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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# PARTY AND PROTEST POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG STUDENTS IN WESTERN AND CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPE

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper aims to bridge the literature on students' socio-political attitudes with the wider literature on political participation that previously focused on cross-regional differences in participation rates and on varied forms of participation more generally. In doing so, the paper extends the empirical scope of previous analyses by exploring, on the one hand, the extent to which student political participation varies across wide ranges of both party- and protest-related activities; and, on the other hand, by looking at differences in student and non-student participation across 6 countries – 4 old democracies in Western European (WE) and 2 post-communist democracies in Central-Eastern Europe (CEE). Methodologically, the paper combines a quasi-experimental design based on genetic matching with regression models in order to better isolate the effect of student status on political participation from that of age, gender, and family background. Using original survey data gathered within the framework of the POLPART Project among 6,990 respondents, the results for both WE and CEE suggest that students do not significantly differ from non-students in terms of political participation when they are matched on age, gender, and family background. Additionally, when controlling for other variables commonly associated with political participation, such as political interest, students actually appear to engage in party politics less than their non-student counterparts. This indicates that existing college-effects models focusing on the impact of being a student on socio-political attitudes are, at best, spurious. When matching and formally comparing students in WE and in CEE, CEE students appear to be more engaged than their WE counterparts. This indicates that the "apathetic" and "atomistic" perspective on CEE political engagement might not hold for more recent years, especially when it comes to Romania.

**KEYWORDS:** party participation, protest participation, student participation, youth participation, genetic matching

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## 1. Introduction

Historically, students have been at the forefront of protests in Tiananmen Square, the Velvet revolution in Czechoslovakia, anti-war protests on several continents, but also at more recent protests such as the "Colectiv" in Romania (2015) or the Hungarian "lex CEU" (2017). Higher education, more generally, has been a long-standing predictor of political participation in studies of political activity. Early political behavior studies consistently linked higher levels of education with greater interest in politics, with higher levels of political knowledge, and with an increased propensity to take part in both electoral and non-electoral political participation forms (e.g. Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba et al. 1995). Research focusing more specifically on college-effects points to the influence that campus and social context has on socio-political attitudes and beliefs (e.g. Dey 1997; Kingston et al. 2003; Campbell and Horowitz 2015).

However, if we contrast the strand of research on the effects of higher education on political participation with other research on youth political participation more generally, we arrive at some partial contradictions that I will explore in this paper. Students, in their majority, are young people (usually aged 18-35). Additionally, many countries in both WE and CEE are considered to be in a stage of mass higher education (Trow 1999), i.e. a large proportion of the younger cohorts are pursuing a form of post-secondary education, especially university. Thus, empirical evidence about youth political participation deserves to be brought in the discussion about college-effects, especially since such studies often show a grimmer picture in what regards the interest and engagement of youth in politics. These studies point to a general decline in political participation in democratic societies (e.g. Dalton & Wattenberg 2000) and, in particular, to declining participation rates among younger individuals (e.g. Henn et al. 2002, 2005). At the same time, several studies observe that movement politics has become frequent in recent years (Dodson 2011) and this decline might not be an overall decline in political participation, but rather just a change of mode of participation from conventional, party politics participation forms to more unconventional, protest politics forms (Zukin et al. 2006). Thus, while we have some empirical evidence that enrollment in higher education and political participation are consistently linked, other empirical evidence points to the fact that political participation is declining or changing mode among the youth. This raises questions about the political engagement of the young citizens currently in higher education. Does the link between education and political activity still hold when it comes to these younger individuals among whom participa-

tion rates are said to be declining? Do student status and college-effects make the "disenchanted youth" more politically active than their non-student peers?

Therefore, despite the empirical results that previous research on college-effects, on the impact of higher education, or on youth political participation has provided us, there are still several questions and gaps to be addressed in what regards the political participation patterns of students in particular. In looking at these participation patterns, this paper attempts to address some of these gaps and to tackle several underscored methodological and empirical issues in the field.

Methodologically, firstly, there is a need to isolate the effect of student status from that of age in assessing the link between higher education and political participation. This allows addressing the question of whether college-effects offset the previously noticed disengagement among the youth. Secondly, recent scholarship also suggests that the effects of college on attitudes and behavior are more often than not confounded with family background (e.g. Hout 2012; Campbell and Horowitz 2015). Addressing this methodological issue enables us to address the question of whether previously noticed effects of student status are spurious or not. Empirically, in what regards studies that focus on students' political participation rates, previous research has rarely explored the extent to which students engage across wide ranges of activities, and has often focused solely either on voting or on street demonstrations. Additionally, while previous comparative studies reveal that countries differ widely in terms of the level and kind of political activity of their citizens (Teorell et al. 2007; Dalton et al. 2009; Morales 2009), these differences have not been explored in the case of students, with most studies being focused on single countries or on more homogenous groups of countries.

Addressing these methodological issues and extending the empirical scope of previous analyses provides an underpinning for further theorizing on how student participation is to be conceived above and beyond age and family background, but also across wider ranges of activities and country contexts. In tackling these issues, the paper aims to bridge the literature on college-effects and students' socio-political attitudes with the wider literature on political participation that previously focused on cross-regional differences in participation rates and on youth participation more generally.

Therefore, the overall aim of this paper is to investigate whether students' political participation patterns differ from those of non-students in a wide range of both party politics and protest politics participation forms, above and beyond age and family background. Additionally, it also examines how these political participation patterns vary across new and old democracies in Europe. To isolate the effect of student status from that of age and family background, the paper combines a quasi-experimental de-

sign based on genetic matching. The latter enables a procedure of processing observational data that is closer to what would result from a randomized or blocked experiment, with regression models controlling for a series of factors associated with participation. This approach allows us to obtain a balanced sample and, therefore, comparable student and non-students groups (and, additionally, comparable students in WE and CEE), while still estimating the effect of other variables commonly related to political participation. Obtaining comparable student and non-student groups is important for isolating the causal effect of being enrolled in higher education from that of age and family background.

For these purposes, the article uses original survey data gathered within the framework of the Advanced ERC POLPART Project (Klandermans 2013), collected in July, August, and September 2017 among 6,990 respondents from four Western European (WE) countries (the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) and two Central-Eastern European (CEE) countries (Hungary and Romania). The analyses explore differences in political participation rates between students and non-students across these countries and compare the political participation rates of students in the WE and, respectively, CEE countries.

## 2. Previous empirical results and hypotheses

*Higher-education and college-effects on sociopolitical attitudes*

Higher education has been a long-standing predictor of political participation in studies of political activity, as it is believed to provide the motivation and skills to understand political matters (Converse 1988). The strength of education as a predictor of political participation has been solidly illustrated starting with some of the earliest political behavior studies (e.g. Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba et al. 1995). These studies consistently linked higher levels of education with greater interest in politics, with higher levels of political knowledge, and with an increased propensity to take part in both conventional and unconventional political participation forms.

When it comes to students in particular, previous studies suggest that there is a consistent relationship between being enrolled in higher education and socio-political attitudes (e.g. Dey 1997; Hout 2012; Campbell and Horowitz 2015). Recent studies focusing on students attending street demonstrations find that students have a structural availability for protest participation (Olcese et al. 2014). Others, focusing on both traditional and non-traditional ways of involvement, find that students actually expand their

civic repertoire by combining traditional and new forms of participation in complex ways (Hustinx et al. 2011).

However, in many of these cases it remains unclear whether the relationships are spurious or not. In other words, it is still debated whether the relationship between student status and socio-political attitudes is driven by other factors, in particular family background. In this respect, Campbell and Horowitz (2015) argue that there are two models of the impact of being enrolled into higher education. On the one hand, there is a college-effects model arguing that, while family background affects both the likelihood of being a student and socio-political attitudes, a college education still has an effect on attitudes above and beyond these factors. On the other hand, a spurious model argues that it is only family background that drives these attitudes, whereas the college effects are only spurious.

