

Youth participation in Eastern Europe in the age of austerity

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Abstract

This chapter explores ways in which austerity policies have influenced patterns of youth political participation between the core and periphery of the European Union (EU), focusing on Eastern Europe. The varied impact of austerity across the EU is reflected in the finding that young people in the Eastern periphery tend to refrain from both conventional and unconventional modes of political participation. While aggravating socioeconomic conditions have resulted in the rise of unconventional political participation activities among young people in Southern Europe, the same has not been the case in Eastern Europe. On the contrary, our findings suggest a retreat from politics that cuts across the distinction between conventional and unconventional modes of political participation.

Introduction

Since the 2008 global financial crisis, a number of countries of the European Union (EU) have adopted austerity policies. Austerity, the neoliberal doctrine that promotes cutting public spending in order to restore competitiveness (Blyth, 2013, p. 12), is often framed by policy-makers as ‘common sense’ and as the only rational policy response in the given circumstances. Furthermore, austerity is often explained with reductionist arguments by its proponents, without seeking to understand its impact on different groups. The human cost of austerity policies was largely invisible (McKee et al, 2012) until recently, due to a lack of reliable data. Despite the growing political economy literature on the negative effects of austerity on various aspects of society, there are still gaps to be filled in regard to the impact of austerity measures. One of these gaps is the impact of austerity policies on patterns of political participation among young people, which we address in this chapter.

Many countries in the EU, and particularly those of Eastern Europe, today face unusually high rates of youth unemployment. According to Eurostat (2016d), the EU average for unemployment among young people aged 15 to 30 peaked in 2013 at 23.8 per cent. This trend is accompanied by declining involvement of young people in conventional forms of political participation, such as voting in parliamentary elections (Ilišin, Bouillet, Gvozdanović and Potočnik, 2013). However, it is important not to make generalisations because significant differences exist among EU member states. For instance, the United Kingdom has experienced rising rates of electoral participation among young people (Pickard, 2017). Similarly, though democracy across Europe is facing a crisis of representation, evidenced through increasing disconnect between citizens and political parties (Mair, 2013) – contemporary research reveals significant differences between the political behaviour of older and younger generations (Dalton, 2011). Following these broad trends, we start from the assumption that both the global financial crisis and the subsequent repertoire of austerity policies have affected European societies unevenly, with differences particularly pronounced along the lines of core-periphery (Epstein, 2014; Hanzl-Weiss and Landesmann, 2013; Jacoby, 2014; Vachudova, 2014). Populations of Southern and Eastern Europe have been worse hit by austerity measures, in

contrast to Northern European states, Germany and Austria, where these impacts have been less pronounced. Taking this on board, we analyse how this dynamic relates to youth political participation. Many empirical studies focus on youth participation in Western Europe (Gaiser, De Rijke, and Spanring, 2010; Grasso, 2016; Pickard, 2017; Sloam, 2007) and Southern Europe (Hooghe, 2012; Lima and Artiles, 2013; Morciano et al., 2014), while there are only a few studies of Eastern Europe (Kovacheva, 2000).

Firstly, we argue that austerity policies have aggravated social welfare by increasing the proportion of young people who remain living with their parents late into their twenties. Secondly, we argue that their prolonged economic dependence thwarts their bid to attain relative autonomy (Garrido and Requena, 1996), and that this is reflected in their modes of political participation. In other words, we explore the interaction between the economic dependence of young people and type of their political participation. Therefore, our main research objective is to explore how austerity policies, mediated through a prolonged life in the parental home, affect the patterns and repertoires of youth political activism and participation. A deferred process of gaining autonomy arguably suppresses innovation and creativity among young people, which are important for their political participation (Siurala, 2000). We argue that prolonged reliance on the family might lead to ‘infantilisation, marked by political apathy and non-participation, or it might lead to an increase in contentious political action. This chapter explores patterns of youth participation in Europe by relying on dependency theory (see below), which postulates a core-periphery dynamic among EU member states. In order to relate the varied impact of austerity between the core and the periphery of Europe to differences in youth political participation, we analyse indicators of economic and social effects of austerity policies in the EU, focusing in particular on countries of Eastern Europe. Coupled with that, we use International Social Science Programme (ISSP) survey data to contrast features of youth political participation in the EU core and its Eastern periphery.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In the first section, we present key arguments regarding effects of austerity policies, their differentiated impact across the core and periphery of Europe, and related expectations regarding youth political participation. In the second section, we outline our comparative analysis of the impact of austerity by examining several indicators for the 28 member states of the EU. In the third section, we analyse ISSP (2014) survey data for 14 countries of Western and Eastern Europe, exploring features of youth conventional and unconventional political participation and relating them to effects of austerity measures. In the final section, we summarize our findings and discuss their implications.

