Joerg Chet Tremmel
Editor

A Young Generation Under Pressure?

The Financial Situation and the "Rush Hour" of the Cohorts 1970–1985 in a Generational Comparison

Springer

- *Are young cohorts – with a delayed entry in the labour market – supposed to make up for this in later stages of life, or can we assume there will be "scarring effects" over the course of the lifetime?*
- *Which policies should be implemented to improve this situation? On which level should they be implemented?*
- *How do legal regulations like the seniority principle and age-biased dismissal protection respect the principle of intergenerational justice in the labour market?*
- *Using common typologies of welfare states, which political system is best in coping with the challenge of inter- or intracohort inequalities?*
- *How has globalisation changed the state of affairs? Has it increased the level of job insecurity for young and old workers, for men and women alike?*

Regarding the second part: even though life expectancy continues to rise, many people feel that they do not have the time to combine work, children and leisure. The book focuses on the easing of the so-called "rush hour" of life between 28 and 38 years of age. In this period, people finish their studies, take decisive career steps and have to decide whether or not to start a family. It is important to examine this crucial period of time, in order to understand why the actual birth rate is lower than the desired figure across various industrialised countries. Key questions for the second part of the book are:

- *How can the phenomenon known as "rush hour of life" be defined?*
- *How can motherhood at a later stage in life support easing the rush-hour? With the knowledge that their life expectancy is higher than that of previous generations to what extent should individuals change their life plans?*
- *How can the public sector and/or the private sector support a balance between every domain of life?*

Regarding the third part: Are we on the path to gerontocracy? In numerical terms, the political balance between different age cohorts has shifted in favour of the elderly in ageing Western democracies. For about 15 years, political scientists have considered the possibility that these states are on the path to gerontocracy. That is, they are increasingly likely to reflect elderly power. A correlate of this is that governments which represent ageing populations increase old age related expenditure, for instance for pensions, health and care. Key questions of the third part of the book are:

- *Are we shifting from a democracy to a gerontocracy?*
- *How is the party formation process affected by the ageing of modern welfare states?*
- *How is the political participation process affected by ageing?*

Most of the articles stem from a symposium that the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations organized on the topic of the "rush hour of life" in Berlin in July 2008. Many thanks go to the sponsors Volkswagen Stiftung, Robert Bosch Stiftung and Haniel Stiftung who supported the symposium financially.

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Chapter 11
Being Less Active and Outnumbered?

The Political Participation and Relative Pressure Potential of Young People in Europe

Achim Goerres

> "I am afraid to say that we are currently witnessing the early signs of a pensioners' democracy. Older people are becoming more numerous, and all political parties pay extraordinary attention to them. This development could end in a situation in which older people would plunder the young."
> Roman Herzog, ex-judge at the Federal Constitutional Court (1983–1994) and ex-president of Germany (1994–1999), on the announcement of the German government in April 2008 to raise public pensions by 1.1% and to deviate thereby from the pension formula (Blome et al. 2008)

There are increasingly panicky discussions about the "war of generations," the "grey power," and "pensioner's democracy" in European countries. Advocates of such apocalyptic visions of politics in ageing democracies seem to follow a simple argument: demographic change leads to a growing number of older people. Older people are politically very active, especially in electoral politics. They share common political interests and use their political activities to pursue them. Policy-makers anticipate this development and make policies in order not to disenchant older people. As a consequence, young people are on the losing side in the politics of ageing democracies.

This chapter challenges some aspects of this simplistic argumentation and tries to give a more balanced view by looking at the whole array of political actions. It compares the patterns of political participation and preferences of young, middle-aged and older people in Europe and explores the question whether differences in participation matter. It is young people who are losing out relatively both to middle-aged and to older people due to their low participation levels and relatively small demographic share of the population. This finding does not imply that there is an antagonism between young and old, but that the influence young people can exert through democratic participation is more *limited*. In general, politicians interested in equality

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were most common in the early years of liberal democracies, e.g., in the two decades after World War II, are on the decline. These include voting, participation in political parties and participation in trade unions. This decline in popularity is not uniform across all countries. For example, membership in political parties is on the decrease in most West European party systems. It is on the rise in Spain and some of the post-communist countries like Poland (Mair and van Biezen 2001). At the same time, other forms of participation are on the increase, for example, participation in single-issue organizations, non-institutionalized forms of participation that do not require long-term commitment and that are sometimes labeled as "consumerist" (Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Norris 2002).

