

The relationship between the civic engagement of parents and children:

A cross-national analysis of 18 European countries<sup>1</sup>

Mario Quaranta, PhD (corresponding author)

LUISS “Guido Carli”

Department of Political Science

Via di Villa Emiliani, 14

00135 Roma, Italy

Tel.: 0039 06 8522 5733

[mquaranta@luiss.it](mailto:mquaranta@luiss.it)

Giulia M. Dotti Sani, PhD

Collegio Carlo Alberto

Via Real Collegio, 30

10024 Moncalieri (TO), Italy

Tel.: 0039 011 670 5270

[giulia.dottisani@carloalberto.org](mailto:giulia.dottisani@carloalberto.org)

Mario Quaranta is post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Political Science at the LUISS “Guido Carli” University in Rome (Italy). His research focuses on comparative political behavior and public opinion.

Giulia M. Dotti Sani is post-doctoral fellow at the Collegio Carlo Alberto (Italy). Her main research interests are the sociology of families and social stratification.

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<sup>1</sup> Published as: Mario Quaranta and Giulia M. Dotti Sani (2016). The relationship between the civic engagement of parents and children: A cross-national analysis of 18 European countries. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45, 6, 1091-1112, doi: 10.1177/0899764016628677.

Authors' note: this article is based on data from Eurostat – EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions. The responsibility for all conclusions drawn from the data lies entirely with the authors. Previous versions of this article were presented at the XXVIII conference of the Italian Political Science Association – University of Perugia, and at the “Politics & Society” conference – KU Leuven in 2014. We would like to thank the participants of the conferences for their suggestions, as well as the anonymous reviewers and the Editors for their comments. The authors contributed equally to this article and apply the rotation principle.

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#### Abstract

While previous research has suggested the existence of a positive association between the political activities of parents and children, little is known about other forms of civic engagement. In particular, the literature lacks an international comparative study on the intergenerational transmission of civic involvement. Using Bayesian multilevel models on data from the EU-SILC 2006 special module on social participation, this article tests hypotheses on the patterns of civic engagement of parents and children in 18 European countries with different political legacies. Our results show a positive association between the participation in associational activities of parents and children in all the considered countries, above individual and contextual characteristics. In particular, we do not find an evident East-West gap in the socialization process, suggesting that the Communist past of Eastern and Central European countries has little influence on what can be considered a basic mechanism of civic learning.

*Keywords:* civic involvement, parents-children similarity, Western-Eastern Europe, Bayesian multilevel models, EU-SILC

### **Introduction**

This article investigates the relationship between the civic involvement of parents and children<sup>1</sup> in 18 European countries. Previous research points to a positive association between the civic activities of parents and children in the United States (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003), and in selected European countries (Cicognani, Zani, Fournier, Gavray, & Born, 2012; Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2015). In contrast, the literature lacks an international comparative study on the “intergenerational transmission” of associational involvement. In particular, very little is known on the relation between the civic participation of parents and children in recently democratized European countries. This study fills this gap in the literature by focusing on the relationship between the associational involvement of parents and their adolescent sons and daughters in 18 European long-standing and new democracies.

Civic participation has been a major topic in studies about democracy, social capital and citizenship. It is argued that it strengthens democracies and the fabric of civil society (Putnam, 2000), and it benefits individuals providing civic skills, trust, and networks (Van der Meer & Van Ingen, 2009). Scholars have stressed the importance of the family as a fundamental socialization agency driving the children’s social and political attitudes, orientations and behaviors (Hess & Torney, 1969), and many studies have found similarities between parents and children in terms of political engagement (see Niemi and Hepburn, 1995) civic behaviors (Andolina et al., 2003), attitudes (Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009) and values (Westholm, 1999). Yet, our knowledge of the intergenerational transmission of this involvement is limited in two ways. First, comparative research is scarce, as most of the previous studies have been conducted on single case-studies,

mostly the US. Hence, the literature lacks large cross-national studies focusing on civic engagement from an intergenerational perspective. This makes the results difficult to validate cross-nationally, raising the important question of whether what we know about the intergenerational transmission of civic participation is generalizable across national boundaries. Second, while research has focused on a variety of forms of civic engagement, there is no cross-national study on the “intergenerational transmission” of associational involvement. This is problematic, as cross-national differences in current political systems, alongside the legacies of each country’s history, could make a large difference in the way the youth is socialized to engagement. On the one hand, children whose parents were socialized during authoritarian regimes and experienced the transition to democracy might learn about civic engagement differently from those whose parents were socialized in consolidated democracies (Pop-Eleches & Tucker, 2013). On the other hand, it could be that the effect of parents’ involvement is a basic mechanism of social learning (Zuckerman, Fitzgerald, & Dasovic. 2007), making the effect of the context less relevant.

Using data from the EU-SILC 2006 module on social participation (Eurostat, 2010) and Bayesian multilevel models, this article looks at the patterns of civic engagement of parents and adolescent sons and daughters in 18 European countries. The results show that families matter for participation in associations in all the considered countries, above and beyond individual and contextual characteristics. In particular, we do not find any East-West gap in the intergenerational process of social learning, which might, therefore, be considered a phenomenon independent of the political context.

### **Civic involvement within families in the US and Europe**

Families are considered among the most important political socialization agencies (Tedin, 1980). As far as political attitudes, orientations, and preferences are concerned, many US studies show strong similarities between parents and children. Overall, studies point towards the existence of inter-generational similarities, even controlling for other relevant individual and family characteristics (Jennings et al., 2009), and in different periods (Jennings & Niemi, 1968; Tedin, 1980; Niemi, Hepburn, & Chapman, 2000). Likewise, studies on political participation show that when a parent is involved in political activities, the children's likelihood of engagement is much higher (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Jennings, 2002; Andolina et al., 2003; McFarland & Thomas, 2006).

