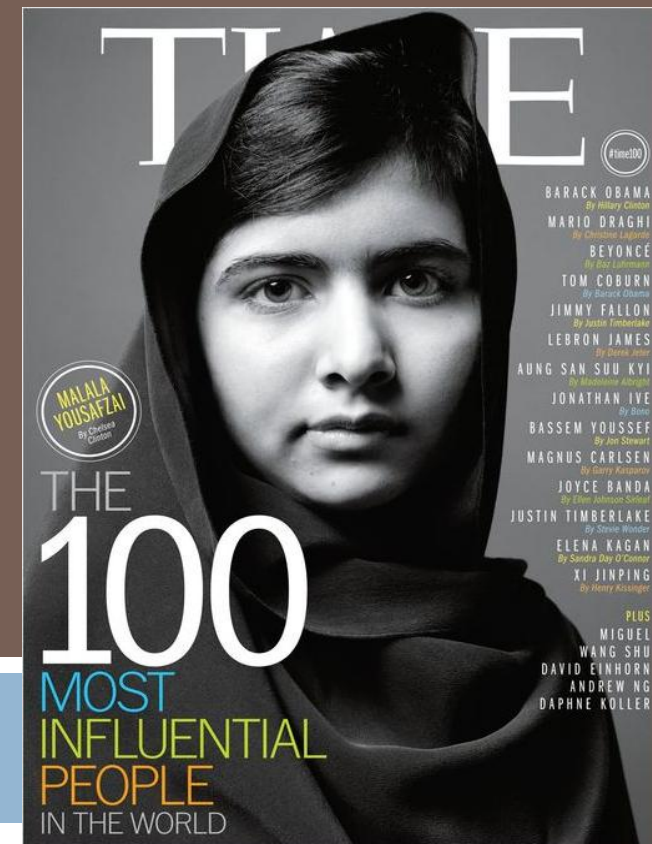# Beyond voting: Components and predictors of political participation and civic engagement among adolescents in Greece

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Abstract

Youth political participation is a controversial issue with significant theoretical and social implications. This paper presents data from the Greek contribution to Catch-EyoU, an interdisciplinary consortium for the study of European youth active citizenship. The sample consisted of 589 adolescents, aged 14-17, who were enrolled in 11 secondary schools from four regions, including Athens. Self-reports were collected on a number of measures extracted after an extensive literature review. Four components of civic engagement emerged, namely formal (proactive support of a political cause), activism (reactive protest against power), online (through the Internet), and volunteering (working for a community/social cause). Predictors of the above varied considerably: Formal participation was equally related to individual (e.g., political efficacy, political interest) and proximal level variables (e.g., perceived discrimination, school participation, family praise). Activism was predicted mostly by variables involving interactions of adolescents with their proximal environments (e.g., community participation, multinational friends) as well as by societal factors (income, citizenship norms). This pattern was even more pronounced in volunteering, where micro-level predictors (esp. school and friends political engagement) were prominent. The opposite was true for online participation, which was predicted mainly by individual variables, but also from media exposure and religiosity. Volunteering and online participation were mobilized mostly by positive perceptions and experiences of adolescents, while active participation was triggered by negative motives, such as perceived inequality and attitudes rejecting EU formal citizenship. Our findings suggest that civic engagement involves complex processes leading to potentially diverse outcomes with significant ideological implications.

Outline

- Civic engagement and political participation
  - What are they? Why bother?
  - Research questions

- Method
  - Participants
  - Measures and procedure

- Results
  - Components and frequency of youth political and civic engagement
  - Predictors and profiles of youth political and civic engagement

- Discussion and Conclusions
  - Limitations and future directions

Civic Engagement and Political Participation: What Are They?

- Terminologies of civic engagement and political participation vary considerably across disciplines and epistemological approaches (normative *vs.* critical).

- Most conceptualizations define civic engagement in rather broader terms and political participation in a more concrete manner.

- Civic engagement refers to 'how an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future' (Adler & Goggin, 2005)…

- …while political participation encompasses 'actions or activities by ordinary citizens that in some way are directed toward influencing political outcomes in society' (Teorell, Torcal, & Montero, 2007) and sometimes even narrows down to electoral behaviour.
  - Voting is excluded by definition when it comes to non-adult citizens.

Civic Engagement and Political Participation: What Are They?

☐ Different operationalizations make comparison across studies difficult or even misleading.

☐ One of the most comprehensive typologies is proposed by Ekman & Amna (2012):

	Non-participation		Civil participation		Political participation		
	Active	Passive	Social Involvement	Civic engagement	Formal	Activism	
						Extra-parliamentary	Illegal
Individual	*[Examples of specific actions described in detail]*						
Collective							

☐ Critical scientists question the mainstream view of the 'good citizen' with responsibilities and rights as the desired civil outcome. They bring notions such as ideology, social justice, minorities and conflict into the centre of attention in the discourse on civic and political engagement (e.g., Banaji, 2008; Bee & Guerrina, 2014).

- Either approach considered, civic engagement and political participation are crucial issues in modern societies:

  - There is widely expressed concern from the mainstream perspective about the decline in youth voting rate and other traditional forms of political action (Putnam, 2000).