*Trends of political participation among the youth*

At the same time, while education and student status have been consistently linked (spuriously or not) with higher participation rates, studies of political participation more generally point not only to a general decline in political participation in democratic societies (Dalton & Wattenberg 2000), but also to declining participation rates among younger individuals. Young people are commonly portrayed as apathetic and disengaged in many of these studies, with survey data revealing they hold high levels of distrust in politicians and politics (Dalton 2004). For example, Henn et al. (2005) find that while the British youth support the democratic process, they are also skeptical of the political system, politicians, and political parties. Fieldhouse et al. (2007) show that while the overall turnout rate in elections for 22 European countries between 1999 and 2002 was 70%, people aged less than 25 had a turnout of only 51%.

This decline has been particularly observed in what regards electoral participation, with several studies (e.g. Franklin 2004; Esser and de Vrees 2007) indicating that turnout rates and involvement in political parties and political campaigns are lower among younger individuals. At the same time, others observe that unconventional political participation forms might have become more frequent in recent years (Dodson 2011) and this decline is not an overall decline in political participation, but rather just a change of mode of participation from electoral activities to non-electoral ones (Zukin et al. 2006). Therefore, running counter to a "pessimistic disaffected youth perspective", there is a "cultural displacement perspective" which suggests that young people are not necessarily less interested and engaged in politics, but rather that they find

traditional political participation forms no longer appropriate for their needs (Loader 2007).

On the one hand, these studies are focused on the youth more generally, rather than addressing students in particular. On the other hand, those studies that do indeed focus on students often do not test the impact of student status on a broad range of political participation forms and whether students differ in this respect from non-students, as they are frequently limited to data on either students or protesters alone. Therefore, the question remains whether the findings regarding the declining or changing mode of participation among the youth also hold in the case of students or whether student status offsets this trend. Additionally, the question also remains whether the previously observed involvement of students matters above and beyond age and family background.

*Cross-regional variations in political participation*

To add to the puzzle, while previous studies focusing on students' socio-political attitudes and participation are mostly focused on a single country, comparative studies actually reveal that countries differ widely in terms of their citizens' level and kind of political activity (Teorell et al. 2007; Dalton et al. 2009; Morales 2009). One comparison that comes up often in studies of political participation is between old and new democracies in Europe. New democracies in CEE are generally characterized as having a weak civil society (e.g. Howard 2002, 2003) and low levels of political participation (e.g. Newton and Montero 2007). Some attribute this political and civic participation deficit to the legacy of communist regimes (e.g. Bernhagen and Marsh 2007; Bernhard and Karakoc 2011), while others refer to the poor governance in the years after the regime change (e.g. Hooghe and Quintelier 2014). Similarly, political inactivity is also attributed to low levels of political trust resulting from corruption and institutional inefficacy (Letki 2003; Braun 2012; Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Hooghe and Marien 2013; Závecz 2017), though some results indicate that this might actually have a positive effect in the case of unconventional participation (Braun and Hutter 2014).

These regional differences have never been explored in the specific case of students. In this respect, previous studies of students' sociopolitical attitudes and political participation have often been limited to single-countries and do not formally test the difference in student political participation patterns across regions. It remains, thus, an open question whether these younger, higher-educated generations depart from the disengagement pattern commonly associated with CEE. Therefore, this paper inquires into

whether the previously observed general differences between patterns of engagement in WE and CEE manifest themselves also in this particular sub-group.

*Hypotheses*

The paper attempts to bridge the three strands of literature discussed above – on college-effects, on youth participation, and on cross-regional variations in participation – in order to generate new empirical evidence on the extent of students' political participation in Europe. It therefore addresses the empirical gaps in previous research by looking at varied participation forms and by inquiring into country differences in patterns of participation. To do so, it compares students with non-students across a wide range of both conventional and unconventional activities and across WE and CEE democracies. The article examines the direct impact of student status on political engagement, while trying to isolate it from the effect of age, gender, and family background through a matching design, while also controlling for eventual differences related to media usage, ideology, and interest in politics through regression models.

In line with previous empirical studies consistently linking education and student status to higher political interest and participation rates, I expect students to be generally more politically engaged than their non-student counterparts across political participation forms (H1). While previous results point to declining participation rates among the young compared to the rest of the population, I expect that after matching and controlling for age (among other factors) in the student and non-student groups, the previously suggested positive effect of education should be isolated from a presupposed negative effect of age. Additionally, by also adjusting for family background, testing this hypothesis will allow us to assess the college-effects model (Campbell and Horowitz 2015) and see whether these effects are spurious or, rather, have an effect above and beyond family background.

College-effects hypothesis:

H1. Students are generally more politically engaged than non-students in both WE and CEE.

In line with previous findings regarding a change of mode of participation among the youth, I expect this change of mode of participation to be particularly visible among students as they are the ones thought to have a structural availability for protest (Olcese et al. 2014) and to expand and vary their political participation repertoires (Hustinx et al. 2011). Therefore, I hypothesize that the differences between students and

non-students are particularly visible when it comes to involvement in protest participation compared to involvement in party participation (H2).

Change of participation mode hypothesis:

H2. Students are more engaged than non-students in protest participation forms in particular in both WE and CEE.

Finally, in line with previous results on differences in political participation among new and old democracies in Europe, we also expect students in CEE countries to be generally less engaged than their WE counterparts. Additionally, CEE students could also have more protest-oriented patterns of political participation, in line with results by Braun and Hutter (2014) that low levels of political trust in these countries could actually increase non-conventional participation. However, the way in which these differences play out in the case of students in particular is still an open empirical question. It could also be that these younger, highly educated generations depart from the common pattern of disengagement previously observed for CEE countries. Therefore, hypothesis H3 should be considered an exploratory one and is now stated to follow previous results on the differences between these two groups of countries in general.

Old vs. new democracies hypothesis:

H3. Students in Central-Eastern European countries are generally less engaged than their Western European student counterparts and have more protest-oriented patterns of participation.

## 3. The data and methodology

*The data*

This study uses original survey data gathered within the framework of the Advanced ERC POLPART Project (Klandermans 2013). The data were collected in July, August, and September 2017 among 6,990 respondents from four Western European countries (the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) and two Central-Eastern European countries (Hungary and Romania)[1] using the international data collecting

[1] Data was also collected on Brazil, Argentina, and Greece, but results for these countries are not included as this study limits itself to studying differences between Western and Central Eastern Europe democracies

company Kantar TNS. Since nationally representative samples with online collected data are virtually impossible to achieve due to Internet penetration rates, the POLPART project aimed for stratified samples in all countries using comparable quotas. Therefore, the online survey was given to subjects aged 18 to 65 year old in each country, selected using quotas for gender (50% female), age (40% 18-34 years; 45% 35-49 years; 15% 50-65 years), education (10% at most lower secondary education; 50% medium-level education; 40% advanced vocational or university education), and employment (70% employed). The survey consisted of a long online self-completion questionnaire including standard demographic questions, questions about political views, vignette experimental studies, but also a wide range of questions regarding previous political participation behavior.

Out of the total of 6,990 subjects on whom data was collected, 4,798 were from the four WE countries in the sample and 2,198 from the two CEE countries. Table 1 presents the distribution per country of student and non-student subjects. As the main predictor on which this paper focuses is student status, there were 606 participants in the sample self-reporting their current main activity as being in education, fairly balanced among the six countries. While the size of the non-student and the student samples are very different, the matching procedure used in this paper makes the two more comparable not only in terms of size, but also in terms of a series of covariates generally considered to be important confounders of the relationship between student status and political participation.

*Table 1 - Table 1. Country Distribution of Subjects*

| | *Non-Student* | *Student* | *Sum* |
|---|---|---|---|
| NL | 1,030 | 92 | 1,122 |
| DE | 977 | 133 | 1,110 |
| UK | 1,159 | 95 | 1,254 |
| CH | 1,236 | 76 | 1,312 |
| HU | 970 | 136 | 1,106 |
| RO | 1,012 | 74 | 1,086 |
| Sum | 6,384 | 606 | 6,990 |

*Methodology – the matching method and the balance obtained*

The matching method used in this study is designed for observational data where the treatment variable is not randomly assigned by the investigator. Matching helps to create a dataset that is more similar to datasets obtained from randomized or blocked experiments. It can, thus, be used for causal inference with a dichotomous treatment

variable, such as student status, and a set of control variables that are used to make the student group look similar to a non-student control group, especially in terms of variables that could affect both treatment assignment and the outcome under investigation. This has the key advantage of creating balanced samples in cases in which there is not sufficient overlap between the treatment and the control group and in which regression models have been shown to perform poorly (Stuart 2010). Creating such a balanced sample reduces the bias in estimating the treatment effect by partly correcting (based on the selected variables) selection biases associated with the sample.

