Political Apathy, Sophisticated Politics or Pluralization of Students' Political Engagement?[1]

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Abstract
Studies in Croatia confirm that political engagement of the youth is changing. Although the youth's interest in politics and political affairs in Croatia saw an increase between 1999 and 2004, it was still weaker than it was in the period of socialism (Ilišin, 2011), while at the same time their political engagement is on decline. Research has found that young people are more skeptical of the forms of traditional politics and are more open to expressing their political engagement through new media. This research addresses the very foundation of the opposing diagnoses as well as the thesis on the pluralization of the youth's political engagement, based on a study conducted among the students enrolled in eight components of the University of Rijeka in 2015 (N = 635). The paper analyzes traditional forms (political party membership, elections,) and new political forms (forms of political engagement on social networks) of the students. The results are compared with the political engagement of the youth/students in European and Croatian research. The results point to the existence of hybrid politics, which includes a high readiness to vote in elections, signing paper petitions, and "liking" political initiatives on the Internet, but at the same time reveals the students' very modest engagement in either traditional or new forms of political action.

Keywords: *youth, political participation, interest in politics, social networks, students.*

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1. Introduction

Recent research on the youth's political engagement (PE)[2] points to their disinterest, unwillingness to participate, detachment, and distrust towards institutional politics (Benedicto and Blasco, 2008). The results undoubtedly indicate that politics no longer plays a central role in the design of young people's life (Benedicto, 2013). Is the underlying reason for this the career and privileges that politics can bring? In contrast to the cynical attitude of the young people towards politics, an increasing number of analysts claim that young people are characterized by their detachment and sole focus on classical/traditional/conventional politics, but that they manifest their PE in innovative and sophisticated way through new media. *To what degree has political apathy spread among young people, and to what extent the "new" PE?* The paper answers this question based on the research conducted among the student population. It is a particularly interesting category within the cohorts of young people from which the majority of the future social elite will be recruited. If the theory of stratified diffusion is applied, it can be assumed that the most educated part of youth dictates trends also in political behavior, which will expand after a certain time and become characteristic of the entire youth population.

2. Theoretical-conceptual starting points

In the analyses of the youth's PE, we find two opposite diagnoses: pessimistic and optimistic. An alarming pessimistic diagnosis (Bessant et al, 2017) argues that young people are uninterested and detached from politics. The underlying arguments of this thesis are the data on the ever-lower level of the youth's participation in elections and their poorer involvement in the work of political parties (Dalton, 2008, Sloam, 2016). Putnam (2000) points out that between the mid-1960s and the 1980s, there was a noticeable decline in the political/social engagement of Americans. Members of the baby-boom generation (born between 1946 and 1964) cast fewer votes in the elections than their parents had done, which, along with a decline in the interest in political and social affairs, is a symptom of their self-exclusion from the life of the community. As political parties grow

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[2] Further on the abbreviation PE will be used instead of the term political engagement.

organizationally (professionally and financially), party identification and unprofessional PE are declining. All forms of local political participation are also decreasing: signing petitions, attending public gatherings, and running for public positions. In the text published ten years later, the authors (Sander and Putnam, 2010) highlight the positive consequences of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 on the PE of young Americans. Their interest in politics and the frequency of political debates increased as well as their civic engagement and election turnout. The authors believe that the post-9/11 generation is reversing the trends of civic engagement in relation to those detected in the book *Bowling Alone*. The authors found an example of this new PE of the youth in Obama's presidential campaign, highlighting thereby that this is not characteristic of the entire generation.

The optimistic diagnosis claims that turning back on traditional politics does not mean that the youth is apolitical; on the contrary. Building upon Beck, Farthing (2010) develops the idea of the radically unpolitical youth that develops new agendas, new spheres of power, and forms of political action – including the possibility of doing nothing. Young people are striving for complete transformation, not just a correction of traditional politics. They construct sophisticated forms of PE in new media and are thus overcoming the frameworks of renewal of traditional politics and are building new, unconventional PE (Gordon and Taft, 2011). Norris (2004) was among the first to formulate this thesis as the theory of evolution of political activism. The author claims that the nature of political activism in general, but primarily youth activism, has changed in two key points. First, the repertoire/scope of political action has expanded and the traditional forms of political action have become insufficient. In the society of late modernity, new forms of youth engagement, related to experimentation outside political parties, are emerging, (Benedicto, 2013). Conventional direct (voting, party engagement) and indirect (contacts with politicians) PE is a characteristic of older generations in poor societies of deprivation. Contemporary political action in postmodern societies is diversified and takes on the forms of protest (strike, petition signing, boycott, demonstration, etc.). Norris distinguishes citizen-oriented actions directed at election and party engagement and cause-oriented repertoires focusing on specific issues emerging from the political sphere (buying or boycotting a certain product). New PE is directed at the government, but it also

includes the influence on actors from the public, non-profit, and private sector. The second change relates to the organizational structures through which political action takes place. Along with traditional bureaucratically structured organisations (parties, trade unions), modern agents, such as the Women's Rights Movement, the Antiglobalization Movement, the Anti-Liberal Movement, the Environmental Protection Movement, and NGOs, are characterized by decentralization, informal borders of affiliation, and an easy exit. Referring to the European Social Survey 2002, which was conducted in 15 countries, Norris emphasizes that citizen-oriented actions are practiced by older participants. The author explains this with the theory of life cycles – a weak involvement at a younger age, an increase in the middle age, and a slight decline in the senior age. Norris detects an identical pattern in all analyzed societies, despite their different cultural-political traditions. Cause-oriented action is a characteristic of younger participants, who rediscover political engagement, but non-institutionalized forms of participation overpower the institutionalized. The concept of "monitorial citizenship" (Schudson) has emerged, according to which young people show great interest in political and social problems but try to solve them through informal connectivity, for example, through buying or boycotting a product for ethical or political reasons. "Therefore the comparison suggests that the political energies among the younger generation in postindustrial societies have diversified and flowed through cause-oriented activism, rather than simply ebbed away into apathy. Evidence in this report indicates that multiple contemporary channels of civic engagement, mobilization and expression have emerged in postindustrial societies to supplement traditional modes" (Norris, 2004, p. 17).

