

Educational and Social Dimensions of Political Participation: *Producing a political opinion*

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Introduction

Q: Is there any political issue that you find interesting today?

A: I'm not interested in politics and I am actually totally uninvolved. I wouldn't want to join and participate in a political party or anything like that. You get upset about a lot of things... things that make me angry. But that's not the same as getting involved..." (Female student, upper secondary school, child care program).

Q: What upsets you?

A: Violence and things like that, destructiveness, affect me a lot...no one seems to do anything about it. Of course I see the environmental issues, which are always a topic of discussion. Of course it's important, but what can you do? I just don't know what to do about it. Some people say we need to change our lifestyles, but I for one can't save the climate: maybe if I had more knowledge, if I was better informed. (Female student, upper secondary school, child care program).

Q: Is there any political issue that you find interesting today?

A: Rwanda, Darfur, Sudan, Western Sahara ... human rights, international law, and international issues are what interests me. There are serious conflicts in the world; the worst thing is the fact that Western societies don't respond or react... We have witnessed conflicts that lasted a very long time before it became an issue for the UN for instance. In Darfur, China vetoed the question when it finally became a matter of UN troops, and one reason that China vetoed the resolution is that China gets its oil from Sudan and Darfur. In Sweden, we have a long tradition of taking a stand for

human rights, but these days, quite to the contrary, Sweden is playing a less important, or reticent, role, in world peace and conflict issues. And Swedish development assistance is decreasing. However, in the case of Western Sahara, Sweden did take a stand and held that the UN needed to act in order to resolve the conflict and we voted against the fisheries agreement between the EU and Morocco concerning fishing in the waters off Western Sahara. It was a great moment, Sweden was the only country to stand up and oppose the agreement. (Male upper secondary student, science program)

The question was asked in interviews of third-year upper secondary students in a survey on political opinions conducted in the university town of Uppsala and the rural mining district of Bergslagen 2008-2009.¹ The quoted responses illustrate a wide difference in the probability of being interested in politics or declaring an interest in politics and speaking out politically. The above quotations only, or primarily, reveal a difference in which interest in politics is opposed to lack of interest or indifference and commitment is opposed to non-commitment. The quotations illustrate a difference when it comes to verbosity and language skills and the related statements also show a difference in trust or confidence in the respondents' own ability to imagine the political and deal with political issues: to speak and judge politically. In the first quotation, political issues seem out of reach in one way or another. While the second quotation, from the very first sentence, indicates that the respondent has a good grasp of politics and that poli-

¹ The survey comprised 40 interviews (25 in Uppsala and 15 in Bergslagen) and a questionnaire completed by a total of 1,499 respondents (402 in Bergslagen and 1,097 in Uppsala).

tics is of great concern to him. The respondent speaks as though he knows that he understands political issues. He is speaking as someone who is not only confident in his own ability, but also can allow himself to evaluate the political situation and the state of Swedish foreign policy: “It was a great moment; Sweden was the only country to stand up and oppose the agreement.” The quotations may also be considered approaches to politics from different educational positions. The first quotation was expressed by a female student in a vocational program while the second was expressed by a male student in a university-preparatory science program, both in Swedish upper secondary schools.² How can such differences be understood? To whom does politics seem to be of concern and to whom is it simply pointless to engage and participate in (any kind of) political activity?

Decline in civic engagement, declining voter turnouts, and growing lack of trust in political institutions have on the whole been of great concern in social science in recent decades (Dalton 1998, Norris 1999; 2002, Putnam 2000).³ Specifically in Sweden, young people’s tendency to refrain from political participation, abstentions in political elections by first-time voters, and the decline in party affiliation among younger generations have been troubling issues in recent years. At the same time a growing body of research has shed light on increasing participation in alternative channels to political participation (Wennerhag 2006, Amnå 2008, Amnå & Ekman 2013, Stolle, Hooghe, Micheletti 2005). Much of this scholarly interest in changing political participation and engagement focuses on intergenerational differences, which may obscure differences in political interest and engagement among youth as a group.

Whereas previous analysis of political position-takings revealed distance and proximity between varying political interests and opinions and the correspondence between the space of political position-takings and educational positions and social origins (Bergström & Dalberg 2013), this article centers on

² The interviews stem from a survey conducted among Swedish upper secondary students in the academic town of Uppsala and four small towns in the mining district of Bergslagen: Grängesberg, Ludvika, Smedjebacken (VBU), and Fagersta (NVU). The survey consisted of 30 interviews and a questionnaire with 1,499 respondents (1,097 in Uppsala and 402 in Bergslagen). This article focuses on political practices and is based on previous analysis of the space of position-takings.

