

## **Voters and Candidates of the Future**

### **The Intention for Electoral Participation among Adolescents in 22 European countries**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Within the literature there is a growing concern about lower voter turnout rates among young age cohorts. In this article we investigate the reported willingness to vote among 72,466 14-year old adolescents from 22 European countries, taking part in the International Citizen and Civic Education Survey (ICCS, 2009). Results indicate that the willingness to vote remains quite high among this age group, but with a clear gender division. While girls are more likely to state that they will vote, boys are more likely to see themselves as a future election candidate. An open classroom climate at school contributes to the willingness to vote in future elections. The elements that are known to have an effect on the turnout level of adults, however, do not have a significant impact on the intention to vote among adolescents. This would suggest that the observed low turnout rate among young age groups cannot just be attributed to an alleged lack of political motivation among adolescents.

#### **KEYWORDS**

electoral participation, voting, adolescents, comparative research, Europe, ICCS 2009

## **Introduction**

In most Western societies one can observe an ongoing concern about the sustainability and legitimacy of electoral democratic procedures and institutions, and empirical research indeed suggests that trends are rather worrisome in this regard. Research shows a structural decline with regard to electoral turnout, as fewer citizens turn out to vote (Blais, 2006). More troubling, it has been shown that especially younger age cohorts are responsible for the bulk of this decline (Rubenson et al., 2004). Dalton (2007) therefore suggests that for young age groups the act of voting no longer should be considered as the quintessential element of the concept of good citizenship. Wattenberg (2007) even wonders whether voting is still something to be done at all by young people. Furthermore, party membership too is in decline and in this case too, especially young citizens no longer seem interested in joining a political party (Hooghe, Stolle & Stouthuysen, 2004; Whiteley, 2011). While political parties and the electoral process they participate in, traditionally could be seen as the most important linkage mechanism between citizens and the political system, this form of linkage has been severely weakened in the current era (Dalton, Farrell & McAllister, 2011; Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2009). It has to be noted that while electoral and traditional forms of participation are in decline, this is not the case for emerging, non-institutionalized forms of political participation that are on the rise, but it remains to be investigated to what extent these new forms actually can function as a democratic linkage mechanism (Harris, Wyn & Younes, 2010; Stolle & Hooghe, 2011; Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2011).

Various explanations have been offered for this observed decline of electoral politics among young age groups. In some of the older research, it was stated that younger age cohorts simply lack political interest or that they are less motivated to engage in political life (Putnam, 2000). Other authors, however, have argued quite convincingly that younger age cohorts actually do participate quite intensively, although no longer in conventional electoral politics (Gaiser, De Rijke & Spanring, 2010; Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2011; Zukin et al., 2006). A competing explanation focuses more strongly on the changing role of political parties in society. As parties pay more attention to their role in government, they are less firmly anchored in society, and they are less likely to represent the preferences of the population at large (Mair, 2006). In that case, political parties and electoral participation simply are perceived as less attractive mechanisms to get one's voice heard in the political process.

To a large extent, the debate about the decline of electoral democracy is focused on the role of younger age cohorts. First, all the indicators suggest that especially young age groups abandon electoral politics, while among older citizens stable habits of participation and party identification still can be found. Second, it has been shown that electoral habits that are picked up early in the life-cycle, continue to have an effect throughout the life-cycle. If citizens do not vote the first time they are allowed to, it is unlikely that they will pick up this habit later on in life (Franklin, 2004; Plutzer, 2002). Investigating the attitude of young citizens with regard to electoral politics therefore provides us already with some indications about the likely trends with regard to electoral turnout for the future. Third, research suggests quite strongly that even at an early age, adolescents already have well-developed ideas about how they will participate in political life once they are adults (Hooghe & Stolle, 2004; Spanning, Ogris & Gaiser, 2008; van Deth, Abendschön & Vollmar, 2011).

In this paper, we investigate the intention of early adolescents to participate in electoral politics, both by casting their vote during elections or by being a candidate in those elections. The analysis is based on a new comparative dataset, including information on 72,466 adolescents in 22 European Union member countries. The comparative nature of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS, 2009) allows us to investigate not only individual level determinants of the intention to participate, but also to take into account whether characteristics of the political system (especially the electoral system) already have an effect on the attitudes and the behavioral intention of adolescents. The study contains data on the intention to participate among 14-year olds, and earlier studies have shown that adolescents at this age already have well structured political preferences and attitudes. Therefore, we can assume that although 14-year olds do not have the right to vote yet, it is meaningful to ask them about their intention to use their future electoral rights.

