

# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## **PIDOP – Processes Influencing Democratic Ownership and Participation**

An EU-funded research project investigating the processes which influence political and civic participation by young people, women, minorities and migrants in Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Turkey and the UK

### **PIDOP Policy Briefing Paper No. 6: What does quantitative research tell us about youth political and civic participation?**

June 2012

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Changing patterns of participation**

Political and civic participation are changing across Europe. Citizens have become increasingly more cynical and untrusting of politicians and political institutions, and traditional forms of political participation, such as voting, are currently in decline. However other forms of civic participation, such as volunteering, are on the increase, especially among young people. Quantitative research can statistically explore differences in patterns of participation between different groups, and can reveal information about the factors which are associated with particular forms of participation. The PIDOP project conducted a quantitative survey in order to examine these issues.

### **The PIDOP survey**

The PIDOP survey used a questionnaire to collect data in nine European countries from 16- to 18-year-olds and 20- to 26-year-olds. Data were collected from the following ethnic majority and ethnic minority/migrant groups in each country, with approximately equal numbers of females and males from each group:

- England: English, Congolese and Bangladeshi youth
- Belgium: Belgian, Turkish and Moroccan youth
- Czech Republic: Czech, Roma and Ukrainian youth
- Germany: German, German resettlers from Russia and Turkish youth
- Italy: Italian, Albanian and Moroccan youth
- Northern Ireland: Northern Irish, Chinese and Polish youth
- Portugal: Portuguese, Angolan and Brazilian youth

- Sweden: Swedish, Iraqi and Kurdish youth
- Turkey: Turkish, Turkish resettlers from Bulgaria and Roma youth

In total, across all nine countries, data were collected from 8197 participants.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS

### Forms of participation

A range of forms of participation were found in the survey, including all of the following:

- Conventional political participation such as voting.
- Non-conventional political participation such as demonstrations, distributing leaflets with political content, wearing symbols in support of a political cause.
- Civic participation such as fundraising and volunteering.
- Economic participation such as making purchasing decisions based on political, ethical or environmental reasons, and donating money to a social or political cause.
- Participation through acts of civil disobedience such as writing political messages or graffiti on walls, and participating in political actions that might be considered illegal (e.g., burning flags, throwing stones, etc.).
- Participation through the internet such as discussing social or political issues on the internet, connecting to political or social groups on social networking sites, and participating in online boycotts or protests.

### Overall levels of participation

- Apart from voting in elections, the young people tended to exhibit relatively low levels of political and civic participation overall.
- However, these young people did not display a lack of political interest or attentiveness to political issues.

### Group differences in participation

In addition, there were significant group differences in patterns of participation, as follows:

- There were large variations in patterns of participation across the different national contexts.
- There were large variations in patterns of participation between the minority/migrant and the majority ethnic groups in each national context, but these minority/migrant vs. majority differences varied across countries and were dependent on the specific national context involved. In some contexts, minority/migrant individuals exhibited higher levels of participation than majority individuals.
- There were also widespread differences between the two minority/migrant groups within each national context.
- Forms and levels of participation were also found to vary according to young people's age and gender (as well as ethnicity). Furthermore, the participatory behaviours of young

people were often specific to particular subgroups defined in terms of the intersection between gender, age and ethnicity (e.g., specific to younger females from an Angolan background, or to older males from a Brazilian background)

Hence, diversity within diversity needs to be acknowledged, rather than trying to trace putative commonalities between different groups or different sub-groups within any one setting.

### **Differences which were relatively consistent across national contexts**

In addition to this widespread variability in patterns of participation, there were also some general differences between some demographic groups which did show a degree of consistency across national contexts, as follows:

- Those who were born in the country of residence tended to display higher levels of political and civic participation than those who had not been born in their country of residence. This was also true for many of the psychological factors that were measured, including levels of political interest, political attentiveness, motivations for participation, and trust in government and leaders. Those born in another country also displayed less support for minority rights.
- Minority/migrant individuals tended to show higher levels of political attentiveness as well as higher levels of civil disobedience, economic participation and political participation on the internet. By contrast, majority individuals tended to show higher levels of voting and reported personal enhancement as a motivation for participating in politics more than minority/migrant individuals.
- Men typically displayed higher levels of political interest and attentiveness than women. They were also more likely to engage in acts of civil disobedience than women. However, women were more likely to engage in economic forms of participation.
- Those who had higher levels of education and higher levels of cultural capital (as indexed by, for example, the number of books in the family home at an early age) displayed higher levels of participation.

### **Quality of participation experiences is associated with levels of participation**

Many assume that participation is automatically beneficial for individuals. However, it is possible that low quality participation experiences reduce levels of participation activities in the future, with only high quality participation experiences having a beneficial effect. For this reason, the survey measured not only types of and frequency of participation but also the quality of the participants' past participation experiences.

High quality participation was defined in terms of the following characteristics:

- The ability to influence group decisions.
- The ability to identify and retrieve information relevant to the association or group in which the participation experience occurs.
- A perception that a variety of viewpoints have been discussed and appreciated.
- A perception that this variety of opinion has resulted in novel

ways of perceiving the issues being discussed.

- The opportunity to discuss real world issues.
- A feeling that the participation experience was important to the individual personally.

Using this measure, it was found that:

- Those that have had high quality participation experiences in the past display higher levels of all forms of civic and political participation.
- Those that have had low level quality participation experiences in the past do not display higher levels of civic or political participation than those who have had no prior history of participation.

