

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
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PhD THESIS

**INTEREST IN POLITICS AND
PARTISAN ATTACHMENT**

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Key words: interest in politics, partisan attachment, participative democracy, civic participation, political participation, political socialisation, gendered socialisation

In the introduction, I expanded the concepts of *interest in politics and partisan attachment*. I then motivated the reason why I chose this subject, and I presented the research purpose and objectives. The starting point of the present thesis is the political interest and partisan attachment in the case of students of the "1 Decembrie 1918" University in Alba-Iulia and their parents.

Chapter I, Interest in Politics and Partisan attachment has the following subchapters: interest in politics, partisan attachment, political Parties attachment in the 2009 presidential elections.

In the subchapter *Interest in politics*, I discuss one's attitude, concern and participation in political issues, processes and institutions that govern society. It is a manifestation of a person's involvement in public life and in the political decisions that affect the community and country where he or she lives. Interest in politics is reflected in one's attitude and concern towards political events and problems. Those interested in politics are usually informed and involved in political debates, either at a national or international level. It is manifested in the form of active participation and involvement in political processes, such as voting, political activism, civic activism, protests and other forms of social and political activism.

Those interested in politics are usually well informed about political structures, political parties, politicians, political problems and decision-making processes in their country or globally. They can have a significant impact on society and political processes. Those interested in politics can influence public opinion, they can mobilize voters and can promote political and social changes that can benefit the community.

They are essential for the functioning of a democratic society and to promoting the values and interests of citizens. It is an expression of civic engagement and the desire to contribute to how the political and social future of a country or community is shaped.

In the subchapter *Partisan attachment*, I discuss the emotional connection and engagement one has toward a political party of a political ideology. It is a manifestation of loyalty and identification with the values, platform and candidates of a political party.

Partisan attachment implies one's identification and loyalty to a person or political party. Those with a strong partisan attachment consider themselves as being part of the party and they share its objectives. They are usually involved in party activities, such as electoral

campaigns, political activism and donations. They are more susceptible to voting with the party candidates and to promoting the party platform to other people.

It may be stable and resistant in time. Those with a strong partisan attachment tend to remain loyal to the party despite political changes or events. This stability may be influenced by factors such as political education, political socialisation and personal experiences. It may influence one's electoral behaviour and political decisions. Those with a strong partisan attachment are more susceptible to voting for their party's candidates and policies and they may be less open to other parties' ideas and proposals.

It is an important component of a person's political identity, and it may significantly influence their political behaviour and decisions.

In the subchapter *Political Parties attachment in the 2009 presidential elections*, I present the strong association and polarization between Romanian political parties in 2009, especially between the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Democratic-Liberal Party (PDL). The citizens with a strong attachment towards any of these parties were less susceptible to vote for the candidates of other political parties.

The political parties tried to mobilize their electorate based on the citizens' partisan attachment. A strong attachment towards a certain political party was associated with an increased loyalty towards the party candidate and with a higher turnout.

The attachment towards political parties influenced how citizens perceived and interpreted the messages and promises of candidates. Citizens with a strong attachment towards a certain political party were more susceptible to accepting and supporting the political positions and platforms of their party. This attachment had a significant impact on the electoral results from the 2009 presidential elections. The citizens with a strong attachment towards a certain political party were more predisposed to vote for their party's candidate and to support the party's political agenda.

However, the attachment towards political parties was an important factor in the context of the 2009 presidential elections in Romania, as it influenced the citizens' electoral behaviour and the final electoral results. This political loyalty and mobilization contributed to political polarization and electoral competitiveness during the electoral campaign.

Chapter II, Political socialisation: explanatory factors and manifestations, contains the following major chapters: Political socialisation: General aspects; Gendered political socialisation; Factors of political socialisation. The last assertion has other subsections, namely: Family, School, Religious Institutions, Groups of individuals equal in status. The chapter then continues with two other major chapters, namely: The intergenerational

transmission of political preferences and Manifestations of political socialisation. Lastly, it incorporates other elements such as: Political trust, Democracy and participation, Civic participation, Political participation, Boycott, Euroscepticism at the European level.