First, we briefly review the literature on the decline of electoral democracy, before introducing data and methods. We close with some observations on what the study of adolescents indicates about the causes of the decline of electoral politics in Western democracies.

## Literature

Adolescents already have a quite firm understanding of their role in political life (van Deth et al., 2011). Their participation levels tend to be fairly elevated, as they participate strongly in social movement oriented forms of political engagement and in various forms of political consumerism (Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008). These forms of political participation are already available to them, but self-evidently this is not the case for electoral participation, as in most electoral systems the age of enfranchisement is fixed at 18. Although discussions have been going on about lowering this age limit to 16, in practice very few electoral systems have taken this step (Hart & Atkins, 2011). In practice, however, adolescents already have clear intentions about what their future role in the electoral process will be. Although it cannot be taken for granted that they will in the end turn these intentions into actual behavior, previous studies have shown that the stratification patterns with regard to the intention to participate among adolescents largely overlap with the stratification patterns typically found among adult voters (Hooghe & Stolle, 2004).

With regard to the determinants of the intention to participate among adolescents, a number of interaction contexts stand out: families, school and the political system at large.

First of all, the intergenerational transmission of attitudes and behavioral patterns has been shown to be remarkably persistent. Having parents who are actively engaged and interested in politics has a strong effect on the participation levels and the political knowledge of young people. To a large extent, findings as these imply that existing inequalities are continued over time and across generations: parents enjoying a high socio-economic status usually are more active in politics and in social life, and subsequently they tend to have children with the same characteristics and the same kind of interests (Jennings & Niemi, 1981; Jennings & Stoker, 2004). Adolescents who grow up in a politicized environment (because their parents are politically active, because politics is discussed at home, or because the family reads a newspaper or watches the television news), also are much more likely to be interested in politics themselves (Pfaff, 2009).

Second, the school environment too, clearly serves as a socializing agent (Niemi & Junn, 1998). While in most of the older literature skepticism prevailed about the effects of civic education efforts, more recent research in general is more optimistic about the occurrence of

these effects. Some studies indeed show that civic education can have persistent effects, although these effects are usually stronger with regard to political knowledge than with regard to political engagement (Galston, 2004). These apparently contradictory findings might be related to the fact that civic education has been changing dramatically during the past three decades. While in the past the focus was more strongly on class-based learning of political knowledge and national history, civic education increasingly has evolved into a hands-on experience, where the emphasis is on learning civic skills and various forms of engagement. Torney-Purta (2004) stresses the fact that civic education as such is not the most important determinant of democratic attitudes among young people, but rather the presence of an open classroom climate within the school. A climate in which students are encouraged to express their own opinions, to take part in discussions and to engage in school matters, is believed to have a positive effect on the civic skills of the pupils. In this respect, Torney-Purta builds on Dewey's notion of 'democratic schools' as a testing ground for adult democratic participation.

Third, it should be remembered that adolescents too, already are influenced by the political system they live in (Helsper et al., 2006). Thus far, most of the research on political socialization is based on data from a single country or political system (for exceptions, see Finkel, 2002; Torney-Purta, Barber & Richardson, 2004). This kind of research however, limits the hypotheses and variables that can be tested, since all respondents belong to the same society or the same political system. We do not know, however, whether findings about the political socialization of young people, e.g., in the US can be generalized toward other countries. Therefore it is essential to develop a comparative research effort and to include nation and school system characteristics in the causal model. The most important reason for taking this step is that we know that political participation is not just being influenced by individual level factors (e.g., socio-economic status, age, gender...), but also by national characteristics. A typical example would be that in countries with a system of proportional representation, voter turnout is significantly higher than in countries with a majoritarian electoral system (Blais, 2006; Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998; Rose, 2004). Requirements for voter registration, too, tend to dampen turnout figures. Apart from elements directly related to electoral law and the electoral system, broader political characteristics, too, were shown to have an impact on participation levels of the population. The quality of democratic government and the length of democratic rule are believed to have an effect on participation levels as well (Farrell, 2001; Norris, 2004). Even if we limit ourselves to a rather straightforward act as voting, it is clear that the likelihood one participates in this kind of

action is not just being influenced by individual characteristics, but just as well by characteristics of the political system (Franklin, 2004; Geys, 2006). As Blais and Dobrzynska (1998, 251) conclude: “Turnout is likely to be highest in a small, industrialized, densely populated country, where the national lower house election is decisive, voting is compulsory, and the voting age is 21, having a PR system with relatively few parties and a close electoral outcome”. A central research question, therefore, is to determine whether this pattern that is present among adults, can already be detected among adolescents.

