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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Non-Formal Education and Political Participation in Post-Socialist Countries

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## ABSTRACT

The relationship between educational fulfillment and political participation has been one of the most persistently studied subjects within the field (e.g., Berinsky and Lenz 2010). Previous studies define the positive relationship between education and political participation. It means that people who have a higher education are more likely to participate in politics than those who are less-educated. This includes both conventional and unconventional forms of participation, specifically voting and protesting (Huntington & Nelson 1976; Marsh 1990; & Dalton 2009). Falling in line with the previous research provided on the link between formal education and political participation, does non-formal education also produce similar outcomes? To understand the link between non-formal education and political participation, this study collects and explores empirical data in the post-socialist countries. With the data collected from the World Values Survey, the Eurostat Adult Education Survey, and the Eurostat Adult Education Survey in post-socialist countries, a correlation analysis between independent variable (job-related learning activities) and dependent variables (voting turnout and attending demonstration) are performed. The results of this study provide an insight into whether or not it is worth for the government to continue to administer the funds for non-formal education to consolidate a representative democracy in the post-socialist countries.

&lt;Key-words&gt;

Non-Formal Education, Political Participation, Post- Socialist Countries

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## I . Introduction

Much debate has taken place on the properties of political participation. What causes people to participate in politics? Do such activities only affect a specific type of participation, or does it encompass all areas? While much research has been conducted on these questions, the correlation between non-formal education and political participation has been left open for debate. Michelle Kuenzi conducts a study in the rural areas of Senegal to explore this question. Her findings find that non-formal education does positively affect political participation in a number of ways. She also mentions that similar studies have been conducted in areas of Latin America and Asia following the same relationship (Kuenzi, 2006), but not the area of the post-socialist countries. Therefore, this study sets out to discover whether or not non-formal education positively affects political participation in the post-socialist countries as Kuenzi's study finds it does in Senegal.

### 1. Non-formal Education

The term “non-formal education” was first used in 1968 by Phillip Coombs to label a new idea for a different kind of education which was not confined to the boundaries drawn by formal education (La Belle, 1982; 1986). However, the general idea was most likely introduced by Paulo Friere who believed that certain personal developments within educational systems would lead to the empowerment of the people and who advocated rejection of the mass education system (Kuenzi, 2006; La Belle, 1986). This idea follows what is a combination between the functional and structural views of education. The functional view, which is used in the study by Coombs and Ahmed, states that education is a lifelong process. This is typically held as the basis of informal education. The structural approach, however, is important in that it facilitates the learning of specific ideas or skills which help a person succeed in many avenues of life. Usually, this falls under the formal structure. Non-formal education, as a fusion of these approaches, is of a broader scope than formal education but does not reach out to include much of the informal realm (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974).

To be able to discuss the classification of non-formal education, it is pertinent to provide definitions for what it is not. Formal, non-formal, and informal education are separated by a fine line because each does have its own characteristics. Formal education is any learning that occurs in a structured, organized way (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004). It typically is funded and run by the government, and it includes lower primary school and ranges up until the end of the tertiary level. The other end of the spectrum is known as informal education, sometimes called lifelong learning. La Belle entertains the idea that informal education is “the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment.” It has no structure or specified instruction (La Belle, 1982; 1986).

Non-formal education falls into the category between formal and informal education. Kuenzi conceptualized this type of education as any program that is set up to provide basic literacy and numeracy skills to its students. This usually includes the adults who have never taken part in a formal education system or dropouts from that system (Kuenzi, 2006). La Belle created a more in-depth definition for the concept and states that it is any educational activity that is both organized and structured but provided outside of the formal system which focuses on a specific topic of learning to certain subgroups within a society. Usually it includes adults as well as children, but this study will focus on the non-formal learning of adults only because the data collected includes only the adult population who is capable of voting and otherwise participating in politics.

In many areas, such as the developing countries, the need for non-formal education arose for people who could not obtain a good public education or required a supplement to their formal education. To be sure, non-formal education must satisfy two sets of criteria: it must involve an organized systematic structure and not be included within the boundaries of the formal system. Another guideline is that it must work toward meeting certain educational goals. Rather than a degree or diploma like those received at the completion of formal education, non-formal education might provide a certificate or badge to the students (La Belle, 1982; 1986).