The results from the smaller literature focusing on non-US contexts are consistent. Attitudes and values are similar across generations in France (Percheron & Jennings, 1981), the Netherlands (Nieuwbeerta & Wittenbrood, 1995), Sweden (Westholm 1999), Germany (Kroh & Selb, 2009) and Italy (Corbetta, Tuorto, & Cavazza, 2012). Non-US studies investigating the impact of parents' participation on their children's are more rare, but nonetheless point towards a strong similarity between parents and children. Studies on Italy found that the probability of children listening to a debate or taking part in a public demonstration is much higher when the parents get involved in the same forms of participation (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2015, Quaranta & Dotti Sani, 2015). Likewise, Cicognani et al. (2012), show that parents' political participation is strongly associated with their children's in Belgium.

The similarity between parents' and children's engagement in voluntary associations has also been found in the literature, although less empirical evidence is

available. Again, most studies have focused on the US. Smith and Baldwin (1974) find a strong relationship between parents' and children's participation in voluntary organizations. Janoski and Wilson (1995) find that the parents' volunteering activity is strongly correlated with their children's, even controlling for the family's socioeconomic status. More recently, Matthews, Hempel and Howell (2010) argue that parental involvement in community and voluntary activities promotes an "ethic of social responsibility" in their children and show that, parental civic activity is associated with a stronger civic activity, net of parents' education and income. Others, studying the importance of social connectedness and integration in influencing young adults' civic engagement, find that parents' civic activity is a significant predictor of the children's probability of volunteering (Settle, Bond, & Levitt, 2011). Even the involvement in the community of one parent relevantly increases the probability of the child's volunteering (Fletcher, Elder, & Mekos, 2000). Overall, studies find a positive association between the voluntary activity of parents, children's, and other family members (Caputo, 2009; Niemi et al., 2000; Paik & Navarre-Jackson, 2011; Nesbit, 2013). The few non-US studies provide very similar results. In Belgium, the children's likelihood of involvement in civic participation increases with parental participation (Cicognani et al., 2012). In Italy, when parents are involved in voluntary activities, their children's probability of engaging in the same activities increases relevantly (Quaranta & Dotti Sani, 2015).

Of course, other institutions and factors are at work in the process of socialization. Scholars have investigated how peers and schools represent important ways to learn how to become an engaged citizen (see Sapiro, 2004), and recent studies have been focusing on whether media, such as TV, the internet and social media, matter for children's

socialization. For instance, Matthews and Howell (2006) in looking at how civic involvement is transmitted from parents to children, find that the presence of rules limiting TV viewing in the household has a positive association with engagement, corroborating Putnam's argument about the negative effect of TV on civic involvement (Putnam, 2000). Moreover, Moeller and de Vreese (2013) show that the type of media exposure is relevant for the political engagement of the youth. Internet use, i.e. reading news or online forum activities, is also found to be associated with forms of civic engagement (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). However, since parents provide media habits to their children (see Gentile & Walsh, 2002) and since studies on media use often do not control for parental civic engagement (see Matthews & Howell, 2006 for an exception), it is possible that the association between children's media use and their civic engagement is actually driven by the (unobserved) parents' civic engagement. In other words, engaged parents might channel their children's media use in ways that enhance their children's civic involvement to a larger extent than unengaged parents. Indeed, more studies are necessary to disentangle the effect of the family from the effect of other agencies, which appear to be increasingly important for the civic (dis)engagement of children (see Putnam, 2000).

Nonetheless, the results from the previous review suggest that family behavior is relevant for various civic activities. On top, one might argue that national contexts mediate the relation between parents' and children's similarity. In particular, it is yet to be understood whether the similarity between parents and children is found also in "newly" established democracies, where the dynamics of civic involvement are influenced by the legacy of the previous regimes (Niemi & Hepburn, 1995). We address

this issue in the following section.

### **Civic involvement within families in comparative perspective**

Beck and Jennings (1979, 737) suggested that changing “political stimuli” can impact citizens’ opportunities for civic activity. In other words, time and place matter for participation and citizens from countries with different institutional settings and political histories face different opportunities for civic engagement. Given the importance of the context for involvement (Rotolo & Wilson, 2012), it is an open question whether the context matters also for the “intergenerational transmission” of these activities. Indeed, comparative research on the topic is scarce, likely due to the lack of comparative survey instruments with information about both parents and children.

Among the few exceptions, Jennings (1984) focuses on the transmission of political ideology and party identification to understand if it varies between eight Western countries, finding that the congruence between parents and children is quite high in all countries on most of the considered items. A subsequent study (Westholm & Niemi, 1992) analyzing the same set of countries finds similar results, while formulating an alternative model of political socialization. Zuckerman et al. (2007) compare the party preferences of mothers, fathers and their children in Britain and Germany and find that family members are extremely similar in both countries. They argue that partisanship dissimilarity between parents and children would be very surprising, since generational conflict is a unique event tied to specific moments of the life cycle, this being independent of the context.

Comparative studies on parents-children similarity in civic participation are almost

absent from the literature. A few studies indirectly address how parents' engagement is associated with their children's. Flanagan et al. (1998), using data collected in high schools in three stable and four transitional democracies, find that in all the considered countries family values, such as "family ethics of social responsibility", predict both boys' and girls' civic commitments. Analogous results can be found in a study comparing the "future" civic participation of youth across European countries (Mirazchiyski, Caro, & Sandoval-Hernandez, 2014).

