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# Young people's intentions about their political activity

**ABSTRACT**

*We discuss some implications for citizenship education, based on a survey of young people in four European countries in which they were asked how they think they will act politically when they are adult. The empirical sections of the article are based on a survey of 2,400 students aged between 11–17 in 2008–2009 in Poland, Spain, Turkey and England. This study is discussed within the broader context of a widespread concern about a so-called 'democratic deficit', and in particular about the political apathy of youth. We suggest that young people appear to intend to act in very similar ways as adults do. We raise questions about expectations of political activity, especially concerning particular kinds of political behaviour, about young people's own intentions, and about what might be an appropriate educational response to these intentions.*

**KEYWORDS**

youth  
political activity  
political intentions  
active citizenship  
apathy  
participation

**INTRODUCTION**

This article presents some of the results from a two-year, four-country study<sup>1</sup> of young people's current political engagement as well as their outlook on their political behaviour in the future (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, Zalewska and Ross 2010). From our analysis, we suggest that children and young people do implicate themselves in political behaviour – an argument that stands in contrast to frequent narratives suggesting that indifference to political issues is commonplace among youth. We interrogate these depictions of young people and

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propose that their particular kinds of political behaviour should serve as a point of departure for appropriate educational response to citizenship education.

We begin by reviewing some current discussions about the meaning of political participation and action, and suggestions that young people are increasingly cynical about, and alienated from, 'the political'. We argue that there is a need to review the traditional view of what constitutes the political, and new social movements may better help us explain different kinds of civic engagement. Many of the young people in our sample indicate that they have a lively and intelligent engagement with contemporary politics, and that they intend to connect with a range of political processes in the future. We conclude that predictions of a coming 'death of politics' are premature: political action, construed as a broad spectrum, will most likely form part of these young people's adult lives, and citizenship-education programmes need to address the agenda being set out by young people.

## THE CONTEXT: DIFFERENT READINGS AND CONCEPTIONS OF 'POLITICAL ACTIVITY'

There is no shortage of concerns about the decline in political participation. A considerable literature has developed on 'the democratic deficit' across the globe (for example Moravsci 2004; Hirschhorn 2006). There are particular concerns in the European Union, where the European vote is often lower than the national election vote (Avbelj 2005; Mitchell 2005). It is claimed that the percentage of young people voting in national elections is in decline (IDEA 2006), and – even more so – in elections for the European Parliament (López Pintow and Gratschew 2004; EurActive 2009).

Examining youth apathy across Europe, Forbrig points out that '[. . .] many lament a dramatic decline in the political involvement of younger generations, and decreasing levels of youth participation in elections, political parties and traditional social organisations are seen to provide ample evidence of this' (Forbrig 2005: 7).

Responses of this nature have been reported from the four countries that are the focus of this study. In Poland, Horowitz identifies 'general concerns that young people in these post-communist nations may grow up to be unsupportive of democratic institutions or to be citizens who do not participate in politics' (Horowitz 2005: 83). Oriza's study of Spanish voting interest noted that in 1981 33% of young people aged 15–24 professed to have a substantial interest in politics, but by 1994 this proportion had declined to just 20% (Oriza 1996: 262); this decline was also noted by Serrano et al. (1997).

Likewise, in Turkey, youth's interest in politics is compared unfavourably to that shown by earlier generations. 'Post-1980 Turkish youth are commonly seen as apolitical consumers of a global market [. . .] All the young people interviewed stated that they are not really interested in politics and they do not trust political parties and political leaders' (Lüküslü 2005: 33, 34). These concerns are paralleled in the United Kingdom. Griffin identifies the 'widespread concern amongst academic researchers, policymakers, youth workers, educators and elected politicians over the levels of apparent political disaffection and apathy amongst young people [. . .] (Griffin 2005: 145).

This perceived decline in political and social participation noted above has become of substantial concern and the subject of extensive media and political comment (Norris 2002; Lister and Pia 2008). It is also of interest to

educationalists, because the fundamentals of how individuals interact with social organizations begins in childhood and adolescence, and thus in the years of schooling. This seems to beg the question: what do we know of young people's social participation, and how might schooling contribute to the processes of their social learning and activity? The information that we have on who votes in elections is not sufficiently detailed to really ascertain whether it is younger voters in particular who have become less inclined to vote. There may be generational changes, or it may simply be that younger people have always participated in elections to a lower extent than older people.