In the subchapter, *Political socialisation: General aspects* I present the process through which individuals learn values, norms, behaviours and political competences within a society.

Political socialisation is the process through which individuals learn and interiorize knowledge, attitudes and political behaviours within a society. It is influenced by the interactions with family, school, friends, mass-media and other social institutions.

Socialisation agents include family, school, mass-media, friends, religion and political institutions. Each of these agents has a different impact on one's political socialisation and plays a role in the formation of political identity and values.

It is a lifelong process, but the critical periods are childhood and adolescence. During these periods, people are more receptive to social influences, and they learn political values and behaviours from their primary socialisation agents. They influence political behaviour, including electoral participation, political orientations and partisan loyalties. Those who have been politically socialised in a certain way can be more susceptible to adopting the political values and behaviours of their socialisation agents. It may be influenced by social, economic and politic changes, as well as personal experience. However, some aspects of political socialisation can be relatively stable in time, as they reflect political traditions and norms in a society.

Socialisation is a complex and dynamic process that influences the political development and behaviour of citizens in a society. The socialisation agents and the critical periods play an important role in the formation of the political identity and behaviour of individuals.

The subchapter *Gendered political socialisation* presents aspects regarding the way in which gender and gender roles influence the process through which individuals learn and internalize knowledge, attitudes and political behaviour within a society.

From an early age, children are exposed to social expectations and stereotypes regarding gender, that can influence the way in which they are socialised politically. For example, boys may be encouraged to get involved in politics and express political opinions, while girls may be encouraged to be less politically active or to focus on other aspects of life. Each gender can have different experiences of political socialisation depending on their interactions with family, school, mass-media and other social institutions. For example, boys may be encouraged to read and discuss political subjects, while girls may be encouraged to focus on other fields.

Gendered political socialisation may influence the level of political participation of individuals. For example, men may be more predisposed to be involved in political activism and to take part in protests of political campaigns, while women may prefer to be involved in more subtle ways, such as volunteering or being involved in NGOs.

Gender stereotypes can influence political perceptions and orientations of individuals. For example, man may be perceived as being smarter or more competent in political matters, while women may be perceived as being more sensible and more preoccupied with social problems.

Gendered political socialisation profoundly impacts the political development of individuals and may influence how they understand, participate and get involved in political life. It is important that gender roles are recognized and understood in political socialisation to promote equal and fair political involvement for all genders.

In the subchapter, *Factors of political socialisation* I present aspects regarding the influences and contexts that contribute to the formation and development of political convictions, values and behaviours of individuals in a society.

Family plays a crucial role in political socialisation, as it is the first and most influential source of socialisation for most individuals. The political values, attitudes and behaviour of parents and other family members can strongly impact the political development of children.

Schools offer opportunities for formal political education and for interactions with teachers and colleagues that can influence the political perceptions and knowledge of students. The school curriculum, course content and extracurricular activities can influence students' political understanding.

Mass-media has a significant role in the formation of public opinion and in the political socialisation of individuals. Through news, political debates and other programs, mass-media can influence the political perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of citizens.

Reference groups, such as friends, co-workers and community members, can strongly impact the political socialisation of individuals through discussions, social influences and group norms.

Religious values and teachings can influence political attitudes and behaviours of individuals. Religious organizations and leaders can play an important role in the formation of public opinion and in the political mobilization of Christians.

Personal experiences, such as political events, life experiences and interactions with public authorities can influence the political understanding and attitudes of individuals.

Political socialisation factors are complex interactions between different institutions, social groups and personal experiences, which contribute to the formation and development of the political identity of individuals. By combining social and contextual influences, these factors model political perceptions, values and behaviours of people within a society.

The subchapter, *The intergenerational transmission of political preferences* presents how political convictions, values and preferences are transferred and perpetuated across generations within a family or community.

Family is one of the most important agencies for transmitting political choices between generations. Parents, grandparents and other family figures influence the political convictions of children through discussions, behaviour patterns and values transmitted within the family.

Children observe and model their political behaviour after the example of their parents and other family members. Participation in political activities, such as voting, political discussions and involvement in political campaigns is transmitted from one generation to the next.