Theoretically speaking, it is difficult to imagine a context where parents would have no effect whatsoever on the offspring's civic involvement. In fact, regardless of the country of residence and despite the potentially different strengths of other socialization agencies (e.g. schools, peers, media, etc.) the first subjects from which children learn about civil society and politics, and whom they are likely to emulate, are their parents. Children are likely to take their parents' cues because they trust them, love them and frequently interact with them (Zuckerman et al., 2007). Moreover, parents can facilitate their offspring's civic involvement in practical ways, such as driving them to activities, providing them with funds to participate, and, most importantly, give them permission to participate in certain activities. However, considering the large differences within Europe, could it be that these "parental cues" have stronger effects in some countries than in others? And if so, what country characteristics could trigger differences in the effects of such parental cues? In Europe, the most evident cleavage is the one dividing the consolidated democracies from those of more recent democratization, belonging to the former Communist and Socialist regimes. This cleavage has drawn the attention of several scholars concerned about the legacy of authoritarian regimes on political

attitudes, social capital and civic involvement. It has been argued that participation in Eastern Europe is influenced by the authoritarian legacy of the previous regimes, where participation in state-approved organizations was simply imposed and engagement in independent organizations was banned, leading to lower levels of engagement than in Western Europe (Howard, 2003; Letki, 2004; Lee, Johnson & Prakash, 2012; Pop-Eleches & Tucker, 2013). The lower levels of engagement in post-Communist countries have been attributed to the weaker presence of citizenship norms (Coffé & Van der Lippe, 2010). In fact, during authoritarian rule, the state aimed at socializing the young to the regime to legitimize its authority, rather than providing the values and orientations necessary to effectively enjoy democratic citizenship. These values had to be learned after the regime transition (Mishler & Rose, 2007). Furthermore, socialization during the Communist rule appears to be associated with conservatism and hierarchy values, which are far from being related to civic engagement (Schwartz & Bardi, 1997). Hence, citizens socialized under the Communist rule have somewhat different patterns of civic participation as compared to citizens socialized in older democracy. But what about the children of those parents socialized under the authoritarian rule? How are they socialized to civic engagement? If it is hard to imagine contexts where families matter little, it is easier to picture engaged parents being more attentive to the socialization of their children in contexts where, due to the legacies of recent authoritarian regimes, civic engagement is lower than elsewhere. Children who grow up in post-Communist countries might have fewer “engaged adults” to imitate compared to children in other countries. However, those parents who are involved may be much more likely to pay large attention to the civic socialization of their children. In other words, it might be that parental

involvement matters more for children's involvement in contexts where, overall, associational involvement is scarce. Involved parents might feel a greater responsibility to socialize their offspring to associational involvement in the absence of alternative external stimuli than if more opportunities to observe and be exposed to such involvement were available. On the basis of these considerations we formulate two research questions:

1. To what extent is parental civic engagement associated with children's civic engagement in European countries?
2. To what extent is the association between parents and children's civic engagement stronger in countries with lower levels of participation or authoritarian legacies – in particular the post-Communist countries?

### **Research design**

#### **Data**

To answer those questions, we rely on data from the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). The EU-SILC is a nationally representative household survey whose main focus is on income, poverty, and social exclusion in European countries. We selected the 2006 special module on social participation (Eurostat, 2010) that includes information on a variety of activities, including participation in associations. Due to the nature of the sampling, the dataset contains information about all household members aged 16 and above. Hence, we have direct information from both parents and adolescent sons and daughters. This represents an advantage over most studies about parents-children similarity, which often make use of

reported information leading to issues of recall bias or misreporting (Tedin, 1976).

Overall, the EU-SILC covers 27 EU countries and some non-EU countries. However, due to missing items on associational involvement in certain countries, we restrict our analyses to: Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Cyprus (CY), Czech Republic (CZ), Germany (DE), Estonia (EE), Spain (ES), France (FR), Greece (GR), Hungary (HU), Italy (IT), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Latvia (LV), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Slovakia (SK) and the United Kingdom (UK). Rather than considering Germany one country, we divided its observations into two groups, former East Germany (DE-E) and former West Germany (DE-W).<sup>2</sup> This is to identify and distinguish those offspring whose parents were socialized under different historical and political circumstances.<sup>3</sup> As a result, we are left with 19 contextual units.<sup>4</sup> In each country we select teenagers aged 16 to 18, residing with both their parents.<sup>5</sup>

### **Dependent and independent variables**

We focus on two forms of associational involvement.<sup>6</sup> The first is engaging in activities or attending meetings of environmental, civil rights, neighborhood and peace organizations. The second is doing unpaid work or attending meetings of charitable organizations.<sup>7</sup> Both items are dichotomous (0 = No, 1 = Yes) and identify involvement over the twelve months preceding the interview. The two items measure forms of civic participation, which is “aimed at achieving a public good, but usually through direct hands-on work in cooperation with others” and “occurs within nongovernmental organizations and rarely touches upon electoral politics” (Zukin et al., 2006, p. 51). However, the two are distinct forms of civic participation. The first aims at influencing

governmental action, albeit not necessarily the selection of political personnel (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). The second form aims at pursuing public goods, but not at influencing political decisions. It is therefore more “social” in its nature, and it could be considered a form of volunteering (Wilson, 2012).

The key independent variables measure whether the respondent’s father and mother engaged in environmental, civil rights, neighborhood and peace organizations, or in charitable organizations (0 = No; 1 = Yes).

