

---

**ANNAMÁRIA SEBESTYÉN \***  
The Mobilization Potential of Political Parties  
among Hungarian Students

---

Intersections.EEJSP  
6(4): 110–130.  
DOI: 10.17356/ieejsp.v6i4.590  
<http://intersections.tk.mta.hu>

\* [[sebestyen.annamaria90@gmail.com](mailto:sebestyen.annamaria90@gmail.com)] (Doctoral School of Political Science, Eötvös Lorand University, Budapest)

### Abstract

Situated in the literature that examines the reasons for the dearth of young party members, this article discusses the mobilization potential of political parties among the youth in light of research conducted among Hungarian university and college students (Active Youth Research, 2019). On the one hand, it analyses the mobilization propensity of Hungarian political parties, and on the other, examines to what extent party-political mobilization plays a role in encouraging young people's involvement in party activities compared to other predisposing factors. Making use of the unique dataset, the study also investigates what attitudinal features distinguish party-politically active students from the rest of the student population. The results show that parties' mobilization attempts are a principal factor in encouraging young people's party participation in Hungary, although parties per se are not able to motivate them; politically stimulating family and peer groups and events that shape political views are also needed to set the stage for involvement. The article also finds that the political interest of party-politically active students is demonstrably higher than that of their counterparts, but both groups have rather negative views about Hungarian politics and are dissatisfied with the country's democracy and present social conditions.

**Keywords:** *political parties, mobilization, mobilization potential of parties, political socialization, students.*



---

## 1. Introduction

It is established in the scholarship that, compared to older generations, today's youth are less inclined to join political parties, and it is taken for granted that the main reason for this is that they are less concerned with conventional politics and conventional forms of participation (see for example Norris, 2011; Dalton, 2013; García-Albacete, 2014; Pickard and Bessant, 2018). These assumptions, however, fail to take into account the fact that participation is not just a matter of individual propensity, but also of mobilization channels. The low level of willingness of youth to become involved in political parties cannot only be interpreted as a lack of interest but might also be because parties are less available to them (Hooghe and Stolle, 2005). Consideration of the issue only from the perspective of young people is therefore insufficient and can generate misleading conclusions. Accordingly, in this study, which focuses on the factors that encourage young people's party-political activity, we attempt to examine both aspects of the relationship between parties and youth.<sup>1</sup>

Youth research conducted in Hungary after the democratic transition has repeatedly identified the pronounced underrepresentation of young people within political parties (Stumpf, 1995; Bauer and Szabó, 2005; 2009; Oross, 2013). Recent data do not show any fundamental changes either – membership has stabilized at a low level (Bauer et al., 2016). The causes of this phenomenon, however, have not yet been investigated, therefore this study aims to take a step towards filling this gap. Following a bilateral approach, it can be said that the low level of youth participation in party organizations may either signal the weak mobilization propensity of Hungarian parties, or the unpopularity of these organizations to youth. It is therefore worth examining the parties' mobilization capacity and mobilization potential among young people – i.e., analyzing whether parties encourage the involvement of youth, on the one hand, and, on the other, measuring what proportion of youngsters would be willing to take part in party activities if the latter invited them to.

Despite the fact that parties can facilitate participation by recruiting citizens, we must not forget that mobilization per se is not necessarily enough to induce youngsters' involvement. The literature suggests that politically active people have distinct social and demographic features and political socialization experiences (Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010; van Haute and Gauja, 2015; Verba et al., 2018), therefore it is also important to look more closely at how potentially predisposing factors contribute to party participation, and at how extensive a role mobilization has in fostering young people's involvement in party activities compared to these effects.

In order to carry out this analysis, we examine survey data gathered from Hungarian university and college students by the Active Youth Research Group in 2019. The significance of this survey is the fact that it was the first initiative in

---

<sup>1</sup> The research presented here was supported by the ÚNKP-19-3 New National Excellence Program of the Ministry for Innovation and Technology.

---

Hungary to deal in detail with party mobilization among the youth and to place great emphasis on how to measure party-politically active students. Consequently, this study restricts its investigation to students, and its conclusions do not refer to the whole population of Hungarian youth. The article is structured in five parts. The first section briefly reviews some of the latest studies on party participation, while the second section presents the theoretical framework, questions, and hypotheses of the research. The third section introduces the data and describes the methods used, and the fourth section presents results. The final section summarizes the findings and highlights their implications.

## ***2. Dwindling party membership, the aging of parties, and their amplified nature in the CEE region***

Over the last couple of decades, almost all Western-European democracies have experienced a gradual decline in and aging of party membership (Mair and van Biezen, 2001; Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010; van Biezen et al., 2012), although it has also been shown that parties founded after World War II, and especially after 1980, tend to be less affected by these negative tendencies than those founded before the end of that war. Several newer parties, such as ecological-, radical right-wing-, smaller and regional parties, have managed to increase their membership in recent years, and also appear to have a higher proportion of younger members than their older counterparts (van Haute and Gauja, 2015; Kölln, 2016). These developments, though, do not alter the fact that people today are less inclined to join political parties, and that disengagement from parties is most acute among the younger generation. The common interpretation of this trend is that contemporary young people are less interested in party organizations that embody the ‘old politics,’ and are more enthusiastic about getting involved in non-conventional direct channels and more expressive ways of participating in politics (such as demonstrating, belonging to single-issue groups, wearing badges, or boycotting products for political or environmental reasons) instead of electoral activities and traditional parties (Norris, 2011; Dalton, 2013; García-Albacete, 2014; Pickard and Bessant, 2018).