Thus, it is not participation itself which it is important to promote, but high quality participation so that citizens increasingly participate and engage in their societies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

### **Ethnic minority and migrant individuals are not disengaged**

Policy-makers need to appreciate that ethnic minority and migrant individuals are not disengaged from political and civic participation. Indeed, in some countries, minorities and migrants are more engaged than the majority group. When considering the causes of the differences between minority and majority participation, it is crucial to look at the specificities of the particular national context which is involved.

### **Each ethnic group is unique**

Each ethnic group shows its own unique pattern of participation, which is often linked to the specific situation of that group within a particular national context. Policy-makers need to appreciate that different approaches may be needed to enhance levels of participation within different ethnic groups.

### **There is considerable diversity within individual ethnic groups**

Political and civic institutions and policy-makers need to be more aware of the internal diversity which exists within all ethnic groups, and alert to the fact that different policies may be required to meet the needs of different sub-groups. In particular, there is a need to address specific sub-groups defined through the intersection of gender, age and ethnicity in order to encourage greater levels of participation by particular sub-groups that have specific needs and concerns. This should occur at all levels in the political and civic systems, but it is especially important that institutions and policy-makers at the local level are aware of this variability and internal diversity.

### **Policies should address issues faced by those who have not been born in the country of residence**

While some minority groups may not need to be specially targeted by interventions aimed at increasing their levels of participation, migrant or minority individuals who have not been born in the country of residence may be a useful focus for policies designed to increase



levels of participation. Such policies should address the specific problems and barriers which are faced by these individuals.

**Equal rights and equal access policies should be promoted**

The discrepancies between men's and women's patterns of participation imply that there are significant discrepancies between men's and women's access to the political sphere. Policy-makers should promote and implement equal rights and equal access policies more effectively, with the goal of achieving equal access to the political sphere for women.

**The role of educational achievement and cultural capital**

When attempting to increase levels of participation, it is important to increase levels of educational achievement and cultural capital. This may be achieved by increasing access to educational experiences for citizens of all ages, including both formal experiences (i.e., through the educational system) and non-formal experiences (i.e., through libraries, museums and other cultural fora).

**The quality of participation experiences is crucial**

In order to increase levels of participation, political institutions, non-governmental organisations, community groups and leisure associations need to foster high quality participation experiences, and allow members greater access to engage in dialogue with that institution or organisation. This dialogue should welcome diversity, and institutions and organisations should value the innovative new thinking that this diversity brings. Furthermore, this appreciation should not just be superficial and tokenistic, but should result in participants' views and recommendations actually influencing decision-making and policy formation.

**The need to provide more information about how to participate**

Many individuals who have low levels of participation may nevertheless have high levels of political interest and political attentiveness but may lack sufficient knowledge about how to participate. Strategies should be developed to increase ease of access to information about how to engage in conventional political, non-conventional political and civic forms of participation.

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

**Objectives**

PIDOP is a multinational research project funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme. The project is examining the processes which influence political and civic participation in eight European states – Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Turkey and the UK.

The research is examining macro-level contextual factors (including historical, political, electoral, economic and policy factors), proximal social factors (including family, educational and media factors) and psychological factors (including motivational, cognitive, attitudinal and identity factors) which facilitate and/or inhibit political and civic participation.

A distinctive focus of the project is the psychology of the individual citizen and the psychological processes through which macro-level contextual factors and proximal social factors exert their effects upon citizens' participation. Young people, women, minorities and migrants are being examined as four specific groups at risk of political disengagement. The research is exploring the differences as well as the overlap between civic and political engagement.

The overall aim of the project is to explain how and why different forms of participation develop or are hampered among citizens living in different European countries and contexts.

## Methodology

The research has involved three strands, as follows:

- New political and psychological theories of political and civic participation have been developed. These theories concern the nature of political and civic participation, the different types of citizens that can be identified on the basis of their patterns of participation, and the various factors and processes which drive citizen participation.
- Existing data from previous surveys have been analysed using advanced statistical techniques. The surveys which have been used include the European Social Survey, Eurobarometer, International Social Survey Programme, Comparative Study of Electoral Systems and the World Values Survey.
- New data on political and civic participation have been collected from ethnic majority and minority populations. These data were collected using both qualitative and quantitative methods, including focus groups, individual interviews and survey methods. Data have been collected in nine different national locations across Europe. In each location, data were collected from members of the ethnic majority group and from members of two ethnic minority or migrant groups. In total, data have been collected from 27 ethnic groups living across Europe.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

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### Consortium

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- University of Liège, Belgium
- Masaryk University, Czech Republic
- University of Jena, Germany
- University of Bologna, Italy
- University of Porto, Portugal
- Örebro University, Sweden
- Ankara University, Turkey
- Queen's University Belfast, UK

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May 2009 – April 2012 (36 months)

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**Budget**

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**Project website**

<http://www.fahs.surrey.ac.uk/pidop/>

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**More information**

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**Further reading****PIDOP policy briefing papers**

PIDOP Policy Briefing Paper No. 1 (2011). *What can be learnt from the analysis of current policies on participation?*

PIDOP Policy Briefing Paper No. 2 (2011). *What do young people believe and think about citizenship and participation?*

PIDOP Policy Briefing Paper No. 3 (2012). *What do existing survey data tell us about citizen participation?*

PIDOP Policy Briefing Paper No. 4 (2012). *What do psychological theories tell us about citizen participation?*

PIDOP Policy Briefing Paper No. 5 (2012). *How do institutional factors affect citizens' political and civic participation?*

All policy briefing papers may be freely downloaded from the PIDOP website.

**PIDOP presentations**

A large number of papers from the PIDOP project have been presented at conferences in 2010, 2011 and 2012. These may be freely downloaded from the PIDOP website.

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