



Young People & Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?

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Synopsis:

Many are concerned that there is widespread apathy, or even alienation, from the traditional modes of political participation in representative democracies, particularly among the young. To examine these issues, *Part I* of this report sets out the theoretical framework and the reasons why recent decades may have seen important generational shifts in common forms of political activism, particularly in the *repertoires* (the actions used for political expression) and the *agencies* (the collective organizations used to become engaged). *Part II* describes the source of evidence used to analyze age-related patterns of political activism, drawing upon the 15-nation European Social Survey, 2002 (ESS), and the methods used to disentangle generational, life-cycle, or period effects. *Part III* examines the age profile of activists using different repertoires, including voting, party work, demonstrations and consumer boycotts. *Part IV* analyzes membership in voluntary associations, exemplified by unions, churches and social clubs. The conclusion considers the implications of these results and whether we are experiencing a generational shift from the traditional politics of loyalties towards the contemporary politics of choice.

Report for the **Council of Europe Symposium**: “*Young people and democratic institutions: from disillusionment to participation.*” Strasbourg, 27-28th November 2003.

Conventional wisdom suggests that in the late twentieth century post-industrial societies have experienced a tidal wave of citizen withdrawal from the traditional channels of political participation, as exemplified by widespread reports of sagging electoral turnout, rising anti-party sentiment, and the decay of civic organizations. Political disengagement is thought to affect all citizens but young people are believed to be particularly disillusioned about the major institutions of representative democracy, leaving them either apathetic (at best) or alienated (at worst). Concern about these issues has often been expressed in the United States, especially in powerful accounts of the post-civic generation offered in studies of voter turnout by Warren Miller and J. Merrill Shanks and work on social capital by Robert Putnam, but similar worries resonate in many European democracies¹.

But are these fears justified? To examine these issues, *Part I* of this report sets out the theoretical framework and the reasons why recent decades may have seen important generational shifts in common forms of political activism, particularly in the *repertoires* (the actions used for political expression) and the *agencies* (the collective organizations used to become engaged). *Part II* describes the source of evidence used to analyze age-related patterns of political activism, drawing upon the 15-nation European Social Survey, 2002 (ESS), and the approaches used to disentangle generational, life-cycle, or period effects. *Part III* examines the age profile of activists using different repertoires, including voting, party work, demonstrations and consumer boycotts. *Part IV* analyzes membership in voluntary associations, exemplified by unions, churches and social clubs. The conclusion considers the implications of these results and whether we are experiencing a generational shift in repertoires from the traditional politics of loyalties towards the contemporary politics of choice.

I: Theories of the evolution of political activism

The literature suggests that the nature of political activism has experienced important changes in recent decades and that the younger generation, in particular, may be at the forefront of those who have adapted to the newer forms of political expression, mobilization and engagement². This study focuses upon the evidence concerning two dimensions of political activism: the common '*repertoires*' of political action, meaning the ways that citizens choose to express themselves politically, and the *agencies*, representing the organizational structures through which people commonly mobilize for political expression. Figure 1 presents the theoretical typology of political action. The report theorizes that if political activism has evolved along these lines, as suggested, then we would expect to find distinct generational shifts, with younger people most willing to adopt these changes.

[Figure 1 about here]

Repertoires of political activism

The first dimension concerns the repertoires of activism. Much of the traditional literature on political participation focused extensively upon forms of civic engagement which emphasize the role of citizens within representative democracy in each nation state, including the channels influencing elections, governments, and the policymaking process. Verba and his colleagues noted multiple 'modes' of political participation which differ systematically in their costs and benefits³. *Voting*, for example, can be classified as one of the most ubiquitous political activities through regular elections, yet one that exerts diffuse pressure over elected representatives and parties, with a broad outcome affecting all citizens. *Campaign work* for parties or candidates such as leafleting, attending local party meetings, and get-out-the-vote drives, also typically generates collective benefits, but requires greater initiative, time and effort than casting a ballot. By contrast, particularized *contacting*, such as when a constituent gets in touch with an elected representative or government official about a specific problem, requires higher levels of information and initiative, generating particular benefits for the individual but with little need for cooperation with other citizens. What these traditional repertoires share is that they are focused primarily upon how citizens can influence representative democracy, either directly (through voting) or indirectly (through parties and elected officials). Verba, Nie and Kim recognized this assumption when they defined political participation as "...those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take."⁴ Citizen-oriented activities, exemplified by voting participation and party membership, obviously remain important for democracy, but today this represents an excessively narrow conceptualization of activism that excludes some of the most common targets of civic engagement.

Many indicators suggest that recent decades have seen a diversification of the available repertoires commonly used for political activism. The seminal literature used to distinguish between 'conventional' and 'protest' politics and this convention often continues to be used in research. The classic study of political action in the early 1970s by Barnes and Kasse, for example, conceptualized 'protest' as the willingness of citizens to engage dissent, including unofficial strikes, boycotts, petitions, the occupation of buildings, mass demonstrations, and even acts of political violence⁵. Yet this way of thinking about activism seems dated today since it no longer captures the essential features of the modern repertoires; for example why should contacting an elected official about individual constituency service be regarded as 'conventional',

while contacting them with a collective petition is regarded as an act of 'protest'? Demonstrations, once regarded as radical, have also become mainstream and widespread today; for example, the 1999-2001 World Values Survey indicates that about 40% of the public have demonstrated in Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands⁶. Similar observations can be made about the widespread practice of consumer politics.

Instead today it seems clearer to distinguish between *citizen-oriented* actions, relating mainly to elections and parties, and *cause-oriented* repertoires, which focus attention upon specific issues and policy concerns, exemplified by consumer politics (buying or boycotting certain products for political or ethical reasons), petitioning, demonstrations, and protests. The distinction is not water-tight, for example political parties can organize mass demonstrations, and elected representatives can be contacted by constituents about specific policy issues and community concerns, as much as for individual constituency service. New social movements often adopt mixed action strategies which combine traditional repertoires, such as lobbying representatives, with a variety of alternative modes such as online networking, street protests, and consumer boycotts. Nevertheless compared with citizen-oriented actions, the distinctive aspect of cause-oriented repertoires is that these are most commonly used to pursue specific issues and policy concerns among diverse targets, both within and also well beyond the electoral arena.

Of course many of the techniques used by cause-oriented activists are not particularly novel; indeed historically petitions to parliament are one of the earliest forms of representative democracy, and periodic waves of radical protest and vigorous political dissent can be identified throughout Western democracies⁷. The mid-1950s saw passive resistance techniques used by the civil rights movement in the US and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in Western Europe. Building upon this, the 1960s experienced the resurgence of direct action with the anti-Vietnam demonstrations, the student protest movements and social upheaval that swept the streets of Paris, Tokyo and London. New social movements expanded, particularly those concerned about women's equality, nuclear power, anti-war, and the environment. The early 1970s saw the use of economic boycotts directed against apartheid in South Africa, and the adoption of more aggressive industrial action by trade unions, including strikes, occupations, and blockades, occasionally accompanied by arson, damage and violence, directed against Western governments⁸. By the last decade, collective action through demonstrations has become a generally accepted way to express political grievances, voice opposition, and challenge authorities.

An important characteristic of cause-oriented repertoires is that these have broadened towards engaging in 'consumer' and 'life-style' politics, where the precise dividing line between the 'social' and 'political' breaks down even further. These activities are exemplified by volunteer work at recycling cooperatives, helping at battered women's shelters, or fundraising for a local school, as well as protesting at sites for timber logging, boycotting goods made by companies using sweat shop labor, and purchasing cosmetic products which avoid the use of animal testing. It could be argued that these types of activities, while having important social and economic consequences, fall outside of the sphere of the strictly 'political' per se. Yet the precise dividing line between the 'public' and the 'private' spheres remains controversial, as the feminist literature has long emphasized⁹. Cause-oriented repertoires aim to reform the law or to influence the policy process, as well as to alter systematic patterns of social behavior, for example by establishing bottle bank recycling facilities, battered women's shelters, and heightening awareness of energy efficiency. Ronald Inglehart provides the most extended argument that the process of cultural change lies at the heart of this development, if the core issue for activists have shifted from materialist concerns, focused on matters such as jobs, wages and pensions, to greater concern about post-materialist values, including issues such as globalization, environmentalism, and gender equality.¹⁰ In many poorer societies, loose and amorphous networks of community groups and grass-roots voluntary associations often seek direct action within local communities over basic issues of livelihood, such as access to clean water, the distribution of agricultural aid, or health care and schools¹¹. Issues of identity politics around issues of ethnicity and sexuality also commonly blur the 'social' and the 'political'. Therefore in general the older focus on citizenship activities designed to influence elections, government, and public policy-making process within the nation-state, seems unduly limited today, by excluding too much that is commonly understood as broadly 'political'.

