Making Citizens in the Classroom? Family Background and the Impact of Civic Education in Swedish Schools

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Introduction

 Political socialization is a multifaceted process, determined by e.g. family, friends, teachers, media and religion (Sherrod, Torney-Purta and Flanagan 2010; Renshon 1977; Dawson and Prewitt 1969). It is conventionally assumed that schools as political socialization contexts are particularly important, for two reasons: the child’s extended exposure to political messages transmitted through teachers and friends at school, and the supposed ability of the state to control the way schools teach students about democracy and political issues as well as provide democratic education in practice, e.g. through shared decision-making or deliberative discussion (cf. Guttman 1999; Englund 2000; Roth 2000; Ekman and Todosijevic 2003). However, the extent to which schools may succeed in educating democratic citizens is a matter of dispute. The relative impact of schools in this respect remains unclear, partly as a result of lack of adequate data that in a proper way take socioeconomic factors on the individual level into account, i.e. family background (cf. Buchmann 2002; Amnå et al. 2009).

This article investigates the role of schools in fostering ‘citizenship competencies’ – comprising democratic values, political trust, political efficacy, political literacy, and political participation and civic engagement – using Sweden as a case. We have unique access to new data – the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS), conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) – that contains information about 3 464 Swedish 14-year olds’ democratic and political attitudes as well as their present and anticipated civic engagement and political participation. The dataset also contains a political literacy test. The student information is paired with school data (a

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school questionnaire), in order to tap the effect of the school context, as well as official statistics (census data from *Statistics Sweden*) to have reliable information about the students’ socioeconomic background.

Our research question is formulated as follows: Do schools have an independent effect on students’ citizenship competencies after individual characteristics have been taken into account, or are citizenship competencies rather determined by *individual level socioeconomic factors* (family background)? In other words, can we demonstrate empirically the impact of *contextual factors* on an individual’s values, attitudes, beliefs or behavior? The preliminary results indicate that Swedish schools have only rather limited possibilities to foster democratic citizens, and students that already are provided with a beneficial home environment (well-educated parents) tend to be ‘winners’ in this respect; i.e. they score higher on the political literacy test and they anticipate a life as active political agents to a higher extent than students with parents with lower levels of education.

The article breaks down into four parts. The first part includes a brief discussion about previous research on the role of schools as political socialization contexts, as well as a few remarks on Sweden as our selected case. Thereafter, we present the data and the statistical model used in the paper. The third part presents the results of the empirical analysis, for which we have used *Hierarchical Linear Modeling* (HLM). The final section summarizes the empirical findings and puts them in a broader historical and societal context.

**Citizenship Competencies and Civic Education**

It has often been noted that education has a positive effect on the vitality of democracy, as education seems to be directly related to political participation; the higher the level of education, the higher levels of political participation and civic engagement (cf. Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry 1996; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). But what is it exactly that comes with education, or rather, what is it that schools actually do in order to foster democratic minded and politically engaged citizens (cf. Ichilov 2003: 418)? There is a substantial body of literature that deals with political socialization and schools, dating back to the post-war decades (cf. Niemi and Hepburn 1995). A number of studies in mainly the 1960s and 1970s tested the assumption that knowledge about politics, society and the democratic political system was the key; such knowledge supposedly facilitated political activity. Thus, young
students who participated in civic education classes could be expected to be more politically active than students who were not exposed to civic education. Still, the findings were often a bit inconclusive, as it proved hard to establish that civic education had a distinct impact on political knowledge (cf. Jennings and Niemi 1969; 1974; Langton and Jennings 1968; Beck 1977). Thus, even if the scholars at the time knew that education levels were more or less directly linked to political knowledge, it remained unclear what aspects of education that mattered (Ekman 2007: 32; Broman 2009).

More recent studies have provided us with more detailed insights into the way schools actually provide young citizens with democratic competencies (Westholm, Lindquist and Niemi 1990; Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry 1996; Niemi and Junn 1998; Nie and Hillygus 2001; Torney-Purta et al. 2001; Amadeo et al. 2002; Milner 2002; Farnen 2003; Gimpel et al. 2003). For example, Niemi and Junn’s seminal study Civic Education (1998) demonstrated that civic education mattered for both knowledge about politics and for a positive attitude towards political participation. Still, their findings also demonstrated that the effect of civic education on political knowledge was especially distinct in those cases when the students surveyed had actually participated in civic education classes the same year. This could mean, as Niemi and Junn argued, that kids at that age (high school students at about 17) had recently begun to take notice of politics and societal affairs, and thus were able to absorb the contents of the civic education teaching. But it could also mean, as Ekman (2007: 33) notes, that timing matters – students would arguably perform better in a political knowledge test just after they have been exposed to civic education teaching than they would, say, six months later (cf. Avery 2002).

Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry (1996) have further added to our knowledge about educational effects on political participation by – drawing on the US Civic Participation Study from 1990 – demonstrating the way education matters for social position, which in turn is related to participation. The authors have also demonstrated that education matters not only for actual political participation, but also for citizens’ general ‘democratic enlightenment’, i.e. their understanding of democracy and society. And, the latter is not necessarily directly related to actual political activity (cf. Berger 2009; Persson and Oscarsson 2010).

Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry (1996) have also stressed the general need for consider the possibility of a self-selection bias when trying to establish the effect of education on political knowledge. (Certain classes or programs are populated by certain students.) This awareness seems to have become established today (cf. Ekman 2007: 34–35). At the same time, attention
has been paid to effects not directly related to the actual contents of the civic education teaching. The IEA’s *Civic Education Study* (CIVED 1999), for example, demonstrated that young students’ knowledge about democracy and politics was, above all, ascribable to family background. Children from ‘well-educated homes’ (measured by the item number of books at home) tended to score higher than others on the political literacy test that was part of CIVED (cf. Torney-Purta et al. 2001).