Conversations about day-to-day politics within the family can play an important role in transmitting political options. Open discussions and debates between family members can influence the children's political perspectives and can encourage a more profound understanding of political issues.

Family values and traditions can also play a significant role in transmitting political options. For example, families with conservative or liberal political traditions tend to pass these values and political preferences on to their children.

The socio-cultural context in which a family lives can also influence the intergenerational transmission of political choices. Factors such as the urban or rural environment, membership in a certain ethnic or religious group, and the socio-economic level can influence a family's political perceptions and values and can be passed on to subsequent generations.

The intergenerational transmission of political choices is a complex and dynamic process involving interactions between family members, cultural values and traditions, and the socio-economic and political context in which a family lives. This process is essential for the perpetuation and transmission of political identity and values between generations.

In the subchapter *Manifestations of political socialisation*, I present the various ways in which individuals internalize and manifest their political convictions, values and behaviours within a society.

One of the most obvious manifestations of political socialisation is the participation in the electoral process by voting. By voting, citizens express their political preferences, and they exercise the right to elect political leaders and representatives.

Another way to manifest political socialisation is political activism or volunteering for political parties, NGOs or political campaigns. This may include organizing protests, petitions, advocacy or political awareness activities.

Participating in political debates and discussions, both online and offline, is another manifestation of political socialisation. These activities allow individuals to express their political views, argue their points of view and interact with other citizens and political leaders.

The consumption of political media, such as news, political debate shows, opinion pieces, and social media, is another important manifestation of political socialisation. Through these media sources, individuals are exposed to various political perspectives and are informed about national or international political events and debates.

Involvement in political and community organizations provides opportunities for citizens to demonstrate their political commitment and influence in local and national decision-making processes. These organizations can promote social and political change and mobilize citizens to support political or social causes.

The manifestations of political socialisation are varied, and they reflect the complex interactions between individuals, institutions and the socio-political context in which they live. Through these manifestations, citizens express and assert their political identity and contribute to the formation and functioning of a society's political system.

Political trust represents the degree of faith and trust citizens have in institutions, leaders and political processes in a society. Trust in political institutions refers to the degree of trust citizens have in fundamental political institutions such as the government, parliament, judiciary and other organs of state. High trust in these institutions indicates a higher level of legitimacy and effectiveness of the political system.

Trust in political leaders refers to the degree of trust citizens have in political leaders, such as the president, prime-minister or cabinet members. Trust in leaders can influence the perception of the country's political direction and it can affect the support level for political parties or specific policies.

Trust in political processes refers to how much citizens trust political processes, such as elections, the legislative and administrative process, media and how they reflect and influence political reality. High trust in these processes is essential for the proper functioning of democracy.

Several factors can influence a society's level of political trust, including government performance, level of corruption, transparency of political institutions, social cohesion, life satisfaction and the citizens' level of political education.

Political trust is essential for the legitimacy and stability of the political system. High trust in political institutions and leaders can promote social cohesion, civic participation and compliance with laws and rules, while a decline in trust can lead to polarization, instability and the development of feelings of alienation and political disillusionment.

Through the above, it emerges that political trust is a central element in the functioning of democracy and the relationship between citizens and the government. It reflects the degree of legitimacy and effectiveness of the political system and can influence political behaviour and the citizens' level of involvement in the political life of a society.

Democracy and participation are two fundamental concepts in political theory and practice, as they reflect the way in which citizens are involved in political processes and they influence the decision-making process in a democratic society.

Democracy is a political system in which power is exercised by citizens or their freely and equally elected representatives. Democracy involves respect for individual rights and fundamental principles such as the separation of powers in the state, the rule of law, free and fair elections, freedom of expression and political pluralism.

Participation is the result of citizens exercising civic and political rights in a society's political life. Political participation can take various forms, including voting in elections, involvement in political activism, membership in political parties, participation in public debates and protests, and involvement in decision-making processes at the local or national level.

The active participation of citizens in democracy is considered essential for the proper functioning of democracy. It ensures the representation of society's diverse interests, promotes the accountability of government and the legitimacy of political institutions, and strengthens social cohesion and democratic coherence.