The picture in Central and Eastern European countries differs in a number of ways. Political parties here, compared to their Western counterparts, are all new, except – to some extent – those parties that have roots in the distant past or in the communist era that were recreated to compete in the democratic system. Furthermore, being newer parties in a system in which most parties are relatively new means something completely different to what this situation in the West might suggest (Deschouwer, 2017). The sudden and elite-driven democratic transition in the region led parties to focus on electoral mobilization instead of building mass-based organizations, and the fact that they emerged in a context in which modern mass communication tools were available to them to reach voters, and that state subsidies for parties were introduced at a relatively early stage of the democratization process, decreased the need for mass membership even in the longer term, resulting in the emergence of parties which have been successful

---

without a widespread and stable network of members and volunteers (van Biezen, 2003; Enyedi and Linek, 2008). The average level of both party membership and party activism in Central and Eastern Europe appears to be lower than that in most Western democracies, although a decline in party membership has been a shared feature of both since the late 1990s (van Biezen et al., 2012: 33; Kostelka, 2014: 952).

The east-west disparity is much less evident among young people. From an analysis of data from the International Social Science Programme (ISSP), Marko Kovacic and Danijela Dolenc did not find a significant difference in terms of party membership between 18–30-year-old Westerners and Central Eastern Europeans. The two groups show a similar willingness to participate in parties. Approximately the same proportion (5.1 and 4.35 per cent of youngsters, respectively) were party members in both regions at the time of research. In contrast, substantial differences were noted in terms of non-conventional forms of participation. The proportion of Western-European youth participating in political activities, such as signing petitions and taking part in protests and boycotts, was twice as great as that of their Central and Eastern European peers. In addition, the latter's participation in unconventional forms of politics was even lower, which suggests that their weak representation in parties cannot be interpreted as being due to the greater popularity of alternative or non-conventional forms of participation (Kovacic and Dolenc, 2018: 385–388).

Hungarian youth are at the bottom of the list in both dimensions, a claim also supported in Hungarian youth research. Only 1 per cent of young people aged 15–29 are engaged in political parties, and 2–3 per cent in non-conventional forms of participation (Bauer et al., 2016: 83). The situation has been similar over the past three decades. After a short period of upheaval in the second half of the 1980s, when more than 10 per cent of the latter were involved in the emerging political organizations, the engagement of youth dramatically dropped at the beginning of the first post-communist decade, and has remained stable at around 1 per cent until now (Stumpf, 1995: 114; Bauer and Szabó, 2005: 95; 2009: 117; Oross, 2013: 308). Consequently, the transformations of the party system during the past ten years are not reflected in the level of youth party participation, but changes in the level of support for parties might be observable.

After two decades of stability, in which for the most part the same parties were represented in the Hungarian parliament, and electoral competition was dominated by the two biggest left-wing and right-wing parties, MSZP (the Hungarian Socialist Party) and Fidesz (Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance), with one or the other regularly receiving more than 40 percent of all votes, the 2010 parliamentary elections brought about pervasive changes, breaking the structure of the left-right, two-block party system (Soós, 2012). Public support for MSZP significantly weakened as Fidesz became the leading party with a two-thirds supermajority, and two former mainstream parties – MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum) and SZDSZ (Alliance of Free Democrats) – lost their positions, while two newcomers entered the political landscape, disrupting the tendency to aging of the party system. The new political forces – namely, the far-right Jobbik (The Movement for a Better Hungary) and the green LMP (Politics Can be Different) –

expressed their difference from their mainstream counterparts and demanded radical system change based on different values. Jobbik campaigned for a change in the political elite on the basis of extreme-nationalist and right-wing values, while LMP aimed to break the polarization between left-liberal and right-wing camps by representing the principles of anti-globalist, environmentalist, and human-rights social movements. Both parties became popular very quickly among young voters, and especially among young students, although support for Fidesz remained stable (Kmetty, 2014). The success of these new parties was followed by the emergence of even newer parties. In 2011, former prime minister and president of MSZP Ferenc Gyurcsány formed a new social-liberal party named the Democratic Coalition (DK), while in 2013 the 'Together – Party for a New Era' (Együtt) party was established under the leadership of Former Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai from an alliance of three social movements (the Patriotism and Progress Association, the One Million for Press Freedom [Milla] and the Hungarian Solidarity Movement). In the same year, a group of radical left-wingers exited LMP and formed Dialogue for Hungary (PM), then in 2014 Hungary's first joke party, the Hungarian Two Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), appeared on the list of officially registered parties. At present, the two youngest parties are the liberal-centrist Momentum Movement founded in 2017, and the far-right Our Homeland Movement, launched by former Jobbik vice-president László Toroczkai in 2018. With the exception of Together (Együtt), all the new parties still exist and most have MPs in the national parliament (Jobbik, LMP, PM, DK), but none of them has so far been able to break the hegemony of Fidesz, which received a two-thirds legislative majority in both the 2014 and 2018 elections. The municipal elections of 2019, however, indicated the first crack in the Fidesz dominated system, as the opposition party candidates won the majority of capital districts and most seats in the Budapest city council, as well as almost half of the major urban centers. The governing party, though, retained its popularity in rural Hungary, demonstrating the weak influence of the opposition parties in most countryside areas (Bíró-Nagy and Sebők, 2020: 13).