Many non-formal education activities in developing countries focus on literacy and numeracy as well as those pertaining to an individual's everyday needs such as nutrition, health, and employment issues. According to La Belle, there are six categories of personal development for which an adult might request instruction from non-formal education: moral instruction, appreciation of the arts, values, problem solving, leisure time, and basic skills. Job training is also included, and it encompasses a large variety of occupations, including instruction on trade-skills, military training, and acquiring service skills. These are all categorized under three overarching types of non-formal educational systems: those that offer industrial and commercial skill training; those which allow an individual or group to adapt to a changing society, such as agricultural extension, literacy, and health instruction; and those which facilitate community development and organization (Kuenzi, 2006; La Belle, 1982).

In his work entitled, La Belle also separates non-formal learning opportunities under two contrasting paradigms: the equilibrium paradigm and the conflict paradigm. Any activity that strives for the increase of human capital, such as job training and basic skills development, is categorized under the equilibrium paradigm. This is a system that naturally equals itself out but operates under internal stresses, which must be overcome. In essence, if some aspect that causes equilibrium is present, the removal of that aspect will result in instability. Adaptation is the only way to adjust for the changing of such conditions. Those associated with any revolutionary activity or attempts at social change are grouped under the conflict paradigm. This paradigm entertains the idea that people are egocentric and that ways of obtaining their desires include participation in group

action. Contrary to the equilibrium paradigm, those who advocate the conflict paradigm state that there are not separate parts of a society that interact with one another; rather, each part acts independently of the others, which emphasizes the role of structures in society (La Belle, 1986).

Taking the above definitions and arguments about non-formal education into account, certain regions and countries have started to implement forms of this education into their societies. According to the European Union, formal education is not capable of fully providing for the European need for and interest in gaining information, but non-formal education has been considered both an effective supplement and complement. Studies in Romania show that non-formal education has been successful in the increase of development within the country. Although Europe as a whole considers specifically formal education to be a strong link to development, non-formal avenues have proven to be less costly, which provide for a more affordable alternative balance for formal education (Padurean, 2012). This major reason shows why non-formal education is increasingly important within the post-socialist region.

## **2. Political Participation**

One single definition for political participation is currently impossible to find, as every scholar has his or her own way of understanding and conceptualizing it. According to Huntington and Nelson, political participation can be defined as activity by private citizens who influence government decision-making. Attitudes toward politics are not included within this definition. He later says “political participation may be directed toward changing decisions by current authorities toward replacing or retaining those authorities or toward changing or defending the existing organization of the political system and the rules of the political game” (Huntington & Nelson, 1976). However, Verba and Nie argue against the latter idea excluding from their study any attempt of a group of people to either change or keep the current government. Building on this, many agree that the political activity must be government-focused, which means that any activity by one individual or group against another individual or group should be excluded. Contrary to this, Booth and Seligson include within their conceptualization strikes by workers or unions against a company. Conge provides a definition from Verba and Nie that political participation is a behavior conducted to affect the decisions of the government or its policies. However, Conge also provides his own views on what it means, stating: “political participation is any action (or inaction) of an individual or a collectivity of individuals which intentionally or unintentionally opposes or supports, changes or maintains some feature(s) of a government or community” (Conge, 1988). It is mutually understood that political participation entails the participation only of citizens, not of political officials (van Deth, 2001; Huntington & Nelson, 1976).

The realm of political participation can be separated into two distinct groups: conventional and unconventional participation. During the 1960s, participation could be

defined as any political activity that was considered “traditional,” (later termed conventional) whereas in the decade before, only voting and campaign work were held to be acts of participation. Later, participation in community groups was added to the category of conventional activities, and unconventional methods were eventually added through the categories of protesting and social movements (van Deth, 2001). Conventional participation can occur at any point in time and tends to happen the most often. Some examples include whether or not one reads about politics, discusses politics, persuades others to vote in a specific way, is active in community participation, attends political meetings, contacts politicians, or works for a particular party or candidate (Marsh, 1990). Unconventional participation only occurs when the need or opportunity arises. This means that they do not occur on a regular basis, but only when circumstances call for such political engagement (Barnes et al., 1979). Some examples for unconventional action are protests, petition signing, boycotting, occupation of government buildings by participating in a sit-in, and even the illegal forms of vandalism and violent rioting (Dalton, 2009; Marsh, 1990).

