

Political Orientations in Adolescence and in Adulthood – Does a Democratic School Climate Make a Difference?

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Background and Research Interest

- Renewed interest in the role of school in political socialization
 - ▶ Indication: Federal programme of the BLK "Learning and Living Democracy" (Edelstein & Fauser, 2001)
- Problems and deficiencies
 - ▶ Right wing extremism (Verfassungsschutzbericht des Deutschen Innenministeriums, 2007)
 - ▶ Limited knowledge and interest of students in politics (Torney-Purta et al., 2001)
- Educational objective: competencies for democratic citizenship
- Does school have positive effects on political socialization?

Background and Research Interest (continued)

■ Two "channels" of school effects on political outcomes

▶ Subject specific learning

- ⇒ Knowledge +
- ⇒ Interest ~ ⇒ assessment of subject
- ⇒ Values Ø specific outcomes

▶ Social learning in the "sociotope" school

- ⇒ Knowledge Ø
- ⇒ Interest ~ ⇒ research on school climate
- ⇒ Values +

Theoretical models for political socialization in school

- Social learning theory (Bandura 1979)
 - ▶ Learning democratic values, attitudes, motives from models
 - ▶ School = society "in nuce"; forming of basic orientations
 - ▶ learning to take part, to feel responsible for common matters; transfer of motivation for participation from school to society
- Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000)
 - ▶ Feeling competent, related/accepted and autonomous fosters mental health, productive development and the motivation to grant others the satisfaction of these basic needs, too.
 - ▶ Convergence with the psychodynamic frustration-aggression hypothesis (Streeck-Fischer, 1992, Duckitt, 1994).

Theoretical models (continued)

- Self-efficacy (Bandura 1977; Krampen, 1987)
 - ▶ Feeling that oneself can attain something, that one can realize one's own interests helps invest energy in participation
 - ▶ Transfer of motivation and competencies for participation from school to society

Evidence from general research on school climate

- School climate has known positive effects (e.g. Fend, 1977; 2006):
 - ▶ School involvement and learning motivation
 - ▶ Self-concept, self-efficacy
 - ▶ Motivation for participation in school matters
 - ▶ Motivation for using verbal conflict-resolution strategies

Evidence of school climate effects on political socialization

- Many substantial correlations on level 2 between school climate and different political outcomes (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Buhl, 2003; Watermann, 2003; Sandmeier & Maag Merki, 2005; Diedrich, 2006)
- But only few of these studies took into account:
 - ▶ control variables (SES, education/track)
 - ▶ longitudinal data
 - ▶ hierarchical structure of clustered samples
- Limited evidence for short-term causal effects
- No evidence yet for long-term effects

Research questions

- Does the school climate – as perceived by students in secondary school – have an influence on two core dimensions of political socialization, that is
 - ▶ on the interest in politics
 - ▶ on attitudes towards foreigners
- in a short- and a long-term perspective?

Data

- Life-Study (Lebensverläufe ins frühe Erwachsenenalter)
 - ▶ Constance youth study (five waves 1979-1983, age 12 to 16; n per wave ≈ 2000; total n ≈ 3000)
 - ▶ Follow-up study (2002, age 35; n = 1527)
- Longitudinal, hierarchical analysis samples
 - ▶ Adolescence (14 y. to 16 y.): n (indiv.) = 1709; n (classes) = 97
 - ▶ Adulthood (14 y. 35 y.): n (indiv.) = 1350; n (classes) = 99