Inglehart (1995) attributes these changes in participatory patterns to a broad societal process of post-modernization. As an element of that process, he identifies the shift from scarcity to post-modern values. Among these latter values, individual self-expression and political participation take important places. Individuals' basic material needs tend to be satisfied in recent times, for example, hunger and lack of shelter remain a problem only for a very small minority in established democracies. Individuals are therefore striving for higher, post-material goods. Also, individuals are less accepting of bureaucratic authority because states and governments are less able to exert their powers in a growingly complex world. The declining control by the state adds to the lessened social control of religion and promotes individuation. The shift towards post-modernism is more prevalent in countries that are characterized by high levels of economic development and high life expectancy, such as in most European countries.

Dalton (2004) presents an abundance of empirical evidence on declining trust in state authorities and on the decline of party identification in established democracies. He argues that the spread of education and civic skills leads to cognitive mobilization and the increased usage of elite-challenging forms of participation. The simultaneous spread of media usage and increasing negative media coverage of politicians and governmental politics add to declining trust and the resort to other forms of participation.[1]

This change in the participation process has generational implications. Younger cohorts tend to be more inclined towards those forms of participation that are becoming more en vogue. Thus, members of younger generations tend to show a greater inclination towards elite-challenging behavior, such as taking part in a street demonstration, and consumerist political behavior, such as boycotting a product for political reasons (see Goerres 2009b, chap. 6).

There is a debate about the implications of declining turnout among young voters in many European countries, such as the United Kingdom. Some authors, like Martin Wattenberg (2008), fear that declining voting participation among younger people is a sign of an increasing detachment of those groups from the

[1]Other factors that accompany the post-modernisation process are (Norris 2002: 22–3): suburbanisation (individuals tend to be more mobile and less embedded in the same social networks for decades) and de-unionisation due to the shift to the services sector (individuals become less mobilised by trade unions).

political process and of political apathy. A similar view is shared by Robert Putnam (2000) in a broader conception of declining engagement in civic life. Other scholars, like Russell Dalton (2008), take a more optimistic view as the decline in participation in elections is also accompanied by an increase in participation through other channels. Thus, younger generations are not becoming more detached, but their "linkage" (Lawson 1988) to politics is different from that of other age groups. For example, one British study showed that the meaning of politics is changing for younger British citizens, with them losing interest in the traditional "formal" politics of elections and parties while retaining interest in other types of politics (Henn et al. 2002).

The discussion about whether these changes in the empirically measurable participation process alter the nature of democracy remains open. A greater variety of political participation among younger cohorts may be viewed as a positive development from the viewpoint of a participatory theorist (such as Pateman 1970) because multiple actions of participation increase an individual's bond to the system. In contrast, since most democratic systems are built on structures of representative democracy, power, legitimacy and public resource allocation still largely depend on formally organized structures of the state the key personnel of which is still recruited through parties and elections.

What remains neglected in this debate, is the changing demographics of numbers, i.e., alongside the change in the participation process, a demographic shift is taking place. Younger people are becoming relatively fewer; and this fact together with the changing nature of political participation overall needs to be looked up more closely, which is the objective of this essay. To that end, I will now – after a short description of what constitutes dimensions in the universe of political participation – look at demographic figures, participation rates by age groups and at what the picture looks like when we bring these two types of evidence together.

11.2 The Nature of Political Participation in Europe

If I define all individual actions as political participation that are intended to influence political outcomes (public policy, institutional arrangements or personnel), what is the underlying structure of this universe of actions? Political participation is a type of behavior that has several dimensions. Citizens of all ages who want to become involved politically have several options to choose from. These options differ in the nature and target of the political action carried out (Table 11.1).

One way to structure this universe[2] is to differentiate between actions that the individual carries out on his or her own or those that are collective, i.e., group-based

[2]There is an extensive discussion in the literature of political participation about which conceptualization is most appropriate, which I am not presenting here. Readers interested in this shall be referred to van Deth et al. (2007).

Table 11.1 Types of political participation

	Institutionalized	Non-institutionalized
Individual	Voting	Consumer participation (e.g., buying or boycotting a product for political reasons), contacting a public official or politician, wearing a badge, signing a petition
Collective	Involvement in parties, single-issue organizations, organizations of the economic sphere	demonstrating

Source: own illustration

types of actions. In terms of motivation, stand-alone actions cannot be motivated by some of the social incentives of collective actions. Collective actions provide the participants with the interactions of a group as another mobilizing and gratifying factor (e.g., making friends). Furthermore, it is advisable to differentiate between the degrees of institutionalization. Political participation by individuals can take place in an organized context or in a more spontaneous, non-institutionalized setting. In the first instance, the political action is dependent on a regular social organization that has permanent character. In the latter instance, the political action is not regulated, but has a temporary nature. Broadly speaking, this non-institutionalized behavior is on the rise in popularity whereas the other form is on the decline in many European democracies. Once the distinction between individual and collective behavior is combined with the degree of institutionalization, political actions can be sorted in this two-by-two scheme.

