

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 1

Civic and Political Engagement Among Youth

Concepts, forms and factors

Martyn Barrett and Dimitra Pachi

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

1

CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AMONG YOUTH

Concepts, forms and factors

This book provides an introduction to youth civic and political engagement. It describes the forms that such engagement takes, how it develops, the factors that facilitate or inhibit its development and the actions that can be taken to promote and encourage the civic and political engagement of youth and empower them as active democratic citizens.

The book is distinctive in a number of respects. It draws on findings that have been obtained across a range of academic disciplines, including psychology, sociology, political science and education, and it explores the many different psychological, social, demographic and macro factors that are related to youth engagement. It also examines the inter-relationships between these various factors, reviewing findings that have been obtained in different national contexts and through multinational studies. The final chapter provides a theoretical synthesis of this large and diverse body of research, using an integrative multi-level ecological model of youth engagement in order to do so. Along the way, the book offers suggestions for future research that needs to be pursued in order to address a number of unresolved issues. We therefore hope that the book will prove useful to those who wish to obtain a comprehensive overview of the research that has been conducted in this field, those who wish to obtain a theoretical integration of what can sometimes feel like a plethora of disconnected findings and those who wish to pursue further research in the field.

In this opening chapter, we provide a guide to many of the concepts that will be used throughout the book. We define some of the key terms that will be used, outline the various forms that youth civic and political engagement can take and take note of the findings of recent studies into patterns of youth engagement. We also introduce the numerous factors that are related to youth engagement – these include psychological, social, demographic and macro factors. We outline

2 Civic and political engagement among youth

the inter-relationships between these four sets of factors and explain how different forms of participation are influenced by different subsets of factors. In addition, this chapter maps the various topics onto the remaining chapters in the book, to aid the reader's navigation of the subsequent chapters. This opening chapter therefore serves as an introduction to the book.

Some definitions

As a first step, it will be useful to clarify the meanings of some of the key terms that are used throughout the book. To start with, the term *youth* itself, which appears in the title of the book, is ambiguous. For example, the United Nations defines 'youth' as the period between 15 and 24 years when (it is claimed) individuals make the transition from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood. UNICEF defines 'young people' as the period of life that falls between 10 and 24 years, while the African Youth Charter defines 'youth' as the period that falls between 15 and 35 years (United Nations, 2014). An alternative view, advocated by the Council of Europe (2006), is based on the observation that the transition from childhood to early adulthood is actually a highly variable, non-linear, fragmented and sometimes extended process, with the transition to independent living in some contexts not taking place until 30 or even 35 years of age. For this reason, it is argued that it is preferable to leave the age-based definition of *youth* open. This book follows the latter approach and is similarly liberal in its use of the term, using it to denote the period of life that starts with early adolescence and extends through into early adulthood. The book will therefore draw broadly on evidence that has been collected about the civic and political engagement of young people across this entire period of life. Importantly, however, wherever possible, we will indicate the specific ages from which the evidence that is being discussed has been derived, so that appropriate conclusions can be drawn about young people's patterns of engagement at different ages.

The term *citizen*, which is used in the opening paragraph of this chapter, is another potentially ambiguous term. Following Barrett and Zani (2015a), we use this term to denote all individuals who are affected by political and civic decision-making and who can engage with political and civic processes through one means or another. This definition means that even those who are not legal citizens of the country in which they are living (e.g., first generation migrant youth who have not been naturalised and who therefore do not hold the passport of that country) are nevertheless citizens because they are affected by political and civic decision-making, and they are able to participate in political and civic processes through a number of means, including youth organisations, ethnic community organisations, pressure groups (e.g., anti-racist, human rights or environmental organisations) and Internet-based activism. This book therefore uses the term *citizen* with this broader meaning in mind.

The term *political engagement* is used throughout the book to refer to the engagement of an individual with political institutions, processes and decision-making. By contrast, the term *civic engagement* is used to refer to the engagement of an individual with the concerns, interests and common good of a community. Here, *community* denotes either the people living within a particular geographical area (e.g., a neighbourhood, a city, a country or a transnational area such as Europe or Africa, or the world in the case of the ‘global community’), a more geographically diffused cultural or social group (e.g., an ethnic group, a religious group, a recreational group, an occupational group or a sexual orientation group) or any other kind of cultural or social group which is salient to an individual and which therefore provides a site for that individual’s civic action.

Engagement usually involves some kind of participatory behaviour that is directed towards political institutions, political processes and public authorities (in the case of political engagement) or towards the fellow members of a community (in the case of civic engagement). However, not all engagement is exhibited through participatory behaviour. It is entirely possible to have an interest in and to have knowledge, opinions or feelings about political or civic matters without undertaking any action. In other words, individuals can be cognitively or affectively engaged without being behaviourally engaged. As we shall see, it has been found that some youths are indeed psychologically but not behaviourally engaged in precisely this way. In other words, lack of overt political or civic action cannot necessarily be interpreted as a sign of political and civic disengagement.

Very often, however, political and civic engagement does involve not only interest, opinions and feelings about political or civic matters but also active participatory behaviours. The term *political participation* is used in this book to denote those behaviours that are intended to influence political institutions, processes and decision-making at either the local, regional, national or supra-national level; these behaviours may be aimed either at influencing the selection of the people who make public policies and decisions, or at influencing the content of those policies and decisions (this definition is adapted from Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995).

Political participation can take many different forms. Some forms involve electoral processes and are called *conventional* forms of political participation. These include voting, election campaigning, donating money to a political party, standing for election, etc. Some forms of conventional political participation (such as voting) are institutionally denied to youth below a particular age (usually 18 years, although other ages between 16 and 21 years apply in a few countries around the world), sometimes with consequences for their feelings of exclusion from political decision-making.