All in all, although the number of Hungarian young party members has remained stable, the impact of the new parties can be presumed to be detectable, all the more so because most of them are 'movement parties' that pursue a bottom-up organizing logic, in contrast to the top-down organizational forms of their mainstream counterparts. These parties aim not only at getting elected, but also at radically reforming the political system by providing a more direct voice and form of participation to ordinary citizens both in terms of their politics and their activities. Due to this characteristic, and the fact that they are newcomers in politics, they are expected to be particularly inclined to expend greater effort on attracting young supporters and activists.<sup>2</sup> The advance of the Momentum

---

<sup>2</sup> A distinction between parties and movements can be made. All parties used to be movements, but only some of them became big tent parties. Thus, this differentiation is based on the issue of organizational aging, and the temporality of political groupings, which is not the focus of the present study.

---

Movement is especially notable, as the latter defines itself as the new political generation of Hungary, and mostly consists of young intelligentsia who are in their 20s and 30s. The party has invested considerable energy in mobilizing young people during the past three years, which effort is still palpable as of today. In the 2019 European Parliamentary Election, Momentum was the second most successful Hungarian opposition party behind DK, winning a significant proportion of voters from earlier founded opposition parties (Bíró-Nagy and Sebők, 2020: 27). However, the question remains whether Momentum will be able to reach and exceed the popularity of Fidesz in the future.

### ***3. In pursuit of the preconditions of party-political action***

Mobilization is considered to be an important predictor of political participation; however, it is widely contested to what extent it helps explain it. This is especially because the focus of research has generally been limited to a few electoral activities (e.g. voting and campaign work) or political recruitment in general (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Karp and Baducci, 2007; Grabarek, 2011; Green and Schwam, 2016; Verba et al., 2018).

Two theoretical models provide a useful starting point for the present investigation: a model by Bert Klandermans and Dirk Oegema on participation in social movements, and the Civil Voluntarism Model (CVM) of Sydney Verba and his colleagues. The central hypothesis of the former conception is that mobilization acts as a catalyst for enrollment among those who are included in the mobilization potential of a mobilizing organization. The notion ‘mobilization potential’ refers to those people who are ready to take part in the activities of an organization if it invites them to. On the one hand, the hypothesis suggests that such organizations have already reached the former through some kind of channel, and that they have a positive attitude towards the latter, and on the other that people who are not part of this mobilization potential will not consider participating, even if they are reached by mobilization attempts (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987: 519).

The CVM model also states that mobilization is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for political participation. One can participate without being requested to, and can refuse a request to participate too, but a request is an important indicator of how available mobilization channels are to individuals. Taking into account this aspect is crucial in Hungary, where most newcomer parties are concentrated in the capital, which inhibits the involvement of those who live in rural areas, especially smaller towns and municipalities. According to the model, being asked to participate encourages the involvement of those ‘with the wherewithal and desire to become active.’ The former refers to socioeconomic features that are closely related to resources such as time, money, knowledge, and the skills necessary to participate, while the latter refers to political socialization experiences that stimulate psychological engagement with politics. Socialization agents, and especially family, play a key role in both aspects as they provide the context in which the proper resources can be acquired and the learning process

through which the motivation to engage in political activities is nurtured (Verba et al., 2018: 50–51).

Despite the fact that neither of these conceptions was designed for use in the analysis of party participation, their assumptions may be important for increasing understanding of the latter. Based on the models, this study also presumes that party mobilization per se is not enough to induce young people to take part in party activities, and that mobilization will be unsuccessful among those who are not part of the mobilization potential of political parties. However, in contrast to the model of Klandermans and Oegema, it is supposed that a positive attitude towards a party is not a sufficient condition for responding positively to requests for participation, thus how social background and political socialization contribute to individual involvement in politics should be analyzed.

It is well known in the literature that neither mobilization nor party participation occurs in a scattershot fashion. Requests for participation are typically highly structured according to socioeconomic and demographic features. More educated and wealthier people are much more likely to become targets of mobilization attempts. Age and gender also play a role in recruitment, but their influence on the likelihood of mobilization is less than the factors of education and income. Older people and women in general are less likely to be contacted by mobilizing agents than younger citizens and men (Grabarek, 2011: 9; Verba et al., 2018: 62–63). With regard to party involvement, we also find significant inequalities, indicating that party members and activists are not socially representative of the wider population. In general, people who are male, middle-aged or older, financially better off, and/or highly educated are more likely to participate in parties (Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010; van Biezen et al., 2012: 38; van Haute and Gauja, 2015: 194–195).

As regards the development of political participation potential, scholars have assigned a prominent role to family, peers, and political events as elements of political socialization. Those people who have politically interested and involved parents and who grow up in families where political communication is part of the daily routine are more likely to become politically active and more likely to have the notion that participation is an indispensable part of everyday life. The second way in which family shapes one's political engagement is through parental socioeconomic status. Highly educated parents tend to have children who are also highly educated, fostering the probability of their becoming politically active (Verba et al., 2018: 65–66). Peer groups also have, at above a certain age (and in particular during adolescence), a significant effect on the development of political identity. Throughout this life period, cognitive functioning increases in importance relative to emotions, and one's knowledge, opinions, and attitudes crystallize. Exchanges of political views with peers are preparatory acts which help pre-adults refine and concretize their political identity. Young people who do not go through these processes are more likely to become passive in political terms. Peers may serve as partners in political participation, and play an important role in attracting youngsters to political parties and to other political organizations. Finally, crucial political events, such as election campaigns, political crises, and particularly

---

antagonistic policy decisions, are also believed to contribute to the decision to take part in politics (Bruter and Harrison, 2009: 45–57; Neundorf and Smets, 2017: 9–10).

