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Voices of discontent: Student protest participation in Romania

Toma Burean*, Gabriel Badescu

Political Science Department, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj, Romania

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ABSTRACT

In January 2012, in several cities of Romania, people turned out to streets to protest. The protests were linked to the wave of movements such as the Indignados or Occupy Wall Street. The students were especially visible among protesters. In this paper, we show that the profile of protests in Romania witnessed a significant shift from workers strikes for higher wages and better jobs, during communism and in the 1990ies, to social movements in which young urban educated citizens mobilize with the help of social networks for issues that are linked to the quality of democracy and life.

Furthermore, the shift in protesting is associated, at the individual level, with distrust of the political system, which stimulates engaging in demonstrations. Interestingly, online activism accelerates the feeling of shared distrust of institutions, motivating youth to engage in protest participation, although the effects might be moderate and the causal arrow somewhat uncertain. The hypotheses are tested with data from a general survey on participation in 2012 and a student survey from October 2012. We find that gender, distrust in institutions and family income influence protest behavior. Time spent online has a negative effect on protest engagement and online activism is related to protest behavior.

Introduction

On November 7, 2011, six activists occupied a deserted building in the downtown of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, to protest against a large mining project in Western Carpathians by a Toronto listed company, Gabriel Resources. The police removed them by force, issued 2500 lei (600 euro) fines for each and initiated criminal prosecutions. This is only one case of a series of protests taking place in 2011, sharing with the others two characteristics: small number of participants and harsh repression by authorities. Systematic data show that Romanians tended to protest less often than citizens in the neighboring Hungary or countries such as Poland and Czech Republic (Badescu et al., 2004). Yet, starting with January 12, 2012, several thousands of Romanians turned out to streets to protest, as a reaction to the governments' attempts to undergo several changes to the medical system. Raed Arafat, a physician well known for initiating a successful emergency service system and a member of the Government, had resign in protest against plans to increase privatization of health care system. In the evening following his resignation, several hundreds of citizens turned out to protest in Targu Mures, the city where Raed Arafat was coming

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: burean@fspac.ro (T. Burean).

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from. In the following days, thousands of citizens from several other cities, including Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timisoara, Oradea, Constanta and Arad, joined the protests. Increasingly, the protests turned into a manifestation of discontent against politicians and political parties. Senior citizens protested against the reduction and taxation of pensions higher than 250 euro. The associations representing citizens who participated in the 1989 revolution protested against the cuts in benefits operated by the government.

Other protested against president Băsescu's authoritarian character. There were groups that protested against the Gold Corporations (Mercea, 2011) plan to mine for gold in Rosia Montana while others asked for a democratic system without political parties and politicians (Stoica and Mihailescu, 2012). Students, who represented the most influential and vocal group, protested because of the underfinanced system of education and against the Roşia Montană mining project. The protests culminated in the resignation of the entire government on February 6, 2012.

The magnitude of the 2012 protests was significantly smaller than the demonstrations in 1990, the last time when Romanians protested on how democracy should develop, with estimates averaging around 10,000 participants (Stoica and Mihailescu, 2012).

The Internet and Facebook played a significant role in mobilizing the participants of the 2012 protests. There were hundreds of blogs and sites, as well as Facebook events that called people to protest (Stoica and Mihailescu, 2012; Gutu, 2012; Dohotaru, 2012).

What have determined Romanian citizens to turn to protest? What does set these protests apart from the revolts in the 1990s and during communism? In this paper we answer these questions and emphasize the peculiar character of the protests for the post-communist Romania.

The first section aims to clarify the concept of political participation and to review how socio-demographic characteristics and Internet have impacted participation of youth and students in previous studies. We place a special emphasize on the potential effects of Internet, which we assert to be a medium of shared-discontent that creates a favorable environment for protest participation. Next we discuss the methodology and data. Then we focus the analysis on the participatory practices of students, compared to adults from Romania. Finally we explain and discuss protest participation of students analyzing their socio-demographic background, political engagement, values, time spent online and online activism and highlight the peculiarity of protesting in 2011 and 2012.

Protest participation in communist and post-communist Romania

The single party rule of the Romanian Communist Party lasted from 1947 to 1989. During that time there were several instances of protests and movements pointed against the low wages and working conditions, but only rarely against the communist regime. Between 1949 and 1962, peasants revolted against the forced land collectivization implemented by the communist authorities (Kligman and Verdery, 2012). The protests and opposition were crushed, with around 80,000 being jailed (Ciobanu, 2009). The Romanian anti-communist resistance movement was active from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, with isolated individual fighters remaining at large until the early 1960s. The National Council for the Study of the Securitate (CNSAS) estimates that the total number of active resistance fighters was higher than 10,000, with at least 40–50,000 supporting persons (CNSAS, 2003). The social structure of the insurgent groups was heterogeneous, including a large number of peasants, many students and intellectuals as well as several army officers (Deletant, 1998).

Nicolae Ceausescu came to power after the defunct Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in 1968. He initiated a large scale industrialization that created a working class, which by the beginning of 1980s reached 50% of the working population (Ciobanu, 2009). Similarly to Poland and Hungary, in Romania most of dissent and protest participation was initiated by workers and intellectuals (Angi, 2011; Keil and Keil, 2002; Laba, 1991). In Poland, the trade unions organized into a large network and managed to be taken into account by the communist leadership and negotiate improvements of working conditions. They also collaborated with dissident intellectuals (Angi, 2011; Laba, 1991) especially at the end of the 1970s. In Hungary, the revolution of 1956, led to the creation of a post-Stalinist system, that was legitimized by a compromise between communist control over the politics and a less regulated economy with some degree of censorship over artists and writers, or as Haraszti (1988) called it "The Velvet Prison".

