

Employment Situation, Social Capital, and Political Participation: A Survey of Unemployed and Precarious Youth in Geneva¹

Marco Giugni and Jasmine Lorenzini

University of Geneva

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Introduction

This paper examines the relationships between employment status, social capital, and the political participation of young people. To do so, we compare young long-term unemployed, precarious youth, and regularly employed youth. These are three groups that have a different employment status, going from being totally integrated to being fully excluded from the labor market, passing through a sort of intermediate (precarious) situation whereby they go in and out from it. We aim to determine whether full or partial exclusion from the labor market deters the potential youngsters have for political participation and therefore for taking part in the democratic process. This is all the more important in the light of the often stressed political alienation of young people (Bay and Blekesaune 2002; Dalton 2009).

In addition to examining the impact of exclusion from the labor market on political participation, we would like to explore the role of two other social integration vectors: voluntary associations and interpersonal relations. The former represents a well-established research tradition (Verba et al. 1995) and was recently addressed both in general (Baglioni 2008; Mahoney and Van Deth 2010; Maloney and Rossteuscher 2009) as well as more specifically in works on the political participation of immigrants (Berger et al. 2004; Eggert and Giugni 2010; Jacobs et al. 2004; Morales and Giugni, forthcoming; Tillie 2004; Togeby 2004). The latter was stressed in earlier works on political behavior (Lazarsfeld et al. 1948), but was then largely overlooked, at least when it comes to explaining the participation of “socially excluded” groups and individuals. We take into account both aspects in our analysis of role of social capital for the political participation of youngsters who are fully or partly excluded from the labor market. The working hypothesis in this respect is that the more unemployed and precarious youth are socially integrated (in terms of associational involvement and in terms of interpersonal relations), the higher their social capital and the more likely their participation in political activities.

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The questions we are addressing are the following: (1) Does the employment situation have an impact on the political participation of young people? (2) To what extent does the social capital that can be drawn from involvement in voluntary associations and from interpersonal relations help youngsters who are fully or partly excluded from the labor market become politically engaged? These research questions will be addressed empirically through an analysis of the results of a random survey of young long-term unemployed, precarious youth, and a control group of regularly employed youth conducted in the context of an ongoing EU-funded project on youth, unemployment, and exclusion in Europe. The survey is conducted at the local level in six European cities. This paper focuses on Geneva, which is the city in Switzerland with the highest unemployment rate. The data includes various indicators of political participation such as voting and engagement in different kinds of political activities (e.g. contacting activities, group activities, protest activities), variables allowing us to examine the impact of social integration (e.g. involvement in voluntary associations, friendship and family ties), and various measures of political attitudes and the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents which we will use as control variables (e.g. political interest, education).

The impact of the employment situation on political participation

The effects of employment on political participation have long been studied following different approaches. One approach, often adopted in the French-speaking literature, looks at the effects of employment on political participation through secondary socialization (Gaxie 2002). Here employment is treated as a sphere of life in which people acquire certain understandings and practices of the world in which they live through socialization processes, and this helps them to form political opinions and influences their political behaviors.

Another approach, mostly found in the Anglo-Saxon literature, focuses on the capabilities and competencies useful for political participation that can be acquired in the workplace through working experiences (Brady et al. 1995; Pateman 1970; Schur 2003; Sobel 1993). In this regard, we can distinguish between the spillover model and the civic skills model (Adman 2008). The spillover model assumes that participation in the workplace offers opportunities to learn how to participate and to develop roles related to social and political participation (Pateman 1970; Sobel 1993). According to this model, participation supports participation, that is, involvement and responsibilities in the workplace have an impact on political participation (Sobel 1993). Moreover, participatory mechanisms in the workplace offer opportunities to develop a sense of political efficacy (Adman 2008). The civic skills approach argues that people participate when they have resources (e.g. time, money, civic skills), when they have psychological predispositions towards engagement (e.g. interest in politics, concern with public affairs, belief that engagement can make a difference, perception of shared interests), and when they are recruited (e.g. by voluntary associations, by individuals) (Brady et al. 1995: 271). Schur (2003) tested this model, focusing specifically on those variables that can be related to employment. Her findings show that income, recruitment, and civic skills (which include the ability to communicate and to organize) have an impact on political participation. The author shows that employed participate more (on all activities except voting), but she found no effect of having only a temporary job.

The specific effects of precarious employment on political participation have mainly been studied with regard to collective mobilizations. For example, a number of studies consider the mobilization of precarious workers in order to understand how heterogeneous groups with little resources for mobilization have been able to stage strikes or protest events in France in the recent past (Abdelnour et al. 2009; Collovald and Mathieu 2009; Sinigaglia 2007). These studies point in particular the variety of movements and people included under the label of “precarious” as well as the importance of defining this concept. Boumaza and Pierru (2007), among others, have stressed the main consequences of precariousness: low and/or instable income, implying a risks of falling into poverty and potential difficulties with regard to housing and health; an instable social status leading to difficulties related to social security and the absence of legal protection (regarding employment in particular); a potential stigmatization or social indignity, generating difficulties to building one’s own identity. As a result, we may expect precarious workers to be less inclined to engage in political activities than those youngsters who have a regular job due to a lack of resources and a political identity. However, we should keep in mind that this is by no means a homogeneous category and within the category of precarious workers we find a plurality of situations.

The lack of resources and political identity that may be attributed to precarious workers is likely to be exacerbated by the condition of unemployment, with important consequences on political engagement. A recent review of the literature presents expected political attitudes and behaviors of unemployed: high abstention levels in elections; high proportions of extreme-right or left-wing voting; a low degree of trust in political institutions (Chabanet (2007). Thus, we would expect an overall low level of political participation of the unemployed as compared to regularly employed people, but also in comparison to precarious workers who, in spite of their condition, are still better off than those who are totally excluded from the labor market in this regard. However, the effect of unemployment on political attitudes and behaviors has been show to be contingent upon the socio-economic status (Scott and Acock (1979). Since the impact of unemployment is not the same across social groups, we should place unemployment in a broader life setting in order to study its impact on political participation. Therefore in our analysis we take into account the impact of sociodemographic characteristics when testing the effect of the employment status on political participation.

Students of social movements have sometimes examined the collective action by unemployed, showing not only their difficulty to organize and mobilize, but also pointing to a rather unstructured form of mobilization (Bagguley 1991, 1992; Chabanet 2008; Faniel 2004; Royall 1997). Thus, their political participation seems to oscillate between apathy and radicalism, also as a result of varying institutional and organizational conditions (Berclaz et al. 2004; Giugni 2008; Baglioni et al. 2008; Zorn 2010).