Still, analyses of CIVED data have also demonstrated an independent school effect on political literacy. Certain teaching practices – e.g. deliberative discussion and an open classroom climate – proved to have a positive impact on the young students’ knowledge about democracy and societal affairs (Amadeo et al. 2002: 147–151; cf. Torney, Oppenheim and Farnen 1975). Other studies too have suggested that students’ participation in democratic practices in school have effect on political knowledge (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Torney-Purta et al. 2001). Thus, when it comes to citizenship competencies like political literacy, we have empirical findings that tell us that family background matters, but other studies that tell us that there is also a distinct school effect.

In this article, Sweden is used as a case, in order to empirically analyze the relative importance of school effects in comparison to family background, when it comes to political socialization, i.e. the way young students develop democratic attitudes, political trust, political efficacy, political literacy, and attitudes towards political participation. In many ways, Sweden represents a perfect case for testing some of the findings in previous research. For one thing, Sweden is a country which only quite recently has experienced heterogeneity in the public school system, in two different ways. Since the early 1990s, the Swedish school system has become increasingly more diversified. Decentralization reforms and the introduction of private (independent) schools have contributed to an increasingly heterogeneous school system (Pierre 2007; Wahlström 2002; Amnå 1992). This should be contrasted to the entire post-war era, up until the 1990s, when the Swedish school system was very homogenous; with public schools alone, regulated, controlled and financed by the state rather than by the municipalities. Also, the challenge of globalization in the form of immigration has created a different situation in Swedish schools, in the sense of an increased ethnic heterogeneity among the students (cf. Nihlfors 2008). This development has taken place in a rather short period of time, say 15–20 years.
In other words, by using Sweden as a case, we are able to analyze the prospects for civic education in different institutional settings and contexts, in both public and private schools, and within a general societal context in which multiculturalism for the first time has become a challenge. In what ways, then, may schools function as arenas of political socialization? Given the recent institutional diversification, will we be able to identify a general school effect on e.g. political literacy in Swedish schools, like the one found in analyses of the international Civic Education Study (Amadeo et al. 2002)? And what about the impact of family background? Can schools really provide young people from very different socioeconomic backgrounds with equal citizenship competencies? In the final section of this article, we will compare our findings, based on analyses of the Swedish part of ICCS 2009 to previous analyses of the Swedish part of CIVED 1999 (cf. Almgren 2006; Ekman 2007).

Data and Methodology

We turn next to a two-level analysis of the determinants of citizenship competencies in Swedish schools. To analyze the role of schools for political socialization, we use data from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS 2009). ICCS is organized by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), with data collection in 38 countries. In many ways, ICCS entails a follow-up to the 1999 Civic Education Study (cf. Torney-Purta et al. 2001). ICCS examines political knowledge, attitudes, intentions and behavior among students in the eighth and ninth grade, or equivalent. In addition to student data, the study also contains a survey of teachers, and it has information about school context characteristics (i.e. a school dataset). The aim with ICCS is to gain better knowledge about the ways in which schools socialize students to become political citizens (see Schulz et al. 2010).

The present analysis utilizes a subset of ICCS 2009, and focuses on Swedish students in grade eight (i.e. 14-year old students). In all, 3 464 eighth-grade students in 169 Swedish schools answered questions about political and societal issues (i.e. a political literacy test) and completed a survey about their political attitudes and behavior. In addition to the empirical motivation for focusing on Swedish students (above), there is a methodological advantage by restricting the analysis to this subset of the ICCS study: We have unique access to census data (from Statistics Sweden) for the Swedish eighth-grade students that participate in the study. Census data is quite rare in these kinds of analyses; usually the researcher uses students’ own
estimations of their parents’ level of education, occupational status and family income (cf. Buchmann 2002). IEA, for example, uses the number of books at home as an indicator of family background. However, such data are not always reliable. Students (especially those from lower socioeconomic status families) do not always know their parents’ educational level or income; thus they may make erroneous estimations – or they fail to answer such questions all together. Having access to official census data, we have accurate information about the students’ family backgrounds. This is important, as the family is conventionally assumed to be one of the most fundamental arenas for political socialization (cf. Sherrod et al. 2010; Amnå et al. 2009). Thus, it is pivotal to control for socioeconomic factors when assessing the role of the school for young people’s political development.

The dependent variable: five dimensions

As may be gauged from Figure 1, the dependent variable in our study is essentially multidimensional. We have chosen to analyze five basic citizenship competencies: democratic values, political trust, political efficacy, political literacy and civic engagement and political participation (Figure 1). These dimensions may be tapped using a number of indicators; and here, we have for pragmatic reasons kept the number of items to a minimum (see Appendix for measures and constructs).

Figure 1. The dependent variable: Citizenship competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship competencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political efficacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic engagement and political participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards gender equality and immigrants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6
Democratic values and political trust are obviously relevant aspects of citizenship competencies in a democratic polity (cf. Dahl 1998). Here, the first dimension is tapped by two questions, about attitudes towards gender equality and attitudes towards immigrants. Both these issues are explicitly mentioned in the official policy documents that steer the Swedish school system. As for political trust, this has been suggested as something crucial in any functioning democracy (e.g. Putnam 1993; 2000).

Internal political efficacy refers to the individual’s belief about his or her own competence to understand and to make a difference in political matters (Lane 1959; cf. Bandura 1997), and it is suggested to be an important prerequisite for an active political citizenship (see e.g. Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Here, we measure internal efficacy with the help of an additive index that is produced by 13 items.

Political literacy is investigated with the help of a comprehensive political knowledge test. The test examines the students’ cognitive as well as interpretative skills. In order to minimize measurement errors as well as errors when making generalizations to the overall population (in this case, 14-year olds in Sweden), every student only answers a subset of questions; and plausible values are then estimated to give each student a total score on the political knowledge test (for more information on the test, see http://www.iea.nl/icces.html). The architects behind the political literacy measure in ICCS have thus constructed a scale, with an international mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100.

