Vesna Laissani*[1], Eva Klemencic Mirazchiyski[2], Igor Peras[3]

* Corresponding Author
[1] International School for Social and Business Studies & Splošna knjižnica Ljutomer
[2] International School for Social and Business Studies & Educational Research Institute
[3] Educational Research Institute

Students With an Immigrant Background and Active Citizenship in Slovenia: Analysis of ICCS 2016 Database

Abstract

This study examines the civic attitudes of eighth-grade students in Slovenia with and without an immigrant background within the framework of civic socialization and the institutional formation of civic competences. Drawing on ICCS 2016 data, linear regression models and weighted group comparisons were employed to analyse key dimensions of active citizenship: expected political participation, gender and ethnic equality orientations, national attachment, and trust in democratic institutions.

The findings indicate that several statistically significant differences exist between the groups. Students with an immigrant background report lower expectations of electoral participation and weaker national attachment. Differences also emerge in equality orientations, with lower support for gender equality but stronger endorsement of ethnic equality. No statistically significant differences were identified in trust in democratic institutions. Although some differences reached statistical significance, effect sizes remain small, suggesting limited substantive divergence between the groups.

The study advances discussions on civic integration and inclusion in contexts of increasing migratory diversity and underscores the role of schools as central educational spaces for the development of active citizenship.

1. Introduction

In Slovenia, students with an immigrant background constitute a growing share of the school population, yet their educational and civic experiences remain underexplored in national research. Existing scholarship suggests that students from an immigrant background often encounter structural and individual challenges, such as language barriers, socio-economic disadvantage, and restricted access to social capital. These conditions may shape disparities in their sense of belonging, civic identity formation, and patterns of social participation (Banks, 2017; Lelie, et.al., 2010).

In contemporary societies shaped by migration and rapid social change, questions of civic participation among young people have become increasingly important. Active citizenship refers to engagement in political and community life and the endorsement of democratic values, whereas passive citizenship reflects more limited involvement in public affairs (Enchikova et al., 2021). Political participation is a core element of democracy and includes diverse forms of engagement beyond electoral activities alone (van Deth, 2011; Prats & Meunier, 2021). Civic and citizenship education therefore plays a key role in fostering critical thinking, responsibility, and readiness to participate in democratic processes (Klemenčič & Mirazchiyski, 2023). In Slovenia, civic education is most explicitly addressed through the compulsory subject Civic and Homeland Culture and Ethics, taught in grades 7 and 8 (Klemenčič et al., 2019). Research highlights a complex picture of youth civic engagement. Traditional forms of political involvement are often relatively low, while non-institutionalized forms of participation, such as protests, online activism, and social movements, have become increasingly common (Kirbiš et al., 2010; Weiss, 2020). School-based participatory experiences have also been linked to later civic engagement, suggesting that adolescence may represent an important period for the development of civic orientations over time (Keating & Janmaat, 2016).

Migration and the integration of students with an immigrant background into democratic processes in Europe and Slovenia are relevant societal issues. Schools continue to represent an important context for the development of civic competences, democratic participation, and students' sense of belonging (Banks, 2017). The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) provides a comprehensive and methodologically grounded framework for examining institutional trust, equality orientations, and political engagement among adolescents (Schulz et al., 2018). In the present study, we focus on data from ICCS 2016, conducting secondary analyses which enables us a deeper understanding of structural dimensions of inclusion and inequality and their development over time (Heath & Brinbaum, 2014). Therefore, the ICCS 2016 data continue to offer meaningful insights into democratic development, equity, and inclusive civic education in contemporary societies.

During adolescence, civic attitudes are formed through processes of socialization in which the family, school, and broader social environment play an important role in young people's development (Keating & Janmaat, 2016). Students with an immigrant background are influenced by multiple social processes that shape their sense of belonging, their understanding of equality, and their trust in democratic institutions (Banks, 2017; Lelie et al., 2010). The school environment, as a shared space of learning and interaction, may contribute to the formation of common values and to reducing differences between groups (Klemenčič & Mirazchiyski, 2023). Differences in civic attitudes should therefore not be interpreted solely as a consequence of immigrant status, but rather as the result of the interplay between family, school, and broader societal factors.