Theoretical framework

Earlier literature on political participation in Europe stressed the difference between Western democracies on the one hand, and post-communist countries on the other. Since the global financial crisis of 2008, political economic analyses have emphasised the core-periphery divide within Europe, characterised by strong economic performance of the North-western core, and a variety of economic deficiencies in both the Southern and Eastern peripheries. Though the process of European integration is premised on the idea that all member states / countries will converge towards the liberal democratic model of development (Green and Smith, 2000), a growing body of literature has shown that European economies have instead clustered into distinctive varieties of capitalism (e.g., Bohle and Greskovits, 2012; King, 2007; Nölke and Vliementhart, 2009). Eastern European countries have developed into liberal economies, characterised by the unhappy marriage of declining welfare standards and liberalised economies that depend on foreign investment (Bohle and Greskovits, 2012).

Core-periphery models, which emerged from dependence theory and the global political economy approach in the 1970s, help explain some features of contemporary social and economic inequalities, and “the dynamics of underdevelopment and regional inequalities on the

global level” (Naustdalslid, 1977, p. 203). In Wallerstein’s original formulation, the world system encapsulates countries of Africa, South America, and parts of Asia (periphery) being economically dependent on North America and Western Europe (core). Developed in opposition to modernisation theory, which assumed that all countries were moving along a linear path towards the ‘superior’ development model of the United States, dependency theory emphasised the fact that poor and wealthy countries are part of the same whole, global capitalist system, rather than similar entities at different stages of development. More importantly, this literature argued that underdevelopment in the periphery was the direct result of development in the centre.

The 2008 global financial crisis drew attention to diverging trajectories among EU member states, aspects of dependency theory have re-emerged in contemporary analysis. Authors such as Schweiger and Magone (2014), de la Porte and Pochet (2014) and Busch et al. (2013) argue that the global financial crisis and the subsequent Eurozone sovereign debt crisis, together with the existing democratic deficit of the EU, have accentuated the internal divisions within the EU. According to Schwiger and Magone (2004, p. 259), the EU is divided “between the Eurozone core group and differentiated peripheries amongst the outsiders.” This raises the issue of whether, and in what way, the distinct features of political economies of the EU’s core and periphery impact the political participation of young people.

