engagement (Kahne et al., 2014; Passini, 2012). These include:

- The speed of information dissemination
- The low financial costs that are incurred in communicating with large numbers of people
- Flexibility in the practical coordination of events such as flash-mobs and protests
- The potential for pluralism of information about issues and concerns, especially information that public authorities might be withholding, and for challenging the information monopoly of repressive governments
- Overcoming geographical distance and national borders in the dissemination of information and eyewitness accounts of protests and building global solidarity
- Obtaining external financial support

Given the rapid evolution of digital devices and social media platforms, one conclusion is certain: the creative ways in which young people use digital technology

will continue to develop in the future. And studies into young people's use of such technology in the pursuit of civic and political goals will no doubt continue to preoccupy social science researchers for many years to come.

The role of politicians and political parties

The final macro factor to be considered here is the role that politicians and political parties can play in mobilising youth. It has been known for many years that mobilisation by other people, especially politicians and political parties, is associated with people's levels of political activity. The same applies in the case of civic activity. Thus, being contacted and invited personally to vote or to participate in a political or civic process is a powerful predictor of subsequent participation (Green & Gerber, 2004; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Zukin et al., 2006). However, all too often, youth feel ignored by politicians and believe that their concerns and interests are regarded as being irrelevant, unimportant and trivial by those in power or by those seeking power. Under such circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that youth disengage from participating in conventional political activity.

This finding emerged especially clearly from focus groups that were conducted by PIDOP with both national majority and ethnic minority 16- to 26-year-olds in nine European countries (Barrett, 2012; Barrett & Zani, 2015b; see Table 1.2 in Chapter 1 for a list of the ethnic groups and countries involved). It was clear from the discussions that took place in these focus groups that most youth in these countries felt that politicians were not interested in their issues and concerns. In addition, many young people said that they did not bother to participate in civic and political matters because they distrusted politicians, who they viewed as cynically pursuing their own goals and interests, rarely keeping their promises to the electorate. Some youth also believed that many politicians employed stereotypes when thinking about youth and regarded youth as being so politically disengaged and alienated that it was not worth the effort of trying to engage with them; in response, the politicians themselves were then disregarded and ignored by the youth.

It is notable that when politicians do make significant efforts to engage actively with youth, then youth respond. There have been two occasions in the past decade when this strategy has been employed to good effect by politicians: by Barack Obama in 2008 in the USA, and by Jeremy Corbyn in 2017 in the UK.

In 2008, in addition to the traditional substantial advertising on television, the Obama campaign used social media to target youth on a significant scale, setting up blogging communities and Twitter feeds and distributing regular emails containing video clips that exhorted recipients to get involved by recruiting friends, organising campaign events and donating money (Bennett et al., 2010). Young voters were more likely to be contacted by the Obama campaign than by the opposing McCain campaign – 25% of voters aged 18–29 years old reported being contacted either in person or by phone on behalf of the Obama campaign,

whereas only 13% reported being contacted by the opposing McCain campaign. The disparity was even larger in some of the key battleground states, where more than half of the voters under the age of 30 said that they had been contacted by the Obama campaign (54% in Pennsylvania and 61% in Nevada) (Keeter, Horowitz & Tyson, 2008). Another notable feature of the campaign was the creative production of unofficial online videos by Obama supporters (rather than by his official campaign), some of which went viral and attracted many millions of views. The campaign was extraordinarily successful, with voting among 18- to 29-year-olds up to 53%, which was an increase of 4–5% on the 2004 election and 11% on the 2000 election. Furthermore, exit polls suggested that 70% of those aged under 30 had voted for Obama.

In the case of the 2017 general election in the UK, the Labour Party also deliberately targeted youth voters (Hobbs, 2017; Therrien, 2017). Social media were used to distribute advertisements with positive messages, which emphasised that the party was building a social movement for progressive change. In addition, Momentum – a Labour Party subgroup supporting Corbyn – created videos, many of which were parodies, as well as quirky entertaining posts, which were widely ‘liked’ and shared on social media, and some of which went viral. Momentum also mobilised young people into an army of canvassers, and set up a website that enabled activists to coordinate their canvassing activities in marginal seats. This led to young people who had no previous experience of canvassing to team up with more experienced canvassers. In addition, the Labour manifesto specifically targeted young people in its policy proposals (e.g., with a promise to abolish university tuition fees, reintroduce student maintenance grants, abolish zero-hours contracts and increase the minimum wage). Corbyn, with his emphasis on justice, fairness and human rights, was also endorsed by many anti-establishment celebrities and musicians, including from the world of grime (a UK music genre), which further bolstered Corbyn’s youth credentials. He also undertook interviews with youth music magazines and with a YouTube football channel, again specifically targeting youth audiences. The strategy had significant effects: the result of the election, in which the Conservatives had been expected to win a large increased majority, was a hung parliament, with Labour gaining 31 seats and the Conservatives losing 12 seats. Labour’s share of the youth vote increased significantly from the 2015 general election (Prosser, Fieldhouse, Green, Mellon & Evans, 2018). Among first-time voters (i.e., those aged 18 and 19 years), Labour was 47% ahead of the Conservatives, whereas among voters aged 70 or older, the Conservatives were ahead by 50% (YouGov, 2017). Perhaps most tellingly of all, the average age at which a voter was more likely to have voted Conservative rather than Labour was 47 years, an increase from 34 years at the start of the election campaign (YouGov, 2017). That said, there is also evidence that turnout among those aged 18–24 years did not increase on the scale that some newspapers and pundits claimed at the time, with the most significant increases in voter turnout actually being among those aged 25–44 years (Prosser et al., 2018).