³ Voter turnout peaked in 1979 at 91.8% of the electorate. Since then, voter turnouts steadily declined until the 2006 election when turnout fell just below 82%. During this period, participation in the most traditional political activities declined as well (Holmberg & Oscarsson 2004). Voter turnout increased slightly in 2010 to 84.6% of the electorate (Svenskt valdeltagande under hundra år, SCB, Statistics Sweden.)

difference and similarities in political participation among young people. The analysis focuses first on the educational and social dimensions of all “don’t know” and “no opinion” responses to political questions in the aforementioned survey on political opinions, interests, and attitudes, and secondly on civic engagement and a wide range of political participation such as joining political parties or special interest groups, participating in political acts, and the propensity to read a newspaper, whether a national daily paper, a local paper, or an evening paper, and to what extent the opinion or arts pages attract different groups of students in upper secondary school.

“Don’t know” responses and variations

As our previous analysis centered around the position holders, in the following we will take a different tack and identify those who rarely or never position themselves in politics (Bergström & Dalberg 2013). It is well-established in political science and psephology that a percentage of the population in surveys and opinion polls will decline to answer political questions and that this “non-response” varies with age, sex, educational level, occupation, etc. Further attempts to understand the relationship between social positions and ways of relating to political action – even in the most rudimentary way, by producing a response to a political question by checking a pre-formulated response – are, however, rarely analyzed.⁴

The probability of formulating a political opinion appears unequally distributed, as is the probability of producing a response to a politically constituted question (cf Bourdieu, 1993, 1984: 397-465)⁵. In a survey on political interests and attitudes conducted among third-year pupils in upper secondary schools in Uppsala and Bergslagen in 2008, male students are overrepresented among those who responded to all political questions as well as among those who responded to none or only one of the political questions. Thus, female students responded less often to the political questions (38.2%) compared to male students (49.5%), but a larger percentage of male students (21.4%) than female students (16.9%) rarely or never responded to any of the questions on political opinion in the questionnaire.⁶ However, these gender differ-

⁴ In this issue Daniel Laurisson (2012) specifically analyzes the patterns of abstention in the 2004 election in the United States probing the (social) status sense of being entitled to act politically.

⁵ This is also a reason why Bourdieu criticized the concept of public opinion, unraveling its misleading consequences in the article *Public Opinion Does Not Exist*, first published in 1972 (see Bourdieu 1979:124-130).

⁶ The questions on political opinions were designed with preformulated answers to which the respondents were asked to choose

ences vary between groups of students and the wider gaps between the sexes in non-response rates appear among students in vocational programs. The differences between the sexes among students in preparatory programs are smaller.

The probability of producing an answer or opinion to political questions or statements also rises as one moves from students in vocational programs to students in preparatory programs, reaching the highest rates in the social science programs, closely followed by students in science programs. Students with more abundant educational resources tend to be more likely to produce a response than those with less abundant educational resources and the lowest response rate is found among students in vocational programs: 38.5 percent of students in male-dominated automotive programs; 34.5 percent of students in electricity and construction programs; and 31.8 percent of students in female-dominated health-care and social service programs rarely or never respond to political questions.

In a similar vein, response rates for politically constituted questions vary as we move through the social hierarchy, rising as we move from students of working class origin to students of upper middle class origin. As shown in Table 1, the sons and daughters of parents in lower level service professions such as vocational nurses and retail workers, as well as industrial workers and farmers, and students whose parents work in construction and transport respond far less often to politically constituted questions than do sons and daughters of parents who are teachers, doctors, or scientists.

The inert “don’t know” category or “no opinion” responses vary not only, as noted, according to the properties of the respondent but also to the nature of the question. The rate of “no opinion” and “don’t know” responses varies within the same survey from one question to the next. To begin with, we find that the rate of “no opinion” responses varies from foreign policy questions and purely political issues to questions that elicit an ethical response to the most mundane issues and/or problems of everyday life. Overall, the number of “no opinion” answers increased significantly when respondents were asked to give their opinion (agree/disagree)⁷ on statements such as: “Reduce the political influence of financial markets” (52.8%); “Aid to developing countries should be equal to 1% of GDP” (48.1%) or “The EU should develop into a United States of Europe” (45.8%). The

level of abstention was substantially lower when respondents were asked to “agree” or “disagree” with the statements: “Lower taxes on high income” (24.3%); “Restrict the right to free abortion” (22.3%), and “Homosexual couples should be given the same rights as heterosexual couples to adopt a child” (22.1%). Taken together, the rate of abstention or “no opinion” response varies in relation to both the properties of the respondent *and* the properties of the question. When the question deals with daily life, ethics, or household morality such as “Restrict the right to free abortion” and “Homosexual couples should be given the same rights as heterosexual couples to adopt a child,” the gap narrows between groups of students in vocational and preparatory programs. The propensity to produce a political opinion not only rises when we move from vocational to preparatory programs and from students of working class origin to upper (cultural) middle class origin, the gap between these positions increases as the question becomes more abstract and detached from everyday experience and depending on the degree to which the question is constructed in a specific political science style, that is, both in subject and in wording.