What this review of the literature makes clear is that we cannot arrive at a full explanation of electoral participation, or the intention for electoral participation, by relying just on micro-level variables. School and national context are equally important. Based on the literature we can develop a number of hypotheses about the kind of relations we expect to find (Torney-Purta, Barber & Richardson, 2004). On the individual level we can assume that an academic orientation of the pupil, and the socio-economic status of the parents will have a positive effect on the willingness to participate. Higher levels of political interest and efficacy should also increase adolescents’ likelihood to engage in electoral politics when they grow up. Experiences with an open classroom and school climate should strengthen democratic value patterns and consequently the prospects for electoral participation among pupils. At the level of the nation, the literature on turnout allows us to speculate that highly-developed industrial countries, with a long established and open proportional electoral system should have higher turnout figures, and therefore these variables should also positively affect the willingness of young people to participate in the electoral process.

## **Data and Methods**

The data that will be used are derived from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2009. These data compare the civic attitudes of more than 100,000 14-year old students in 38 countries. These data allow researchers not only to compare the effect of individual attitudes on individual outcomes, but also to measure the effects of national policies on civic education outcomes. The survey has been funded by the educational authorities of the participating countries, the UNESCO Education Sector, the European Commission and the Inter-American Development Bank (for more information see: <http://iccs.acer.edu.au/>). In the analyses, we will rely on the scales that are provided by the

ICCS organization itself (Ainley and Schulz 2011; Schulz et al. 2011). The advantage of these scales is that it is tested whether they are unidimensional (using confirmatory factor analysis) and various forms of item response (Rasch-)modeling is used to produce cross-nationally equivalent scales. The scales used in this analysis therefore can be considered as valid.

Because our focus is on future voting behavior in local, national and European elections combined, the dataset is limited to those EU-countries that had all these questions in their national questionnaires. As a consequence, the analysis is conducted on a dataset of 72,466 students in 22 different EU-countries (see Table 1 below). Limiting the analysis to only European countries also allows us to avoid a number of potential pitfalls with regard to the cross-cultural measurement equivalence of the central variables in the analysis. As in all the European countries, school education is compulsory at this age, and participation therefore is almost universal, this also allows for a generalization toward this age group.

[Table 1 about here]

ICCS data were obtained in each country by the educational authorities themselves, resulting in rather high response rates. Central services of ICCS, furthermore ensured uniform sampling methods in the various participating countries. The dependent variables of interest in our analysis are adolescents' future electoral participation.

The data show strong differences between countries with regard to the items measuring the concept of electoral participation (Table 2). While almost 80 per cent of all respondents indicate that they will go out to vote in national elections in the future, this level is clearly lower in countries like Bulgaria and especially the Czech Republic. Already at this age, however, the willingness to take part in elections of the European Parliament is much lower, and stands at less than 60 per cent. This is indeed in line with the fact that turnout rates tend to be much lower for European elections that are often considered to be second-order elections. Especially in the more recent EU member states, but also in England, the level of enthusiasm for European elections remains remarkably low. The willingness to play a more active role in electoral politics on the other hand, is much more limited. While 72.9 per cent of respondents still indicate that they will try to obtain information about the candidates prior to the elections, only 20 per cent indicates that they will stand as a candidate or join a political party.

[Table 2 about here]

Instead of analyzing the factors that determine willingness to participate in political life for each of these items separately, we develop a scale for intended political participation. Therefore we use a principal component extraction method. Because the items contain both measurements of voting behavior and more active forms of political participation as being a candidate, we expected two components. These components, although different, should be related and therefore an oblique rotation is appropriate. As shown in Table 3, we can indeed clearly distinguish a more passive voting component and a ‘politically active’-component. While all acts of voting (no matter the level involved) clearly load on the first factor, the more active components of electoral behavior (being a candidate, joining a political party, helping a candidate), clearly load on this second factor. The factor scores of this principal component extraction method are saved and subsequently used as the dependent variables in our analysis. High factor scores indicate a strong willingness for performing the activities that form the political participation components.