However, there are many other forms of political participation that do not involve electoral processes and that can be undertaken by individuals of any age. These so-called *non-conventional* forms of political participation

4 Civic and political engagement among youth

include participating in political demonstrations, protests and marches, signing petitions, writing political articles or blogs, writing political graffiti on buildings, etc. Both conventional and non-conventional political participation can be undertaken either alone (e.g., voting, spraying political graffiti) or collectively in cooperation with other people (e.g., election campaigning, participating in a protest march about a particular issue). And some forms of political participation are legal (e.g., electoral campaigning, signing petitions) while others are illegal (e.g., spraying graffiti, throwing stones at a demonstration).

The term *civic participation* is used in this book to refer to activities that are focused on helping other people within a community, solving a community problem, working on behalf of a community or participating in the life of a community more generally (this definition is adapted from Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins & Delli Carpini, 2006). Once again, such activity can include work which is undertaken either alone (e.g., doing shopping for an ill neighbour, boycotting a product for environmental reasons) or in cooperation with others (e.g., attending a community meeting about an issue of concern, helping to renovate a facility such as a communal park in the neighbourhood).

Table 1.1 lists some of the numerous forms that political and civic engagement and participation can take.

In addition to engagement, however, young people can also be disengaged from both political and civic processes and may fail to display any of the characteristics that are shown in Table 1.1. As in the case of engagement, there are different forms of disengagement (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). For example, some young people may simply not have any interest in political matters, may regard all such matters as boring and may have no wish to participate in any forms of political action because such action is viewed as either irrelevant to their lives or a waste of time that can be much better devoted to more enjoyable, stimulating or rewarding activities instead. These young people may be characterised as *apolitical*.

However, other youth may be strongly *antipolitical* and vehemently refuse to engage with political matters, being resolutely opposed to any form of political action. For example, some youth may adopt this stance because they view politicians as corrupt, dishonest or self-serving, or because they believe that politicians have no interest in the views and lives of young people.

A parallel conceptual distinction can be drawn between young people who are *acivic* and young people who are *anticivic*, that is, between those who are simply not interested in participating in any activities with or on behalf of other people in the communities to which they belong, and those who are actively opposed to engaging with other people in their communities, perhaps because they are antisocial and mistrustful of other people.

Having outlined some of the terminology and conceptual distinctions that we will be using in this book, we now turn to some of the claims that have been made about the nature of youth civic and political engagement.

TABLE 1.1 Some of the different forms taken by conventional political participation, non-conventional political participation, civic participation and psychological engagement (reproduced from Barrett & Zani, 2015a, pages 5–6).

Forms of conventional political participation

- Voting
- Membership of a political party
- Running for political election
- Working on political election campaigns for candidates or parties
- Donating money to political parties
- Trying to persuade others to vote

Forms of non-conventional political participation

- Protests, demonstrations, marches
- Signing petitions
- Writing letters/emails to politicians or public officials
- Writing letters/emails/phone calls with a political content to the media (both old and new media)
- Writing articles/blogs with a political content for the media (both old and new media)
- Using social networking sites on the Internet to join or like groups which have a political focus
- Using social networking sites on the Internet to distribute or share links which have a political content to friends and contacts
- Wearing or displaying a symbol or sign representing support for a political cause
- Distributing leaflets which express support for a political cause
- Participating in fundraising events for a political cause
- Writing or spraying graffiti on walls which expresses support for a political cause
- Participating in other illegal actions (e.g., burning a national flag, throwing stones, rioting) in support of a political cause
- Membership of political lobbying and campaigning organisations/attending meetings of these organisations/expressing one's point of view at these meetings/participating in the activities of these organisations/holding an office in these organisations

Forms of civic participation

- Informally assisting the well-being of others in the community
 - Community problem-solving through community organisations/membership of community organisations/attending meetings of these organisations/expressing one's point of view at these meetings/participating in the activities of these organisations/holding an office in these organisations
 - Membership of other non-political organisations (e.g., religious institutions, sports clubs)/attending meetings of these organisations/expressing one's point of view at these meetings/participating in the activities of these organisations/holding an office in these organisations
 - School-based community service
 - Undertaking organised voluntary work
 - Translation and form-filling assistance for non-native speakers
 - Sending remittances to others living elsewhere
 - Donations to charities
 - Fundraising activities for good causes
 - Consumer activism: boycotting and buycotting (preferential buying)
-

(Continued)

TABLE 1.1 (Continued)*Forms of psychological engagement*

- Paying attention to or following political or civic events
- Having political or civic knowledge or beliefs
- Holding opinions about political or civic matters
- Having feelings about political or civic matters
- Having political or civic skills
- Understanding political or civic institutions
- Understanding or holding political or civic values

Is there a crisis of youth civic and political engagement?

Many researchers and commentators have noted that youth who are eligible to vote in national elections do so less frequently than older generations (e.g., International IDEA, 2004; Macedo, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Youth are also less likely to be registered to vote than older generations. Furthermore, the percentage of youth who vote in national elections across the Western developed democracies has been in steady decline since the 1970s. These patterns have given rise to the claim that the future of democracy in these countries is in jeopardy. This is a consequence of the fact, so the claim goes, that political engagement in later life is rooted in the habits that are developed in youth, and the youth of today will eventually become the older generation of tomorrow. An accompanying worry is that, because youth fail to vote in sufficient numbers, those who are elected to positions of power do not represent youth and will inevitably undervalue or overlook the views of youth in their decision-making processes.