  - Critical scientists point to the elitist character of established citizenship leading certain social groups –such as immigrants and young people, in particular– to political and social exclusion (Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison, & Anstead, 2014).

- In parallel to the debate on the definition and concept of civic and political engagement, modern societies undergo deep changes that challenge the legitimacy of established political institutions. These include, among others, the rise of far-right populism, extremism and radicalization, immigration and the refugee crisis, recession and growing inequalities (e.g., Hatton, 2016; Kuhn et al., 2016; Maricut, 2017; Mudde, 2016).

The Present Study

□ Catch-EyoU is an interdisciplinary consortium that aims to identify the factors, located at different levels (psychological, developmental, contextual and macro-social) influencing the different forms of youth active engagement in Europe.

□ Catch-EyoU WP7 coordinators have collated existing scales and instruments designed to capture the central constructs and variables as a pool for the design of a questionnaire.

□ Two age groups are targeted: adolescents (16-18 yrs) and young adults (20-26 yrs).

□ The questionnaire was evaluated in a pilot study involving 160 participants in each country.

□ Wave 1 of data collection has already been completed. The present study is based on this data set, focusing on adolescents from Greece.

□ A second wave will follow in 12 months. A longitudinal, cross-national data set will be created to study the processes that influence youth societal and political engagement.

Research Questions

- What are the components of youth political participation and civic engagement?

  - Both formal and unconventional types of participation will emerge, ranging from overt political actions to latent forms of civic engagement (Ekman & Amna, 2012).

- What is the frequency of political participation overall and across domains?

  - Online (Dahlgren, 2007) and extra-curricular involvement (McFarland & Thomas, 2006) are expected to be more prominent among youth, compared to manifest politics which are found in decline (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001).

- What are the predictors of youth political participation?

  - Predictors of political participation will be organized in nested multilevel models, from social positioning and individual differences to proximal environments of interactions and macrosystemic societal factors (Motti-Stefanidi, Berry, Chryssochoou, Sam, & Phinney, 2012).

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Participants (*N* = 589)

- **Gender** 60% female; 40% male

- **Age** 14-17 years (mean = 15.1, *SD* = 0.39)

- **Education   Mother** 46% secondary; 19% university; 13% postgraduate
  Father 44% secondary; 18% university; 9% postgraduate

- **Job Status Mother** 65% working; 13% unemployed; 20% NEET
  Father 82% working; 7% unemployed; 6% NEET

- **Ethnic Origin Own** 3.4% born in another country
  Family 34% at least one parent born in another country (23% both)

- **Place of residence** 49% Athens; 23% Attica outskirts; 11% Peloponese; 18% Evia

Measures

- Political Participation (Catch-EyoU WP7 team, 2016)

  - Activism (5 items, α = .75)
    e.g., *'Taken part in an occupation of a building or a public space'*

  - Online (5 items, α = .72)
    e.g., *'Discussed social or political issues on the Internet'*

  - Formal (5 items, α = .65)
    e.g., *'Worked for a political party or a political candidate'*

  - Volunteering (3 items, α = .66)
    e.g., *'Volunteered or worked for a social cause'*

  - Total score (18 items, α = .83)

Measures

- Sociodemographic
- Individual differences
- Family
- School
- Community
- Societal level variables

- Gender
- Parental education
- Family income relative to family needs
- Multicultural experience (5 items, α = .71)

Measures

- Sociodemographic

- Individual differences

- Family

- School

- Community

- Societal level variables

- **Personality** (BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999)
  - Extraversion (7 items, α = .78)
  - Agreeableness (8 items, α = .66)
  - Conscientiousness (9 items, α = .67)
  - Neuroticism (9 items, α = .69)
  - Openness (9 items, α = .72)

- **Religiosity** (Catch-EyoU)
  - *'To what extent are you religious?'*

- **National Identity** (Catch-EyoU)
  - Sense of belonging (3 items, α = .83)
  - Identity Search (3 items, α = .75)

- **Political awareness** (Catch-EyoU)
  - Political Efficacy (7 items, α = .79)
  - Political Interest (4 items, α = .81)
  - Civic Altruism (3 items, α = .74)

Measures

- Sociodemographic

- Individual differences

- Family ———————

- School

- Community

- Societal level variables

- Family Political Engagement (Catch-EyoU)
  - ➢ 3 items, α = .62

- Parents' Attitudes towards EU (Catch-EyoU)
  - ➢ 2 items, a = .63

- Family Praise (Catch-EyoU)
  - ➢ 3 items, a = .83

Measures

- Sociodemographic

- Individual differences

- Family

- School

- Community

- Societal level variables

- Democratic School Climate (Catch-EyoU)
  - 7 items, a = .79

- Participation in the School Context (Catch-EyoU)
  - 3 items, a = .51

Measures

- Sociodemographic

- Individual differences

- Family

- School

- Community

- Societal level variables

- Friends' Political Engagement (Catch-EyoU)
  - 2 items, α = .64

- Neighbourhood participation (Catch-EyoU)
  - 4 items, α = .68

Measures

- Sociodemographic

- Individual differences

- Family

- School

- Community

- Societal level variables

- **Media Exposure** (Catch-EyoU)
    - *'How often do you watch, read or listen to news?'*

- **Trust** (Catch-EyoU)
    - 3 items, α = .66

- **Representations of EU citizenship** (Catch-EyoU)
    - Normative EU citizenship (2 items, α = .65)

- **Ethnic Group Discrimination** (Motti & Asendorpf, 2012)
    - 4 items, α = .87

- **Personal Discrimination** (Motti & Asendorpf, 2012)
    - 4 items, α = .91

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Components of Political Participation

- **Activism** (14.8% of expl. var.)