[Table 3 about here]

Some individual characteristics should explain to a considerable extent the willingness of adolescents to take part in political life in the future. Therefore we first include some traditional background characteristics in our explanatory analyses. Besides gender and an indicator for immigrant background we also add a series of variables that serve as proxies for students’ socio-economic status: we include the number of books at home, the expected years of further education and the highest parental educational level (in years). Furthermore we include students’ position on certain political attitudes that can be expected to explain their willingness to become politically active or to vote. Therefore we make use of the scales that are provided by ICCS, and we include a measurement of interest in political and social issues, a measurement of internal political efficacy and one of trust in institutions (for question wording see Appendix 1).

With regard to the school related variables, a first scale measures students’ sense of an open classroom climate, a second one measures students’ perception of influence on decisions in school (for exact question wording see Appendix 1). Students’ scores on both of these scales



were aggregated at the school-level. By doing so we obtain a school-level measurement for the ‘democratic school’ variables. Aggregated civic education variables should reflect reality more accurately compared to individual measurements. Especially with regard to civic education, we would expect recall error to be strong and biased depending on students’ level of interest in politics and society in general. By aggregating the variables to the school level, we overcome this measurement problem.

Thirdly, we also include country-specific variables that are related to the political and electoral system of the countries investigated. These variables should capture part of the variation between countries in students’ willingness to vote or to become politically active in the future. A first variable included is the 2009 Human Development Index as reported in the UNDP database ([hdrstats.undp.org](http://hdrstats.undp.org)). Furthermore, we include the 2009 Freedom House Index scores of the countries analyzed ([www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)). The proportionality of the electoral system and the effective number of parties (ENP) in Parliament are included to capture the variation in electoral systems and competitiveness between the countries. For these variables the indices of the 2009 election (or the elections preceding that year as closely as possible) were included. The election indices were derived from the Gallagher database ([www.tcd.ie](http://www.tcd.ie)). Furthermore we included a dummy variable for the presence of compulsory voting in the countries analyzed (Quintelier, Hooghe & Marien, 2011). In order to allow for a very direct comparison between adult behavior and the intention to participate among adolescents, we also included two additional country level variables. We compare the intention to vote with actual turnout rates in 2009 ([www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)). For the analysis with the politically active component as dependent variable, party membership rates are included (Van Biezen et al., 2011). The country-level data used in the analysis can be found in Appendix 2. Descriptives for all independent variables included in the current analysis can be found in Table 4.

[Table 4 about here]

Because of the structure of the data, multilevel analysis is the appropriate technique to investigate the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variables of interest. Students are nested in schools and the schools are nested within national contexts. A multilevel analysis technique takes into account this nested structure and the fact that students within a school or within a country are not completely independent and resemble one another.

By means of multilevel analysis techniques we can investigate the effect of variables at different levels (individual, school, country) on pupils' willingness to become politically active (Hox, 2010). Analyses are performed with the statistical program HLM. Within regression analysis, one of the main assumptions for testing significance is that samples are randomly drawn. For multilevel analysis, this assumption of random samples should hold for every level in the data. At the country level of the ICCS data, however, this is not the case. The random selection at the lower levels and the nested structure of the data, nevertheless render multilevel modeling necessary when analyzing these data (Franzen & Meyer, 2010; Hox 2010). Furthermore, because we focus on Europe and the European Union more specifically, the bias in the countries participating in the ICCS 2009 wave should not be too strong. Of the 27 member states of the European Union, 22 participated in the ICCS survey and are thus represented in the dataset and included in our analysis.

### **Results: Intention to Vote**

In the analysis, we first investigate the determinants of the intention to vote, before turning to the intention to be a candidate or join a political party. For reasons of clarity, we develop the model in a number of steps (Table 5). First, a null-model is estimated showing 12 per cent of intra-class correlation at the school level, but only 5 per cent at the country level. This suggests that schools are a meaningful element to include in the analysis, either because of the composition of their student body, or because the democratic character of the school indeed has an impact on the willingness of pupils to engage in electoral politics. The fact that intra class correlation at the country level remains limited to five per cent, however, suggests that the European countries and electoral systems do not differ all that much with regard to the level of electoral engagement among adolescents. In a first model, we only include basic background characteristics. The results show that girls are more likely to report future electoral participation, and the same is true for those with a higher socio-economic status. These background differences remain significant, even when controlling for political attitudes in Model II. When we introduce the school level variables in Model III, the hypothesis about an open classroom climate is clearly confirmed: the perception of such a climate is significantly related to the willingness to vote. The effect of whether or not pupils have a say in the way their schools are being run, is not significant.