Scholarly works have also been done on the individual engagement in protest activities by unemployed. They are of particular important for our present purpose as we also focus on individual participation. For example, Maurer and Pierru (2001) have looked at the individual factors explaining engagement in protest activities. Their research was based on qualitative interviews and examined both engaged and unengaged unemployed in order to understand what explains their mobilization or lack thereof. They found that unemployed mobilize when they are already politicized and socialized in a politically sensible familial background; when they are isolated or marginalized and enter the organizational world in search for material and human support which leads them to taking part in protest with no or little political motivation; and for individual reasons, to express their discontent, lacking political socialization and a

political vision. We will focus on the second of these three possible explanations, therefore stressing the role of social isolation. However, unlike Maurer and Pierru (2001), following works on the role of social networks and social capital which we will review below, we argue that social isolation diminishes rather than increases the likelihood that unemployed become involved in politics. Thus, we expect those unemployed who are involved in voluntary associations and have a wider network of interpersonal relations to be more likely to participate in political activities overall and in protest activities more specifically.

While there is a substantial body of literature on the political involvement of unemployed and precarious youth, especially if we include research on collective action and protest activities, work focusing on young unemployed is sparser. Some have compared unemployed to employed youth, finding predispositions towards violent and illegal actions on the part of the former (Breakwell 1986; Clark 1985). However, these studies focus on attitudes rather than behaviors. Other works have shown that, while being interested and open towards radical actions, young unemployed display a lower affiliation to political groups such as parties and social movements. Banks and Ullah (1987) have studied political attitudes and voting behaviors of young employed and unemployed. They found overall low levels of interest and involvement in politics for youth, tending towards apathy and resignation, but little difference between employed and unemployed. Similarly, Bay and Blekesaune (2002) found that, beyond a specific political marginalization of young unemployed, youth in general are little interested in politics. Nevertheless, young unemployed were found to be less satisfied with the way democracy works and in particular with the authorities' incapacity to solve problems relating to unemployment (Banks and Ullah 1987). As for political engagement, young unemployed are predicted to be either marginalized from political participation or engaged in radical activities.

One of the limits of these studies is that it is difficult to ascertain whether regularly employed people are different from unemployed people from the start as stated by Schur (2003). One way to meet this criticism is to look also at precarious workers, in addition to these two groups, as they can be seen as standing somewhere in between the other two groups. In this regard, Schur (2003) found no effect of temporary work on political participation. Moreover, other studies have questioned the direction of the relationship between employment and political participation as well as the very existence of the relationship. Cohen and Vigoda (1999), for example, have found that political participation can explain attitudes and behaviors in the workplace, reversing the relationship between the two variables. To solve this puzzle, Adman (2008) has tested the effect of work on political participation with panel data. The effect found in cross-sectional analyses does not hold when one takes into account the temporal ordering of events (first being involved in a specific workplace setting, then participating politically).

In sum, on the basis of the works reviewed above, we hypothesize an impact of the employment status on political participation. Specifically, we expect young unemployed, other things being equal, to be less likely to participate than precarious youth and both group less likely to participate than regularly employed youth due to a lack of resources and political identity. To what extent this can be compensated by the social capital stemming from their involvement in voluntary associations or their network of interpersonal relations is something we address next.

The social capital perspective

In addition to examining the impact of exclusion from the labor market on political participation, we would like to explore the role of two other social integration vectors: voluntary associations and interpersonal relations. Both can positively influence participation by yielding important resources that can be put to use in political behavior. Social capital can be seen as one of such resources.

The concept of social capital has become fashionable in recent years in various research fields (see Lin 2001 and Portes 1998 for overviews), including the study of political participation. The mainstream literature linking social capital to political participation has stressed the role of voluntary associations as crucial for the production of social capital. In this perspective, which goes back at least to Tocqueville's analysis of American democracy and was reinvigorated in particular by the work of Putnam (1993, 2000), there is a positive relationship between associational life and democracy (Paxton 2002). A specific strand of research has looked in particular at the impact of people's involvement in voluntary associations on political participation and behavior, specifying the mechanisms linking the latter to the former. The civic voluntarism model (Verba et al. 1995), for example, points to the important role played by involvement in associations for increasing the level of civic skills, political efficacy, and political knowledge. In a similar fashion, recent work has shown more specifically the benefits that people can draw from their involvement in voluntary associations for their political involvement (Baglioni 2008; Mahoney and Van Deth 2010; Maloney and Rossteuscher 2009).

Perhaps a particularly relevant body of literature for our present purpose is the one looking at the role of voluntary associations for immigrants. While this topic has been addressed in the past, especially by U.S. scholars (Portes et al. 2008; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001), a group of European scholars have recently revamped the social capital approach by applying it at the political participation and integration of immigrants in various cities (Berger et al. 2004; Eggert and Giugni 2010; Jacobs et al. 2004; Morales and Giugni, forthcoming; Tillie 2004; Togeby 2004). Inspired by previous work by Fennema and Tillie (1999, 2000) on the impact of organizational networks on the political participation of immigrants, these studies show that the more an immigrant is a member of voluntary associations, the more she or he participates politically. In this perspective, this is not so much related to the individual skills or resources one can develop in associations, but has something to do with the social capital generated by such an organizational affiliation. The mechanism would be found in the creation of social trust through associational involvement which in turn would bring to higher levels of political trust and participation (Jacobs and Tillie 2004).

Here we would like to apply this line of reasoning in other groups at risk of social exclusion, namely young long-term unemployed and precarious youth. Thus, we advance the hypothesis that youngsters who find themselves in such a situation will benefit from being members of voluntary associations and therefore be more inclined to engage politically, both in general and more specifically in protest activities. This, of course, should also apply to regularly employed youth, at least following the literature mentioned earlier. However, we expect the impact of associational membership on political participation to be stronger for unemployed and precarious youth as this might compensate for the lack of resources and motivations stemming from their situation of social exclusion.

While involvement in voluntary associations represents a well-established research tradition, the role of interpersonal relations outside the associational life has remained largely overlooked in this field. To be sure, one of the seminal studies in the political behavior literature examines this aspect (Lazarsfeld et al. 1948), but later works on social capital have not paid much attention to it. There are important studies of the role of interpersonal networks for insertion into the labor market, including the influential article by Granovetter (1973), but the connection to political participation has seldom been examined. Yet, particularly for socially excluded people, interpersonal networks might be a crucial source of social capital as well as other important resources not only to find a job, but also to become politically engaged. In particular, interpersonal networks may play a role through the discussion of political issues as they transmit and give access to broader political debates and opinions (Beck et al. 2002; Mcclurg 2003).