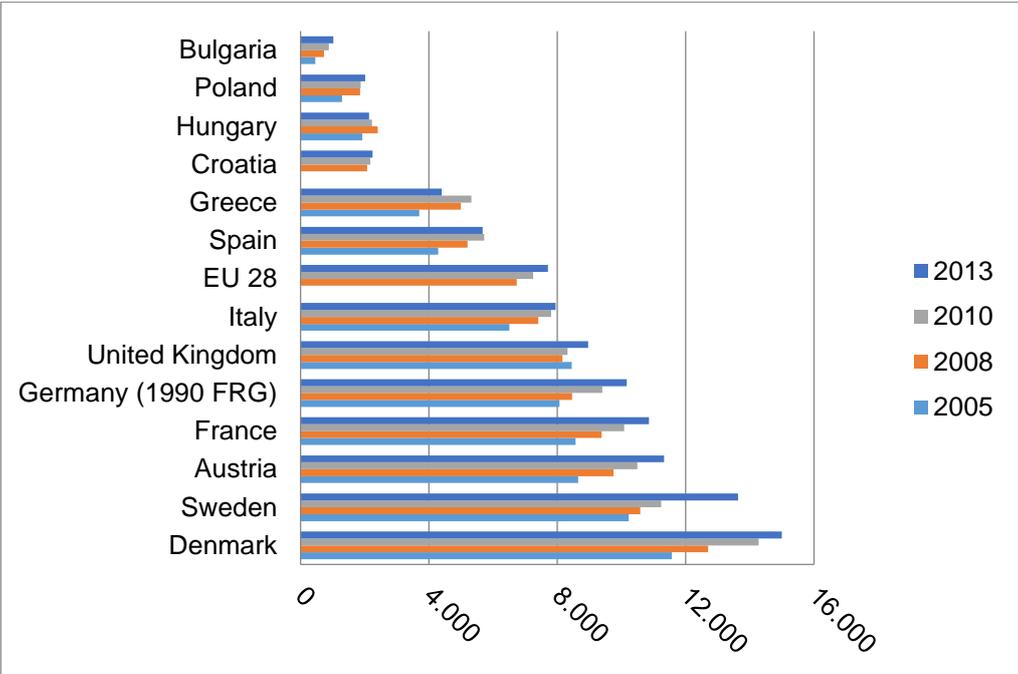
Within the core-periphery dynamic, we understand the financial crisis of 2008 as aggravating already existing differences among EU member states, given that they represent a logical extension of the long-term trend of increasing economic liberalism in the EU. Neoliberal economic policies were taken up by the EU in its reforms during the 1990s (Judt, 2009). For Hall (2012), the guiding principle of the EU, which used to be “peace for Europe”, was reformulated by the Single European Act, 1987 into “prosperity for everyone via the Single Market.” The criteria in the Treaty of Maastricht on European Union, 1992, and the Stability and Growth Pact; 1988 effectively closed a number of policy options available for pursuing social objectives (Esping Andersen, 2002; Green and Smith, 2000). As a result, the EU’s policy prescriptions after the 1990s started to resemble increasingly those of international financial organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Guillén and Palier, 2004). In a deliberate emulation of the model of development in the United States, the Washington consensus on deregulation, the minimal State and low taxation travelled to Europe (Judt, 2009).

Austerity as a concept stands for economic measures implemented by national governments with the aim of reducing public expenditure and controlling public sector debt. Ostensibly, their principal aim is to restore the trust of financial markets and investors, thereby restoring competitiveness, but their principal effects have been on the social fabric of European states. As several analyses show (e.g. Busch et al, 2013; Blyth, 2013), in the attempt to consolidate public finances, austerity measures created negative consequences for the European social model. This resulted in significant cuts in welfare in Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and elsewhere, jeopardizing the “very foundations of social and economic development” (Lehndorff, 2012, p. 15). In contrast, Western European countries like Austria, France, Germany, and Sweden were performing much better (ibid).

Figure 1 shows levels of investment into social protection for a selection of European states, in order to illustrate some of the dynamic described above. The annual data, ranging between 2005 and 2013, has been selected so as to capture changes in the level of social protection before and after the financial crisis of 2008. Furthermore, Figure 1 reveals considerable differences among member states of the EU with respect to overall levels of social welfare. While in Denmark the total level of expenditure on social protection per inhabitant ranges between EUR 11,500 and EUR 15,000, in Bulgaria the range is between EUR 450 and EUR 1,000. Figure 1 also shows that while the core European countries reacted to the economic

crisis by substantially increasing investment into social protection, the same cannot be said of the peripheral states. Peripheral members of the EU both entered the crisis with much lower levels of social protection, and they have not been able to substantially increase it since 2008. In the case of Hungary for instance, the levels of investment in social protection per inhabitant are actually lower post-2008.

Figure 1: Total expenditure on social protection, per inhabitant (in Euros)



Source: Eurostat (2016) ‘Expenditure on social protection, 2003-13’.

In brief, austerity measures implemented post-2008 emphasised already existing differences regarding social protection among core and peripheral states of the EU. Austerity measures have had a stronger impact in peripheral regions of Europe, with consequences for various social groups. In this chapter, we focus on young people, and in particular on the possible effects of austerity on youth participation in Eastern Europe. Young people are expected to be particularly vulnerable because their quest for identity and social integration is occurring in unstable and risky circumstances of democratic transition where societal and political spheres change drastically (France, 2007; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997).