Both the Obama campaign and the Corbyn campaign indicate that, when politicians and political parties pay attention to young people's views on civic and political matters, propose policies that address their concerns and use methods to communicate which youth themselves use to communicate with each other, then young people are more likely to support those politicians and parties. In other words, if politicians and political parties wish to gain support from young people, then they need to engage more actively with youth through relevant media, they need to treat their views and concerns with greater respect, and they need to propose policies that address the needs of young people. This is perhaps not a surprising conclusion, but it is one which politicians and political institutions should heed if they wish to enhance levels of youth engagement with conventional political processes.

Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed a wide range of macro factors that can influence youth civic and political engagement. These factors include: the patterns of political and civic engagement that are exhibited by adults within a country; the recent history and longevity of democracy within a country; the level of economic, educational and health development of a country; the extent to which human rights, the rule of law and government accountability apply within a country; national policies on migrant integration and naturalisation; national, regional or local policies on youth engagement; voting age; the provision of youth organisations within a country; the availability of a youth parliament within a country; the extent to which education policies and regulations foster the provision of effective citizenship education; the availability of digital technology and social media; and the extent to which politicians and political parties attempt to engage with and mobilise youth.

This review of the existing research into macro factors suggests that rather less research has been conducted into the relationship of macro factors to youth engagement than has been conducted into psychological, social and demographic factors, and much more research is required to enable us to properly understand how macro factors affect young people's engagement. Such research would benefit considerably from interdisciplinary collaboration involving political scientists, sociologists, policy analysts, educationalists and psychologists. As we noted earlier in this chapter, it is unlikely that many macro factors operate independently of social and demographic factors – it is instead much more likely that macro, demographic, social and psychological factors are intertwined in complex causal pathways, pathways that have not yet been properly investigated in any great depth to date. For this reason, interdisciplinary teams of social scientists would be ideal for undertaking investigations of these causal pathways involving multiple levels of factors.

In addition, a great deal of further research is required into the impact of the policy environment on youth civic and political engagement. As we have seen

in the case of policies on migrant integration, these can have significant effects on the civic and political activity of migrant youth by either facilitating or hindering their school education, and their participation in local communities and in conventional politics. In the case of educational policies, these too can either encourage and support youth in becoming active citizens (by providing them with suitable educational experiences to promote their civic and political knowledge and skills) or limit their capacities to engage civically and politically (by denying them these experiences). Likewise, youth policies can also either support youth engagement (by specifying high expectations of youth as active citizens and providing plentiful resources for youth organisations so that they can help to equip young people with the relevant skills and experience needed for meeting those expectations) or hinder their engagement (by having limited expectations of youth and withholding the necessary resources from youth organisations). However, even when very well-intentioned policies are in place, there can still be a significant gap between those policies and their actual implementation on the ground, as well as a further gap between the measures that are implemented and the perceptions of those measures by young people themselves. There is currently very little research into these various issues, and further investigations are required to understand the causal links that can exist between policies and youth engagement, the mediating role that young people's perceptions of policies can play in the process and the policy implementation gaps that can arise.

In addition, much more research is needed into the effects of youth parliaments, both on the youth who participate in them and on the youth who are excluded from them. There is a notable lack of research into (as opposed to official rhetoric about) the extent to which youth parliaments serve to enhance the civic and political skills of those who participate in youth parliaments, and into the attitudes and subsequent behaviours of those who are excluded from these parliaments. There is also a need to identify ways in which these parliaments can be made much more inclusive, rather than being populated by youth who are socio-economically and educationally advantaged, and ways to ensure that youth do not view these parliaments as being politically ineffective and irrelevant.

The role of the Internet and social media in youth civic and political engagement is another area that is in need of further investigation. Studies are required to monitor the changes that occur to youth engagement as digital technology continues to develop. Digital devices and social media platforms are rapidly evolving, and youth engagement will almost certainly continue to change in conjunction with this evolution. Studies using longitudinal and cohort sequential designs could be invaluable for understanding how digital technology impacts on the civic and political engagement of young people.

Finally, our review of the literature raises a crucial question about responsibility for the civic and political education of young people: whether this responsibility should lie with the state or with civil society or whether it should be a private or family matter. Because the research reveals that the state, civil society and the family can all be influential agents for fostering the civic and political

engagement of young people, there is a question about whether all three should share this responsibility equally or whether one or two of these agents should take the primary responsibility. The answer to this question will presumably vary depending on the cultural and ideological orientation of the person providing the answer. There are important political-normative issues here which would benefit from the attention of political theorists.

This chapter concludes our survey of the different levels of factors that are related to youth civic and political engagement. We have now seen that many different psychological, social, demographic and macro factors are linked to youth engagement. In the next chapter, we will integrate some of the main conclusions that have emerged from our survey and provide a more theoretical perspective. We will also summarise some of the actions that may be taken to promote youth civic and political engagement, drawing together the various lines of evidence that have been reviewed. In addition, we will describe a major policy initiative that is currently under way in Europe which is aimed at enhancing young people's levels of democratic engagement and participation through the harnessing of state education systems.