Following an argument similar to the one developed by proponents of the social capital perspective, we hypothesize that unemployed and precarious youth would be more inclined to participate politically, both in general and more specifically in protest activities, when they have a large interpersonal network. In particular, we think that close friends should play an important role in this regard as they are more likely to engage in political discussions and have a stronger persuasion power. Again, the same argument applies to regularly employed youth, but here too we expect the impact of the size of the interpersonal network to play a greater role for the political participation of unemployed and precarious youth due to a compensating effect.

Data and operationalization

Our analysis is based on a telephone survey carried between February and August and July 2010 on a representative sample of young long-term unemployed and precarious youth, plus a control group of regularly employed youth. All three groups include people aged between 18 and 34 residing in the canton of Geneva.² Long-term unemployment is defined as having been without a job for at least one year. The sample size for each of the three groups is the following: 124 (unemployed), 254 (precarious), and 320 (control group). The data was retrieved as part of the EU-funded project “Youth, Unemployment, and Exclusion in Europe: A Multidimensional Approach to Understanding the Conditions and Prospects for Social and Political Integration of Young Unemployed” (YOUNEX). Next we describe the operationalization of the main variables of interest: political participation (dependent variable), employment status, associational membership, interpersonal networks, age, and other sociodemographic variables we use as controls in the regression analysis.

Political participation is measured, on the one hand, through two questions on voting and, on the other hand, following a standard approach consisting in asking respondents to mention whether they participated in a number of other forms of political activities.³ The two questions

² Geneva is the canton that has systematically the highest unemployment rate.

³ Question wording for voting: “Sometimes, people don’t vote because they cannot or because they don’t want to. Did you vote in the [last national election]?” and “Did you vote in the [last local election]?” Question wording for participation in other forms of political activities: “There are different ways of trying to improve things in society or to help prevent things from going wrong. In the following, we name some political activities, for each of them could you please tell me if you have done it during the last 12 months?” The political activities are the following: contacted a politician; contacted a national or local government official; worked in a political party; worked in a political action group; worn or displayed a badge, sticker or poster; signed a petition; taken part in a public demonstration; boycotted certain products; deliberately bought certain products for political

on voting were used to form a new variable named *voting*. Those who have either voted at the last national or local election are considered as active on this variable. The questions on political activities were used to distinguish between four main types of participation:⁴ *supporting activities* (sign a petition, boycott products, deliberately buy certain products); *protest activities* (wear or display a badge, participate in demonstration, participate in illegal actions, participate in violent actions); *contacting activities* (contact politicians, contact government officials, contact the media, contact a solicitor or judicial body); and *group activities* (work in a political party, work in another political group, donate money to a political organization). In addition to these four types of participation, we created a more general indicator of participation in any political activity (corresponding to having answered yes to any one of the 14 activities mentioned).

Employment status is given by belonging to one of the three groups being compared: unemployed, precarious, and regularly employed youth. Table 1 shows the sociodemographic composition of the three groups, indicating whether cross-group differences are statistically significant. We find a higher percentage of foreigners than expected among the unemployed. Furthermore, the relationship between employment status and nationality is significant. As far as age is concerned, we distinguish between three age categories: 18-24, 25-29, and 30-34. We decided to include respondents up to the age of 34 in order to take into account youth as a transition period, one in which individuals enter the labor market, gain financial independence, live on their own, and start their own family (Van de Velde 2008). The significance of the relationship between age and employment status is due mainly to the differences between precarious workers and employed: there are fewer employed among the younger cohorts and fewer precarious workers among the older ones. In contrast, unemployment does not relate to age. Finally, there are also differences among the three groups with respect to education. Overall, the unemployed have a lower level of education. In particular, there are more unemployed who have stopped school after the primary level and fewer who have reached the tertiary level of education than expected. Nevertheless, we should stress that in our sample 19% of the unemployed have a tertiary level of education and have been unemployed for a year or more. The relationship between the two variables is significant and stronger than for the other two sociodemographic variables.

Table 1

Two variables capture the concept of social capital in its collective and individual dimensions: associational membership and the size of the interpersonal network. Firstly, we asked respondents about their membership in different kinds of associations and we added up the number of associations one is a member of, regardless of the type of organizations.⁵ Then we

reasons; donated money to a political organization or group; taken part in a strike; contacted the media; contacted a solicitor or a judicial body for non-personal reasons; participated in an illegal action (e.g. blockade, building occupation); participated in a violent action (e.g. violent demonstration, physical attack). In our analyses we exclude participation in strikes as we are working on groups of youth with different employment status, not all of them having the same opportunities to take part in strikes. In particular, the unemployed have lower chances of having taken part in a strike. On all three groups, only 11 respondents have taken part in a strike, of them none were unemployed, 7 precarious workers and 4 employed.

⁴ These four types reflect in part the typology of political participation proposed by Teorell et al. (2007). We factor-analyzed the response items in order to confront this typology with our data. The factor analysis yielded four main factors, but some of the items did not correspond to their classification. We therefore adapted the typology to our present purpose.

⁵ Question wording: "There are different ways of participating in social and political life, therefore we would like to ask some questions about your personal involvement. In the following, we name some different types of organizations, for each of them could you please tell me if you are or were a member?" (Possible answers:

aggregated the answers by creating a variable distinguishing between those who are not members of associations, those who are members of one association, and those who are members of two or more associations. Following work on multiple memberships in social movements (see Diani 2004 for an overview), we expect different effects of being a member of one association or of two or more. Secondly, the measure of interpersonal network is based on a question asking about the number of close friends one has.⁶ For the regression analysis we aggregated the original categories used in the questionnaire by merging the categories “no friends” and “1-2 friends” due to the small number of cases in these two categories.

Finally, we consider three indicators of political attitudes, measured following standard practice: political interest, political satisfaction, and political trust. While political interest is measured through a direct question with four possible answers going from no interested at all to very interested, political satisfaction and political trust are 0-10 scales on two distinct batteries of items.⁷ In the regression analysis below we use the indicator of political interest, an item concerning satisfaction with the way democracy works as a measure of political satisfaction, and an additive index for political trust.