The political and social experiences of young people shape their political identity and actions as adults. Thus, it is important to explore the political actions of young people because their social and political behaviour may reveal important features of the social and political reality of our future (Kimberlee, 2002; Mannheim, 1970; Pickard, 2017). Given the severe effects of austerity policies that we describe, analysts are now talking of a “lost generation” (International Labour Organization - ILO, 2012). We expect this phenomenon to be particularly pertinent for young people in the periphery of Europe, where they are encountering the so-called double transition (Ule, 1988). In the post-socialist context, young people’s transition from childhood to adulthood takes place in a changing context of countries undergoing political and economic transformation into liberal democracies (Ilišin, Bouillet, Gvozdanović, Potočnik, 2013). Furthermore, key life events such as marriage or parenthood are being postponed,

especially in Southern and Eastern Europe (Ilišin, Bouillet, Gvozdanić, Potočnik, 2013). This phenomenon of “extended youth,” which is characteristic of Mediterranean countries, means that integration of young people into society is being prolonged (Ule, 1988). Arguably, austerity policies, and in particular high levels of unemployment among youth in the European peripheries have further aggravated youth dependence on their parents. How does this prolonged dependence translate into patterns and repertoires of political activism and participation?

Research on Southern European countries shows that high youth unemployment rates push young people into a state of frustration, caused primarily by the lack of available jobs in the labour market, in response to which they initiate various contentious activities (Cairns, de Almeida Alves and Correia, 2016; Williamson, 2014). Given this finding, we analyse whether similar patterns are observable in Eastern European countries.

As is the case with general political participation, investigating empirically youth political participation includes activities aimed at “attempting to influence the activity of government and the selection of officials, trying to affect the values and preferences which guide the political decision-making process, and seeking to include new issues on the agenda” (Morales, 2009, p. 57). Political participation is closely related to democratic and economic performance of a country, and, as Dalton (1988) argues, the success of democracy is measured by the extent of citizens’ participation in the decision-making process. In addition, Putnam (2000) claims that consolidated democracies have higher conventional political participation rates, due to more developed democratic political culture.

In order to avoid conceptual stretching (Sartori, 1970) and to avoid making the study of political participation is “a study of everything” (Van Deth, 2001, p. 2), in this chapter, youth political participation is understood as attempts of young people to influence the decision-making process and put their issues on the political agenda (Kovacheva, 2005). Barnes and Kaase’s (1979) differentiate between conventional and unconventional political participation, and this was later elaborated by Inglehart (1990). This is a distinction between *elite-directed activities* (voting, party membership, union membership), as opposed to *elite directing activities*^{1 2}(political discussion, participation in new social movements and protest activities).

Building on their argument, Grasso (2016, p. 17) operationalises conventional political participation in terms of voting, contacting a politician, donating money, joining a party, doing unpaid voluntary work for a political party, while unconventional political participation is captured by indicators such as signing a petition, joining a boycott, joining an environmental organisation, attending a demonstration and occupying public spaces. Taking this into account, a vast number of recent empirical studies focusing on young people confirm that they incline more towards unconventional political participation (Dalton, 2011; Grasso, 2016; Ilišin, Bouillet, Gvozdanić, Potočnik, 2013). As Kovacheva points out, research on young people in principle deals with three fundamental forms of political participation: “involvement in institutional politics (elections, campaigns and membership); protest activities (demonstrations and new social movements); and civic engagement (associative life, community participation, voluntary work)” (2005, p. 25). However, despite these recent discussions, very limited empirical research exists regarding unconventional youth participation due to measurement problems and the bias in self-reporting (Amnå and Ekman, 2014; Dalton, 2011; Kovacheva, 2005).

What about us? Empirical evidence from the Eastern Europe periphery

In this section, we explore the relationship between the effects of austerity and political participation of young people in core and peripheral European states. Following similar analyses (Busch et al, 2013; Müller, 2014), austerity measures are operationalised into four indicators: unemployment rate, social expenditure on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), risk

of poverty and material deprivation. In addition, given our focus on young people, we include two more indicators: youth unemployment rate and the average age when young people leave their parental home. All data shown in Table 2 are for the year 2014 and retrieved from Eurostat, apart from the “social expenditure of the GDP” indicator, which was retrieved from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) database. In the following section, we present this data and the main findings, then relate the effects of austerity measures to patterns of young people’s political participation. Information on patterns of young people’s political participation are obtained from the International Social Science Programme (ISSP) programme, the 2014 module on citizenship.

Core EU countries are characterised by higher overall economic development in contrast to Eastern and Southern Europe, regions most severely hit by austerity measures. In that sense, austerity measures may be seen as amplifying already strong core-periphery differences within Europe. Table 2 shows that core EU countries are performing better on all selected indicators. For instance, material deprivation, an indicator capturing the extent to which people have access to goods necessary for a decent life, is three times higher in the periphery than in the core of Europe. In addition, peripheral countries are marked by comparatively higher risk of poverty rates, demonstrating aggravated social welfare in the aftermath of austerity.