The European Social Survey 2002/2003, which I am going to use for the analysis, includes 25 individual political actions in 21 European countries.[3] These items include: voting, contacting a public official or politician, wearing a badge, signing a petition, taking part in a legal or illegal demonstration, boycotting or buying a product for political reasons, involvement (membership, donations, participation in activities and voluntary work) in political parties, trade unions, professional organizations, humanitarian/ human rights organizations, environmental organizations, peace organizations, animal rights organizations and consumer organizations. The last five types of organizations are often called "single-issue organizations" as their activities tend to focus on a limited set of political issues only.

In this scheme, individual, institutionalized participation is captured in voting. Collective, institutionalized participation is represented by involvement in political parties, in single-issue organizations and organizations of the economic sphere (trade unions and professional organizations). Individual, non-institutionalized

[3]Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland. Some types of participation were not asked for in Hungary and Switzerland.

participation includes such things as contacting a public official, consumer participation, wearing a badge and signing a petition. The last combination of non-institutionalized, collective participation is represented by taking part in demonstrations.

Whereas this scheme is useful to guide the analysis, the boundaries between the various combinations are fluid. So, for instance, involvement in single-issue organizations often goes hand-in-hand with non-institutionalized forms of participation. Another example may be that party activists act as initiators of demonstrations, trying to reach a broader audience than their own members. In addition to fluid transitions between types of activities, all types of political participation are correlated albeit only at moderate levels, meaning that people active in one type of channel are also more likely to be active in another.

11.3 Demographics in Europe

In this section, I demonstrate that the demographic weight of older and middle-aged people has increased significantly whereas young people are a diminishing group as a percentage of the total and the adult population.

It is helpful to define older people in Europe as those who are 60 and older, with 60 being about the mean retirement age in Europe.[4] Retirement is an important social division point. Retirees have left the labor market; their expectations from the state are different with them paying less tax and being increasingly dependent on state services. Also, their social life is characterized by more free time and a focus on their own social lives. Those who are younger than 60 can be divided into two subgroups: young people (18–29) and middle-aged people (30–59). Young people are likely still to be in education or in their early professional careers. They are likely to be exposed to various pressures from the labor market and their social environment to build their careers and organize their lives. Middle-aged people are likely to be economically active, have family responsibilities in the form of children or older individuals that they care for. They are on average fully embedded in the labor market. In contrast to young people, their lives tend to be more organized already.

European countries underwent a remarkable demographic shift in the last three decades (see Table 11.2). After the population expansion following World War II, population growth stagnated from the 1960s onwards. In the 21 countries under investigation here, the total population was 405 million in 1970. In 2000, the closest data point to the survey period, it was 465 million.

As a consequence, the size of age groups changed as well. Here, the most important change was the ageing of the baby-boomer cohort, i.e., the large

[4]The rate of economically active people between ages 60 and 64 tends to be much lower than the rates for younger age groups. On average, it stands at 29.4% in the 21 European countries. The rate of economically active individuals aged 65 and older lies at an average of 5.1% (ILO 2006).

Table 11.2 Demographic change in 21 European countries by age group 1970–2000

	1970	2000	Diff. 1970–2000
Very young (0–18), mill.	125.1	99.1	−26.0
% of total population	30.9	21.3	−9.6
Young (18–29), mill.	63.5	67.3	3.7
% of total population	15.7	14.4	−1.2
% of adult population	22.7	18.3	−4.3
Middle-aged (30–59), mill.	146.8	188.1	41.3
% of total population	36.2	40.4	4.2
% of adult population	52.4	51.3	−1.1
Older (60+), mill.	69.8	111.4	41.6
% of total population	17.2	23.9	6.7
% of adult population	24.9	30.4	5.4
Total, mill.	405.2	465.9	60.6
Total adult, mill.	280.1	366.7	86.6

Note: 1970 without East Germany, United Nations Common Database (2007)

generation of people that was born in the first two decades after World War II. That generation still belonged to the very young in 1970 and was among the middle-aged in 2000.

The number of minor children between ages 0 and 18 decreased from 125 million in 1970 to 99 million in 2000. The group of young individuals (18–29) increased slightly from 64 to 67 million. The groups of middle-aged and older people increased dramatically. Middle-aged residents numbered 147 million in 1970 and 188 million in 2000. Older residents increased from 70 to 111 million. The relative proportion of the total population changed as well. The youngest age group decreased by almost 9.6%, the group of the young decreased by about 1.2%, the middle-aged increased by about 4.2% and the oldest age group increased by about 6.7% of the total population.