The foregoing claims of youth political apathy are predicated on particular forms and patterns of political participation; principally the traditional markers of political involvement in post-1945 western states. It can be argued that such a 'traditional' political activity as voting is not the only possible way to participate, and indeed is rooted in an outdated concept of what constitutes a civic culture, i.e., something that simply requires most people to have a fairly irregular and passive participation in the political sphere, leaving a small political elite to undertake more regular and effective activity.

Much commentary on 'the democratic deficit' is rooted in a particular form of civic culture, in which most citizens were required (and expected) to quietly endorse the political system, making occasional selections between parties that put forward broadly similar slates of policies. This, it might be argued, was related to the international climate of the cold-war years. The classic exposition of such a civic culture was made by Almond and Verba (1965), who posited the theory of a 'passive culture' in which most citizens accept existing political systems and structures, and a few are more actively involved in political roles. Perhaps this was a sufficient level of political activism in the period from 1945 to 1990, particularly as the ruling elite saw itself as engaged in international cold-war confrontation.

Norris (2002) argues that such forms of political and social engagement are being replaced. Using Lasswell's definition of politics as 'who gets what, when and where' (Lasswell 1936), Norris suggests that:

Political participation is evolving in terms of the 'who' (the agencies and the collective organizations), 'what' (the repertoires of actions commonly used for political expression) and 'where' (the targets that participants seek to influence). (Norris 2002: 4)

Plausibly, traditional electoral participation and political party membership is being replaced by informal political and social participation through demonstrations, political activism around single issues, petitions and boycotts, and perhaps by greater participation at the micro level. Lister and Pia (2008) suggest that in many European countries there has been an increase in the number of people who profess to have an interest in politics.

The World Values Survey [...] provides evidence that civic participation is increasing, with membership of and participation in civic organizations both seeing significant increases (particularly so for environmental and global justice issues). It seems that the claim that there has not been a general decline in citizen's political activity has some considerable purchase.

(Lister and Pia 2008: 93)

They do add that these activities remain minority pursuits, and that taking part in elections remains more popular. Nevertheless, voting participation has gradually declined over the past thirty years, and informal political activism has risen sharply over the same period. European youth appear to be progressively disenchanted with politics while exercising their political participation in ways that differ from traditional electoral participation.

Why might this be so? The three major competing theories (the socio-economic resources model, the rational choice theory and the social capital theory) as to why individuals do (or do not) participate in the social arena all appear to have limitations.

The socio-economic resources model (Verba and Nie 1972) argues that individuals with better material resources, education and time are more likely to participate – it is the better educated and better off who vote (and stand for election, and participate in informal political activities). But diachronic studies point out that in European societies overall educational levels and levels of material wealth have greatly increased, while voter participation rates have fallen (Pattie et al. 2003; 2004).

Rational choice theory suggests that participation occurs when benefits outweigh costs. It has been suggested that the citizen is better off not voting, because the chance that an individual vote will have any impact on the outcome is virtually zero (Downs 1957). The rational decision is not to participate in any collective activities, but to freeride (Olson 1971). Yet this is not the case: many people (still) behave ‘irrationally’ and vote; among many political scientists, this has been termed the paradox of participation (Green and Shapiro 1994; Mansbridge 1990).

Social capital theory proposes that if individuals participate in social groups – (e.g. associations) – then social capital in the form of cooperation, trust and reciprocal behaviours develops (Putnam 1993; 2000). Higher levels of social capital lead to higher levels of participation, which in turn lead to higher levels of social capital. But how (and why) should this be so? One critic argued ‘Can we imagine rates of voter participation and organized public activity sharply improving if people heed the call to hold more picnics and songfests?’ (Skocpol 2003: 57).

Some analysts have identified what are termed ‘new social movements’ emerging from the mid-1960s onwards. Such movements – which focus on environmental issues, feminism and human rights – have resisted incorporation into traditional political parties based on social class or trade unionism (Pichardo 1997).

On the other hand, many in the citizenship education movement, and others, would also aspire to educational processes that empower active citizens – individuals who will critically engage with, and seek to affect the course of, social events. The distinction between active and passive citizenship has been particularly debated over the past five to six years (Ireland et al. 2006; Nelson and Kerr 2006).