Nevertheless, while improving upon them, matching methods are actually complementary to regression models. This study therefore combines both a matching procedure to obtain balanced samples and regression models to control for and estimate the effect of other factors commonly associated with political participation. Four different matching and associated regression models were performed for the paper: one for comparing students to non-students in the entire sample, one each for comparing students to non-students in WE alone and in CEE alone, and a fourth one for comparing students in WE to students in CEE. As further described in section 4.3, the balance variables selected for the matching procedures were those thought to affect both the treatment assignment and the outcome but not to be affected by the treatment. In this specific case, age, gender, country,[2] perceived household income, and father education were used. Additionally, the subsequent regression models also control for the use of traditional media, use of social media, satisfaction with democracy, political interest, and left-right ideological self-placement, i.e. variables that are commonly associated with political participation.

One common choice that researchers face when performing matching is the selection of an appropriate matching procedure. In this respect, several matching procedures are available (nearest neighbor, optimal, genetic, etc.) that are using algorithms following different logics (greedy in finding the fastest available match, optimizing the average balance, automating the process of finding an optimal balance through weights obtained through iterations, etc.) (Ho et al. 2011, 8). Nevertheless, all these methods share the aim of obtaining the best balance possible (considering the covariates given) between the treatment and the control group. The choice of matching procedure in this paper followed the same logic of balance optimization. Therefore, three different matching procedures (nearest neighbor matching, optimal matching, genetic matching) were tried out for each of the three comparisons and the one that produced the largest balance improvement was chosen. Genetic matching yielded the best bal-

[2] Not used for the fourth analysis for matching students in WE with students in CEE.

ance for all three comparisons. This matching procedure uses a "genetic search algorithm to find a set of weights for each covariate such that a version of optimal balance is achieved after matching" (Ho et al. 2011, 8).

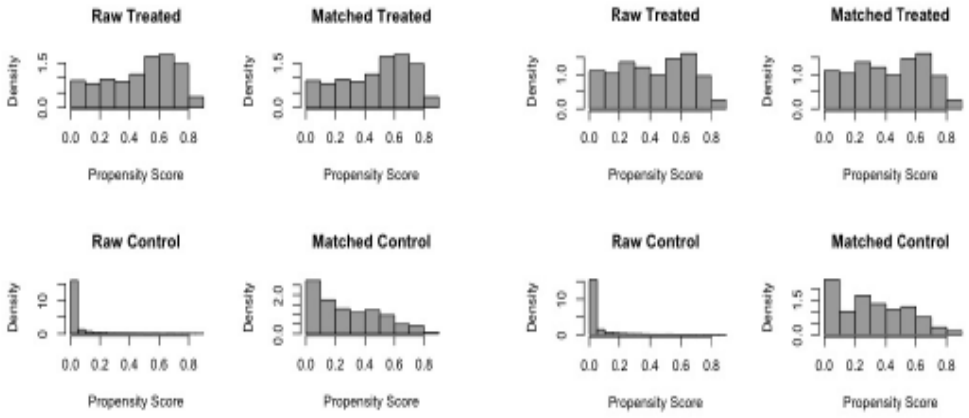
The balance obtained between the control and the treatment groups in terms of the covariate distributions can be examined in Table 2 and graphically in Figure 1, corresponding to each of the four comparisons made (students vs. non-students in the entire sample, students vs. non-students in WE and in CEE, and students in WE vs. students in CEE). The table shows that using genetic matching produces a more than 90% balance improvement in all four cases[3]. The figure shows histograms of the matching distance for the treatment variables and we notice a drastic change in the similarity of the treated and control groups distributions from before (left side) to after matching (right side) in all four cases.

Table 3 shows the sample sizes for the matched data in the entire sample, the two sets of countries, and for the comparisons between regions. For the entire sample, 607 non-students were matched to the 606 students in the sample. For WE, 470 control cases (non-students) were matched to the 396 students, resulting in a sample size of 866 respondents. For CEE, the sample size is relatively smaller, with 114 non-students being matched to the 210 students, resulting in a sample size of 324. When comparing students in the two regions, 189 CEE students were matched to the 396 WE students, resulting in a sample size of 585 respondents.

As mentioned, after matching, linear regressions were used to examine the effect of student status on the party and protest participation indices. Although the balance obtained between the two groups was fairly good, the covariates used for matching were also included as predictors in these models together with additional control variables. Therefore, the results presented here can be considered very conservative estimates of the effect of student status on participation, since the models are not only assessed on the matched sample using weights, but also include the balancing covariates and other control variables in the subsequent regression models.

[3] The other methods produced at most a 79.60% balance improvement (optimal matching in the case of comparing students vs. non-students in WE).

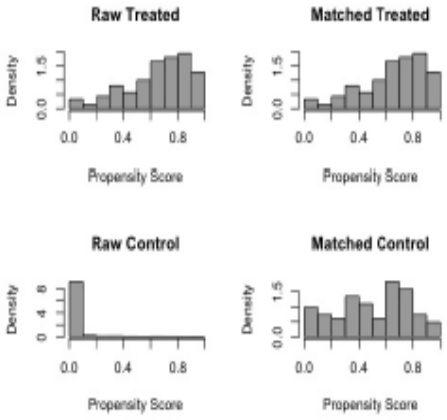
**Figure 1 - Balance before and after genetic matching**



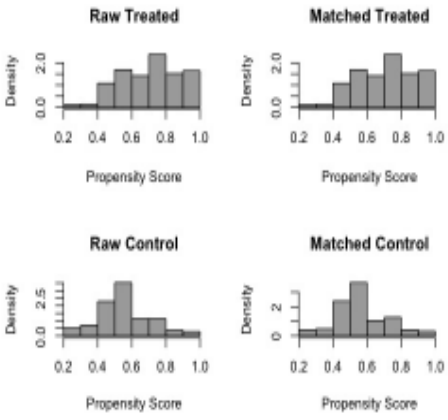

(a) Students vs. non-students general




(b) Students vs. non-students WE




(c) Students vs. non-students CEE




(d) Students WE vs. CEE

Table 2 - Summary of balance for the matched data entire sample.

| Statistic | *Means Treated* | *Means Control* | *% Balance Improvement* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Entire Sample* | |
| *Distance* | *0.4719* | *0.4703* | *99.62%* |
| Age | 23.7690 | 23.8333 | 99.64% |
| H. Income | 2.1379 | 2.0858 | 15.47% |
| DE | 21.95% | 21.62% | 95.03% |
| UK | 15.68% | 12.54% | -26.51% |
| CH | 12.54% | 12.54% | 100% |
| HU | 22.44% | 20.30% | 70.40% |
| RO | 12.21% | 12.21% | 100% |
| Female | 54.46% | 54.46% | 100% |
| Father H. Edu. | 29.04% | 29.04% | 100% |
| | | *Western Europe* | |
| *Distance* | *0.4054* | *0.4045* | *99.74%* |
| Age | 24.8535 | 24.8990 | 99.73% |
| H. Income | 2.2247 | 2.2197 | 86.81% |
| DE | 33.59% | 33.08% | 95.56% |
| UK | 23.99% | 20.96% | -29.55% |
| CH | 19.19% | 19.19% | 100% |
| Female | 53.79% | 53.79% | 100% |
| Father H. Edu. | 31.06% | 30.81% | 96.73% |
| | | *Central-Eastern Europe* | |
| *Distance* | *0.6457* | *0.6401* | *99.06%* |
| Age | 21.7238 | 21.8429 | 99.37% |
| H. Income | 1.9714 | 1.9476 | 92.30% |
| RO | 35.24% | 31.43% | 100% |
| Female | 55.71% | 55.71% | 85.72% |
| Father H. Edu. | 25.24% | 19.05% | 16.08% |
| | | *WE vs. CEE* | |
| *Distance* | *0.7066* | *0.7052* | *99.04%* |
| Age | 24.8535 | 24.5909 | 91.60% |
| H. Income | 2.2247 | 2.2172 | 97.00% |
| Female | 53.79% | 53.79% | 100% |
| Father H. Edu. | 31.06% | 25.76% | 8.92% |