Motivated by prior research, we include a number of controls in the models. We control for the respondent’s gender (0 = Boy; 1 = Girl), as it has been shown that already during adolescence different patterns of civic participation between girls and boys can be detected (see Wilson, 2012).<sup>8</sup> We control for age coded in categories (16, the reference category, 17, and 18 years old), as children participate more as they grow older (Zukin et al., 2006). Then, we control for whether the respondent is a student (0 = No; 1 = Yes), as this might expose the child to stimuli that can be beneficial in developing civic behaviors (Torney-Purta, 2002). We include two measures of integration that indicate whether the respondent gets together with, respectively, friends and relatives on a daily basis (0 = No; 1 = Yes). As known, the micro-context can strongly affect the patterns of participation, especially when participation involves the contact with others (Zuckerman, 2005; Paik & Navarre-Jackson, 2011). Eventually, we include in the models the father’s and mother’s level of education and their employment status. Education is considered a strong predictor of civic participation, as it provides the necessary resources for engagement (Gesthuisen & Scheepers, 2012). Therefore, parents with higher levels of education are more likely to have offspring who engage in civic activities. Education is coded in three

categories (1 = “Pre-primary, primary, lower secondary”; 2 = “Upper secondary”, the reference category; 3 = “Post-secondary”). Employment status, that basically means income, is also considered a pre-condition for participation (Zukin et al., 2006). Thus, we include a variable tapping whether the respondent’s father and mother are employed (0 = No; 1 = Yes). Descriptive statistics of the pooled sample are presented in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

### **Models**

Considering the structure of our data, that sees children and their parents nested in countries, we model the probability of engaging in the two activities using multilevel logistic models (Gelman & Hill, 2006). As the number of level-2 units is not particularly high, i.e. 19, we estimate the models using the Bayesian framework that produces more reliable estimates and uncertainties compared to Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation (Stegmueller, 2013). ML rests on asymptotic assumptions and is better suited when the number of level-2 units is sufficiently high and these are a sample drawn from a population, so that standard errors are based on the normal sampling distribution. By contrast, Bayesian methods do not rely on specific a sampling distribution. The estimates are simply the posterior probability of lying in an interval of values, without referencing to any population. An additional advantage of using the Bayesian framework is that we can estimate the uncertainties of all parameters and make use of the property of “exchangeability”, which allows estimating the group-level parameters using the information contained in all the groups, not just the information in each group (Jackman, 2009).

To test whether parents' involvement is associated with their sons' and daughters' involvement in Europe, we use the following logistic random-intercepts model:

$$\begin{aligned}
 y_i &\sim \text{Bernoulli}(\pi_i) \\
 \pi_i &= \text{logit}^{-1}(\eta_i) \\
 \eta_i &= \alpha_j + x_{i1}\beta_1 + x_{i2}\beta_2 + X_iB, \quad \text{for } j = 1, \dots, J \\
 \alpha_j &\sim N(\mu_\alpha, \sigma_j^2)
 \end{aligned}$$

Where  $y_i$  is a generic dichotomous dependent variable for each observation  $i$ , that is, the child, and follows a Bernoulli distribution. The term  $\pi_i$  is the probability of success of each observation that is linked to the linear predictor  $\eta_i$  via the inverse of the *logit* function. The linear predictor is a combination of  $\alpha_j$ , representing the random-intercepts for each  $J = 19$  contexts, the predictors of interest  $x_{i1}$  and  $x_{i2}$ , that is, respectively the father's and mother's involvement, their fixed coefficients  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$ , and the vector of control variables  $X_i$  with the corresponding vector of fixed coefficients  $B$ . The context-specific intercepts follow a Normal distribution with mean  $\mu_\alpha$  and standard deviation  $\sigma_j$ . For the  $\mu_\alpha$  we use a  $N(0, 1000)$  prior, while for  $\sigma_j$  we use a  $\text{Unif}(0, 10)$ .<sup>9</sup> This model estimates the overall association between parents' and children's civic involvement accounting for contextual heterogeneity.

To test whether the association is present in all contexts and identify the presence of cross-national variation, we let the coefficient of the variables of interest vary across the contexts. This is done by estimating the following random-intercepts random-slopes model:

$$\eta_i = \alpha_j + x_{i1}\beta_{j1} + x_{i2}\beta_{j2} + X_iB, \quad \text{for } j = 1, \dots, J$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} \alpha_j \\ \beta_{j1} \\ \beta_{j2} \end{bmatrix} \sim N \left( \begin{matrix} \mu_\alpha \\ \mu_{\beta_{j1}} \\ \mu_{\beta_{j2}} \end{matrix}, \Omega \right)$$

Now,  $\beta_{j1}$  and  $\beta_{j2}$  are random and are estimated for each context (Model 3). They both follow a Normal distribution with  $\mu_{\beta_{j1}}$  and  $\mu_{\beta_{j2}}$ . The term  $\Omega$  is a variance-covariance matrix  $\Omega$  following an inverse-Wishart distribution with 4 degrees of freedom, that models the correlation between intercepts and slopes.<sup>10</sup> We estimate the models using a Gibbs sampler run for 500,000 iterations, with a burn-in period of 50,000, a thinning factor of 50 and 3 chains.<sup>11</sup>

### Results

The models are presented in Table 2 – for engaging in environmental, civil rights, neighborhood and peace organizations – and in Table 3 – for engaging in charitable organizations. Each table comprises a null model (Model 1), a random-intercepts model (Model 2), and a random-intercepts random-slopes model (Model 3). Before discussing the results from the multivariate models, we present the children’s predicted probabilities of engagement in each of the 19 contexts. The predicted probabilities are derived from Model 1 and depicted in Figure 1.