Torney-Purta et al. (2004) begin to distinguish types of participation when they suggest that the type of engagement with political and social issues may be related to the different agents of influence, distinguishing between ‘conventional political participation’ and ‘community participation’ such as volunteer work, charity work and so forth. Others have noted these trends more vigorously. In Spain, for example, Blanch (2005) describes young people’s participation in the Galician *Nunca Mais* (Never Again) activism against ecologically disastrous oil spillages on the coastline. ‘The *Nunca Mais* movement

was generally supported by a broad spectrum of citizens spanning much of the centre-left, and although it gradually became an umbrella for anti-government slogans, its status remained that of a movement' (Blanch 2005: 66).

He concludes new forms of participation are not conventional, and that

youth are not disinterested in politics in a broad sense, and periodically become actively involved in movements, volunteering and social activity. Even though social-capital indicators such as levels of association, interpersonal trust and political confidence have not increased in Spain, unconventional participation levels suggest that youth are not politically alienated.

(Blanch 2005: 66)

Similarly, Siurala (2000) tries to distinguish old and new forms of political participation, using the terms 'modern' and 'postmodern'. Thus the modern is 'representative participation and direct participation with all their variants, such as NGO-based structures, co-management, youth parliaments, school councils, youth hearings, demonstrations', while postmodern participation is 'various types of expressive, emotional, aesthetic, casual, virtual and digital participation' (Siurala 2000: 1).

In the UK, young people interviewed by Eden and Roker (2002) were in favour of citizenship education in British schools on condition that it could demonstrate relevance to their lives and local communities. The respondents were not committed to political parties, and, while distrusting politicians, generally intended to vote. What they wanted discussed in schools were national politics and voting, racism, sex education and local issues (Griffin 2005: 151). Other studies found young people wanting discussion on domestic violence, racism, animal rights and other environmental issues (O'Toole et al. 2003; Henn et al. 2002).

Active citizenship is, very broadly, about doing things, while passive citizenship is generally seen as related simply to status, to the act of being. The delineation between the two is under debate (Ireland et al 2006; Nelson and Kerr 2006), and though there is no international consensus, the model suggested by Kennedy (2006) may be helpful. He distinguishes four forms or levels of activity in citizenship. The first level – the level at which those concerned with the democratic deficit would have us act – is engaging in voting, belonging to a political party, and standing for office. The second form of activity lies in social movements, in being involved with voluntary activities; it is essentially conformist and ameliorative in nature, intending to repair rather than to address causes. The third form consists of action for social change: the individual is involved in activities that aim to change political and social policies (ranging from letter writing and signing petitions to working with pressure groups or participating in demonstrations and pressure groups). Kennedy's fourth active form is of enterprise citizenship, in which the individual engages in such self-regulating activities as achieving financial independence, becoming a self-directed learner, being a problem solver and developing entrepreneurial ideas.

These distinctions are not necessarily clear-cut, and Nelson and Kerr's analysis (2006) demonstrates strong cultural variations in what might be considered as appropriate 'active' citizenship. In some countries many of the attributes characterized as passive and concerned with accepting status are elements of active citizenship that are to be encouraged and developed. This may depend

on the particular historical development and configuration of the state: in some countries (perhaps particularly in Europe) there is a greater perception that citizenship and national identity may now be seen as social constructs, and that active citizenship may embrace a diverse range of relevant political scenarios in which to be a 'politically active citizen'.

Researchers and theorists must consider the way in which 'political engagement' is understood. While our research indicates a certain level of scepticism towards political leaders' intentions, this does not necessarily cover non-traditional areas of youth activity and attitudes, in particular online activities and online communities. While we have quoted assertions that young citizens have become disengaged and apathetic, there is also evidence to suggest that they may be engaging in their own ways – with issues that they consider as relevant to their everyday lives.

## METHODS

The work we report here was part of a large study of about 2,800 young people: 700 each in Poland, Spain, Turkey and the UK, and divided between one large urban context, and one small town or rural locality. In each, we selected four classes (between 100 to 120 pupils) aged 11–12, 13–14 and 17–18. The field-work was carried out in 2008–2009. Parental and pupil agreement was obtained for those under 16 (pupil agreement alone for the older pupils). All data was made anonymous, including the identities of the participating schools. Pupils were asked to respond to a multi-part questionnaire that asked about a range of related topics: their hopes and fears for the future (personal, local, and globally), with particular reference to socio-political topics (violence and conflict, economic futures, health, tolerance and diversity); how likely it was that they would act in particular ways in the future – by voting, for example, or by taking part in pressure group or NGO activities.