Comparing unemployed, precarious, and regularly employed youth

Next we present a comparison of the three groups (unemployed, precarious, and regularly employed youth) on political participation as well as on the network and political attitude variables we include in our analysis (the sociodemographic variables were discussed earlier). Let us first have a look at our dependent variable, namely political participation. Table 2 shows participation in five kinds of political activities as well as the overall participation by employment status. We find that, on average, voting participation is quite limited, as compared to the participation rate observed for the general population.⁸ Some differences across groups can be observed, with the middle cohort displaying the highest rate. However, the relationship between age and voting is not statistically significant.

Table 2

Concerning the other forms of political participation, we see that the three groups differ significantly on supporting and protest activities, with precarious youth being more active than both unemployed and regularly employed youth. The relationships are not very strong, but, as we can see from the adjusted residuals displayed between parenthesis, unemployed participate less than expected in supporting activities and, conversely, precarious tend to do so more than expected.⁹ In the case of protest activities, the difference lies between precarious

yes/no/not anymore). The types of organizations are the following: political party; trade unions; religious organization; cooperative; social movement organization; other civil society organization.

⁶ Question wording: “How many friends do you have – people with whom you feel well and feel you can talk about private issues or asking for help if necessary?”

⁷ Question wording for political interest: “How interested would you say you are in politics?” Question wording for political satisfaction: “Could you tell me how satisfied you are with the way Switzerland government is dealing with the following issues?” (where 0 means extremely dissatisfied and 10 means extremely satisfied). Question wording for political trust: “In the following, we name some public institutions. Specify to what extent you do, or do not, trust them in general.” (where 0 means that you do not trust at all and 10 means totally trust).

⁸ A little less than 50 percent of the Geneva residents voted in the last cantonal and national elections.

⁹ Adjusted residuals are distributed normally with a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. They allow to see which cells are significantly different from one another (similar to the chi-square for the overall cross tabulation). When adjusted residuals have an absolute value higher than 2 the relationship is significant (the cutting point being ± 1.96 for a 95% confidence interval).

and employed, with the former participating more than the latter. Differences concerning contacting and group activities are not significant. Finally, there is a significant although not very strong relationship between overall political participation and employment status. More specifically, unemployed participate less than expected and precarious more than expected.

Thus, contrary to what we expected, precarious workers are the most active in the political field among the three groups we are studying. They are more active than regular workers in various forms of political activities as well as overall. This suggests that there is a different impact of the lack of resources for unemployed and precarious youth. A possible interpretation of that is that the absence of some resources can more easily be compensated by other resources in the case of precarious workers than for unemployed. This would be consistent with a study by Sinigaglia (2007), who has shown that specific groups of precarious workers – artists and persons working in the artistic milieus – have high education levels, are well inserted in networks, therefore possessing compensating resources.

Since we are dealing with a young population, often in a transition phase, we need to pay special attention to the effect of age and the peculiarities of youth with regard to political participation. Table 3 shows the participation in the five kinds of political activities as well as the overall participation by age groups. We find significant relationships for supporting activities, contacting activities, and overall participation. These three items are highest for the older cohort and lowest for the middle age group. Here we find something close to what Muxel (2001) calls the “moratorium of youth years” (*moratoire des années de jeunesse*): youngsters try out political mobilization, but they are not consistent in their mobilization, they are testing it. In addition, the middle age group might be more worried to find a job than the younger one. Generally speaking, the picture concerning the relationship between political participation and age is not crystal clear as the levels of participation vary greatly across types of activities. Furthermore, the effect of age is difficult to assess as the younger cohort and the older one have similar patterns of participation.

Table 3

Let us now turn to the network and social capital variables. Table 4 shows the associational membership according to employment status. We find that young unemployed are not less involved in voluntary associations than precarious and regularly employed youth. People in three groups are predominantly members of no associations, about one third are members of one association, and only a minor part is member of two or more associations.

Table 4

In contrast, table 5 suggests that unemployed youth have a smaller interpersonal network, therefore being socially more isolated. Furthermore, as we can see from the adjusted residuals, the number of young unemployed who say they have no friends is higher than expected. They are also more to say that they have only 1 or 2 friends. Precarious youth have more friends than expected, as the adjusted residuals for the 3-to-7 category is significantly higher and those for the 1-2 category lower than the expected value. Thus, we see not only that young unemployed are less integrated in interpersonal networks, but also that precarious youth have larger interpersonal networks than both the other two groups.

Table 5

In this comparison of the three groups we also consider the three indicators of political attitudes which we include in our analyses (political interest, political satisfaction, and political trust) in order to see if our three groups differ significantly in this respect. Table 6 shows the degree of interest in politics of unemployed, precarious, and regularly employed youth. The relationship between the two variables is significant, but not very strong, and unemployed saying that they are very interested in politics is the only category which differs from the expected value (they are fewer than expected).

Table 6

Table 7 shows the means of political satisfaction on different policy issues for the three groups. As expected, the level of political satisfaction of the group of unemployed is more or less systematically lower than that of precarious and regularly employed youth. As far as the specific policy issues are concerned, interestingly enough we can see that the means differ among the groups only on those issues related to employment and youth. The value of the F-test is significant for economy, poverty, unemployment, precarious employment, and youth.¹⁰ In contrast, the three groups do not differ significantly with regards to satisfaction on how the government deals with education, health care, and environment and sustainable development. Nevertheless, they differ significantly on the overall measure of satisfaction (the way democracy works). We can also look at which groups are significantly different from one another in terms of political satisfaction. This can be seen in table 8. Looking at paired group comparisons on political satisfaction using Tukey's HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) test, we find that the means for the unemployed differ from those of the employed on all the policy issues.¹¹ The unemployed also differ from the precarious on all issues except for poverty. On all these issues unemployed have a significantly lower level of satisfaction than their counterparts, whereas precarious and employed do not differ significantly with respect to any of them.

Table 7 and 8

While political satisfaction refers to policy issues, political trust deals with institutional actors. The means for the three groups on this indicator are shown in table 9. The three groups differ significantly with regard to trust in the city parliament, national parliament, and courts as well as on the overall political trust. Again, as we can see in table 10, the means for the unemployed are significantly lower than those of regularly employed youth on all items. Unemployed also differ significantly from precarious youth with regard to trust in the city parliament and courts, displaying a lower level of political trust on both counts. Like for political confidence, precarious and regularly employed youth do not differ significantly on any item.