In Romania, none of the manifestations of dissent matched the large scale protesting in Poland during Solidarity or Hungary during the 1956 revolution. Notably, there were some instances of individual dissent that received international support. Vasile Paraschiv, a worker from Braşov and a member of the communist party, wrote a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party, in which he identified eleven problems addressing the organization of trade unions and the working conditions of the workers. As a result, Paraschiv was arrested and then confined to a psychiatric hospital. Paul Goma and Doina Cornea also wrote open letters in which, the former expressed support for the Charter 77 and the latter criticized the regime of Nicolae Ceausescu.

Compared to other countries in Eastern Europe, in Romania during communism there were very few instances of large scale public protests (Siani-Davies, 2005). The spontaneous revolt of the miners in Jiu Valley, in 1977, was an outcome of the worsening working conditions (Cesereanu, 2004; Kideckel, 2008). Ceausescu had to meet with the protesters and promised them to fulfill everything the miners requested. However, shortly after he left the Jiu Valley area was isolated and the leaders of protesters were jailed and an intense indoctrination process started to prevent protest outbursts (Kideckel, 2008). Worsening poverty sparked the second mass revolt in 1987. Food, electricity, hot water shortages and low wages led workers from the Truck Factory "Steagul Roşu" (Red Flag) from Braşov to organize and protest (Keil and Keil, 2002). About 400 workers

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marched through the city and attacked the city hall and the headquarters of the communist party (Angi, 2011). The repressions were extremely harsh, most of the protesters being fired, and many of them jailed and tortured.

The protests in communist Romania can be explained by relative deprivation and availability of resources for mobilization (Ciobanu, 2009). Their grievances referred to the improvement of living and working conditions, wages and pensions. The weak labor union organization and networking explained why the miners' protests from 1977 and the protests of the Steagul Roşu workers in 1987 did not succeed to a similar extent as Solidarity movement (Ciobanu, 2009).

The 1989 revolution represented the most important large scale protests in the 20th century Romania (Ghaleb, 2011). The protests were initiated at a moment when in the neighboring communist countries, protests and regime changes were occurring. The clumsy and brutal attempts of the authorities to end the protest started in Timisoara on December 16, 1989, led to many citizens being injured and shot (Deletant, 1998). The majority of the participants were young, most of them born after a 1967 decree that banned abortion, and were supposed to represent, according to the communist party propaganda, a new type of human being.

The Romanian revolution has achieved its success due to mass media, since the televised events accounted for the swift mobilization of people in several cities (Siani-Davies, 2005). Another factor is that the participants realized, following the 1987 protests, that without concerted action the chances to succeed are limited (Keil and Keil, 2002). It is true that the spontaneous nature of the revolution was doubted, although the detailed account of Siani-Davies seems to disprove the terrorist plots or coup d'état (Siani-Davies, 2005). Most authors agree that the main determinant factors for the revolt were the tough austerity measures imposed by the regime in the 1980s, following the unfortunate borrowing of funds at highly fluctuating interest rates at the end of the 1970s (Ban, 2012), and the favorable international environment that allowed for Eastern European regimes to democratize, following Gorbachev's liberalizing policies (Ciobanu, 2009; Ban, 2012).

The period immediately after 1989 abounded with workers protests for saving their jobs, higher wages and improved working conditions. During early 1990s, there were several strikes among transport workers, wood processing laborers, professors, pharmacists, naval workers and miners. The 1990s protests brought to the spotlight the student community as well. Students were especially prominent during the protests against FSN (National Salvation Front) a temporary umbrella organization that decided to participate in the first founding elections despite promises of dissolution just before elections. The authorities organized a counter protest with workers from different factories in Bucharest and, a week later, over 5000 miners from Jiu Valley, mobilized and supported by authorities traveled to Bucharest and engaged in a civil conflict with anti-governmental protesters and destroyed the headquarters of opposition parties. The students were called hooligans (golani) by the interim president Ion Iliescu, who publicly thanked miners for overcoming the demonstrators. Miners returned to Bucharest in June 1990 and, in 1991, to protest against the closing down of mines and to ask for improved working conditions. In 1992, the radio and TV workers, the medical personnel and the staff of an important state owned printing house went on strike, and miners protested again, all asking for better wages and working conditions. In 1993, the workers organized a massive protest, causing massive disruptions to the rail traffic. The inability of former communist Party of Social Democracy and president Iliescu to handle major economic reforms led to an alternation of power.

The liberal right wing Democratic Convention coalition initiated a liberal reform of the economy that included closing down of mines and factories. As a result, the workers from the oil refineries in Ploiesti went on strike, whereas the miners from Jiu Valley blocked themselves in the mines. In 1999 miners intended to come again to Bucharest, but the government managed to negotiate a deal that would stop the closing down of mines. On February 1999, about 2500 miners from Jiu Valley started another march to the capital city, but were stopped at Stoneşti by a large police force, after violent confrontations. Several miners were jailed together with their leader Miron Cozma, who was sentenced to 18 years of prison. In 1999, there was another strike of the railroad workers and a student protest for better living conditions in dorms. In Braşov and in Neamţ workers protested and demanded an increase of wages signaling that the liberal reform of the Victor Ciorbea, Radu Vasile and later Mugur Isarescu governments was far from being successful (Keil and Keil, 2002).

Most of the protests from 1990 to 1999 shared two important characteristics. The first is that most of the protesters were part of the working class, which was severely affected by the costs of transition to a market economy. Secondly, protesters demanded higher wages and better protection for their jobs. From 1999 to 2012 there were no other large scale protests against the government in Romania. The 2012 protests were different from the ones during 1990s, by having much higher diversity of participants and grievances. Some protesters demanded a cleaner environment, other requested more democracy and yet others targeted narrower topics such as animal protection, lowering of the price of petrol or taxing pensions. Another new characteristic regards the mobilization process, which relied on social networking sites and blogs. Thus, the small scale protests of 2011 and the larger protests in 2012 represent a shift on the type of protesting in Romania from a classical protest with materialist clear objectives to a protest in which different groups from society compete to make their voices heard.