As far as engagement in environmental, civil rights, neighborhood and peace organizations is concerned (left hand panel of Figure 1), there is a certain degree of contextual variation, as also indicated by the standard deviation of the random-intercepts ( $\sigma_\alpha = 1.025$ ). The probability of participation in these activities is lowest in Estonia (0.01), and highest in West Germany (0.22). There are 11 countries where the probability of participation is below 0.05, while only 8 countries range between 0.08 and 0.15. There

does not seem to be any particular geographical pattern of participation. In particular, “new” democracies do not appear to have lower levels of engagement compared to older democracies. This result contrasts with what is found in earlier studies on the involvement of the adult population in civic activities (Letki, 2004, Pop-Eleches & Tucker, 2013). Our comparative findings on adolescent sons’ and daughters’ involvement in such organizations indicate that there are no particular differences between countries with different historical and political traditions. This points to the emergence of a “new” generation of citizens that has been socialized to the values of democracies, one of which is engagement in the public sphere (Coffé & Van der Lippe, 2010). Although indirectly, the results seem to suggest that the legacy of state-controlled participation of the former Communist regimes is now weak, and that the “new” citizens have adopted behaviors that are common in democratic countries (Mishler & Rose, 2007).

The situation is somewhat different when it comes to charitable organizations (right panel of Figure 1). Most of the Eastern European countries are in the lower part of the distribution together with France, West Germany and Greece. In these countries, the probability of engaging in charitable organizations is less than 0.05. By contrast, the probability is highest in Cyprus (0.11) closely followed by Italy (0.09). Thus, in this case, there appears to be a participation gap between Eastern and Western youth. A tentative explanation for the lower engagement in charitable organizations in Eastern Europe could be sought in their welfare-oriented scope. In fact, in many Western European countries, charitable organizations have a longstanding tradition of delivering a number of welfare services, either because these are unavailable or inaccessible (see Ferrera, 1996, on Southern Europe) or, to the very opposite, because citizens find it easier to engage in civil

society within an extensive welfare state (Van Ingen & Van der Meer, 2011). The relatively recent transition to democracy and to a market economy places Eastern European countries in a special position in this respect. In Eastern European countries, the provision of welfare was a sole responsibility of the party-state until 1989 (Deacon, 2000). It is only in the 1990s, hence, that alternative, private welfare providers start to develop. In the course of this marketization process, there began to be “appeals to philanthropy and voluntary effort to compensate for withdrawn state services” (Deacon, 2000, p. 149), yet the development of the third-sector was slow. Hence, it could be that the longer legacy of charitable organizations in Western European countries explains the relatively higher engagement rates that we observe in this group of countries as compared to Eastern European ones.

[Figure 1 about here]

The results from the multivariate random-intercepts model (Model 1) in Table 2 are univocal. The positive coefficients for fathers’ (1.175) and mothers’ involvement (1.399) clearly indicate a strong association between children’s involvement in environmental, civil rights, neighborhood and peace organizations and either parent’s involvement in the same organizations, net of the selected control variables. In terms of probabilities, a child has a 0.07 higher probability of engaging in a given activity if the father did the same activity and a 0.09 higher probability if the mother did so, as compared to adolescents whose parents did not engage. More importantly, when both parents are involved, the probability that the child has engaged is almost 0.28 higher than the probability of a child

with non-involved parents, *ceteris paribus*.

[Table 2 about here]

When we let the slope coefficients to vary across contexts (Table 2, Model 2) we notice that the fixed part of the two coefficients of interest moderately increases. To grasp a better understanding of the differences between contexts in terms of the association between parents' and children's participation in this first group of organizations, we display in the left panel of Figure 2 the marginal effects of having engaged parents vs. non-engaged parents on the likelihood of children engaging themselves, in each of the 19 considered contexts. In all of them, as indicated by the standard deviations of the random-slopes ( $\sigma_{\beta j1} = 0.651$ ;  $\sigma_{\beta j2} = 0.562$ ), children are more likely to get involved in environmental, civil rights, neighborhood and peace organizations if their mother or father did so as well. When focusing on the engagement of just one parent, it does not make a large difference whether it was the mother or the father who is involved. However, in all contexts it is evident that children are much more likely to participate when both parents do so. As previous literature suggests (see Wolak, 2009) adolescents in highly participatory households are much more likely to participate themselves than children in non-participatory households. Again, though, we do not notice any specific geographical pattern in the association between parents' and children's involvement. In other words, children are likely to behave like their parents in both Western European "old" democracies as well as in Eastern European "new" democracies: the association between parents and their offspring's civic engagement does not appear to be stronger –

nor weaker – in the post-Communist countries.

As for the control variables, most of them are not related to the outcome (see Model 3, Table 2). The only exceptions to this are the child's age – with seventeen year olds more likely than sixteen year olds to participate in the meetings of the considered groups – and the variable indicating whether the child gets together with relatives, which is positively associated with the outcome.<sup>12</sup>

The results for involvement in charitable organizations, presented in Table 3, closely mirror the ones just discussed. The fixed coefficients in Model 2 are positive for both fathers' (1.202) and mothers' (1.409) activity, even controlling for the confounding factors. A child's probability of engaging in charitable organizations is 0.04 higher if the father engaged and 0.06 higher if the mother engaged than if neither parent got involved. In the event that both the mother and the father got engaged, the probability is higher by 0.20. Once again, these results are in line with those from previous studies on parents' and children's involvement in voluntary activities (Fletcher et al., 2000; Matthews et al., 2010).