Thus the probability of response depends in each of these cases on the *relationship* between the two dimensions of properties; between the properties of the question (defined by its nature, remoteness from experience, degree of abstraction and attachment to common realities in subject and language) and the respondents’ properties (sex, educational position, social origin, place) (cf Bourdieu 1984:405-406). In a similar vein, the likelihood of participating in political activities varies with the nature of the act and the properties of the respondent. As with producing a response to a questionnaire on politics, the propensity to join a political party, a political interest group, participate in a public demonstration, sign a petition, contact an elected official, or the propensity to read a newspaper and especially particular sections of the paper lay bare social disparities and differences between students in different educational positions. However, political acts are also intertwined with the structure of political orientations. In the following, we have projected “supplementary variables” – indicating political activities – onto a space of political position-taking among students in upper secondary school in Uppsala (Bergström & Dalberg 2013). The aim here is to enrich the interpretation of the correspondence analysis of political orientations among young students (Le Roux & Rouanet 2004: 254). This supplementary analysis not only sheds light on the probability of being politically active among students in

among “Fully agree,” “Agree somewhat,” “Do not really agree,” “Totally disagree,” and “No opinion.”

⁷ The preformulated answers ranged from “Fully agree” to “Do not agree at all” and “No opinion.”

upper secondary school, more to the point it reveals the differences that can be discerned between holders of differing political positions and thus students in different educational positions and of different social origins.

Political activities and civic engagement

The space of political position-takings among students in Uppsala is mainly structured in three dimensions (Bergström & Dalberg 2013).⁸ Figure 1 presents the distribution of political activities, membership in various kinds of associations, and newspaper consumption added as supplementary variables in the constructed space of position-takings, in this case the plane of axis 1 and 2 (the first two dimensions). The horizontal axis 1 is structured by opposing opinions on redistribution, cultural pluralism, and environmental issues where a left-wing orientation on the left-hand side is juxtaposed with a liberal right-wing orientation on the right-hand side. The vertical axis 2 is constructed by different positions towards trust in established political institutions and attitudes towards Swedish membership in the EU and EU policy, where the established trusters in the upper part of the figure are opposed to the distrustful positions in the lower part of Figure 1, juxtaposing those who favor Swedish EU membership and are interested in EU-policy from position-takings against Swedish EU membership and indifference or lack of interest in EU policy.

At first glance, we find an overrepresentation of members in politically related associations and political activities in the upper level of the chart in Figure 1, especially on the left-hand side. It is also in this area, the upper left part of the chart, that we find an overrepresentation of those who read the newspapers' opinion, editorial, and foreign news pages along with the arts pages. On the right hand side of the graph we find an overrepresentation of readers of the financial. Consumers of financial pages reside among those who hold liberal-right political positions, whereas consumers of arts pages are juxtaposed to liberal-left position-takings and positions that favor cultural pluralism, environmental protection, etc.

The distribution of political practices and newspaper consumption corresponds with the structure of political position-takings in two striking ways. First,

we find the multimembers among those who are inclined to position themselves. Members of associations and organizations, as well as participants in various activities are mainly concentrated among the position holders along horizontal axis 1, among students who respond to questions and position themselves in relation to issues of redistribution, environmental protection, and cultural pluralism. Secondly, differences in memberships, activities, and newspaper readership correspond to the structure of opposing opinions along the first horizontal axis 1. For instance, we find an overrepresentation of those responding that they participated in public demonstrations several times on the left-hand side of horizontal axis 1, closely related to left-wing political position-takings, interests in environmental issues, and egalitarian attitudes towards immigrants. In this area of the graph we also find an overrepresentation of those organized in international human rights, human aid and environmental organizations (cf table 1 appendix). In the opposite area of the graph where the liberal-right wing position-takings are situated we find an overrepresentation of those that responded with more reluctant attitudes towards public demonstrations (no response to public demonstration). Public demonstrations are not solely associated with the labor movement. Feminist, environmental, and LGBT movements have successively been associated with public acts and demonstration with the advent of relatively new forms of political action: political activism; political consumerism; and discursive political actions (Micheletti, Follesdal & Stolle 2003, Micheletti & Stolle 2004, Amnå 2013).⁹

⁸ The first dimension is constituted by opposing opinions on redistribution, cultural pluralism, and environmental issues. The second dimension is constructed by different positions towards trust in established political institutions and attitudes towards Swedish membership in the EU and EU policy, while the third dimension is constructed by political interest vs. lack of interest (Bergström & Dalberg 2013).