The protests of 2012 followed the extremely harsh economic austerity measures implemented by the Boc government. In 2011, wages in the public sector were decreased by 25%, and the VAT tax increased from 19% to 24%, raising suspicions that the IMF was experimenting with this country on the limits of austerity measures (Ban, 2011). The 2012 demonstrations represented also the culmination of a one year series of small scale protests on very diverse issues. Thus, a 30% increase of the gasoline price in December 2010 resulted in several hundred citizens boycotting for about a month the gas stations by buying 1 L of gas with small coins. Then, retired military personnel protested against pensions cuts.

They were followed by a strike of about 10,000 labor union members at Dacia car company and other union members against a new labor law, accusing authorities for serving the International Monetary Fund's interests. About 100 people protested against the demolition of a historical market place in Bucharest in February 2011. One month later, 300 students

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from Cluj marched for democratization of the decision making system within public universities. In April, a few hundred people protested in small towns against the closing down of hospitals. In June 2011, police officers protested against wage cuts and the "Democratie Reala Acum" (Real Democracy Now) group consisting of several dozen students and activists organized protests in Cluj as a sign of solidarity with the Occupy Now movements. In July, August and September there were protests of a handful of activists against the lobby of Gold Corporation Company that plans to open gold mines in Rosia Montana. In November, about 600 teachers in Turnu Magurele refused to enter schools because they did not receive their wages. In the same month students from the Faculty of History occupied the classrooms and refused to leave, protesting against the decision of authorities not to include the students' rights act as part of the law on education. On November 7, a few activists occupied the Continental Hotel, a deserted building in Cluj, as a protest against the Gold Corporation. In Sibiu people with disabilities protested against the evaluations they have to go through in order to receive state assistance.

Although the number of protests in 2011 was high the overall number of participants was very low in comparison with protest in other European countries or in the United States. The 2012 protests had the diversity of topics found in the previous year but a significantly higher number of participants.

Political participation. Conceptual clarifications

Protest engagement is one form of political participation. Verba et al. (1995) define political participation as the "… activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action - either directly by affecting the making of or the implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those selections"(p. 38). Forms of political participation include conventional forms such as voting, being involved in a political party and contacting a politician and unconventional participation such as protest or participation in marches. Stoker (2006) classifies types of political participation according to its relation to the state. Institutional or "traditional" (Teocharis, 2011) refers to conventional participation and extra institutional to participation that does not involve state institutions directly. Several authors consider that since unconventional participation has become a mainstream activity the term is largely outdated (Norris, 2002). However, for the Romanian context the political participation outside institutional frameworks is rare and practiced by few (Badescu et al., 2004).

Political participation is influenced by socio-economic status and education (Almond and Verba, 1963; Verba et al., 1995). Among socio demographic variables education was considered as particularly closely linked to political participation (Converse, 1972, p. 315 and Putnam, 2000 p. 168). Although these studies linked political participation to education at the individual level, at the aggregate level the relationship between education and political participation becomes negative or inexistent (Campbell, 2006). More recent studies found that to a large extent education mediates the effects of parents' socioeconomic status and family political discussions influence political participation (Berinsky and Lenz, 2011; Kam and Palmer, 2011; Persson, 2012).

Several studies found that gender matters for explaining protest engagement (Jost et al., 2012). In several studies, men are more likely to engage in protest (Gurr, 1970; Hustinx et al., 2012). However, in other studies there is no significant difference between men and women in terms of protest participation (Teocharis, 2011) or distrust (Carlin, 2011). Matzal (2013) found evidence that in Romania women are predominantly taking up activist roles in their community.

The linkage between political attitudes and political participation was surveyed from the early research of Almond and Verba (1963). Trust and ideological orientation were considered predictors of political participation (Machado et al., 2011; Putnam, 1993, 2000). Political trust was found to have a negative effect on political participation (Quintelier and Hooghe, 2012). On the other hand generalized trust is a resource for certain forms of political participation such as protest engagement (Machado et al., 2011). Ideological orientation is linked with political participation. In Western European countries leftism is associated with engagement in unconventional political participation or radicalism (Forland et al., 2010; Porta, 2003) although the association of leftism with activism is less clear (Duch and Strom, 2004). There are several studies that link age to political participation (Beck and Jennings, 1979; Melo and Stockemer, 2012; Nie et al., 1974). Initial research revealed a positive effect of age on political participation, with the notable exception of post-war Germany (Almond et al., 2008).

Apathy, disillusionment towards politics and lack of political participation were found to characterize youth behavior and attitudes towards polity in several research. Hooghe (2004) explains that youth is not involved because they do not perceive that they have a stake in politics, whereas others claim that social capital decline among youth lead to a decline of participation (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Putnam, 2000). Some see apathy and alienation as reasons for youth lack of political participation (Henn et al., 2005; O'Neill, 2003; O'Toole, 2003). Gauthier (2003) views the analysis of political orientation of young citizens as a litmus test of how democracy will look like in the future. With an apathetic and uninterested youth democracy is more prone to suffer in the future from problems of legitimacy and lack of people's involvement in the decision making.

Several authors assert that standard tools for measuring political participation are not appropriate when studying youth (Bennett, 2012; Deth Van, 1986; Kalaycioglu and Turan, 1981; Keeter et al., 2002; Verba and Kim, 1978; Gaiser et al., 2010; Harris et al., 2010). These tools accentuate formal types of participation and rely less on the gamut of forms political participation embodies. Recent research targeting youth political participation focused on alternative means of participating with encouraging results.

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Gaiser et al. (2010) discovered that youth manifest politically in various ways, and their level of participation depends on gender, education and location. Riley et al. (2010) attributed political meanings to informal activities such as club partying. Stolle et al., (2005) built a "consumerism index" in order to highlight the boycotting and "buy-cotting" as phenomena that belong to political participation. Quintelier and Hooghe (2012) emphasized the socialization effect of collective political participation of youth.

