2  
1. The political participation of young people in   
times of crisis: a framework for analysis  
Daniela Chironi, Donatella della Porta and Chiara Milan  
In academic and public debates, times of economic, social, and political crisis have been   
associated with a decline in political participation and civic engagement (della Porta, 2013;   
2014; Kerbo, 1982). In addition to the long-term effects of the financial and economic crisis   
started in 2008, since 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted not only the economy but   
also all aspects of everyday life. At the same time, climate change and global warming have   
created unprecedented environmental threats. In a similar context, scholarly expectations   
would predict political participation to diminish sharply and an entire generation to disengage   
from politics. In a liquid society (Bauman, 1997), the erosion of collective identities and   
the challenges to solidarity processes, coupled with the perception of a closure of political   
opportunities and a decline in informal networks and resources available (money, power, and   
status), typical consequences of crises, are in fact usually interpreted as factors that jeopardise   
political participation. As all these conditions have severely affected young people, analyses   
have spread to point at a disenchanted, frustrated, apathetic young cohort (see Cammaerts et   
al., 2014; Earl et al., 2017).  
Challenging these expectations, research on contemporary social movements has noted that   
young people are not apathetic, disengaged, anti-political, or detached from political participa-  
tion (Amnå and Ekman, 2013; della Porta, 2019a; della Porta et al., 2022a). Although they are   
suffering high levels of unemployment, precarisation, cuts in social services, changes in con-  
sumption patterns, and a grim outlook for their future, as results of the intertwining between   
different types of crises; those material grievances are coupled with idealistic aspirations, fuel-  
ling mobilisation (della Porta et al., 2022a, Ch. 2 and 3; 2022b). From the Arab Spring to the   
Indignados movement, from the anti-austerity protests to the recent mobilisations for climate   
justice, gender equality, and labour rights, a new generation has engaged in contentious poli-  
tics, advocating for a more just and inclusive society. Especially in those countries that have   
been hit hardest by the financial crisis, a substantial number of young citizens have reacted to   
adverse conditions with increased political and social mobilisation, choosing predominantly   
intermittent, non-institutionalised, horizontal forms of political participation, performed across   
hybrid public spaces, from the Web to the town squares as well as self-managed spaces (della   
Porta, 2014; Milan, 2019). In addition, especially some types of social movements and protest   
campaigns – such as the Global Justice Movement beginning in the 2000s, the anti-austerity   
protests, which followed the 2008 financial crisis, and recent anti-racist, environmentalist, and   
gender-based mobilisations – are over-proportionally populated by young people (Andretta   
and Sommier, 2009; Andretta and della Porta, 2015; della Porta, 2013; della Porta, 2019a;   
della Porta et al., 2022a, Ch. 3).  
Furthermore, since the early 2020s, movements like Fridays For Future and Extinction   
Rebellion have mobilised a large number of young activists in protest against climate change   
(de Moor et al., 2020; Zamponi et al., 2022). Similarly, young cohorts have been found to