Civic engagement and political participation, finally, is divided into six different additive indexes, reflecting a broad notion of what constitutes ‘political participation’ (cf. Brady 1999; van Deth 2001; Teorell, Torcal and Montero 2007). To begin with, we measure students’ participation in school democracy activities with a six-item additive index. This construct focuses on the students’ manifest political involvement in an institution that has been referred to as part of ‘the small-scale democracy’ (cf. Kriese and Westholm 2007). Moreover, we analyze the students’ anticipated civic engagement and electoral participation (i.e. voting) with two additive indexes based on five items, respectively. The students’ anticipated political party and/or political campaign activities are investigated with the help of a three-item additive index. Finally, we use a six-item additive index to examine the students’ anticipations of participating in legal protest activities (e.g. extra-parliamentary political manifestations or demonstrations) and a three-item index to cover illegal political activity. All the additive
indexes in this study have been constructed after performing principal component factor analysis as well as reliability tests to secure internal consistency.

In sum, even if one theoretically could include other dimensions as well in what we here refer to as ‘citizenship competencies’ (Figure 1), the present analysis nevertheless focuses on very important resources (democratic attitudes, political trust, internal efficacy and political knowledge) that are needed for an active political citizenship. Also, the analysis covers both manifest participation – school-democratic activities – and latent political participation, i.e. anticipated voting and political action (cf. Ekman and Amnå 2010). We feel that this is quite sufficient for saying something worthwhile about political socialization in schools.

The background variables

We know from previous research that educational achievement is not a simple function of the student’s innate ability (Miner 1968: 372). Social, demographic and other background variables matter as well (cf. Sherrod et al. 2010). In the present study, three individual background variables have been included: gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES). We know from assessments of Swedish schools that achievement is related to gender (cf. Björnson 2005; Amnå et al. 2010). Ethnicity in this context refers to migration background, and we have made a simple distinction between students with Swedish background and students with immigrant background (i.e. born outside of Sweden and/or having both parents born outside of Sweden). International studies have indicated that immigrant status is related to certain aspects of political engagement (cf. Sherrod et al. 2010; Fuligni 1997).

As for the SES variables, we are in a fortunate position of not having to rely upon subjective measures of parents’ income or levels of education. Rather, as already noted, we have access to official data from Statistics Sweden (SCB), which has been made available to our research team by courtesy of the Swedish National Agency for Education. Previous studies on civic education in Swedish schools have demonstrated the impact of SES variables on young people’s interest in politics, civic and political engagement, and democratic orientations (cf. Almgren 2006; Ekman 2007; Broman 2009). In the present two-level analysis, our chosen measure of SES is parents’ educational attainment. The full model thus includes three background variables on the individual level: gender, migration background, and parents’ educational attainment.
The contextual factors and the analytical model

Any analysis of the role of schools for political socialization rests on the assumption that there is some variance in students’ political knowledge, attitudes and behavior that cannot be explained by factors related to the individual (e.g. sex or socioeconomic status). Also, contextual factors supposedly matter. If this is true, we should expect certain between-school variance; without it, there would simply be no contextual effect to justify a focus on the school context.

Here, as a first step in our analysis, we have looked at the so-called intraclass correlation coefficient, which shows the share of between-school variance in relation to within-school variance. Although most of the variance is in fact across individuals within the same school/class, there is an approximate 10–15 percent variance across schools (i.e. the intraclass variance). This is sufficient for considering a multilevel analysis that takes school factors into account (cf. Lee 2000).

In the present analysis, we examine four contextual factors related to the overall school context. These factors operate at slightly different levels. Two of them take the ‘macro’ context of schools into account, by focusing on institutional as well as compositional aspects. Institutional aspects have to do with the role of school structure (cf. Lee 2000), i.e. if the school is private or public. In Sweden, students are free to choose between private (independent) schools and public (municipal) schools. Compositional aspects have to do with the possible role that the socioeconomic embeddedness of schools might have for students’ political socialization (cf. Strömblad 2003). For instance, it is quite possible that a student is positively affected by having a large share of peers with well-educated parents, even if he or she personally comes from a family with no academic tradition. Again, a focus on contextual school factors rests on the assumption that not only individual characteristics determine students’ attitudes and actions, but that the surrounding environment contributes in shaping the values of an individual as well as the choices he or she makes. Here, we have aggregated the education level among parents to the classroom level, i.e. transforming it into a compositional factor (simply by using the official census data to calculate a class mean for the share of students that have at least one parent with university education). This is a way of tapping the socioeconomic embeddedness of a school. Because of the way the sampling was carried out in ICCS, ‘a school’ for all practical purposes equals ‘a class’.
As for the classroom factors (or ‘micro’ school factors), these are tapped by using two composite indices, based on the ICCS student data (see Appendix). The questions utilized deal with the students’ evaluation of their teachers’ ability to create a positive classroom environment, as well as the students’ perceived ability to influence the organization of the civic education teaching. The first factor refers to the extent to which the teacher allows the students to discuss political issues and openly express their opinions in the classroom. Here, we have aggregated each student’s assessment to a class mean. The score is produced by an additive index of eight items. As for the second micro contextual factor, we analyze the perceived impact of student influence on social science classes. This factor refers to the extent to which students feel that they could have a say in the organization of the structure as well as of the contents of the social science classes. The students’ perceptions are measured with the help of a four-item additive index. Again, we use the students’ scores to produce a class mean.

*Figure 2. The full model*

We thus have two different types of macro contextual variables in the model; one *institutional* contextual factor and one *compositional* contextual factor. Furthermore, we have two additional micro contextual factors, *classroom climate* and *perceived shared decision making*. The full model is illustrated in Figure 2.
Before presenting our empirical findings, a few words on the use of *Hierarchical Linear Modeling* (HLM) are in order. This statistical method is conventionally used for analyses in which the data are structured at multiple levels: both at the individual level and at a contextual/structural level. It is also useful when we have two different datasets, as in this case; one for school factors and one for student data. To put it simple, HLM is useful when assessing the relative impact of a contextual factor – here, the macro and micro school factors – on an individual’s values, attitudes, beliefs or behavior (Figure 2). HLM has various advantages over single-level methods such as OLS linear regression (see e.g. Lee 2000). The perhaps most important benefit of using HLM, in relation to OLS regression, is that it enables us to explore explicitly the probable dependence between students in the same school/class. A key assumption in OLS regression is the independence of observations; and when this assumption is violated, there is a misestimation of the standard errors. As a consequence, the wrong conclusions might be drawn. Here, we may avoid this pitfall.