For a discussion of political participation, it is necessary to look at changes of the adult population (defined as 18 and older) because some of the dimensions of participation require the participant to be an adult. Here, the relative changes clearly show a decrease of the groups of the young and the middle-aged by 4.3% and 1.1%, respectively and an increase of the group of older people of 5.4%. In 2000, the adult population comprised 18.4% young people (18–29), 51.3% middle-aged individuals and 30.4% older people.

Thus, a dramatic shift can be seen in the age composition of the European population. Older people are the strongest growing age group, and the youngest and the young are the ones losing in relative numerical importance. The population changes mean for political participation that the pool of potential participants changes as well. Increasingly, the pool of citizens who can potentially become active consists of middle-aged and older people. As a consequence, the following analysis of the variation in political behavior of young, middle-aged and older people should take the demographic weight of each group into consideration.

11.4 Age Group Imbalances in Political Participation in Europe

In general, differences in participation between age groups can be due to cohort differences or differences along the life-cycle. Cohort differences are rooted in varying socialization experiences at young age that are experienced by a group of individuals born in the same period. For example, cohorts differ in the extent to which they have internalized the sense of duty to vote. Life-cycle differences are the same for all cohorts. They stem from the fact that the individual endowment with resources and motivation to engage in political behavior varies across the life-cycle. For example, the older individuals are, the more likely they are to be hampered by illness (see for a detailed discussion Goerres 2009b, p. 52).

11.4.1 Participation Rates by Age Groups in Europe

Figure 11.1 summarizes the results in eight variables by age group. Each variable captures whether an individual was active in the 12 months before the survey or not for a given kind of participation. The numbers for each age group indicate the average probability of someone in that age group to be active in that type of activity.

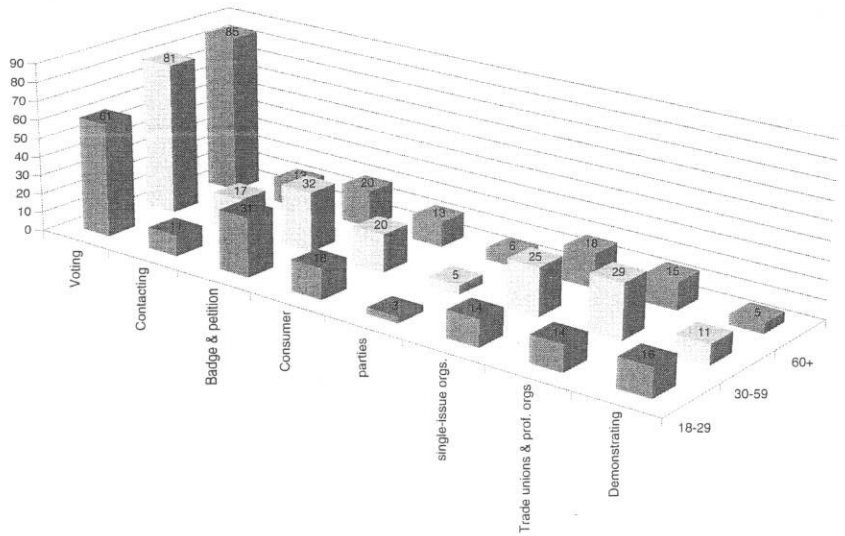

Fig. 11.1 Average participation rates on eight kinds of political participation by age groups *Source*: ESS 2002/2003. Observations weighted

At a first glance, it can be seen that voting is still by far the most common form of political participation across all age groups. Young people have a likelihood of 60% to have voted, middle-aged people 81% and older people 85%. So, older people are most active on this participation channel. The difference of 25 percentage points is also the most substantive difference across age groups as can be judged from the comparison with other types (Fig. 11.1).

Across all areas of participation, young people are the least active compared to the other two age groups – except for demonstrating where young people have a 16% chance of having taken part in a demonstration compared to 11% for middle-aged and 5% for older people. In some areas, young people hardly differ from middle-aged people, such as for having worn a badge/signed a petition or consumer activities. Thus, young people are most likely to use non-institutionalized individual and collective forms of participation, relative to the other age groups. Older people clearly dominate the traditional ways of participation through voting and party involvement; even with regard to involvement in organizations of the employment sphere (trade unions and professional organizations), which are likely to be tied to working life, they have a higher likelihood (15%) of being involved than young people (14%). Older people tend to be retirees who are economically inactive. Still, their high level of involvement in trade unions or employers' organizations seems to result from the effort of these organizations to maintain relations with retirees.

