

Young People and Politics in the UK: Apathy or Alienation?

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Constraints and opportunities for civic and political participation: perceptions of young people from immigrant and non-immigrant background in Portugal

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ABSTRACT. Youth civic and political participation has been a central concern of research and public policy. This situation has been motivated by growing signs of the disaffection of younger generations, at least regarding conventional forms of participation. Recent theoretical debates stress how forms of civic and political participation are evolving; nevertheless it is obviously important to integrate young people's views in the discussion, particularly taking into account groups at risk of exclusion, such as immigrants. This paper intends to contribute to this discussion by considering the meanings that young people attribute to their civic and political experiences, using data collected with focus groups (N=94) that address the factors that facilitate and/or inhibit the participation of young people from immigrant (Brazilian and Angolan) and non-immigrant (Portuguese) backgrounds. Data will be analysed according to three main dimensions: i) participants' sources of knowledge, information and influence; ii) participants' views on civic and political engagement: relevance, resources, personal experiences, trustworthiness and efficacy; and iii) participants' perceptions of excluded groups and proposals to promote inclusion. Results show that the experiences and levels of participation of young people of Brazilian and Angolan origin are influenced by their immigrant background. In addition, they indicate a strong tendency of young people to emphasize constraints over opportunities. They feel like incomplete or in-the-making citizens, and state their claim for rights and opportunities to be heard and to be civic and politically engaged.

KEYWORDS: immigrants; citizenship; politics; civic and political participation

Introduction

Over the last few decades, civic and political participation (henceforth CPP) has become an important topic in the social sciences, with the term *political* generally referring to activities that intent to influence the governance (cf. Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995), and the term *civic* to the voluntary activities focused on helping others, solving a community problem or achieving a public good (cf. Zukin et al. 2006). This stems from the widespread belief that the quality of democracy depends on the active participation of citizens in different realms and contexts (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995, Araújo

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