We asked about what kinds of political activities they might engage in when they were adult. They were offered five different kinds of activity. Three of these related to easily understandable traditional political activities, voting, standing for office, and joining a political party. One was specifically about non-traditional political activity, campaigning or working with a non-governmental organization. Our fifth activity potentially covered both traditional and non-traditional activity: 'talking about politics with friends'.

For each of these they could indicate 'definite', 'possible', 'not sure' or 'no'. Responses were entered into an SPSS database and analysed. A chi-squared test was used to determine levels of confidence, and all data reported here is significant at the 95 per cent level or greater ( $p < 0.05$ ). The total numbers responding varied slightly from question to question, but were between 2,302 and 2,344. Following the questionnaires, smaller groups of students were asked to participate in focus groups to discuss their answers in more detail.

## THE FINDINGS OF OUR STUDY

Our research shows that many young people intend to participate on political issues, in a variety of ways, both traditional and non-traditional. They hold strong, articulated opinions on issues which affect their own lives, although they may demonstrate little patience with political debate, in part because they feel that politicians follow their own course, independently from people's lives. While some may feel that there is little, if anything, to do to change matters,

others do not. As has been pointed out, it should not be assumed that children and youth are apathetic. Their lack of participation in traditional political processes may be a way of expressing that dissatisfaction and frustration, or they may be turning to non-traditional means of political and social engagement.

Table 1 shows that over the entire sample 82% of students were 'definite' or 'possible' future voters, 44.4% thought that they would talk about politics with friends, 34.2% thought they might join some form of campaigning organization, 17.5% thought that they might stand for election, and 16.5% thought they might join a political party.

Only 2.6% of all respondents said that they did not expect to do any of these, so the great majority of these pupils at least considered that they might participate in at least one way; and only 7.3% responded 'unsure' or 'no' to all five options. Conversely, only 1.6% said that they expected to participate in all of the five suggested ways.

These overall figures suggest that the great majority of these students consider it possible that they will be 'politically active' in some way. However, within these overall figures there is a considerable degree of variation as to who intends to participate, depending on how participation is defined. In terms of overall intention, it should be noted that Turkish young people showed a significantly greater propensity to see themselves as politically active in the future. This is seen more clearly as we analyse each political activity in turn.

### **Voting in elections**

Looking first at the most popular intended political action, participating in elections, there is a very clear overall difference between Turkey and the UK. Turkish students are more likely to project themselves as future voters and UK students least likely, both by statistically significant margins.

This apparent level of political activity in the UK sample is, however, better understood when looking at the variations in response by age. The 11-year-olds

	Definite	Possible	Unsure	No	N	% Definite and possible
Voting in elections	55.8	26.2	10.2	7.6	2,344	82.0
Talking about politics with friends	16.9	27.5	27.8	27.2	2,320	44.4
Joining a campaign or an NGO	11.5	22.7	34.2	31.2	2,320	34.2
Trying to be elected	7.6	9.9	24.1	58.2	2,313	17.5
Joining a political party	6.5	10.0	25.1	57.9	2,302	16.5

*Table 1: Responses to 'When you are an adult, which of the following things do you think you might do?'*

	Country				
	Poland	Turkey	Spain	UK	All
Definitely	56%	74%	58%	39%	56%
Possibly	30%	11%	27%	34%	26%
Not sure	8%	7%	11%	14%	10%
No	6%	8%	5%	12%	8%

Table 2: Responses to the question 'When you're an adult how likely is it that you will be voting in elections?'

are much less likely to vote than those of the same age in the other countries, and at age 17 the intention to definitely or possibly vote is between 89–91% in all four countries. Figure 1 shows these changes in detail. Why are UK 11-year-olds so much less likely to think that they will vote than their peers in the other countries? And what happens between the ages of 11 and 14 that so increases their propensity to vote?

These results showed very little variation by gender, and there were no consistent gendered patterns by country or by age.

### Trying to be elected

The second potential activity (generally far less popular) was to stand for election. Again, the proportion of Turkish students who are either definitely or possibly considering standing is significantly higher than in the other countries.