Dalton (2008) holds the view that the expression of concern due to a poorer PE of the youth has become a mantra in social sciences, and that he forms of PE mentioned by Putnam have not significantly decreased in comparison to the late 1960s. On the contrary, he argues that "the repertoire of political action is broadening" (Dalton, 2008, p. 93). The youth voter turnout is declining, but new forms of political action (in the areas of environmental protection, consumer protection...), informal groups, and new media (internet) are emerging. Political institutions are accepting new

forms of political action by their citizens, thereby expanding their influence.

Benedicto and Blasco (2008), adding onto Norris's findings, claim that the model of militant party activism has been replaced by new sporadic forms of engagement in various areas of civic solidarity. In the late modernity characterized by strong individualism, the influence of socialization agents is diminishing, and politics no longer has a central place in the life of young people. Younger generations have a different view of politics from the elderly and are focusing on new instruments in articulating their interests and concerns. Young people have developed new, hybrid forms of political culture that simultaneously include both cynicism and apathy. "Young people develop experiences, shape their opinions and carry out different types of actions around these different groups of political meanings, depending on their life circumstances" (Benedicto and Blasco, 2008, p. 26). Amna and Ekart (2014) also believe that we should scratch below the surface of the dichotomy politically active - politically passive youth. Postmodern citizens are expected to be less interested in traditional politics, but more interested in new forms of politics and in specific social problems. The authors consider that among the active citizens (characterized by high interest and highest participation) we can distinguish three forms of political passivity of the youth: (1) "stand-by citizens," "which refers to citizens who are interested in politics without participating" (Amna and Ekart, 2014: 269); (2) disengaged (low interest and low participation); and (3) disappointed citizens (low participation and lowest on interest).

Hustinx et al. (2012), starting from the idea of postmodern individualization, develop a pluralistic thesis in which diversification of youth politics (students) involves combining traditional and new forms of political and social participation. The new generation is versatile, because with the expansion of the existing, it adds new and combines old and new forms of political and social participation. The authors distinguish five patterns in this context: (1) Disengaged students, who are mostly inactive; (2) Classical volunteers engaged in sporting or cultural youth organizations, who are poorly politically active; (3) Humanitarian citizens, active in several types of humanitarian organizations, but relatively weak in political ones; (4) Monitorial citizens, the dominant form, who show

great interest in politics and in action and combine different types of new and unconventional non-institutional activities; (5) Civic omnivores, the most interesting category, which combines conventional and unconventional, and formal and informal forms of political "á la carte" participation.

Starting from Inglehart's distinction of materialism and postmaterialism, Henn, Oldfield, and Hart (2018) argue that economic circumstances of socialization are more important in explaining the forms of political participation than socio-economic factors. Young people are turning their back on formal politics and are turning to protest, boycott, and direct actions in accordance with their lifestyle. Young postmaterialists are more inclined to institutional and non-institutional forms of political action than materialists.

Gordon and Taft (2011) argue that the youth's cynicism and mistrust in politics is a logical consequence of understanding the relationship between power and inequality in that societal sphere. This has nothing to do with apathy, because young people are more engaged in social movements. The discourse of the youth's apathy towards politics is used as the adults' justification for patronizing and oppressing the youth.

In his analysis of the political participation of young people in 15 "old" EU Member States, Sloam (2016) found that they are not apathetic but rather "protesters" or "postmaterialistically" political. It refers to engagement in solving specific issues, but outside the mainstream political parties. Stand-by citizens (Amna and Ekman, 2014) deal with concrete problems rather than ideological issues. Voting in elections is still the most widespread form of classical PE of young people, and signing petitions is the most widespread form of engagement in specific issues. However, the forms of the youth's PE depend on the type of political (participative) culture of the country, its socio-economic context, and the democratic tradition. Sloam detects four regional forms of the youth's PE in Europe: (1) the Nordic cluster, which is characterized by a high participation in elections and high PE on specific political issues; (2) the Southern European cluster, which is characterized by a relatively high participation in the elections, but at the same time a weak engagement on specific political issues; (3) the Anglo-Celtic cluster, which includes a low participation and moderate engagement, and (4) the Central European

cluster, which corresponds to the mean value of the entire sample. A generational comparison between the young and the elderly reveals that young people are less active in turning up for elections, they sign fewer petitions, and join fewer boycotts, but are also more active in wearing badges and participating in demonstrations. Sloam concludes that the weak political participation of young people does not necessarily mean a lack of interest in politics. By problematizing *a new participatory landscape,* Sloam (2017) finds significant differences in the political participation of the young people, which are determined by the socio-economic status and political culture of the country. Young people are distancing themselves from established parties and vote less in elections. Traditional PE as well as *issue-based PE* (signing petitions, boycotting a product, and participating in demonstrations) increases with the level of education. Young people from socially excluded groups are more inclined to join populist, nationalist, and extremist parties. Sloam concludes that "...young people are interested in politics and politically active in many different ways." (Sloam, 2017, p. 292).