⁹ Public demonstrations have successively been associated with new political interest groups: feminism, the environmental movement, LGBT movement, etc. In the early 1980s, the business sector took to the streets to demonstrate their disappointment with wage-earner funds (The 4th of October 1983), etc. At the turn of the century, there was a wave of transnational social protest and global activism in which associated groups previously considered as being in contradiction to each other acted in concert against privatizations, unemployment, for environment protection etc., (Seattle 1999, followed by the European cities of Brussels, Genoa, Florence, Rome, Gothenburg etc.), see Wennerhag (2006).

It is noteworthy that these “new forms” of political activity are scattered among the differing political orientations in the space of position-takings. Boycotts and boycotts are especially closely related to left-wing political position-takings and are overrepresented among students in social science programs oriented towards language and culture, while political activism – such as protest – appears to be more closely related to students in arts and media programs. It is in the upper level of the graph, along vertical axis 2 – structured by trust versus distrust in established political institutions – that we find an overrepresentation of non-responses to political “action groups” and “protest activity”. It is also in this area we find an overrepresentation of those who joined a political youth organization, 8.6 percent of the students in economic oriented social science programs are organized in a political youth party, 7 percent of the science students and 6.8 percent of the students in language and culture oriented social science programs are organized in a political party. In comparison with students in vocational programs these figures do not reach above 2 percent (cf Table 1, Table 5 appendix). Thus, it is in the area of Figure 1 marked by trust in established political institutions that we find an emerging cautious approach toward protest and preferred adherence instead to the traditional, established political system. Accordingly, students are more likely to respond “contacted elected official” and “several times”, joined a political party and participated in party work (social science students in programs oriented towards economics).¹¹

A newspaper offers information that is not solely political; its purpose is a rather diverse offering of, to varying extents, international and national politics, news, arts and culture, and sports. In an attempt to examine the relationship between educational position and social origin and political orientation, it is enticing to analyze students’ choice of newspaper and the distribution of the choice of news pages.¹² In a similar vein to students’ civic engagement, memberships in

associations, and participation in various political activities, newspaper readers tend to scatter in the upper level of the graph. Readers of the newspapers’ opinion, editorial, foreign news, and arts pages are overrepresented on the left-hand side of the chart whereas sports pages and financial pages are overrepresented on right-hand side in Figure 1 (cf table 3). Close to 20% of students in science programs (19.8%) and students in language and culture-oriented social science programs (18.6%) responded that they regularly read at least one national daily paper. However, the local paper is the most common choice of newspaper even among those groups of students where it is least common to read a newspaper. Nearly 50% of students in language and culture-oriented social science programs responded they regularly read the local paper (cf Table 2). The evening papers are a more common choice among students in arts and media programs (20%) and a relatively common choice among students male-dominated and female-dominated vocational programs (approx. 10%). Relatively few, less than 5%, of students in science programs reported that they regularly read the evening paper. The free newspapers seem to be an alternative shunned by science students (cf Table 2).

¹¹ Students in science programs are less likely to participate in protest activities and are also overrepresented among position holders in favor of Swedish membership in NATO and the EU, also representing a trustful posture towards established political institutions (Bergström & Dalberg 2013).

¹² In comparison, available statistics report a decreasing trend in newspaper readership: In the 15-29 age group, total readership of daily newspapers has decreased to less than 50%. In the early 1990s, 64% read one of the dailies on an “average day,” a number that had increased to 70% in 1998. Since then, readership has steadily declined, reaching 51% in 2008 and 46% in 2009. As of 2008, approximately 22% read one of the evening papers every day (Svensk dagspress 2010, SCB, [Statistics Sweden]).

Table 2. Participation (“once” or “several times”) in political activities, percentage breakdown by educational program.