More specifically, the analysis in this article is based on a HLM random intercept model, allowing us to determine whether contextual factors have any impact at all on citizenship competencies among the young students, after individual level characteristics have been taken into account. This means, at the same time, that we will not be able to control for interaction effects, e.g. if schools may be able to ‘compensate’ for a disadvantageous SES background, or if schools rather reinforce the impact of an advantageous SES background on citizenship competencies. The more modest goal here is to assess any possible impact of contextual factors on the 14-year olds’ citizenship competencies, while at the same time controlling for the individual level factors (cf. Almgren 2006: 74). Simply speaking, our primary interest is to examine variation across schools (cf. Snijders and Bosker 1999). The idea is to analyze if students that share socio-demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, but go to different schools, vary in their levels of citizenship competencies.

In the final section of the article, we will briefly touch upon the question whether the impact of contextual factors is equally strong across different groups of young students (based on sex, national background and socioeconomic status). It is quite possible that schools mainly have an impact on some student groups, either by *compensating* students with a socioeconomic disadvantage and thereby closing gaps among students, or by *reinforcing* differences based on socio-demographic and/or socioeconomic characteristics.
Results

In this section, our empirical findings are presented, following the structure suggested in Figure 1, i.e. focusing in turn on democratic values, political trust, political efficacy, political literacy, and civic engagement and political participation.

Democratic values

We begin our presentation by looking at democratic values, i.e. attitudes towards gender equality and attitudes towards immigrants. Table 1 displays a few clear-cut statistical relationships at the individual level. For example, boys seem to be less ‘tolerant’ than girls – as a rule, they are less in favour of gender equality and they are more critical when it comes to the rights of immigrants. Also, Table 1 indicates that the 14-year olds with at least one well-educated parent have more favourable attitudes towards immigrants and gender equality than others.

Table 1. Relationship between individual level and contextual factors and democratic values (fixed effects)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Attitudes towards gender equality (0–12)</th>
<th>Attitudes towards immigrants (0–18)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>– 1.75***</td>
<td>– 1.46***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration background</td>
<td>– 0.83***</td>
<td>2.97***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents with university degree</td>
<td>0.52***</td>
<td>0.96***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school</td>
<td>0.36*</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic embeddedness of school (classroom level)</td>
<td>– 0.01</td>
<td>1.63***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared decision making (classroom level)</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>– 0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom climate (classroom level)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>7.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>3130/169</td>
<td>3130/169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** = Statistically significant at the 99 % level, * = Statistically significant at the 90 % level. We have also controlled for shared decision making and classroom climate on the individual level (cf. Almgren 2006).
When it comes to ethnic background and democratic values, the pattern is less distinct. Students with immigration background have – hardly surprising – more favourable attitudes than others to immigrant rights. At the same time, students with immigration background have less than average supportive attitudes towards gender equality.

As for our contextual factors, these apparently have a rather limited impact on the 14-year olds’ democratic orientations. For example, the variation in attitudes towards gender equality or immigration rights cannot be accounted for at all by our ‘micro’ school contextual factors (classroom climate and perceived influence/shared decision making). At the same time, we find that one of our ‘macro’ contextual factors seems to matter, namely the parents’ level of education aggregated to the classroom level. This is our way of tapping the socioeconomic embeddedness of a school; we think of this as a compositional factor. For an individual, to be situated in a class with peers whose parents are well-educated, this has a positive impact on that individual’s attitudes towards gender equality and immigrant rights.

As for our ‘institutional’ contextual factor, the administration of the school has some impact on one of our democracy items, i.e. attitudes towards gender equality. All things being equal, this means that if you go to a private school, you seem to be a bit more in favour of gender equality, than you would be if you went to a public school (Table 1).

**Political trust**

The empirical findings related to institutional trust and confidence in politicians in some ways resemble the findings reported above (democratic orientations). There is a statistically significant relationship between our chosen SES variable on the individual level (parents’ educational attainment) and political trust (Table 2). Students with at least one parent with university experience have more trust than their peers – with less educated parents – in relation to both societal institutions and politicians.

However, in contrast to the analysis of democratic attitudes (Table 1), there are no clear-cut statistical relationships to be found when it comes to gender and political trust. We admittedly find that among boys, trust in politicians is lower than among girls, as a rule. At the same time, when controlling for other factors on the individual and the school level, differences between boys and girls are not statistically significant when it comes to trust in institutions (Table 2).
As for differences between students with immigrant background and students with Swedish background, Table 2 indicates that the 14-year olds with immigrant background tend to have significantly lower levels of political trust. In other words, as for trust in institutions and political leaders, there seems to be a distinct ethnic cleavage present in Sweden.

Just like in Table 1, the school contextual factors in our model have a rather modest impact on political trust. The administration of the school (public/private) and classroom climate have no significant impact on the students’ political trust at all. As for the 14-year olds’ experiences of democracy in practice (shared decision making), this has – perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively – a negative impact on their trust in institutions (Table 2). It should at the same time be noted that this statistical relationship is significant only at the 90 per cent level.

Table 2 further indicates – like Table 1 – that our chosen compositional factor is of relevance; the socioeconomic embeddedness of a school obviously matters for political and institutional trust. In other words, children who spend their school days among peers with highly educated parents tend to have higher levels of trust in political/societal institutions than others. However, the same effect fails to kick in when it comes to more specific confidence in political leaders.
Political efficacy

Looking at the general levels of political efficacy, boys tend to have higher levels of political self-efficacy than girls (Table 3). However, we also have to report some model-specific effects that disrupt this finding. Roughly speaking, it means that the effect of gender on political efficacy varies considerably depending on what independent variables that are actually included in the model. This casts some doubt on the seemingly clear-cut gender difference.