Tomić-Koludrović (2002) offered an interesting analysis of the youth's PE in Croatia. The author analyzes the causes of the awakened youth engagement in the Republic of Croatia expressed in the greater voter turnout in the 2001 elections. Tomić-Koludrović explains the youth's apolitical engagement until the year 2000 with their disagreement with the dominant political pattern in Croatia, which she termed "patriarchal politics", since the modernization and postmodernization processes in Croatia are rather weak, and there is still "traditional youth" in our country, i.e., the adults' paternalistic treatment of young people as an infantile generational category. The author thinks that the true face of the youth's apolitical nature is expressed precisely through the youth's exceptional criticism of the sphere of conventional politics. Young people, more specifically the student population, are the bearers of the process of individualization as the foundation of alternative political engagement. This new PE of the youth, developed in subcultural groups, will gradually spread to other social classes through the logic of stratified diffusion (Young and Willmot, 1973). A characteristic of the new anti-political engagement of the youth (Beck) is also the lack of interest in traditional politics and the volunteer engagement "based on voluntary social

networks" (Tomić-Koludrović, 2002, p. 89). However, in post-socialist societies, we encounter the process of collectivization (national homogenization) instead of the process of individualization, which is further strengthened due to war circumstances in Croatia. This, along with the transitional obstacles and an underdeveloped civic society, has allowed the domination of patriarchal conservative politics that prevents social affirmation of young people. The author thinks that the political passivation of the youth in Croatia and its redirection into the sphere of privacy were a rational reaction of actors in the context of social retraditionalization and war circumstances. "By rejecting the traditional political action ... the young people in Croatia showed similarity with 'subpolitical' (Beck) strategies of achieving their interests through different micro-scenes (from labor to private), which are characteristic of societies of 'reflexive modernization'" (Tomić-Koludrović, 2002, p. 94). Although the author sees the intensified PE of the youth in the late 1990s as a rejuvenation of the youth's new PE in Croatia, at the end of her paper she pessimistically concludes that a traditional, intolerant, relentless youth continues to dominate; one that is unprepared for engagement in charitable work.

Continuation of the IDIZ research on the Croatian youth (Ilišin, 2011, 2014, 2017) confirms that the youth's PE is a dynamic phenomenon in our country. Although the interest of the young people in politics and political affairs in Croatia between 1999 and 2004 was on an increase, it was still lower than it was in the period of socialism (Ilišin, 2011). At the same time, the political participation of young people is on the decrease and is characterized by a high degree of distrust in the institutions of political power and their potential correctors (Ilišin, 2017). Ilišin concludes that young people in Croatia are more skeptical about institutions and forms of traditional politics, and more open to expressing their PE through new media.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Aims

The paper has the following aims: to analyze the general student interest in politics; to analyze student participation in the forms of

traditional and new politics; to establish their relationships and the rapport between their interest and participation with socio-demographic characteristics.

3.2. Hypotheses

H1. Based on the previously conducted research (Ilišin, 2011, 2014, 2017), we hypothesize that the students' interest in politics is low.

H2. According to the research presented above, we hypothesize that the students should be more involved in the new than in the old forms of PE.

H3. There are two hypotheses about the old types of PE:

3a Participants taking active part in new forms of PE do not participate in traditional political actions, i.e., their participation in the new forms of PE is an alternative to the traditional forms.

3.b. Participants are simultaneously taking an active part in both forms of political action (political omnivores).

H4. There are differences in the PE with regards to the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.

This paper deals with the youth's PE based on a field survey carried out in eight components of the University of Rijeka[3] in the first half of 2015 (N = 635). The results are compared with the PE of the youth/students in European (Amna and Ekart, 2014; Paolini, Horvath and Motiejunaite, 2018; Sloam, 2016, 2017) and Croatian (Ilišin, 2011, 2014, 2017) research. The data were processed in the statistical package SPSS 24 at the level of univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analysis.

3.3. Sample structure

The gender structure of the sample does not differ significantly from the structure of the UNIRI population in the academic 2015/2016 (male 57.9%: female 42.1%). Students from smaller urban settlements (up to 10,000 inhabitants) prevail, while the other three categories of settlements are equally represented. Parents with secondary education dominate the sample, which is followed by the category of obtained university education. Due to the low representation of both parents with

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[3] Students enrolled in the following components of the University of Rijeka participated in this research: Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Law, Department of Physics, Department of Informatics, Faculty of Engineering, and Faculty of Teacher Education. We would like to thank all the colleagues who helped with the survey.

completed primary education, this category was added to the category of completed three-year secondary education in further statistical analysis.

TABLE 1. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (%)

SEX[4]		*AGE* (M)	20,9
MALE	60,9	18 – 20	56,5
FEMALE	38,4	21 – 23	30,6
SIZE OF SETTLEMENT		24 AND ABOVE	11,8
UP TO 1.000	20,8	*YEAR OD STUDIES*	
1.001 – 10.000	37,3	FIRST	59,2
0.001 – 100.000	20,8	SECOND	6,3
100.001 AND MORE	20,0	FOURTH	20,6
EDUCATION OF THE FATHER		FIFTH	13,9
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	2,9	*EDUCATION OF THE MOTHER*	
THREE-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL	14,7	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	5,4
FOUR-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL	42,7	THREE-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL	8,7
COLLEGE	17,8	FOUR-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL	47,9
UNIVERSITY	20,6	COLLEGE	14,0
		UNIVERSITY	22,9