While voting intentions appear to increase with age, the intention to possibly stand for election generally seems to decrease with students' age. This may reflect a possible increase in political realism linked to age, as older students

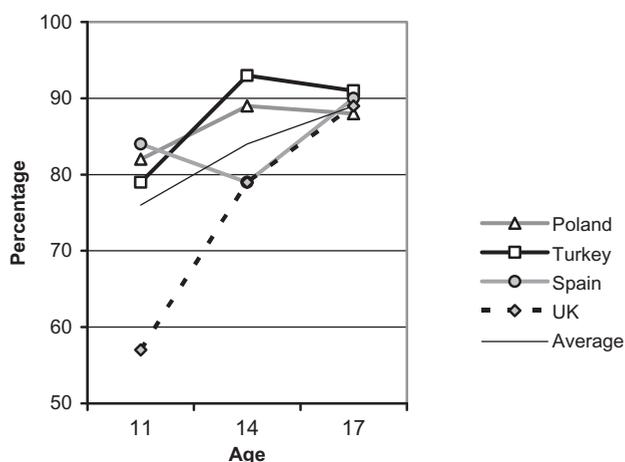


Figure 1: Changes in propensity to vote in elections (definite and possible) by age and country.

Note: scale starts at 50%.

	Country				
	Poland	Turkey	Spain	UK	All
Definitely	5.2%	20.8%	3.7%	3.9%	7.6%
Possibly	5.9%	14.8%	7.8%	12.5%	9.9%
Not sure	26.3%	29.5%	19.3%	22.9%	24.1%
No	62.6%	34.9%	69.2%	59.1%	58.0%
N	615	461	643	594	2313

Table 3: Responses to the question 'When you're an adult how likely is it that you will stand for election?'

Age		Country				
		Poland	Turkey	Spain	UK	All
10–12 year olds	Definitely	6%	24%	4%	4%	10%
	Possibly	5%	20%	12%	14%	13%
	Not sure	32%	31%	25%	28%	29%
	No	56%	25%	59%	53%	47%
13–15 year olds	Definitely	6%	12%	5%	4%	6%
	Possibly	6%	7%	7%	12%	8%
	Not sure	23%	29%	20%	23%	23%
	No	65%	52%	69%	57%	62%
16–18 year olds	Definitely	4%	25%	2%	3%	6%
	Possibly	6%	10%	5%	10%	8%
	Not sure	24%	25%	14%	15%	19%
	No	66%	39%	79%	69%	67%

Table 4: Respondents' intentions to stand for election, by country and age.

recognize alternative (or more obvious) ways of taking part in the political process. Table 4 shows the data in full, and Figure 2 shows the declining numbers who are definitely or possibly intending to stand, and the rising numbers of those who say they do not intend to stand for election.

Males were more likely than females to consider running for office, in each country, and in each age group (only Polish 17-year-old females were slightly more likely to seek election than boys).

### Talking about politics with friends

Talking about politics with friends was the second most likely predicted activity in the overall sample. While the Turkish students again seem most predisposed to this activity, the Spanish students seem less likely to engage in this activity.

However, there are again variations by age, and this, like voting, is an activity that seems to be considered more probable as students grow older.

This activity is also gendered, though to a much lesser extent than standing for election. Males are more likely to say that they will do this, and this generally increases with age.

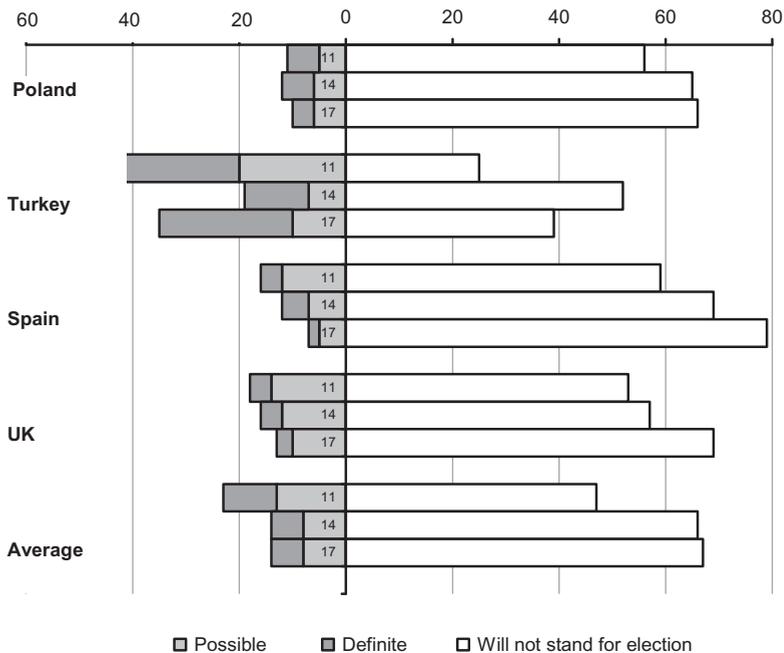


Figure 2: Changes in propensity to stand for election by age and country.