All of the above arguments lead to the decision of what should be included within the framework of this study, conventional and/or unconventional participation and what specific actions, as well as how they should be measured. Although Marsh and Barnes provide a convincing argument against the use of voter turnout, this study will include voter turnout as well as different forms of unconventional action, as does Dalton and Inglehart. Political participation, according to Inglehart, can be divided into three different levels: the least demanding route of voting in elections, the next avenue of learning more about politics, and then the most demanding route of the three – trying to do something about a political issue (Inglehart, 1977). This is why both voting and attendance of demonstrations have been chosen for this model – it encompasses the easiest route of participation as well as the most taxing. The other conventional actions listed above will not be sufficient in this research, due to the inability to create and deliver a survey within the time allotted for the study. Another reason is that voter turnout is a more efficient measurement for a study which will be using cross-national level data rather than individual level data. In the realm of unconventional participation, this study will contrast the work done by Barnes and Kaase, who pair the measurement of the potential to participate in direct action with individual intent to participate. This type of measurement provides data on an individual level, rather than a cross-national level, on which this study presents its case (Barnes & Kaase, 1979). This research will be conducted using data that shows how many people within a given country have participated in demonstrations in the past.

Although the likelihood that people will participate in political elections in an increasing manner is high due to the greater accessibility of the voting process, this is not the way it has progressed (Pacek et al., 2009). Throughout the period between the end of the communist rule and the present, post-socialist countries have indicated a lower level

of participation than had been projected. These low levels pose a threat to their relatively newly formed democracies. In fact, this trend of decreasing levels of political participation is not common only in this region, but it is rapidly becoming the norm throughout the world (Howard, 2002). It is well-known specifically that voter turnout rates in the post-socialist countries have been declining over the past couple of decades. Citizens have continued to neglect the polls on Election Day. The idea that increased accessibility to voting will encourage people to participate more in elections comes from the stakes-based approach to voter turnout, which states that people will be more likely to vote when there is more to lose (Pacek et al., 2009).

### **3. Post-Socialist Countries**

Within the framework of this research, the post-socialist European countries will be evaluated. This area of interest is important to study because of the lack of research provided on this region in reference to non-formal education specifically. Kuenzi's efforts were focused on the country of Senegal, and it is mentioned that such studies have been done in Latin America and other parts of Africa and Asia as well. This leaves the post-socialist countries open for more speculation and research potential. Also, the study of these countries provides an example of an area which best allows for the understanding of the inner workings of political participation in the context of new governmental systems. Their common histories of authoritarian rule, with a change to democracy or democratic-like governments provide a common vantage point from which one can compare. As stated by Jackman and Miller, Eastern Europe and Russia had a strong legacy of authoritarianism in the recent past. This indicates the difficulties that the region has in gaining democratic support and maintaining the interest of its citizens in the democratic process. The data and analyses show that being exposed to the workings of democracy and the presence of democratic institutions provides much influence on the level of political participation in a positive way (Letki, 2003). With the fairly recent addition of the non-governmental and non-formal educational programs, due to the possibility of having such non-governmental systems present, it is of great interest to scholars to understand this phenomenon. Knowing how non-formal education impacts political participation within these societies allows them to better understand the workings of these new regimes and how to improve participation levels within these countries.

## **II. Research Design**

### **1. Date and Variables**

The general hypothesis of this study can be stated as such: As the level of non-formal education increases, the greater the level of political participation in post-socialist countries. To perform an analysis to test this hypothesis, both of the descriptive statistics

and the correlative analysis of the variables are applied. Data for these analyses are compiled for the independent variables of job-related learning activity for both the years of 2006 and 2011. The dependent variables are voter turnout in the latest parliamentary election, voter turnout in the latest presidential election, and the percentage of the population of each country who had participated in a demonstration in the past.

Providing a way to operationalize the factors of non-formal education, data was collected from the Eurostat Adult Education Survey (AES) for the years of 2006 and 2011 to provide the percentage of people per country evaluated who reported participating in job-related learning activities in those years. This survey was conducted by each of the countries of the European Union (EU) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), and it is included within the EU statistics on lifelong learning. The survey was focused on individuals between the ages of twenty-five and sixty-four who lived in private households. The surveys for 2006 were conducted between 2005 and 2008, and those for 2011 were carried out between July 2011 and June 2012. To measure the latest voter turnout percentages for both the parliamentary and presidential elections within each country, data from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) is employed. This database includes all voting statistics available since 1945 and is constantly being updated as new data is provided. In addition, the recent World Values Survey is employed to measure citizen's attendance in demonstrations. The cross-national survey of 2010 provided by this organization included a question intended to measure the unconventional political action of participating in demonstrations of each respondent. The minimum sample size of the surveys submitted was 1000 people between the ages of 18 and 85. The surveys were executed in a face-to-face interview setting.