*Table 3 - Sample sizes after matching*

Entire Sample

| | Control | Treated |
|---|---|---|
| All | 6384 | 606 |
| Matched | 607 | 606 |
| Unmatched | 5777 | 0 |
| Discarded | 0 | 0 |

Western Europe

| | Control | Treated |
|---|---|---|
| All | 4402 | 396 |
| Matched | 470 | 396 |
| Unmatched | 3932 | 0 |
| Discarded | 0 | 0 |

Central Eastern Europe

| | Control | Treated |
|---|---|---|
| All | 1982 | 210 |
| Matched | 114 | 210 |
| Unmatched | 1868 | 0 |
| Discarded | 0 | 0 |

WE vs. CEE

| | Control | Treated |
|---|---|---|
| All | 210 | 396 |
| Matched | 189 | 396 |
| Unmatched | 21 | 0 |
| Discarded | 0 | 0 |

*Balancing and control variables*

The choice of the balancing variables was guided by the debated issue of whether the relationship between student status and socio-political attitudes is driven by other factors, in particular age and family background (Campbell and Horowitz 2015). Therefore, to match students (the treatment group) to non-students (the control group) in WE and CEE, the variables used were age, gender, perceived household income (measured on a 5-point scale), father's higher education completion (measured dichotomously), and country of origin. Except for country of origin, the same variables were used when matching students in CEE with students in WE. This makes the control and the treatment groups similar in terms of the characteristics that might drive both student status and propensity to participation and, therefore, helps in isolating the effect of student status. Using these balancing variables also follows guidelines in the field that usually recommend selecting variables for matching that are commonly associated with either just the outcome or with both the outcome and the treatment. Therefore, variables which are likely to be only associated with the treatment, but not with the outcome, and variables that are likely to be affected by the treatment in their own turn were not included as covariates in the matching procedure (Heckman, Ichimura, and Todd 1997; Stuart 2010; Cuong 2012).

In addition to these balancing variables, the regression models performed after matching also included a series of control variables commonly associated with political participation and whose effect is estimated. These variables include media usage, ideology, and political interest. Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of students and non-students on the covariates chosen for matching (with an *) and for the regression models. We can see that, unsurprisingly, the average age of the students in the sample is lower than that of the non-students. Students also tend to report slightly higher household income levels and tend more than non-students to have a father who completed higher education. On average students use traditional media (Trad. media in tables) more than non-students (2.98 compared to 2.26 on a 1-5 scale), they are more satisfied with democracy (Satis. Dem. in tables) (6.56 compared to 6.35 on a 1-11 scale), and they are placing themselves more to the left in terms of ideology (LR in tables) (4.79 compared to 5.33 on a 0-10 scale). However, students don't appear to differ from the rest of the sample in terms of their social media usage and in terms of their political interest (Interest in tables).

*Table 4 - Characteristics of students and non-students on the variables included*

Students

| Statistic | N | Mean | St. Dev. | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trad. media | 606 | 2.983 | 1.668 | 1 | 5 |
| Social media | 606 | 2.157 | 1.602 | 1 | 5 |
| Age* | 606 | 23.769 | 5.060 | 19 | 62 |
| Satis. Dem. | 606 | 6.566 | 2.680 | 1 | 11 |
| Interest | 606 | 2.665 | 0.863 | 1 | 4 |
| LR | 606 | 4.797 | 2.150 | 0 | 10 |
| H. Income* | 606 | 2.137 | 0.939 | 0 | 4 |
| Gender* | 606 | F | 54.45% | M | 45.55% |
| Father Edu.* | 606 | H.E. | 29.04% | N.H.E. | 70.95% |

Non-students

| Statistic | N | Mean | St. Dev. | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trad. media | 6,384 | 2.269 | 1.641 | 1 | 5 |
| Social media | 6,384 | 2.179 | 1.615 | 1 | 5 |
| Age* | 6,384 | 41.716 | 11.190 | 19 | 68 |
| Satis. Dem. | 6,384 | 6.353 | 2.843 | 1 | 11 |
| Interest | 6,384 | 2.675 | 0.836 | 1 | 4 |
| LR | 6,384 | 5.331 | 2.175 | 0 | 10 |
| H. Income* | 6,384 | 2.076 | 1.022 | 0 | 4 |
| Gender* | 606 | F | 49.25% | M | 50.75% |
| Father Edu.* | 6,384 | H.E. | 21.63% | N.H.E. | 78.36% |

*Note: Variables with a * were included in the matching model, and all variables were included in the regression models.*

*The dependent variables*

While the literature on students' political participation usually focuses on single participation forms, this paper attempts to look at a wider variety of forms of participation and in particular to differentiate and compare party politics forms of political engagement and protest politics forms of political participation. Party politics forms usually comprise more institutionalized political actions often falling under the sphere of conventional politics. These political participation forms usually include voting, working for a party, contacting politicians, attending a town hall meeting, or making monetary donations to parties. Protest political participation forms falling under the sphere of unconventional participation (but not only) are usually more episodic and less predictable (Klandermans 2013). They are less institutionalized and usually centered on activities such as signing petitions, taking part in public demonstrations, occupying public sites, boycotting, striking, or engaging with protest organizations by working or donating for them.

As previously mentioned, the self-completion questionnaire included a wide range of questions about the participants' previous participation behavior. In particular, two batches of questions concerning whether the respondent ever engaged in a wide range of party and protest political participation forms were included (Table 5). The first batch consisted of actions that are more conventional, generally falling under the umbrella of party or institutional politics. This includes voting in national elections, voting in referenda, working for a party, contacting politicians, donating for a party, taking part in town hall meetings and neighborhood committees, and engaging in discussions about a political party in an Internet or social media forum. The second batch consisted of less conventional actions, falling broadly under the umbrella of protest politics. These items included signing a petition, occupying public spaces, striking, working for protest organizations, engaging in public demonstrations, boycotting, donating for protest organizations, and engaging in discussions in an Internet or social media forum about a protest organization.

*Table 5 - Political participation forms by type included in the survey*

| Party Politics | Protest Politics |
|---|---|
| Vote in national elections | Sign petitions |
| Vote in referenda | Occupy |
| Work for a party | Strike |
| Contact politicians | Work for protest org. |
| Donate for a party | Public demonstration |
| Town hall meetings | Boycott |
| Internet forum party | Donate for a protest organization |
| | Internet forum protest |

For ease of comparison across these two main participation forms, the particular actions included in each batch are aggregated into indices of party and protest participation. The aggregation rule used is an un-weighted additive one, giving equal importance to each participation form in each respective batch. The aggregation results into a party politics index that ranges from 0 activities undertaken to 7 activities undertaken, and a protest politics index ranging from 0 activities to 8 activities undertaken[4]. The subsequent analyses included here examine differences in the engagement of students and non-students across each of these participation indices in part. When looking at how students and non-students score on these indices before matching and controlling for other factors (Table 6), we can see that students appear actually to be less engaged then non-students, especially in party politics participation forms. The following analyses will test whether these results hold when matching and controlling for the variables discussed in the previous section.

[4] The scalability and reliability of the two indices obtained was assessed for each country and for the entire sample using the scale scalability coefficient H (Loevinger 1948; Mokken 1971) and the Molenaar–Sijtsma (MS) reliability measure (Sijtsma and Molenaar 1987) indicated for cases in which items are additively constructed into an index, such as those measuring political participation data (van Schuur 2003; Quaranta 2013). The results indicate that the scalability and reliability scores are quite consistent across countries (the scores do not differ much between countries and the entire sample). While the indices have quite weak scalability, they are quite reliable (for the precise value for each scale and each country see Table A4). All in all, despite the low scalability values (most values are around the 0.3 threshold commonly considered for this measure), it still makes theoretical sense to take into account all of these activities in the indices of participation as it provides us with a broader measure of participation repertoires, even if some items might be more difficult than others or might have different frequency distributions.