Another defining characteristic of cause-oriented activities is that these are directed towards parliament and government, but also towards diverse actors in the public, non-profit and private sectors. Well-known examples include international human rights organizations, women's NGOs, transnational environmental organizations, the anti-sweatshop and anti-land mines networks, the peace movement, and anti-globalization and anti-capitalism forces¹². The targets are often major multinational corporations, including consumer boycotts of Nike running shoes, McDonald's hamburgers, and Californian grapes, as well as protest demonstrations directed against international agencies and intergovernmental organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, the World Economic Forum in Davos, and the European Commission¹³. The process of globalization is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, but one of the clearest

political manifestations of this development is the declining autonomy of the nation-state, including the core executive, as power has shifted simultaneously towards intergovernmental organizations like the U.N. and WTO, and down towards regional and local assemblies¹⁴. Moreover the 'shrinkage of the state' through initiatives such as privatization, marketization and de-regulation mean that decision-making has flowed away from public bodies and official government agencies that were directly accountable to elected representatives, dispersing to a complex variety of non-profit and private agencies operating at local, national and international levels¹⁵. Due to these developments, it has become more difficult for citizens to use national parliamentary elections and parties as a way of challenging those in power, reinforcing the need for alternative repertoires for political expression and mobilization.

Agencies of political activism

The literature also suggests that a related type of change which has occurred concerns the 'agencies' use for political action, meaning the organizational structures through which people commonly mobilize for political expression. Traditional agencies, which conventionally provided the most important social institutions for civic mobilization during the postwar era in Western Europe, included what Duverger termed 'mass-branch' political parties (which established a large-scale organization base), churches affiliated to Christian Democratic parties, and trade unions and cooperative associations which mobilized the working class on the left, as well as other diverse interest groups and voluntary associations in civic society, such as community social clubs, professional and business organizations, agricultural cooperatives, and philanthropic groups¹⁶. The roots of many traditional associations can be traced back for centuries but these generally expanded in organizational strength during the nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe. Characteristically voluntary associations with a large membership usually developed regularized, institutionalized, structured, and measurable activities: people signed up and paid up to become card-carrying members of the Norwegian trade unions, the German Social Democratic party, and the British Women's Institute. Traditional agencies, and mass-branch political parties, were characterized by Weberian bureaucratic organizations, with formal rules and regulations, fulltime paid officials, hierarchical mass-branch structures, and clear boundaries demarcating who did, and did not, belong¹⁷. Active members served many functions as the voluntary life-blood of associations, such as serving on a local governing board or contributing financially to community associations, holding fundraisers, publishing newsletters, manning publicity stalls, chairing meetings, and attending socials for groups such as the Red Cross, the Parent-Teacher Association, and the Rotary club. Some of these large-scale umbrella organizations articulated

and aggregated diverse interests on behalf of their members, particularly mainstream political parties, while other public interest groups focused their energies upon narrower policy concerns and niche sectors.

By contrast, modern agencies which evolved since the early-1960s are typified by the women's movement, the anti-globalization movement, anti-war coalitions, and the environmental movement, as well as diverse non-governmental organizations and multinational policy advocacy networks. These are usually characterized by more fluid boundaries, looser networked coalitions, and decentralized organizational structures. The primary goals of new social movements often focus upon achieving social change through direct action strategies and community-building, as well as by altering lifestyles and social identities, as much as through shaping formal policy-making processes and laws in government¹⁸. Observers suggest that the capacity for modern agencies to cross national borders signals the emergence of a global civic society mobilizing around issues such as globalization, human rights, debt-relief, and world trade¹⁹. These agencies are characterized by decentralized networked communications among loose coalitions, relatively flat 'horizontal' rather than 'vertical' organizational structures, and more informal modes of belonging, including shared concern about diverse issues and identity politics²⁰. People can see themselves as belonging simply by 'turning up' or sharing political sympathies with an easy-entrance, easy-exit permeability of organizational boundaries, rather than 'formally' joining through paying dues.

If new social movements have now become an important alternative avenue for informal political mobilization, protest, and expression among the younger generation, as many observers suggest, then this development has important implications for how we interpret and measure trends in civic engagement. In particular, if studies are limited to comparing membership in the traditional agencies of political participation -- including patterns of party membership, union density, and church-going -- then they will present only a partial perspective which underestimates engagement through modern agencies characterized by fuzzier boundaries and more informal forms of belonging.

II: Analyzing political activism

Generational, period and life-cycle effects

If we assume that the repertoires and agencies of political activism have evolved, along the lines we have suggested, then we could well expect that the younger generation is the group

most affected by these developments. We can examine the age profile of activists to see whether there is good evidence supporting this proposition.

Yet before doing so we must recognize that any age-related differences that we find in political behavior can be attributed to three distinct processes: a *generational effect* (due to long-term secular trends, such as steadily-rising levels of education, that distinguish successive cohorts), a *life-cycle effect* (such as the experience of entry into the workforce and settling down to start a family within a local community), and a *period effect* (the product of distinct historical events that leave a lasting impression, such as the radicalizing experience of the 1960s or the end of the Cold War). Each of these has different implications for understanding processes of social and political change²¹.

Traditional theories of socialization suggest that habitual patterns of political behavior are generally acquired during an individual's formative years -- in the family, school, workplace, and local community -- and these habits gradually rigidify over time, creating persistent differences among successive generations. If the repertoires and agencies for political activism have evolved over time, and if people acquired patterns of activism in their youth which prove fairly stable during their lifetimes, then, compared with their parents and grandparent's, young people will display different patterns of activism which persist as they age. Certain broadly linear trends in political activism over successive age cohorts, for example steadily falling levels of party membership, or the rising propensity to engage in demonstrations, would tend to support the generational interpretation.

By contrast, *life-cycle* effects are produced by the experience of changing individual circumstances. Patterns of political activism can be expected to alter as people leave home for educational and work-force opportunities, and then start their own family and settle down within a local community, as well as eventually entering retirement. Each successive state of life produces exposure to different political networks and contexts, for example at college young people may well become involved in student politics, sports clubs, and university-based societies, before eventually joining trade unions and professional associations once they enter the paid labor force, becoming engaged in parent-teacher associations or local community groups in early middle-age. In this regard, people's behavior is expected to change as they get older or pass through different stages of life, especially through educational experiences and labor force participation. Rather than displaying linear trends of activism among successive birth cohorts, instead life-cycle effects should be evident in a curvilinear pattern displayed across successive cohorts. For example, first-

time voters may be unsure which party to support, but they may gradually acquire the habits of voting and a sense of party loyalties from participating over successive elections.

Lastly *period effects* can be attributed to a particular major historical event which had a decisive impact upon all citizens in a society at one point in time, exemplified by experience of the Great Depression during the 1920s and 1930s, the end of the World War II, the 1960s student protests, or the dramatic transition to democracy in post-Communist Europe. These events may alter political activism in many different ways; most dramatically, the consolidation of democracy in Central Europe, the experience of free and air competitive elections, and the expansion of civil society, transformed the opportunities for political expression and mobilization in these nations. The end of the Cold War, and the redrawing of European boundaries, altered foreign and defense policy, which had been one of the most important cleavages traditionally dividing European parties of the left and right. Europeans have also experienced major structural changes in the working of their democracies through the impact of EU membership, which has constrained the autonomy of the nation-state and therefore reduced the importance of national parliamentary elections.