Given these perspectives, it is important to better understand how adolescents in Slovenia perceive civic participation, equality, national identity, and democratic institutions, particularly in relation to immigrant background. The present study draws on ICCS 2016 data to examine whether students with and without an immigrant family background differ in expected political participation, attitudes toward gender and ethnic equality, perceptions of national identity, and trust in democratic institutions. The main purpose of this study is to assess whether meaningful attitudinal differences between these groups can be observed within

the Slovenian context. Based on theoretical foundations and the dataset available, we have formulated four hypotheses in the present study:

H1: Eighth--grade students with an immigrant background in Slovenia show less interest in future participation in society (e.g., political participation, voting, volunteering) compared to eighth-grade students without an immigrant background.

H2: Eighth–grade students with an immigrant background in Slovenia express more positive attitudes toward equality between different groups (e.g., gender equality, equal rights for ethnic groups) compared to eighth-grade students without an immigrant background.

H3: Eighth–grade students with an immigrant background show less positive attitudes toward their country of residence (Slovenia) compared to students without an immigrant background (e.g., attitudes related to the national flag, respect, pride, and living in Slovenia).

H4: Eighth–grade students with an immigrant background in Slovenia report lower levels of trust in democratic institutions compared to eighth-grade students without an immigrant background.

2. Literature Review

Active citizenship can be understood through theories of learning, social action, and models of cultural adaptation and integration. The present study draws on four complementary perspectives: social learning theory, social action theory, the acculturation model, and integration theory.

The theory of social learning explains why an individual follows a certain path in life. Therefore, human behaviour is explained as a product of many learning trials: both planned and random; in this way, everyone finds their own method and learns something from it (Akers & Jensen, 2015). Through learning, we acquire skills, knowledge, experiences, interests, values, preferences, feelings, and emotions, while future activities are also conceived, as explained by Krumboltz (2009, in Drobnič, 2012). The author particularly highlights two forms of learning experiences: instrumental and associative learning experiences. In instrumental learning experiences, individuals observe the consequences of their own actions. This provides feedback: approval (positive) or rejection (negative) of their actions. This has an impact on the individual (success or failure of their activities). The second type of experiences that influence an individual's decision–making are associative learning experiences: an individual acquires them by observing the environment and the actions of others, along with all the consequences that follow. Media such as TV, film, online portals, advertising, newspapers, and books have had a significant impact on individuals, offering many opportunities for associative learning Krumboltz (2009, in Drobnič, 2012).

Social action theory conceptualizes human behaviour as purposeful and meaningful: to understand an individual's actions, one must consider their motivations, goals, and values (Weber, 1978). Weber (1978) distinguishes four ideal types of social action. Goal-rational action involves pursuing a clearly defined goal through a rational selection of means. Value-rational action is guided by personal or ethical convictions, regardless of outcomes. Affective action is driven by emotions, and traditional action is rooted in habit and routine (Weber, 1978). In the context of civic and political engagement, this framework helps explain not only whether individuals participate, but also why they choose particular forms of participation and what meanings they attach to them. Building on this foundation, contemporary scholarship has extended Weber's insights to modern forms of civic engagement and the conditions that enable or constrain participation. Zukin and colleagues (2006) emphasize that bonding social capital can support collective efficacy, making civic action more likely and more sustainable. Weber and colleagues (2004) similarly argue that civic self-efficacy—especially when developed among students—can encourage value-driven participation. Other authors underline how participation is shaped by institutional opportunities and constraints: Layton and Smith (2015) show that contexts such as churches or schools may either restrict or enable active citizenship, while Kelly (2004) draws attention to bureaucratic structures that can limit meaningful citizen involvement. More recent conceptualizations further broaden the definition of the "active citizen." Weger and Herbig (2021) present active citizenship as reflexive and ethically grounded, including research-oriented engagement, whereas Welzel and colleagues (2003) highlight the role of emancipative values and shared norms in sustaining democratic participation over time.