Table 3. Relationship between individual level and contextual factors and political efficacy (fixed effects)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political efficacy (0–39)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>0.91***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration background</td>
<td>1.84***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents with university degree</td>
<td>1.76***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school</td>
<td>– 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic embeddedness of school (classroom level)</td>
<td>3.41***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared decision making (classroom level)</td>
<td>0.74**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom climate (classroom level)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>3156/169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** *** = Statistically significant at the 99 % level, ** = Statistically significant at the 95 % level. We have also controlled for shared decision making and classroom climate on the individual level (cf. Almgren 2006).

The other factors on the individual level seem to matter for political efficacy. Students with immigrant background have as a rule stronger political efficacy beliefs, compared to students with a Swedish background. The parents’ level of education also matters: students with highly educated parents have more confidence in their ability to understand and influence politics, than students with less educated parents (Table 3).

Among the contextual variables in our model, only one factor seems to be of relevance for explaining the variation in the students’ sense of political efficacy. Admittedly, the students’ perceived opportunity to influence decisions in school seems to have some impact on their
political efficacy beliefs, but neither the administration of the school (public/private) nor classroom climate really matters in this regard. Rather, the factor that has the single strongest impact on the students’ sense of political self efficacy is again the socioeconomic embeddedness of the school (the parents’ educational attainment aggregated to the classroom level). Simply put, a 14-year old who spends time among other 14-year olds with well-educated parents seems to have better chances to develop political efficacy beliefs, for some reason, compared to a 14-year old who spends time among peers with less educated parents.

**Political literacy**

What we have seen so far, is that the socioeconomic embeddedness of a school seems to be a powerful determinant of the 14-year olds’ citizenship competencies. This holds true for political literacy as well. Children attending classes with peers with well-educated parents generally score higher on the ICCS 2009 political literacy test, than children from less ‘academic’ families. We may thus identify a distinct compositional effect in this respect (cf. Strömblad 2003). It should be noted, again, that the other contextual factors in our model fail to stand out as significant determinants (Table 4).

**Table 4. Relationship between individual level and contextual factors and political literacy (fixed effects)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>– 10.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration background</td>
<td>– 37.08***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents with university degree</td>
<td>36.88***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school</td>
<td>10.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ educational attainment (classroom level)</td>
<td>58.78***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared decision making (classroom level)</td>
<td>6.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom climate (classroom level)</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>314.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>3164/169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:*** = Statistically significant at the 99 % level, ** = Statistically significant at the 95 % level. We have also controlled for shared decision making and classroom climate on the individual level (cf. Almgren 2006).*
At the same time, individual level factors also matter. Children with well-educated parents (on the individual level) generally score higher than others on the ICCS political literacy test. As a rule, girls score higher than boys, and students with Swedish background score significantly higher than students with immigrant background (Table 4).

*Civic engagement and political participation*

Our final aspect of ‘citizenship competencies’ has to do with various forms of political participation (Figure 1). Here, we cover democratic participation in school, the 14-year olds’ expected or prognosticated (future) civic engagement, expected electoral participation, expected party activity, expected extra-parliamentary (legal) political action, and expected illegal political activity. Table 5 reports the results.

Looking at the background variables (on the individual level), the pattern is comparably clear. Generally speaking, girls seem to have a more developed sense of engagement than the boys – to a higher extent than boys, girls participate in school democracy related activities, and predict future civic engagement, electoral participation and legal protest activity. In fact, the only kind of future political activity where the boys to higher extent than girls predict future activity is related to the illegal forms of political action (e.g. squatting or spray-painting political slogans on public walls).

Moreover, Table 5 further reinforces the conclusion that the parents’ level of education matters a lot for citizenship competencies among youth. 14-year olds with highly educated parents have higher levels of both actual and prognosticated political activity than students with less educated parents. Again, the only deviant case is illegal political activity: children to parents with lower levels of education to a larger extent than others predict illegal political activity.

As for students with immigrant background, the pattern is less straightforward. In some ways, the 14-year olds with immigrant background stand out as engaged citizens – to a higher extent than students with Swedish background, those with immigration background predict future civic engagement and party activity. However, aside from that, Table 5 demonstrates no other statistically significant effects on the individual level.
### Table 5. Relationship between individual level and contextual factors and various forms of political participation (fixed effects)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Democratic participation in school (0–6)</th>
<th>Expected civic engagement (0–15)</th>
<th>Expected electoral participation (0–15)</th>
<th>Expected party activity (0–9)</th>
<th>Expected legal protest (0–18)</th>
<th>Expected illegal political activity (0–9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>– 0.03</td>
<td>– 0.26**</td>
<td>– 0.27**</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>– 0.63***</td>
<td>0.82***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration background</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.58***</td>
<td>– 0.12</td>
<td>0.23**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>– 0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents with university degree</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td>0.32***</td>
<td>0.98***</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.56***</td>
<td>– 0.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
<td>– 0.15</td>
<td>0.54*</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td>– 0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic embeddedness of school (classroom level)</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>0.81**</td>
<td>1.58***</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>1.10**</td>
<td>– 0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared decision making (classroom level)</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>– 0.03</td>
<td>– 0.02</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>– 0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom climate (classroom level)</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>– 0.02</td>
<td>– 0.05</td>
<td>– 0.03</td>
<td>– 0.03</td>
<td>– 0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>– 0.17</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>3159/169</td>
<td>3103/169</td>
<td>3109/169</td>
<td>3104/169</td>
<td>3106/169</td>
<td>3101/169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** = Statistically significant at the 99 % level, ** = Statistically significant at the 95 % level, * = Statistically significant at the 90 % level. We have also controlled for shared decision making and classroom climate on the individual level (cf. Almgren 2006).