[Table 3 about here]

How does the association vary by context? The standard deviations of the random-slopes indicate negligible differences between the coefficients of fathers (0.78) and mothers (0.58) across the 19 contexts. The left panel in Figure 2 shows the marginal effects of having a mother, a father or both parents who engaged in charitable organizations vs. having no parent who did so, on the probability that the child would

engage. Once again, no clear geographical pattern emerges. For many countries, having only one parent who got involved is not associated with the child's outcome. In Austria, Czech Republic, East and West Germany, France, Hungary, Lithuania and Latvia, the confidence intervals of the marginal effect of mother's involvement touches the 0 line, while the father's marginal effect touches the 0 line in Estonia, France, Hungary, Poland, Portugal and the UK. However, the marginal effects of having both engaged parents are always large and far from 0, indicating that living in a highly engaged household has a powerful association with children's involvement (see Jennings et al., 2009). As before, having parents engaged in charitable associations increases the probability of being an engaged child, providing comparative support to the claim that parents' behavior affects their offspring's. Lastly, as can be seen from Model 3 in Table 3, girls are more likely than boys to take part in the unpaid work or meetings of charitable organizations (see Wilson, 2012), a positive association that is also found for students and for children who often get together with relatives. By contrast, having a low educated mother reduces the likelihood of doing this activity, while the parents' other socio-economic traits are unrelated to the outcome.

[Figure 2 about here]

To wrap up, our results fall in line with previous findings showing parents-children similarity in civic behavior (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Jennings, 2002; Andolina et al., 2003; Cicognani et al., 2012). However, being based on a larger pool of contexts that have experienced different political and social phases, our findings can be generalized

and suggest that the intergenerational transmission of associational involvement is not unique to the US or few European countries. Moreover, we find no indication of an East-West cleavage in the association between parents' and children's involvement in associational activities: adolescents from former-Communist countries are just as likely as adolescents from other countries to take part in associations if their parents do so as well.<sup>13</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This article studied the association between parents' and children's participation in two forms of civic engagement. While previous studies found similarities in parents' and their children's attitudes and behaviors, both in a few European countries and the US, this is, to our knowledge, the first article to focus on parents' and children's civic engagement in a larger number of Western and Eastern European countries. Considering that "attention to civil societies as developmental contexts has been rare" (Flanagan, Martínez, & Cumsille, 2010, p. 113), and that the "rate of volunteering might be influenced by the relation between state and society or it might be affected by the dominant culture in the society" (Rotolo & Wilson, 2012, p. 453), our cross-national study contributes to the literature by adding fresh evidence on how parents' and children's activity is related in contexts that have very different historical legacies.

From a theoretical standpoint, we argued that the practices within a country may define the patterns by which citizens are socialized and, in turn, this may affect how parents socialize their offspring to the political and social sphere. In other words, we expected parental socialization practices to vary according to the larger contexts in which

they are embedded (Grusec & Davidov, 2007), as different social institutions define the obligation of the citizens, their prerogatives and rights, while different political institutions may have a mediating role in the development of civic duties (Flanagan et al., 2010). In particular, we anticipated that the association between parents' and children's involvement would differ between old democracies and "newly" established democracies, where the dynamics of political and civic involvement might be influenced by the legacy of the previous regimes (Niemi & Hepburn, 1995).

Our results indicate that parental involvement is crucial for adolescent involvement in the European countries considered and that there is little evidence of an East-West "negative gap" in the association between the engagement of parents and their children. Thus, there appears to be a basic mechanism of political and social learning that is independent of the national context (Zuckerman et al., 2007). The analyses also suggest that a "positive gap" may not be present either. There are a few countries where having engaged parents matters more than in others, but, overall, we do not find support for our argument that engaged parents socialized under Communist regimes would exert a stronger effect on their offsprings' engagement than parents who grew up under democracies. Indeed, our results point towards a convergence of behavior between Eastern and Western European countries (Mirazchiyski et al., 2014).

Some limitations of the study need to be stressed. First, a larger set of indicators – unavailable in the EU-SILC module – would have allowed a wider investigation and a more complete picture of the transmission of civic participation in Europe. Unfortunately, such items were not collected in the survey. Similarly, certain variables that are known to be relevant for civic participation, such as religiosity (Perks & Haan, 2011) and the use of

internet (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011), are not collected in the survey and therefore cannot be included in our analyses. Two further limitations of the study are due to the cross-sectional nature of the data. First, we cannot say how children's behavior will evolve once they grow older and leave their parents' home. Perhaps they will continue to emulate their parents' behavior or they might diverge from it. Second, we cannot draw definite conclusions on the direction of the relation between the associational involvement of parents and children. While it is reasonable to assume that children learn from their parents how to be active in the civic sphere and not vice versa, and although longitudinal studies on the topic support this assumption (see Zuckerman et al., 2007), the cross-sectional nature of the EU-SILC data does not allow us to test this assumption and therefore to claim that civic engagement is "transmitted" from parents to children. Only the use of large scale, longitudinal household data could remove these limitations, but until such dataset is available, observing the behavior of parents and children who live together is among the closest approximation that we can obtain of the "intergenerational transmission" of civic participation. Future research should try, at best, to set up a comparative longitudinal dataset that would allow addressing some of the issues discussed above, or at least to harmonize the few available longitudinal datasets, wherever possible. Another possible line of research could deal with the issue of the "gendered transmission" of participation, i.e., whether the patterns of participation change depending on the parent's or child's gender, and whether such patterns vary cross-nationally. Finally, given that most surveys, including the EU-SILC, do not simultaneously include items measuring a wide array of potential socializing factors, e.g., family, school, peers, or media, the collection of more complete data could allow future

research to try and disentangle the effect of various socialization agencies in order to understand what matters the most for children's civic engagement.