According to these findings, this study was also expected to find significant social inequality in party mobilization, as well as in party participation among young students. However, since its target group consisted of youngsters whose average age was 22 and who were on their way to becoming highly educated at the time of the survey, the analysis does not incorporate the impact of age and education level on mobilization or participation. Instead, it broadens the scope of socio-demographic characteristics by including the respondent's place of living and field of education, and presumes that students who live in the capital and those who study fields related to politics, such as social sciences, are more likely to receive requests from political parties than the rest of the student population. We also assume that gender and income are significant predictors of mobilization attempts (thus men and those with higher incomes are more likely to be recruited by parties). These features, accompanied by intensive political socialization experiences and high parental socioeconomic status, are also considered to be important preconditions of party participation.

Viewing mobilization attempts as a tool for channeling students into politics, the study investigates with an exploratory aim to what extent party mobilization has a role in encouraging young people's involvement in party activities compared to other predisposing factors. Moreover, making use of the unique dataset, we observe what main attitudinal features distinguish party-politically active students from their counterparts.

In this regard, we anticipate that young party activists will be more interested in and have quite positive views about politics. Presumably, they will also be more ideologically extreme and more dissatisfied with Hungary's democracy and present social conditions compared to their non-party-politically active peers.

#### ***4. Research setting***

The data used in this study is obtained from the Active Youth in Hungary survey, which was conducted with a representative sample of 800 university and college students in February 2019 (hereafter AFM, 2019). This survey was designed to explore the mobilization propensity of political parties among young students, and also provides data about students' socioeconomic and demographic character, field of study, previous and present political socialization experiences, and party preferences and political attitudes, which are all appropriate variables for testing our hypotheses.

With regard to mobilization, respondents were asked whether they had ever received a request from parties or their youth factions to participate in their work, and, if they said yes, to report the name of the organization. With this information, we were able to estimate the mobilization propensity of mainstream and newcomer parties. In order to determine whether there is an association between

the socio-demographic variables and being contacted by a party, we used a Chi-square statistic with the following explanatory variables:

- gender (0=female, 1=male)
- settlement type (Budapest, major urban center, other town, municipality)
- subjective perception of income (living comfortably on present income, coping on present income, living from salary to salary, experiencing financial difficulties)
- field of study (social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, applied sciences)

The proportion of successfully recruited young people provides significant information about the scope of the mobilization potential of parties among the student population, while the proportion of those who participate in parties on the basis of their requests tells us something about the importance of mobilization attempts in party involvement. AFM, 2019 individually measured party participation with three questions: ‘Are you a member of any political party?’; ‘Are you a member of any youth organization within a political party?’; ‘During the last 12 months have you taken part in the activities of a political party?’ The variable was coded ‘0’ if the respondent reported not having been a member, or not having taken part, and ‘1’ if the respondent reported having been a member or having taken part in the activities of a party. These three participation modes represent different – stronger and weaker – degrees of engagement, but due to the overlaps it is not useful to separate them into groups. Slightly more than one-third of those who had taken part in party activities during the past year had formal party membership, and nearly 30 per cent of those who were formally engaged in a party or its youth faction had not been involved in party activities within the previous 12 months. By filtering out certain segments, we risked losing important information about the factors leading to party participation, thus under the term ‘party-politically active students’ we mean all three groups in the analysis. The latter comprise 5.1 per cent of the total sample, which indicates that a substantial proportion of Hungarian party-political active youth are university and college students.

To identify the socio-demographic and socialization preconditions of party participation and explore which variables have the strongest effect on the likelihood of joining a party, after pre-testing the relationship between each potential predisposing factor and the aggregated party participation dummy variable we developed two explanatory models using binary logistic regression with party involvement as the binary dependent variable.<sup>3</sup> The first model excludes party mobilization from the series of independent variables, while the second one includes it so as to ascertain the relative importance of mobilization attempts in party participation. The socioeconomic status of parents is measured here by their

---

<sup>3</sup> Logistic regression was used with the enter method. The regression table in the appendix summarizes the explanatory variables, regression coefficients (B), odds ratios (ExpB), and the goodness-of-fit of the models. Instead of the two statistics – COX-SNELL and NAGELKERKE  $R^2$  – offered by SPSS, we used  $R^2_{adj}$  statistics, which refer to how the involvement of independent variables diminishes the value of  $-2LL(0)$  ( $D0$ ).

---

level of formal educational attainment, while political socialization by events shaping respondents' political views and the frequency of discussing politics with family and peers throughout secondary school and presently – namely:

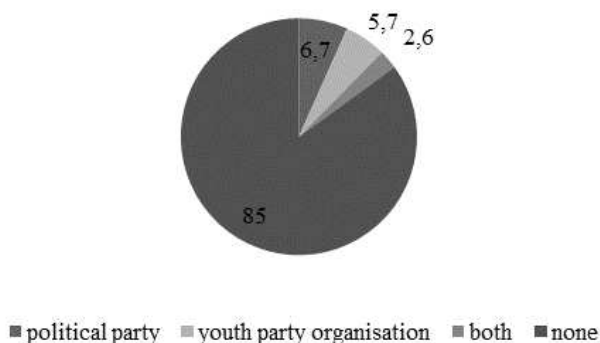
- level of educational attainment of respondent's father (lower than high school graduate, high school graduate, graduate),
- level of educational attainment of respondent's mother (lower than high school graduate, high school graduate, graduate),
- event/s shaping the respondent's political views (0=no, 1=yes; which event/s:...),
- political communication with family throughout secondary school years (never, occasionally, regularly),
- political communication with friends during secondary school years (never, occasionally, regularly),
- political communication with family (never, occasionally, regularly),
- political communication with friends (never, occasionally, regularly).

Finally, to help evaluate which attitudinal features make a difference between party-politically active young people and the rest of the student population, the analysis observed common ideological orientations (left wing-right wing, liberal-conservative, moderate-radical), interest in and associations with politics, and satisfaction with democracy and the present social, economic, and political conditions of Hungary.