*Table 6 - Party and protest participation among students and non-students*

| Statistic | N | Mean | St. Dev. | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students Party Part. | 606 | 1.383 | 1.066 | 0 | 6 |
| Students Protest Part. | 606 | 1.452 | 1.400 | 0 | 8 |
| Non-students Party Part. | 6,384 | 1.864 | 1.232 | 0 | 7 |
| Non-students Protest Part. | 6,384 | 1.458 | 1.429 | 0 | 8 |

## 4. Results

*Student vs. non-student participation across the sample*

Table 7 presents the results of regressions models on the party and protest participation indices with student status as the main predictor, including the matching covariates (Models 1 and 3) and additional control variables (Models 2 and 4). These results suggest that, generally, students do not significantly differ from non-students in terms of their level of political participation in either party politics activities, or in protest politics activities when adjusting for age, gender, father education, income, and country of origin (Models 1 and 3). Moreover, when controlling for other variables commonly associated with political participation in Models 2 and 4, students appear to participate slightly less than their non-student counterparts in party politics. Being a student makes one score on average 0.107 less on the party participation index ranging from 0 to 7. Additionally, if including Attained Higher Education as an additional variable to control for whether the non-student group also comprises people who might have finished higher education, where they could have learned behaviors similar to those of the students in the sample, even this negative effect of student status on party politics disappears (see Appendix).

These results go against H1 and indicate that college effects are indeed spurious, at best, when it comes to political participation. Therefore, both after adjusting for family background and after controlling for a series of other characteristics associated with political participation, student status alone does not make any positive difference in what regards political participation. In other words, non-student respondents participate at similar rates with students of similar age, gender, and with similar family background. Additionally, the effect of being a student becomes negative when taking into account political interest, satisfaction, ideology, and media usage. Comparing the direction of the coefficient estimates in Models 1 and Model 3, positive for protest politics

and negative for party politics, is along the lines of H2 regarding a change of mode of participation towards protest politics. However, these differences are not significant, suggesting that the change of mode of participation is not particularly visible among students as hypothesized.

*Table 7 - Student vs. non-student party and protest participation across the entire sample*

| | *Dependent variable:* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Party | | Protest | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Student | -0.048 | -0.107* | 0.073 | -0.044 |
| | (0.062) | (0.062) | (0.075) | (0.072) |
| Age | 0.009 | 0.009 | 0.001 | 0.0001 |
| | (0.007) | (0.007) | (0.008) | (0.008) |
| Income | -0.109*** | -0.115*** | -0.013 | -0.010 |
| | (0.034) | (0.035) | (0.042) | (0.041) |
| Father H. Edu. | 0.300*** | 0.241*** | 0.389*** | 0.298*** |
| | (0.070) | (0.069) | (0.085) | (0.081) |
| Female | -0.263*** | -0.257*** | -0.016 | -0.025 |
| | (0.063) | (0.062) | (0.076) | (0.073) |
| DE | -0.266** | -0.321*** | 0.219* | 0.111 |
| | (0.103) | (0.101) | (0.125) | (0.119) |
| UK | 0.295*** | 0.171 | 0.452*** | 0.228* |
| | (0.113) | (0.113) | (0.136) | (0.132) |
| CH | 0.067 | 0.061 | 0.335** | 0.306** |
| | (0.117) | (0.115) | (0.142) | (0.135) |
| HU | -0.361*** | -0.383*** | 0.158 | 0.162 |
| | (0.101) | (0.104) | (0.122) | (0.122) |
| RO | 0.186 | 0.150 | 1.234*** | 1.237*** |
| | (0.118) | (0.122) | (0.143) | (0.143) |
| Trad. media | | 0.004 | | 0.026 |
| | | (0.019) | | (0.022) |
| Social media | | -0.020 | | -0.024 |
| | | (0.019) | | (0.022) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Satis. Dem | | -0.019 | | -0.024 |
| | | (0.013) | | (0.015) |
| Interest | | 0.280*** | | 0.464*** |
| | | (0.038) | | (0.044) |
| LR | | -0.032** | | -0.093*** |
| | | (0.015) | | (0.018) |
| Constant | 1.558*** | 1.273*** | 0.935*** | 0.496* |
| | (0.205) | (0.255) | (0.248) | (0.299) |
| Observations | 1,213 | 1,213 | 1,213 | 1,213 |
| $R^2$ | 0.085 | 0.133 | 0.084 | 0.186 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.078 | 0.122 | 0.077 | 0.176 |
| Residual Std. Error | 1.080 (df = 1202) | 1.054 (df = 1197) | 1.309 (df = 1202) | 1.236 (df = 1197) |
| F Statistic | 11.185*** (df = 10; 1202) | 12.231*** (df = 15; 1197) | 11.052*** (df = 10; 1202) | 18.241*** (df = 15; 1197) |
| *Note:* | | | | *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 |

While the focus of this article is on the impact of student status in explaining participation, a brief look at the control variables included in Models 2 and 4 will reveal whether they generally align with previous findings or expose significant country differences. In this respect, the results point to political interest as being consistently and significantly associated with both party and protest participation forms, thus aligning with general understandings in the participation literature on the role of political interest (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960; Verba et al. 1978; Verba et al. 1995). After matching, respondents leaning more to the left of the political spectrum and those whose father completed higher education also appear to participate more in both party and protest politics (e.g. Verba et al. 2005). In line with other results pointing to a gender gap in political participation (e.g. Burns et al. 2001), respondents who are female appear to engage significantly less in party politics. Additionally, respondents who report higher levels of income also participate less in party politics. While this goes against income inequality theories (e.g. Brady et al 1995; Solt 2010), the measure included here does not capture inequality between poor vs. affluent groups in particular and other controls as interest and media usage are already included. The results also show that there are wide and significant differences between the countries included in the study. These differences are further explored in the next three sections, first within each region (WE and CEE) and next by formally testing differences between these regions.

Table 8 presents similar results for the sub-sample of WE countries. Similar to the findings for the entire sample, these results suggest that students do not significantly differ from non-students in terms of their level of political participation in either party politics activities, or in protest politics activities. Again, this goes against H1 and suggests that the college-effects model is spurious when looking at political participation in WE. Therefore, both after adjusting for family background and after controlling for a series of other characteristics associated with political participation, student status alone does not make any difference in political participation. Non-student respondents participate at similar rates with students of similar age, gender, and with similar family background. One difference from the results for the entire sample is that, when taking into account political interest, satisfaction, ideology, and media usage, students do not appear to participate significantly less than non-students in party politics[5]. This suggests that these negative results might have been driven by the CEE countries in the sample and will be tested in the next section. As far as H2 is concerned, similar to results for the entire sample, while the direction of the coefficient estimates points in the right direction, positive for protest politics and negative for party politics, these differences are not significant, suggesting that this change of mode of participation is not particularly visible among students as hypothesized.

As far as the impact of other respondent characteristics on political participation is concerned, the results point again to political interest and left-leaning ideology as being positively and significantly associated with both party and protest participation forms. Females also appear to participate less in party politics, whereas using social media a lot appears to be slightly detrimental to protest participation. This corroborates empirical results by Burean and Badescu (2014) for Romania, suggesting that time spent online has a negative effect on protest engagement. In WE, respondents whose father had completed higher education appear to engage more only in protest politics, rather than in both forms of participation, as for the entire sample. The results also show that there are wide differences between these WE countries that could be further examined. For example, respondents in the UK appear to be the most engaged in both party and protest activities, with respondents from Switzerland following in second place. German respondents appear to be the most disengaged when it comes to

[5] These results are also robust to including Attained Higher Education as an additional variable to control for whether the non-student group also comprises people who might have finished higher education, where they could have learned behaviors similar to those of the students in the sample. These results are included in the Appendix.

party politics activities, whereas Dutch respondents are the most disengaged in protest politics activities.