Instruments

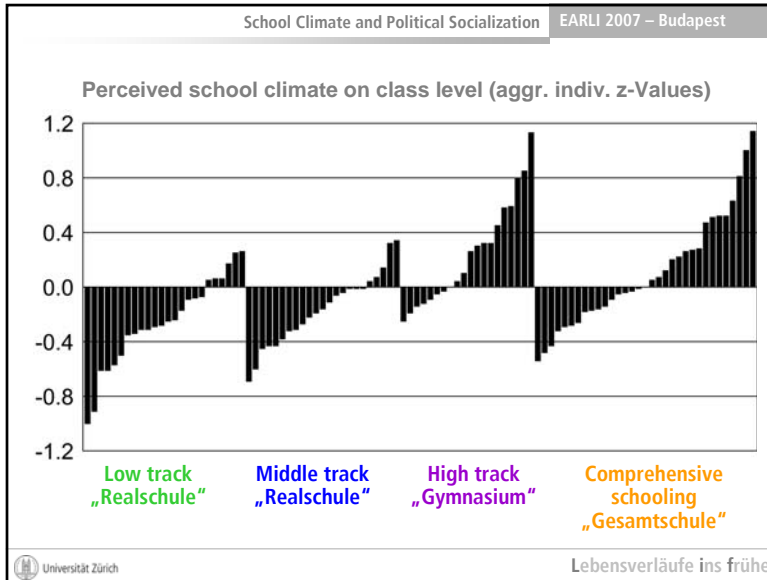
- Interest in politics at age 16 (Cronbachs Alpha = .84)
 - ▶ Combined scale (2nd order) of two (sub-)scales:
 - attitude towards political activities (3 Items)
 - political information behavior (3 items)
- Interest in politics at age 35 (Cronbachs Alpha = .88)
 - ▶ Combined scale (2nd order) of two (sub-)scales and one single item:
 - direct assessment of political interest (1 item)
 - political information behavior (2 items)
 - self-concept of political competencies (3 Items)

Instruments (continued)

- Intolerant attitude towards foreigners at age 16 (Cronbachs Alpha = .76)
 - ▶ Scale based on three items
- Intolerant attitude towards foreigners at age 35 (Cronbachs Alpha = .77)
 - ▶ Scale based on four items

Instruments (continued)

- Perceived generalized school climate (age 14-16; 1981-1983)
 - ▶ Combined scale (3rd order) of three 2nd order-scales (1981, 1982, 1983) each one consisting of nine (sub-)scales:
 - compulsion to perform (6 Items; reversed)
 - compulsion to obey (6 Items; reversed)
 - patronizing (4 Items; reversed)
 - participation in decision making (4 Items)
 - exertion of power (4 Items; reversed)
 - achievement-related discrimination (4 Items; reversed)
 - anonymity (4 Items; reversed)
 - conformity pressure (4 Items; reversed)
 - competitive pressure (4 Items; reversed)
- facets of school climate (7)
- facets of classroom climate (2)
- Alpha = .82; 120 items: Alpha = .97 😊



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Zero-order correlations with interest in politics at ages 16 and 35

	Interest in politics at age 16 (1983)		Interest in politics at age 35 (2002)	
	Level 1 Individual (n=1448)	Level 2 Class (n=74)	Level 1 Individual (n=1350)	Level 2 Class (n=99)
Perceived school climate (14-16 y.; 1981-1983)	.00 ns	.32**	.05 ns	.38***
Sex (female: 0; male: 1)	.29***	.46***	.33***	.24*
SES of family of origin	.16***	.53**	.18***	.64***
Low track (Hauptschule)#	-	-	-.24***	-.60***
Middle track (Realschule)#	-.10**	-.32*	-.14***	-.37*
Comprehensive schooling (Gesamtschule)#	-.05 ns	-.12 ns	-.14***	-.28*

*** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10
in contrast to high track (Gymnasium)

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Zero-order correlations with intolerance t. foreigners at ages 16 and 35

	Intolerant attitudes towards foreigners at age 16 (1983)		Intolerant attitudes towards foreigners at age 35 (2002)	
	Level 1 Individual (n=1497)	Level 2 Class (n=96)	Level 1 Individual (n=1335)	Level 2 Class (n=99)
Perceived school climate (14-16 y.; 1981-1983)	-.17***	-.35***	-.13***	-.48***
Sex (female: 0; male: 1)	.09***	-.14 ns	.04 ns	.03 ns
SES of family of origin	-.02 ns	-.28**	-.13***	-.55***
Low track (Hauptschule)#	.14***	.36*	.29***	.63***
Middle track (Realschule)#	.12***	.39*	.20***	.65***
Comprehensive schooling (Gesamtschule)#	.05 ns	.10 ns	.18***	.39***