As for contextual factors, Table 5 suggests that the ‘micro’ contextual factors do not matter, at all. Rather, we find some support for the conclusion that it matters for at least some citizenship competencies if students attend a public or a private school. The latter students seem to have a bit more developed sense of political engagement. More specifically, to attend a private school has a positive impact on democratic participation in school, as well as on predicted electoral participation and extra-parliamentary activity. However, our chosen ‘compositional’ contextual factor is the one that matters most, i.e. the socioeconomic embeddedness of the school. Table 5 clearly suggests that attending a class with a large share of peers with well-educated parents has a significant positive impact on a students’ political engagement and future participation, even if he or she personally comes from a family with no academic tradition.
Conclusions

The findings of two-level analysis (the random intercept model) are summarized in Table 6. Starting with the factors on the individual level, what we have seen in the previous tables is that there is a rather distinct gender difference here, in the sense that girls tend to have more of citizenship competencies than boys. This pattern is familiar from other ‘ordinary’ knowledge tests that have demonstrated that as a rule, girls achieve better than boys in Swedish schools (cf. Björnson 2005). The impact of immigration background is less distinct, but certainly present in the tables presented above. Immigration background has a negative impact on support for gender equality, political trust, and political literacy. At the same time, we find positive relationships when it comes to political efficacy and predicted future civic engagement and political participation.

Still, as we have noted repeatedly, the single most important factor on the individual level is parents’ educational attainment. For a student to have at least one parent with university education, this has a positive impact on all the citizenship competencies analyzed here, except for predicted illegal protest (Table 6).

As for contextual factors, the analysis shows that there is particularly one school factor that appears to have an impact on the 14-year olds’ citizenship competencies: the socioeconomic embeddedness of the school. Thus, school environments with many students from well-educated families appear to be associated with certain dynamics that are favorable for the young students’ acquisition of political knowledge as well as for their development of participatory attitudes and behavior. There is a statistically significant positive relationship between the class average of parents’ education and a number of the chosen indicators of citizenship competencies: attitudes towards immigrants, trust in institutions, political efficacy, political literacy, democratic participation in school, future civic engagement, future electoral participation, and prognosticated extra-parliamentary political activity (Table 6). It should be noted that all these relationships are significant also after controlling for individual factors, such as the student’s own family background. This finding is quite interesting; it means that it is not only the students’ own socioeconomic status that matter for political socialization. Students from families without any experiences of higher education too, appear to be able to ‘benefit’ in this respect, by going to a school with many students from well-educated families.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship competencies</th>
<th>Individual level factors</th>
<th>Contextual factors</th>
<th>Classroom climate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Immigration background</td>
<td>Private school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards gender equality</td>
<td>Neg***</td>
<td>Neg***</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards immigrant rights</td>
<td>Neg***</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in institutions</td>
<td>Neg***</td>
<td>Neg**</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in politicians</td>
<td>Neg***</td>
<td>Neg***</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political self-efficacy</td>
<td>(Pos***)</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political literacy</td>
<td>Neg**</td>
<td>Neg***</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic participation in school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pos**</td>
<td>Pos*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected civic engagement</td>
<td>Neg**</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected electoral participation</td>
<td>Neg**</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
<td>Pos*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected party activity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pos**</td>
<td>Pos**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected legal protest</td>
<td>Neg***</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
<td>Pos**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected illegal political activity</td>
<td>Pos***</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neg***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *** = Statistically significant at the 99 % level, ** = Statistically significant at the 95 % level, * = Statistically significant at the 90 % level. Parentheses indicate that due to certain model specific conditions, the relationship – even if statistically significant – should be treated as tentative.

There is one other school factor that also seems to have a positive impact on some dimensions of citizenship competence; the management of the school. Students in private schools are more active than students in public schools when it comes to democratic practices within the school domain. Also, students in private schools prognosticate electoral participation as well legal protest activity to a higher extent than others. However, in terms of political resources, there is no statistically significant difference between students in private and public schools – no ‘institutional’ contextual effects are visible in Table 6, neither on internal efficacy nor on political knowledge.

Again, it should be noted that we have controlled for the individual students’ own family background here. Thus, the positive impact of private schools is not the result of the socioeconomic composition of these schools, on the individual level. In other words, any differences in family backgrounds between students in private and public schools,
respectively, are not able to account for the positive impact of private schools.\(^2\) It should be noted, at the same time, that the positive effect of private schools is statistically significant only at the lowest level (90 per cent) in two of the three cases. Thus, the overall impact of this school factor is not as distinct as the positive effects associated with the socioeconomic embeddedness reported above.

As for contextual school factors related to the classroom – i.e. the ‘micro’ contextual factors in Figure 2 – there is barely any relationship at all to report with the different dimensions of citizenship competencies (Table 6). The only positive relationship is between shared decision making and internal political efficacy: Whenever students perceive that they have a say in the organizing of the social science classes, they are more likely to perceive that they can understand politics and be politically active, more generally speaking. This specific finding is intuitively appealing. However, this optimistic observation does not really tie in well with the other observations in Table 6; instead, somewhat counter-intuitively, shared decision making has a negative impact on trust in institutions (Table 6). This may cast some doubt on the possibility of fostering democrats by democratic practices in school, but it should be noted that this relationship is statistically significant only at the lowest level.

As for the communication climate in the classroom, this has been deemed to be important for young people’s political knowledge, also in a Swedish context (Almgren 2006; Ekman 2007). However, in this analysis there are no statistically significant effects at all to report, related to classroom climate.\(^3\)

To summarize, this analysis has addressed the question of whether crucial school factors matter at all for students’ political development. We have shown that one school factor in particular, the socioeconomic embeddedness of a school, appears to be of importance when it comes to the development of citizenship competencies. However, based on this analysis, we do not know if all students are equally affected by this factor; or if schools tend to level out or reinforce already existing differences, based on gender, ethnic background and parents’ educational attainment. In order to address this issue, additional analyses should be done that take possible cross-level interaction between the socioeconomic embeddedness and individual characteristics into account. Hitherto, researchers at the Swedish National Agency for Education (2010b) have run some initial tests for interaction effects, in the official report on the Swedish part of the ICCS study. Their findings point to one interaction effect in particular: Students from an ‘academic’ family background (i.e. with at least one parent with university
education) who attend a class with a large share of students with equally well-educated parents, tend to score ‘extra’ high on the ICCS 2009 political literacy test. In other words, Swedish schools tend to reinforce differences among students in this respect. Thus, students who are already ‘winners’, i.e. come from a benevolent family background (with well-educated parents), seem to win also another political victory – they are able to benefit from a benevolent socioeconomic embeddedness of the school.