## ***5. Findings***

On the basis of responses gathered by the Active Youth in Hungary survey, requests from political parties for participation are far from universal among college and university students. Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of those contacted by party organizations in the sample, indicating the weak mobilization propensity of the Hungarian parties. Only 15 per cent of the sample of students have ever been asked by a political party or a party youth organization to join their activities. We are unable to specify the exact number of requests, although it is surely somewhat higher than the number of students who were invited to participate, because those who named the party organization in many cases reported receiving more than one request.

Figure 1 Degree of mobilization (per cent)



Source: Active Youth, 2019 N=800

As Table 1 reveals, with regard to mobilization the governing party (Fidesz) and two newcomer parties, the Momentum Movement and the far-right Jobbik, account for the first three places on the podium, with the same order in the case of the youth organizations. Fidelitas<sup>4</sup> (the youth wing of Fidesz) is the forerunner in communicating with youth, the youth faction of Jobbik takes second place, followed by Momentum TizenX (the youth section of Momentum), Societas (the youth organization of MSZP), and the Future Can Be Different (the youth wing of the green party, LMP).

<sup>4</sup> Here it is important to note Fidesz itself started as a liberal youth party founded by university students in the turbulent years before the fall of the Soviet Regime. It later, however, became one of the establishment parties, accompanied by a conservative ideological shift. Fidelitas, their youth faction, was created more as a recruitment asset for the party, and less in resemblance of the original, 1989 image of Fidesz. The other newcomer parties (Jobbik, LMP, and Momentum) were also mainly created by students, and their youth factions are designed to provide ideological education and socialization, besides having a recruitment function. MSZP is an exception as it is the successor of the ruling communist party of state socialist times, thus it has traditionally been considered a party favored by the older generation, not a grassroots movement.

Table 1 Order of parties and youth party organizations that mobilize students  
(number of requests)

<b>Political party</b>		<b>Youth party organization</b>	
Fidesz	27	Fidelitas	25
Jobbik	20	Jobbik IT	17
Momentum	10	Momentum TizenX	5
MSZP	6	Societas	3
DK	6	Future Can Be Different	2
LMP	5		
PM	3		
KDNP	3		
MKKP	2		
Our Homeland	1		

Source: Active Youth, 2019

Party mobilization does not seem to be fruitful at first sight, with only 7.4 per cent of the students who were invited joining a party organization. In this regard, parties' youth wings were a bit more effective (9 per cent) than their mother parties (2.6 per cent). Despite this, we should not underestimate the power of mobilization, because the data shows that half of all students who were formerly party members, and more than half (53 per cent) of those who had taken part in party activities over the previous 12 months without membership, had participated on the basis of a party's or youth party organization's request. These results seem to confirm the hypothesis that being asked to become involved is more likely to stimulate the participation of students whose political involvement was part of their socialization than those who lacked the predisposing socialization experiences.

Contrary to our expectations, there was no interaction between socio-demographic features and party mobilization attempts. In terms of gender, settlement type, field of study, and financial background, the likelihood of being recruited by parties appears to be randomly distributed among students. Analysis of participatory activities, however, shows crucial gender differences, underlining the fact that gender socialization plays an important role in students' becoming involved in party activities. Party-politically active students are substantially more likely to be male (66 per cent) than female (34 per cent) compared to their non-party-politically active peers, for whom the proportion of women and men is more or less balanced (52 and 48 per cent). In contrast, differences based on the field of study cannot be identified, nor in terms of socio-demographics, or parental education attainments. Neither do respondents' subjective perceptions of income vary significantly with party participation. This suggests that the 'social slope' previously identified in research into party members and activists (Scarrows and Gezgor, 2010; van Biezen et al., 2012; van Haute and Gauja, 2015), as well as by the Hungarian youth research with regard to conventional forms of participation (e.g. voting, or organizational membership) (Bauer and Szabó, 2005; 2009; Bauer et al.,

---

2016), does not prevail among Hungarian college and university students. Youngsters from different social layers show a similar willingness to participate in party organizations. This conclusion, however, should be revised from the perspective of social status. Students who are in a financially advantageous position (88 per cent), and those who have at least one parent with a university degree (59 per cent), make up a relative majority of the student population. Perhaps this privileged status is reflected in the results described above.

The impact of the type of settlement is again not significant, which may predict the strong preference for the ruling party among party-politically active students. Taking a look at those respondents who shared their party preference with us, this assumption is supported. More than one-third of party-politically active youngsters are Fidesz voters (12 people), the next most popular party is Momentum (10 people), and the third is the Hungarian Two Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) (5 people), followed by Jobbik and LMP (each with 3 supporters), while MSZP and DK have the least supporters (one each). Thus, in contrast to the order that can be observed in the case of party mobilization, support for the far-right political force is not among the strongest and is replaced by support for MKKP, which, according to the data, was not as active at recruiting young people, but its format as a joke party and subversive activities seem to be sufficient to make it attractive to students, without the need for direct contact.

We find empirical evidence that the variables tapping respondent's mobilization and political socialization experiences are related to the likelihood of party participation, thus it is necessary to find out which variables have the strongest influence. Table 2 presents the results of logistic regression analysis. This allows us to determine which differences between party-politically active students and the rest of the student population persist once other factors are held constant. As discussed in Section 4, we excluded party mobilization from the first explanatory model, while it was included in the second one to estimate the relative importance of party requests in party activity.