From an educational perspective, these arguments imply that active citizenship is not only an individual disposition but also an outcome shaped by socialization processes and the learning environments in which young people develop. For the development of active citizenship in education, it is thus important to provide students with positive role models of civic engagement—particularly teachers and parents—while also fostering critical thinking, value-based reflection, dialogue, and self-awareness (Banks, 2008; Hoskins and Janmaat, 2019; Biesta, 2011). Such educational practices can strengthen students' motivation to engage and contribute to social change (Kerr, 1999). Taken together, social learning theory and social action theory provide a complementary lens for understanding civic development. Social learning theory emphasizes how civic competences are formed through observation, interaction, and reinforcement within social contexts (Bandura, 1997), whereas social action theory clarifies how individuals interpret participation, select among different forms of engagement, and evaluate civic action in relation to goals, values, emotions, and habits (Kalberg, 1994). Combined, these perspectives offer a coherent explanation of both the development of civic competences and the meaning-making processes through which young people translate those competences into participation.

To further understand civic development among students with an immigrant background, it is necessary to consider theories of cultural adaptation and integration as well. Berry's (1997) two-dimensional acculturation model provides a structured framework for analysing how individuals adapt to a new cultural context. The model examines two central questions: whether individuals seek to maintain their culture of origin and whether they aim to establish relationships with the majority society. Based on these dimensions, Berry (1997) identifies four acculturation strategies. Integration refers to maintaining one's original culture while actively participating in the majority society and is often regarded as the most favourable strategy for the development of active citizenship. Assimilation involves abandoning the culture of origin in favour of full adaptation to the majority culture. Separation occurs when individuals maintain their original culture but avoid engagement with the broader society. Marginalization represents the weakest form of civic connection, as individuals lose ties both to their culture of origin and to the majority society (Berry, 1997). From a civic perspective, these strategies are likely to shape patterns of participation, national attachment, and trust in institutions.

Closely related to acculturation processes is the broader integration model, which is central to inclusive civic and citizenship education. Integration-oriented approaches support identity formation rooted in one's own cultural background while simultaneously fostering openness to democratic participation within the wider society. Scholars such as Banks (2008), Osler and Starkey (2003), and Barrett (2017) argue that pluralistic and inclusive models of citizenship education strengthen students' sense of belonging and promote intercultural understanding—both of which are essential for democratic societies. At the same time, the theory of segmented assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993) cautions against assuming uniform integration trajectories. Young people with an immigrant background may follow diverse pathways: some achieve successful integration into mainstream institutions, while others face structural barriers that increase the risk of marginalization. These differentiated trajectories have direct implications for civic orientations, including willingness to participate, perceptions of equality, and feelings of belonging.

Together with social learning and social action perspectives, acculturation and integration theories deepen the analytical framework by situating civic attitudes within broader processes of cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, and structural opportunity. Civic development among students with an immigrant background can thus be understood not as a fixed outcome of migration status, but as the result of dynamic interactions between individual learning processes, value orientations, institutional contexts, and integration pathways.

Although not based on a systematic review, the literature indicates that research on students with an immigrant background within civic and citizenship education has also been conducted in Slovenia. Large-scale studies such as ICCS and related policy initiatives (Berry & Taban, 2022; EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion) provide important national and international perspectives on participation and integration.

However, research directly connecting active citizenship and immigrant background remains limited. Existing studies suggest that young people with an immigrant background often express aspirations toward civic engagement and belonging, yet structural inequalities may shape their opportunities for participation. Both international and Slovenian research highlight education systems as key contexts for supporting inclusion and addressing socio-economic disadvantage (Vižintin, 2013). Despite these contributions, empirical analyses that systematically examine differences in civic attitudes between students with and without an immigrant background in Slovenia remain scarce. This study addresses this gap by analysing ICCS 2016 data to provide a focused comparison of civic attitudes, expected participation, and institutional trust among eighth-grade students in the Slovenian context.

The international studies summarized in Table 1 situate immigrant background students in Slovenia within broader debates on migration, civic integration, and democratic participation. Projects such as IMMERSE (Puroila et al., 2021; Martin, 2023) highlight the importance of socio-educational integration and students' sense of belonging for active citizenship. Research on young migrants (Mansouri & Kirpitchenko, 2016; Prati et al., 2020) shows that civic participation often takes culturally shaped and non-traditional forms. Broader analyses further link civic attitudes and engagement to social capital, institutional contexts, and experiences of inequality (Guagnano & Santini, 2020; Hahn, 2020).