However, as we have seen, voting is only one form of political and civic engagement. And it has been argued by other commentators that while young people's commitment to conventional political participation is indeed currently in decline, young people nevertheless still remain committed to non-conventional and civic forms of participation. Indeed, many authors have suggested that to construe voting as the principal form of political engagement is to fundamentally misunderstand the way in which young people today conceptualise the political domain and the role of alternative forms of engagement. These authors argue that politicians and political institutions are often perceived by young people as having little interest in their views and concerns, with the result that many youth feel marginalised by and excluded from the conventional political arena. For this reason, they seek out and use alternative forms of civic and political engagement instead (Dalton, 2008; Forbrig, 2005; O'Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones & McDonagh, 2003; Zukin et al., 2006).

Hence, this counter-argument continues, declining levels of voting among youth need to be balanced against other evidence which suggests that non-conventional political and civic participation are still used by many young people today. Whereas in the past, issues of concern might have mobilised them into voting for particular candidates in elections or writing to their elected

representatives, nowadays these issues might instead be tackled through consumer activism, protests and demonstrations, activity on the Internet, charitable fundraising and voluntary work in the community. Therefore, even though in many countries youth are less likely than they were in the past to vote, to be a member of a political party or to campaign on behalf of political parties during an election, these phenomena are not indicative of civic and political disengagement or apathy. Instead, they are a consequence of young people's sense that politicians and political institutions are not interested in their concerns and interests and do not address their needs. For this reason, they employ a different pattern of activism to support the causes that are of relevance and matter to them.

A great deal of evidence has now been collected which supports this view. For example, Marsh, O'Toole and Jones (2007) conducted interviews with British youth aged 16 to 25 years old. The interviews revealed that, although the majority would not consider voting in an election, these youth felt passionately about many issues, including education, employment, housing and the lack of facilities for young people in their local communities. However, they felt that no one was interested in finding out what they thought about these various matters or encouraged them to express their views, and the denial of voting to 16- and 17-year-olds was viewed as simply confirming the lack of interest that politicians had in finding out about and addressing the views and needs of young people.

Similar findings have been obtained in the USA. For example, in a study of 18- to 25-year-old American college students, Kiesa et al. (2007) found that most students said that voting was not an effective way to achieve change and expressed distrust of and dissatisfaction with the political system which they viewed as being inefficient, corrupt, self-serving, unresponsive to citizens' needs and counter to the genuine welfare of citizens. However, despite this dissatisfaction with the political system, many students still wanted to engage with public policy and did not dismiss politics from their lives. The problem was that they perceived the political system as being inaccessible to them, largely because their elected representatives did not consider their views to be important and therefore did not listen to them. At the same time, the students reported that they undertook voluntary work in a large variety of areas, including education, healthcare, poverty/welfare, the environment and human rights, with most of them viewing this kind of activity as one of their responsibilities so that they could help others and make things better in society. While some students did list national or international issues as being of concern to them, many more undertook volunteering action in their local areas instead. The students did not eschew politics as such but saw no clear way to access the system and felt that they could not have any influence through that route, and they therefore sought out volunteering instead as a way to have an impact, to effect change and to improve the lives of other people.

A further striking example of the disconnection in young people's lives between conventional political participation on the one hand and non-conventional political and civic engagement on the other hand comes from the

region of Galicia in Spain (Blanch, 2005). Youth in Galicia typically display low levels of interest in politics, with more than three-quarters of youth aged 15 to 29 years old declaring that politics has little or no importance in their lives. Political disaffection takes the form of frustration and distrust over voting, being listened to by politicians and political parties, and being able to affect government policies. However, in 2002, the oil tanker *MV Prestige* sank off the coast of Galicia with 50,000 tonnes of oil being spilt, leading to a major environmental disaster in which hundreds of kilometres of coastline on the Spanish, French and Portuguese coasts were polluted. The contamination threatened to destroy the environment, fishing industry and tourism in Galicia. Major demonstrations over the oil spills took place in the Galician cities of Santiago and Vigo (involving 200,000 protestors in the former city and 130,000 in the latter), with the large majority of those participating in the demonstrations being youth and college students, and 325,000 people volunteered to take part in the environmental clean-up operation. Despite these enormous levels of non-conventional political and civic engagement, patterns of voting in subsequent elections did not show any indication of having been affected. This was despite extensive calls for the ruling party to be removed from power due to their poor performance during the crisis.

A fourth example is provided by the work of Weller (2007), who studied younger adolescents, British 13- to 16-year-olds. She found that over one-third of these teenagers had already engaged in civic activities, for example, by participating in local campaigns, planning local events (such as painting murals), maintaining local music events and involvement in bidding for money to improve the local environment. Although much of the engagement of these teenagers took place at the local level, many of them also considered the global dimensions of engagement and the possibility of connections with other youth elsewhere in the world, especially through the Internet and text messaging. Some respondents also firmly challenged the notion of teenage apathy and provided suggestions on how teenagers' contributions to their communities could be increased. However, 81% of them said that they had never been asked for their opinion on a local issue and had not had any opportunities to contribute to decision-making by the local council, despite the fact that they were extremely keen to express their opinions on those issues that were relevant to their lives. Furthermore, when the minority of youths who had participated in local consultations were questioned, it was found that these consultations were viewed as ineffective and tokenistic because they had rarely resulted in any real action. The frustration and resentment experienced by these teenagers rendered their active participation and involvement in the community problematic, and they largely construed political participation as an activity that only concerned adults.