For all these reasons, before jumping to any conclusions about an inevitable decline in civic activism among the young, any age differences in political participation need to be carefully scrutinized to consider how these should best be understood. The implications for understanding age-related patterns of activism depend to a considerable extent on which of these three accounts – generational, lifecycle or period effects - holds. Of course they may each hold but to a different extent with regard to alternative aspects of political activism.

To examine the evidence, this study draws upon the European Social Survey (the ESS), a new academically-driven study designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behavior patterns of its diverse populations²². We draw on the initial release of the first round of the European Social Survey, 2002, currently covering 15 nations in Europe. This includes seven nations in Northern Europe (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland), four from Mediterranean Europe (Greece, Spain, Portugal and Israel), and four from post-Communist Central Europe (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia). All these countries were classified using the Gastil Index by Freedom House in 2001-2 as fully 'free' in their political rights and civil liberties. Most can also be categorized as affluent post-industrial economies (with an average per capita GDP in 2002 ranging from \$16,000 (in Greece) to \$30,000 (in Norway) although all of the post-

Communist states except Slovenia fall below this level. All but one (Israel) are member states of the Council of Europe, representing about one third of its total membership.

The methodological challenge is to disentangle the separate components of social change²³. Ideally we need longitudinal time-series data from panel surveys monitoring patterns of political activism among the same individuals as they gradually age. Unfortunately these are rare within single nations and simply unavailable cross-nationally. There are serious limits in monitoring change over time even with a succession of cross-sectional surveys, as the first systematic studies monitoring protest politics only started in the mid-1970s²⁴. In the absence of such resources, here the European Social Survey is analyzed using two approaches. (i) First we compare regression models of linear age effects (implying secular trends that progress steadily from young people to the elderly) and also logged age effects (implying a curvilinear life-cycle pattern with activism peaking in middle-age) to explore which provides a better fit to the data. If we establish that linear models are stronger, they suggest (although they do not prove) substantial intergenerational differences in activism, indicating the direction in which prevailing trends are moving²⁵. In addition, (ii) we can also compare age-related patterns of activism in many different European societies to see whether distinct historical experiences leave a different imprint. Many of the countries under comparison are long-established democracies, although Spain, Greece and Portugal only became consolidated democracies during the 1970s, while the post-Communist states became consolidated during the 1990s. If the experience of democracy during each cohort's formative years stamps a lasting impression on political attitudes and behavior, then we would expect to observe different patterns of activism by age cohort in established and newer democracies.

Another major difficulty facing attempts to understanding and document modern repertoires is that some of these activities are situational and episodic rather than generic. Participation is often triggered in reaction to specific events and particular circumstances, depending upon the structure of opportunities generated by specific issues²⁶. For instance the American and British use of air strikes in Afghanistan triggered an outpouring of street rallies in Karachi, Jakarta and Islamabad, but it is doubtful if residents would have displayed particularly atypical propensities to protest outside of this context. In the past specific critical events such as the American urban riots in the 1960s, reactions to the Vietnam War, the decision to site US nuclear weapons at Greenham Common, and the Chernobyl disaster, may have played a similarly catalytic function, leading to approaches focusing on event analysis²⁷. Reflecting these considerations, studies have often focused on 'protest potential', or the propensity to express

dissent. Yet this can be problematic: surveys are usually stronger at tapping attitudes and values rather than actual behavior, and they are generally more reliable at reporting routine and repetitive actions ('how often do you attend church?') rather than occasional acts. Unfortunately hypothetical questions ('might you ever demonstrate or join in boycotts?') may well prove a poor predictor of actual behavior. These items may prompt answers that are regarded as socially acceptable, or just tap a more general orientation towards the political system (such as approval of freedom of association or tolerance of dissent)²⁸. Given these limitations, this study focuses on political acts that people report they actually *have* done during the previous 12 months, taken as the most accurate and reliable indicator of behavior, and excludes acts that people say they *might* do, or protest potential.

III: The repertoires of political action

So are there contrasts in the age profile activists using different repertoires, as expected? To start to compare the survey evidence, Figure 2 describes the average age of those using citizen-oriented and cause-oriented action repertoires, without any prior controls for their background and attitudes, in the pooled sample across all 15 nations. The pattern confirms, as many observers have found, that all the citizen-oriented acts attracted a slightly older profile; the average age of all survey respondents was 46, but the average age of those who reported voting was 50, while the average age of party members was 52. Yet the results also show how all the cause-oriented acts attracted slightly younger citizens; compared with an average age of 40 for those who demonstrated or protested illegally during the previous year. Those engaging in consumer politics and petitioning were also slightly younger than average.

[Figure 2 about here]

Table 1 breaks down these indicators for younger citizens (aged 18-29), the middle-aged (30-59) and older citizens (60+), and also presents the results of the linear and logged age effect regression models. The results confirm that a significant age gap was apparent in all the citizen-oriented repertoires of action, including voting, contacting, donating money, party membership and party work. The age gap was largest in terms of voting turnout: only half of all the younger people (under 30) reported having voted in an election during the previous 12-months, in sharp contrast to over three-quarters who reported casting a ballot among the middle aged and older groups. The age gap was also clearest in terms of party membership, where only 3% of younger citizens joined parties compared with 8% of the older group, and the gap was modest (although still statistically significant) across the other forms of citizen activity. Yet contrary to the thesis of young people's apathy, the age gap was both substantively larger *and also reversed* for all the

cause-oriented forms of activism. Compared with the older group, young people were 8% more likely to have signed a petition, 7% more likely to have bought a product for political reasons, and 6% more likely to have demonstrated. Regression models can be compared examining both linear age effects (implying secular generational trends) and logged age effects (implying a curvilinear life-cycle pattern) to see which provides a better fit to the data. As shown in the last columns in Table 1, there are often only modest differences, at best, between the linear and logged models. Nevertheless overall the logged models prove slightly stronger for citizen-oriented activities, suggesting a life-cycle effect, especially in voting and contacting officials. And by contrast, where there are differences, the linear models prove marginally stronger for cause-oriented repertoires, suggesting a generational shift.

[Table 2 about here]

Yet these age-related differences could be due to many factors which distinguish younger and older people, whether in terms of their social backgrounds such as their education and cognitive skills, income and residency within a local community, and their political attitudes such as their political interest, trust and efficacy. To examine these factors more systematically, Table 2 uses multivariate regression analysis to examine the role of age (in years) in explaining both citizen-oriented and cause-oriented patterns of activism after entering a comprehensive battery of controls. Model 1 first entered age alone. Model 2 added the standard social factors commonly found to influence activism, including gender, education, income, urbanization, and length of residency. Model 3 then entered the cultural variables associated with participation, including interest, discussion, left-right ideology, closeness to a party, satisfaction with the performance of the government and the workings of democracy, political and social trust, internal and external efficacy and a sense of civic duty. The results show that most of these indicators performed as expected; for example people who engaged in citizen-oriented activism were typically male, well-educated, more affluent, and urban residents, displaying greater than average interest in public affairs, with a partisan attachment, a strong sense of internal efficacy and civic duty. Even after including all these controls, however, *age (in years) remained not only statistically significant but also one of the strongest predictors of citizen activism.*

The pattern of cause-oriented activism also confirmed some similar patterns: those most likely to engage in this repertoire were also typically well-educated and more affluent than average, with a strong sense of internal efficacy. But there were other important contrasts, for example women were more engaged than men, and patterns of residency were also reversed; people who had lived in their community for less time were more cause-oriented. Compared with

civic-oriented activists, cause-oriented activists were also more leftwing and with higher social trust. Most importantly for the issue under analysis, *the age profile remained significant even after including the full battery of controls and it was consistently reversed, with younger people more likely to engage in cause-oriented forms of action, not less.*

[Figure 3 about here]