[Table 5 about here]

We also assumed that various characteristics of the electoral system would have an impact on the intention to vote of adolescents. It should be remembered, however, that we only have 22 observations on the country level, while most of the country level variables are strongly related, leading inevitably to multicollinearity. Therefore we proceeded in a more elaborated manner, by introducing the country level variables one by one, in a separate model. All models of course included all the variables from the full model III reported in Table 5 (but not repeated in Table 6 for reasons of clarity).

The results of this exercise, however, are fairly disappointing. Not a single one of the country level variables comes even close to significance. Even a system of compulsory voting is not related to the intention to vote (Table 6, Model IV). Variables that have been shown to have an effect on electoral turnout, apparently are not related to the intention to vote among adolescents. A final test then, was the inclusion of adult turnout figures at the country level. The variables included to capture the differences in electoral systems are not significantly related to adolescents' willingness to vote. This could indicate that we included the wrong variables to capture variance at the country level. We did, however, expect adolescents' willingness to vote to be related to the degree to which adults, living within their country and facing the same electoral and political system, actually turn out to vote. As is clear in Table 6 and illustrated in Figure 1 in Appendix 3, however, even adult turnout is not significantly related to adolescents' willingness to vote.

None of the political or electoral system variables proves to be related to adolescents' willingness to vote as an adult. Since we are analyzing the intention to vote of 14-year olds, a lack of knowledge of and interest in these systemic elements might explain why we do not find a relation between these variables and adolescents' willingness to vote. Therefore, we also tested for cross-level interactions between adolescents' expected years of education and the systemic variables in the analysis. The better educated should be more aware of the political context in which they will vote as an adult and this should be reflected in their intended voting behavior. As can be seen in Table 6 (Model V), the only significant interaction effect found is between students' expected years of education and the level of proportionality of the electoral system. Although the general effect of proportionality is negative, for students that expect to study for an extended period of time, a more proportional system increases the willingness to turn out to vote. We can assume therefore that if adolescents understand more clearly the proportional characteristics of the electoral system, this has a positive impact on their willingness to vote.

[Table 6 about here]

### **Results: Being a Candidate and Party Member**

In the analysis reported in Table 7, we proceed in the same manner to explain our second dependent variable, the willingness to be actively engaged in the electoral process. Here the null model shows a much more limited intra class correlation of 6 per cent at the school level. Differences between schools are thus more limited here than with regard to the intention to vote.

If we introduce the individual level background characteristics (Model I), it is important to note here that the gender effect runs exactly in the opposite direction as for the intention to vote. While girls were more likely to go out to vote, they are much less likely to indicate that they would be willing to be a candidate in future elections. Some elements of the rather persistent gender gap with regard to political representation, obviously can already be found at this age. Furthermore, we do not find an effect of the expected years of further education here.

Adding the attitudinal variables in Model II leads to the expected results; those that are higher on political interest and efficacy, also are more likely to be a candidate.

Again in contrast to voting, the presence of an open classroom climate does not have an effect here, while we do observe a positive effect of the ability to participate in school governance.

[Table 7 about here]

With regard to the country level variables (Table 8), we proceed in exactly the same manner, by introducing the variables one by one to the model already developed in Table 7. Here too, however, the only conclusion to be drawn is that not a single one of the country level variables even comes close to significance. Even if we were to apply a very liberal standard of significance, it is clear that none of the standard variables helps us to explain the country level variance. For this analysis too, we test whether at least adolescents' willingness to become politically active in the future is related to the degree to which being politically active is prevalent in the country they live in. Therefore we include information about the rate of party membership as a percentage of the electorate as a country-level variable. Once more, no significant relation is found between the institutional specific variable and adolescents'

willingness to become politically active as an adult. These findings indicate that there does not even seem to be a correlation between adolescents' intention to become active in a political party, and the degree of party membership among adult age groups (Figure 2 in Appendix 3). In this analysis, we also tested interaction effects with adolescents' expected years of education (see model V in Table 8). Only one of the interaction terms, however, is significantly related to adolescents' reported future political activities, and that is the interaction between years of stable democracy and expected years of further education. Pupils with a stronger academic orientation, therefore, are more likely to respond in a more positive manner to the presence of a stable democratic climate in the country.

[Table 8 about here]

## **Discussion**

Given the ongoing concern about the future of electoral democracy in Western societies, in this paper we reported on the intention to participate among adolescents, who might be considered as the future generation of voters, candidates and citizens.