- Online

- Formal

- Volunteering

Loading	Mean	Item
.74	1.75	Took part in an occupation of a building or a public space
.73	1.50	Took part in a demonstration or strike
.71	1.17	Took part in a political event where there was physical confrontation with opponents/police
.66	1.30	Painted or stuck political messages or graffiti on walls
.49	1.26	Signed a petition

Components of Political Participation

- Activism

- Online
  (14.7% of expl. var.)

- Formal

- Volunteering

Loading	Mean	Item
.78	2.05	Discussed social/political issues on the Internet
.68	2.73	Shared news social or political content with people in my social networks
.66	1.68	Joined a social or political group on a social network
.64	1.34	Participated in an internet-based protest or boycott
.42	1.80	Boycotted or bought products for political, ethical or environmental reasons

Components of Political Participation

- Activism

- Online

- Formal
  (11.7% of expl. var.)

- Volunteering

Loading	Mean	Item
.78	1.07	Worked for a political party or a political candidate
.60	1.28	Donated money to support a political group
.57	1.17	Created political content online
.55	1.10	Contacted a politician or public official
.42	1.20	Wore a badge, ribbon or t-shirt with political message

Components of Political Participation

☐ Activism

☐ Online

☐ Formal

☐ Volunteering
(10.9% of expl. var.)

Loading	Mean	Item
.78	2.25	Donated money to a social cause
.73	1.80	Volunteered or worked for a social cause (children/elderly/refugees/organization)
.60	1.73	Participated in a concert or a charity event for a social or political cause