But is this age difference due to a generational (linear) effect or a life-cycle (curvilinear) effect? And how does this vary by the type of society? Figure 3 presents some of the most persuasive evidence that different patterns are evident in both forms of activism, as already observed. Citizen-oriented activism displays a curvilinear pattern in every type of society, suggesting that the young are indeed least likely to engage through these channels, (especially those aged 18-23), with participation rising then peaking in late middle age, with a subsequent decline among the elderly (especially those over 70). This pattern is clearly evident in post-Communist Europe which only experienced the transition and consolidation of democracy during the last decade, as well as in Mediterranean Europe which became democratic during the 1970s, and in Northern Europe and Scandinavia. The consistency of this curvilinear pattern across diverse types of society suggests that we should rule out the impact of a specific period effect from historical events, such as the era of the radical 1960s student protests in Western Europe, or the experience of the end of the Cold War in post-Communist Europe, which could be expected to have generated the strongest impact upon each particular region. Instead the evidence strongly suggests that civic-oriented activism is the product of life-cycle effects, with younger groups gradually becoming more engaged through elections and parties as they enter middle age and settle down within local communities. Figure 4 breaks this down further by each nation and the results confirm the curvilinear pattern in most (although not all) countries. The fact that the models regressing age on voting participation are stronger in the logged than the linear models also suggests that although there is a large age gap in turnout, nevertheless this can be attributed more to life-cycle patterns, so that the younger groups can be expected to gradually vote more often as they enter middle age. This pattern is consistent with the finding that overall aggregate levels of voting turnout have not declined consistently in established democracies during the post-war era; instead there is a broadly stable pattern of voting during the last fifty years, with only a modest erosion during the 1990s²⁹.

[Figures 4 and 5 about here]

Yet the profile of cause-oriented activists by birth cohort displays strikingly different patterns: while the older cohorts are least engaged through these means, there is a linear rise in

activism until this peaks among the younger cohorts, and this rise is most marked in Scandinavia and, to a lesser extent, Northern Europe. Other types of society, particularly post-Communist Europe, display a flatter age distribution. What this suggests is that younger people are *more* likely than their parents and grandparents to engage in *cause*-oriented political action, contrary to the thesis of youth apathy. A broadly linear pattern is found among successive cohorts in every type of European society, suggesting a persistent generational shift with important implications for representative democracy. Figure 5 breaks this down further by each nation and again this confirms the linear trend in many, although again not all, societies. The variations by nation require further scrutiny in future research, to see what contributes towards these patterns.

Additional evidence for age-related cultural attitudes towards the political system and civic activism in the pooled sample are examined in more detail in Table 3, including patterns of partisan attachment, interest in politics, satisfaction with democracy, civic duty, political and social trust, and efficacy. The results show that the age gap is particularly clear in party affiliations; only 41% of young people (under thirty) feel close to any particular party, compared with two-thirds of the elderly. This helps to explain the fact that party membership is also far stronger among the older groups. The patterns also show that young people were less likely to express political interest and satisfaction with government, as many commentators have commonly reported. Yet at the same time, compared with older groups, young people have a stronger sense of efficacy, both external (meaning a feeling that government is responsive to their interests) and internal (meaning a sense that they can affect government and the policy process), as well as greater trust in multinational institutions, a pattern also confirmed elsewhere. While some cultural indicators therefore predict that the young would be less engaged in politics, others point in the contrary direction.

[Table 3 and 4 about here]

IV: The agencies of political action

The related issue concerns whether there is also a distinct age profile, as expected, in the membership of traditional voluntary associations and new social movements, for all the reasons outlined earlier. Unfortunately we do not have extensive evidence for who belongs to all the major types of new social movements, but the ESS does monitor membership and activism in a range of voluntary associations, including humanitarian and environmental organizations, which are the closest type of new social movements. To start to compare the evidence, Figure 6 provides the average age of membership across a dozen types of voluntary organizations, using the pooled sample from all 15 nations.

[Figure 6 about here]

The results confirm the observation that young people in Europe are usually less engaged through most of these channels. The average age of respondents in the survey was 46, but the average age of the membership was greater in most groups, especially in churches (49), parties (52), and social clubs (54). Even the organizations most closely representing new social movements, including humanitarian associations concerned with human rights and ethnic minorities, attracted a membership slightly older than average, contrary to expectations. We probably need to monitor activism in a broader range of new social movements for a more comprehensive analysis, including distinguishing those active in the women's movement and the anti-globalization movement. Interestingly, the average age of trade unionists reflected the general population in the survey, as did membership of environmental groups. The only exceptions where the age gap reversed were sports and educational groups, both probably reflecting the interests of the young in physical fitness and in student societies. Table 4, breaking down the proportion of the young, middle aged and older groups by type of association, confirms these patterns. For example, 17% of the over-sixties join a social club, compared with only 6% of the under-thirties. By contrast, one quarter (24%) of young people belong to a sports club, compared with 13% among the older group. The regression models present mixed results: overall the differences between logged and linear models remain extremely modest but three groups indicate a slightly stronger logged (life-cycle) age effect (consumer/automobile, business, professional or farmers, and trade unions). Two groups (social clubs and sports clubs) display slightly stronger linear age effects. In the rest, there is no systematic difference.

[Figure 7 and Table 4 about here]

Further analysis of the patterns broken down by birth cohort and type of society, in Figure 7, suggests that in Northern Europe and Scandinavia the pattern of membership was curvilinear, suggesting a life-cycle effect. That is to say, in these countries the young are least engaged, but people are more likely to join groups such as professional associations, consumer affairs and hobbies as they enter middle age, before an erosion of membership as people become less socially active and physically mobile after retirement. In both Mediterranean Europe and post-Communist Europe, however, there are both lower levels of associational membership in general, and the age profile also remains flatter over successive cohorts (especially in Central Europe). These countries appear to be consistently far lower in social capital, as other studies have found, suggesting that most people in these countries do not join these voluntary associations at any age³⁰.

Conclusions

Many observers believe that the younger generation has become disengaged from political participation, reflecting, it is feared, a broader disenchantment and disconnect with representative democracy. Yet many of our traditional indicators, including patterns of voting turnout, church membership, and party activism, present only a partial perspective, and one that may now appear dated, reflecting the civic attachments and channels common during the 1950s but no longer mirroring contemporary politics. Analysts face many difficulties in examining the impact of age upon participation in the absence of a longitudinal time-series of cross-sectional or multi-wave panel surveys. Here we are limited to a single cross-sectional survey which makes it difficult to clearly disentangle life-cycle, generational and period effects. Nevertheless analysis of patterns of activism broken down by birth cohort provides some indirect insights into this process.

Based on the evidence examined in this study, the report concludes with four main findings:

- (i) In terms of repertoires, the report confirms that engagement in *citizen-oriented* political action, especially voting turnout and party membership, peaks among the middle-aged generation (those over 30 and under 60 years) as many others report. The pattern is essentially curvilinear in each major type of society (including post-communist nations), suggesting a life-cycle effect, with both the oldest and the youngest cohorts less likely to engage in these repertoires than the middle-aged.
- (ii) Yet at the same time younger people are *more* likely than their parents and grandparents to engage in *cause-oriented* political action, contrary to the thesis of youth apathy. A broadly linear pattern is found among successive cohorts in every type of European society, suggesting a persistent generational shift, with important implications for representative democracy.
- (iii) In terms of agencies, the report confirms many studies which have observed that the middle-aged also have the highest propensity to belong to traditional voluntary associations, notably political parties and churches. The cohort pattern in older democracies again broadly suggests a life-cycle effect, with a 'flatter' pattern by cohorts in both Mediterranean and post-Communist Europe, where mass membership in civic society remains more limited.

- (iv) Many previous studies also suggest that the generation gap is reversed with younger people more engaged with new social movements concerned with environmental or humanitarian issues, but the limited evidence presented in this study did not substantiate this proposition.