Together, these studies demonstrate that patterns of civic inclusion are context-dependent while revealing shared challenges across countries. Within this broader comparative landscape, the Slovenian context would benefit from further systematic empirical examination, particularly regarding the civic attitudes of students with an immigrant background.

Table 1: International Research on Students with an Immigrant Background

Research and Year	Country	Key Findings	Results	Authors
IMMERSE (EU Horizon 2020), 2018–2023	Ireland	Focus on socio-educational integration through teacher-student and peer relationships.	Integration factors are interconnected and vary by age; reflect students' sense of belonging.	Puroila et al., 2021; Martin, 2023; Mohamed Thomas, 2017; Konsta, 2019; Raabe, 2019; Hart, 2009; Smyth et al., 2004
Active Citizenship among Young Migrants, 2014–2015	Australia	Active citizenship expressed through non-traditional forms, influenced by local and cultural contexts.	Youth gain self-worth and belonging; Arabic-speaking youth face more precarious positions; civic participation is culturally shaped.	Mansouri & Kirpitchenko, 2016
YPAR, 2020–2021	Italy	Promotes youth as civic agents and researchers.	Youth voices must be understood to enable change; comprehensibility is crucial for empowerment.	Prati et al., 2020
PAL Impacts, 2016–2019	UK	Model for fostering active citizenship in schools.	Improves soft skills, student-teacher relationships, and civic attitudes; resource intensive but beneficial.	Jarkiewicz, 2020
EU-SILC Analysis, 2011	UK	Explores links between citizenship and social factors.	Active citizenship is positively associated with social capital and socio–economic status.	Guagnano & Santini, 2020
Global Migration and Citizenship	Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, UK	Focus on educational policies	Identities are fluid and shaped by everyday racism	Hahn, 2020

Education, 2019–2023		and transnational student identities.	and injustice; students engage across borders.	

Table 1 shows that international studies highlight the importance of belonging, school relationships, culturally shaped forms of participation, and structural factors (e.g., social capital), while the civic identity of students with an immigrant background is often dynamic and contextually shaped.

3. Data and Methodology

Sample

This study is based on data from the Slovenian sample of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016 (ICCS 2016). ICCS 2016 was conducted in Slovenia between March and June 2016 and assessed civic knowledge, attitudes, and engagement among eight-grade students (Schulz et al., 2018). The study employed a two-stage stratified sampling design in accordance with international research standards. In the first stage, schools were selected using probability proportional to size (PPS). In the second stage, one eight-grade class was randomly selected within each participating school. This procedure ensured national representativeness of the student population.

The Slovenian ICCS 2016 sample included 135 schools and 2,844 eight-grade students, along with 2,056 teachers and school principals (Klemenčič et al., 2019) The target population consisted of all eight-grade students enrolled in Slovenian schools at the time of data collection.

The following study focuses on differences between students with and without an immigrant background. Immigrant background was operationalized using the variable S_IMMIG, which is based on the country of birth of the student and both parents (Schulz et al., 2018). The original classification used in ICCS 2016 distinguishes between three groups (native students, first-generation students, second-generation students, however for the purposes of the present study students were dichotomized into two groups: students without an immigrant background (native students) and students with an immigrant background (first- and second-generation students combined). Based on dichotomization, 15 % of students reported an immigrant background (Klemenčič et al., 2019), allowing for between group comparisons.

Instruments

Data were drawn from the ICCS 2016 standardized student questionnaire (Schulz et al., 2018). The questionnaire includes validated scales measuring expected political participation, equality orientations, national identity, and institutional trust. For the present study, the following scales were analysed (all scales are available in the ICCS international database):

S_ELECPART (expected electoral participation) is composed of the following variables: voting in local elections, voting in national elections, obtaining information about the candidate before voting in the elections (Schulz et. al., 2018).

S_POLPART (expected active political participation): helping a candidate or a party during an electoral campaign, joining a political party, joining a trade union, standing as a candidate in local elections, joining an organisation with political or charitable aims (Schulz et al., 2018).