| Program | N | Party work | Participate action group | Contact elected officials | Public demonstration | Protest political activism | Editorial letter | Boycott | Boycott | Political chat | Clothing as political consumerism | Culturejamming |
|------------------------------|------|------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|------------------|---------|---------|----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| Science | 172 | 3.5 | 6.4 | 20.6 | 11.4 | 2.3 | 8.9 | 38.9 | 43.6 | 18.6 | 16.80 | 4.6 |
| Technology | 68 | 0 | 1.5 | 17.7 | 4.4 | 2.9 | 1.5 | 25.0 | 29.5 | 26.5 | 8.80 | 4.4 |
| Social Science-language-cult | 129 | 4.4 | 17.0 | 23.9 | 27.4 | 6.0 | 15.5 | 42.7 | 42.7 | 20.2 | 19.40 | 10.9 |
| Social science-economics | 210 | 10.0 | 10.5 | 20.9 | 17.6 | 5.1 | 9.5 | 26.2 | 26.2 | 20.2 | 12.90 | 8.5 |
| Arts-media | 210 | 3.4 | 5.2 | 14.2 | 16.6 | 9.7 | 11.5 | 30.4 | 30.4 | 16.2 | 14.30 | 10.9 |
| Care-Health-service | 134 | 2.3 | 5.2 | 5.4 | 7.5 | 3.7 | 2.1 | 15.6 | 15.6 | 8.2 | 8.20 | 6.7 |
| Construction-vehicle-elct. | 174 | 2.9 | 4.6 | 3.0 | 5.3 | 5.7 | 2.3 | 10.3 | 10.3 | 12.7 | 6.90 | 5.8 |
| Total | 1097 | 3.8 | 7.2 | 15.1 | 12.1 | 5.1 | 7.3 | 27.0 | 28.3 | 23.5 | 12.47 | 7.4 |

Table 3. Reading a newspaper, percentage breakdown by educational program.

| Program | N | National Daily | Local paper | Evening paper | Free news paper | Read no paper | Total % |
|----------------------------------|------|----------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|---------|
| Science | 172 | 19.80 | 36.00 | 4.70 | 0.60 | 39.00 | 100 |
| Technology | 68 | 10.30 | 44.10 | 8.80 | 1.50 | 35.30 | 100 |
| Social Science-language-culture | 129 | 18.60 | 48.10 | 5.40 | 1.60 | 26.40 | 100 |
| Social science-economy | 210 | 11.90 | 33.80 | 14.80 | 1.90 | 37.60 | 100 |
| Arts-media | 210 | 6.70 | 26.70 | 20.00 | 6.20 | 40.50 | 100 |
| Health-care-service | 134 | 3.00 | 23.10 | 11.90 | 6.00 | 56.00 | 100 |
| Construction-vehicle-electricity | 174 | 0.00 | 25.90 | 10.90 | 4.60 | 58.60 | 100 |
| Total and mean % | 1097 | 8.40 | 31.50 | 14.70 | 2.70 | 42.70 | 100 |

In the lower part of the graph we find an overrepresentation of members of “Local action groups” and “non-response” to “Contacts with elected officials” juxtaposed to distrust in established political institutions. In the lower right-hand corner there is an overrepresentation of members in motor clubs among students in male-dominated vocational programs

(construction, automotive, electricity). Far away in the opposite corner we find the very few members of feminist organizations. When comparing reported newspaper-reading habits, it is noteworthy that the editorial pages, foreign news, and arts pages tend to appeal in particular to science students and students in language and culture-oriented social science programs

to a relatively greater extent than students in any other program (cf Table 3).

The majority of students in automotive, construction, and electricity programs do not regularly read a newspaper (60% replied they did not read any paper), and none reported they regularly read any of the national dailies. Among newspaper readers in these vocational programs, the local pages seem to attract the majority of students. As such distinctions in newspaper readership correspond with the distinctions between an internationally oriented and conservative right-wing orientation in the space of political position-takings and these distinctions also correspond with social class structure. The probability of reading a national daily newspaper rises with educational resources (students in university-preparatory programs and culturally upper middle class social origin) whereas the probability of reading an evening paper varies in the opposite direction, Students in vocational programs with a working class origin are relatively more likely to read an evening paper than any of the national dailies. The distance between the positions characterized by trust in the political system, egalitarian attitudes towards immigrants, and interest in international political issues and opposing positions characterized by reluctance towards cultural pluralism and immigrant support, lack of interest in international political issues, and lack of trust in established political institutions seems to reflect the difference

between those who are more likely to read not only a local daily paper but also a national daily and furthermore, even more likely to read the sections of the paper that offer information about national and international political discourses and those least likely to read any of national dailies or any of the editorial, debate, or financial pages.

For example, among those students who reported they were very interested in issues of international peace and conflict, 26.7 percent responded they regularly read one of the dailies, whereas 5.9% only regularly read one of the evening papers. Exceedingly few (1.3%) of those who responded that they were not at all interested in international peace and conflict reported they regularly read any of the dailies. Local papers and local pages emerge as the wide-audience papers and pages, reducing the differences in readership between students in differing educational positions, and in different position-takings. For instance, the local pages attract slight more than 40% of those most interested in international peace and conflict, 33.5% of those who are least interested, and 23.9% of those who reported that they were not at all interested in these issues. Students in vocational programs tend to be more likely to read the ‘wide-audience’ pages; the comic strips, local, and sports pages: pages that are more or less acceptable or appealing to people of all tastes and value orientations.