	Country				Total
	Poland	Turkey	Spain	UK	
Definitely	14.4%	32.9%	10.5%	13.9%	16.9%
Possibly	29.2%	27.4%	25.0%	28.7%	27.5%
Not sure	28.4%	27.8%	29.4%	25.7%	27.8%
No	28.0%	12.0%	35.1%	30.0%	27.2%
N	617	468	639	596	2320

Table 5: Responses to the question ‘When you’re an adult how likely is it that you will talk with friends about politics?’

### Joining a campaign or an NGO

Taking part in campaigning groups was seen as a potential activity by about a third of the whole sample. This figure is significantly raised by the Turkish students’ high levels of positive responses: 58% were definitely or possibly intending to take part in campaigning activity. In comparison, only 17% of Polish students intended this. The Spanish and the UK students were more likely to say that this was a possibility, rather than something that they would definitely do.

There were variations by age in the responses: broadly, in Turkey, Spain and Poland older students were *less* likely to participate, while in the UK the intention to participate increased with age. At the same time, qualitative

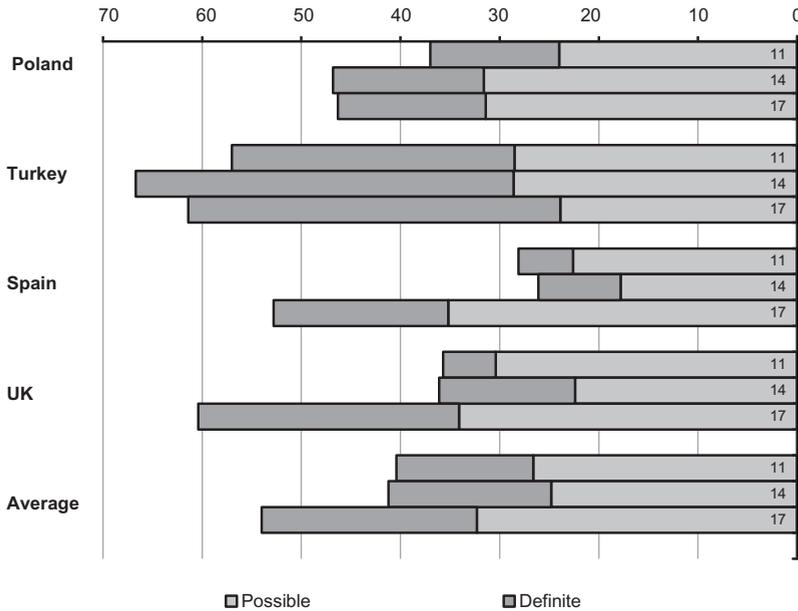


Figure 3: Changes in likelihood of talking with friends about politics when adult, by age and country.

	Country				
	Poland	Turkey	Spain	UK	Total
Definitely	4.1%	30.6%	9.7%	6.2%	11.5%
Possibly	13.0%	26.9%	27.4%	24.2%	22.7%
Not sure	42.4%	22.0%	39.1%	30.1%	34.2%
No	40.6%	20.5%	23.8%	37.7%	31.2%
N	616	468	642	594	2320

Table 6: Responses to the question 'When you're an adult how likely is it that you will join a campaigning group or NGO?'

responses indicated that many students intended to participate in more 'individual' activism (e.g. buy responsibly, work for health or environmental improvements, etc.)

### Joining a political party

Joining a political party was generally less popular than campaigning for specific issues. But there were very significant differences between countries. Again, the Turkish students are much more enthusiastic than in any of the other countries, but Polish students' disaffection with political parties is clearly evident, as it is, to a lesser extent, in Spain – in both of these countries very substantial proportions of students said that they would not join a party.