Tables 9 and 10

In sum, as far as political attitudes are concerned, young unemployed are less interested in politics, show lower levels of satisfaction with the way the government deals with

¹⁰ The F-test is used to test the difference in the means of different populations. It assumes a normal distribution and the same standard deviations for the samples being compared.

¹¹ Tukey's HSD test is based on the studentized range distribution, similar to a T-test, but taking into account the number of means to be compared in order to reduce the chances of finding differences that could be due to chance only (higher in multiple comparisons). In this case, since we have different sample sizes we used the modification proposed to the Tukey test by Kramer, which adapts it to unequal groups.

employment-related issues, and are less trustful towards the main political institutional actors. These results are in line with what may be expected following the literature on the political attitudes of unemployed. However, we find quite surprisingly that precarious youth have a similar relation to policy issues and institutional actors alike as regularly employed youth insofar as the two groups do not differ significantly in terms of political satisfaction or trust.

Explaining the political participation of young unemployed and precarious youth

The next step consists in assessing the impact of the employment status and the two social capital variables. To do so we conduct a multivariate regression analysis of the effect of employment status, associational involvement, and the size of the interpersonal network on participation in political activities, controlling for the effect of political attitudes and sociodemographic characteristics of respondents. We first examine the effect of these variables on the overall measure of political participation, then we focus more specifically on protest activities. The latter are of particular interest as they represent the more social-movement oriented kind of political involvement. In both cases, we enter each block of variables in the analysis stepwise, starting from the employment status (Model 1), then including the two social capital variables (Model 2), the three measures of political attitudes (Model 3), and the sociodemographic characteristics (Model 4).

Table 11 shows the results for the overall measure of participation. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous (0 for “no participation” and 1 for “participation”), we modeled a logistic regression and the coefficients in the table are odds ratios. Values above 1 indicate a positive relationship between dependent and independent variables (if statistically significant), while values below 1 indicate a negative relationship. Consistently with what we found earlier, the employment status has a statistically significant effect on political participation, although the margin of error never goes below 5 percent. More specifically, we can see that young unemployed have more chances to be politically active than regularly employed youth (reference category), while precarious youth are more likely to participate than the latter. The effect for the unemployed disappears in the models including the sociodemographic characteristics, but overall we find a strong relation between employment status and political participation. Furthermore, we can confirm that precarious workers are more inclined to participate than both unemployed (which is not a surprise) and regularly employed people (which is more surprising, but also more interesting).

Table 11

An even stronger relation exists between associational involvement and political participation, confirming the wealth of studies showing the importance of the social capital stemming from voluntary associations for becoming involved in politics (Baglioni 2008; Mahoney and Van Deth 2010; Maloney and Rossteuscher 2009). Indeed, this is the variable that has the strongest effect overall. Respondents who are members of two or more associations are much more likely to participate than those who are members of only one association (reference category). In contrast, the odds to participate for the youngsters who have no associational membership are half of those of respondents who are members of one association.

While the social capital that can be drawn from involvement in voluntary associations seems to play the role that was observed for other “socially excluded” groups such as immigrants (Berger et al. 2004; Eggert and Giugni 2010; Jacobs et al. 2004; Morales and Giugni,

forthcoming; Tillie 2004; Togeby 2004), that which could be derived from interpersonal relations outside associations does not seem to matter much. There is a negative effect of having only between 0 and 2 close friends as compared to having between 3 and 7 (reference category), but at the same time having a larger interpersonal network does not seem to increase the likelihood to participate. Here our expectation does not find strong support, rather they correspond to the cross-pressures hypothesis developed by Diane Mutz (2002) according to which an extended interpersonal network can result in multiple, countervailing political positions and opinions that would not favor more political participation.

Among the political and sociodemographic controls we included in the analysis, we observe a strong significant effect of political interest. This is not surprising at all, as the literature on political participation has long shown the close correlation between political interest and participation. The other two political attitude indicators, in contrast, have no impact whatsoever, although we would expect so. We also see significant effects for nationality, age, and education. All three variables are consistent with previous works. Firstly, youngsters of migrant origin are much less likely to participate than nationals. Secondly, the older cohort participate more than the younger ones. Thirdly, participation is more likely among educated youth.

Do these findings hold when we examine a specific form of political participation such as protest activities? Table 12 provides an answer to this question. The answer is basically yes, with some qualifications. To begin with, the employment status has an impact on the engagement in protest activities. Here, however, only the effect for precarious workers has statistical significance and, moreover, not in the model including all the variables. Yet the direction and magnitude of the effect is similar to the ones observed earlier for political participation in general. We also observe a similar impact of associational involvement, while the size of the interpersonal network is not significant when controlling for the sociodemographic variables. In this case, however, the higher the number of close friends, the more likely one engages in protest activities, while having few friends does not seem to matter. Where things are most different is with regard to the sociodemographic characteristics. When it comes to explaining engagement in protest activities rather than political participation in general, nationality has no longer an impact. Age does so, but here the younger cohort is more likely to participate than the older ones. The fact that we are dealing with a form of participation particularly attractive to the young probably explains that. Finally, education has lost its effect as well.

Table 12

We conclude our analysis by exploring some possible interactive effects between employment status and our two social capital variables. Figures 1 and 2 examine the interaction on the overall political participation. The three lines in figure 1 represent predicted probabilities to participating for the three groups under study across different degrees of associational involvement. The line representing the precarious is above those corresponding to unemployed and regularly employed youth, reflecting their higher propensity to participate politically which we have seen earlier. We also see a stronger participation of respondents who are more deeply involved in voluntary associations, regardless of their employment status, which is again what we found in the multivariate analysis. Here, however, we are interested in a possible interactive effect on participation of the other two variables. In this regard, we observe a moderate interactive effect as the increase in the predicted probability of participation is higher for the unemployed than for the other two groups and in part also for

the regularly employed youth as compared to precarious youth. This means that associational membership is more important for the group of the unemployed to leading them to participate, although the effect is not very strong.

Figures 1 and 2

The interaction between employment status and the size of interpersonal network, depicted in figure 2, presents a different pattern. Here, the three lines have exactly the same shape, only separated by the different levels of participation of the three groups. For all three groups, going from a small to an intermediate number of close friends dramatically increase the probability to participate politically, but then the latter basically does not change if the interpersonal network becomes larger. We can therefore conclude that there is no interactive effect on political participation of employment status and interpersonal network. The latter is neither more, nor less important for one group or another.