*** p<.001; ** p<.01; * p<.05; + p<.10
in contrast to high track (Gymnasium)

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Prediction of interest in politics at ages 16 and 35

ICC Model	Interest in politics at age 16 (1983) [§]			Interest in politics at age 35 (2002) [§]		
	A ₁	A ₂	A ₃	B ₁	B ₂	B ₃
	.051			.068		
<i>Level 1: Individual</i>						
SES of family of origin [§]	.12***	.10**	.10**	.12***	.08**	.08**
Sex (male) [§]	.55***	.54***	.54***	.65***	.65***	.65***
School Climate 81-83 [§]	.00	.00	.00	.02	.02	.02
<i>Level 2: Class</i>						
SES of family of origin [§]	-	.10***	.12***	-	.17***	.13**
Sex (% males) [§]	-	.03	.03	-	-.12	.01
high track (Gymnas.; ref.) [§]	-	-	-	-	-	-
low track (Hauptschule) [§]	-	-	-	-	-	-.22*
middle track (Realschule) [§]	-	-	.02	-	-	-.02
comprehens. (Gesamtsch.) [§]	-	-	.10	-	-	-.10
School Climate 81-83 [§]	.06+	.01	.00	.13***	.06+	.06+

[§] standardized (coefficient=Beta) [§] dichotomous (0; 1) [§] group-mean centered + a<.10

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Prediction of intolerant attitudes towards foreigners at ages 16 and 35

Model	Intolerant attitudes at age 16 (1983) [§]			Intolerant attitudes at age 16 (1983) [§]		
	C ₁	C ₂	C ₃	D ₁	D ₂	D ₃
ICC	.038			.082		
<i>Level 1: Individual</i>						
SES of family of origin [§]	-.02	.01	.01	-.08*	-.03	-.02
Sex (male) [£]	.17**	.18**	.18**	.08	.08	.08
School Climate 81-83 [§]	-.14***	-.13***	-.13***	-.07*	-.07*	-.07*
<i>Level 2: Class</i>						
SES of family of origin [§]	-	-.11**	-.10**	-	-.23***	-.19***
Sex (% males) [£]	-	-.03	-.03	-	.04	.02
high track (Gymnas.; ref.) [£]	-	-	-	-	-	-
low track (Hauptschule) [£]	-	-	.09	-	-	.21
middle track (Realschule) [£]	-	-	.07	-	-	.11
comprehens. (Gesamtsch.) [£]	-	-	-.02	-	-	.09
School Climate 81-83 [§]	-.11***	-.08*	-.06	-.17***	-.09**	-.07*

[§] standardized (coefficient=Beta) [£] dichotomous (0; 1) [§] group-mean centered * p < .10

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Summary

- Classroom climate, SES and track are confounded with regard to effects on political socialization.
- The multi-level analyses with multiple predictors put the preliminary findings into perspective.
- Interest in politics:**
 - When controlling for gender, SES and track, with regard to political interest at age 16 the effect for the school climate on class level disappears completely.
 - In a long-term perspective, that is on political interest at age 35, a very small effect on class level can be perceived. It is only significant on the level of Alpha < 10%.

In classes with a better, more democratic perceived school climate, the students, on average, tend to be a little bit more politically interested by the age of 35 years.

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Summary (continued)

- Intolerant attitudes towards foreigners:**
 - Significant class-level effect on the long run – even after controlling for SES and track

A collectively perceived better school climate is slightly linked to lower levels of intolerance in adulthood!

- Very small effect size
- No significant class level effect on tolerance within adolescence
- Individual level effects:

Students who individually perceive the climate worse than the average in their respective class tend to be more intolerant at the age of 16 and even at the age of 35.

The school climate does make a difference.

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Summary (continued)

- Non-Effect for interest in politics:**
 - No simple transfer of positive participation experiences in school to political participation in society.
 - ≠ general proof of ineffectiveness with regard to political interest.
 - Re-contextualization: participation in the early eighties.
 - Specification of findings: The then practiced kind and degree of participation didn't have an effect on political interest.

Only when schools – in the future – do let their students participate to a more substantial amount we can know if this might give further support to the development of political interest.

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Thank you for your attention!

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