Table 2 Determinants of party-political participation: results of logistic regression analysis

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Model 1</i>			<i>Model 2</i>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
<b>Gender</b>						
<i>male</i>	0.203	0.58	1.225	0.220	0.56	1.246
<b>Political socialization</b>						
<i>political communication with family</i>	1.145	0.02	3.141	1.200	0.01	3.321
<i>political communication with family throughout respondent's secondary school years</i>	0.081	0.83	1.085	-0.067	0.86	0.935
<i>political communication with friends</i>	-0.201	0.59	0.818	-0.270	0.76	0.763
<i>political communication with friends throughout respondent's secondary school years</i>	0.726	0.02	2.067	0.613	0.05	1.845
<i>event shaping respondent's political views</i>	0.956	0.00	2.602	0.795	0.03	2.215
<b>Mobilization</b>						
<i>party-political mobilization</i>				1.797	0.00	6.031
Constant	-3,860	0,00	0,021	-4,336	0,00	0,013
N	724			724		
Goodness-of-Fit: $R^2_L$	0,141			0,218		

Source: Active Youth, 2019

In the results produced by Model 1, the first surprising thing is a lack of a relationship with gender, which leads to the conclusion that the strength of gender socialization differences is much more marginal than that of other socialization factors. Based on the model, the latter factors are linked with family, personal experiences, and peers at secondary school. It has been widely acknowledged that a politically rich home environment, in which frequent political discussions take

---

place, has a sensitizing and participation-orienting effect – a claim that is also reflected in our analysis. Controlling for other independent variables, the regularity of discussing politics within family undoubtedly increases the likelihood of party participation. Besides family, the effect of experiences outside the family is also significant and positive (albeit somewhat weaker), indicating that those who had an experience that shaped their political views are far more likely to take part in party activities than those who did not, even after controlling for other explaining variables. This result was somewhat foreseeable, as 60 percent of party-politically active students reported to having experienced an event that had strongly affected their political orientation, whereas less than 30 percent of the non-party-politically active group reported the same. The spectrum of experiences that left their marks on the young students' political socialization process is considerably wide. Party-politically active youngsters mentioned international events (e.g. the economic crisis of 2008; immigration) and national ones (e.g. the 2010 parliamentary elections; student protests involving demand for the reform of the public education system in 2018), as well as personal (e.g. a party member parent; party activist friends), object-related (e.g. books) and environmental effects (e.g. lack of women politicians). Peers are included among these, but it is worth referring separately to their role in political participation.

The main conclusion of Model 1 is that peers have a significant impact, but rather during secondary school years, not at the time of surveying. Those young people who were frequently involved in political conversations with friends throughout high school were more likely to be open to political parties. The particular relevance of this factor in channeling youngsters into politics should be highlighted in the case of Hungary, since one of the first legal measures after the democratic transition was to eliminate party organizations from schools, thereby discontinuing a guaranteed level of recruitment. This process, however, entailed not only the exclusion of parties, but the exclusion of politics in its entirety from public education, while even mentioning the term 'politics' became problem ridden within the walls of schools. Party politics and political socialization were brought under the same umbrella, with the consequence that emerging generations during their formative years do not receive proper knowledge about democracy and political systems at school (Csákó, 2004: 545). Peer groups from politically stimulating homes therefore comprise an important compensating force, especially during the time of adolescence, which is also evidenced in our model. A further remarkable result is that the variable representing family political communication during secondary education was not significant, which suggests that different agents have influences of different magnitude at various periods of life, but both family and friends are needed for the development of party-political action.

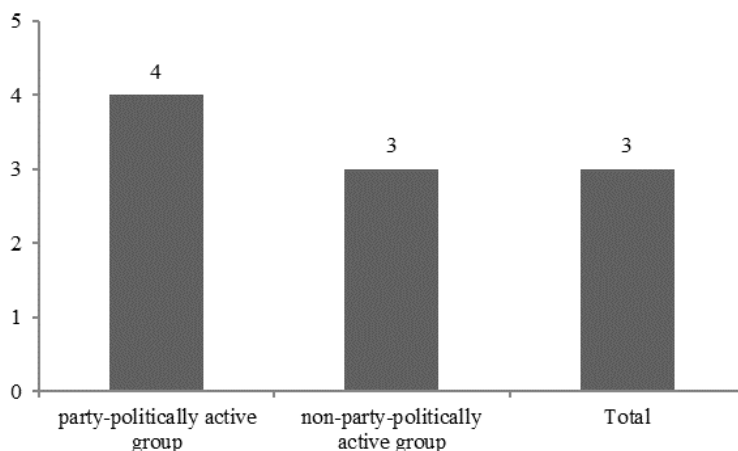
The findings of the second model uphold the patterns outlined by the first explanatory analysis. The involvement of party mobilization, however, improves considerably the goodness-of-fit of the model, demonstrating the robust impact of party requests on student involvement. In fact, the strongest predictor of party participation in the model is mobilization. Controlling for other variables, students who are asked to participate by party organizations are over six times more likely

to be party activists than those who have been omitted from this process. This supports the idea that the persuasion of parties serves an important function in attracting those young people who already have a desire to become politically active to participate in party activities. Family remains the most powerful predictor among the socialization preconditions, even when the impact of party mobilization is taken into account. Besides these two factors, although to a lesser extent, events and peers also affect the likelihood of joining in with party-related activities.

Turning to the attitudinal dimensions, Figure 2 reveals that party-politically active students' interest in politics is unarguably above average.