Figures 3 and 4 look at the interaction on the engagement in protest activities, following the same logic. Starting from associational membership, leaving aside the findings already discussed earlier (higher level of participation of precarious youth and strong impact of associational membership), we find once again a weak interactive effect. Specifically, we observe a slight increase in the propensity to engage in protest activities by precarious youth when they are more strongly involved in associations, while the other two groups do not differ much from each other.

Figures 3 and 4

A similar pattern can be seen if we look at the interaction between employment status and the size of the interpersonal network, as shown in figure 4. Again, having more close friends is important for all three groups, but especially so for precarious youth. The effect, however, seems even weaker than for associational membership, to the extent that we might perhaps conclude that in this case there is no interactive effect.

Conclusion

In this paper we have addressed the question of youth political participation and in particular the effect of employment status and social capital on the overall political participation as well as on protest activities through a comparison of young unemployed, precarious youth, and a control group of regularly employed youth. Our analysis suggests that both employment status and social capital (especially that which can be drawn from associational involvement) impinge upon political participation. In addition, we have seen that these two variables have a interactive effect as, especially in the case of unemployed, associational involvement reduces the gap in political participation between the three groups. This effect is not very strong, but points to a mediating role of social capital in the relation between employment status and participation.

Consistently with our expectations, we found that young unemployed are less engaged in political activities. They are fewer than expected to take part in any kind of political activities and especially so in supporting activities. In the multivariate analysis the effect of unemployment on political participation does not hold once controlling for social capital and political attitudes, nor for the sociodemographic characteristics. Therefore, the effect of

unemployment on political participation is mediated by social capital. In particular, young unemployed who are more deeply integrated in associational networks are more likely to participate, witnessing a mediating effect of associational membership on the overall political participation for this group. In addition, young unemployed display lower levels of trust towards political institutions, as well as a lower degree of political interest and satisfaction, resulting in a reduction of the effect of unemployment once these variables are included in the multivariate analysis. Here we need further research on the impact of unemployment on political trust as well as on how associational involvement and interpersonal networks may increase levels of trust through the production of social capital, thus leading to political participation.

A particularly striking result of our analysis is that precarious youth are more active in politics than both unemployed and regularly employed youth. The former are more likely to engage both in general and in more specific forms of participation such as protest as well as support activities. The stronger political engagement of precarious youth holds when controlling for socio-demographic characteristics and political attitudes in the multivariate analysis. This allows us to specify the interaction between employment status and social integration: social capital, especially the one derived from membership in voluntary associations, has a compensating effect for the political participation of young unemployed. However, this argument does not hold for precarious youth as, contrary to our expectations, they are not less active than regularly employed youth. This finding calls for more thorough analyses of the political participation of precarious workers in order to understand which mechanisms can explain the link between precarious employment and political participation. For example, this might be a matter of resources. Specifically, precarious workers might lack some resources, but might also have more time available to engage politically.

We found strong evidence for the impact of associational involvement and interpersonal relations on political participation. However, while the effect of the former is quite straightforward, the latter yields more ambiguous results as having a small number of close friends seems to spur political participation, but at the same time having a higher number of friends does not increase the likelihood to engage in political activities. This might be interpreted in the light of the distinction, on the one hand, between those who are socially isolated and those who are well integrated in friendship networks and, on the other hand, between those who have a homogeneous group of friends and those who have a diversified network. In the latter situation participation would not increase due to possible tensions among political opinions. Yet this should be subject to empirical investigation, namely by inquiring into the relationship between interpersonal network and political participation, for example through the study of political discussions.

Finally, some of the findings concerning the sociodemographic characteristics are also worth mentioning. In the case of protest activities, the effect of age is significant and we found that the younger cohort is more likely to engage in protest activities than the other cohorts. This is consistent with previous work on youth political activities. However, the effect of age on political participation remains somewhat puzzling as our findings are not clear-cut and should be studied more thoroughly, in particular by inquiring into why the younger and the older cohort follow similar trends, differing from the middle cohort. This may shed new light on the study of youth political participation. It would in particular be interesting to understand what happens between the age of 25 and 30, whether other preoccupations prevail (perhaps related to the transition to adulthood, constraints on economic independence, and building a family) that lead to lower political participation. Another finding relating to the sociodemographic

characteristics, which should be addressed more thoroughly, is the disappearance of the effect of nationality when it comes to protest activities. For this form of participation, being Swiss does not make any difference in terms of participation, while it does matter in the case of political participation in general. However, here we should stress that we did not include voting, which is a form of participation not available to foreigners. Indeed, young unemployed and precarious youth who, in addition, do not have the Swiss citizenship, would be even more at risk of social exclusion. This would be an important group whose political participation or lack thereof could be studied in further work in this field.

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Table 1: Sociodemographic composition of the groups (percentages)

| | Unemployed | Precarious | Employed | Cramer's V |
|------------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Sex | | | | NS |
| men | 49 | 44 | 52 | |
| women | 51 | 46 | 48 | |
| Nationality | | | | .12*** |
| Swiss | 46 (-3.7) | 68 (3.3) | 59 | |
| foreigners | 54 (3.7) | 32 (-3.3) | 41 | |
| Age | | | | .19*** |
| 18-24 | 29 | 44 (6.2) | 19 (-5.9) | |
| 25-29 | 32 | 27 | 29 | |
| 30-34 | 39 | 29 (-5.1) | 52 (5.4) | |
| Education level | | | | .21*** |
| not completed compulsory schooling | 3 (2.1) | 0 | 1 | |
| primary level | 38 (6.4) | 12 (-2.9) | 14 (-2.2) | |
| secondary level | 39 | 45 | 47 | |
| tertiary level | 19 (-3.6) | 37 | 35 | |
| second stage of tertiary level | 1 | 6 (3) | 2 | |
| N | 125 | 254 | 320 | |

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Note: Adjusted residuals $\geq \pm 1.96$ shown between parentheses.

Table 2: Political activities by employment status (percentage of yes)

| | Unemployed | Precarious | Employed | Cramer's V |
|------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Voting | 30 | 38 | 32 | NS |
| Supporting | 47 (-3.1) | 67 (3.0) | 59 | .14*** |
| Protest | 19 | 28 (3.0) | 18 (-2.3) | .12** |
| Contacting | 14 | 17 | 14 | NS |
| Group activities | 3 | 4 | 2 | NS |
| Any political activity | 56 (-2.9) | 74 (3.2) | 65 | .14** |
| N | 125 | 254 | 320 | |

Note: Voting includes having voted at the last local or national election. Protest activities include wear or display a badge, participate in demonstration, participated in illegal actions, participated in violent actions. Supporting activities include sign a petition, boycott products, deliberately buy certain products. Contacting activities include contacting politicians, contacting government officials, contact media, contact solicitor/judicial body. Group activities include worked in a political party, worked in another political group; donate money to a political organization. Any political activity includes all the above mentioned activities except voting. Adjusted residuals $\geq \pm 1.96$ shown between parentheses.