In other words, there is ample research evidence which suggests that: (i) youth are far from apathetic when it comes to political and civic engagement; (ii) they experience the conventional political arena as one that marginalises and excludes them and perceive politicians as having very little interest in the views or needs

of young people; (iii) they regard voting as one of the least effective ways of achieving change; and (iv) they view civic and non-conventional political forms of engagement as being much more effective for having an impact in the world.

The shift towards issue-based activism

A further interesting characteristic of youth engagement at the present time concerns the specific topics upon which youth activism tends to be focused. In the past, in Western democracies, political activism was very much focused on party politics, especially voting and sometimes party membership and campaigning for a specific party during elections, and such activism was primarily aimed at influencing the composition of government and public policymaking. However, many youth today simply sidestep any engagement with mainstream political parties as a consequence of their frustration with and cynicism about politicians and conventional political processes. Instead, they tend to focus their energies on single issues or causes about which they have strong feelings. Specific issues that commonly attract the attention of youth in this way include global warming, pollution, global poverty, the use of low-wage labour in third world countries, the greed of multinational corporations, human rights (at the global level); income inequalities, political corruption, youth unemployment, gender equality, gay rights, health care (at the national level); and graffiti, litter, unsafe streets, transport facilities, recycling facilities and youth amenities (at the local level) (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Kiesa et al., 2007; Marsh et al., 2007; Norris, 2002, 2003; Torney-Purta, 2009; Weller, 2007).

Young people's interest in and enthusiasm for such issues typically occurs on a case-by-case basis and is not usually organised through any formal political institution. However, their activism may be channelled and focused through special interest groups such as Oxfam, Amnesty International or Friends of the Earth. Initial engagement typically takes place through the Internet and social media, which are used for obtaining information, before the organisations concerned are approached offline. Importantly, the issues that are selected as the focus for action are usually experienced as having considerable personal meaning for those who engage with them, and they tend to be selected and shaped by young people's own lifestyles, identities and values as well as by the social networks through which they commonly interact and participate. And the particular forms of participation that are undertaken are often the ones that have the most relevance and meaning from the perspective of their own everyday lives, experiences and practices.

Voting remains important

In short, there is abundant evidence that a shift has taken place in youth political and civic engagement in recent times. This shift has involved a decline in levels of conventional political participation, an increase in levels of non-conventional

political and civic participation and greater attention being paid to single-issue causes. That said, it would be misleading to overemphasise this shift. This is because quantitative studies have revealed that, while levels of voting among young people are currently at a historic low in Western democracies and are significantly lower than those exhibited by older generations, voting nevertheless remains a commonly used form of participation by young people.

This finding emerges clearly from a study by Sloam (2016), who looked at five different types of participation – voting in the previous national parliamentary election, displaying a badge or sticker, signing a petition, joining a boycott and participating in a demonstration. Analysing data collected from 15- to 24-year-olds in 15 European countries, Sloam found that voting tends to be the single most common form of participation among young Europeans in this age range. This finding held up in every country, including those that have exceptionally low proportions of young people turning out to vote in national elections (i.e., Luxembourg, Ireland and the UK – in all three countries, only about 37% of individuals in this age range vote). Indeed, on average across all 15 countries, 58.9% of youth voted in the previous election, whereas the frequencies of the other forms of participation were 24.7% for signing a petition, 14.2% for participating in a demonstration, 14% for joining a boycott and 11.1% for displaying a badge or sticker. Hence, despite the shift that has taken place in youth political and civic engagement in recent times, voting nevertheless still remains a commonly used form of participation by young people within Europe.

That said, voting is a relatively low-effort and low-cost form of participation. Once a person is registered to vote, the act of voting in a national election usually only involves contributing a few minutes of one's time in order to visit a polling station once every few years (or, in the case of a postal vote, ticking a box on a form and returning it through the post). As such, the effort involved can perhaps be compared to signing a petition, which is also a very simple and undemanding action to take. By contrast, participating in a demonstration is much more demanding and requires greater time, effort and commitment. Thus, in interpreting these figures, it is important to factor in the relative ease of engaging in the various forms of action.

The concept of the standby citizen

Amnå and Ekman (2014, 2015) have recently put forward a different perspective on the current characteristics of youth civic and political engagement. They argue that many young people can be classified as *standby citizens*. The concept of a standby citizen is based on the idea that a person may have an interest in political issues, follow political news in newspapers or on TV or the Internet, have political knowledge and hold informed opinions on many political matters but not engage in any forms of political action. Amnå and Ekman suggest that it is wrong to characterise such people as politically passive or politically uninvolved, and these individuals are certainly not politically apathetic. They are instead

monitoring political events in a critical manner. Or, to use the terminology that was introduced earlier in this chapter, these individuals are psychologically but not behaviourally engaged.

Amnå and Ekman suggest that one reason why some individuals may adopt this orientation is because they have a high level of trust in the political system and in their political representatives who have been elected to make decisions on public policies. Their low level of participation therefore reflects rational decision-making: why spend time engaging with the system when that system is trusted to make decisions that are in the best interests of the people being governed? It is only when there is a reason to intervene (e.g., because it is thought that poor decisions are being made) that such citizens will become active and take up conventional and non-conventional forms of political participation.

While this characterisation of the standby citizen sounds far removed from the patterns of attitudes and behaviours reviewed in the preceding sections, Amnå and Ekman (2014) present evidence to support their argument. In a study of Swedish 16-year-olds, they found that these individuals fell into four distinct groups in terms of their citizenship orientations: (i) active youths, who were high on measures of both political interest and political participation; (ii) standby youths, who were high on interest but were significantly lower on participation; (iii) disengaged youths, who were very low on both interest and participation; and (iv) disillusioned youths, who were the lowest of all the four groups on political interest and also low on participation. In other words, Amnå and Ekman found that young people who do not participate politically can be differentiated empirically into three separate categories, with ‘standby’ youths being those who stay alert, keep themselves informed about politics and are willing and able to participate if needed.