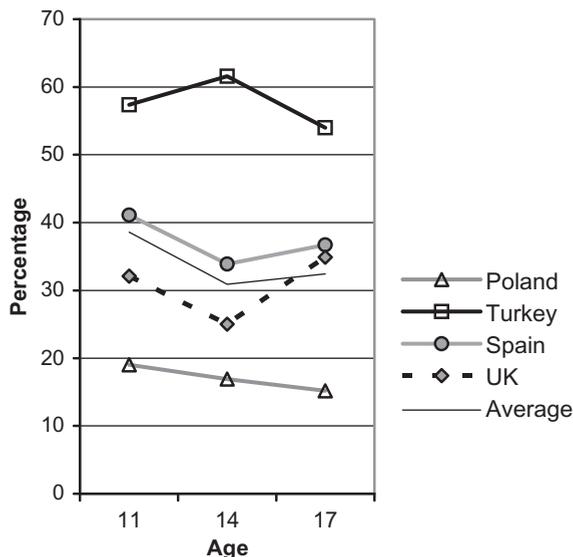


Figure 4: Changes in likelihood of joining a campaign or NGO when adult, by age and country (percentage definite or possible).

	Country				Total
	Poland	Turkey	Spain	UK	
Definitely	2.9%	16.5%	4.4%	4.8%	6.5%
Possibly	4.7%	14.8%	8.4%	13.5%	10.0%
Not sure	20.4%	28.4%	25.6%	26.9%	25.1%
No	71.9%	40.3%	61.6%	53.0%	57.9%
N	613	461	641	587	2302

Table 7: Responses to the question ‘When you’re an adult how likely is it that you will join a political party?’

In both Turkey and the UK there appeared to be particular disillusionment around joining a political party in the middle age group: as they approached leaving school, their intentions rose. The Polish students seemed particularly disenchanted with political parties, and the Spanish only slightly less so. It is particularly noticeable that there are, in almost all instances, more respondents rejecting the idea of political parties outright than there are those who think it possible that they might join.

There were also gender differences. Males were more likely to intend to join political parties than females, in every country.

While the rate of membership to more traditional campaigns was relatively low, in the qualitative data and focus groups, alternative participation in activities related to today’s ‘knowledge society’ was mentioned. Their responses indicated that they are aware of the transformative potential of new technologies as a means of participation. ‘I would participate in a “cazuela” like we did

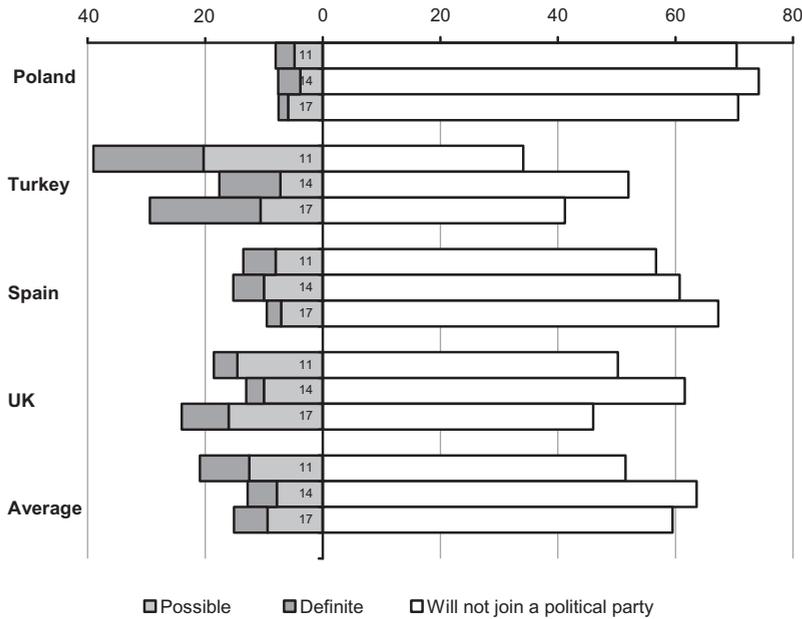


Figure 5: Changes in intention to join a political party.

	Country				Total
	Poland	Turkey	Spain	UK	
Males	12%	34%	16%	19%	20%
Females	5%	28%	10%	17%	15%

Table 8: Likelihood of joining a political party.

with our SMS messages in the 11-M' (Spanish focus group of 14 year olds). The respondent is referring to an 'underground' movement, begun with the diffusion of texts messages sent by cellphones, in which Spanish youth were urged to demonstrate on the streets of all the major cities leading up to the 2004 elections.