Job-related learning activities are considered important for this study because of the access to the data as well as the presence of many important characteristics or factors that push citizens to become involved in such activities. Briefly mentioned was the role of political efficacy in attracting individuals to become active in the political realm. This sense of self-confidence in politics allows a person to be comfortable enough to join a political rally or campaign, vote for the candidate he or she believes will best serve the position as well as even writing a letter to a congressman about an important issue that he or she feels needs to be addressed. Also, the ambition one has to push himself toward bettering his career through participating in job-related learning activities would also be useful in steering him toward political engagement. If an individual is driven in one area, it is more likely that he or she will be ambitious in other areas in life as well. Where other forms of non-formal education would have also sufficed for analysis, the information for the job-related learning activities was most accessible.



## 2. Hypotheses

Given the above operationalizations of the variables, it is possible to produce several research hypotheses as the following:

- (1) The higher level of job-related learning activities, the higher voting turnout in parliamentary elections in the post-socialist countries.
- (2) The higher level of job-related learning activities, the higher voting turnout in the presidential elections in the post-socialist countries.
- (3) The higher level of job-related learning activities, the higher level of participation in a lawful demonstrations in the post-socialist countries.

Post-socialist countries share similar histories, due to the approximate times of their regime changes. The fall of the Soviet Union provided an opportunity for most of these countries to change governmental roles or choose completely new forms of government. This commonality indicates a period where the entire structure of the international structure changed in a major way. Particularly important was the ability for these countries to incorporate non-formal educational systems, as well as a change in the relationship of the citizens to their duties of political participation. However, only data beginning with the year 1990 and continuing on to the present day were chosen due to data discrepancies during the previous years. Where these new standards of elections began as far back as 1990, when the major regime-shift began, the relative data is not present. Whereas there are a few instances in which appropriate data can be found for specific countries, not all of them have such information. In that case, the first year in which all cases have submitted data will be the starting point for the collection, and it will continue up until the latest elections, which exist up until 2011. Specifically selected were the dates for the latest parliamentary and presidential elections for which there is information for each of the countries included. The model includes the following countries for evaluation: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The raw data sets for each of these countries are shown in Appendix A.

Although this data exists for almost all entities considered, it is not entirely the case. Data could not be found for the countries of Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, or Uzbekistan for one or more of the variables used. For these reasons, these post-communist countries which do not provide the data for both variables have to be excluded.

## III. Findings

With the data that has been collected from the World Values Survey, the Eurostat Adult Education Survey, and the IDEA survey for each of the variables involved, a correlation analysis were performed. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of variables. As

is shown, out of the 28 post-socialist countries originally selected, only 11 were used in the analysis of job-related learning activities in both 2006 and 2011. Column 3 includes the minimum percentages shown within each variable, and column 4 provides the statistics for the highest percentages shown. Column 5 provides the mean data sets for all of the countries examined.

<Table 1> Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Job Related Learning Activities in 2006	11	70.80	96.30	86.91	7.04
Job Related Learning in 2011	11	72.40	94.40	84.12	6.32
Voter Turnout of Latest Parliamentary Election	28	35.91	93.87	61.56	13.51
Voter Turnout of Latest Presidential Election	24	42.41	96.70	64.75	16.65
Attending Lawful Demonstrations Have Done	11	4.50	27.80	13.71	7.08

Sources: The World Values Survey; International Institute of Democracy & Electoral Systems; and Eurostat Adult Education Survey.

For those who participated in job-related learning activities in 2006, Slovenia held the position for the lowest percentage of 70.80% of the population, and the highest percentage came from Bulgaria with 96.30% of its population having participated. On average, 86.91% of people participated in job-related learning activities that year. Not much difference is observed during the year 2011 in the statistics. The minimum percentage is shown once again in Slovenia with 72.40% of its population having participated, and the maximum percentage is found again in Bulgaria with 94.40%. Together, all of the countries propose a mean of 84.12% for 2011.

Because almost all of the 28 post-socialist countries had readily-accessed data for voter turnout during the latest presidential and parliamentary elections, all possible data was collected for the statistical table. The lowest percentage of voter turnout for the latest parliamentary election is found in Lithuania with 35.91% of its citizens having participated, and the highest percentage was in Turkmenistan with 93.87%. On average, 61.56% of the population between each of the 28 countries analyzed voted in their most recent parliamentary elections. Voter turnout for the latest presidential elections did not dramatically differ, although only 24 of the 28 countries were analyzed for this variable. 42.41% of Slovenians voted in the most previous election, producing the lowest turnout rate observed, whereas Turkmenistan again held the highest percentage of 96.70%. The calculated mean is shown at 64.75%.