3.4. Measuring instruments

For the purposes of this paper, several simple indicators and one scale were used from the survey. General interest in politics and the frequency of political discussions with family members and friends were measured using single indicators that participants could respond to on a five-point scale (Table 2 and Table 3). The political participation was measured with a scale that comprised nine variables. The participants could answer each offered form of participation whether they exercise it or not (Table 6). Finally, for the purposes of additional analyses, composite variables were constructed to represent the forms of political participation obtained on the basis of latent dimensions determined by factor analysis (Table 7). Composite variables were obtained by summing the participants' affirmative responses to the variables that most strongly saturate the identified factors (Table 8, Table 9, and Table 10). Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate statistical procedures were used in the analysis of the data obtained on the mentioned instruments. Univariate statistical methods describe the percentages of the distribution of responses on the variables used, as well as the arithmetic means and standard deviations. Bivariate analyses (simple analysis of the variance, t-test, correlation

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[4] 0.7% of the students did not answer this question. In the continuation of this paper we will not explicitly mention the number of students who did not answer a particular question because it can be calculated on the basis of other data presented in the paper.

analysis) tested the significance of differences between the groups, i.e., the correlation between the variables. Factor analysis was used to determine the existence of latent dimensions within the scale of various forms of political participation.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Interest in politics

The participants' overall interest in politics is analyzed first. Political interest is "the degree to which politics arouses a citizen's curiosity" (van Deth, 1989, p. 278 according to Amna and Ekart, 2014, p. 268). Research at the level of Croatia (Ilišin, 2017) found that, in the last thirty years, the percentage of young people who are completely uninterested in politics is growing, from one fourth (24%) in 1986 to over one third (38%) in 2004 and one half (54.3 %) in 2013. The author brings this growing lack of interest into connection with the change in the political system, since the same trend is present in other transition countries. Unlike the overall youth population, in the student subgroup, when comparing the years 1999 and 2010, the interest in politics remained unchanged (Ilišin, 2014).[5] The total lack of interest in politics in 2010 was represented by 43.8% of the students, while a great interest was represented by 14.5% of the students. It should be emphasized that the lowest interest at the national level was expressed by the students in Rijeka and Osijek. In our research, the interest in politics is measured with a more elaborate five-degree scale.

TABLE 2. GENERAL (LACK OF) INTEREST IN POLITICS (%)

YOU ARE INTERESTED IN POLITICS:	
1. NOT AT ALL	25.7
2. I'M NOT INTERESTED	26.1
3. NEITHER INTERESTED NOR UNINTERESTED	22.7
4. MOSTLY INTERESTED	20.2
5. EXTREMELY INTERESTED	5.0
M(SD)	2.53 (1.21)

It is observable from Table 2 that twice as many students claim that they are not interested in politics (categories 1 and 2 = 51.8%) than those who claim that they are interested in politics (categories 4 and 5 =

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[5] Ilišin (2014) cites the paradox that the number of political party members doubled (5.3%: 10.7%) in the student population with a simultaneous decline in their interest in politics (2004 - 2013).

25.2%). Furthermore, five times more students claim that they are not interested in politics at all (25.7%) than those who claim that they are extremely interested in politics (5%). When comparing the results of this research and that of Ilišin (2014), we can notice that the share of those who are greatly interested in politics is stably small among the students in Rijeka.

TABLE 3. HOW OFTEN DO YOU DISCUSS POLITICS (%)?

	WITH YOUR FAMILY?	*WITH YOUR BEST FRIEND?*	*IN YOUR PEER GROUP?*
1. NEVER	7.4	18.6	13.5
2. VERY RARELY	29.3	28.5	32.3
3. OCCASSIONALLY	41.3	36.2	37.3
4. FREQUENTLY	18.9	13.2	12.8
5. ALL THE TIME	2.7	3.0	3.6
M(SD)	2.80 (0.92)	2.53 (1.03)	2.30 (0.99)

The frequency analysis of political discussions within the primary groups (Table 3) indicates that the number of participants who never or very rarely engage in these (categories 1 and 2) is almost twice as large as the number of those who do it frequently or all the time (categories 4 and 5). It can be noticed that the students are more likely to discuss politics more frequently within the family than with their best friend or peer group.

The analysis of the general level of student interest in politics and the frequency of their discussions on politics with family members or friends reveals the existence of statistically significant positive correlations. The correlation ranges from r = 0.490**[6] in the context of conversations with family members, to r = 0.487** in the context of conversation with the best friend, and to 0.449 ** in the context of the discussions within the peer group. A variance analysis was conducted in order to gain an insight into the relationship between the students' level of interest in politics and the level of frequency of political discussions. We started off from the assumption that family policy discussions are an important aspect of primary political socialization of young people and therefore affect their general interest in politics. On the other hand, we assumed that the level of the students' general interest in politics is, at least

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[6] For the sake of saving space wherever possible, the level of statistical significance of the analyses will be indicated by „*" (p<0.05) and „**" (p <0.01).

partly, responsible for the extent to which they discuss politics with their best friend and within their peer group.

TABLE 4. TESTING THE DIFFERENCES AT THE LEVEL OF THE STUDENTS' GENERAL PE IN REGARD TO THE FREQUENCY OF POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS IN THE FAMILY

INTEREST IN POLITICS[7]			
HOW OFTEN DO YOUR DISCUSS POLITICS IN YOUR FAMILY?	**N**	**M**	**SD**
1. NEVER	47	1.57	0.950
2. VERY RARELY	186	1.90	0.927
3. OCCASIONALLY	262	2.70	1.078
4. OFTEN	120	3.29	1.198
5. ALL THE TIME	17	3.94	1.345
$F_{(632)}=50,834**$ 5≠1,2,3 ; 4≠1,2, 3 ; 3≠1,2			

The results shown in Table 4 indicate that only those students who frequently (4) or all the time (5) discuss politics with their family on average reach the arithmetic mean values above the theoretical average of the scale on the general interest in politics indicator. It is also evident that the students who discuss politics only occasionally (3), very rarely (2) or never (1) on this indicator achieve, on average, the values of the arithmetic mean below the theoretical average of the scale. The results of the analysis of variance and correlation analysis show that primary family political socialization to some extent affects the level of the youth's general interest in politics.