*Table 8 - Student vs. non-student party and protest participation in WE*

| | *Dependent variable:* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Party | | Protest | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Student | -0.014 | -0.098 | 0.116 | 0.007 |
| | (0.072) | (0.071) | (0.085) | (0.084) |
| Age | 0.004 | 0.001 | 0.007 | 0.006 |
| | (0.007) | (0.007) | (0.008) | (0.008) |
| Income | -0.029 | -0.042 | -0.004 | -0.010 |
| | (0.041) | (0.041) | (0.049) | (0.049) |
| Father H. Edu. | 0.009 | -0.012 | 0.255*** | 0.255*** |
| | (0.079) | (0.078) | (0.094) | (0.092) |
| Female | -0.254*** | -0.256*** | -0.060 | -0.091 |
| | (0.073) | (0.072) | (0.086) | (0.085) |
| DE | -0.154 | -0.199** | 0.253** | 0.189* |
| | (0.099) | (0.097) | (0.117) | (0.114) |
| UK | 0.545*** | 0.474*** | 0.625*** | 0.504*** |
| | (0.107) | (0.108) | (0.126) | (0.127) |
| CH | 0.204* | 0.197* | 0.433*** | 0.413*** |
| | (0.112) | (0.109) | (0.132) | (0.129) |
| Trad. media | | -0.003 | | 0.041 |
| | | (0.022) | | (0.026) |
| Social media | | 0.006 | | -0.055** |
| | | (0.021) | | (0.025) |
| Satis. Dem | | 0.022 | | 0.021 |
| | | (0.016) | | (0.019) |
| Interest | | 0.304*** | | 0.292*** |
| | | (0.043) | | (0.051) |
| LR | | -0.047*** | | -0.077*** |
| | | (0.018) | | (0.021) |
| Constant | 1.453*** | 0.885*** | 0.730*** | 0.330 |
| | (0.222) | (0.279) | (0.262) | (0.330) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Observations | 866 | 866 | 866 | 866 |
| $R^2$ | 0.072 | 0.135 | 0.049 | 0.109 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.063 | 0.121 | 0.040 | 0.096 |
| Residual Std. Error | 1.060 (df = 857) | 1.026 (df = 852) | 1.249 (df = 857) | 1.212 (df = 852) |
| F Statistic | $8.277^{***}$ (df = 8; 857) | $10.187^{***}$ (df = 13; 852) | $5.468^{***}$ (df = 8; 857) | $8.055^{***}$ (df = 13; 852) |
| *Note:* | | | | $^{*}$p<0.1; $^{**}$p<0.05; $^{***}$p<0.01 |

*Student vs. non-student participation in Central-Eastern Europe*

The picture in CEE appears slightly different from that in WE. Students in Romania and Hungary appear to significantly differ from non-students in what regards party participation, but not in the direction expected by H1 (Table 9). Therefore, when adjusting for age, gender, and family background (Model 1), but also after controlling for other variables associated with political participation (Model 2), students in CEE engage significantly less than their non-student counterparts in these party politics activities[6]. This indicates that the negative difference between students and non-students at the level of the entire sample might have been primarily driven by students in CEE countries. When it comes to protest politics (Models 3 and 4), similarly to previous results, there are no significant differences between students and non-students.

Therefore, in what concerns Hungary and Romania, not only is the college-effects model spurious, as in the WE case, but it works in fact in the opposite direction when it comes to party politics. Being currently enrolled into higher education actually deters participation in party politics. However, this negative effect is not observed in the case of protest participation. This offers mild support, in the case of CEE, for the change of participation mode hypothesis H2, as students engage significantly less in party politics, but are not deterred to participate in protest politics.

[6] These results are also robust to including Attained Higher Education as an additional variable to control for whether the non-student group also comprises people who might have finished higher education, where they could have learned behaviors similar to those of the students in the sample. These results are included in the Appendix.

*Table 1 - Table 9. Student vs. non-student party and protest participation in CEE*

| | *Dependent variable:* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Party | | Protest | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Student | -0.349*** | -0.344*** | -0.182 | -0.204 |
| | (0.121) | (0.119) | (0.165) | (0.153) |
| Age | 0.076*** | 0.078*** | -0.020 | -0.013 |
| | (0.021) | (0.021) | (0.029) | (0.027) |
| Income | 0.060 | 0.024 | 0.149 | 0.105 |
| | (0.069) | (0.068) | (0.094) | (0.088) |
| Father H. Edu. | 0.650*** | 0.434*** | 0.585*** | 0.264 |
| | (0.139) | (0.143) | (0.189) | (0.184) |
| Female | -0.042 | -0.051 | 0.260 | 0.240 |
| | (0.118) | (0.117) | (0.161) | (0.150) |
| RO | 0.857*** | 0.789*** | 1.146*** | 1.130*** |
| | (0.129) | (0.127) | (0.175) | (0.163) |
| Trad. media | | -0.007 | | 0.038 |
| | | (0.035) | | (0.045) |
| Social media | | -0.113*** | | -0.028 |
| | | (0.039) | | (0.050) |
| Satis. Dem | | -0.010 | | -0.050* |
| | | (0.021) | | (0.027) |
| Interest | | 0.217*** | | 0.650*** |
| | | (0.069) | | (0.089) |
| LR | | 0.062** | | -0.076** |
| | | (0.027) | | (0.035) |
| Constant | -0.620 | -1.116* | 1.225* | 0.219 |
| | (0.531) | (0.596) | (0.725) | (0.767) |
| Observations | 324 | 324 | 324 | 324 |
| $R^2$ | 0.194 | 0.248 | 0.191 | 0.328 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.179 | 0.221 | 0.176 | 0.304 |
| Residual Std. Er- | 1.034 (df = 317) | 1.007 (df = 312) | 1.410 (df = 317) | 1.295 (df = 312) |

| ror | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F Statistic | 12.719*** (df = 6; 317) | 9.355*** (df = 11; 312) | 12.470*** (df = 6; 317) | 13.833*** (df = 11; 312) |

*Note:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

When looking at the control variables included, political interest appears to play the same role as in WE, with higher political interest being associated with higher participation rates in both party and protest politics. In terms of ideological self-placement, similarly to WE, being more to the left is associated with participating more in protest politics, while being more to the right is associated with participating more in party politics. Social media usage again appears to be detrimental to participation, but in the case of CEE countries this result is significant for party participation. However, since the coefficients are negative for both participation types we could consider this result complementary to the one found by Burean and Badescu (2014) in the case of protest engagement in Romania. Additionally, respondents whose father had completed higher education appear to engage more in party politics in CEE after controlling for ideology, media usage, satisfaction with democracy, and political interest, in contrast to WE where they engage more in protest politics. Finally, being less satisfied with democracy appears to be significantly associated with protest participation, which partially aligns with previous findings in the literature (e.g. Braun and Hutter's 2014 study on how lack of trust increases extra-representational participation).

When it comes to differences between the two CEE countries included, results point to Romanian respondents as being significantly more active than Hungarians in both party and protest politics participation forms. These results corroborate the findings of previous qualitative studies on political participation in the two countries, which point to the fact that while respondents in both countries have similarly negative views on the state of politics, Romanian citizens still have generally more pro-active attitudes than their Hungarian counterparts, which are portrayed as being more apathetic and disillusioned (Oana 2019; Enyedi and Zavecz 2019).

*Student participation in Western Europe vs. Central-Eastern Europe*

Table 10 formally tests differences between student participation in WE and CEE. Similar to the analyses presented in Sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, students in the two regions were initially matched based on their age, gender, income, and father education. The differences between the two groups were afterwards explored using regression

models with country fixed effects, with and without controlling for other variables commonly associated with political participation.