Table 2 gives the analysis of the correlation between variables. Job-related learning activities in both 2006 and 2011 have been set with the three categories of voter turnout of the latest parliamentary election, voter turnout of the latest presidential election, and people who have attended lawful demonstrations. Each section is measured by the Pearson's R correlation coefficient and the probability factor of significance (2-tailed). The number of units within the sample has also been recorded under each variable. Pearson's R is measured on a scale of zero to one, where zero signifies no correlation and one denotes a perfect relationship between variables. In measuring the independent variable used for non-formal education and the dependent variables used for political participation, according to the table there is a weak correlative relationship.

<Table 2> Correlations of Variables

Independent Variables (NFE)		Voter Turnout of Latest Parliamentary Election	Voter Turnout of Latest Presidential Election	Attending Lawful Demonstration Have Done
Job Related Learning Activities in 2006	Pearson Correlation	-0.083	0.501	0.397
	Sig. (2 Tailed)	0.808	0.206	0.226
	N	11	8	11
Job Related Learning Activities in 2011	Pearson Correlation	-0.481	-0.032	-0.12
	Sig. (2 Tailed)	0.134	0.94	0.74
	N	11	8	10

Source: The World Values Survey; International Institute of Democracy & Electoral Systems; and Eurostat Adult Education Survey.

Looking at the row for job-related learning activity in 2006, there is actually a slight negative relationship with parliamentary election voter turnout. This indicates that those who participated in such activities during the year of 2006 were less likely to vote in the parliamentary election for the most recent year. However, the next column shows a good positive relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Looking at the last column, the relationship is again weak, but is positively correlated. The probability of each dependent variable in reference to the independent variable is insignificant, because each reaches a number higher than the 0.05 level.

Moving down to the job-related learning activity row for 2011, it is shown that it negatively correlates with all three dependent variables. Presidential voter turnout and attendance of lawful demonstrations are both significantly weak correlations, whereas

voter turnout for the parliamentary elections is slightly stronger. Again, it is shown that the probability of the relationship of the dependent variables with the independent variable is insignificant, due to the fact that the 2-tailed test of significance produces values over 0.05.

Given the above findings, a model for the hypothesis cannot be produced. The hypothesized positive correlations between the independent and dependent variables were not present, and in some cases reversed in the opposite direction to show negative correlation, albeit insignificant. This finding is surprising, as the literature indicated that a positive relationship should have occurred. In turn, this means that the findings Kuenzi provided in her research in Senegal do not necessarily insinuate the same results for the post-socialist countries.

#### IV. Conclusions

Reflecting upon the general question of this research, how non-formal education affects the rates of political participation in the post-socialist countries, allows for a summation of information found throughout the study. Such a subject is of interest to both scholars and policy makers for its potential guiding information on how to best continue down the road of education with a goal of raising political participation. The information gathered through this study is intended to provide insight into whether or not it is worth it for the politicians of a country to continue to administer the funds for non-formal education. After a close examination of the data, one can see that the lack of a correlative relationship between the two variables points toward a better allocation of a government's resources than investing in non-formal education if the goal is boosting participation in the political sphere. Also contributing to the literature is an addition to the lack of research conducted on the issue. There has been much written in the way of formal education and political participation, but there is scarce information on the tie with non-formal education, and where there are studies, it lacks the viewpoint of the post-socialist countries.

Kuenzi reports that the results found through her research indicate that NFE has a positive effect on civic participation in relation to her work in Senegal. However, this does not translate to a similar study on post-socialist countries. In fact, the data surprisingly shows that non-formal education through learning in job-related activity has no semblance of correlation with the levels of political participation within a country, at least in terms of voter turnout and participation in demonstrations. Through an analysis conducted between an independent variable of job-related learning activity during the years of 2006 and 2011 and the dependent variables of voter turnout in both the latest parliamentary and presidential elections as well as past participation in demonstrations, a correlation could not be found. The Pearson R correlation coefficient and the two-tailed test of significance were employed, and the results produced were different, and in some

cases opposite, of the anticipated results. This may indicate that non-formal education may only produce the skills and characteristics needed for such participation without actually leading to correlation with political participation itself (Berinsky & Lenz, 2010).

Although the data collected for this study was not perfect, time and resources limited the availability of the data as well as the ability to correct some of the issues by inserting additional quantitative data. With such restrictions, it was difficult to proceed further. However, in the presence of more time, a different perspective could have been proposed for the field. Future studies may include an evaluation across regions, and possibly even a universal evaluation. Also significant would be the inclusion of multiple variables to test against the independent variable of political participation - how does non-formal education fare against other factors that affect political participation, such as formal education, level of income, level of democracy within the selected countries, type of government, or even the political culture. Such modifications are thought to produce more thorough results as well as even more significant findings.

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