The importance of youth participation in the Eastern European democracies is tantamount to democratization (Russell, 2005). Research records low voting participation levels of youth (Fieldhouse et al., 2007; Rotariu and Comsa, 2004). Even less involved are youth in informal forms of participation such as protesting or being member in interest groups (Ekiert and Kubik, 1998; Vanhuysse, 2004). Youth in Eastern Europe are less active than youth in Western Europe (Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998; Roberts, 2003). This lack of involvement in the East was explained by socialization in a culture of limited involvement in the social life (Robertson, 2009).

The 2012 protests in Romania had higher amplitude and different socio-demographic structure then protests in the last decade. Therefore the 2012 events are important for the shift of type of protesting in Romania, a shift at the generational level, and for the salient role played by the internet mobilization.

Internet and youth political participation

"In this regard internet changes nothing" (p.780) asserted Margolis (2007) referring to the internet as an inefficient tool for making citizens pay attention to politics. Following his line of reasoning, Internet does not bring changes in the way we explain political behavior of citizens. When the Internet became a widely used medium of communication, political scientists saw it as a catalyst for improvement of the quality of democratic systems. Cyber-optimists argued that this medium improves access to political information, enhances citizens' say in who decides, what is decided and allows people to react and discuss the effects of political decision making (Weber and Bergman, 2003). But, the research on the potential of Internet to change democracy was suspected of technological determinism. Cyber-pessimists argued that Internet would not bring changes to the way we perceive political participation since the frequency of the political uses of the net is low (Margolis, 2007). Secondly, mainstream mass media and market took over the Internet as it was the case with television. Thirdly, the Internet created a digital divide within countries, where the more affluent, males and young have more say in online politics (Margolis, 2007). It is no surprise then that most studies on the effect of internet on political participation focused on youth. Our study focuses on students online activities effects on offline protest participation. We assert that the digital divide in Romania between students and other citizens is substantial.

Studies on social networking (Enjolras et al., 2012), and research on the various political uses of Internet revealed that online activities have positive effects on offline political participation (Bennett, 2012; Quintelier and Vissers, 2008; Teocharis, 2011).

Quintelier and Vissers (2008) distinguished between the quantity of time spent on internet from the quality of the activities performed online and found that certain online activities had repercussions on offline political participation. Most studies found evidence that time spent on internet has a negative effect on political participation because it reduces the time spent for engaging in off line civic activities.

Quintelier and Vissers (2008) showed that online petitioning has a positive effect on unconventional political participation, whereas Bakker and Vreese de (2011) found positive effects of online usage of media and online participation on off line political participation.

Therefore, we expect that time spent on the internet have a negative effect on protest political participation, and that there is a positive relationship between online activism and protest participation in the case of the Romanian youth.

The next section will discuss the intermingling of protest participation and online activism.

Protest political participation

Why do citizens engage in political protests? There are several explanatory models of protest political participation. Status inconsistency motivates protest by differences of social status between groups in society. According to this theory those who perceive status inequalities are most likely to engage in protest. Cumulative deprivation theory posits that economically deprived social groups will engage in protest participation, yet socioeconomically disadvantaged groups are more likely to be withdrawn rather than politically active. Social isolation theory posits that people who are isolated or marginalized by society are most likely to engage in protests (Orum, 1974). Orum (1974) identifies individual motivation, trust and a sense of political efficacy as determinants of protest participation. Others identify weak institutions as a determinant of engagement in alternative modes of participation that include protesting (Machado et al., 2011).

Relative deprivation theory argues that perceived imbalances between groups generate social upheavals (Gurr, 1970). Gurr (1970) explains that engaging in rebellious acts is associated with a higher level of "potential for collective violence". This potential is an effect of the level of "shared discontent" and frustration among citizens. The "potential for political violence" is influenced by the level of shared discontent towards the political system (Gurr, 1970, p.8). The Internet represents the medium in which the process of discontent sharing spreads rapidly. Those exposed to this sharing-discontent-environment will be a public that accumulates a high potential for collective rebellious acts. Within this theoretical framework we assert that

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the internet is capable for activating young citizens, by sharing discontent. Our contribution to the theory explaining citizen rebellion is that we show that the Internet is a favorable medium for communicating discontent.

In periods of severe economic crisis, citizens are more likely to engage in protest participation (Corrigall-Brown, 2012). The protests in Greece (Teocharis, 2011) in Spain (Charnock et al., 2012) or Lithuania (Woolfson, 2010) were triggered by the political and economic context. In Lithuania protests were considered an outcome of disappointment generated by failures of market oriented economic policies (Woolfson, 2010). In Spain and Greece unemployment and politicians' poor performance led to outbursts (Charnock et al., 2012; Teocharis, 2011). These conditions create an environment of distrust in politicians and political institutions (Carlin, 2011). That is why we expect that our data show a negative relationship between trust and protest political participation.

Many of the protests are triggered by organizations that have the potential to create social movements (Corrigall-Brown, 2012; Felix et al., 2008; Mercea, 2011). Thus we expect to find a positive effect of membership in organizations and protest participation.

Occupy Now, Indignados and Aganaktismenoi were social movements that relied on the Internet as a medium for information and mobilization (Biddix and Park, 2008; Earl and Kimport, 2011; Mercea, 2011; Pickerill, 2004; Teocharis, 2011). Earl and Kimport (2011) discern between various degrees of online activism: e-mobilization, e-tactics and e-movement. E-mobilization refers to those online tools that encourage citizens to aggregate opinion, e-tactics employ a mixture of offline and online methods, while e-movement refers to protests that are taking place entirely online. Our research focuses on the second category of internet activism. Mercea (2011) differentiates between types of protest participation and types of activists. High risk protest requires affiliated activists to use online mobilization while low risk protests are associated with unaffiliated activist' usage of Internet.

We aim to investigate the entwinement of protest participation and online participation. We will evaluate the following hypotheses:

H1. Participation in unconventional political acts, other than protest, has a positive effect on protest participation.
H2. Institutional trust has a negative effect on protest participation.
H3. Time spent on internet has a negative effect on protest participation.
H4. Online activism has a positive effect on protest participation.