To conclude, we wish to stress that our results reveal another side of the transmission of participating behavior: the fact that children of non-engaged parents have a very low chance of being involved. This result could stimulate further research to find out whether other socializing agencies (e.g. peers and schools) might act as role models for the associational involvement of adolescents whose parents are not involved.

Considering the importance of civic participation for the well-being of both political systems and individuals (Putnam, 2000), its lack, especially in some countries, and the reasons behind it, should be studied more in depth.

Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of brevity, throughout the article, when referring to our sample we use the term children to indicate adolescent sons and daughters living with their parents.

<sup>2</sup> Germany can be considered a “critical case”, as unification should have a positive effect on Eastern Germany civil society despite the authoritarian regime (Howard, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> In explorative analyses we also controlled for the country of birth of the parents. This did not affect the results and the variable was dropped from the final models.

<sup>4</sup> After list-wise deletion of missing values the pooled sample size is 9,475. Each country sample sizes are: AT (350); BE (233); CY (401); CZ (443); DE-E (200); DE-W (553); EE (718); ES (764); FR (616); GR (365); HU (443); IT (942); LT (394); LU (205); LV (235); PL (1,350); PT (261); SK (609); UK (393).

<sup>5</sup> We chose to study children in two parent households to investigate the cumulative effects of having one vs. two active parents on children’s involvement. By doing so, we acknowledge the differences in the patterns of transmission in dual- vs. single parent households, which should be addressed in a separate study.

<sup>6</sup> The EU-SILC special module comprehends other variables on participation, but some were not suitable for describing the participation of the youth, such as participation in activities of political parties, trade unions, or professional associations.

<sup>7</sup> It includes unpaid charitable work for churches, religious and humanitarian organizations.

<sup>8</sup> Another possible point related to gender could be looking at how the participation of mothers and fathers are differently relevant for the participation of girls and boys. This

issue is discussed in the conclusion.

<sup>9</sup> Given that the random-effects work on the logistic scale this prior is sufficiently uninformative. Using different priors does not change the results.

<sup>10</sup> To speed up the convergence of the chains we used redundant parametrization and blocking (Gelman and Hill, 2006, Jackman, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> We used several diagnostics to assess the convergence of the samplers (Gelman and Hill, 2006; Jackman, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Due to space limitations, we are not able to further comment the estimates of the control variables.

<sup>13</sup> To formally test whether different political legacies mediate the relationship between parent's and children's engagement in associations, we ran additional models which included, separately, two level-2 predictors, "age of democracy" (a variable that sums the number of consecutive years in which a country scored higher than zero on the Polity IV scale) and "Western vs. Eastern countries dummy", and two cross-level interactions, to verify whether the effect of parental involvement is different between young vs. old democracies or between Eastern vs. Western Europe. The results show that the level-2 variables are not associated with the children's probabilities of involvement and the variation in the association between the involvement of parents and children is not accounted for by the country's years of democracy, nor by a dichotomization differentiating between Western and Eastern countries.

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**Table 1** Descriptive statistics

	Proportion
Engaging in activities or attending meetings of environmental, civil rights, neighborhood and peace organizations:	
Child	0.063
Father	0.073
Mother	0.070
Doing unpaid work or attending meetings of charitable organizations:	
Child	0.048
Father	0.064
Mother	0.071
Girl	0.488
Age:	
16	0.211
17	0.403
18	0.385
Student	0.880
Getting together with friends on a daily basis	0.681
Getting together with relatives on a daily basis	0.193
Father's education:	
Low	0.259
Medium	0.465
High	0.276
Mother's education:	
Low	0.243
Medium	0.504
High	0.252
Employed father	0.867
Employed mother	0.689
<i>N</i>	9,475

**Table 2** Bayesian logistic multilevel models predicting engagement in activities or attendance of meetings of environmental, civil rights, neighborhood and peace organizations

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Est.	CI		Est.	CI		Est.	CI	
Intercept	<b>-2.956</b>	-3.057	-2.858	<b>-3.609</b>	-4.027	-3.193	<b>-3.675</b>	-4.087	-3.241
Father engaged in org.				<b>1.175</b>	0.984	1.380	<b>1.392</b>	1.022	1.759
Mother engaged in org.				<b>1.399</b>	1.202	1.609	<b>1.448</b>	1.103	1.789
Girl				-0.017	-0.165	0.136	-0.029	-0.179	0.122
Age:									
17				<b>0.435</b>	0.179	0.698	<b>0.425</b>	0.175	0.691
18				0.029	-0.169	0.233	0.031	-0.176	0.233
Student				-0.068	-0.272	0.144	-0.067	-0.277	0.142
Get together with friends				-0.050	-0.215	0.119	-0.042	-0.216	0.124
Get together with relatives				<b>0.251</b>	0.073	0.426	<b>0.252</b>	0.078	0.434
Father's education:									
Primary				-0.074	-0.309	0.161	-0.064	-0.300	0.171
Post-secondary				0.055	-0.139	0.244	0.056	-0.138	0.251
Mother's education:									
Secondary				-0.156	-0.379	0.077	-0.173	-0.393	0.059
Post-secondary				0.014	-0.181	0.207	0.022	-0.174	0.212
Father employed				-0.180	-0.403	0.049	-0.183	-0.415	0.038
Mother employed				0.123	-0.048	0.301	0.132	-0.041	0.309
<i>Random components</i>									
$\sigma_\alpha$	<b>1.025</b>	0.703	1.328	<b>0.931</b>	0.638	1.212	<b>0.976</b>	0.683	1.250
$\sigma_{\beta 1}$							<b>0.651</b>	0.355	0.927
$\sigma_{\beta 2}$							<b>0.562</b>	0.338	0.780
DIC		3331.084			2998.04			2973.055	