First of all, the data confirm that it is meaningful to question 14-year old adults about their attitude and intentions to participate. The structure of the data suggest that adolescents do not answer randomly, but in a well-structured manner. The factor analysis suggests a clear and theoretically relevant division between voting and more active forms of electoral participation, as we could expect theoretically.

At first sight, the results of the ICCS study in Europe provide reasons for optimism. Roughly 80 per cent of all adolescents claim that they are likely to vote, which is roughly in line with current turnout levels. It is quite striking to observe that we find these high percentages not only in the Scandinavian countries, which traditionally figure high on various political participation rankings, but also in countries as Ireland, Italy and Spain. Of course, it would be erroneous to assume that all the adolescents who claim that they will go out to vote, will actually do so in the future. Inevitably, quite a number of them in practice will not perform in the same manner as they now intend to do. Theoretically, however, it is interesting to note that the observed low turnout rates among young voters, apparently are not caused by a generalized lack of political interest or engagement (Gaiser, De Rijke & Spannring, 2010). While at the age of 14, these adolescents still plan to go out and vote, apparently by the age of

18 only a small percentage of that group actually does so. This would indicate that all kinds of other elements, like e.g., the obligation to register as a voter, play a role in this process. This kind of barriers, therefore, needs to be addressed in campaigns to bring out the vote among young citizens.

Another element suggesting that it is meaningful to ask adolescents about their intention to participate is the clear gender division we find at this age. While girls are more likely to report they will go out to vote, they are much less willing to be a candidate in elections. While this pattern earlier already has been described for a US sample of adolescents (Hooghe & Stolle, 2004), we now find exactly the same pattern across European societies. Again, this indicates that future efforts to increase female participation in the electoral process will have to take account of the fact that these differences are already present at the age of 14. Gender roles and gendered expectations that already have been acquired at this age, apparently play a role in this process, and therefore these gender concepts have to be taken into account in the study of gender differences in electoral representation.

The most puzzling finding in the current analysis, however, is that characteristics of the electoral system do not seem to have an impact on the intention to vote among adolescents. Even if we limit ourselves to the characteristics that were found to be significant in the research by Blais and Dobrzynska (1998), we did not find any meaningful relations. So how can we explain that the variables that do have an effect on adult turnout do not have an effect yet on the intention to vote among adolescents?

A first possible explanation is that the intention to vote has little predictive power for what will happen later on in the life of these adolescents. This would suggest that questions about likely future participation are not very useful to be used in this kind of research. Panel studies, following respondents over a longer period of time, however, allows us to question this assumption. Panel research shows quite clearly that respondents who already start to participate during adolescence will continue this habit even two decades later (Jennings & Niemi, 1981; Jennings & Stoker, 2004). We can assume therefore that the intention to vote has at least some predictive value.

It has to be remembered however, that the motivation to go out to vote is but one element of a complex interplay of various elements that eventually determine turnout. Other elements might be legislation (e.g., with regard to voter registration), the complexity of the electoral process, the salience of the electoral campaign, and the effort political actors undertake to

mobilize voters. All those elements do play a role. In *Voice and Equality*, Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995, 15) famously argued that there are three potential reasons for political passivity: “because they can’t; because they don’t want to; or because nobody asked”. The current analysis suggests that the low turnout among young age groups is not related with not wanting to vote, as a vast majority of adolescents indicates a willingness to vote. This would indicate that the “can’t” and the “nobody asked” should be investigated further. Future efforts to explain low voter turnout levels among young citizens, therefore should not focus on the alleged lack of political interest among this age groups, but rather on the presence of administrative barriers, and on the reluctance of political parties to concentrate their mobilization efforts on this age group.

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**Table 1.** Countries included in the analysis

Country	n
Austria	3385
Bulgaria	3257
Cyprus	3194
Czech Republic	4630
Denmark	4508
Estonia	2743
Finland	3307
Greece	3153
Ireland	3355
Italy	3366
Latvia	2761
Lithuania	3902
Luxembourg	4852
Malta	2143
Netherlands	1964
Poland	3249
Slovak Republic	2970
Slovenia	3070
Spain	3309
Sweden	3464
United Kingdom*	2916
Belgium*	2968
<b>Total</b>	<b>72,466</b>

Source: ICCS, 2009. \*In Belgium, only Dutch language schools were included. In the United Kingdom only schools in England participated.