[Benson and Rochon (2004) found a positive connection between post-materialism, interpersonal trust and protest participation, while Heunks (1996) found a positive relationship between post-materialist values, protest engagement, leftism and youth. Finally Teocharis (2011) linked post-materialist values to non-institutional participation, protest engagement and online activism. Several other studies confirmed the existence of a positive correspondence between youth post materialist attitudes and protest participation (Cantijoch and Martin, 2009; Kim, 2007; Opp, 1990; Roberts, 2006). However, most of these studies were conducted in countries with higher level of postmaterialism than the ex-communist countries. In the case of Romania, one of the countries with few postmaterialists, Uslaner (2004) found a negative effect of political tolerance on protest participation.]

We evaluate these hypotheses on data of a 2012 representative survey of the Romanian adult population and on a 2012 survey on the Romanian university students.

Methodology

Case selection

Since the change of political regime in December 1989, Romania went through major institutional changes. The transition period was marked by few economic and political reforms. The crisis oriented democratization or what Paul Sum and King (2011) called triage democratization did not yield positive results until 2007 when Romania joined the European Union. The transition period was associated with the development of a weak civil society (Badescu et al., 2004). The legacies of communist oppression and lack of opposition against the previous regime has effects on the development of participatory democracy (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2013). Previous studies showed that political participation in Romania is low and citizens engage in protests because conventional participation is not trusted to be efficient (Uslaner, 2004).

In Romania the internet penetration rate increased from 3% in 2000 to 50% at the end of 2013 (Internet World Stats, 2014). Among the internet users the youth (18–24) represent 38% and students are 22% of users. Other users are overwhelmingly employees with university graduation (New Media Trend Watch, 2012). These categories are often underrepresented in national surveys in Romania.

The data

In this research we survey the interplay between conventional, unconventional and protest participation of students and the quantity and quality of Internet use. For comparative purposes we make use of a nationally representative survey in Romania. Initially we compare the data from the national survey with the results obtained from a student survey in order to show the digital divide between students and the other categories of citizens. The national survey data had probabilistic sampling. The questions tapping on political participation included the questions found in the 2011 WVS (World Values

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Survey, 2012) and are part of a larger battery of questions specifically designed for the Romanian context. The nationally representative survey has 1102 respondents. 77 respondents were students who were excluded from the sample. The questionnaires for the national survey were applied in October 2012. They contain batteries of questions that target directly the protest activities of citizens in January 2012. Only 38 respondents declared that they participated in protests in January 2012. This made the analysis of protest participation in January 2012, on a nationally representative sample, difficult.

In order to test our hypotheses we used the data from a 2012 student survey. This is a category of citizens who uses internet heavily, it is concentrated in the cities where the majority of protests took place increasing the likelihood of political activism. The downside is that this data will be biased toward a category of citizens that are educated, tend to come from families that are better off, and to be more often urban and politically active than the general population (Weber and Bergman, 2003). The survey targeted students from six university centers from Romania: University of Bucharest, Aurel Vlaicu University from Arad, University of Oradea, Petru Maior University from Targu-Mures, Ovidius University from Constanta, Babes-Bolyai University and Technical University from Cluj-Napoca. The survey was applied in classes in November 2012 and it contains 1407 respondents.

The measurement of political participation and online activism

In this paper we look at protest political participation, conventional and unconventional participation, Internet use and online activism. The construction of the questionnaire used the participation indicators from WVS 2011 and added a few questions. Thus, conventional political participation consists of a battery of three questions that measure reported participation in local elections, involvement in activities of a political party and contacting a member of parliament. Unconventional political participation is a variable that merged eight questions that refer to contacting an NGO or another organization, wearing a badge, signed a petition, boycott products or events, "buycott" products due to environmental or political reasons, donated money, contacted a newspaper or TV station and participated in a political gathering. Protest participation consists of the combination of two questions on participation in spontaneous protest acts and abstain from elections or referendum as a sign of protest.

Unlike in other research on participation we decided to include declared non-participation in elections as a sign of protest participation. Protesting by abstaining is a form of political participation acknowledged in research on vote and turnout (Kang, 2004; Johnston and Pattie, 1997). Membership in organizations was measured by combining nine questions covering the following types of organizations: sports clubs, religious associations, environmental associations, animal rights group, cultural associations, student organizations, political parties and other associations or organizations. Institutional trust was computed from students' level of trust in the following institutions: city hall, government, political parties, parliament, justice system, police, European Union and church. Online activism was measured by computing posting social and political issues on Facebook (a variable that needed recoding), whether the respondents used the Internet and social networks for any of the forms of political participation mentioned above.

Results

Political participation

The student survey includes many of the forms that political participation embodies. A categorization was created following the conventional and unconventional classification. Protest participation which belongs to the unconventional participation includes two categories of behaviors: individual (the refusal to participate in voting or referendum) and based on cooperation, such as engaging in spontaneous protests.

Fig. 2 reveals a discrepancy between student offline activism and other citizens' political involvement. Students are more active in unconventional forms of political participation. A quarter of the student population was involved in protests and the same percentage refused to vote as a sign of protest and participated in political meetings. 29% signed petitions and almost half donated money for a cause.

More students contacted a member of parliament and more students are engaged in a political party. Somewhat fewer students than other citizens declared that they participated in the local elections. These results confirm that students are a politically and socially engaged group.

Romanian students are less active than youth from Greece. According to Teocharis (2011), 56% of youth signed petitions, 73% participated in boycotts and 15% participated in illegal protests. 82% of youth participated in local elections, 4% contacted a politician and 18% did voluntary party work. These levels are similar to Romanian students' conventional engagement. Hustinx et al. (2012) report higher levels of political participation of students from Flanders and one university from Netherlands: 4% participated in illegal and 24% in legal demonstrations, 68% signed a petition, 61% did boycotting, 12% contacted a politician and 5% were active in a political party. With the exception of voting, political party activism and contacting members of parliament are participatory acts that are rarely used by students from Romania in a similar fashion with students from Netherlands, Belgium or youth from Greece. Students from Romania are more active than other citizens in Romania but engage in fewer participatory acts than youth from other countries.