S_GENEQL (endorsement of rights and duties/roles of men and women): men and women should have equal opportunities to participate in government, equal rights in all respects, women should not be involved in politics, when jobs are scarce, men should have a greater right to employment than women, men and women should get equal pay for equal work, men are better qualified to be political leaders than women (Schulz et al., 2018).

S_ETHRGHT (endorsement of rights and responsibilities of ethnic/racial groups): all ethnic/racial groups in Slovenia should have equal opportunities to get a good education, all ethnic/racial groups in Slovenia should have equal opportunities to get a good job, schools should teach pupils to respect members of all ethnic/racial groups, members

of all ethnic/racial groups should be encouraged to run in election for political office, and members of all ethnic/racial groups should have the same rights and responsibilities (Schulz et al., 2018).

S_CNTATT (attitudes towards the country, in our case Slovenia): flag of Slovenia is important to me, I have a great respect for Slovenia, in Slovenia we should be proud of what we have achieved, I am proud to live in Slovenia, and generally speaking, it is better to live in Slovenia than in most other countries (Schulz et al., 2018).

S_INTRUST (trust in democratic institutions – were in original questionnaire also named as are in Slovenia): government, local government of your town/city, courts of justice, police, political parties, national parliament (Schulz et al., 2018).

All scales included items rated on a Likert-type response scales and demonstrate satisfactory psychometric properties and cross-national validity (Schulz et al., 2018). For the Slovenian sample, reported internal consistency coefficients range between 0.82 and 0.87 (Schulz et al., 2018). For all scales, higher values indicate stronger endorsement of the respective civic dimension (i.e., more positive attitudes or greater expected participation). Specifically, higher scores reflect greater expected electoral and political participation (S_ELECPART; S_POLPART), stronger support for gender equality and equal rights for ethnic groups (S_GENEQL; S_ETHRGHT), more positive country-related attitudes (S_CNTATT), and higher trust in democratic institutions (S_INTRUST). Thus, across all scales, higher scores consistently correspond to more positive civic orientations.

Statistical analyses

All analyses were conducted using the IEA IDB Analyzer (Version 4), a statistical tool specifically designed for large-scale IEA assessments. The analyses were performed on weighted data using the final student weight variable (TOTWGTS). The software accounts for the complex sampling design and produces design-corrected standard errors, ensuring nationally representative estimates (IEA, 2019).

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, descriptive statistics were computed to present the main characteristics of the sample and to examine mean values of the ICCS scales for students with and without an immigrant background. Second, simple linear regression models were estimated to assess mean differences between the two groups across each civic-related scale. Third, the regression results were used to test the research hypotheses and evaluate whether immigrant background significantly predicted differences in civic attitudes, expected participation, and trust in democratic institutions.

To examine group differences, linear regression analysis was applied. Linear regression enables estimation of the association between an independent variable (immigrant background) and a dependent variable (each ICCS scale), with the regression coefficient representing the average difference in scale scores between students with and without an immigrant background.

For each ICCS scale (S_ELECPART, S_POLPART, S_GENEQL, S_ETHRGHT, S_CNTATT, S_INTRUST), a separate simple regression model was estimated. Immigrant background was operationalised as a binary independent variable (0 = without immigrant background; 1 = with immigrant background), with students without an immigrant background serving as the reference category. As immigrant background was the sole predictor included in the models, the estimated coefficients represent unadjusted mean differences between the two groups. Complete-case data were used in all analyses. No formal correction for multiple testing was applied, as the analysed scales were theory-driven and directly linked to predefined hypotheses. Results are interpreted cautiously, with emphasis placed on effect sizes and 95% confidence intervals in addition to statistical significance levels. Given the cross-sectional design of ICCS 2016, the findings are interpreted as associative rather than causal.

4. Results

First, we present the results related to linear regression (regarding students without and students with an immigration background), after that we describe the testing of each hypothesis (in some cases for this more than one scale is used). All scale means are centered with M = 50 and SD = 10.