Thus, with regard to simple participation rates, young people are at a disadvantage with regard to all dimensions of political participation. This is already a remarkable finding given the strong normative importance of political activity in liberal democracies. However, since I am ultimately interested in the potential impact of participation by young people, I should also take into consideration how many individuals belong to each age group.

11.4.2 Participation by Age Groups Weighted by Demographic Size

In a democracy, numbers do matter. So, when there are more individuals in a certain age group, there exists a larger reservoir of people who can become active and can potentially exert pressure on elites (as well as reveal political preferences). This pressure potential can be approximated by multiplying the average likelihood of participation of an age group with its relative size in the adult population. This number combines the relative numerical power of an age group together with their participation patterns.

Figure 11.2 presents the participation rates by age groups weighted by their relative demographic sizes. Recall that in 2000, the adult population comprised 18.4% young people (18–29), 51.3% middle-aged (30–59) and 30.4% older people (60+). For example, if all three groups have a participation rate of 10%, younger people have a pressure potential of 1.84, middle-aged a 5.13 and older people a

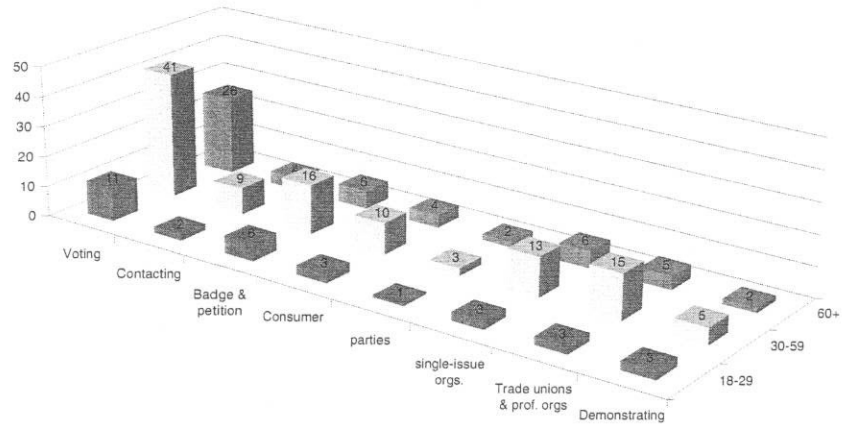

Fig. 11.2 Pressure potential by age groups in Europe in 2002
Note: Pressure potential = average likelihood to participate*relative demographic weight of age group. Values are those from Fig. 11.2 times the proportion of the respective age group of the adult population (18.3% for young, 51.3% for middle-aged, 30.4% for older individuals)

3.04. The impact of the middle-aged through that participation dimension on elites and the political system, as a whole, is potentially higher than for older or younger individuals.

The results in Fig. 11.2 are even clearer than the unweighted results before with regard to age distortion of the participation process. The columns of the middle-aged are higher than the other two columns for all dimensions. Middle-aged individuals dominate in their pressure potential over the young and older people in all channels of participation. The strong demographic weight of middle-aged citizens makes up for any lower participation rate that they might have, e.g., in voting. In addition, young people have the lowest pressure potential compared to the other two age groups in all dimensions – except for wearing a badge/signing a petition where there is a tie with the 60+ age group. Seen from this perspective, the relatively high levels of non-institutionalised participation of young people is lost with regard to pressure potential through their low and declining number in the population.

These results show that the varying participation rates that could be seen above are not so much of importance with the clear demographic differences between young, middle-aged and older individuals being considered. The picture in 2000–2002 is now clear: due to their average participation rates and their relative demographic size, young people are at a disadvantage with regard to their pressure potential, compared to middle-aged and older individuals. Older people are almost always second in the size of their impact relative to the other two groups. The clear "winner" in this comparison of pressure potential is the middle-aged group. Their overall relatively high participation rates and their large demographic size make them outperform the other two groups on all dimensions.

Coming back to the structuring principles, I can also see that the domination of the middle-aged is comparatively higher in the institutionalized dimensions of participation (voting, involvement in parties, single-issue organizations and organizations of the economic sphere). Their domination in the non-institutionalized forms, which are considered to be on the rise, is slightly smaller. Since middle-aged people dominate in their pressure potential on all types of participatory channels, their relative impact potential in conveying information about their preferences as well as their potential to exert pressure on political elites is always higher than for the other age groups.[5]

If it is accepted for the moment that the streams of political participation are *distorted* between age groups, does that mean that public policy can be distorted to one age group or the other, depending on the influence of various forms of political participation? This is what Robert Dahl (1982) called the "distortion of the public agenda" in his discussion of *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy*. Those groups that are more active can determine the content and scope of the public policy agenda. I therefore need to go one step further. The answer lies in the last step of the analysis, the investigation into the political preferences of older, middle-aged and young people in order to decide whether there are any systematic differences.