To conclude, the findings tell us that Swedish schools have only rather limited possibilities to foster ‘citizenship competencies’. Such competencies seem mainly to be developed at home – or elsewhere – rather than in school, and in any case related to a benevolent socioeconomic background (as measured by the parents’ educational attainment) rather than to classroom effects. This should help us to think more realistic about what schools can actually do, as democratic socialization agents. It may also be noted, that in no other country in Europe is the effect of parents’ educational attainment as strong as in Sweden (cf. Schulz et al. 2010).

Comparing our findings to similar analyses based on the Civic Education Study (1999), we may note some interesting differences. Both Almgren (2006) and Ekman (2007) identified distinct classroom climate effects on young students’ political literacy and other citizenship competencies in Swedish schools. International studies too have demonstrated that the extent to which classrooms are ‘open’ to discussions have some effect on civic learning (cf. Torney-Purta 2009). However, in the present analysis, for all practical purposes, we find no significant straightforward effects on the 14-year olds’ citizenship competencies, relating to shared decision making or classroom climate (Table 6).

This could perhaps be explained with reference to measurement issues – the questions used in CIVED and ICCS to tap classroom climate are not identical (cf. Almgren 2006; Amnå et al. 2010). But it could also mean that something has changed in Swedish schools in the period under review (1999–2009). One way of describing this change would be to say that schools seem to have become less important as political socialization agents. More specifically, when it comes to citizenship competencies, less seem to be determined by what actually goes on in the classroom, and more seem to be determined at home, or elsewhere for that matter. What is needed, to shed further light on these issues, are multi-contextual analyses of political socialization (cf. Amnå et al. 2009). In the present analysis, we have noted that family background is above all what matters, but both on the individual level and the aggregated level. Thus, there is in fact a distinct school effect that comes in the form of a compositional
factor. In other words, Swedish schools still matter, as political socialization contexts, but again, schools seem to have become less important as political socialization agents.

This notion of schools not really leveling out socioeconomic differences among students by their actual practice should be contrasted to other assessments of the Swedish educational system. Recently, Persson and Oscarsson (2010) have analyzed the effects of longer educational programs – with an extended curriculum of social science courses – on citizenship competencies. As briefly noted above, in the 1990s, extensive reforms in the Swedish educational system were initiated, among them a reformed gymnasium program (grade 10–12). Assuming that civic education promotes civic virtues, the idea behind the reform was to level out existing differences between theoretical and vocational gymnasium programs in Sweden. However, analyzing various survey data from 1987 to 2006, Persson and Oscarsson (2010) found no signs of a closing gap. Differences in political participation, political knowledge and political attentiveness between students from theoretical and vocational study programs did not seem to disappear, as a result of the reform. The two authors concluded that, as for citizenship competencies, a pre-adult socialization model would seem to have more explanatory power than any model pointing to distinct educational effects. A tentative conclusion would be that the great expectations sometimes associated with civic education and a democratic school environment would thus seem to be exaggerated. The present analysis points in basically the same direction. This does not mean that one should rule out school or education effects all together, as we have in fact demonstrated, but again, it means that one should be realistic about the actual impact of ‘classroom socialization’ on citizenship competencies. Family background and activities beyond the classroom clearly matters as well.
Notes

1. We have in fact tested the two subjective measures of SES available in ICCS 2009 (books at home and parents’ educational attainment as stated by the students) against the official Swedish census data. Our results clearly indicate that the ICCS measures are problematic. More specifically, we have tested the pattern we encounter – when using parents’ educational attainment (from Statistics Sweden) as an independent variable, and our citizenship competencies as dependent variables (see Table 6) – against the pattern we encounter when using the two corresponding subjective measures of SES from ICCS 2009. When using ‘books at home’ as a measure, the patterns differ in one-third of the 15 tested statistical relationships. When using the students’ assessments of their parents’ educational attainment, some 60 per cent of the tested statistical relationships differ from the ones we find when using parents’ educational attainment from Statistics Sweden. While this in itself does not tell us which measures that are most accurate, we do place more weight on the official statistics. (There is a distinction in Sweden between official statistics and other public statistics. Official statistics are statistics that are produced by Statistics Sweden, according to the statistical act and ordinance and published as required by official regulations.) The kind of statistics held by this agency is as close to accurate information one can possibly obtain about Swedish citizens and their income, educational attainment, occupational status, or immigrant background.

2. This lack of self-selection bias does of course not exclude the possibility that the effects are the result of other kinds of self-selection biases, however of a more subtle kind, like for instance, more ‘active’ and supporting parents (cf. Gutmann 1999).

3. When running separate analyses for the ‘macro context’ of schools and single variables related to the classroom, there is a positive relationship between classroom climate and political literacy and school-democratic activities, respectively. However, this does not change the overall conclusion. Such relationships are likely to be spurious, or non-causal; it is probable that any of the macro factors are likely to account for certain differences both in e.g. classroom climate and in political knowledge results.
References


Torney-Purta, Judith et al. (2001) *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-eight Countries*. Amsterdam: IEA.


Appendix: Variables and Constructs

1. BACKGROUND VARIABLES

Gender
1 = Girls
2 = Boys

Migration background
0 = Swedish (both parents born in Sweden)
1 = Immigration background (born outside of Sweden and/or both parents born outside of Sweden)

Parents’ educational attainment (SES)
0 = Below university education
1 = University education (at least one parent)

2. CONTEXTUAL VARIABLES

Macro contextual factors

Institutional factors
0 = Public school
1 = Private school

Compositional factors
We have aggregated the education level among parents to the classroom level, i.e. transforming our chosen SES measure into a compositional factor (simply by using the official census data from Statistics Sweden to calculate a class mean for the share of students that have at least one parent with university education). The class mean ranges from 0 to 1.