Political participation can be divided into two main categories: electoral participation and non-electoral participation. Electoral participation refers to participation in the electoral process by voting or running for public office, while non-electoral participation includes other forms of political engagement, such as civic activism, petitions, protests, and involvement in political or social organizations.

There are various factors that can influence the level and nature of political participation, including access to political information, financial resources, political education,

level of alienation and political disillusion, as well as the institutional and legislative structure of the political system.

Democracy and participation are interconnected and essential to the effective functioning of a democratic society. An active and involved participation of citizens in political life contributes to strengthening democracy, protecting individual rights and freedoms and promoting social and economic progress.

Civic participation is the active and voluntary involvement of citizens in public affairs and community life, aiming to improve and promote common interests and values.

Civic participation involves the active and voluntary involvement of citizens in activities aimed at improving the community and promoting common interests and values. These activities may include involvement in NGOs, volunteering, civic activism, involvement in local or national decision-making processes, and the promotion of civil rights and social justice.

Civic participation can take various forms, including: Volunteering in NGOs or community actions; involvement in advocacy campaigns or civic activism to promote certain causes or social issues; participation in decision-making processes at local or national level through public consultations, petitions or lobbying; Contributing to the development and implementation of public policy through involvement in working groups or advisory committees; Participating in protests or social movements to promote social and political change.

Civic participation is essential to the functioning of a democratic society and to the achievement of social and economic progress. It strengthens social cohesion and community solidarity, promotes accountability and transparency of governance, supports community development, and protects and promotes individual rights and freedoms.

Several factors can influence the level and nature of civic participation, including the degree of education and political awareness, access to resources and information, the institutional and legislative structure of society, the level of political alienation and disillusionment, and the civic culture and participatory traditions of a community.

Promoting civic participation involves creating a conducive and stimulating environment for citizens' involvement in public and community affairs. This may include facilitating access to political information and resources, raising political awareness and civic education, creating mechanisms and institutions to facilitate citizen participation, and promoting a climate of openness and dialogue between governments and citizens.

Political participation refers to the involvement of citizens in political processes and the exercise of influence over governmental and political decisions. This can take various forms and can have a significant impact on how democracy works in a society.

Political participation is essential for the functioning of democracy and for ensuring the government's legitimacy and representativeness. It allows citizens to express their political preferences and influence decision-making processes, thus contributing to strengthening social cohesion and promoting democratic values.

To promote political participation, it is important to facilitate access to political information and political education, improve transparency and accountability of government, create mechanisms and institutions that facilitate citizen participation, and promote a climate of openness and dialogue among citizens and decision makers.

Boycotting is a form of passive protest in which individuals or groups refuse to participate in certain activities or use the services of entities, as a sign of disapproval of certain actions or policies. It is more specifically a protest tactic in which individuals or groups refuse to participate in certain activities or use the products or services of entities to draw attention to an issue, exert pressure on decision makers, or promote social or political change.

The effectiveness of boycotts can vary depending on several factors, including the degree of mobilization and support of the population, the level of awareness and information of public opinion, and the reaction and response of the targeted entities.

However, boycotting is a protest and mobilization tactic that can be used to promote social or political change and exert pressure on decision makers, but which can also have associated limitations and challenges.

Euroscepticism at the European level is an attitude of scepticism or criticism towards the European Union (EU) and European integration in general.

From the multitude of definitions, I refer to Euroscepticism as a political and social position that expresses doubts or opposition to the EU and/or the European integration process. It can take various forms, from moderate scepticism or criticism of certain aspects of the European Union, to vehement opposition to the entire European project.

Of course, Euroscepticism can significantly impact politics and decision-making at European level, influencing political agendas, elections and referendum results, and the evolution of European integration. It can also affect cohesion and solidarity between member states and increase tensions and divisions within the European Union.