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Engagement in conventional political participation is correlated with unconventional participation, protest participation and membership in organizations. We find positive correlation with institutional trust. Female students are more involved in conventional participation than males. We find positive correlation with online activism.

Unconventional participation correlates with protest and with membership in organization and with education of the mother there is a weak positive relationship.

Protest participation correlates with the other forms of participation. We found no correlation with institutional trust and a negative one with income. Online activism has a positive effect on engagement in political protest (Table 1).

Internet use and online activism

The purpose of this research is to explain protest participation and link it to online activism, other forms of participation adding socio-demographic determinants and political attitudes as controls.

In 2012, in the European Union, 84% of youth ages 16–24 used Internet daily. 58% of citizens with age over 55 have never used Internet (European Commission, 2012 p.9). 53% of all citizens in the EU use the internet at least once a day. In Romania 35% of citizens use the internet daily, the lowest percentage in Europe with the exception of Portugal and equal with neighboring Bulgaria (European Commission, 2012, p.8).

Fig. 1 contrasts Internet use of students with other citizens. The data shows that the digital divide between students and other citizens is large. Almost all students in Romania use internet daily (87%). Female students (64%) use more frequently the Internet than male students. For other categories of citizens daily internet use is reserved to a few (23%). Compared to other citizens an overwhelming majority of students have Facebook accounts and use them daily (Fig. 1). The other citizens' daily use of social networks (11%), Internet (9%) or social networks for political participation is limited (6%). Student use of internet (42%) and social networking sites (31%) for political participation is more extensive. This data confirms that in Romania the Internet usage for social or political purposes is predominantly the repertoire of students.

Table 1 reveals that the time spent on Internet is not correlated to protest participation. There is a weak but significant negative correlation (−.104) between the time spent on internet and number of organizations that a student is involved in. This indicates support for the time replacement hypothesis (Quintelier and Vissers, 2008) that states that there is a negative correlation between time on internet and political participation.

Online activism was computed from two variables: internet political participation that is measured by asking students whether they have used the internet for any of the reported political participation practices and the frequency of posting social and political texts or topics on Facebook. The importance of activism on the net is disputed. Several see activism online as a complementary form of political participation used by young citizens. Others (Morozov, 2009) would argue that email alerts or signing petitions are part of a phenomenon labeled slacktivism defined as a set of "actions performed via the Internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement, for example, signing an online petition or joining a campaign group on a social networking website" (Oxforddictionaires.com, 2013). In this study we cannot discern the potentially slacktivist activities from the online activist activities although having in mind previous research we suspect that slacktivist activities such as signing petitions or liking a political message seem be associated with offline activism. We consider internet as a catalyst for protesting. It is an environment for those who are politically engaged online to be exposed and share discontent with their fellow citizens increasing the potential for engagement in collective rebellion acts.

Online activism does not correlate with education and income of parents and with gender. It correlates with all the other variables. We find positive and significant associations with unconventional participation (.544), protest participation (.274), conventional participation (.244), organizational membership (.223), institutional trust (.116) and ideological orientation (.177). The students who are active online are also engaged in unconventional, conventional and protest participation, are

Table 1
Spearman r correlation.

	Online activism	Unconventional participation	Protest participation	Conventional participation	Membership in organization	Institutional trust	Gender	Family income	Mother education	Father education	Internet
Online activism	–	.544**	.275**	.244**	.223**	.116**	−.009	−.005	.014	.033	.045
Unconventional participation	.544**	–	.332**	.390**	.362**	.092**	−.013	.012	.059*	.035	−.005
Protest participation	.275**	.332**	–	.089**	.172**	-.040	−.106**	−111**	−.010	.000	.055
Conventional participation	.244**	.390**	.089**	–	.269**	.120**	−.069*	.026	.039	.036	−.027
Membership in organization	.223**	.363**	.172**	.269**	–	.059*	−.087*	.007	.067*	.086*	−.104**
Institutional trust	.116**	.092**	−.040	.120**	.059*	–	.098**	.089**	.017	.018	−.014
Left-right self-placement	.177**	.055	.068*	.036	.072*	.002	−.054	−.011	.041	.007	−.034

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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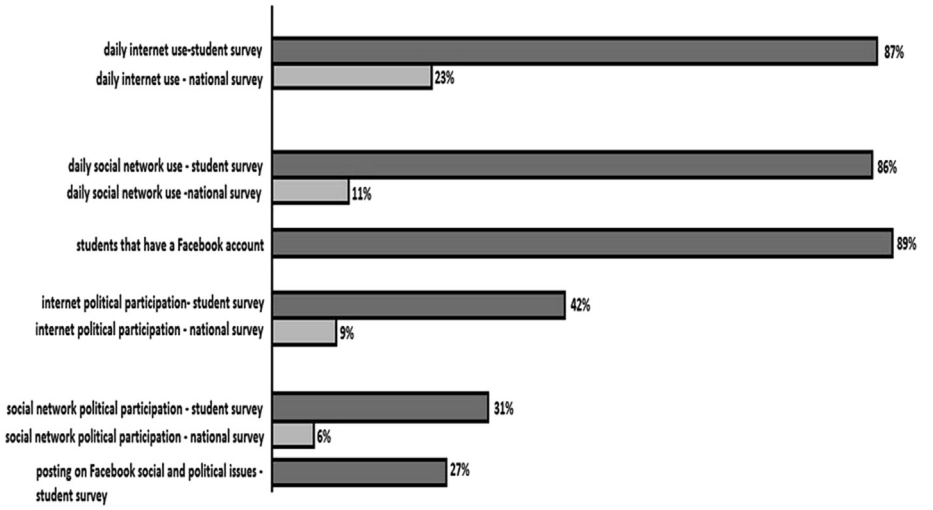

Fig. 1. Student and other categories of citizens' internet use in Romania 2012.

members in organizations, trust institutions and have a rightist ideological orientation. We suspected that online activism and unconventional participation would be collinear. The multivariate regression collinearity diagnosis revealed that the variance inflation factor (VIF) did not exceed 1.7 for all the variables included in the multivariate models from Table 2 (discussed later).