11.5 Age Differences in Political Preferences

If older, middle-aged and young people wanted the same in politics, differences in pressure potential would not matter. If the same kind of people (with regard to political interests) use different routes for their political expression, the aggregate outcome *cannot* be affected by these participatory differences.

Let us look at attitudes in a broad range of policy domains: the role of the state in the economy, immigrant immigration and sexual life-style policy. In the European Social Survey, respondents were given a statement and were then asked to what extent they agreed with them:

[5]Obviously, this result is contingent in the age separation that I suggested here: 18–29, 30–59, and 60+ . However, this categorization might be considered to be conservative as far as young people are concerned. The defining line of young people being not as settled as middle-aged people might be drawn at even earlier ages than 30. If I did so, the differences would even be starker. As to the other division line, 60 seems the most plausible social division point as it is the mean retirement age across Europe. One could argue that early retirement regimes in, for example, Italy would call for a lower division point, but the analysis is quite robust even for cut-off points between 50 and 60. Thus, we can say with confidence that currently, middle-aged people dominate in their pressure potential due to their high participation rates and demographic weight, relative to other age groups whereas young people are the least influential and older people are always in between.

- The less the government intervenes in the economy, the better it is for your [country].
- It is better for a country if almost everyone shares the same customs and traditions.
- Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish.

Table 11.3 reports the percentages of young, middle-aged and older people who agreed or fully agreed with the statements. I split the analysis by participation channels in order to get a sense of to what extent older people using one certain type of participation are different from younger people using the same type. The highlighted columns present the difference in percentage of people supporting the respective statement. For instance, among voters, 38% of older people compared to 24% of young people agree with the statement that *less* government intervention in the economy is *better*. So there is a difference of 14% between the young and older people.

The most important finding in this table is that the direction of difference is the same, no matter what the channel of participation, with regard to all three policy domains. Thus, young people active in politics are on average more in favor of a stronger involvement of the state in the economy, more in favor of a culturally heterogeneous society and more in favor of a liberal sexual life-style policy. Depending on the policy domain, the difference between young and older people varies, but not to a large degree (and could easily stem from sampling errors). In the area of the state and the economy, the difference is as small as 8% for those who are active in contacting, parties and demonstrations. However, it is 20% for consumer participation. In the sexual life-style policy area, there are no differences as the numbers only vary between 15 and 21. In the area of migration policy, the difference varies between 16% (demonstrators) and 22% (active in consumer participation, wearing a badge/signing a petition and voting). On all three policy domains, however, young citizens are less conservative than middle-aged or older ones.[6]

In sum, political preferences vary between age groups. In three diverse policy domains (the role of the state in the economy, migration policy and sexual life style policies), older people are always more conservative than middle-aged who are more conservative than young people. Probably, these differences are due to changing socialization effects at young adulthood (see Sect. 6), meaning that they are differences between cohorts than across the life cycle. Middle-aged individuals who have the strongest pressure potential through their participation given their demographic weight are always between younger and older individuals in their political preferences.

Therefore, the differential impact of age groups that has been unveiled in Sect. 4 matters. Age groups are different in their political preferences. Since middle-aged

[6]The literature on preference formation and age effects tends to explain these differences with a generational account. Thus, older people are not becoming more conservative. If society moves into a certain direction with its mean value position, older people tend to maintain on average an ideal point that was prevalent during their time of early political socialization (see for example Tilley 2005; Danigelis and Cutler 1991).

Table 11.3 Political attitudes of young, middle-aged and older people in three policy domains across Europe

	State and the economy				Sexual life styles				Immigrant integration			
	Young	MA	Older	Diff.	Young	MA	Older	Diff	Young	MA	Older	Diff.
Voting	24	31	38	−14	78	76	59	19	43	48	65	−22
Contacting	26	31	34	−8	80	76	59	21	39	43	57	−18
Badge and petition	24	29	37	−13	86	82	66	20	31	38	54	−22
Consumer	23	29	43	−20	86	83	68	18	28	33	50	−22
Parties	30	32	38	−8	77	76	62	15	41	44	61	−20
Single-issue orgs.	27	32	43	−16	85	83	68	16	32	35	53	−21
Trade unions and prof. orgs	23	29	37	−14	82	80	66	16	36	40	55	−19
Demonstrating	22	28	30	−8	86	84	69	17	32	34	48	−16

Source: ESS2002/3. Questions (B43, B46, D40), 21 European countries, trade union/single issue = 19 countries. Cell entries are percent who agree or strongly agree, all differences are significant at the 0.05 level. Weighted observations, MA = middle-aged

people have a *higher* pressure potential than young people and older people, their preferences can potentially have *more* of an influence.