In chapter III, Studies on interest in politics, partisan attachment and political socialisation, I present the essence of the paper by providing primary and secondary data

information. Thus, *interest in politics*, partisan attachment and political socialisation are essential concepts in political science and sociology, which explore how individuals engage and relate to the political sphere. Interest in politics represents the level of attention and involvement that individuals show towards political issues. Studies show that political interest is influenced by factors such as education, access to information and political discussions in the family and social circle. People with a high political interest are more informed about current events, more involved in political debates and more active in electoral participation. *Partisan attachment* refers to the identification and loyalty towards a certain political party. It influences electoral behaviour, causing individuals to consistently vote for the same party regardless of circumstances. Studies point out that partisan attachment is often formed during adolescence, and it is influenced by the family of origin; however, it can evolve throughout life depending on personal experiences and the socio-political context. *Political socialisation* is the process by which individuals form and develop political attitudes, values, and behaviours. This is a life-long process and is influenced by factors such as family, school, mass-media and peer groups. Studies show that political socialisation plays a crucial role in the development of political interest and party attachment, providing the context and information necessary for political identity formation.

However, *interest in politics*, *party attachment*, and *political socialisation* are interconnected and influence each other. For example, high political interest can intensify partisan attachment and vice versa. Political socialisation, through education and social influences, contributes to the development of both concepts, thus strengthening the individual's political involvement.

Research in the field emphasizes the importance of these concepts for the functioning of democracy. High political interest and clear party attachment contribute to increased electoral participation and better functioning of the democratic system. Adequate political socialisation can also contribute to the formation of informed and active citizens able to participate effectively in their community's political life.

Studies on interest in politics, party attachment, and political socialisation provide valuable insights into how individuals engage in political processes and form their political identities. Understanding these processes is essential to promoting a vibrant and participatory democracy that reflects the will and involvement of citizens.

Chapter 3 presents the empirical results from three studies, namely primary data collected during the doctoral studies and secondary data from the *European Social Survey 2018 (ESS)* database.

3.1. Empirical study with primary data

For the first study, a questionnaire survey was carried out, developed in Romanian and adapted from the questionnaire used in the *European Social Survey* (ESS). The research was focused on the interest of students and their parents in political and social life, as well as the analysis of family-level concordances for political interest, partisan attachment and other manifestations of a political nature. The standardized questionnaire was applied to both students and their parents, who participated voluntarily. Analyses were performed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 software.

The study tested the following **research hypotheses**:

1. *Students are less interested in politics than their parents.*
2. *Students show a less intense partisan attachment than their parents.*
3. *Students find politics to be much more complicated than their parents.*
4. *Parents voted in the 2016 elections in greater numbers than their children.*
5. *Students have a lower level of trust in institutions than their parents.*
6. *The level of trust in public institutions of mothers and fathers is similar.*
7. *Age is a significant predictor for the level of confidence among students and their parents.*
8. *There is agreement regarding interest in politics and party attachment between students and their parents, with a higher level for girls than for boys.*

The study sample included:

- **248 students** from 10 specializations, undergraduate level, from the "1 Decembrie 1918" University in Alba Iulia, average age 24,46 years ($DS = 5,49$)
- **193 mothers of students**, average age 50,5 years ($DS = 7,63$)
- **165 fathers of students**, average age 53,36 years ($DS=7,00$).

Two types of questionnaires were applied. *The students' questionnaire* includes six sections: 1) the time spent in a working day with various activities; 2) students' perceptions regarding the credibility of other people, honesty and the manner of reporting to their own interests; 3) interest in politics, level of trust in different institutions in Romania and the European Union, political involvement in the December 2016 parliamentary elections, forms of civic participation; 4) partisan attachment and "Left" vs. "Right" political opinions; 5) the students' degree of satisfaction regarding the economic and political situation in the country, attitudes towards various aspects in society; 6) sociodemographic data: gender, year of birth,

residence, religion, nationality, marital status, occupational status, number of family members, cumulative net income of the family. The *Parents' questionnaire* was narrower than the one addressed to students, but largely coincided with it.

Results

The empirical data were analysed using descriptive statistics and relative frequencies, as well as bivariate correlation analysis (by determining the Pearson coefficient). The most notable results recorded among **students** include: 39.1% of students who watch TV also watch news or political programs; students reported an average level of general confidence ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 2.41$); 43.5% are somewhat/very interested in politics; they have a low level of trust in national and regional institutions ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.69$); 24.2% felt closer to a certain party; they expressed *Right-wing* political opinions ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 2.19$).