Regarding young people, Table 2 shows that those from peripheral Europe leave their parents’ home later (average age is 28.5 years) in comparison to their peers from the West (average age 23.85 years). Though we know that cultural factors play a role here as well (Ule and Kuhar, 2008; Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998), when analysed together with the social impact of austerity, the average age of young people leaving home does seem to be related primarily to economic factors. Furthermore, youth unemployment is substantially lower in the core, where the average rate is 17.93%, while the average youth unemployment rate in the EU periphery is 28.71%. This is in line with other studies, which have established that peripheral European countries have higher rates of youth unemployment (O’Reilly, et al, 2015). Along the same lines, Table 2 shows that general unemployment levels are almost double in the periphery when compared to the core of Europe.

These findings suggest that life prospects of young people in the periphery of Europe are considerably more adverse than those of the core countries. In the following sections, we explore the possible relationships that austerity has had on patterns of conventional and unconventional youth political participation, focusing particularly on Eastern Europe.

We cluster political participation into two categories, using Grasso’s (2016) conceptualisation of conventional and unconventional participation (see also Pickard, 2017). Unconventional political participation is captured by relying on the following survey items: signing a petition, boycotting certain products, taking part in protests, contact media, choosing products for political or environmental reasons, and expressing political views on the Internet. Our measurement of conventional political participation includes the following survey items: voting in an election, contacting a politician, attending a political meeting or rally, donating money, and being a member of a party. In addition, young people are defined based on the mode value of national definitions of youth for the EU-28 countries (Eapyouth, 2015), that is, as the age group between 18 and 30.

Table 2: Austerity in the core and peripheral EU member states, 2014

Country	Unemployment (%)	Social expenditure % of GDP	Risk of poverty (%)	Material deprivation (%)	Youth unemployment (%)	Youth leaving home (average age)
<i>Periphery</i>						
Bulgaria	11.4	n.a.	40.1	33.1	23.8	29.1
Croatia	17.3	n.a.	29.3	13.9	45.5	31.0
Cyprus	16.1	n.a.	27.4	15.3	36.0	28.4
Czech Republic	6.1	19.1	14.8	6.7	15.9	26.7
Estonia	7.4	16.0	26.0	6.2	15.0	24.2
Greece	26.5	26.1	36.0	21.5	52.4	29.3
Hungary	7.7	21.4	31.8	24.0	20.4	27.7
Italy	12.7	29.0	28.3	11.6	42.7	30.1
Latvia	10.8	14.2	32.7	19.2	19.6	28.0
Lithuania	10.7	n.a.	27.3	13.6	19.3	26.1
Malta	5.8	n.a.	23.8	10.2	11.7	30.6
Poland	9.0	19.5	24.7	10.4	23.9	28.3
Portugal	14.1	24.5	24.7	10.6	34.7	28.8
Romania	6.8	n.a.	40.3	26.3	24.0	28.5
Slovakia	13.2	17.4	18.4	9.9	29.7	30.8
Slovenia	9.7	21.5	0.4	6.6	20.2	28.6
Spain	24.5	26.1	29.2	7.1	53.2	29.1
Periphery, average	12.34	21.35	26.78	14.48	28.71	28.55
<i>Core</i>						
Austria	5.6	27.9	19.2	4.0	10.3	25.4
Belgium	8.5	29.2	21.6	5.9	23.2	25.1
Denmark	6.6	29.0	17.9	3.2	12.6	21.2
Finland	8.2	30.0	17.3	2.8	20.5	21.9
France	10.3	31.9	18.5	6.7	24.2	23.7
Germany	5.0	24.9	20.6	5.0	7.7	23.8
Ireland	11.3	19.2	27.6	8.4	23.9	25.8
Luxembourg	6.0	23.0	19.0	1.4	22.3	26.7
Netherlands	7.4	n.a.	16.5	3.2	12.7	23.6
Sweden	7.9	27.1	16.9	0.7	22.9	20.9
United Kingdom	6.1	21.6	24.1	7.3	16.9	24.3
Core, average	7.53	26.38	19.93	4.43	17.93	23.85

Sources: OECD, 2016; Eurostat, 2016a; Eurostat, 2016b; Eurostat, 2016c; Eurostat, 2016d; Eurostat, 2016e; Eurostat, 2016f.