Frequency of Political Participation
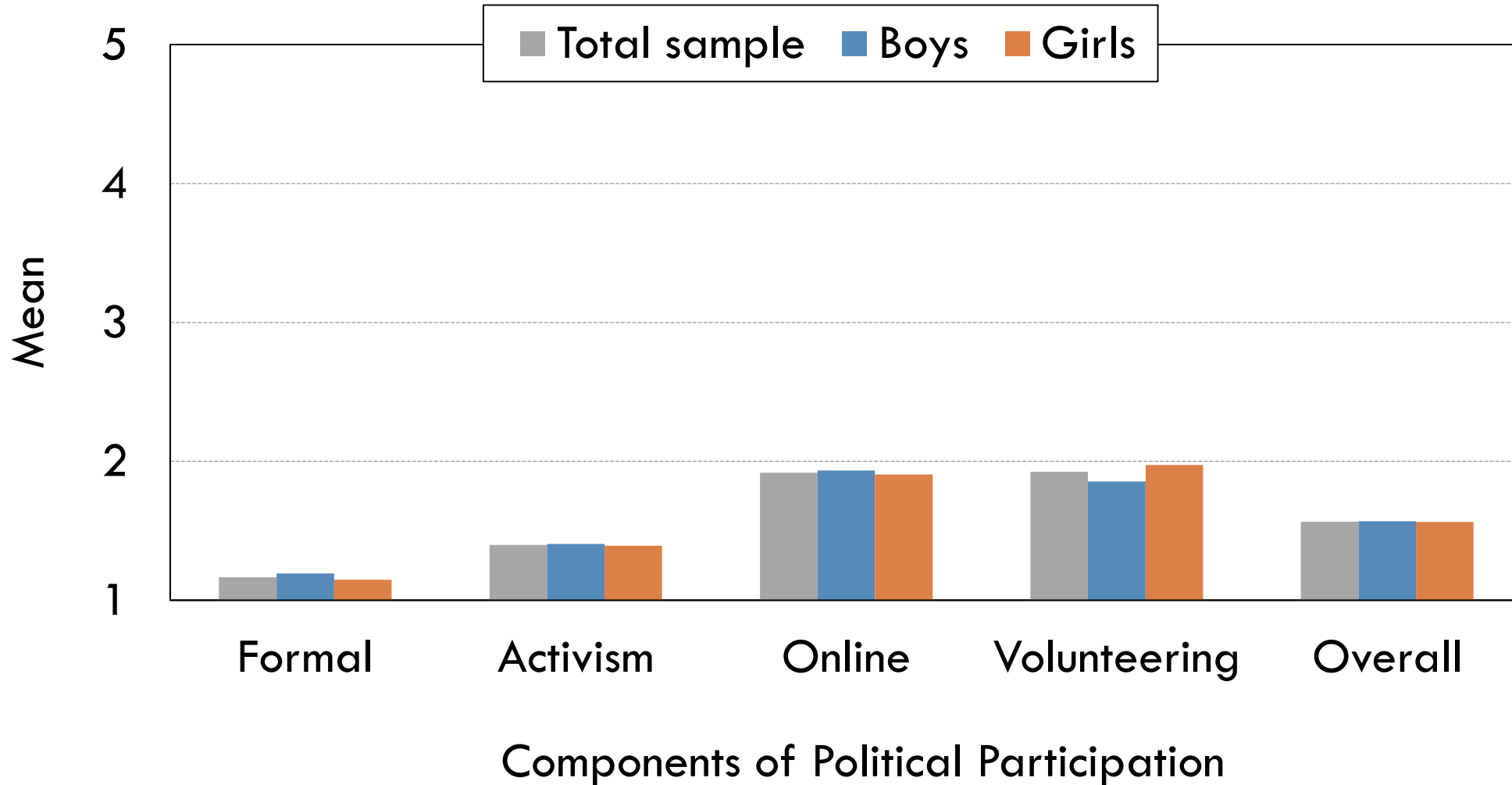
Predictors of Overall Political Participation
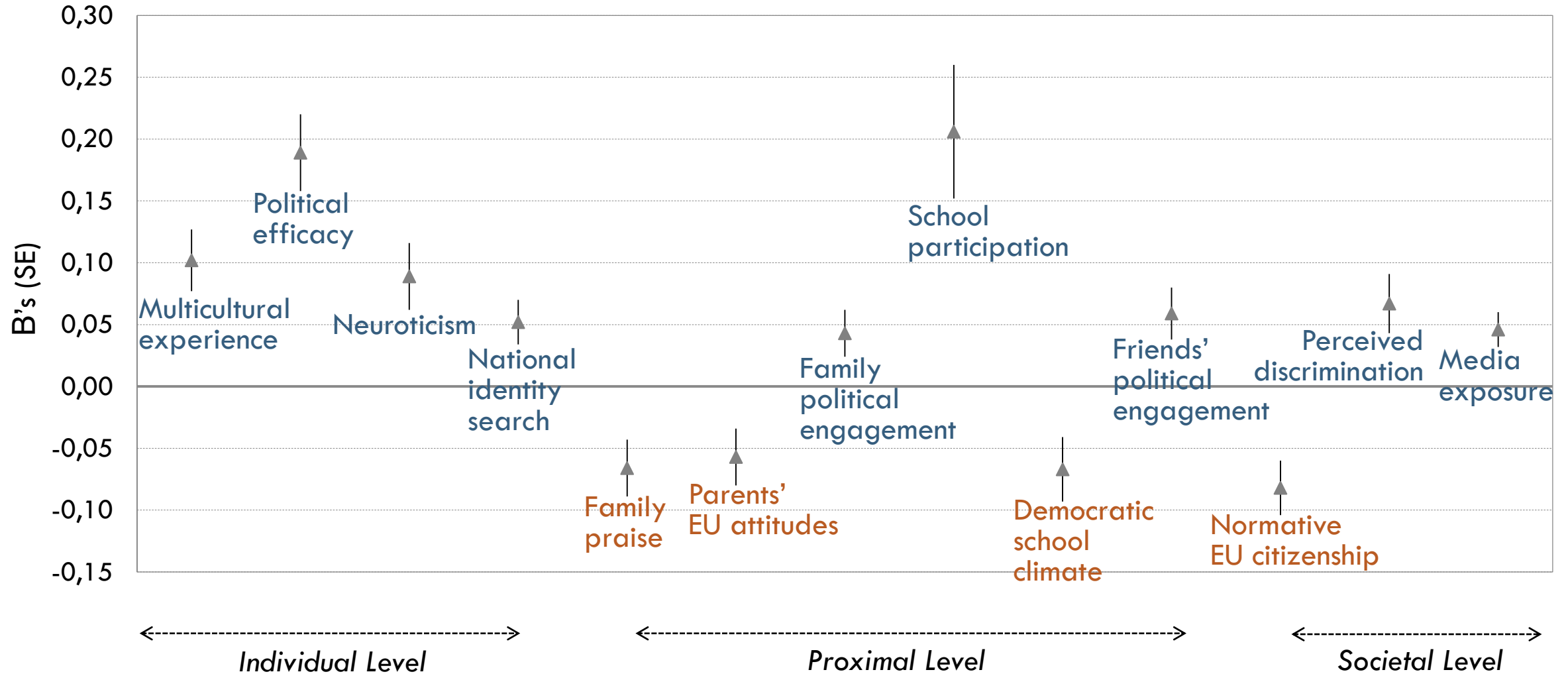
Predictors of Political Activism