11.6 Discussion

Let us now put the results into perspective with some findings of other researchers. In sum, this chapter reveals three empirical findings for Europe at the beginning of the third millennium: (1) young people are at a disadvantage relative to middle-aged and older people on most forms of political participation; (2) young people's potential to exert political pressure through means of mass participation and due to their number is lower than that of middle-aged and older people; and (3) young people differ in their political preferences from middle-aged and older people. Thus, their lower pressure potential *can matter* as to political outcomes.

The first finding is just another description of what has been found by many scholars, namely that the current generation of young people in Europe is less active than people of higher age in many forms of participation. Some aspects of these lower levels of especially institutionalised participation are typical of the current generation who are socialized into being less interested in formal politics, but may be still interested in "the political" (Dalton 2004; Henn et al. 2002). Future generations of young people may receive a different kind of socialization, such as through civic education at schools, and be more active again (Galston 2001). Other aspects of this lower level of participation are linked to the life course and may be more difficult to change. For example, there is strong evidence that early experience of voting is hindered by the exigencies of setting up an adult life (Plutzer 2002). Since there are both cohort and life cycle effects at work, it is difficult to judge for the near future what the political participation of young people will look like.

Secondly, the lower level of pressure potential is contingent on the lower levels of political participation of young people. If future generations of young people are *socialized* into more political activity, their pressure potential will rise again. However, the demographic trends in European democracies are very rigid; low fertility seems to be a characteristic of post-industrial societies. Policy-makers' attempts to raise it seem mostly to be in vain, although some demographers think solutions are viable (Morgan 2003). So, overall, the pressure potential of young people is likely to remain rather low due to *demographics*.

But age group differences in political pressure potential may only be a problem if there is a conflict between generations. There exists very little evidence for conflicts between cohorts in post-industrial democracies. Apart from the differences in some political preferences, which have been shown above and will be discussed further down, generational conflicts seem not to be an issue in politics. This lack of conflict may be due to the two things: (a) members of birth cohorts have links to members of other birth cohorts in their families and (b) intermediary

organizations like parties and trade unions historically created and managed varying generational demands (Kohli 1999, 2008).

Some social scientists claim that the shifting demographics can close doors for fundamental reforms, such as a reform of the public pension system (Sinn and Uebelmesser 2002; see for counter-arguments Goerres 2007). Their assumption is a very simplistic notion of material self-interest and voting: older people will use their increasing pressure potential to block any political change that worsens their material status quo like the adjustment of pension levels to sustainable formulae. However, studies of actual voting patterns of older people (Bonoli and Häusermann (2009); Goerres 2008, 2009a) show that such a materialistic outlook on politics does not determine voting choices of older people. Also, there is evidence that in those European countries in which the necessity for reform, for instance due to a high old-age dependency, young people are more active compared to older people than in countries where the necessity is less urgent (Goerres 2009b).

Another concrete proposal to improve the political situation of young people as to their pressure potential is to *lower* the voting age. There are three variations to this idea: to lower the age (typical at 18 at the moment) to another threshold, such as 16, as was done in Austria in 2007 for elections at all levels, to get rid of any voting age (effectively setting it to 0) or to give parents extra votes for their minor children until these children can take on their own right (see Goerres and Tiemann 2009; Krieger 2006). These proposals once put into practice would effectively increase the numerical size of the group of "the young" as voters and thereby increase their pressure potential, although it would not affect other areas of participation where often legal age is the minimum (for example, for full party membership). However, with regard to generational conflict, such changes could be counter-productive (although no study has yet been carried out in order to empirically assess this claim). It could be that solidarity between generations would decrease if older and middle-aged people saw that those younger than 18 had access to the political process. The consideration by middle-aged and older people for the young when casting their vote or acting politically in general could vanish. If anything, these reforms should be produced due to normative considerations among which generational justice may be an important aspect (see Kohli 2006).