Table 3 shows data on conventional participation among young people for countries of the core and of the Eastern periphery. Our selection of countries classified as core and Eastern periphery is based on countries that participated in the International Social Science Programme (ISSP) survey. The first two columns in Table 3 show percentages of young people who agree with the statement that voting in elections was important, while the remaining columns in Table 3 show the percentage of young people who report participating in the given activity, such as contacting a politician or being member of a political party. The last two rows show results of

chi-square test, used to establish whether there was a statistically significant difference in youth conventional participation rates between the two regions.

Table 3: Conventional youth participation

	Voting in elections (%)		Contacting politician (%)	Rally participation (%)	Donations to politicians (%)	Party membership (%)
	Not important	Important				
Austria	5.4	35.65	14.8	19	40.4	6.2
Belgium	8.75	35.15	10.1	19.1	54.6	4.5
Denmark	3.9	41.05	10.7	28.2	54.9	4
Finland	12.35	30.8	6.8	17.3	38.3	3.2
France	4.3	40.95	7.5	20.7	43.7	2.4
UK	8.9	34.9	8.8	9.8	44.2	9.8
Sweden	2.2	41.3	17	29.8	53.8	5.3
Core	6.54	37.11	10.81	20.56	47.12	5.1
Croatia	11.15	33.35	5.7	8.2	26.4	9.5
Czech Republic	11.7	32.05	12.1	23.4	16.6	2.1
Hungary	9	34.2	2.6	6	3.5	2.5
Lithuania	5.4	39.25	7.7	13.4	38.7	6.5
Poland	7.4	35	3.2	7.8	20.2	1.2
Slovakia	14.85	27.05	5	6.2	6.3	n. a.
Slovenia	17.2	68.9	12.1	12	26.5	4.3
Eastern Europe	10.92	38.54	6.9	11	19.74	4.35
χ^2 (1;2)	2.52		2.629	1.097	34.644	1.64
p	.110		.000	.000	.000	.200

Source: International Social Science Programme (ISSP) (2014). ‘Citizenship.’ (<http://zacat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zacat.gesis.org/obj/fStudy/ZA6670>)

Table 3 shows that core countries are marked by higher rates of youth conventional participation in comparison to peripheral countries; in other words, in the Eastern periphery, fewer young people use available options for influencing decision-making process within the democratic system. Regarding regional differences, results of the chi square test suggest that for two dimensions – voting in elections and party membership – differences among youth in the core and in the Eastern periphery are not statistically significant. In the case of the remaining three dimensions – contacting a politician, rally participation and donation to a politician – statistically significant differences exist between young people in the core and in the periphery, with young people in the core showing much higher levels of activity. The low percentage regarding “donating funds to politicians” in Eastern Europe might be related to limited financial and material resources available to young people in these countries.

Next, we look at unconventional modes of youth political participation, shown in Table 4. The first two columns in Table 4 show the percentage of young people who agree that choosing products for political or environmental reasons is important, while the remaining five

columns show the percentage of young people who stated that they participated in a certain activity.

Table 4: Unconventional youth political participation

	Choosing products for political or environmental reasons		Signing petitions (%)	Boycott (%)	Contacting media (%)	Participating in protests (%)	Expressing views on internet (%)
	Not Important	Important					
Austria	14.1	30.6	57.5	54.2	11.8	25.9	25.1
Belgium	18.2	23.15	69.9	36.5	8.2	27.8	21.7
Denmark	15.45	23.4	65	46.7	9	32.4	31.6
Finland	24.4	26.25	48.9	51.3	10.1	8.3	22.8
France	14.65	24.35	72.1	48.3	4.2	49.2	21.2
Sweden	7.65	37.5	75.5	70.8	10.8	33.3	40.2
UK	17.1	22.95	50.8	32.1	7.3	18.7	21.2
Core	15.93	26.89	62.81	48.56	8.77	27.94	26.26
Croatia	14.7	22	48.1	13.6	3.9	6.2	16.2
Czech Republic	20.9	20.9	54.8	25.7	11.8	13.3	27
Hungary	11.15	18.7	4.7	4.4	0.9	5.1	4.3
Lithuania	26.2	14.45	28.3	12.3	3.1	9.4	12.5
Poland	23.1	18	18.6	13.4	2.7	7.9	12.3
Slovakia	20.9	15.8	43.8	12.7	3.8	11.2	14.4
Slovenia	14.65	25.45	24.5	33.3	9.4	31.6	24.4
Eastern Europe	18.8	19.33	31.83	16.49	5.1	12.1	15.87
χ^2	41.56		3.02	37.07	37.229	1.858	47.364
p	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Source: International Social Science Programme (ISSP) (2014). 'Citizenship.' (<http://zacad.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zacad.gesis.org/obj/fStudy/ZA6670>)