*Table 1 - Student party and protest participation in WE vs. CEE* [7]

| | *Dependent variable:* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Party | | Protest | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| WE | -0.478** | -0.546*** | -1.218*** | -1.167*** |
| | (0.191) | (0.191) | (0.255) | (0.246) |
| Age | 0.010 | 0.010 | -0.009 | -0.009 |
| | (0.008) | (0.008) | (0.011) | (0.010) |
| Income | -0.088* | -0.101** | -0.082 | -0.045 |
| | (0.048) | (0.047) | (0.064) | (0.061) |
| Father H. Edu. | 0.218** | 0.166* | 0.551*** | 0.474*** |
| | (0.092) | (0.090) | (0.122) | (0.116) |
| Female | -0.120 | -0.144* | 0.225** | 0.121 |
| | (0.083) | (0.084) | (0.111) | (0.107) |
| DE | -0.073 | -0.117 | 0.448** | 0.336* |
| | (0.138) | (0.135) | (0.185) | (0.173) |
| UK | 0.632*** | 0.438*** | 0.806*** | 0.443** |
| | (0.148) | (0.149) | (0.198) | (0.191) |
| CH | 0.308** | 0.238 | 0.540*** | 0.473** |
| | (0.156) | (0.153) | (0.208) | (0.196) |
| HU | -0.408** | -0.504*** | -0.992*** | -1.101*** |
| | (0.181) | (0.177) | (0.241) | (0.227) |
| Trad. media | | 0.040 | | 0.053* |
| | | (0.025) | | (0.032) |
| Social media | | 0.007 | | -0.088*** |
| | | (0.025) | | (0.032) |

[7] Romania's coefficient is not estimated because it is linearly dependent on the other country variables, and R automatically excludes it.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Satis. Dem | | 0.011 | | -0.067*** |
| | | (0.017) | | (0.022) |
| Interest | | 0.304*** | | 0.403*** |
| | | (0.049) | | (0.063) |
| LR | | -0.025 | | -0.110*** |
| | | (0.020) | | (0.026) |
| Constant | 1.684*** | 0.967*** | 2.258*** | 2.262*** |
| | (0.298) | (0.347) | (0.398) | (0.446) |
| Observations | 585 | 585 | 585 | 585 |
| $R^2$ | 0.083 | 0.146 | 0.102 | 0.226 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.069 | 0.125 | 0.088 | 0.207 |
| Residual Std. Error | 0.985 (df = 575) | 0.954 (df = 570) | 1.314 (df = 575) | 1.225 (df = 570) |
| F Statistic | 5.812*** (df = 9; 575) | 6.978*** (df = 14; 570) | 7.294*** (df = 9; 575) | 11.895*** (df = 14; 570) |
| *Note:* | | | | *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 |

The results are quite surprising in that students in CEE appear significantly more engaged in both party and protest politics than their WE counterparts not only after matching for age, gender, and family background, but also above and beyond media usage, ideology, political interest, or satisfaction with democracy. Being a CEE student makes you score on average around 0.546 points more on the party politics index ranging from 0 to 7 (Model 2) and around 1.167 on the protest politics index ranging from 0 to 8 (Model 4). These results are in stark contrast with H3 expecting students in CEE to participate less and indicate that the previous findings regarding widespread disengagement in these countries might not hold in more recent years. This result is surprising especially since students in CEE appear to engage less than non-students in CEE, but more than their student counterparts in WE. This suggests that while CEE might have been for a long time characterized by a weak civil society (e.g. Howard 2002, 2003) and low levels of political participation (e.g. Newton and Montero 2007), there might have been a general change of tide in terms of engagement and political participation in this region (Andreescu and Proteasa 2019). This change of tide and evidence of a newly developed civil society is also documented in recent empirical studies on Romania in particular (especially since respondents here have been found significantly more active

than their Hungarian counterparts, see Table 9) (Oana 2019; Olteanu and Beyerle 2017). Additionally, as the size of this effect is higher for protest politics, these findings also show that the change of mode of participation towards more unconventional actions is especially prominent in the case of CEE students.

When looking at the effect of covariates on political participation for this student-only sub-sample, students with higher political interest and those that have a father who completed higher education participate more than the rest of the students, irrespective of the country they come from. Additionally, the less students use social media and the more they use traditional media, the less they are satisfied with democracy; and the more to the left of the ideological spectrum they identify themselves, the more they tend to take part in protests.

## 5. Conclusions

This article was primarily dedicated to empirically analyzing the differences in political participation trends between students and non-students across a wide range of both party and protest activities and between new and old democracies in Europe. While previous literature has consistently linked higher education to higher rates of political interest and participation and has pointed to college-effects on socio-political attitudes, other studies indicate a general decline in participation among young citizens and/or a shift of mode of participation from party politics activities to protest politics activities. Taking insights from these previous findings, the article aimed at addressing several methodological and empirical gaps in previous research, while bridging the literature on students' socio-political attitudes with the wider literature on political participation that previously focused on cross-regional differences in participation rates and on youth participation more generally.

Methodologically, the article attempts to overcome some of the shortcoming of previous research by combining a quasi-experimental design based on genetic matching with regression analyses in order to better isolate the effect of student status from that of age and family background and check whether previously observed college-effects are spurious (e.g. Hout 2012; Campbell and Horowitz 2015). Empirically, this paper extended the scope of previous analyses in two ways. First, in comparison with analyses focusing on single participation forms, this paper studied the effect of student status across a wide ranges of activities pertaining to both party and protest politics. Secondly, in contrast to previous analyses of college-effects which are often single-country fo-

cused, the article explores differences in participation rate across a wider group of both WE and CEE countries, focusing more specifically on cross-regional differences.

Using original survey data in six countries, four WE democracies and two new democracies in CEE, the results show that the behavior of students does not significantly differ from that of non-students after matching for age, gender, family background, and country of origin. Moreover, student status actually appears to be detrimental to party participation when controlling for political interest, ideology, media usage, and satisfaction with democracy. This is in stark contract with the so-called college-effects model that argues that being enrolled in higher education influences socio-political attitudes and shows that these college effects are at best spurious (Campbell and Horowitz 2015). One of the key findings of the study is, therefore, that previously observed effects of student status on political participation and socio-political attitudes more generally might have been confounded with age or family background.

These results also hold when looking at sub-groups of the sample for the two regions included in the study. WE students do not differ from their non-student counterparts either in terms of party politics participation, or in terms of protest politics participation. CEE students, on the other hand, engage significantly less than their non-student counterparts in party politics. These slight differences between the results for party and, respectively, protest politics activities offer mild support for the change of mode of participation hypothesis in the case of CEE, as it is only party participation that is deterred by student status.

These differences between students in the two country groups are explored more systematically in an additional model that matches students in WE with students in CEE by age, gender, income, and father education. The results show that CEE students are more engaged than their WE counterparts. These results hold not only when adjusting for the balancing variables, but also after controlling for political interest, media usage, satisfaction with democracy, and ideology. This indicates that the results of previous research showing widespread disengagement in post-communist regimes in CEE might not hold in recent years within the general population, especially since students in CEE participate less than their non-student counterparts. This is in line with recent empirical literature documenting a change of tide towards more active political engagement and participation, especially in Romania (Oana 2019; Olteanu and Beyerle 2017). Additionally, the size of the positive effect of being a student in CEE is larger when it comes to protest participation compared to party participation. This is in line with previous results in the literature comparing participation patterns across these regions and pointing to a shift towards protest-oriented participation in CEE.

Finally, besides the differences between WE countries and CEE countries in what regards student political participation, there are also significant differences within each country group when it comes to overall participation rates (irrespective of student status). In the WE group, the respondents from the UK tend to participate more in both protest and party politics, while in the CEE group, Romanians engage more in both party and protest activities than their Hungarian counterparts. While studying these differences in depth exceeds the purpose of this article, future research could further reveal and explain country variations in participation repertoires more in depth.

All in all, this paper aimed to shed light, on the one hand, on whether student participation rates differ from non-student participation rates when adjusting for age, gender, and family background in a quasi-experimental design. On the other hand, it aimed to explore variation in student participation across new and old democracies in Europe. In doing so, it showed that a college-effects model arguing that students participate more is at best spurious and that, contrary to evidence pointing to lower levels of participation in CEE, there might have been a reinvigoration of political engagement in recent years in these countries, especially in Romania. Nevertheless, while aiming to bridge the wider literature on political participation with the more specific literature on students' socio-political attitudes and college-effects, the results presented here remain fairly descriptive. Future studies could, therefore, examine more closely the causal mechanisms behind these variations in patterns of political participation. Secondly, while looking at variations across countries falling in the WE and CEE regions, the data used here does not cover all countries in Europe and, therefore, the results might be limited to the countries in this sample. Finally, the results presented here are based on data collected at a single point in time. Future studies could also focus on and reveal whether the differences shown here are a singular phenomenon, or whether they are part of a longer time-trend.