Table 3: Political activities by age groups (percentage of yes)

| | 18-24 | 25-29 | 30-34 | Cramer's V |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Voting ¹ | 31 | 38 | 34 | NS |
| Supporting ¹ | 58 | 53(-2.5) | 66 (2.8) | .12** |
| Protest ¹ | 26 | 18 | 22 | NS |
| Contacting ¹ | 11 | 10 (-2.3) | 21 (3.7) | .14*** |
| Group activities ¹ | 3 | 3 | 2 | NS |
| Any political activity ¹ | 66 | 60 (-2.5) | 72 (2.5) | .11* |
| N | 205 | 200 | 286 | |

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Note: Voting includes having voted at the last local or national election. Protest activities include wear or display a badge, participate in demonstration, participated in illegal actions, participated in violent actions. Supporting activities include sign a petition, boycott products, deliberately buy certain products. Contacting activities include contacting politicians, contacting government officials, contact media, contact solicitor/judicial body. Group activities include worked in a political party, worked in another political group; donate money to a political organization. Any political activity includes all the above mentioned activities except voting. Adjusted residuals $\geq \pm 1.96$ shown between parentheses.

Table 4: Associational membership by employment status (percentage by group)

| | Unemployed | Precarious | Employed |
|------------------------------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Member of no association | 56 | 57 | 57 |
| Member of one association | 35 | 30 | 33 |
| Member of two or more associations | 9 | 13 | 10 |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| N | 124 | 254 | 320 |

Cramer's V not significant

Table 5: Size of interpersonal network by employment status (percentage by group)

| Number of friends | Unemployed | Precarious | Employed |
|---------------------|------------|------------|----------|
| No friends | 5 (3.5) | 0 | 1 |
| 1 or 2 friends | 17 (2.2) | 8 (-2.1) | 12 |
| 3 to 7 friends | 54 | 55 | 57 |
| More than 7 friends | 24 | 37 (2.4) | 39 |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| N | 124 | 251 | 320 |

Cramer's V = .13 (p<.001)

Note: Adjusted residuals $\geq \pm 1.96$ shown between parentheses.

Table 6: Political interest by employment status (percentage per group)

| | Unemployed | Precarious | Precarious Employed | Employed | F |
|---|------------|------------|------------------------|------------|---------|
| Not interested at all | 28 | | 19 | 24 | |
| Satisfaction with the way the government deals with... | 28 | | 33 | 35 | 4.98** |
| Not very interested | 41 | 6.14 (249) | 36 | 37 | 5.35** |
| Fairly interested | 4.57 (127) | 5.01 (247) | 6.19 (316) | 5.00 (311) | |
| Very interested | 3 (2.6) | 6.70 (252) | 12 | 10 | NS |
| Total | 6.47 (121) | 6.70 (252) | 6.66 (317) | 6.66 (317) | NS |
| N... unemployment | 4.70 (124) | 5.47 (251) | 5.68 (311) | 100% | 10.3*** |
| N... health care | 6.13 (124) | 6.24 (253) | 5.99 (317) | 320 | NS |
| Cramer's V = .10 (p < .05) | 4.49 (122) | 5.05 (237) | 5.26 (299) | | 7.1*** |
| Note: Adjusted residuals > ± 1.96 shown between parentheses | 6.26 (123) | 6.32 (251) | 6.41 (317) | | NS |
| ... environment / Sustainable development | 5.30 (123) | 5.83 (246) | 5.91 (310) | | 4.4** |
| ... youth | | | | | |
| Satisfaction with the way democracy works | 6.21 (122) | 6.64 (252) | 7.02 (315) | | 7.55*** |

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 8: Paired group comparisons of means on political satisfaction (Tukey's HSD test)

| | Unemployed - Precarious | Unemployed - Employed | Precarious - Employed |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Economy | -.60* | -.65** | -.05 |
| Poverty | -.43 | -.75** | -.31 |
| Unemployment | -.75** | -.97*** | -.21 |
| Precarious employment | -.56* | -.77*** | -.21 |
| Youth | -.53* | -.61** | -.08 |
| With the way democracy works... | -.44 | -.81*** | -.38 |

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 9: Political trust by employment status (means)

| | Unemployed | Precarious | Employed | F |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|--------|
| Trust in City Government | 5.45 (116) | 5.49 (235) | 5.78 (301) | NS |
| Trust in City Parliament | 5.11 (120) | 5.76 (241) | 5.86 (305) | 5.77** |
| Trust in National Government | 5.39 (123) | 5.79 (246) | 5.90 (310) | NS |
| Trust in National Parliament | 5.49 (124) | 6.00 (245) | 6.10 (308) | 3.46* |
| Trust in Court | 6.04 (124) | 6.63 (248) | 6.83 (312) | 5.68** |
| Overall political trust | 5.47 (114) | 5.92 (224) | 6.10 (292) | 4.99** |

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Note: N between parentheses.

Table 10: Paired group comparisons of means on political trust (Tukey's HSD test)

| | Unemployed - Precarious | Unemployed - Employed | Precarious - Employed |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Trust in City Parliament | -.65* | -.75** | -.10 |
| Trust in National Parliament | -.51 | -.61* | -.09 |
| Trust in Court | -.59* | -.80** | -.21 |
| Mean institutional trust | -.46 | -.64** | -.18 |

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 11: Logistic regression of participation in any political activity on selected independent variables (odd ratios)