Method: Stepwise, controlling for other forms of participation; Total R^2 = .36; ΔR^2 = .07
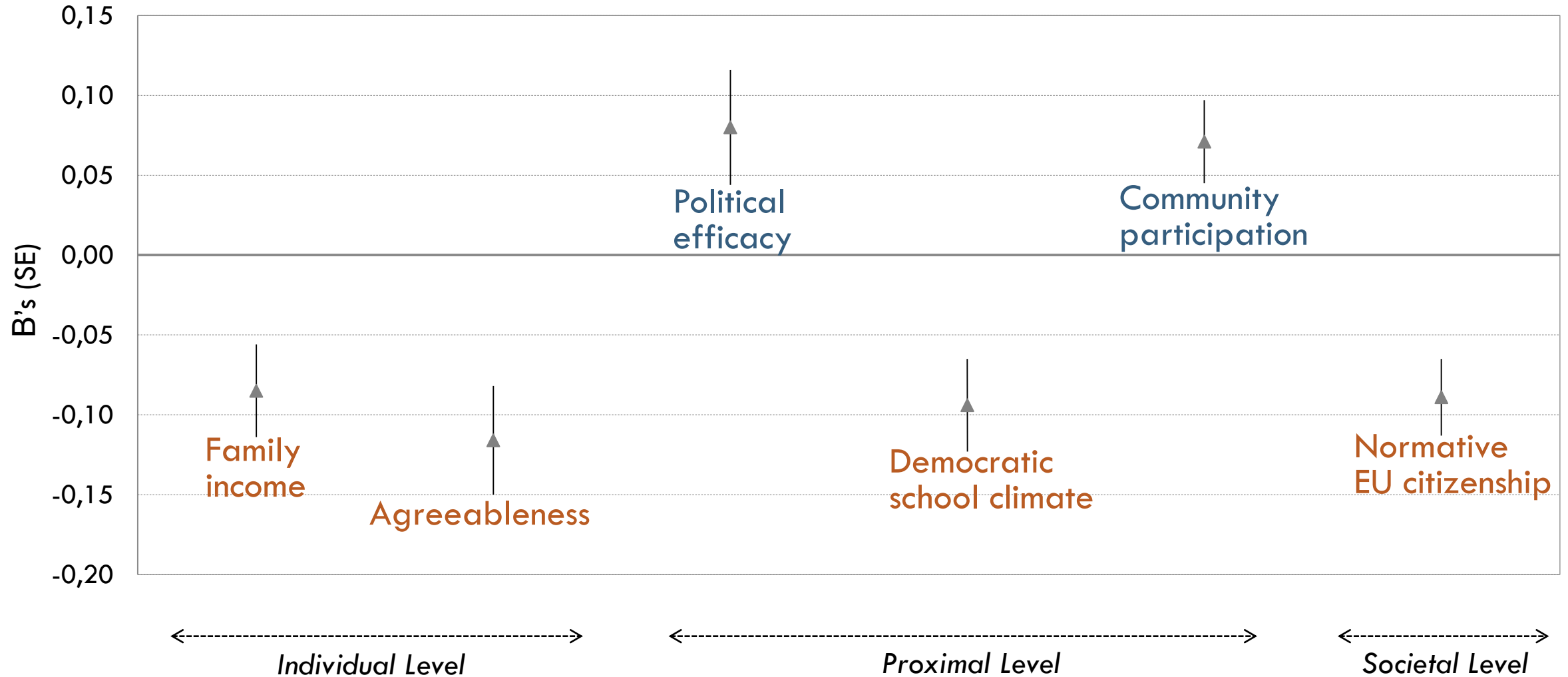
Predictors of Online Participation