Table 2: Linear regression table for each hypothesis

Variable (scale)	Students without MB/ students with MB (scale difference)	Estimate (scale mean) vs. scale difference	SE	t-value	N	Weighted N	95 % CI
H1 S_ELECPART (expected electoral participation)	students without MB	50.23	0.26	-	2385	14511.41	(49.72, 50.74)
	students with MB (scale difference)	-3.37	0.57	-5.97*	392	2475.95	(-4.49, -2.25)
H1 S_POLPART (expected active political participation)	students without MB	49.03	0.24	-	2385	14517.09	(48.56, 49.50)
	students with MB (scale difference)	0.47	0.54	0.88	392	2475.96	(-0.59, 1.53)
H2 S_GENEQL (endorsement of rights and duties/roles of men and women)	students without MB	53.03	0.28	-	2395	14573.45	(52.48, 53.58)
	students with MB (scale difference)	-2.06	0.62	-3.32*	395	2499.27	(-3.28, -0.84)
H2 S_ETHRGHT (endorsement of rights and responsibilities of ethnic/racial groups)	students without MB	50.88	0.27	-	2383	14455.17	(50.35, 51.41)
	students with MB (scale difference)	1.47	0.68	2.16*	395	2495.27	(0.14, 2.80)

H3 S_CNTATT (attitudes towards the country, in our case Slovenia)	students without MB	48.39	0.24	-	2392	14558.38	(47.92, 48.86)
	students with MB (scale difference)	-3.31	0.70	-4.70*	393	2482.74	(-4.68, -1.94)
H4 S_INTRUST (trust in democratic institutions)	students without MB	49.56	0.26	-	2395	14630.50	(49.05, 50.07)
	students with MB (scale difference)	-1.00	0.52	-1.92	394	2487.11	(-2.02, 0.02)

Own calculations, estimate (scale mean). SE (standard error of scale), t-value (t-value), MB – immigrant background of students.* shows statistical significance.

Table 2 presents comparisons between students without an immigrant background and students with an immigrant background across six civic-related scales, based on linear regression analyses. *N* denotes the unweighted sample size (students without an immigrant background: 2,383–2,395; students with an immigrant background: 392–395). *Weighted N* reflects the estimated population size after applying ICCS 2016 sampling weights (approximately 14,455–14,631 for students without an immigrant background and 2,476–2,499 for students with an immigrant background). All analyses were conducted using weighted data. The 95% confidence interval (CI) indicates the range within which the true population parameter is expected to fall; statistical significance is inferred when the CI does not include zero. Statistical significance is also indicated by the t-value (t > 1.96 or t < -1.96).

H1: Expected political participation

The first hypothesis proposed that eighth-grade students with an immigrant background in Slovenia show less interest in future participation in society (electoral and political participation) compared to students without an immigrant background.

Regarding expected electoral participation (S_ELECPART), students with an immigrant background reported significantly lower expectations of future electoral participation than their non-immigrant peers. The difference amounted to 3.37 scale points in favour of students without an immigrant background and was statistically significant (*t* = -5.97). This finding supports the first part of H1.

In contrast, for expected active political participation (S_POLPART), students with an immigrant background reported slightly higher intentions than their non-immigrant peers. However, the difference was small (0.47 scale points) and not statistically significant (*t* = 0.88). Thus, the second part of H1 was not supported. Overall, H1 was only partially confirmed: while differences emerged for expected electoral participation, no statistically significant differences were found for expected active political participation.

H2: Equality orientations

The second hypothesis stated that students with an immigrant background would show more positive attitudes toward equality (gender equality and ethnic equality) compared to students without an immigrant background.

For support for gender equality (S_GENEQL), students with an immigrant background reported significantly lower endorsement than their non-immigrant peers. The difference was 2.06 scale points lower for students with an immigrant background and was statistically significant (*t* = -3.32).

In contrast, for support for ethnic groups' rights (S_ETHRGHT), students with an immigrant background expressed significantly stronger endorsement of equal rights for ethnic or racial groups. The difference was 1.47 scale points in favour of students with an immigrant background and was statistically significant ($t = 2.16$).

These findings indicate that H2 was also only partially confirmed. Students with an immigrant background do not uniformly demonstrate more positive equality attitudes. Rather, they are less supportive of gender equality but more supportive of ethnic equality compared to students without an immigrant background. Immigrant background is therefore associated with distinct orientations across different dimensions of equality.