Therefore the comparison suggests that the political energies among the younger generation in postindustrial societies have diversified and flowed through cause-oriented activism, rather than simply ebbed away into apathy. Evidence in this report indicates that multiple contemporary channels of civic engagement, mobilization and expression have emerged in postindustrial societies to supplement traditional modes. How far this represents a broader cultural shift from the politics of loyalties towards the politics of choice is an issue raising important challenges for the future of representative democracy in Europe.

Table 1: Age and the main repertoires of political activism

	All	Younger (i) 18-29	Middle- Aged (ii) 30-59	Older (iii) 60+	Age Gap (i-iii)	Linear age effects		Logged age effects	
						R ²	Sig.	R ²	Sig.
Citizen-oriented repertoires						.048	***	.066	***
Voted	72	50	79	84	-34	.118	***	.162	***
Contacted a politician or official	16	12	19	14	-2	.001	***	.004	***
Donated money to political organization	8	7	9	8	-1	.001	***	.001	***
Party member	6	3	6	8	-4	.009	***	.009	***
Worked for a political party	5	4	5	5	-1	.001	***	.001	***
Cause-oriented repertoires						.004	***	.001	***
Bought products for political reasons	24	24	28	17	7	.002	***	.000	***
Signed a petition	22	23	24	15	8	.003	***	.001	***
Boycotted certain products	15	14	17	11	3	.000	***	.000	n/s
Lawfully demonstrated	6	9	6	3	6	.004	***	.004	***
Took part in illegal protest	0.9	1.4	0.8	0.6	0.8	.001	***	.001	***

Note: Q: "There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?" % who have done these acts. Pooled sample (weighted by dweight). 15 nations N. 29,515. The strength and significance of the relationships between age (in years) and the indicators of activism are measured by the correlation coefficient R. N.18844. The use of a measure of logged age slightly strengthened the coefficient for some traditional repertoires where there was a curvilinear relationship. *** p.>.001 n/s Not significant

Source: The European Social Survey, 2002

Table 2: Models explaining repertoires of activism

	Citizen-oriented activism					Cause-oriented activism				
	B	Std. Error	Beta	Sig	Adj.R ²	B	Std. Error	Beta	Sig	Adj.R ²
MODEL 1: AGE					.036					.006
(Constant)	.706	.				1.048				
Age (in years)	.011	.000	.189	.000		-.005	.000	-.075	.000	
MODEL 2: AGE+ SOCIAL STRUCTURE					.087					.124
(Constant)	-.104					.062				
Age (in years)	.011	.000	.203	.000		-.002	.001	-.026	.002	
Gender (Male)	.107	.014	.057	.000		-.145	.016	-.067	.000	
Highest level of education	.123	.005	.194	.000		.126	.006	.173	.000	
Income (12-cat)	.024	.003	.066	.000		.086	.003	.202	.000	
Urbanization	.049	.006	.062	.000		-.011	.007	-.012	n/s	
How long lived in this area	.002	.000	.036	.000		-.006	.001	-.098	.000	
MODEL 3: AGE+ SOCIAL STRUCTURE + CULTURE					.235					.218
(Constant)	.011					.829				
Age (in years)	.008	.000	.145	.000		-.001	.001	-.017	.042	
Structure										
Gender (Male)	-.005	.013	-.003	n/s		-.235	.015	-.108	.000	
Highest level of education	.059	.005	.092	.000		.056	.006	.077	.000	
Income (12-cat)	.007	.003	.019	.015		.060	.003	.143	.000	
Urbanization	.063	.006	.080	.000		-.009	.006	-.010	n/s	
How long lived in this area	.003	.000	.050	.000		-.004	.001	-.073	.000	
Cultural attitudes										
Interest in politics	.104	.010	.093	.000		.103	.012	.080	.000	
Discuss politics/current affairs	.029	.004	.059	.000		.062	.005	.111	.000	
Placement on left-right scale	-.001	.003	-.003	n/s		-.051	.003	-.103	.000	
Important in life: politics	.016	.003	.041	.000		-.013	.004	-.029	.001	
Feel closer to a particular party than all other parties	.244	.014	.128	.000		.145	.016	.066	.000	
How satisfied with the national government	.013	.004	.032	.000		.020	.004	.041	.000	
How satisfied with how democracy works in country	.001	.004	.003	n/s		.000	.004	.000	n/s	
Trust in the national government and politicians	.001	.002	.005	n/s		-.001	.002	-.004	n/s	
Trust in the EU and UN	-.007	.002	-.033	.000		-.016	.002	-.063	.000	
Social trust	.002	.001	.012	n/s		.021	.001	.116	.000	
Internal efficacy	.097	.004	.199	.000		.073	.005	.131	.000	
External efficacy	.022	.004	.044	.000		.036	.005	.062	.000	
Sense of civic duty	.010	.001	.091	.000		.002	.001	.014	.067	

Note: The models present the results of OLS regression models where the dependent variable is the citizen-oriented activism scale (5-items including voted, party member, party work, donated, contact) or the cause-oriented activism scale (summarizing 5 items including signed petition, bought, boycott, demonstrated, protested).. The coefficients represent the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), the standard Error, the standardized regression coefficient (Beta) and the significance. n/s=Not significant. Pooled sample weighted by dweight. 15 nations. Models were tested with tolerance statistics for multi-collinearity. The positive age coefficient represents the greater propensity to engage in citizen-oriented activity by older groups. **Source:** The European Social Survey, 2002

Table 3: Age and political attitudes

	All	Younger	Middle aged	Older	Age Gap	Corr	Linear age effects		Logged age effects	
		18-29	30-59	60+		R	R ²	Sig	R ²	Sig
Feel closer to a particular party than all other parties	54	41	55	62	-21	-.166	.029	***	.030	***
Interest in politics (% 'very interested')	10	6	10	12	-6	-.083	.016	***	.020	***
Satisfied with the national government (5-10)	51	49	50	55	-6	.042	.002	***	.001	***
Important in life: politics (% 'impt' 5-10)	49	46	50	51	-5	.031	.004	***	.004	***
Satisfied with how democracy works in country(5-10)	69	68	68	70	-2	.000	.000	n/s	.000	n/s
Discuss politics/current affairs (% every day)	13	10	16	11	-1	.032	.000	n/s	.001	***
Trust in the national government/ politicians (mean)	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.2	0	-.009	.000	n/s	.000	n/s
Sense of civic duty (mean 60-pt scale)	41.2	40.1	41.2	42.1	-0.2	.081	.016	***	.014	***
Social trust (mean 30-pt scale)	15.2	15.0	15.3	15.5	-0.5	.026	.003	***	.002	***
Placement on left-right scale (% left 0-4)	31	32	32	29	+3	.032	.002	***	.002	***
External efficacy (mean 10-pt scale)	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.4	+0.3	-.053	.001	***	.000	***
Internal efficacy (mean 10-point scale)	5.3	5.4	5.4	4.8	+0.6	-.095	.003	***	.001	***
Trust in the EU and UN (mean 20-point scale)	10.1	10.6	10.1	9.9	+0.7	-.062	.005	***	.006	***

Note: The age effect estimates represent the results of individual-level regression analysis where age (in years) was regressed as a linear or logged variable on political attitudes, without any prior controls, using curvefit. The regression coefficients represent the amount of variance, and the significance of the relationship, explained by age. A positive correlation (R) represents greater support among older citizens and a negative coefficient represents greater support among younger citizens. The pooled sample in 15 nations was weighted by dweight.