Figure 2 Interest in politics

(average score of responses on a scale of one to five, where 1= very uninterested, and 5= interested a lot)



Source: Active Youth, 2019 N=800

Their strong political affinities, however, do not go hand in hand with more positive opinions about politics. Earlier Hungarian youth research pointed out that the term 'politics' had become discredited and associated with negative connotations in the minds of the public after the political transition, and this is strongly echoed in young people's subjective interpretations of politics (Szabó and Kern, 2011). This is also reflected in the present data, and party-politically active students are no exception in this sense. Their politics-related associations are very similar to that of the student majority. The word 'corruption' dominates in both groups' responses, and a relatively large proportion of the party activist students mentioned words associated with a lack of transparency (e.g. 'obscure,' 'ambiguous,' and 'chaotic'). We conclude that, compared to their non-party-politically active counterparts, active students were more likely to mention 'power' and 'interest,' and less likely to associate politics with the words 'cheating' and 'lying.' With regard to satisfaction with democracy and with the country's present economic, social, and political state, party-politically active students' answers are

also very similar to those of the rest of the student population. Most of them reported they are dissatisfied with democracy (61 per cent) and with the present social conditions (63 per cent).

We cannot identify large disparities in relation to ideological orientations either, which is largely consistent with the results of previous studies.

Table 3 Self-categorization into ideological categories (average score of responses given on a scale of one to seven)

	party-politically active group	non-party-politically active group	Total
left wing-right wing	4,2	4	4
liberal-conservative	3,9	3,5	3,5
moderate-radical	3,8	3,3	3,3

Source: Active Youth, 2019 N=800

Ideological extremism is no longer an immanent characteristic of party activists (Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010: 839). In terms of a left-wing-right-wing continuum, active students are divided approximately equally among the left, the middle, and the right wing, and are thus not significantly different to their non-party-politically active peers. A somewhat smaller proportion of them evince moderate values and a higher proportion extreme ones – this was particularly true among Fidesz sympathizers. The same conclusion applies regarding the liberal-conservative scale, whereas the situation was reversed in terms of the moderate-radical spectrum (a larger proportion located in the middle, while a smaller proportion chose an extreme score). However, it can also be said that party-politically active students seem to be somewhat more radical than their counterparts.

## ***6. Conclusions: What makes the small fraction of Hungarian youth party-politically active?***

The starting claim of the study was that the weak party involvement of young people cannot only be the result of their lack of their interest, but also of the low availability of parties. This issue is especially relevant in Hungary, where, similarly to other Central and Eastern European countries, the elite-dominated transition led mainly to the emergence of top-down party organizations with weak social embeddedness and dependence on the public sector instead of on party volunteers. The empirical analysis corroborated the weak mobilization propensity of Hungarian political parties, and showed that the majority of students have not yet

---

encountered requests for participation. A small group, however, has been mobilized by party organizations, but interestingly these young people are likely to have been randomly contacted. In opposition to the findings of the literature, we find that neither socio-demographic variables nor place of living nor field of education matter in terms of students' becoming targets of parties' mobilization attempts.

The findings also demonstrate that the mobilization potential of party organizations is very narrow within the student population, which leads to less effective recruitment. Despite this, it is also true that parties differ both in their willingness to recruit young students, and in their mobilization potential. The governing party enjoys a dominant position in both dimensions, having a stranglehold on the young population, although the recruiting efforts of the Momentum Movement are hardly invisible. Momentum has succeeded in rising to second place behind Fidesz in a short period of time with regard to the number of student participants. The Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), which in contrast to Fidesz and Momentum does not excel in contacting young people, also appears on the political landscape. The example of MKKP demonstrates that 'movement parties' can be attractive to youngsters without the need for direct invitation, especially when their revolutionary sense manifests itself not just in discourse but also in practice. The creative- and awareness-raising activities of MKKP, such as wry campaigns against the right-wing government, repainting faded crosswalks, building bus stops, and drawing graffiti on broken sidewalks and around potholes, calls local governments' and citizens' attention to common problems, effectively guaranteeing that the party is seen to be taking its aims seriously and fulfilling its promises. Nevertheless, mobilization should not be dismissed as an insignificant effect, since we find that a sufficiently large proportion of party-politically active students participate on the basis of party requests; furthermore, mobilization dominates among the factors predisposing party activism. Students are more likely to get involved in the work of parties when they have been contacted by them. However, our results suggest that mobilization per se is not enough to motivate young people to participate: politically stimulating family and friends and events that shape political views are also needed to set the stage for involvement. In fact, due to the privileged social status of the student population, political socialization is what really matters in terms of student involvement in parties.

Another result worth mentioning is that the political interest of party-politically active young students is above average, but this does not mean they hold positive views about politics. Similarly to their counterparts, they interpret politics within a national context, and associate it with words that suggest that politics is not a respectful and attractive activity but rather a corrupt, or at least a doubtful one. This raises the question why young people still choose to take part in politics at all. It is conceivable that the students who participate have accepted what they consider to be distasteful conditions fully or superficially, and have political career ambitions (in contrast, others are bitter but have a desire for change). Based on its incumbency, Fidesz may attract students that conform to the

former scenario, while extra-parliamentary opposition parties such as Momentum and MKKP mainly attract those who represent the latter position. In order to clarify this issue, we would need to investigate further. However, the fact that most party-politically active students express their strong dissatisfaction with democracy and the present social conditions of the country may outweigh the change-oriented vision.