Among **parents**, I found the following results: mothers reported an average level of general trust ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 2.30$), as did fathers ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 2.58$); 46.6% of mothers are interested in politics, compared to 58.7% of fathers; mothers are more confident in public institutions than fathers; fathers (29.7%) are closer to a political party than mothers (23.8%); the parents expressed *Right-wing* political views.

Analysing the concordances between students' and parents' reports on politics, I found that:

- the correlation regarding interest in politics registered a higher value for the tandem boys–fathers ($r = 0.48$; $p < 0.01$) than for boys–mothers ($r = 0.15$; $p < 0.01$);
- the girls–fathers tandem indicated a lower interest in politics ($r = 0.25$; $p < 0.01$);
- the level of correlations regarding actions involving effort, dynamism and appetite for risk is high, especially when the variables of interest involve fathers.

3.2. Empirical study with secondary data ESS (I)

To carry out the study, I used data from the *European Social Survey 2018 (ESS), Round 9 (EES9303_1)*. This round was named "Synchronization of life, justice and fairness" and included (among others) topics related to the following aspects: social behaviour and attitudes; political behaviour and attitudes; political ideology, inequity and social exclusion. Cross-sectional empirical data were collected during 2018–2019 through approximately one-hour individual interviews carried out by specialized operators.

The study was conducted in 29 European countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Switzerland, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland,

Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Great Britain, Montenegro, Norway, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Hungary. The total sample included 49,519 participants, of whom 53.5% were women. According to the demographic data, the participants involved in this round of the EES study were at least 15 years old and lived in private residences in the mentioned countries. The average age of the participants was 50.44 years ($DS=18,77$). The demographic data collected also included the domicile, last level of education completed, status on the labour market and occupation.

Results

I analysed the interest in politics and the functioning of democracy with the help of bivariate correlation analysis (Pearson coefficient). In this sense, the indicators considered were: interest in politics; trust in political parties; voting in the last national elections; contacting politicians or government representatives in recent months; satisfaction with the way democracy works in the state; boycotting some products in the last 12 months. According to the results, I found the following aspects:

- a high level of trust in political parties is associated with an increased interest in politics ($r = -0.27$; $p < 0.01$);
- an increased interest in politics can be associated with the act of voting in the last national elections ($r = 0,22$; $p < 0,01$);
- increasing public disinterest in political life is associated with a lack of initiatives to contact either politicians or government representatives over a year ($r = 0,21$; $p < 0,01$);
- a high level of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy is associated with a high level of trust in political parties ($r = 0,53$; $p < 0,01$);
- the total lack of interest in the political scene is associated with the lack of willingness to boycott certain products in the last 12 months ($r = 0,24$; $p < 0,01$).

3.3. Empirical study with secondary data ESS (II): Interest in politics

To examine **interest in politics**, I used the same set of secondary data, collected through the *European Social Survey 2018 (ESS), Round 9 (EES9303_1)*.

I estimated five models using multiple linear regression, with political interest as the dependent variable. The explanatory variables considered were all those related to how people report to politics. The regression models explained between 28.2% and 35.5% of the variance of interest in politics. Two of the models were estimated on the entire sample and all age

categories, one model included participants aged 15–29 from all participating countries, another model considered participants from Romania regardless of age, and the last model was estimated on the Romanian sample aged 15–29 years.

Main conclusions:

- There are independent variables that influence interest in politics and that do not belong to a general European model, but probably to variables specific to each country;
- Gender, age and education are explanatory variables of interest in politics, but, at least according to ESS2018 data, they do not have such a large impact. In general, the role of the variables related to political socialisation (reporting to the political system, tolerance, trust, information, civic and political activism) seem to be more important in the explanatory models analysed than the "classic" variables;
- Partisan attachment (measured by the variable "how close you are to a political party") explains just part of the variation in interest in politics. The most notable result is that the most important effect of the partisan attachment variable on interest in politics was recorded among young people in Romania;
- Education, as number of completed school years, has no significant effect on interest in politics;
- Trust in the political system coupled with a significant amount of time devoted to political information appear to be the most important factors explaining interest in politics.

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