Source: The European Social Survey, 2002

Table 4: Age and membership of voluntary organizations

Type of organization	All	Young	Middle	Older	Age Gap	Corr R.	Sig.	Linear age		Logged	
		er 18-29	aged 30-59	60+				effects R ²	Sig.	age effects R ²	Sig.
Social club, club for the young, the retired/elderly, women or friendly societies	10	6	7	17	11	.133	***	.020	***	.014	***
Consumer or automobile organization	15	8	19	13	5	.057	***	.009	***	.015	***
Religious or church organization	12	10	12	14	4	.054	***	.003	***	.003	***
Organization for cultural or hobby activity	13	10	14	13	3	.022	***	.002	***	.002	***
Business, professional or farmers' organization	9	4	11	6	2	.021	***	.002	***	.005	***
Humanitarian aid, human rights, minorities or immigrants	5	4	5	5	1	.028	***	.002	***	.003	***
An organization for environmental protection, peace, or animal rights	4	4	5	4	0	-.003	n/s	.000	***	.000	***
A trade union	21	13	28	12	-1	-.002	n/s	.001	***	.006	***
Organization for science, education, or teachers and parents	6	5	9	2	-3	-.048	***	.001	***	.000	***
Sports club	20	24	23	13	-11	-.116	***	.008	***	.006	***

Note: Q: "For each of the voluntary organizations I will now mention, please use the card to tell me whether any of these things apply to you now or in the last 12 months and, if so, which?" % Members Pooled sample weighted by dweight. 15 nations N. 29,515. The strength and significance of the relationships between age (in years) and the indicators of activism are measured by the correlation coefficient R. The use of a measure of logged age slightly strengthened the coefficient for some traditional agencies (especially work-based unions and professional associations) where there was a curvilinear relationship. *** p.>.001 n/s Not significant

Source: The European Social Survey, 2002

Figure 1: Typology of the evolution of political action

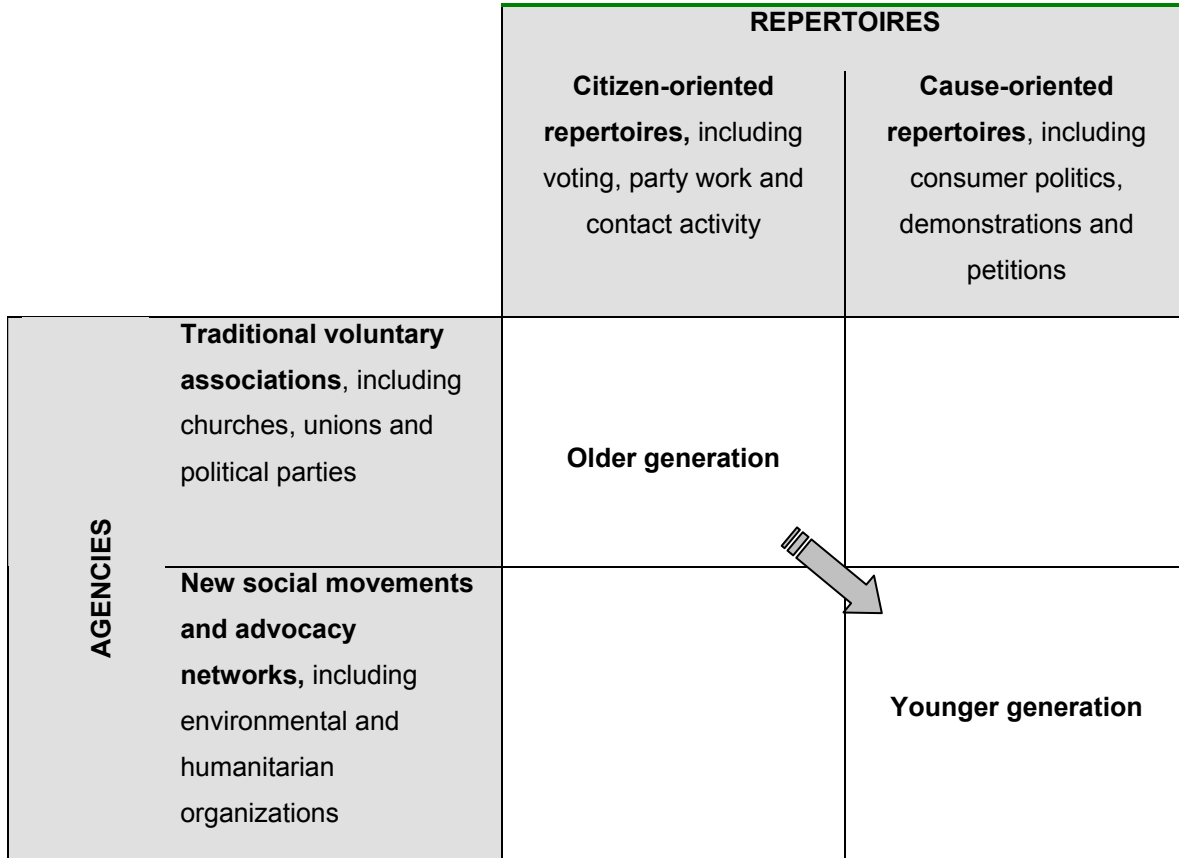
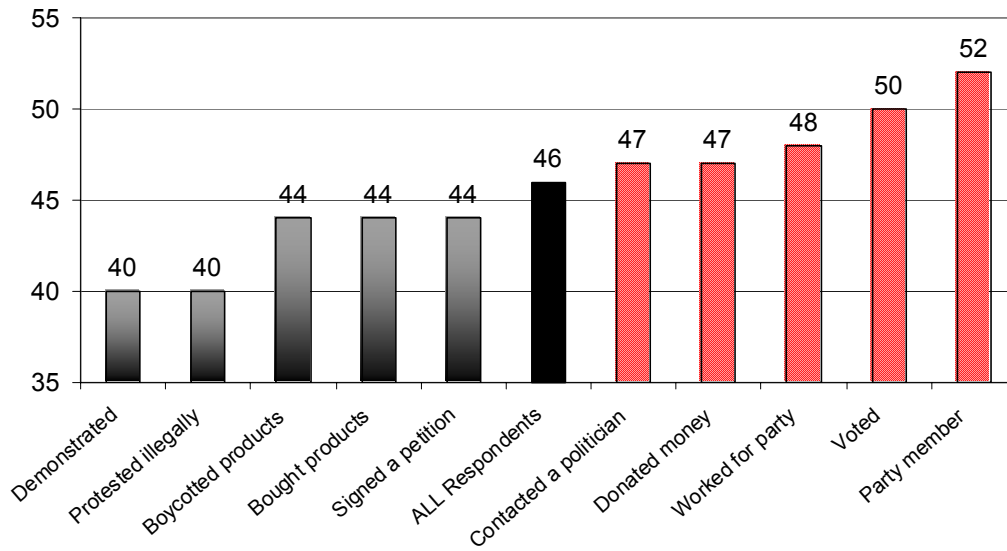