## References

- Bauer, B. and Szabó, A. (eds.) (2005) *Youth Flash Report 2004*. Budapest: Mobility Youth Research Office.
- Bauer, B. and Szabó, A. (eds.) (2009) *Youth Flash Report 2008*. Budapest: SZMI.
- Bauer, B., Pillók, P., Ruff, T., Szabó, A., Szanyi, T. E. and Székely, L. (2016) *The Hungarian Youth Report 2016*. Budapest: ÚNK.
- Csákó M. (2004) Ifjúság és politika (Youth and politics). *Educatio*, 4: 535–550.
- Biezen, I. van (2003) *Political Parties in New Democracies. Party Organization in Southern and East-Central Europe*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403937858>
- Biezen, I. van, Mair, P. and Pogunkte, T. (2012) Going, going, ... gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, 51: 24–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.01995.x>
- Bruter, M. and Harrison, S. (2009) *The Future of our Democracies: Young Party Members in Europe*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230245426\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230245426_9)
- Bíró-Nagy, A. and Sebók, M. (2020) *Hungarian Politics in 2019*. Budapest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Policy Solutions.
- Dalton, R. J. (2013) Youth and participation beyond elections. *Replika*, 84(3): 19–35.
- Deschouwer, K. (2017) New parties and the crisis of representation. In Harfst P., Kubbe, I. and Pogunkte, T. (eds.) *Parties, Governments and Elites: The Comparative Study of Democracy*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS. 73–85. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-17446-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-17446-0_5)
- Enyedi, Zs. and Linek, L. (2008) Searching for the right organization: Ideology and party structure in East-Central Europe. *Party Politics*, 14(4): 457–479. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068808090255>
- García-Albacete, G. M. (2014) *Young People's Political Participation in Western Europe. Continuity or Generational Change?* London: Palgrave MacMillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137341310>
- Grabarek, M. A. (2011) *Mobilization and Political Participation: Who is Asked to Play the Game?* PhD Thesis, University of Michigan.

- 
- Green, D. P. and Schwam, M. (2016) Mobilization, participation, and American democracy. *Party Politics*, 22: 158–164.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068815605678>
- Haute, E. van and Gauja, A. (2015) Conclusion: Members and activists of political parties in comparative perspective. In Haute, E. van and Gauja, A. (eds.) *Party Members and Activists*. New York: Routledge. 186–202.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315722214>
- Hooghe, M. and Stolle, D. (2005) Youth organisations within political parties. In Forgbrig J. (ed.) *Revisiting Youth Participation: Challenges for Research and Democratic Practice in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council Europe Publishing. 43–51.
- Karp, J. A. and Banducci, S. A. (2007) Party mobilization and political participation in new and old Democracies. *Party Politics*, 13(2): 217–234.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068807073874>
- Klandermans, B. and Oegema, D. (1987) Potentials, networks, motivations and barriers: Steps towards participation in social movements. *American Sociological Review*, 52(4): 519–531. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095297>
- Kmetty, Z. (2014) Fiatal, vallásos és fideszes (Young, religious and Fidesz voters). In Szabó, A. (ed.) *Racionálisan lázadó fiatalok II. (Rationally Protesting Youth. 2.)* Szeged and Budapest: Belvedere Meridionale and MTA TK PTI. 173–186.
- Kostelka, F. (2014) The state of political participation in post-communist democracies: Low but surprisingly little biased citizen engagement. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 66(6): 945–968. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2014.905386>
- Kovacic, M. and Dolenc, D. (2018) Youth participation in Eastern Europe. In Pickard, S. and Bessant, J. (eds.) *Young People Re-Generating Politics in Times of Crises*. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan. 375–395. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58250-4\\_20](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58250-4_20)
- Kölln, A-K. (2016) Party membership in Europe: Testing party-level explanations of decline. *Party Politics*, 22(4): 465–477.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068814550432>
- Mair, P. and van Biezen, I. (2001) Party membership in twenty European democracies, 1980–2000. *Party Politics*, 7(1): 5–21.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068801007001001>
- Neundorf, A. and Smets, K. (2017) *Political Socialization and the Making of Citizens*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935307.013.98>
- Norris, P. (2011) *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592713001333>

- 
- Oross, D. (2013) Társadalmi közérzet, politikához való viszony (Social well-being, attitudes towards politics). In Székely, L. (ed.) *Magyar ifjúság 2012 (Hungarian Youth 2012)*. Budapest: Kutatópont. 283–315.
- Pickard, S. and Bessant, J. (eds.) (2018) *Young People Re-Generating Politics in Times of Crises*. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58250-4>
- Rosenstone, S. J. and Hansen, J. M. (1993) *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2944841>
- Scarrow, S. and Gezgor, B. (2010): Declining memberships, changing members? European political party members in a new era. *Party Politics*, 16(6): 823–843. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1354068809346078>
- Soós, G. (2012) Kétflokkrendszer Magyarországon (Two-block system in Hungary). In Boda, Zs. and Körösnéyi, A. (eds.) *Van irány? Trendek a magyar politikában (Is There a Drift? Trends in Hungarian Politics.)* Budapest: Új Mandátum and MTA TK PTI. 14–40.
- Szabó, A. and Kern, T. (2011) A magyar fiatalok politikai aktivitása (The political activity of the Hungarian youth). In Bauer, B. and Szabó, A. (eds.) *Arctalan (?) nemzedék. Ifjúság 2000–2010. (Faceless Generation? Youth 2000–2010)* Budapest: Nemzeti Család- és Szociálpolitikai Intézet. 37–80.
- Stumpf, I. (1995) Ifjúság, politikai részvétel, pártpreferenciák (Youth, political participation, party preferences). In Gázsó F. and Stumpf, I. (eds.) *Vesztesek – Ifjúság az ezredfordulón. (Losers – Youth at the Millennium.)* Budapest: Ezredforduló Alapítvány. 110–121.
- Verba, S., Brady, H. A. and Scholzman, K. L. (2018) *Unequal and Unrepresented. Political Inequality and People’s Voice in the New Gilded Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.23943/9781400890361>