H3: Attitudes toward the country

The third hypothesis proposed that students with an immigrant background would show less positive attitudes toward their country of residence (Slovenia) compared to students without an immigrant background.

For attitudes toward the country (S_CNTATT), students with an immigrant background reported significantly less positive evaluations than their non-immigrant peers. The difference was 3.31 scale points in favour of students without an immigrant background and was statistically significant ($t = -4.70$). The scale included items related to respect, pride, national achievements, and the importance of the Slovenian flag.

Thus, H3 was confirmed: students with an immigrant background displayed less positive attitudes toward their country of residence.

H4: Trust in democratic institutions

The fourth hypothesis assumed that students with an immigrant background would report lower trust in democratic institutions compared to students without an immigrant background.

For trust in democratic institutions (S_INTRUST), students with an immigrant background reported slightly lower levels of trust than their non-immigrant peers. However, the difference was small (1 scale point) and not statistically significant ($t = -1.92$). The scale included trust in government, local government, courts, police, political parties, and the national parliament.

Accordingly, H4 was not supported, as no statistically significant difference between the groups was observed.

Results of Standardized Effect Sizes (Cohen's d) Across Scales

To assess the substantive magnitude of group differences, standardized effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated and presented in Table 3. Most effects were small or negligible. The largest effects were observed for expected electoral participation and national attachment, while political participation and institutional trust showed negligible differences. Overall, the results indicate limited substantive variation between the groups.

Table 3: Effect sizes across scales

Scale	Cohen's d	Interpretation
S_ELECPART	0.27	small effect
S_POLPART	–0.04	negligible
S_GENEQL	0.15	small effect
S_ETHRGHT	–0.11	small effect
S_CNTATT	0.28	small effect
S_INTRUST	0.08	very small effect

6. Conclusion

Discussion

The present study examined the civic attitudes of eight-grade students in Slovenia with and without an immigrant background within the framework of civic and citizenship education according to ICCS 2016 data. The findings indicate that immigrant background is not a deterministic factor in the development of civic attitudes. Although some statistically significant differences were identified, their magnitude was small based on effect sizes. In this study, students with an immigrant background expressed lower support for gender equality and higher support for ethnic equality. Moreover, we found lower expected electoral participation among students with an immigrant background. Lastly, we found no significant differences in in trust in democratic institutions based on immigrant background. The mentioned findings are discussed along with the theoretical framework below.

Based on the results of testing Hypothesis 1, there is some support that students with an immigrant background tend to show less interest in conventional political activities, such as electoral participation. Research in civic education consistently suggests that young people develop their sense of active citizenship through multiple contexts of socialization, including the home environment, school culture, classroom practices, and engagement within the broader community (Banks, 2017; Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009; Klemenčič et al., 2018; Schulz et al., 2018). Conger (1991), which highlights the importance of participation during the youth period at a time when identity is being formed and roles are being explored. This is connected to how students with and without an immigrant background develop active citizenship. Moreover, regarding political participation, research shows that young people engage differently from adults (Weiss, 2020). Young people, especially does with an immigrant background, increasingly engage in alternative and non-traditional forms of political participation - such as forums, protests, and demonstrations (Kirbiš et al., 2010; Mansouri & Kirpitchenko, 2016). Our results partly support the mentioned findings, as students with an immigrant background reported less expected electoral participation.

Our results for Hypothesis 2 and 3 show that students with an immigrant background reported less support for gender equality and less positive attitudes towards the country of testing, while reporting more support for ethnic groups rights compared to their peers without an immigrant background. This can be connected to previous work in this field. For example, according to Ia Roi Mood (2023) immigrant background youth in Sweden adopt more liberal family, sexuality and gender role attitudes than their parents or first–generation peers. Relational inclusion refers to a sociocultural process involving the formation of identity and the development of an individual's sense of belonging and connectedness (Cook & Kim, 2023), the importance of which this can demonstrate. But our results on Hypothesis 2 contrast with aforementioned study - instead of convergence toward more egalitarian gender attitudes, we find a gap where immigrant–background students are less supportive. However, in this context it could be crucial to investigate other important family and individual factors that could be associated with those attitudes. Based on the IEA's Civic Education Study of 14-year–old students in 1999 from 11 countries, secondary analysis revealed that those with an immigrant background tended to display more positive attitudes toward immigrants, more negative attitudes toward women's political and economic rights, more negative feelings toward their country of residence, and somewhat lower levels of trust in government-related institutions (Prokic & Dronkers, 2010).