Interestingly, in this Swedish sample, the standby category formed the single largest group, representing nearly 50% of the 16-year-olds who were studied. It remains to be seen whether a similar proportion of youths living in other political contexts show this particular profile – it may be that the well-functioning Scandinavian democracies form a special case. Amnå and Ekman note that, in recent times, political parties in Sweden have become increasingly ‘professional’ and no longer require members for their organisation or funding due to the provision of state grants. For this reason, members of political parties have effectively been made redundant, with ordinary citizens being assigned the role of audience rather than participant in the political system. Thus, Swedish political parties have been implicitly transmitting the message that while they want people to turn out and vote for them in elections, they do not want them to be involved any further in the everyday business of politics. For this reason, the pattern found by Amnå and Ekman may be specific to political systems with these kinds of characteristics and may not generalise to other countries which have other kinds of political systems (and, indeed, the pattern may also be specific to a particular period in Scandinavian history which is currently drawing to a close). We will return to this issue of possible differences in patterns of youth civic and political engagement from one country to another later on.

The factors that are related to patterns of youth civic and political engagement

There has been much research over the past 50 years into the factors that are related to young people's patterns of civic and political engagement. This body of research has shown that these factors can be classified into four main types: psychological, social, demographic and macro.

Psychological factors include, for example, having political knowledge and paying attention to political issues, both of which tend to be (contra Amnå and Ekman) consistent predictors of both political and civic participation (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Zukin et al., 2006). A further very important psychological factor is internal political efficacy (often called more simply 'internal efficacy'). This is the self-belief that one can understand and participate effectively in politics. Internal efficacy is strongly related to having an interest in political issues, and people who have high levels of internal efficacy and high levels of interest in politics tend to show high levels of all forms of participation (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Brunton-Smith, 2011). Other important psychological factors that have been linked to civic and political participation are trust (e.g., the belief that societal and political institutions will generally operate in ways that are beneficial rather than detrimental to people) and emotions (e.g., anger about a perceived social injustice, feeling a humanitarian obligation to help other people, enjoyment in helping others). All of these psychological factors, and more, are discussed at length in Chapter 2 of this book.

In addition to these psychological factors, there are many different *social factors* that are related to civic and political engagement. First, *parental behaviour* is linked in numerous ways to young people's patterns of civic and political engagement. For example, individuals whose parents engage in civic volunteering have higher levels of civic and political participation, are more attentive to news about government and politics and are more likely to engage in consumer activism, while individuals who have frequent political discussions with their parents are more likely to volunteer and to vote (Zukin et al., 2006). In addition, parents' levels of political knowledge predict their offspring's levels of political knowledge (Jennings, 1996), while individuals whose parents engage in protests are also more likely to participate in protests (Jennings, 2002).

Education is a further social factor that is related to civic and political engagement (Emler & Frazer, 1999; Nie, Junn & Stehlik-Barry, 1996). Students who attend schools that provide training in civic skills (e.g., in letter writing and debating) are more likely to be involved in organisations outside school, to sign petitions, to participate in boycotts, to follow political news, to engage in charitable fundraising and to attend community meetings (Zukin et al., 2006). In addition, if there is an open classroom climate at school which enables young people to raise and investigate ethical, social, civic and political issues and explore their opinions and those of their peers within the classroom, they acquire a higher level of political interest, trust and

political knowledge (Hahn, 1998; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Losito, Agrusti & Friedman, 2017; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald & Schulz, 2001). In addition, the emphasis that is placed on voting and elections in school classes is a further significant predictor of young people's future voting intentions (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Links have also been found between civic and political engagement and *peer group relationships*. For example, civic and political participation is related to having positive relationships with peers and to having friends who are involved in civic and political activities (Silva, Sanson, Smart & Toumbourou, 2004; Rossi, Lenzi, Sharkey, Vieno & Santinello, 2016; Wentzel & McNamara, 1999), and when youth feel a sense of solidarity with peers at school, they are more likely to commit to civic and political goals and values (Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo & Sheblanova, 1998).

Another social factor related to civic and political engagement is *membership of youth, community and religious organisations*. For example, involvement in youth or community organisations in which the young person is able to take on specific roles (such as helping to organise activities and leadership roles) is related to prosocial-oriented political and civic participation (Albanesi, Cicognani & Zani, 2007; Quintelier, 2008). Belonging to religious organisations seems to be particularly important: youth with high levels of religious attendance and religious activity are more likely to be civically and politically active (Crystal & DeBell, 2002; Youniss, McClellan, Su & Yates, 1999).

In summary, many different social factors are related to the civic and political engagement of youth, including parental behaviour, educational practices in schools, peer group relationships, and membership of civic organisations. All of these social factors are reviewed in detail in Chapter 3 of this book.