As was the case with conventional political participation, data from Table 4 show that young people in the Eastern periphery are marked by significantly lower levels of unconventional political participation. Comparing regional averages between young people in the core and in the periphery of Europe shows substantial differences. While for instance 27.94% of young people in the core of Europe report participation in protests, only 12.1% of those in the Eastern periphery report this type of participation. What is particularly interesting is the indicator “choosing products for political and environmental reasons.” Despite ubiquitous public debates on environmental issues and strong arguments about the necessity for new modes of understanding and acting towards natural environment, this message resonates with only 19% of young people in Eastern Europe. Chi square test results reveal statistically significant differences between the two regions on all the presented indicators. This strengthens the finding that young people in the core are more active in unconventional modes of political participation. For example, they are keener to choose products for political or environmental reasons, express their views on various internet platforms, or to contact the media in order to address injustices.

Taken together, results on patterns of young people's political participation in conventional and unconventional activities distinguish young people in the core from those in the Eastern periphery of Europe. These findings are in line with studies that have shown the levels of political competence among young people to be lower in Eastern compared to Western Europe (Spajic-Vrkas and Cehulic, 2016). Furthermore, young people in Eastern Europe have lower levels of participation in unconventional compared to conventional modes of participation, suggesting their lower overall contentious potential. In contrast to findings from Southern Europe, where research showed significant levels of contentious activities and young people's participation in general (Cairns, de Almeida Alves and Correia, 2016; Hooghe, 2012; Williamson, 2014), young people in Eastern Europe generally withhold from political participation, and in particular from unconventional modes of political participation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored ways in which austerity policies have influenced patterns of youth political participation among the core and peripheral EU countries, focusing in particular on features of youth political participation in Eastern Europe. Our analysis showed that, despite the negative effects of austerity policies across Europe, their affect was stronger in the EU peripheries. Higher levels of exposure to risk of poverty and material deprivation, coupled with higher levels of general and youth unemployment were in our analysis related to statistically significant differences in the levels of youth political participation between the European core and its Eastern periphery. Young people on the periphery, instead of using their creativity and innovation to explore both conventional and unconventional modes of political participation, tend to refrain from all participation, and this seems particularly true for young people in Eastern Europe.

While severe socioeconomic conditions, which were further aggravated by austerity measures, resulted in the rise of unconventional political participation activities among youth in Southern Europe, the same has not been the case in Eastern Europe. On the contrary, our findings suggest a political passivity that cuts across the distinction between conventional and unconventional modes of political participation. When analysed together with lower levels of political interest, knowledge and trust (see Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson, 2007), a rather gloomy picture emerges of young people's political potential in Europe's Eastern periphery. This finding has clear implications for democratic prospects of countries of Eastern Europe, some of which are currently exhibiting signs of the right-wing populism and authoritarian tendencies, for instance Hungary and Poland. Our analysis also suggests that democratisation studies must rely more substantively on insights from political economy in order to explain features of political participation.

Finally, given that our findings suggest an interesting distinction between the Southern and Eastern peripheries when it comes to young people's involvement in contentious action. In future work, we would like to focus on systematically outlining the various features of young peoples' political participation in Southern and Eastern Europe, and rely on a broader array of empirical sources apart from international surveys. This should enable us to more confidently assess the cross-regional variance of young peoples' potential for contentious action, and the many features that may help explain it.

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² In 2002, Inglehart upgraded his conceptualisation (he excluded political discussion from this category) and changed the name of the second category into *elite-challenging activities* (Inglehart and Catterberg, 2002). Elite-challenging activities served as a platform for Isin (2009) to develop the concept of *activist citizenship*.