Difference between students with or without immigration background status in our study did not reveal differences in attitudes towards the democratic institutions (Hypothesis 4). This suggests that, at least among younger generations, such as students, the distinctions observed among adults may diminish, possibly reflecting greater integration or shared civic socialization within the educational context or any other possible context that shapes development of attitudes. This can be connected to findings from other studies. Secondary study results from European Social Survey (data collected between 2002 and 2006) show that first-generation immigrants report higher trust in public institutions than natives - mainly due to better perceived governance in host countries - but this trust declines with acculturation, while second-generation immigrants show lower confidence; value differences play only a minor role and gradually align with those of natives over time (Röder & Mühlau, 2012). However, we need to be aware that immigrants' trust in institutions is influenced by the level of democracy in both origin and destination countries, as differences between these contexts shape trust through a dual frame of reference (Qaranta, 2024).

Limitations of our research and future possible research

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, due to sample size considerations, first–and second–generation students were combined into a single aggregated group of students with an immigrant background. This approach may mask potential heterogeneity between these subgroups and should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. Second, although the analyses followed the standard ICCS procedures and employed appropriate weighting methods, no additional robustness or sensitivity checks were conducted. Third, the cross–sectional nature of the ICCS 2016 data does not allow for causal conclusions, but rather supports interpretations in terms of associations between immigrant background and civic–related attitudes. because this study is based on a secondary analysis of ICCS 2016 data, concepts such as relational inclusion, identity formation, and marginalisation could not be directly operationalised through the available survey measures, and should therefore be addressed more explicitly in future research using targeted instruments or complementary qualitative approaches. Lastly, the use of ICCS 2016 data means findings may not fully reflect current conditions, as migration and education contexts have since evolved.

Future research should further explore the long–term trajectories of civic attitudes, considering the interplay of family background, school environment, and broader societal influences to better understand how inclusive education can foster equal civic participation and democratic engagement among all students in Slovenia. Future research should also focus on a multidimensional approach to the inclusion of students with an immigrant background. It is important to study the long-term effects of various forms of political and social participation (Banks, 2021; Huddleston et al., 2020). In today's context, future studies need to explore the role of digital media and unconventional forms of active citizenship, which are also characteristic of students with an immigrant background status (Stolle & Hooghe, 2011). Additionally, research is needed to examine in greater detail the challenges and support mechanisms for teachers (methods, materials, training) as well as the influence of local communities on the successful integration of students and their families (Kymlicka, 2018).

Conclusion

The findings indicate that immigrant background is not a strong or central predictor of civic attitudes among eighth-grade students in Slovenia. Although statistically significant differences were identified, the effect sizes were small, highlighting the distinction between statistical significance and substantive importance. The results suggest that the formation of civic competences is likely influenced not solely by migration status, but rather by broader educational and learning processes within the school environment. By situating

civic attitudes within the framework of school-based learning and knowledge transmission, the study offers a more in-depth understanding of how educational institutions function as environments of civic socialisation in societies characterised by increasing migratory diversity. Rather than treating immigrant background as the primary source of differences in civic attitudes, the findings support a broader and more comprehensive interpretation of active citizenship formation. In this respect, the study underscores the importance of empirically grounded research in informing discussions on diversity, inclusion, and the role of educational systems in fostering democratic participation. This interpretation aligns with research emphasising the role of schools in civic socialisation (Keating & Janmaat, 2016; Klemenčič & Mirazchiyski, 2023). Taken together, these findings indicate that although some group differences remain—particularly in the areas of national identity and gender equality—the overall attitudinal gap between students with and without an immigrant background appears relatively small. These patterns may be associated with broader educational and social contexts in Slovenia, including civic and citizenship education frameworks and school integration processes, although the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow for causal conclusions.

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