## DISCUSSION

These responses show a number of interesting patterns. Intention to take part in voting seems fairly consistent, and most popular, in all countries, and the intention to do so rises as these young people approach voting age.

Far fewer young people consider standing for election, or joining a political party: as students get older any intentions to do so generally decline. This may be a growing sense of realism in the case of standing for election, but in terms of joining a political party, this may also reflect growing cynicism about these political institutions (perhaps coupled with an increasing intention to vote). It may also indicate a growing awareness of the potential to make social and

political changes through less conventional means, such as online campaigning or participating in non-traditional political events.

In terms of 'conventional' political activity this data seem to suggest that the coming generation of voters will not be very different from their immediate predecessors:

- They show a propensity to vote (at similar levels that have been common in elections in recent years).
- Most do not intend to run for office – though a small number seem intent on considering this, and a somewhat higher proportion in Turkey.
- A small number think that they will join a political party – about 6.5% (4.1%, if one excludes the generally more enthusiastic Turks). But this level matches adult levels of political party membership in Europe, which has fallen from 15% of adults in the 1960s (Mair and van Biezen 2001) to an average of 3.7% (Lister and Pia 2008).

Informal participation is seen as a more likely form of political activity by these young people. Talking with friends about politics is a more probable activity than either standing for office or joining a party. This is also more likely to be a male activity. As students grow older, they feel they will definitely talk about politics, and are more likely to see this as a definite and possible activity. Other informal political activity, through campaigning, is also a fairly popular intended activity – especially with the younger and the older students. This is significantly more likely to be a female activity. Polish students were, again, very significantly less likely to see themselves as engaging in this.

The Turkish students were most likely to see themselves as politically engaged, in both formal and informal politics, at almost all ages. The Polish students were generally most disaffected from politics of all kinds, formal and informal. Spanish students seemed more interested in informal activities – talking and campaigning – rather than working with political parties. UK students seemed inclined to engage in both formal and informal activities, though not nearly to the same extent as their Turkish peers.

Formal activities – standing for election and joining parties – appealed generally more to males than females. Males were also slightly more likely to see themselves as engaging in political discussion. Females, however, were more interested in campaigning.

## CONCLUSIONS

These findings both support and challenge other studies that suggest that there is considerable political interest amongst young people in these four countries – though not necessarily political interest in the conventional sense of traditional party political activity.

These young people suggest that they will behave politically in very similar ways to current generations of adults. The majority will participate in electoral activity, but party membership and standing for office will be activities for small minorities (as they are for most adults). Taking action through campaigns and campaigning organizations will be important for about a third of these young people, and a possible activity for a further third. Approaching half of them – 44% – will probably be involved in political discussions with their peers; suggesting that political apathy amongst youth is chimerical.

Young people are being politically socialized to act in ways very similar to adults. The various distinctions between different types of active citizenship, described earlier, are useful in distinguishing different kinds of activity, and in identifying the propensity or otherwise of different groups to act in one way or another: for example, in our survey males seemed somewhat more inclined than females to participate in 'conventional activities', and females to be involved in less conventional activities. Young people have always been more involved in direct, issue-focused political action than their elders, who are more engaged in traditional forms of activity.

These findings support Blanch's previously cited observations on the *Municipia Mais* (2005). In Turkey, Lüküslü reports that, despite the affectations of consumerism, young people still 'emphasized that they are concerned about the problems of the country and its future, and that they are interested in what is going on locally and globally' (Lüküslü 2005: 34), but see the discourses of the political realm as old fashioned 'ossified structures that prevent youth from expressing itself freely' (Lüküslü 2005: 34), thus preferring to discuss matters in spheres they see as non-political. This is challenged by our data, which suggests Turkish youth have a relatively high propensity to become involved. Griffin (2005) argues that in the UK, 'once young people in Britain are invited to discuss politics in their own terms (thereby widening the definition of politics and political participation), then there is evidence of much higher levels of political interest and activity' (Griffin 2005: 148).

Our findings concur with those of Forbrig (2005), who observes, despite the negative views of many traditional observers across Europe, there are also '[...] more optimistic voices [that] stress the changing forms of youth political participation, away from involvement in conventional democratic institutions and towards novel patterns of youth engagement' (Forbrig 2005: 7).

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