Table 4. The distribution of readers of different news pages, percentage breakdown by educational program.

| Program | N | Editorial pages | Opinion pages | Foreign pages | Domestic pages | Local pages | Arts pages | Financial affairs | Sports pages | Comic strips |
|----------------------------------|------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Science | 172 | 21.5 | 30.2 | 51.7 | 50.6 | 44.8 | 40.1 | 12.2 | 34.3 | 48.3 |
| Technology | 68 | 17.6 | 29.4 | 38.2 | 47.1 | 51.5 | 32.4 | 11.8 | 38.2 | 52.9 |
| Social Science-language-culture | 129 | 24.8 | 41.9 | 66.7 | 59.7 | 46.5 | 59.7 | 2.3 | 17.8 | 53.5 |
| Social science-economy | 210 | 16.7 | 23.8 | 46.7 | 51.4 | 51.0 | 27.1 | 17.1 | 40.5 | 37.6 |
| Arts-media | 210 | 16.7 | 20.5 | 35.2 | 41.0 | 41.4 | 45.7 | 4.8 | 22.4 | 48.6 |
| Care- health-service | 134 | 10.4 | 12.7 | 25.4 | 37.3 | 50.0 | 27.6 | 6.0 | 26.1 | 7.2 |
| Construction-vehicle-electricity | 174 | 9.2 | 9.8 | 16.7 | 30.5 | 40.8 | 12.1 | 8.0 | 37.4 | 43.1 |
| Total N/mean % | 1097 | 16.4 | 23.1 | 39.7 | 44.9 | 45.9 | 34.5 | 9.1 | 30.9 | 44.9 |

“If I only knew more...”

As shown, the probability of producing a response to the political questions on the questionnaire depends in

each of these cases on the *relationship* between the two dimensions of properties – the properties of the respondent and the question. The evident close rela-

tionship between educational position (social origin and inherited educational capital) and the propensity to answer, in particular, the most specifically political or political science-oriented questions – such as statements on foreign policy – might easily be interpreted as a “direct effect of unequal distribution of specific political competence defined ... by the possession of theoretical and practical knowledge needed to produce political actions and judgments and perhaps especially by command of political language, capacities which, one may assume, vary with educational capital” (Bourdieu 1984:408).

A: You certainly need to know more. If I knew more or was better informed, I might be more interested. I never follow the debates, really, on TV, or like [...] read the papers, never pay much attention to such ..., in politics or political issues, like you say. I mean, when you don't know all that much, you're kind of left behind [...] should I say [...] I am just not up to it. I certainly wouldn't go for it, and like [...] argue for one position or another. I simply wouldn't know how to *argue* for what I might feel is right. You know, you really have to *argue*, it seems like you actually need to convince other people that you are right or have something to say. [...] Some kids at school do take a stand [...], but none of my friends. I'd rather not bother with it (Female student, service program).

There is no doubt that an interested, attentive, and knowledgeable public has repeatedly been identified as a prerequisite for representative democracy.¹³ Nonetheless, the close relationship between educational position and propensity to respond politically, although self-evident judging by appearances, should not be over-interpreted (Bourdieu 1984: 399, 406-409). Bourdieu (1984: 399, 406-409) revealed how

¹³ The relationship between education and democratic citizenship has a long history in western philosophical and political philosophical tradition. We are drawing on Socrates' concept of the examined life, Aristotle's notion of reflective citizenship, and the Greek and Roman ideals of liberating education which Nussbaum (1997) reformulates in cultivating humanity. We are drawing on the German *bildung* and Continental Enlightenment philosophy (Kant), the Anglo-Liberal philosophy (Mill), American pragmatism (Dewey), contemporary political philosophy (Rawls 1996, pp 213, and Habermas 1997, p 488- 490). To Habermas 1997 (drawing on Julius Fröbel) political will formation is explicitly associated with compulsory secular education, in that he conceptualizes a political culture that is egalitarian, “divested of all educational privileges and thoroughly intellectual” (1997:490). This intellectualist *illusio* in Bourdieus (2000:65-72, 122pp) terms disclose a democratic doxa which supports all political thought and practice, making political choice or opinion a purely political judgment implementing explicitly political principles in order to produce a articulated response – an opinion.

the propensity to answer political questions, act, and judge politically is not sufficiently understood if reduced to *technical competence* defined as a matter of fact, knowledge, or being informed.¹⁴