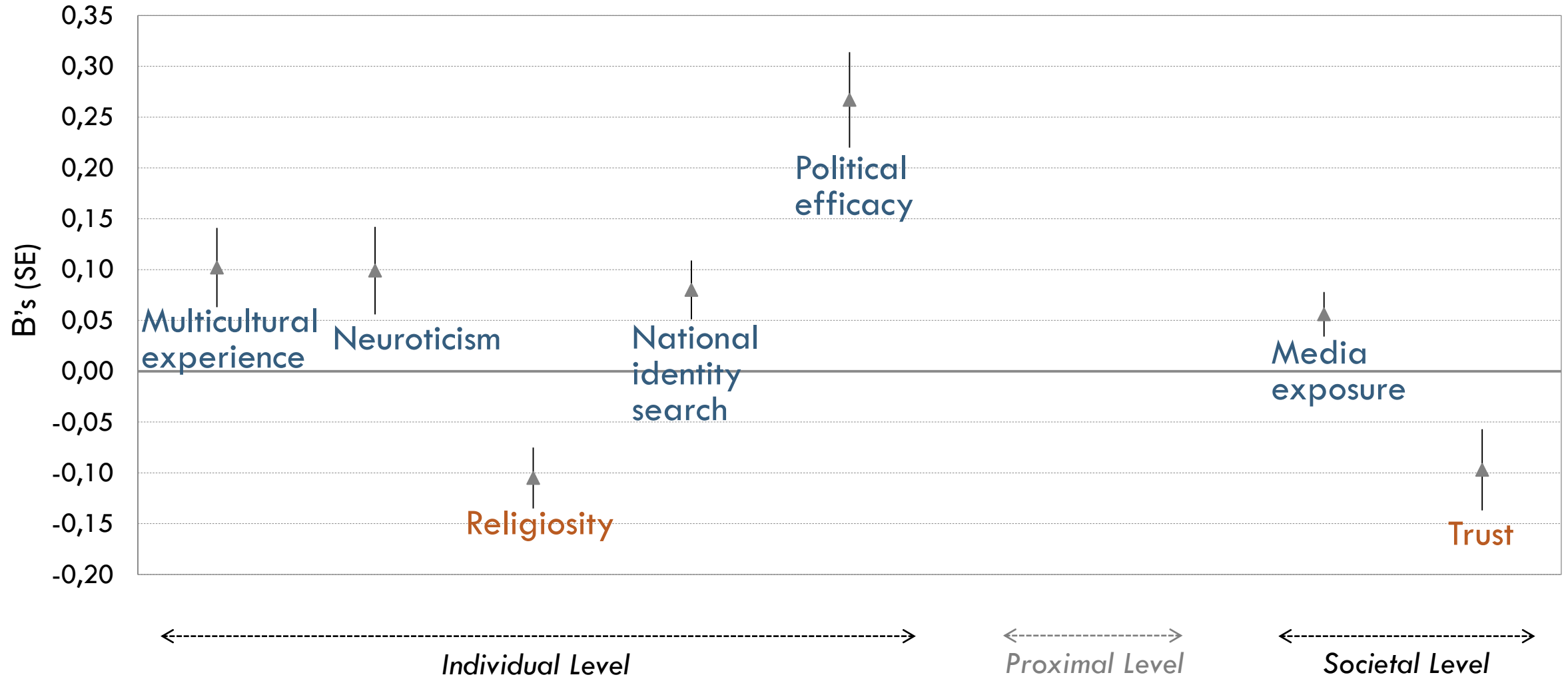
Predictors of Formal Participation
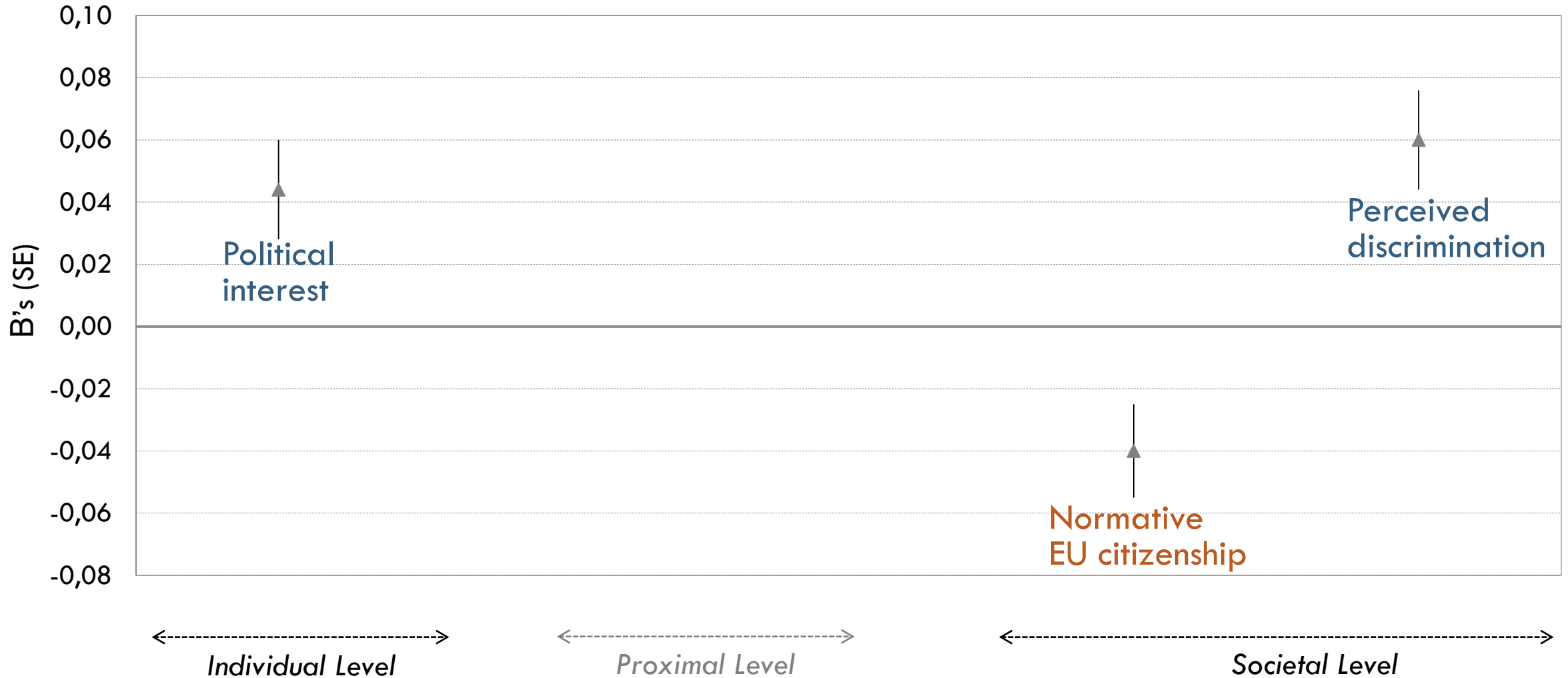
Predictors of Volunteering
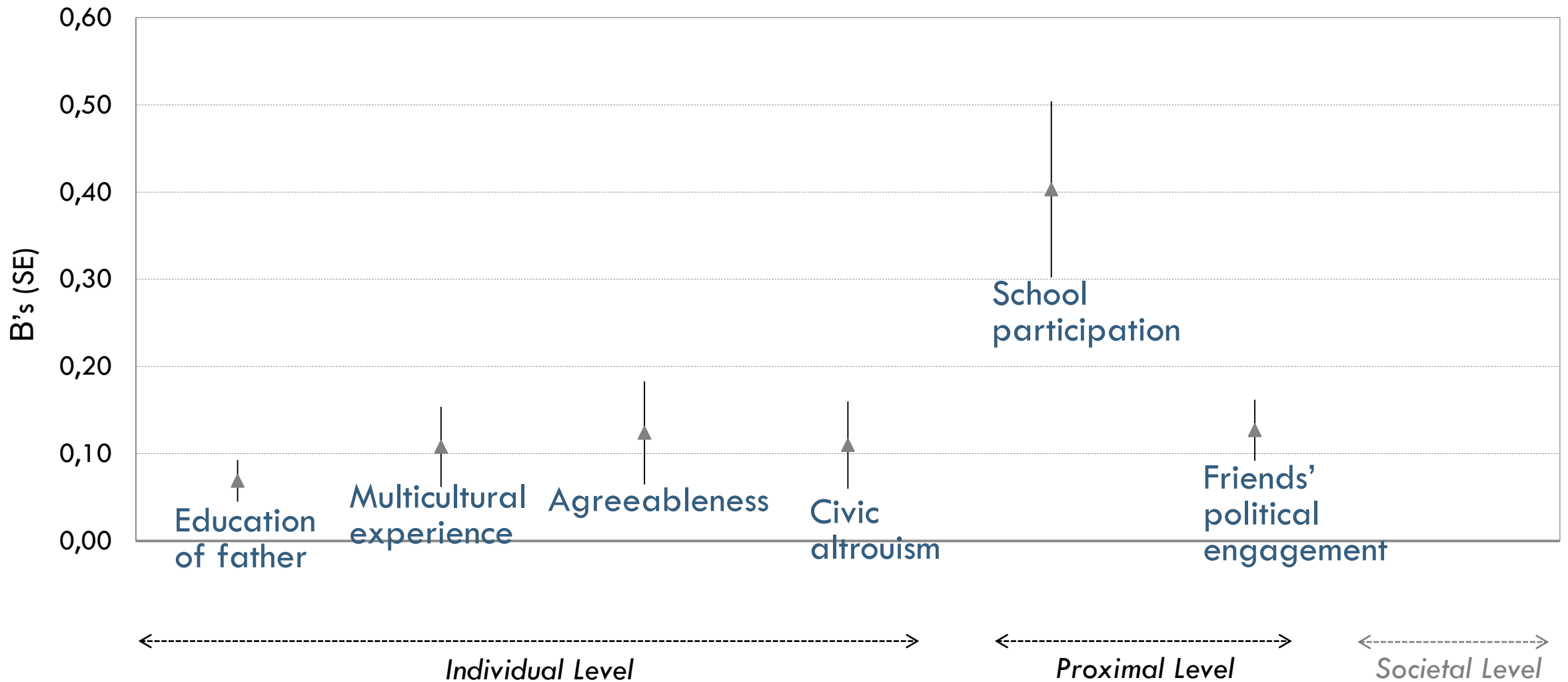