Additional variance analyses were carried out in order to uncover whether there is a correlation between the socio-demographic variables and the level of the students' general interest in politics. These analyses have shown that the size of the settlement in which the participants grew up and the financial status of their families do not affect the level of the students' interest in politics. On the other hand, it turned out that the participants' sex[8] and the level of their parents' education[9] affect the difference in the level of general interest in politics to a certain extent. According to the findings of previous research (Henn and Foard, 2015), women (M = 2.44) show statistically significantly greater disinterest in politics than male

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[7] 1. Not at all interested; 2. Mostly not interested; 3. Neither interested, nor interested; 4. Mostly interested; 5. Extremely interested

[8] t=2.351**

[9] Education of the mother $F_{(632)}= 2.899*$; education of the father $F_{(632)}= 2.391*$

participants (M = 2.67). In addition, the participants whose mothers graduated from university (M = 2.79) were statistically significantly less uninterested in politics than the participants whose mothers completed only a four-year high school (M = 2.39). The situation is almost identical when the father's level of education is concerned.

4.2. Political participation

Political participation includes "ways in which ordinary citizens try to influence the political decision-making process" (Parry et al. 1992: 39, according to Amna and Ekart, 2014: 269). In the beginnings of the research, political involvement was operationalized only by a single variable – voting. Since 1960 this has included protest engagement in social movements and at the end of the century it includes social engagement and civic participation (Amna and Ekart, 2014). The instrument used in this research included nine forms of political participation, whose results are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6. FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION (IN %)

	NO	*YES*	*N/A*
ARE YOU A MEMBER OF A POLITICAL PARTY?	92.8	5.7	1.5
IF THE ELECTIONS WERE HELD THIS MONTH, WOULD YOU GO TO THE POLLS?	23.6	73.4	3.0
DID YOU SIGN A PAPER POLITICAL PETITION IN THE PAST YEAR?	57.4	41.3	1.3
HAVE YOU BEEN ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THE WORK OF A POLITICAL PARTY IN THE LAST YEAR?	95.3	3.6	1.1
DID YOU "LIKE" SOME POLITICAL INITIATIVE ON THE INTERNET IN THE LAST YEAR?	63.5	35.4	1.1
DID YOU COMMENT ON POSTS OF SOME POLITICAL INITIATIVES IN THE LAST YEAR?	87.6	11.1	1.3
DID YOU POST SOMETHING ABOUT A POLITICAL INITIATIVE IN THE LAST YEAR?	94.5	4.2	1.3
DID YOU "SHARE" THE CONTENT OF SOME POLITICAL INITIATIVES IN THE PAST YEAR?	90.2	8.5	1.3
DID YOU ADMINISTERING WEBSITES OF A POLITICAL INITIATIVE IN THE LAST YEAR?	98.1	0.6	1.3

From Table 6 it is evident that only turnout in elections is a widespread form of the students' political participation. Three quarters of the participants (73.2%) expressed their intention to go to the polls, but only a fifth of them had a clear idea of which party they would vote for.

The results coincide with those at the European Union level (Paolini et al., 2018), where three quarters (74%) of young people reported voting in local, regional, national, or EU elections in the past three years. Similarly, Sloam's (2017) data show that three-quarters (75.1%) of young people with a graduate degree participate in voting.

The second political action in terms of frequency is the signing of paper political petitions (42.3%). When comparing these data with those from "old" EU Member States (Sloam, 2016), only young Swedes do this more frequently than our participants. The most widespread action in the new media is "liking" a political initiative on the Internet (35.4%). Each tenth participant commented on the post of some political initiative, and every twelfth "shared" the content of some political initiative on the Internet. Finally, the results show that a relatively small number of students are members of a political party, that even fewer are actively involved in their work, and that the "posting" of the content of some political initiative and administering of political initiative pages are very poorly represented among the students. The share of students who are members of political parties does not differ from the share of membership of EU youth with a university degree (4.5%) in Sloam's research (2017).

On the basis of only the two most widespread indicators (voting and signing petitions) it could be concluded that, compared to the European average, Croatian students are politically active above average. However, we come across a lot of political passivity in other forms of political action. For example, 15.7% of the participants do not participate in either form of political action, while one third (33.1%) does, mostly in voting in elections (28.1%). A quarter of the sample participates in two activities and slightly more (26.1%) in three or more activities. The scope of PE is statistically significantly associated with the interest in politics[10] and policy discussions in primary groups[11]. The number of political actions in which the participant is active increases with the interest in politics and the frequency of political discussions in primary groups. The analysis of correlation between the interest and scope of engagement variables shows a statistically significant correlation between them ($r = 0.414^{**}$) and indicates that there is an equal share of diametric categories in the sample:

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[10] $F_{(631)}=35.584^{**}$
[11] Discussions in the family $F_{(631)}=19.768^{**}$; with the best friend $F_{(631)}=18,880^{**}$; in the peer group $F_{(631)}=22.012^{**}$.

those who are not interested in and do not participate in any activity (12.3%) and those who are interested in and participate in three or more activities (13.1%). Additionally, it is interesting to note that one third of the participants are not interested in politics, but that they nevertheless participate in one (21.3%) or two (11.4%) activities.