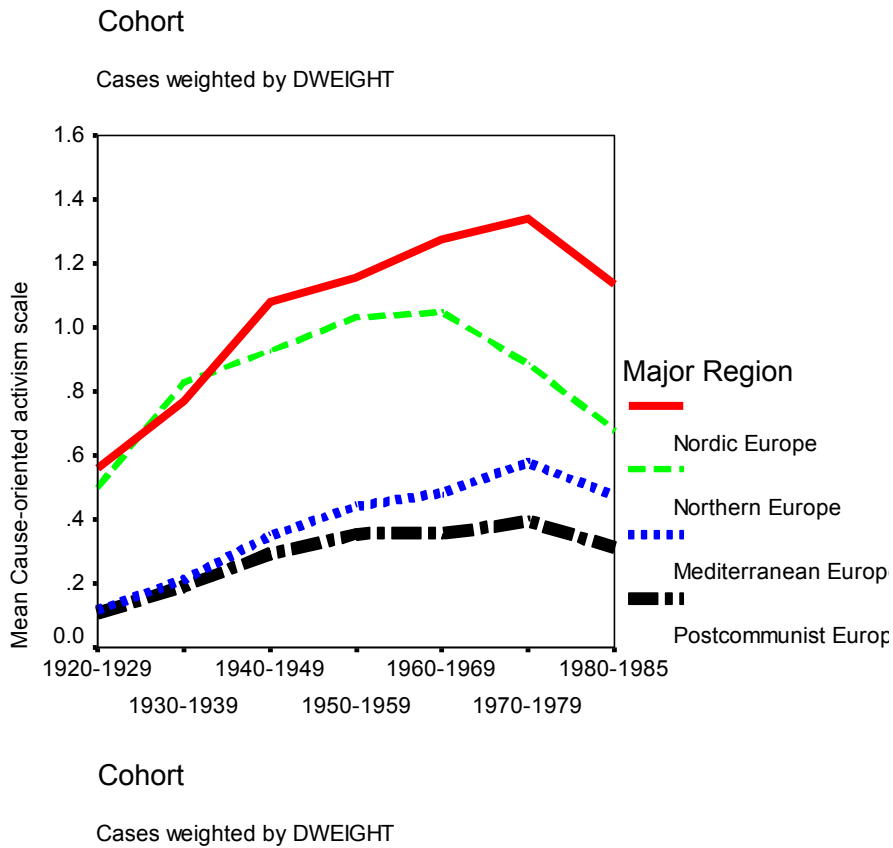
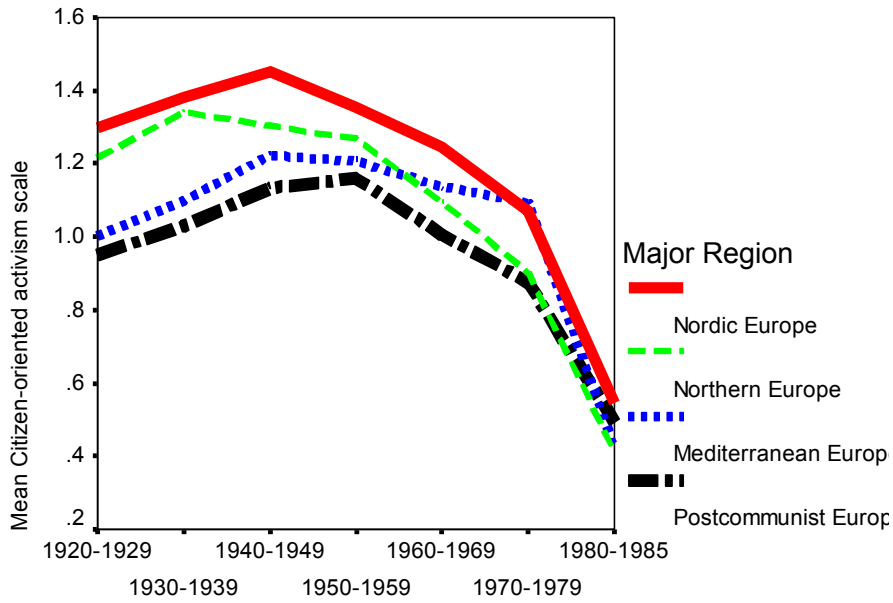
Figure 2: Mean age of activists



Note: Whether the respondent did these acts during the previous 12-months

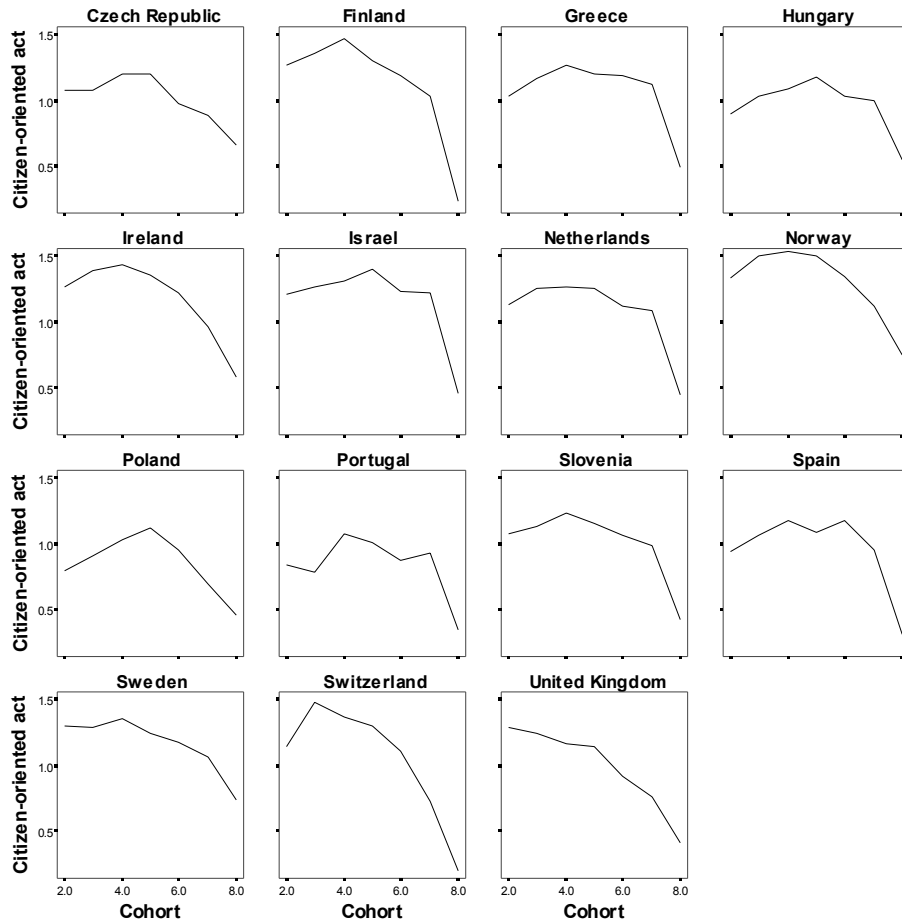
Source: The European Social Survey, 2002

Figure 3: Activism by cohort and region



Source: The European Social Survey, 2002

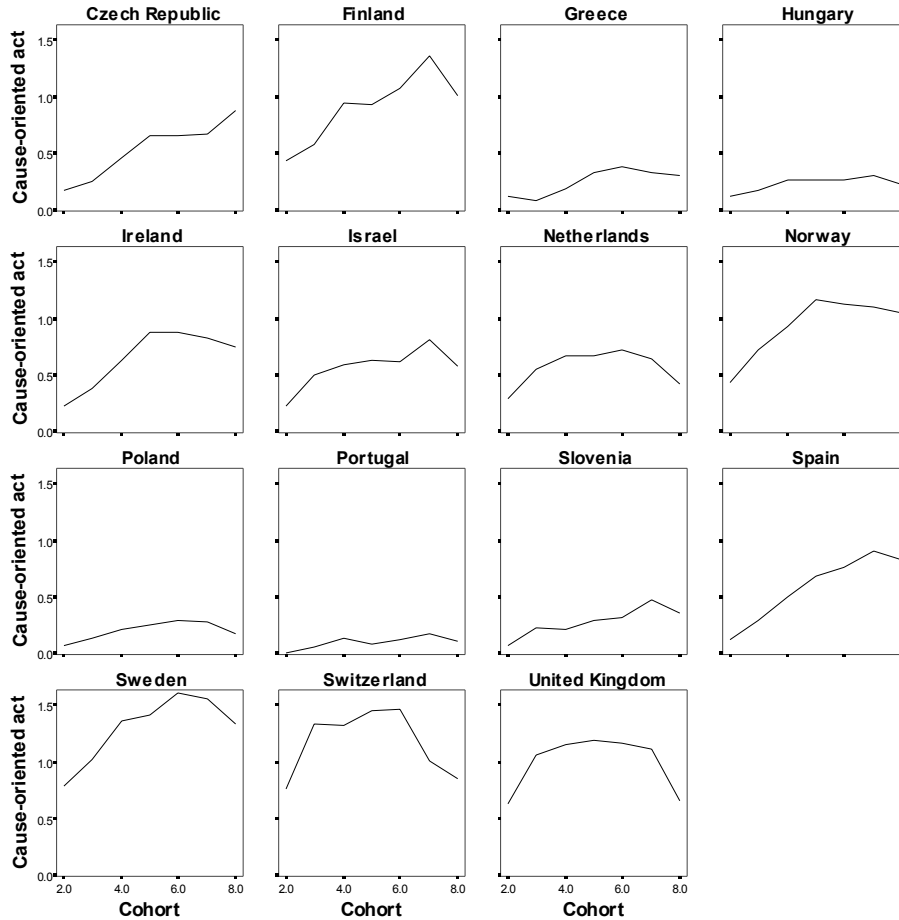
Figure 4: Cohort analysis of citizen-oriented activism



Note: The citizen-oriented activism scale summarizes whether the respondent did five acts during the previous 12-months: voted, party member, worked for party, donated money, contacted official. The cohorts in the pooled dataset were classified by decade of birth (2=1920-29; 3=1930-39; 4=1940-49; 5=1950-59; 6=1960-69; 7=1970-79; 8=1980-85). Weighted by dweight.