Profiles of Civic and Political Engagement
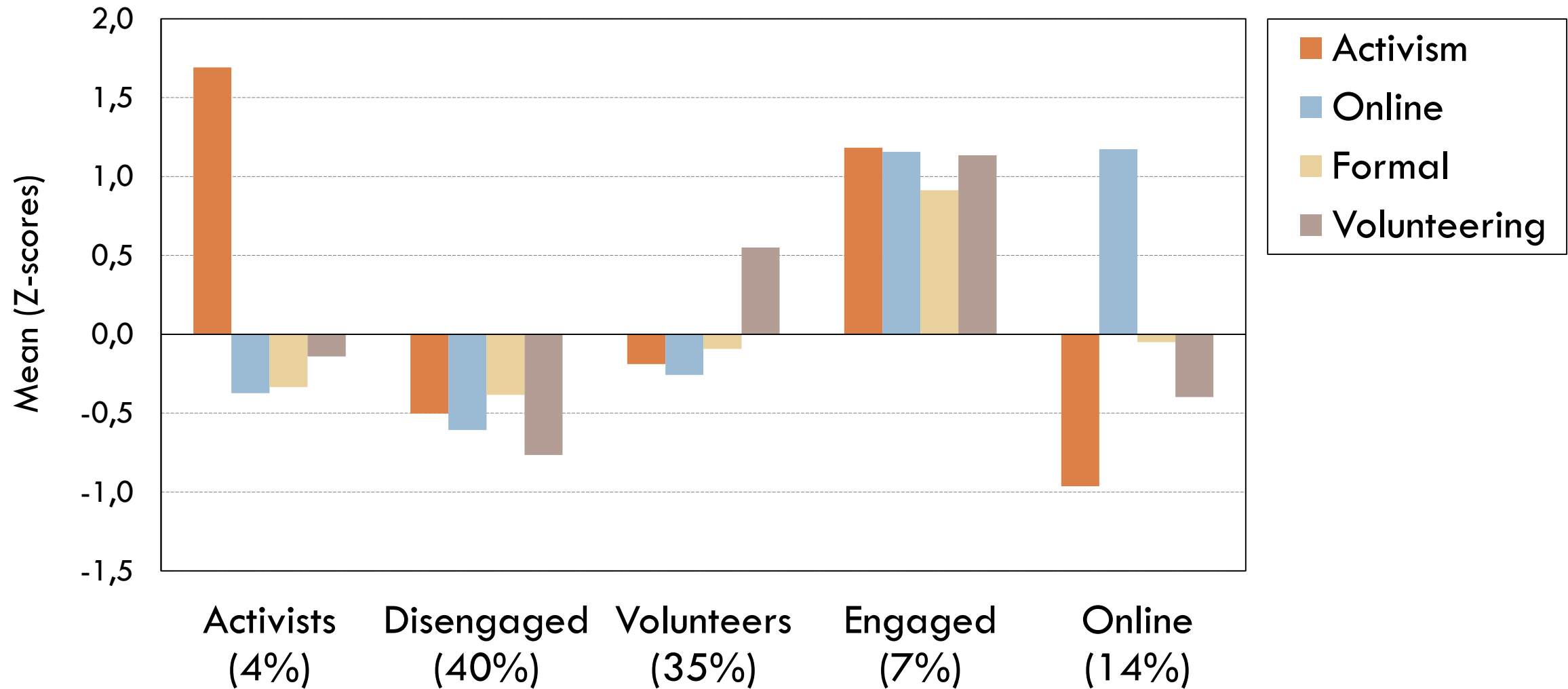
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Discussion and Conclusions