A factor analysis was performed in order to determine the manner in which the indicators of political participation of the students are grouped (Table 7). The analysis has shown that the measured aspects of political activity can be grouped into three latent dimensions that together account for 58.53% of the total variance of the instrument. The first factor brings together variables that represent aspects of the "new" forms of political participation such as commenting on posts of political initiatives on the Internet (0.79), publishing political posts (0.77), and "sharing" the content of political initiatives (0.73). The second factor is saturated with variables that test membership (0.78) and active engagement of students in political parties (0.81) as well as administering pages of a political initiative (0.67). The common denominator of the included items is the traditional party engagement.

TABLE 7. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION - FACTOR STRUCTURE MATRIX
(VARIMAX TRANSFORMATION)

	FACTOR 1	*FACTOR 2*	*FACTOR 3*
MEMBERSHIP IN A POLITICAL PARTY	-0.026	*0.767*	0.232
VOTING IN ELECTIONS	-0.078	0.004	*0.723*
SIGNING A PAPER POLITICAL PETITION	0.179	0.039	*0.693*
ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE WORK OF A POLITICAL PARTY	0.217	*0.807*	0.026
"LIKING" A POLITICAL INITIATIVE ON THE INTERNET	0.444	0.075	*0.551*
COMMENTING ON POSTS OF A POLITICAL INITIATIVE	*0.790*	0.144	0.063
PUBLISHING POSTS ON THE PAGE OF A POLITICAL INITITATIVE	*0.767*	0.199	-0.036
"SHARING" THE CONTENT OF A POLITICAL INITIATIVE	*0.729*	0.053	0.249
ADMINISTERING WEBSITES OF A POLITICAL INITIATIVE	0.190	*0.669*	-0.130

The third factor includes variables that at first glance represent a variety of forms of political participation, such as voting in elections (0.73), signing paper political petitions (0.69), and "liking" political initiatives on the Internet (0.55). It should be emphasized that the "liking" item at the same time somewhat less (0.44) saturates the first factor, which, based on "theoretical logic" it should present. It seems that these activities have become an integral part of the dominant political culture and are the prevailing forms of political activity in our country and that, in this context, they may have to be seen as forms of conformist behavior irrespective of their "hybrid" character.

In the continuation of this paper we will analyze the relationship between the general interest in politics, the frequency of political discussion within primary social groups and socio-demographic variables on the one hand, and the variables that represent the three mentioned forms of political participation on the other. In order to gain a deeper insight into the level of student engagement in these forms of political participation for each of the obtained dimensions, a composite variable is constructed, which represents the indices of the total number of student activities in them. The range of results within these composite variables may vary from 0 (the student has not participated in any activity) to 3 (the student has participated in all three activities). The correlation analysis showed that there is a statistically significant but weak correlation between the obtained indices. More precisely, the correlation between the index of traditional party engagement and the index of "new" politics is $r_s = 0.166**$, the correlation between the index of traditional party engagement and the index of "hybrid-conformist" engagement is $r_s = 0.173**$, and the correlation between the index of "new" and the index of "hybrid-conformist" engagement is somewhat higher than in the previous cases and amounts to $r_s = 0.362**$. The correlation between the indicators of the general interest in politics and the mentioned indices is statistically significant but still relatively weak. With regards to the traditional party participation index, $r_s = 0.166**$, in the context of the index of participation in "new" forms of political activity $r_s = 0.332**$, and with regards to the "hybrid-conformist" index $r_s = 0.384**$. In addition, the correlation between the frequency of political discussion within the primary groups and the mentioned indices is also statistically significant, but it is slightly

weaker than in the context of their connectedness with the indicator of the general interest in politics. The index of traditional party politics is extremely poorly correlated with the rate of discussion within the family ($r_s = 0.091*$), with the best friend ($r_s = 0.111**$), and the peer group ($r_s = 0.093**$).

With regards to the remaining two indices, the correlations are slightly higher than in the previous case, but are still weak. According to previous research (Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers, 2009; Verba, Lehman Schlozman, and Burns, 2005) we find that family discussions affect the political behavior of the participants. Slightly higher correlation values between family political socialization and the hybrid-conformist index ($r_s=0,219**$) suggest a somewhat more important role of the family in transmitting this form of political behavior than the remaining two agents. Discussions with friends and peer groups have a somewhat greater impact on this new PE than discussions with family members, suggesting that this is a political action that is to a greater extent generationally marked.

In the following sections, the connectedness between the socio-demographic variables and types of politics will be analyzed by means of the correlation analysis on the obtained indices, and the relationship between the general interest in politics and the mentioned types of PE will be further examined through t-tests on individual variables from which the indexes are constructed.[12]

4.3. Traditional party politics

The index of traditional party politics is a composite variable derived from the sum of results on the variables: membership in a political party, active engagement in a political party, and administration of a page of a political initiative in the previous year. Table 8 shows that as many as nine out of ten participants did not participate in any form of traditional party political activity, and only 7.1% of the participants actively participated in one of these forms. Finally, it can be seen that only 2.4% of

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[12] Since in the obtained indices, the vast majority of the participants (eight or nine out of ten participants in the first two indices) opted for the first category of activity (no activity) and only a very small number of the participants for the remaining three categories, we have decided to analyze the relationship between the general interest in politics and the measured forms of political participation through t-tests on individual variables that were initially used to measure these forms of political activity.

the participants participated in more than one form of such political activity.

The correlation analysis showed (r_s) that there is no statistically significant correlation between the index of traditional party politics of the students and the socio-demographic variables, such as the size of the settlement where the students grew up, the socio-economic status of their families, and the level of their parents' education. Interestingly, the commonly observed relationship (Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010; Paolini et al., 2018) between gender and conventional PE was not determined.