Young people's patterns of civic and political engagement are also related to three main *demographic factors*: socio-economic status (SES), gender and ethnicity. Individuals with higher SES tend to have higher overall levels of both civic and political participation (Hart, Atkins & Ford, 1998; Zukin et al., 2006). There are also sometimes gender differences in political knowledge and political interest, and in the specific forms of participation that are undertaken by male and female youth (Bennett & Bennett, 1989; Vroman, 2003; Wolak & McDevitt, 2011). In addition, ethnic minority and ethnic majority individuals participate in different kinds of volunteer activities, with the former participating more in activities relating to their own ethnic community and to other minorities (Stepick, Stepick & Labissiere, 2008). Generational status of migrant and ethnic minority individuals is linked to patterns of participation as well: for example, the first generation is less likely to be registered to vote than later generations (Stepick et al., 2008) and is also less participative in terms of actual voting, volunteering and boycotting when compared with majority group individuals (Lopez & Marcelo, 2008). By contrast, the second generation is sometimes more civically and politically active than individuals belonging to the majority ethnic group (Lopez & Marcelo, 2008; Stepick & Stepick, 2002).

Chapter 3 reviews the relationship between youth civic and political engagement and SES, gender and ethnicity in detail.

Finally, young people’s patterns of engagement are related to *macro factors*. Macro factors include the historical, cultural and economic characteristics of the country in which the young person is living, and the structure and design of the political institutions within that country. For example, young people’s trust in political and legal institutions is higher in countries that have longstanding democratic traditions; however, the importance that young people attribute to voting and joining a political party is higher in countries in which democratic institutions have been strengthened in the previous 30 years (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). In addition, youth in countries that have a high level of economic development have more political knowledge than youth who live in countries that have a low level of economic development (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito, 2010; Schulz et al., 2017). As far as institutional design is concerned, youth participation is higher in countries that have institutional structures in place to hold the government accountable for its actions and to ensure and protect the rule of law, human rights and civil liberties (Brunton-Smith, 2011; Brunton-Smith & Barrett, 2015). The role of macro factors such as these are reviewed in detail in Chapter 4 of this book.

Relationships between the factors that are linked to youth civic and political engagement

The factors that are linked to youth civic and political engagement usually do not operate in isolation from one another – instead, they are frequently inter-related (see Figure 1.1).

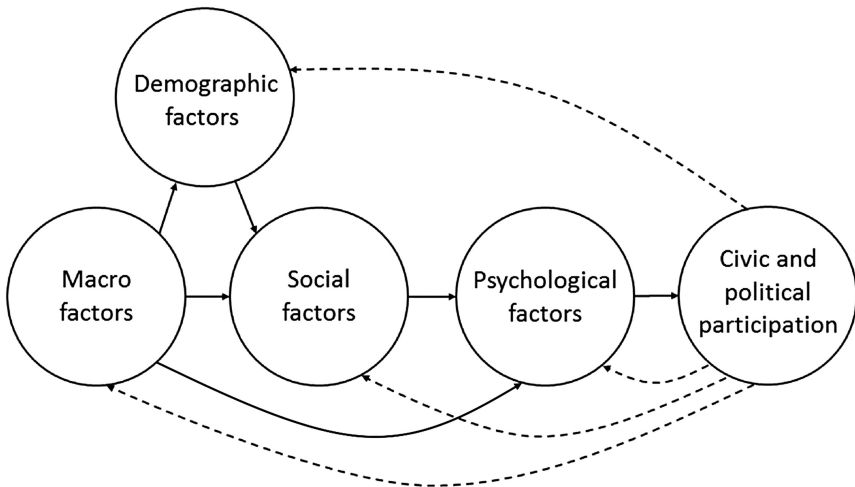


FIGURE 1.1 The inter-relationships between macro, demographic, social and psychological factors, and their relationship to civic and political participation

For example, macro factors are often linked to both demographic and social factors. This applies most obviously in the case of the economic characteristics of a country. The level of economic development of a country (a macro factor) influences the economic positioning of the individuals who live within that country (a demographic factor) and thus the amount of time and money that they are able to devote to political activity (Brady, Verba & Schlozman, 1995). In addition, a country's level of economic development is related to expenditure on education and the quality of educational provision within that country (IES, 2015), with the quality of educational provision affecting young people's experiences at school (a social factor). Macro factors are also sometimes linked to psychological factors. For example, in the case of a youth who is personally contacted by a political party during an election campaign, or a youth who participates in a country's youth parliament, the first-hand experience that is obtained through the direct contact with the political institution (a macro factor) may affect his or her attitudes to conventional political processes (a psychological factor), and this effect can be either positive or negative (Green & Gerber, 2004; Turkie, 2010).

Demographic factors are also often linked to social factors. For example, SES (a demographic factor) is commonly related to the quality of the schooling that an individual receives (a social factor) and hence to the level of educational achievement by that individual (OECD, 2012). Educational achievement, in turn, is linked to subsequent employment (if indeed an individual manages to find employment, which is not always a given), and the type of employment that an individual undertakes (a further social factor) is related to the acquisition and maintenance of the knowledge and skills that are needed for civic and political participation (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980; Verba et al., 1995). In addition, education affects individuals' social networks and their ability to occupy positions of influence in civic life, which in turn are linked to individuals' patterns of civic and political participation (Nie et al., 1996). In other words, a demographic factor such as SES can have widespread ramifications on social factors and hence on outcomes.

Social factors are also related to psychological factors. For example, adolescents whose parents are interested in political and social issues have higher levels of interest in these issues themselves as well as higher levels of political knowledge (Schulz et al., 2010), and a family ethic of social responsibility predicts young people's levels of civic commitment (Flanagan et al., 1998).

Finally, psychological factors are related to patterns of civic and political participation. For example, interest in politics, political knowledge and internal efficacy are all usually related to levels of participation (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Brunton-Smith, 2011; Zukin et al., 2006).

However, it is important not to neglect the fact that participating in civic and political action itself can have effects on psychological, social, demographic and macro factors (the dashed arrows in Figure 1.1). For example, participating in collective protests is often perceived as an empowering experience which increases the sense of internal efficacy and reinforces a sense of identification with the group that has organised the protest (Drury & Reicher, 2009).