□ Political Participation and civic engagement are multifaceted constructs, expressed in different forms which are in line with recent typologies (Ekman & Amna, 2012).

□ Formal participation is a manifest, more or less conventional, proactive support for a political cause, rather than a confrontational action.

□ Political activism is a reactive protest against power, sometimes at the interface between legal (e.g., take part in a demonstration, sign a petition) and not-so-legal behaviour (e.g., occupation of public space or even use of physical violence).

□ Online participation is channelled through the electronic media and social networks. It also has strong interpersonal orientation (e.g., discussions, sharing, participation).

□ The scope of volunteering expands to social issues where politics is not always found on the front line. In this respect, it is closer to the concept of civic engagement.

Discussion and Conclusions

- Political activism seems to be induced by motives of relative deprivation, in the sense that it combines disadvantaged comparison (low income) with unfair treatment (authoritarian school climate). Group relative deprivation is known to lead to political alienation –such as rejection of normative citizenship– and participation in collective protests or approval of political violence and civil disobedience (Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012). The precondition of feasibility (Crosby, 1976) is in line with political efficacy predicting activism, as in our study.

- Compared to other types, formal participation yielded a more balanced profile, in terms of a set of both positive and negative unique predictors (political interest and perceived discrimination, respectively). The extremely low frequency of this type of participation is in accordance with notions of decline of conventional politics in modern established democracies (e.g., Pharr & Putnam, 2000); this may also explain the small number of its predictors, given the low variance of the criterion variable.

Discussion and Conclusions

☐ Political participation and civic engagement are catalogued among the benefits of digital citizenship (Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2007). However, online participation may also contain a 'dark side'. Neuroticism is central to social media use (Amichai-Hamburger, & Vinitzky, 2010). Higher neuroticism predicted higher online presentation of the ideal and false self (Michikyan, Subrahmanyam, & Dennis, 2014). Also, it is associated with a sensitivity to danger, which is compatible to low level of trust found in this study.

☐ Volunteerism is an antecedent of 'the good citizen'. The link between agreeableness and prosocial behavior in both adults and children is a well-established finding (Graziano et al., 2007). In addition, the interaction of agreeableness by altruistic motives increases volunteerism (Carlo, Okun, Knight, & de Guzman, 2005). In our case, this is further enhanced through socialization with proximal agents, such as the family, school, and peers.

Limitations and Future Directions

- So far, we have tested for statistical predictors, not for determinants of political and civic engagement. Causal effects cannot be inferred from cross-sectional data.
  - The longitudinal design will allow for testing more complex hypotheses once the second wave of data collection has been completed.

- Difficult to disentangle individual from societal factors of political and civic engagement.
  - Cross-national comparison and more advanced statistical techniques (e.g., MLM) may be more enlightening.

- Self-report questionnaires administered in schools are prone to social desirability and do not allow for studying the full range of phenomena (e.g., illegal action).
  - Other Catch-EyoU WP's can deal with these aspects.

- Need to move from research to policy, in light of significant negative developments in our societies (e.g., radicalization and extremism, refugee crisis, rising inequality).

Thank you for your attention!

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