TABLE 8. INDEX OF TRADITIONAL PARTY PE (%)

NONE	90.2
ONE	4.7
TWO	1.9
THREE	0.5
N/A	2.7

Several t-tests were conducted in order to investigate the relationship between the general interest in politics and the traditional forms of political action. In all cases, the analysis showed that there are statistically significant differences between those who practice the forms of traditional political activity and those who do not practice them with regards to the level of their general interest in politics. For example, those who did not actively participate in the work of political parties in the last year (M = 2.49) on average do not show interest in politics, while those who participated in such activities showed a positive general interest in politics (M = 3.61).[13] A similar situation is observable in the context of party membership. Those who have never been members of a political party (M = 2.47) on average achieve values below the theoretical average of the scale of general interest policy indicators, while those who are members of a political party (M = 3.25) on average achieve values above the theoretical scale average.[14] Finally, the difference in the interest in politics is further increased among those who have administered (M = 4.25) the website of some political initiative and those who have not (M =

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[13] t = - 4.401**
[14] t = - 3.805**

2.52)[15] in the last year. Overall, it is evident that the general interest in politics has an effect on the forms of traditional political activity. In all cases, those who have participated in these forms of political participation show, on average, a "positive" general interest in politics, while those who have not, on average, show a "negative" general interest in politics.

4.4. "New" political engagement

The index of new forms of political participation is represented by a composite variable obtained by summing the results on the variables related to commenting on posts of political initiatives, publishing political posts, and "sharing" the content of political initiatives on the Internet.

TABLE 9. INDEX OF "NEW" FORMS OF POLITICS (%)

NONE	83.3
ONE	9.0
TWO	3.6
THREE	2.5
N/A	1.6

The results from Table 9 show that eight out of ten participants did not take part in any of the measured "new" forms of political activity. It is observable that a slightly larger share of the participants (15.1%) actively participated in some of the new forms of political action than was the case in the context of participation in traditional forms of party political action. A similar situation applies to those participants who have participated in more than one form of this kind of political activity. It is evident that there are twice as many participants who participated in two or more forms of new political activity (6.1%) than those who participated in two or more forms of traditional party political activity (2.4%).

As it was the case with the traditional party participation index, the correlation analysis (r_s) has shown that there is no statistically significant correlation between the index of "new" forms of PE and the socio-demographic variables. The relationship between the general interest in politics and the "new" forms of political action was tested using t-tests. It was once again shown that, in all cases, there are statistically significant differences between politically active and inactive participants. For

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[15] t = - 2.866**

example, those who commented on posts of some political initiative (M = 3.56) seemed to be more interested in politics than those who did not comment on such posts (M = 2.40)[16]. A similar situation is noticed with "sharing" the content of some political initiative on the Internet. Students who have "shared" (M = 3.63) such content are on average more interested in politics than those who have not (M = 2.43)[17]. The difference in the general interest in politics among those who published a "post" on a political initiative on the Internet (M = 4.07) in the past year and those who did not (M = 2.46) is somewhat higher than in previous cases[18]. Based on the results presented, it can be noted that general interest in politics even better distinguishes the participants in the context of participating or not participating in the "new" forms of political action than in the context of participating or not participating in the traditional forms of political activity.

4.5. Hybrid-conformist politics

The index of hybrid-conformist forms of political participation is a composite variable obtained by summing the results on the variables relating to voting in elections, signing paper political petitions, and "linking" political initiatives on the Internet.

TABLE 10. HYBRID-CONFORMIST FORMS OF POLITICS (%)

NONE	15.0
ONE	36.1
TWO	27.2
THREE	20.3
N/A	1.4

The results from Table 10 indicate that a significantly higher percentage of surveyed students participated in the forms of hybrid-conformist PE than was the case with the forms of traditional party participation and "new" political engagement. Indeed, it can be seen that, in this context, we have a completely different trend than in previous cases. Namely, with regards to this index, the vast majority of the participants (three quarters of them) took part in at least one form of political

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[16] t = - 7.954**
[17] t = - 7.931**
[18] t = - 9.235**

participation and only a small number did not participate in any of them (15%). As can be seen from Table 10, every third participant participated in at least one activity, every fourth in two activities, and every fifth in each of the three measured activities.

The correlation analysis (r_s) showed that there is no statistically significant correlation between the socio-demographic variables and index of hybrid-conformist forms of PE.

The relationship between the general interest in politics and forms of the students' political action gathered within this index was analyzed with a t-test. Analyses have shown that there are statistically significant differences between active and inactive participants in all the variables from which this index is compiled. However, the tests have shown that the level of general interest in politics cannot as clearly distinguish active and inactive students, as was the case with the variables in the previous two types of political engagement. More specifically, students claiming to vote in elections are on average somewhat less uninterested in politics (M = 2.70) than the participants claiming they would not vote (M = 1.97). The situation is similar in the context of signing paper political petitions. Those who did not sign a petition in the last year (M = 2.29)[19] have on average only slightly less interest in politics than those who signed it (M = 2.85)[20]. Finally, those who have "liked" a political initiative on the Internet (M = 3.05) on average show a somewhat greater general interest in politics than those who have not (M = 2.24). The average responses of those who have "liked" a political initiative on the Internet are closer to indifference towards politics than to interested in politics.[21] The presented results of arithmetic means that represent this type of politics as well as their comparison with the results of the arithmetic means obtained on the items in the previous two types (traditional-party and "new" political engagement) indicate that the participants do not have to be generally interested in politics in order to vote in the elections, sign a paper political petition, or "like" a political initiative on the Internet.