A matter of status, social entitlement, or encouragement

Recalling the quoted responses to the question “Is there any political issue that you find interesting today?” in the introduction to this article, lack of interest in or indifference to politics stands in glaring contrast to being interested in and well-informed about politics and to political speech and judgment. However, the probability of speaking politically also seems intertwined with the *sense* of being entitled to be concerned with politics. This social status-linked condition appears in the distribution of “no opinion” responses and is made particularly clear in this study through the response rates to the statement: “Introduce national tests in all subjects in primary education,” which varies between 38% and 45% among sons and daughters of working class origin enrolled in a vocational program (automotive, construction, health care, and service programs) compared with about 10% among sons and daughters of highly educated parents enrolled in social science or science programs, most likely in preparation for university education. In this case, the propensity for a given social group to respond to such a statement is close to the group's objective chance of continuing on to higher education. The response rates depend on the extent to which the respondent depends (or relies) on the educational system for her or his own life course and therefore have an objective and subjective interest in its functioning (cf Bourdieu 1984: 411). In order to understand lack of interest in or indifference to politics, we need to see how this is related to the *propensity* to act politically.

The probability to produce an opinion is not only more likely among students with of culturally upper

¹⁴ A considerable amount of research effort has been devoted to analyzing the consequential effects of political information on voters (cf Bartles 1996, Berelson et al. 1954, Luskin 2003, Lau & Redlawsk 2001, Oscarsson 2007). Bartles (1996) conducted a counterfactual analysis of how a U.S. presidential election would have turned out if all voters were sufficiently informed. Holmberg & Oscarsson (2004) and Oscarsson (2007) replicated this study analyzing the Swedish elections from 1985 to 2002. The conclusions are that the direct effects of knowledge are very far-reaching. Regression analyses were performed with controls for variables such as gender, age, place of residence, and education. These variables are known to correlate with both elections and political knowledge and as such are correlations that are essential from our point of view and whose absence precludes examination of the objective social bases of representations of the division of political labor.

middle class origin in the university-preparatory science programs and language and culture-oriented social science programs (cf Bergström & Dalberg 2013). The interviews with the culturally upper middle class students disclosed a certain sense of entitlement to state a ‘personal opinion’.

“Opinionated habitus”

This kind of pretension to state a “personal opinion” is, particularly among students in the science programs, intertwined with a sort of distrust in delegation (cf Bourdieu 1984:414). The following quotation is from one of the interviews with students in the science programs and illustrates the point I want to make here. During the interview the respondent explained he was most interested in US politics. When asked to name a politician he admired or considered respectable, he named a couple and most importantly, emphasized that no *single* politician could simply represent his political opinions or views:

A: But in the Swedish political context [...] Maria Wetterstrand impresses me. She is a talented debater and has done much to create a Green Party policy that makes sense when it comes to political matters other than the environmental issues. As a result, she has become a more realistic alternative to the Social Democrats, the Liberal Party, etc. She is able to handle substantive debates about taxes, welfare, and education too. Per Schlingman is the man behind Reinfeldt's policy; many believe Reinfeldt is a good politician but Schlingman is the one who created the political rhetoric. Rhetoric is the whole idea; politics is all about conquest, conquering the right words. [...] As for me, I am not inclined to vote for or get involved in a party, and it is still hard to find one politician who stands for everything I value. Most importantly, as Voltaire wrote, “Think for yourself and let others enjoy the privilege of doing so too”. (Male student, Science program).

In order to understand the sense of entitlement to “personal opinion” it is not sufficient to consider the enhancement through educational position without the social conditions that produce “self-worth” and entitlement to personal opinion.

This staking of a “claim” to personal opinion and disinclination to delegate one’s will formation under the label of a common party or in line with a party platform was shown to be especially apt among students who seem particularly vigilant about choosing an educational path that will give them a variety of

options when investing in future higher education, among students whose futures are oriented towards individual deliverance, centered on personal merits, talents, and abilities (cf Bourdieu 1984:414-416).¹⁵

This staking of a claim to personal opinion was closely associated with an emphasis on the importance of staying informed and among those to whom newspapers were the kind of “viewpapers” that confirmed a sense of entitlement to some kind of citizenship, an entitlement and duty to express an opinion – whatever this opinion is – shaped by an everlasting effort to keep informed.

A: Most importantly, you have to keep informed. We live in a global area, society is globalized. The most important thing is to learn to critically examine the flow of information. We need to be able to scrutinize politicians, lobbyists, companies, etc. All you have left to rely on is your capacity to criticize. I, for instance, read the papers every day, I mean the dailies of course, and they give you some view of the world at least. It provides a view on the state of national and international issues. (Male student, Science program)

Conclusions

If we regard the questionnaire on politics as one chance to grasp the conditions of access to the political and political opinions and consider not first and foremost the space of political position takings but the opportunity producing or not producing any answer an their relation to various conditions we find that the capacity to adopt the needed posture to respond to the political questions depends on a variety of properties, on sex, educational position (and capital) and social origin (whereas the weight of inherited cultural capital is relative to economic capital).