Finally, there is the evidence for differences in political preferences across several policy domains. The differences in political preferences between young and middle-aged or older people can be due either to life-cycle or cohort differences (Goerres 2009b, Chap. 2). The longitudinal evidence that exists seems to point towards cohort differences being the main determinant of these differences between age groups (Danigelis and Cutler 1991; Tilley 2005). Thus, the low pressure potential of young people linked to preferences different from those of middle-aged or older people because of cohort membership could only lead to less impact of these cohort specific interests, i.e., political impact could be *skewed* in favor of the interests of the current cohorts of middle-aged or older people, not their interests in the position of the life-cycle. Overall, there is little evidence for differences in political preferences linked to the life-cycle. The little there is may be due to very specific circumstances of the country and the existing political institutions. Simple

material self-interest linked to the life-cycle is definitely not the main answer to these findings (Bonoli and Häusermann (2009); Busemeyer et al. (2009); Wilkoszewski 2008). Thus, for example, the policies towards same-sex marriage may not be optimal for the current generation of young people who are more progressive than the current generations of middle-aged and older people who are more conservative. But the political output is unlikely to be skewed against the interests of those who are younger than 30 (education, childcare, etc.).

11.7 Conclusions

Political participation by individuals is becoming more heterogeneous in European democracies due to large-scale societal changes. In addition, demographic changes made the group of young people shrink in the past, which will continue into the future.

This essay argues that the political participation process in Europe is currently skewed in favor of middle-aged people who dominate in pressure potential measured through their participation levels and demographic size. Older people, the fastest growing age group, come in second on almost all dimensions. Young people, who are unlikely to increase in the near future, have the lowest pressure potential due to their low participation rates and their small demographic weight. The evidence also showed that young, middle-aged and older individuals differ in their political preferences. Therefore, seen from this non-specific perspective, young people are less able to convey information about their preferences and exert less pressure on political elites relative to other age groups. It is important to point out that this chapter is about broad dynamics and the potential for pressure. Whether young people in a *particular country* and with regard to a *certain policy* exert less pressure, remains another empirical question.

Overall, the empirical evidence throws up the question as to what extent preferences for channels of political participation by groups and political preferences of these groups can influence political outcomes that are produced in a democracy. Whereas the literature tends to be pre-occupied with a mismatch of the preferences of those who participate and those who do not (Verba et al. 1978, Verba et al. 1995; Verba and Nie 1972), there is also a case to be made that among those who participate, differences in preferences could lead to diverging political results. Politicians interested in equality in participation and outcome should not be concerned about the growing importance of older people, but rather the *diminishing significance* of the young compared to both middle-aged and older people.

This chapter demonstrated that the demand for policies expressed through channels of participation varies among age groups. Therefore, it needs to be investigated how the intermediary organizations, such as political parties, trade unions and NGOs deal with these differences. In addition, there are still too few studies that look at differences in political preferences among age groups more closely. What are the policy interests that are immediately tied to young age and to

what extent are they context-dependent? The evidence that is known hints at very few truly life-cycle related differences in political preferences that are also highly dependent on the institutional context. Still, if a vote is carried out on matters such as pension reforms in very specific circumstances where only one policy is at stake, these life-cycle interests may be played out.

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Chapter 12
The Emergence of Pensioners' Parties in Contemporary Europe

Seán Hanley

12.1 Introduction

Party politics in contemporary Europe often exhibit marked generational biases. Older voters are both more likely to turn out to vote to support political parties at elections and also to be members of political parties (Goerres 2009). Conversely, younger voters are increasingly disinclined to participate in formal party-electoral politics leading to concern over the 'greying' of party democracy and of socio-political organizations (Henn et al. 2002; Phelps 2006; Goerres 2009; and Robertson 2009). Certain (types of) parties are disproportionately supported by older age groups. Indeed, in certain cases – as with the members of the British Conservative Party during 1990s (Whiteley et al. 1994) or the electorate of the Czech Republic's Communist Party (Hanley 2001) – older age cohorts can find themselves in the majority, significantly affecting the way such parties understand, prioritize and respond to issues of the day and often tending to narrow their political appeal over time.

However, the possibility that population ageing and the growing salience of issues relating to ageing societies might generate pressures for the emergence of *new* parties has been largely overlooked. This is in many ways unsurprising. Despite the emergence at the margins of political systems across Europe of pensioners and retirees' parties over the last two decades, such 'grey interest' parties' (Goerres 2009, p. 148), appear on first examination a fringe phenomenon of little importance (Walker 1998; Goerres 2009, pp. 72–74).[1] Nevertheless, grey interest parties arguably merit closer examination both as socio-political phenomena in

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[1]Following Goerres (2009, p. 72), I take a 'grey interest' party to be any organization contesting (or planning to contest) elections which signals through its name and/or founding documents that it seeks mainly to represent the interests of pensioners and/or older voters.