Explaining political protest

The previous sections showed that Romanian students report more participatory acts than other citizens. This is not a surprise since students come mainly from urban areas. They live in cities that have a vibrant associational life compared to other cities that are not university centers. This section included the variables that explain engaging in political protests.

We computed four explanatory categories. First there are socio demographics that include attributes of the parents (education and income) and students 'gender. Family attributes are considered as background variables that influence political and social engagement. The studies that criticize the impact of education on participation argue that it is a family with

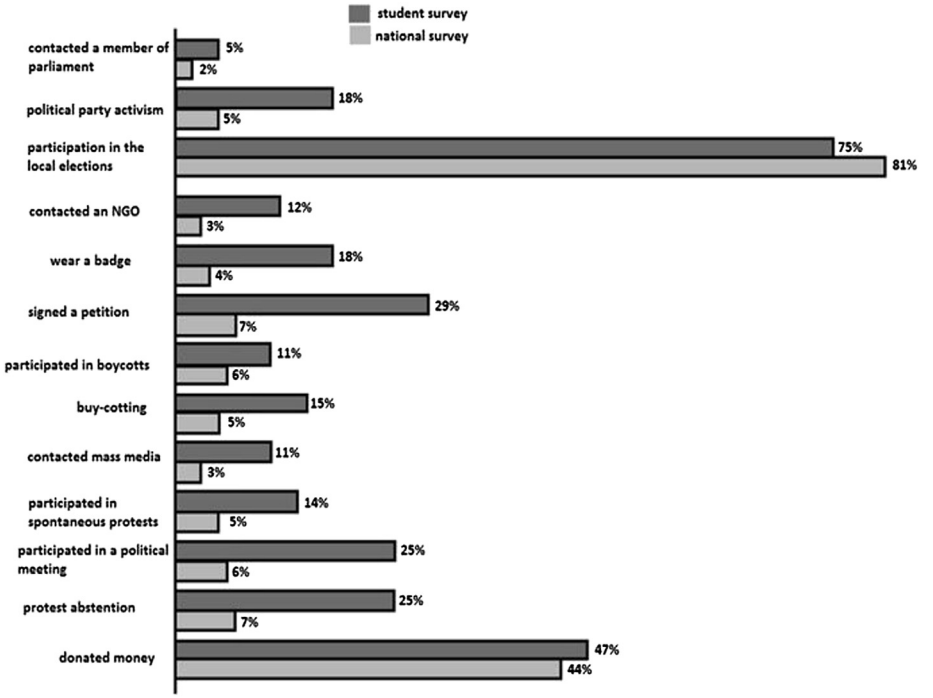

Fig. 2. Political participation of students and the other categories of citizens in Romania 2012.

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Table 2
Multivariate models that explain protest engagement.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	β(.sig)	β(.sig)	β(.sig)
Socio–demographics			
Gender	−.101**(.001)	−.101**(.002)	−.071*(.036)
Mother Education	−.014 (.704)	−.013 (734)	.000 (.993)
Father Education	−.002 (.967)	.020 (.604)	.019 (.646)
Income	−.112**(000)	−.109**(.001)	−.110**(.001)
Participation			
Conventional		−.052 (.131)	−.027 (.458)
Unconventional (Excluding protest)		.287**(.000)	.300**(.000)
Membership in organization		.044 (.203)	.017 (.633)
Political attitudes			
Institutional Trust			−.098** (.004)
Left-right self-placement			.001 (.975)
Internet use			
Time spent on Internet	−.084**(.004)	−.076*(.016)	−.095**(.004)
Online activism	.275**(.000)	.097*(.011)	−.097*(.015)

**sig < .01; $R^2 = .108$; $R^2 = .158$; $R^2 = 165$.
*sig < .05; $F = 20{,}908$; $F = 17{,}857$; $F = 14{,}093$.
Dependent variable: protest participation (engage in spontaneous protest + protest abstention).

social and political engagement background that favors access to education and learning participatory practices. The second category refers to off line political participation individual and collective, conventional and unconventional, including membership in organization. These variables impact political protest although we are aware that some forms of unconventional political participation might be consequences and not determinants of political protest.

The third category refers to the political attitudes that are considered related to trust. Low levels of institutional trust could be associated with higher engagement in political protests. Leftism is associated with political protest engagement in several countries from Europe. The fourth category is Internet use that assesses the impact of the time spent on Internet and activism online. The expectation is that time on Internet would have a negative effect on protest participation and activism would have a positive effect.

Table 2 presents three regression models. The first model contains socio-demographics of parents and students' gender, the second adds political participation variables and the third adds political attitudes. The dependent variable is protest participation computed from two variables: reported engagement in spontaneous protest and refusal to turn out to vote as a form of protest.

Socialization studies claim that the family has an important role in shaping youth political preferences. We find that students who protest come from families with lower income. This finding provides supports for the socialization thesis and for the status inconsistency theory (Orum, 1974) and is contrary to the postulates of the post materialist thesis that claims that the affluent and better off would be more likely to be engaged in participatory acts. We discovered no effect of education of parents and protest engagement and a significant effect of gender. Female students are more likely to engage in social protest than males, disconfirming findings that showed no relationship between gender and protest. Thus we refute the first hypothesis. Unconventional participation has a positive effect on protest participation. It is the variable with the strongest effect. Membership in associations or voting do not influence protest engagement. The second hypothesis is not refuted. We found no effect of left-right self-placement and protest participation. On the other hand, students who distrust institutions are more likely to engage in protest participation. Thus we find support for our third hypothesis.