Participating in civic and political action can also have effects on other people within one's social environment. For example, young people may engage in civic or political activity about a particular issue which is of concern to them, perhaps as a result of a school project or a project run by a youth organisation, and they may then initiate political discussions at home with their parents about the issue, which prompts the parents to pay greater attention to news media, obtain new knowledge and construct new opinions (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002).

In addition, participating in civic and political action can have an effect on an individual's demographic situation. For example, people sometimes freely volunteer their time for community work for self-focused rather than other-focused reasons, such as enlarging their social networks, learning new skills, gaining experience or gaining qualifications in order to better compete in the employment market (Dean, 2015; Omoto & Snyder, 2002); this in turn can then help them to enhance their own demographic situation.

Finally, participating in civic and political action can have effects on macro factors as well. Arguably the most dramatic example here is provided by the widespread demonstrations and protests in the Middle East which came to be known as the Arab Spring, which began in December 2010 and continued through 2011 into 2012. These acts of political protest by young people on the streets of numerous cities in the Middle East and North Africa brought about considerable changes in the macro political conditions of many countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria (Haseeb, 2012; Herrera & Sakr, 2014).

Thus, the various factors at the psychological, social, demographic and macro levels do not operate independently of one another, and the causal routes through which these factors impact on young people's civic and political engagement can be complex. This complexity raises issues concerning the actions that may be taken to enhance young people's engagement with civic and political issues and boost their levels of active participation. We will return to these issues when we discuss possible interventions in Chapter 5.

Intersectionality

In considering the nature of youth civic and political engagement, it is also important not to oversimplify the nature of young people's lives and reduce them to a one-dimensional caricature based solely on their age. It is true that there are profound differences between the lives, perspectives and activities of a 16-year-old who is still in full-time education and a 25-year-old who has entered the world of work, but there can also be profound differences between the lives of males and females, and between the lives of ethnic majority and ethnic minority youths. However, much more subtly even than all of these broad distinctions, the lives – and hence the civic and political views and concerns – of young people are often specific to particular subgroups of youths who are defined in terms of the intersection between their country, ethnicity, gender and age.

An illustration of this was found in a study by Pachi, Garbin and Barrett (2011), which was carried out as part of a large multinational study called PIDOP, which examined youth civic and political engagement in nine European countries (Barrett, 2012; Barrett & Zani, 2015b). Pachi et al. conducted focus groups with British Bangladeshi, British Congolese and English youth aged 16 to 26 years who lived in London, discussing civic and political issues which were of concern to them and the forms of action which they would take. The topic of women's rights came up in these focus groups, where differences of opinion occurred not unexpectedly between female and male participants. However, gender differences in views about women's rights were far more pronounced among female Bangladeshis, many of whom deplored their parents' traditional cultural view that women should stay mainly in the domestic environment and not get involved socially or politically in the public sphere. In other words, an issue which was of the most profound importance to the female Bangladeshi participants was largely absent from the discourse of the male Bangladeshi participants and not especially pronounced in the discourse of the female and male Congolese and English participants. At the same time, however, there were differences between the younger and the older Bangladeshi girls in terms of the forms of political participation which they thought were acceptable: for example, younger Bangladeshi girls rejected illegal non-conventional forms of expression such as spraying graffiti on official buildings because of their illegality, whereas older Bangladeshi girls accepted these forms of action, especially for tackling local issues, as did both the younger and the older Bangladeshi boys. In other words, the views of these young people were specific to particular subgroups defined in terms of the three-way intersection between ethnicity, gender and age.

The importance of considering the specific concerns of individuals who occupy particular demographic niches as defined by the intersection of several demographic categories was confirmed by the subsequent quantitative research that was conducted by PIDOP, in which survey data about civic and political participation by 16- to 26-year-olds were collected from individuals belonging to the national majority group and two ethnic minority groups in nine countries (Barrett & Zani, 2015b). There was very considerable variability in the data both between countries and between ethnic groups within individual countries. It was also clear that this variability could not be reduced to differences between the members of the majority national group and the members of the minority ethnic groups within individual countries, as there were significant differences between the two minority groups within each country, and also within each individual majority and minority group as a function of both age and gender. In other words, the participatory behaviours of young people (and indeed the factors that predicted those behaviours) were often specific to particular subgroups defined in terms of the intersection between country, age, gender and ethnicity (e.g., in Portugal, specific to younger females from an Angolan background, or to older males from a Brazilian background).

In other words, it is important to be cautious in making generalisations about youth civic and political engagement. We need to be attentive to the specific groups of young people from which data have been gathered and especially attentive to possible differences in the experiences and concerns of groups that are defined in terms of intersections between demographic categories. This applies especially when it comes to efforts to identify actions that can be used to enhance levels of civic and political participation among youth. This is an important issue to which we will return in Chapter 5 of this book.

Different subsets of factors are linked to the different forms of participation

The findings from PIDOP also serve to underline a further point about the nature of youth civic and political engagement. The project revealed not only considerable cross-group variability in the patterns of political and civic participation that were displayed according to the intersection of country, ethnicity, gender and age – there was also a great deal of variability in the specific subsets of psychological and social factors that were linked to the different forms of participation. In other words, different constellations of factors were related to the different forms of participation.