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <i>Employment status (ref. employed)</i> | | | | |
| Unemployed | .64* | .66† | .64† | .80 |
| Precarious | 1.62* | 1.57* | 1.51* | 1.56* |
| <i>Social capital</i> | | | | |
| Associational membership (ref. 1 association) | | | | |
| No associational membership | | .50*** | .52*** | .55** |
| Member of 2 or more associations | | 2.99* | 2.34† | 2.46* |
| Number of friends (ref. 3-7 friends) | | | | |
| 0-2 friends | | .49** | .52* | .59† |
| More than 7 friends | | .92 | .91 | .82 |
| <i>Political attitudes</i> | | | | |
| Political interest | | | 1.54*** | 1.45*** |
| Political satisfaction | | | .99 | .97 |
| Political trust | | | .91 | .95 |
| <i>Sociodemographic characteristics</i> | | | | |
| Nationality (ref. Swiss) | | | | .31*** |
| Sex (ref. men) | | | | .82 |
| Age (ref. 25-29) | | | | |
| 18-24 | | | | 1.39 |
| 30-34 | | | | 2.01** |
| Education (ref. secondary level) | | | | |
| Primary level | | | | 1.37 |
| Tertiary level | | | | 1.71* |
| Constant | 1.85*** | 2.92*** | 2.00 | 1.99 |
| -2 Log likelihood | 815.184 | 773.606 | 754.247 | 706.260 |
| Nagelkerke R Square | .033 | .117 | .154 | .242 |
| N | 652 | 652 | 652 | 652 |

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 12: Logistic regression of participation in protest activities on selected independent variables (odds ratios)

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <i>Employment status (ref. employed)</i> | | | | |
| Unemployed | .96 | .99 | .99 | .99 |
| Precarious | 1.70* | 1.67* | 1.59* | 1.42 |
| <i>Social capital</i> | | | | |
| Associational membership (ref. 1 association) | | .37*** | .39*** | .39*** |
| No associational membership | | 2.31** | 1.82* | 2.10* |
| Member of 2 or more associations | | | | |
| Number of friends (ref. 3-7 friends) | | | | |
| 0-2 friends | | 1.04 | 1.10 | 1.25 |
| More than 7 friends | | 1.45† | 1.44† | 1.38 |
| <i>Political attitudes</i> | | | | |
| Political interest | | | 1.5*** | 1.47** |
| Political satisfaction | | | .94 | .94 |
| Political trust | | | .99 | 1.00 |
| <i>Sociodemographic characteristics</i> | | | | |
| Nationality (ref. Swiss) | | | | .90 |
| Sex (ref. men) | | | | .70† |
| Age (ref. 25-29) | | | | |
| 18-24 | | | | 2.35** |
| 30-34 | | | | 1.28 |
| Education (ref. secondary level) | | | | |
| Primary level | | | | 1.07 |
| Tertiary level | | | | 1.33 |
| Constant | .23*** | .28*** | .17*** | .13*** |
| -2 Log likelihood | 673.122 | 621.852 | 608.192 | 596.158 |
| Nagelkerke R Square | .018 | .134 | .163 | .188 |
| N | 652 | 652 | 652 | 652 |

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of participating politically by group and associational membership



Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of participating politically by group and interpersonal network

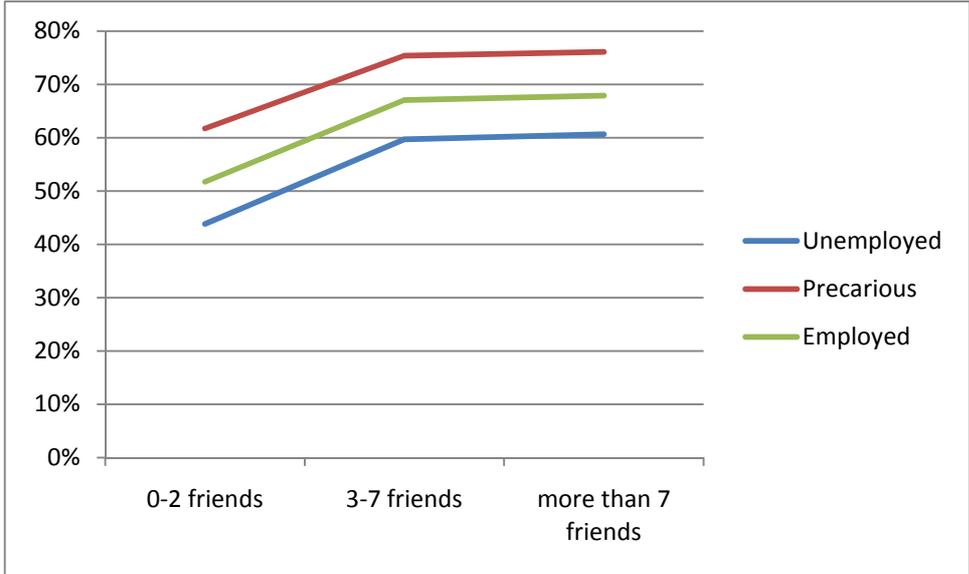


Figure 3: Predicted probabilities of taking part in protest activities by group and associational membership

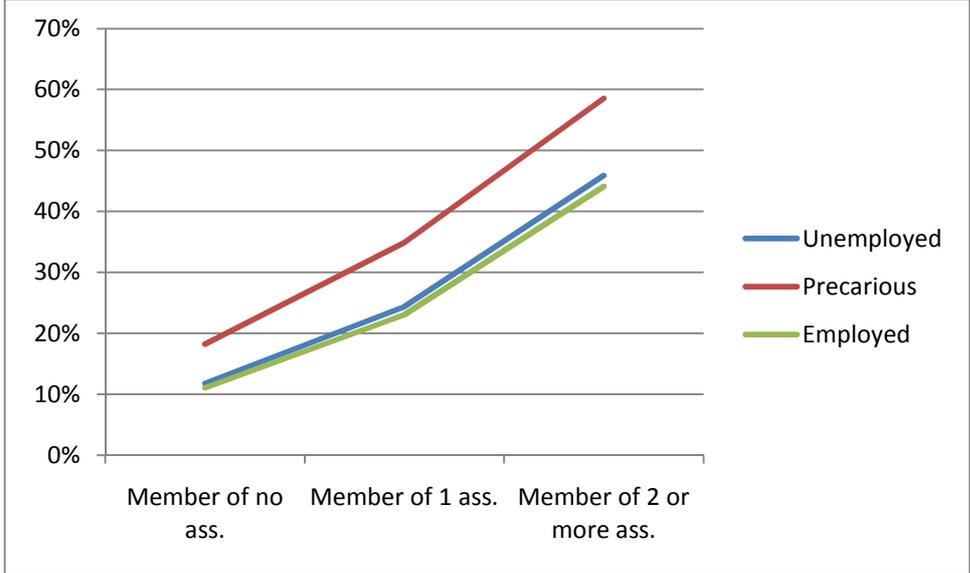


Figure 4: Predicted probabilities of taking part in protest activities by group and interpersonal network