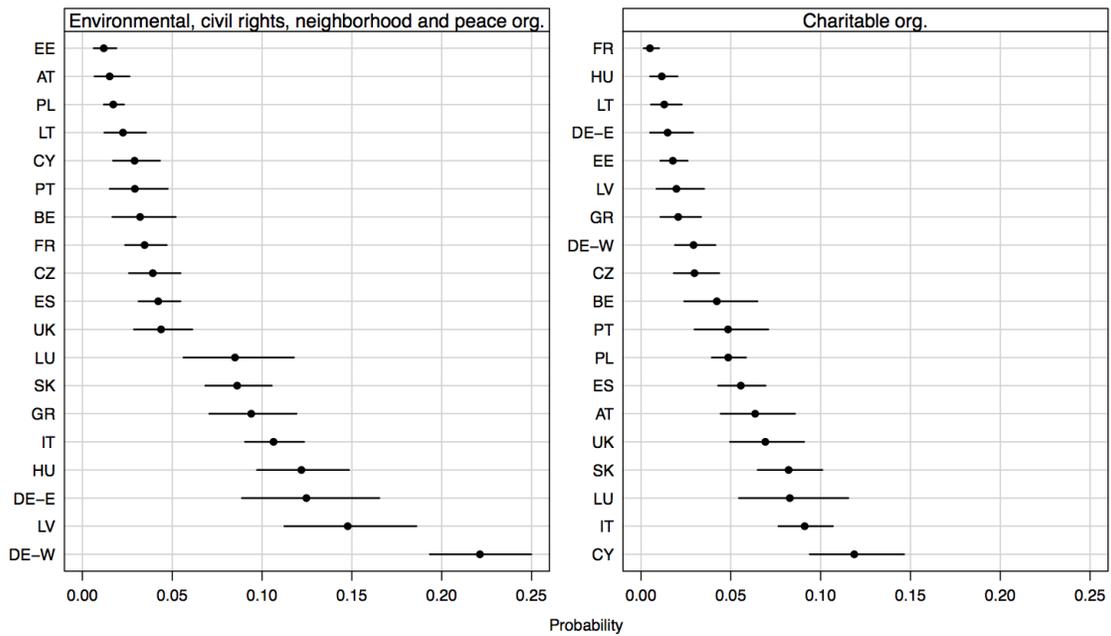
*Note:* based on 9,475 level-1 units (respondents) nested in 19 level-2 units (contexts), and on 10,000 MCMC draws run for 3 chains. Est. = posterior mean; CI = 90% Highest Posterior Density; DIC = Deviance Information Criterion. Estimates in bold have a 90% probability of being different from 0.

**Table 3** Bayesian logistic multilevel models predicting unpaid work or attendance to meetings of charitable organizations

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Est.	CI		Est.	CI		Est.	CI	
Intercept	<b>-3.382</b>	-3.546	-3.228	<b>-4.212</b>	-4.696	-3.740	<b>-4.313</b>	-4.806	-3.831
Father engaged in org.				<b>1.202</b>	0.964	1.437	<b>1.390</b>	0.919	1.862
Mother engaged in org.				<b>1.409</b>	1.179	1.643	<b>1.377</b>	0.968	1.784
Girl				<b>0.377</b>	0.201	0.543	<b>0.379</b>	0.202	0.549
Age:									
17				-0.064	-0.342	0.220	-0.041	-0.327	0.236
18				0.189	-0.063	0.437	0.204	-0.042	0.457
Student				<b>0.276</b>	0.028	0.524	<b>0.287</b>	0.036	0.538
Get together with friends				0.064	-0.129	0.259	0.077	-0.116	0.271
Get together with relatives				<b>0.257</b>	0.057	0.476	<b>0.257</b>	0.048	0.466
Father's education:									
Primary				-0.112	-0.380	0.142	-0.122	-0.381	0.142
Post-secondary				0.053	-0.165	0.280	0.044	-0.179	0.277
Mother's education:									
Primary				<b>-0.385</b>	-0.653	-0.124	<b>-0.383</b>	-0.650	-0.119
Post-secondary				0.116	-0.100	0.340	0.121	-0.101	0.348
Father employed				-0.017	-0.289	0.267	-0.016	-0.295	0.259
Mother employed				0.114	-0.084	0.311	0.123	-0.074	0.322
<i>Random components</i>									
$\sigma_\alpha$	<b>1.046</b>	0.650	1.500	<b>0.857</b>	0.542	1.157	<b>0.859</b>	0.580	1.153
$\sigma_{\beta 1}$							<b>0.775</b>	0.395	1.144
$\sigma_{\beta 2}$							<b>0.577</b>	0.322	0.830
DIC		2783.794			2431.664			2426.327	

Note: based on 9,475 level-1 units (respondents) nested in 19 level-2 units (contexts), and on 10,000 MCMC draws run for 3 chains. Est. = posterior mean; CI = 90% Highest Posterior Density; DIC = Deviance Information Criterion. Estimates in bold have a 90% probability of being different from 0.

**Figure 1** Children’s probabilities of engaging in activities or attending meetings of environmental, civil rights, neighborhood and peace organizations and of doing unpaid work or attending meetings of charitable organizations across 19 European contexts, with 90% confidence intervals.



**Figure 2** Marginal effects of having a mother, a father or both parents who engaged in activities or attended meetings of environmental, civil rights, neighborhood and peace organizations, and did unpaid work or attende meetings of charitable organizations vs. having no parent who did so, on the probability that child would engage in the same organizations, with 90% confidence intervals