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## Appendix

## Results with higher education as a post-matching control variable

*Table A1 - Students vs. non-students in the entire sample*

| | *Dependent variable:* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Party | | Protest | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Student | -0.019 | -0.084 | 0.080 | -0.047 |
| | (0.063) | (0.062) | (0.076) | (0.073) |
| Age | 0.011 | 0.010 | 0.002 | 0.002 |
| | (0.007) | (0.007) | (0.009) | (0.008) |
| Income | -0.114*** | -0.120*** | -0.015 | -0.012 |
| | (0.035) | (0.035) | (0.042) | (0.041) |
| Father H. Edu. | 0.305*** | 0.243*** | 0.392*** | 0.308*** |
| | (0.076) | (0.075) | (0.092) | (0.088) |
| Female | -0.273*** | -0.260*** | -0.017 | -0.016 |
| | (0.064) | (0.063) | (0.077) | (0.073) |
| DE | -0.204** | -0.267*** | 0.207* | 0.091 |
| | (0.104) | (0.102) | (0.126) | (0.120) |
| UK | 0.330*** | 0.205* | 0.421*** | 0.210 |
| | (0.113) | (0.113) | (0.136) | (0.132) |
| CH | 0.121 | 0.109 | 0.324** | 0.285** |
| | (0.118) | (0.115) | (0.142) | (0.135) |
| HU | -0.323*** | -0.355*** | 0.142 | 0.141 |
| | (0.101) | (0.105) | (0.123) | (0.123) |
| RO | 0.249** | 0.200 | 1.245*** | 1.242*** |
| | (0.119) | (0.122) | (0.144) | (0.143) |
| Trad. media | | 0.007 | | 0.020 |
| | | (0.019) | | (0.022) |
| Social media | | -0.021 | | -0.023 |
| | | (0.019) | | (0.023) |
| Satis. Dem | | -0.020 | | -0.021 |
| | | (0.013) | | (0.015) |
| Interest | | 0.290*** | | 0.466*** |
| | | (0.038) | | (0.044) |
| LR | | -0.034** | | -0.096*** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | (0.015) | | (0.018) |
| H.Edu. | -0.013 | -0.030 | 0.024 | -0.022 |
| | (0.087) | (0.085) | (0.105) | (0.100) |
| Constant | 1.479*** | 1.177*** | 0.919*** | 0.486 |
| | (0.211) | (0.261) | (0.256) | (0.307) |
| Observations | 1,206 | 1,206 | 1,206 | 1,206 |
| $R^2$ | 0.085 | 0.136 | 0.085 | 0.188 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.076 | 0.124 | 0.077 | 0.177 |
| Residual Std. Error | 1.081 (df = 1194) | 1.052 (df = 1189) | 1.309 (df = 1194) | 1.236 (df = 1189) |
| F Statistic | 10.049*** (df = 11; 1194) | 11.682*** (df = 16; 1189) | 10.083*** (df = 11; 1194) | 17.211*** (df = 16; 1189) |

*Note:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

*Table A2 - Students vs. non-students in WE*

| | *Dependent variable:* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Party | | Protest | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Student | -0.013 | -0.096 | 0.114 | 0.006 |
| | (0.072) | (0.071) | (0.085) | (0.084) |
| Age | 0.005 | 0.003 | 0.005 | 0.005 |
| | (0.007) | (0.007) | (0.009) | (0.008) |
| Income | -0.028 | -0.040 | -0.006 | -0.011 |
| | (0.041) | (0.041) | (0.049) | (0.049) |
| Father H. Edu. | 0.039 | 0.034 | 0.220** | 0.232** |
| | (0.091) | (0.089) | (0.108) | (0.105) |
| Female | -0.250*** | -0.251*** | -0.064 | -0.094 |
| | (0.073) | (0.072) | (0.086) | (0.085) |
| DE | -0.147 | -0.188* | 0.245** | 0.184 |
| | (0.100) | (0.097) | (0.118) | (0.115) |
| UK | 0.551*** | 0.483*** | 0.619*** | 0.499*** |
| | (0.108) | (0.108) | (0.127) | (0.128) |
| CH | 0.205* | 0.199* | 0.432*** | 0.412*** |
| | (0.112) | (0.109) | (0.132) | (0.129) |
| Trad. media | | -0.003 | | 0.041 |
| | | (0.022) | | (0.026) |
| Social media | | 0.007 | | -0.056** |
| | | (0.021) | | (0.025) |
| Satis. Dem | | 0.023 | | 0.021 |
| | | (0.016) | | (0.019) |
| Interest | | 0.306*** | | 0.291*** |
| | | (0.043) | | (0.051) |
| LR | | -0.047*** | | -0.076*** |
| | | (0.018) | | (0.021) |
| H.Edu | -0.063 | -0.100 | 0.075 | 0.050 |
| | (0.096) | (0.093) | (0.113) | (0.110) |
| Constant | 1.423*** | 0.824*** | 0.766*** | 0.360 |
| | (0.227) | (0.285) | (0.268) | (0.337) |
| Observations | 866 | 866 | 866 | 866 |
| $R^2$ | 0.072 | 0.136 | 0.049 | 0.110 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.062 | 0.121 | 0.039 | 0.095 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Residual Std. Error | 1.060 (df = 856) | 1.026 (df = 851) | 1.250 (df = 856) | 1.213 (df = 851) |
| F Statistic | 7.401*** (df = 9; 856) | 9.542*** (df = 14; 851) | 4.906*** (df = 9; 856) | 7.487*** (df = 14; 851) |
| *Note:* | | | | *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 |

*Table A3 - Students vs. non-students in CEE*

| | *Dependent variable:* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | partyind | | protestind | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Student | -0.344*** | -0.339*** | -0.181 | -0.202 |
| | (0.121) | (0.119) | (0.165) | (0.154) |
| Age | 0.062*** | 0.064*** | -0.023 | -0.017 |
| | (0.024) | (0.023) | (0.032) | (0.030) |
| Income | 0.056 | 0.019 | 0.148 | 0.103 |
| | (0.069) | (0.068) | (0.095) | (0.088) |
| Father H. Edu. | 0.651*** | 0.436*** | 0.585*** | 0.264 |
| | (0.139) | (0.143) | (0.189) | (0.184) |
| Female | -0.027 | -0.036 | 0.263 | 0.245 |
| | (0.118) | (0.117) | (0.161) | (0.151) |
| RO | 0.844*** | 0.777*** | 1.143*** | 1.126*** |
| | (0.129) | (0.127) | (0.176) | (0.163) |
| Trad. media | | -0.010 | | 0.037 |
| | | (0.035) | | (0.046) |
| Social media | | -0.111*** | | -0.028 |
| | | (0.039) | | (0.050) |
| Satis. Dem | | -0.009 | | -0.049* |
| | | (0.021) | | (0.028) |
| Interest | | 0.220*** | | 0.651*** |
| | | (0.069) | | (0.089) |
| LR | | 0.061** | | -0.076** |
| | | (0.027) | | (0.035) |
| H.Edu | 0.308 | 0.304 | 0.070 | 0.101 |
| | (0.221) | (0.216) | (0.302) | (0.278) |
| Constant | -0.348 | -0.847 | 1.288* | 0.308 |
| | (0.565) | (0.625) | (0.773) | (0.806) |
| Observations | 324 | 324 | 324 | 324 |
| $R^2$ | 0.199 | 0.253 | 0.191 | 0.328 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.181 | 0.224 | 0.173 | 0.302 |
| Residual Std. Error | 1.033 (df = 316) | 1.005 (df = 311) | 1.412 (df = 316) | 1.297 (df = 311) |
| F Statistic | 11.214*** (df = 7; 316) | 8.768*** (df = 12; 311) | 10.664*** (df = 7; 316) | 12.656*** (df = 12; 311) |

*Note:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

## Reliability scores for the party and protest participation scales

*Table A4 - H and reliability scores for the party and protest participation scales*

| | H - Protest | H - Party | MS - Protest | MS - Party |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NL | 0.319 (0.024) | 0.334 (0.027) | 0.600 | 0.592 |
| DE | 0.219 (0.024) | 0.202 (0.024) | 0.633 | 0.494 |
| UK | 0.265 (0.024) | 0.327 (0.026) | 0.620 | 0.633 |
| CH | 0.253 (0.024) | 0.218 (0.021) | 0.573 | 0.531 |
| HU | 0.281 (0.022) | 0.264 (0.027) | 0.603 | 0.515 |
| RO | 0.330 (0.021) | 0.283 (0.025) | 0.655 | 0.563 |
| ALL | 0.293 (0.009) | 0.240 (0.010) | 0.626 | 0.522 |