The analysis of the “non-responses and “don’t know”-responses to political statements and questions, the distribution of political activities, memberships, and newspaper readership considerably enrich the interpretation of the space of political position-takings. The correspondence with the structure of position-takings reinforces the indicated hierarchical order of political socialization where different opinions, entwined with interest and trust in political institutions, outline what tends to be a homology between social structures and political orientations.

¹⁵ Cf Lidegran, I. (2009:226-230), Palme, M. (2008). Both studies disclose the strategies among elite students and their careful educational choices, made in order to avoid pathways that would limit their opportunity to make future choices.

The propensity to participate in politics, interest and/or participation in political will formation or simply to respond to political questions on a questionnaire is actually highly dependent upon educational position and educational resources and generally on the composition of cultural and economic properties, whereas it tends to increase with cultural properties as opposed to economic properties. Social groups with a relatively high amount of cultural and economic capital respectively are overrepresented in opposing positions on redistribution issues in the political space of position-takings in Uppsala. Students in the language and culture-oriented social science programs, with a culturally upper middle class origin are not only overrepresented among those who were most concerned with positioning themselves and responding to most political questions in the questionnaire, they also represent the multimembers who are more likely to participate in political actions, especially with a cultural and international orientation. It is striking how dispositions towards refugees and immigrant groups – separating students from preparatory educational programs with a cultural middle class social origin from students in vocational educational programs with a working class social origin dispossessed of cultural and/or economic assets – correspond with a the propensity to invest in internationally oriented activities relative to local oriented. The propensity to participate in human rights and human aid organizations, spend time reading foreign, as well as editorial and opinion, pages raises when we move from vocational programs to preparatory programs, whereas students in vocational programs with a working class social origin are more likely oriented towards that which is local. Local papers, local and domestic pages and (although disappearing few) local action groups.

□

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Abstract

This article centers on difference and similarities in political participation among young people. The analysis focuses first on the educational and social dimensions of all “don’t know” and “no opinion” responses to political questions in a survey on political opinions, interests, and attitudes, and secondly on civic en-

gagement and a wide range of political participation such as joining political parties or special interest groups, participating in political acts, and the propensity to read a newspaper, whether a national daily paper, a local paper, or an evening paper, and to what extent the opinion or arts pages attract different groups of students in upper secondary school. The analysis, inspired by a Bourdieusian approach to class and politics, reveal that social class still play an important role in understanding the distribution of political participation among young citizens.

Keywords

Young citizens, Politics, Political practice, Class, Geometric Data Analysis

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Appendix

Table 5. Distribution of memberships in associations, percentage breakdown by educational program.

| Program | Science | Technology | Social Science- language- cult | Social science- economics | Media- art | Care- helath- service | Construction- vehicle-elctr. | Total |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------|---|---------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Sports club | 50.6 | 44.1 | 31.0 | 46.7 | 28.1 | 27.6 | 36.8 | 37.8 |
| Motor club | 3.5 | 5.9 | 1.6 | 1.0 | 2.9 | 5.5 | 25.9 | 6.6 |
| Animal rights assn. | 1.2 | 1.5 | 3.1 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 2.2 | 1.7 | 2.2 |
| Humanitarian aid org. | 8.1 | 2.9 | 6.2 | 3.8 | 3.3 | 0.7 | 1.1 | 3.7 |
| Immigrants assn. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.4 | 1.0 | 3.0 | 1.7 | 1.0 |
| Cultural assn. | 11.9 | 5.9 | 19.6 | 3.3 | 7.7 | 1.5 | 3.3 | 7.6 |
| Political youth org. | 7.0 | 0 | 6.2 | 8.6 | 4.3 | 1.5 | 1.7 | 4.2 |
| Feminist org. | 0 | 0 | 1.0 | 0.5 | 0.8 | 0.7 | 0.6 | 0.5 |
| Religious org. | 4.7 | 5.9 | 8.5 | 1.9 | 6.7 | 6.0 | 2.9 | 5.2 |
| Local action group | 1.2 | 0 | 1.6 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 2.2 | 1.1 | 1.3 |
| Environment org. | 2.3 | 1.5 | 0.8 | 2.9 | 1.4 | 0 | 1.1 | 1.4 |
| Human rights org. | 7.0 | 5.9 | 5.4 | 1.4 | 2.4 | 0 | 0 | 3.2 |
| Total N | 172 | 68 | 129 | 210 | 210 | 134 | 174 | 1097 |