Unlike the findings on Quintelier and Vissers (2008 p.9) we find that the time replacement hypothesis is valid. Moreover we find that online activism has a positive effect on protest participation. Therefore we find that the mobilization theory that views internet as a catalyst for participation is valid as well. This is a surprising finding since the two theories seem to be inconsistent (Quintelier and Vissers, 2008, p.4). It seems that those who engage in protest participation stay less time on the Internet and are more active online. Thus there seems to be an inverse relationship between the amount of time on internet and the use of internet for political participation. We find support for H4 and H5. Time spent on internet and online activism were part of all three models that explain political protest and reported statistically significant effects. The same can be said about gender and income. The next section will discuss the implications and limits of our findings and suggest topics for future research on political protest participation.

Discussion

The survey of political protest participation in Romania revealed a different profile of protests. As several scholars of transition have pointed out, protests in Romania were mostly work related and could be explained through the classical deprivation theory, although there are studies that show that resource mobilization is an adequate framework as well

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(Ciobanu, 2009). During the communist regime, protests were merged with workers' demands for better working conditions and wages. Protests spurred as a result of the austerity measures imposed towards the end of the 1970s. December 1989 was an inevitable, yet unpredictable outcome of one decade of economic repression imposed by Ceausescu's idea to repay Romania's enormous debts. Later on, after the regime changed, the protests were linked to the large social costs of the transition and privatization of the economy. After the last large scale protest in 1999 and 2000 the protests profile in Romania changed dramatically, testifying to the changes at the society's level. The recent events were viewed as an outcome of the harsh austerity measures implemented by the center-right Boc government that benefited from the support of the incumbent president Basescu. Unlike in the 1990s, the socio-demographic profile, the mobilization tactics and the demands of protesters have become diverse. Students and younger people were more present. Their demands targeted as varied issues as the resigning of the president, protection for the stray dogs, the support of anti-fracking measures, or protests against ACTA.

Several of the protests from this decade and the previous one, that linked Internet to the societal changes from below and expression of dissent, indicated, that such a link is important and has profound effects on the mobilization of protesters. Romanian protesters, and among them especially students, were very active online and made use of mobilization tactics online. This is what we found out when we surveyed protest participation at the individual level. We focused on students, one of the most visible social categories, during the 2011 and 2012 manifestations. Compared to other adults, students from Romania are heavy users of Internet and of social networks such as Facebook. It is this segment of the society that is most likely to use Internet for online and offline political participation. We found that students engaged in more unconventional participatory behaviors than other categories of citizens but less than Greek, Dutch or students from Belgium. They signed more petitions, engaged in protests, wore badges and donated money for a cause than other adults. Our data has shown that females and students that have families with low income are more likely to display protests engagement. There is some evidence for cumulative deprivation theory (Orum, 1974) that states that the deprived segments of the society are more likely to engage in political protests. This finding contradicted other research that claims that the origin of protests in Europe and the US stems from the rise of post materialist values within society. We show that in Romania this is not necessarily so, although we believe that a more accurate measurement of income is necessary to prove that lower income has an effect on protest engagement. The measure we had in the survey was asking students to evaluate their family's level of income and not the students' level of income.

With our data we were able to show that institutional trust had a negative effect on political protest engagement. We found no relationship between membership in organizations and protest confirming that the protests were not hierarchically organized. Heavy Internet use, however, had a negative influence on protest behavior, confirming the time replacement hypothesis. The type of activities students are engaged online has different outcomes. More students, that were civically active online, reported participation in protests than those that were not. With the help of social networks, protesters discovered that they were not alone. This effect of Internet is explained by theory that claims that collective rebellion or protest participation is more likely to occur in mediums of shared discontent.

Our contribution to the theories that explain why citizens engage in protests is that the online medium, as a platform for sharing discontent, had the potential to stimulate engagement in protests. During the 1970s and 1980s workers protests the communist authorities managed to isolate the protesters from other worker's communities, especially due to the weakness of labor unions. After the 1990s the close collaboration of labor union leaders with political leaders and the weakness of labor union organization impeded a larger scale more organized protesting. This is certainly what sets apart the protests from 2011 to 2012. The Internet changed the mobilization tactics. Organizers managed to get in contact and share their discontent with the government on a large array of issues, resulting in a non-hierarchical protest in which a large diversity of voices expressed discontent.

There are certain caveats that one has to be aware of when discussing these findings. The survey we use is representative of the students from Romania. We cannot generalize the findings to all categories of citizens. We contrasted the citizens' levels of online and offline engagement with the students' participatory practices in order to highlight the differences between the two categories. Students are socialized with the use of Internet from an early age and come from families from urban areas and which have a higher socio-economic status. The data cannot be generalized to all voting age youth from Romania. Having more diverse sample of youth (18–34) we assume that the impact of internet would be higher. The youth that already is employed might be more involved in political participatory practices because the stakes of participation are different. This research assumes causality and discusses of determinants of online activism on offline protest participation but this must not be so. A panel study is needed in order to assume causality. Last but not least a comparative approach would provide the framework for understanding the mobilization effect of online activism on offline political protesting.

This article provides an important contribution to understanding how the Internet impacts protest participation in democratic systems but also raises several questions that need to be researched and answered to. What is the relationship between categories of online political engagement and protest engagement? The level of protest engagement is related to generational effects or to the Internet use? Can Internet lead to change of political regimes? Is the Internet a medium that promotes the expression of the diversity of opinions or it is a means to achieve greater mobilization for a cause? The role of the online sphere in political protest engagements has increased. The protests in Northern Africa, Moldova, Kirghizstan or the economic crisis related protests in Spain, Italy, France, Greece or Romania used internet as a mobilization factor. Its importance in understanding political protesting is not to be neglected.

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