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[19] t = - 7.120**
[20] t = - 5.829**
[21] t = - 8.442**

5. Concluding remarks

The analysis of the students' PE has resulted in a rather colorful picture. The first hypothesis of the low interest, i.e., of the students' predominant lack of interest in politics was confirmed. However, an open doubt remains as to whether the participants have expressed their views with regards to institutional politics. Namely, student engagement in the work of political parties is very low. Politics, and we assume here that this refers to institutional politics, is occasionally or very rarely a topic of discussion in the primary groups in which the respondents participate, more often within the family than a circle of friends. Despite the apparent detachment from party engagement, two thirds of the participants stated they would vote in the elections. However, the majority does not know which political option they would vote for. In regard to the percentage of the general voter turnout in the previous elections in the Republic of Croatia, a high percentage of positive responses should be taken with a degree of doubt. Compared to European results, the activity of signing paper political initiatives is relatively high. "Liking" political initiatives on the Internet is the most widespread form of political action in new media. Although the PE of the participants on the Internet is significantly greater than their party engagement, due to voting information, the second hypothesis in favor of greater participation in new forms of politics is dismissed. We notice that a part (15.7%) of the participants are completely detached from any form of PE, and that almost twice as many participants (28.1%) are politically engaged only in voting in the elections. A quarter of the participants simultaneously participate in both traditional and new forms of political engagement.

The conducted factor analysis extracted three factors, two theoretically expected (traditional and new political engagement) and one somewhat unexpected. The third factor refers to the three most widespread forms of political action: voting in the elections, signing paper political petitions, and "liking" political initiatives on the Internet. Connecting one indicator of traditional and two new forms of PE into a new hybrid factor, points to a pluralization of the participants' political engagement. It should be emphasized that it would be dubious to unquestionably associate the signing of paper political initiatives in Croatia with new forms of political

engagement, since it is often the case with party political actions. A similar case is with "liking" political initiatives on the Internet, which does not have to be connected to initiatives of various associations or civil society organizations. In any case, these forms of political action are a part of the usual, one might also say conformist political actions, because even those who are politically uninterested participate in them.

The existence of opposing forms of participation (H 3a) has not been confirmed, according to which the participation in new forms of PE excludes the participation in the old forms. Due to relatively modest PE in the new media and the broadest conformist political behavior (voting), we could not apply Pippa Norris's assessment that the youth is "reinventing political activism."

The family atmosphere manifested in political discussions is connected to the participants' interest in politics and PE in the forms of hybrid conformist politics, which confirms the importance of primary political socialization. Participation in the forms of new PE is somewhat more pronounced, but still modest and is associated with the frequency of political discussions with friends and peers rather than the frequency of conversations within the family. Socio-demographic variables, sex, and the level of the parents' education are statistically significant only in relation to the interest in politics, but not in regard to the forms of political action; the fourth hypothesis is therefore dismissed. PE is primarily influenced by the level of an individual's interest in politics. In other words, the impact of parental transmissions leaves a mark on the general interest in politics, but not on the forms of political engagement.

Exploring the level of political engagement of students, as potentially important stakeholders of political processes in democratic societies, is especially important given the emergence of the paradox of democracy, which is characterized by an increasing dissatisfaction with the work of democratic institutions and an increasing mistrust in the institutions of the political system (Giddens, 2007, p 429-431). This is also vital because of a possible debate on the need to introduce formal education for young people that addresses the functioning of contemporary democratic political systems and the challenges that democracy faces in the late modern era.

This research has several limitations. In the operationalization of new political engagement, not all forms of cause-oriented repertoires of political actions were covered. The emphasis was on the traditional forms of political action, so the questionnaire covered only a part of the range of extra-institutional political actions. The second limitation is related to the absence of research into the forms of political action at the level of the entire population, on the basis of which it would be determined whether and to what extent younger and older generations are different. Furthermore, the sample encompassed only the student population of the University of Rijeka, which comprises students from the Croatian regions (Primorje-Gorski Kotar and Istarska County), whose level of development is above the state average, which, of course, influences the political identity of the region (Boneta, 2004, Mrakovčić, 2015) and most likely also the forms of political engagement.

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Politička apatija, sofisticirana političnost ili pluralizacija političke participacije studenata?

Sažetak

Istraživanja u Hrvatskoj potvrđuju da se političnost mladih mijenja. Iako interes mladih za politiku i politička zbivanja u Hrvatskoj između 1999. i 2004. godine raste, još je uvijek manji nego što je bio u razdoblju socijalizma (Ilišin, 2011), dok istodobno, politička participacija mladih opada. Istraživanja nalaze da su mladi sve skeptičniji prema oblicima tradicionalne političnosti, a otvoreniji prema iskazivanju političnosti kroz nove medije. Rad problematizira utemeljenost oprečnih dijagnoza, kao i teze o pluralizaciji političnost mladih, na temelju istraživanja provedenog među studentima osam sastavnica Sveučilišta u Rijeci 2015. godine (N=635). U radu se analiziraju oblici tradicionalne (članstvo u političkim strankama; izlazak na izbore) i nove političnosti (oblici političkog angažmana na društvenim mrežama) studenata. Rezultati se uspoređuju s političnošću mladih/studenata u europskim i hrvatskim istraživanjima. Rezultati govore o postojanju hibridne političnosti koja uključuje visoku spremnost glasovanja na izborima, potpisivanje peticija na štandu i lajkanje političkih inicijativa na internetu, ali, istovremeno, ukazuju i na vrlo skromni angažman studenta u ostalim, bilo tradicionalnim bilo novim, oblicima političke akcije.

Ključne riječi: *mladi, politička participacija, interes za politiku, društvene mreže, studenti*