**Table 2.** Willingness to take active part in political life in the 2009 ICCS study

Country	Vote in local elections	Vote in national elections	Vote in European elections	Obtain informa- tion	Join political party	Stand as candidate	Help candidate or party
Austria	83.2	81.6	76.9	82.9	25.5	29.2	46.4
Bulgaria	77.3	68.6	55.7	69.7	20.8	23.7	38.9
Cyprus	75.5	74.7	58.8	70.5	36.1	37.1	46.1
Czech Republic	66.8	49.6	38.3	62.3	10.4	19.6	24.0
Denmark	80.0	88.9	53.4	69.6	17.6	9.8	25.5
Estonia	77.6	72.4	30.3	65.0	14.7	16.8	28.0
Finland	85.3	84.7	54.0	76.4	12.0	6.6	12.7
Greece	83.3	76.6	67.2	74.4	30.6	29.8	35.9
Ireland	89.8	87.0	73.1	78.7	18.7	21.6	43.7
Italy	91.0	88.5	78.0	88.7	24.0	22.7	45.6
Latvia	80.7	76.7	62.3	80.3	25.4	32.9	40.0
Lithuania	86.3	85.3	57.8	80.0	20.1	22.6	39.1
Luxembourg	69.4	74.8	64.7	78.4	21.9	24.7	51.1
Malta	80.9	86.4	61.9	66.7	30.5	19.3	36.7
Netherlands	76.4	73.7	59.3	62.1	18.4	14.7	41.3
Poland	81.8	77.3	50.0	62.5	12.2	22.4	25.5
Slovak Republic	73.3	74.1	63.8	75.6	16.3	24.3	30.0
Slovenia	78.9	80.8	42.7	74.3	17.9	30.7	31.4
Spain	86.8	85.4	68.5	78.3	31.5	18.1	38.3
Sweden	80.8	85.1	63.5	76.0	17.3	23.3	32.2
United Kingdom	75.0	71.6	42.4	68.9	19.4	16.8	35.0
Belgium	75.8	73.2	53.0	53.5	8.6	11.1	25.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>79.6</b>	<b>77.8</b>	<b>57.9</b>	<b>72.9</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>35.0</b>

Entries are the percentage of students that indicated that they would certainly or probably do the political activity mentioned once an adult. Source: IEA ICCS 2009.

**Table 3.** Political participation measures, principal component analysis with oblimin rotation

Item	Voting	Electoral activity
Vote in local elections	<b>0.881</b>	-0.053
Vote in national elections	<b>0.924</b>	-0.099
Vote in European elections	<b>0.620</b>	0.167
Get information about candidates before voting in an election	<b>0.751</b>	0.046
Help a candidate or party during an election campaign	0.216	<b>0.643</b>
Join a political party	-0.027	<b>0.867</b>
Stand as a candidate in local elections	-0.081	<b>0.864</b>
Eigenvalues	3.273	1.348
% of variance	46.75	19.25

Entries are factor loadings of a principal component analysis with oblimin rotation. Factor loadings over 0.400 are indicated in bold. Factor correlation is 0.377.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics for independent variables in the analysis

		Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Valid n
Individual level	Gender (0 = boy, 1 = girl)	0.00	1.00	0.50	0.50	71,618
	Immigrant background	1.00	3.00	1.14	0.46	70,948
	Number of books at home	0.00	5.00	2.47	1.34	71,643
	Expected future education (years)	0.00	9.00	6.39	2.25	70,772
	Highest parental educational level (years)	2.00	17.00	13.56	2.73	69,895
	Interest in politics and society	26.58	73.81	48.64	10.08	71,377
	Internal political efficacy	22.94	79.74	48.90	10.26	71,303
	Trust in institutions	20.21	77.35	49.34	9.70	70,934
School level (aggregated)	Open classroom climate	36.51	68.67	50.24	1.78	3,024
	Influence in school decisions	37.13	58.81	47.82	1.41	3,024
Country level	Human Development Index	0.74	0.89	0.84	0.04	22
	Freedom House Index	1.00	2.00	1.11	0.26	22
	Years of stable democracy	9.00	129.00	46.50	31.60	22
	Proportionality	0.72	16.73	4.95	3.50	22
	ENP	2.00	8.42	4.10	1.52	22
	Compulsory voting	0.00	1.00	0.18	0.39	22
	Adult turnout	29.44	98.39	68.65	15.29	22
	Adult party membership	0.74	17.27	5.13	4.48	20