This finding was obtained both in the nine-nation survey (Barrett & Zani, 2015b) and also in the secondary analysis of data from other existing large-scale datasets such as the European Social Survey (ESS) (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Brunton-Smith, 2011; Brunton-Smith & Barrett, 2015). For example, the secondary analyses revealed that different subsets of factors are linked to voting, to forms of conventional political participation other than voting, to non-conventional political participation and to civic participation. Thus, a high level of attentiveness to political issues was linked to a higher tendency to vote and to participate civically, but was simultaneously linked to a *lower* tendency to engage in non-conventional political participation. It was also found that a high level of the belief that public and political officials and institutions are responsive to citizens' demands (i.e., a high level of what is called *external political efficacy*) was not systematically linked to voting behaviour, but was systematically related to forms of conventional political behaviour other than voting and to non-conventional political behaviour – people who had a high level of external efficacy exhibited high levels of conventional political activity other than voting as well as high levels of non-conventional political activity. In other words, depending on the specific type of participation being examined, different subsets of factors were operating. As we will see in Chapter 2, this same finding has been obtained in other studies as well.

Importantly, these findings indicate that boosting some psychological factors through, for example, educational interventions (e.g., to increase the political

attentiveness of young people) might have a positive impact on some forms of participation (e.g., voting and civic participation) but might simultaneously have a negative impact on other forms (e.g., non-conventional political participation). Once again, this means that we need to exercise caution in developing interventions, especially if the goal is to develop robust interventions for enhancing levels of all forms of youth civic and political participation. The implications of these findings concerning the specificity of links between predictors and specific forms of participation are discussed further in Chapter 5.

Civic and political engagement always takes place within specific contexts

One final very important caution also needs to be flagged here. Young people's civic and political concerns are always formed within specific contexts that are situated within particular locations and at particular points in historical time, and their civic and political participatory behaviour is therefore also likely to be specific to those particular locations and times. For this reason, it is important to be careful about generalising from the results of any single study and assuming that the findings will necessarily apply to youth living in other contexts.

This caution gains additional force from the fact that the vast majority of studies that are available within the research literature in this field have been conducted in Western democracies. The lives, concerns and range of political and civic activities that young people undertake in Western democracies will be very different from those of youth living under other types of political regimes or in very different cultural conditions. We also cannot assume that findings that are obtained from youth living in one particular democracy will apply to youth living in another democracy, given that there are so many institutional, social and cultural factors that vary from one country to another. Hence, multinational studies, where data are collected from a number of different countries, are especially important sources of evidence in this field. Examples of such studies are CIVED (Torney-Purta et al., 2001), ICCS 2009 (Schulz et al., 2010), ICCS 2016 (Schulz et al., 2017) and PIDOP (Barrett, 2012; Barrett & Zani, 2015b). All of these studies collected their data in multiple countries (see Table 1.2), and for this reason their findings are especially important and noteworthy.

Hence, throughout this book, whenever we discuss the findings from a particular study, we have tried to provide not only information about the specific ages of the youth who were involved in the study but also information about the countries where those youth were living. The aim here is twofold: to alert the reader to the possible specificity of the findings, and to encourage the reader to reflect on the extent to which the reported findings may or may not be applicable to youth living in other contexts.

TABLE 1.2 The countries in which data were collected in CIVED, ICCS 2009, ICCS 2016 and PIDOP; the PIDOP listing also includes the national and ethnic groups within each country from which data were collected.

CIVED 1999 (Torney-Purta et al., 2001)

Australia, Belgium (French-speaking community), Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong SAR, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, United States

ICCS 2009 (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito, 2010)

Austria, Belgium (Flemish-speaking community), Bulgaria, Chile, Chinese Taipei, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, England, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Guatemala, Hong Kong SAR, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Republic of Korea, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Paraguay, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand

ICCS 2016 (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Losito, Agrusti & Friedman, 2017)

Belgium (Flemish-speaking community), Bulgaria, Chile, Chinese Taipei, Colombia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hong Kong, Italy, Republic of Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Sweden (with additional data also collected in Croatia, North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), Peru)

PIDOP (Barrett, 2012; Barrett & Zani, 2015b)

Belgium (French-speaking community): Belgians, Turks, Moroccans

Czech Republic: Czechs, Roma, Ukrainians

England: English, Congolese, Bangladeshis

Germany: Germans, German resettlers from Russia, Turks

Italy: Italians, Albanians, Moroccans

Northern Ireland: Northern Irish Catholics, Northern Irish Protestants, Chinese, Polish

Portugal: Portuguese, Brazilians, Angolans

Sweden: Swedes, Kurds of Turkish background, Iraqis

Turkey: Turks, Roma, Turkish resettlers from Bulgaria

Conclusions

This chapter has provided an introduction to many of the themes and issues that are discussed at greater length throughout the remainder of this book. In particular, it has described the various forms that young people's civic and political participation can take, described recent changes in the forms of participation that are used by young people, outlined four groups of factors that are related to such participation (i.e., psychological, social, demographic and macro factors) and explained the inter-connections that can exist between these factors. This chapter has also sought to emphasise the complexity of youth civic and political engagement: young people's civic and political concerns are very much tied to their everyday lives and to their own specific social situation and context as defined by the intersection of their country, ethnicity, gender and age, and the

different forms of participation which they adopt can be influenced by different constellations of factors.

Chapter 2, which follows, examines the role of psychological factors in greater detail. Chapter 3 focuses instead on social and demographic factors, while Chapter 4 explores the role of macro factors. Chapter 5 offers an integrated theoretical synthesis of the material that has been covered in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Chapter 5 also discusses the various actions that can be taken by different actors to enhance and promote youth engagement. In addition, this final chapter describes a major policy initiative that is currently under way in Europe that is aimed at enhancing young people's levels of democratic engagement and participation through the harnessing of state education systems.