Micro contextual factors

Classroom climate
‘Classroom climate’ refers to the extent to which the teacher allows students to discuss political issues and openly express their opinions in the classroom. The measure is based on the students’ perceptions. The students’ assessments are then aggregated to a class mean, based on an additive index of eight items (the class mean ranges between 8 and 32). Students were asked to rate the frequency (never, rarely, sometimes or often) with which the following events occurred during regular lessons that included discussions of political and social issues:
1. ‘Teachers encourage students to make up their own minds’
2. ‘Teachers encourage students to express their opinions’
3. ‘Students bring up current political events for discussion in class’
4. ‘Teachers bring up current political events for discussion in class’
5. ‘Students express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from those of most of the other students’
6. ‘Teachers encourage students to discuss the issues with people who have different opinions’
7. ‘Teachers present several sides of the issues when explaining them in class’
8. ‘Students can openly express opinions that are different from the teachers’ opinions’

Shared decision making

‘Shared decision making’ refers to the (perceived) impact of student influence on social science classes. Students were asked about the extent to which they feel that they could have a say in the organization of the structure as well as of the contents of the social science classes. Based on a four-item additive index, a class mean was produced (that ranges between 0 and 4).

‘Think about the last time a new civic education period started. Were you students allowed to…’
1. ‘…have a say about the teaching and the classroom activities?’
2. ‘…have a say about how your skills should be demonstrated, e.g. in the form of a test or as an oral presentation?’
3. ‘…have a say about how long the civic education period should be?’
4. ‘…have a say about the literature that should be used?’

3. CITIZENSHIP COMPETENCIES

Democratic values

Gender equality

Additive index: 0–12. Students were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements:
1. ‘Women should stay out of politics’
2. ‘When there are not many jobs available, men should have more right to a job than should women’
3. ‘Men are better qualified to be political leaders than are women’
4. ‘Women’s first priority should be raising children’

Attitudes towards immigrants

Additive index: 0–18. Students were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements:
1. ‘When there are not many jobs available, immigration should be restricted’
2. ‘Immigrants should have the right to speak their own language’
3. ‘Immigrants should have the opportunity to exercise their traditions and way of life’
4. ‘Immigrants who have stayed in a country for several years should have the right to vote in elections’
5. ‘Immigrants should have the same rights as everybody else in our country’
6. ‘Immigrant children should have the same rights as everyone else to get an education’
Political trust

Institutional trust

Additive index: 0–36. Students were asked about their trust – complete, quite a lot, a little or none at all – in a number of civic and political institutions:

1. ‘Media (television, newspapers, radio)’
2. ‘Political parties’
3. ‘School system’
4. ‘European Commission’
5. ‘Local government’
6. ‘European Parliament’
7. ‘National government’
8. ‘National parliament’
9. ‘Army’
10. ‘Police’
11. ‘Courts’
12. ‘United Nations’

Confidence in politicians

Additive index: 0–9. Students were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements:

1. ‘The people in power care little about ordinary people’
2. ‘Political parties are only interested in getting votes, and not in what people actually think’
3. ‘Politicians quickly forget about the needs of their voters’

Political efficacy

Additive index: 0–39. Two sets of questions have been used.

‘How well do you think you could do the following activities…?’ [Very well, fairly well, not very well, or not at all?]

1. ‘Discuss a newspaper article about a conflict between countries’
2. ‘Stand for your opinions in a controversial political or societal issue’
3. ‘Stand as a candidate in a school election’
4. ‘Organize a group of students in order to change things at school’
5. ‘Follow a televised debate about a controversial issue’
6. ‘Write to a newspaper, making your opinions public on a current issue’
7. ‘Speak in front of your class about a political or societal issue’

‘How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about you and politics…?’ [Strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree?]

8. ‘I know more about politics than most people my age’
9. ‘When political problems or issues are discussed, I usually have something to say’
10. ‘I easily understand most political issues’
11. ‘I have political opinions that are worth listening to’
12. ‘As a grown-up, I will participate in politics’
13. ‘I have knowledge about the political issues facing this country’
Political literacy

The ICCS 2009 political literacy test is based on a 79-item test that encompasses questions about politics, society and civic principles. A majority of the test items (75 per cent) ask students to exercise reason and analysis when considering matters associated with politics and citizenship issues. Remaining items (25 per cent) have to do with knowledge about politics and society (cf. Schulz et al. 2010). The political literacy measure has been constructed as a scale, with an international mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100.

Civic engagement and political participation

Participation in school democracy

Additive index: 0–6. Students were asked whether they had done the following activities within the last 12 months (coded 1), more than a year ago (coded 1) or never (coded 0):

1. ‘Participation in protest activities in school’
2. ‘Active participation in a debate’
3. ‘Voting for a class representative or the school parliament’
4. ‘Taking part in decision-making about how the school is run’
5. ‘Taking part in discussion at a student assembly’
6. ‘Becoming a candidate for class representative or school parliament’

The ICCS survey also includes a number of questions, asking the students about their expected (future) political participation. The response categories were: ‘I will certainly do this’ (coded 3), ‘I will probably do this’ (coded 2), ‘I will probably not do this’ (coded 1), and ‘I will certainly not do this’ (coded 0):

Expected civic engagement in the near future (additive index 0–15)

1. ‘Join an organization for a political or social cause’
2. ‘Volunteer to help people in the local community’
3. ‘Talk to others about your views on political and social issues’
4. ‘Write to a newspaper about political and social issues’
5. ‘Contribute to an online discussion forum about social and political issues’

Expected electoral participation (additive index 0–15)

1. ‘Vote in national elections’
2. ‘Vote in regional elections’
3. ‘Vote in local elections’
4. ‘Vote in European Parliament elections’
5. ‘Obtain information about candidates before voting in elections’

Expected party activity (additive index 0–9)

1. ‘Help a candidate or party during an election campaign’
2. ‘Join a political party’
3. ‘Stand as a candidate in local elections’

Expected (legal) extra-parliamentary activity (additive index 0–18)

1. ‘Contact a politician’
2. ‘Participate in a demonstration’
3. ‘Collect signatures for a petition’
4. ‘Write a letter to a paper’
5. ‘Wear a badge/T-shirt with a political message’
6. ‘Boycott certain products’

**Expected illegal political activity (additive index 0–9)**

1. ‘Occupy a building (squatting)’
2. ‘Block traffic’
3. ‘Spray-paint political slogans on walls’