Source: The European Social Survey, 2002

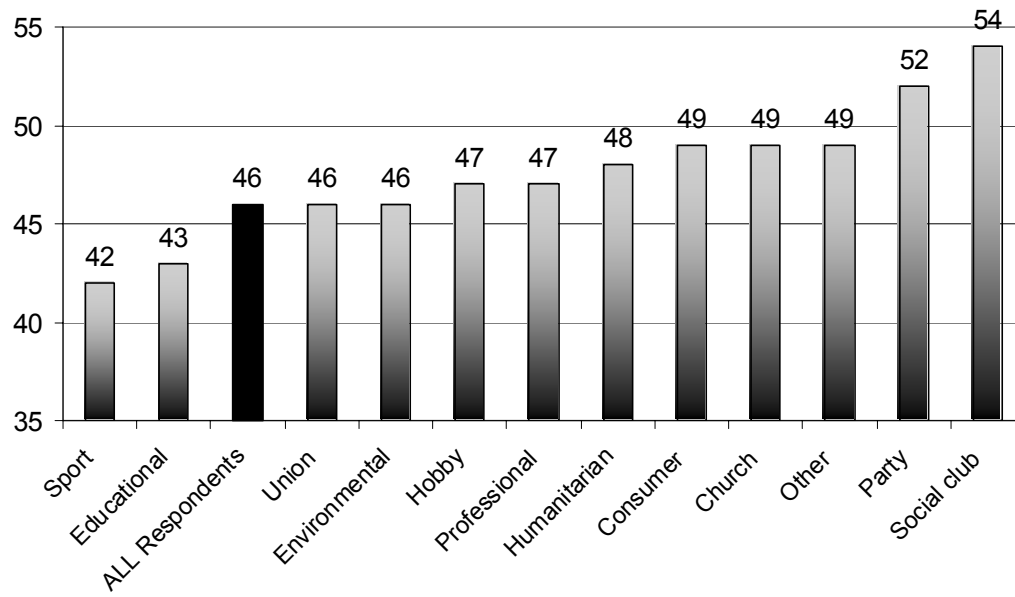
Figure 5: Cohort analysis of cause-oriented activism



Note: The cause-oriented activism scale summarizes whether the respondent did five acts during the previous 12-months: signed petition, bought goods for political reasons, boycotted goods for political reasons, demonstrated legally, protested illegally. The cohorts in the pooled dataset were classified by decade of birth (2=1920-29; 3=1930-39; 4=1940-49; 5=1950-59; 6=1960-69; 7=1970-79; 8=1980-85). Weighted by dweight.

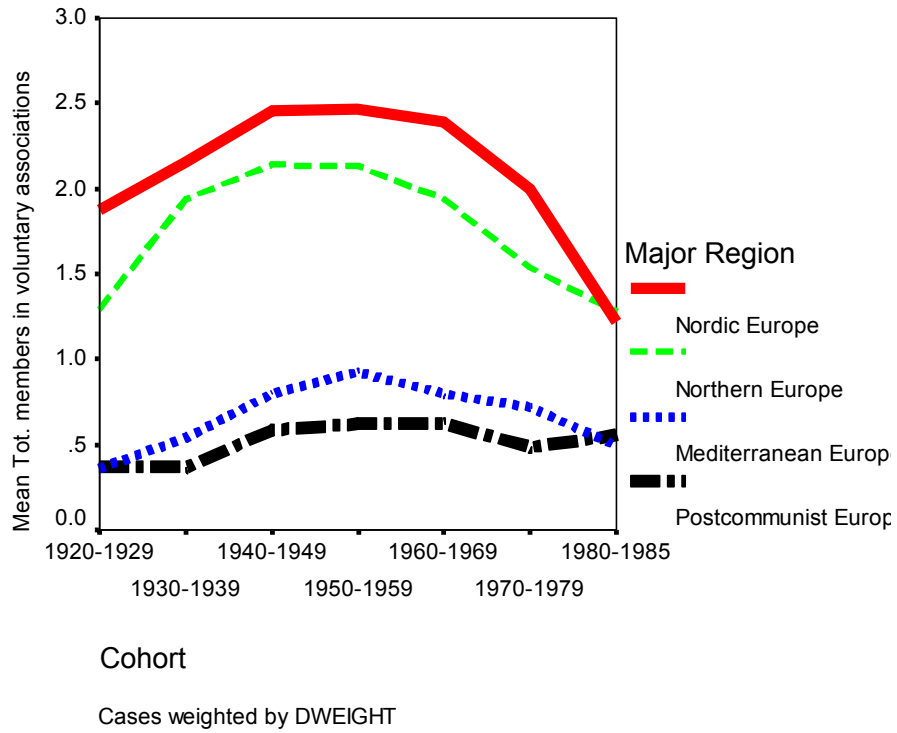
Source: The European Social Survey, 2002

Figure 6: Mean age of associational members



Source: The European Social Survey, 2002

Figure 7: Membership in voluntary associations by cohort and region



Source: The European Social Survey, 2002

¹ The 'civic malaise' literature is too numerous to cite but a summary can be found in Pippa Norris. Ed. 1999. *Critical Citizens*. NY: Oxford University Press and Pippa Norris. 2002. *Democratic Phoenix*. NY: Cambridge University Press. For some of the most thorough examinations of generational patterns in the U.S. see Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks. 1996. *The New American Voter*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Robert D. Putnam. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. NY: Simon and Schuster. For studies of generational patterns of turnout in other postindustrial societies see Mark N. Franklin. 2004. *The Dynamics of Voter Turnout in Established Democracies since 1945*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

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¹⁰ For details see Ronald Inglehart. 1997 *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. 2003. *Rising tide: Gender equality and cultural change around the world* New York: Cambridge University Press; Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. 2004. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. (forthcoming). New York: Cambridge University Press.

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¹⁵ Harvey B. Feigenbaum, J. Henig and C. Hamnett. 1998. *Shrinking the State: The Political Underpinnings of Privatization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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²¹ See N. D. De Graaf. 1999. 'Event history data and making a history out of cross-sectional data - How to answer the question "Why cohorts differ?"' *Quality & Quantity* 33 (3): 261-276.

²² For more details, including the questionnaire and methodology, see <http://naticent02.uuhost.uk.uu.net/index.htm>. Data for an initial fifteen countries, along with comprehensive documentation, is accessible at <http://ess.nsd.uib.no>.

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²⁴ Samuel Barnes and Max Kaase. 1979. *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*. Beverley Hills, CA: Sage.

²⁵ See N. D. De Graaf. 1999. 'Event history data and making a history out of cross-sectional data - How to answer the question 'Why cohorts differ?'' *Quality & Quantity* 33 (3): 261-276.

²⁶ M. Kent Jennings and Jan W. van Deth, et al. 1989. *Continuities in Political Action: A Longitudinal Study of Political Orientations in Three Western Democracies*. New York: Walter de Gruyter.

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²⁸ For a fuller discussion see Samuel Barnes and Max Kaase. 1979. *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*. Beverley Hills, CA: Sage; Christo[pher A. Rootes. 1981. 'On the future of protest politics in Western democracies: A critique of Barnes, Kaase et al., Political Action.' *European Journal of Political Research* 9: 421-432.

²⁹ See Pippa Norris. 2002. *Democratic Phoenix*. NY: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 3; Mark N. Franklin. 2004. *The Dynamics of Voter Turnout in Established Democracies since 1945*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

³⁰ See Pippa Norris. 2002. *Democratic Phoenix*. NY: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 8.