**Table 5.** Intention to Vote: level 1 and level 2-variables

	Null Model	Model I	Model II	Model III
	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)
Intercept	-0.008 ns (0.050)	-0.791 *** (0.057)	-3.386 *** (0.051)	-3.892 *** (0.219)
<i>Individual-level variables</i>				
Gender		0.029 *** (0.007)	0.080 *** (0.007)	0.080 *** (0.007)
Immigrant background		-0.081 *** (0.009)	-0.122 *** (0.008)	-0.122 *** (0.008)
Expected years of education		0.072 *** (0.002)	0.050 *** (0.002)	0.050 *** (0.002)
Parents' highest years of education		0.014 *** (0.002)	0.012 *** (0.001)	0.012 *** (0.001)
Books at home		0.091 *** (0.003)	0.056 *** (0.003)	0.056 *** (0.003)
Political interest			0.017 *** (0.000)	0.017 *** (0.000)
Internal political efficacy			0.022 *** (0.000)	0.022 *** (0.000)
Political trust			0.020 *** (0.000)	0.020 *** (0.000)
<i>School-level variables</i>				
Open classroom climate				0.014 *** (0.003)
Student influence				-0.004 ns (0.003)
ICC school	0.12	0.11	0.09	0.08
ICC country	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.05

Data: Source: ICCS 2009. Entries are parameter estimates and standard errors (between brackets) of a multilevel OLS regression. Significance: \*\*\*:<0.001; \*\*:<0.01; \*:<0.05; ns: not significant.

**Table 6.** Intention to Vote: Country Level Variables

		Model IV No interaction	Model V With interaction
		Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)
A	Intercept	-5.154 *** (0.860)	-5.029 *** (1.143)
	Human Development Index (HDI)	1.510 ns (0.995)	1.329 ns (1.342)
	Expected years of education * HDI		0.023 ns (0.097)
B	Intercept	-3.927 *** (0.280)	-4.035 *** (0.318)
	Freedom House Index (FHI)	0.031 ns (0.158)	0.104 ns (0.206)
	Expected years of education * FHI		-0.011 ns (0.014)
C	Intercept	-3.957 *** (0.226)	-4.012 *** (0.233)
	Years of stable democracy	-0.001 ns (0.001)	0.002 ns (0.002)
	Expected years of education * Years of stable democracy		-0.000 ns (0.000)
D	Intercept	-3.862 *** (0.226)	-3.804 *** (0.232)
	Proportionality	-0.006 ns (0.012)	-0.024 ns (0.015)
	Expected years of education * Proportionality		0.003 * (0.001)
E	Intercept	-3.856 *** (0.246)	-3.967 *** (0.265)
	Effective Number of parties (ENP)	-0.009 ns (0.028)	-0.012 ns (0.036)
	Expected years of education * ENP		-0.003 ns (0.003)
F	Intercept	-3.886 *** (0.219)	-3.917 *** (0.222)
	Compulsory voting	-0.036 ns (0.106)	-0.008 ns (0.140)
	Expected years of education * Compulsory voting		-0.005 ns (0.010)
G	Intercept	-4.024 *** (0.287)	-4.205 *** (0.325)
	Adult turnout	0.002 ns (0.003)	0.004 ns (0.003)
	Expected years of education * Adult turnout		-0.000 ns (0.000)

Data: ICCS 2009. Entries are parameter estimates and standard errors (between brackets) of six separate multilevel OLS regressions. Country level variables included one by one in order to avoid multicollinearity. Each time all individual level and school level variables (see Table 5) were also included (not shown in the Table). Significance: \*\*\*:<0.001; \*\*:<0.01; \*:<0.05; +:<0.1; ns: not significant.



**Table 7.** Intention for Electoral Participation, level-1 and level-2 variables

	Null Model	Model I	Model II	Model III
	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)
Intercept	0.010 ns (0.037)	-0.093 * (0.044)	-2.487 *** (0.046)	-2.880 *** (0.230)
<i>Individual-level variables</i>				
Gender		-0.153 *** (0.008)	-0.097 *** (0.007)	-0.096 *** (0.007)
Immigrant background		0.075 *** (0.009)	0.039 *** (0.009)	0.038 *** (0.009)
Expected years of education		0.003 ns (0.002)	-0.019 *** (0.002)	-0.019 *** (0.002)
Parents' highest years of education		-0.000 ns (0.002)	-0.002 ns (0.002)	-0.002 ns (0.002)
Books at home		0.032 *** (0.003)	-0.005 ns (0.003)	-0.004 ns (0.003)
Political interest			0.014 *** (0.000)	0.014 *** (0.000)
Internal political efficacy			0.024 *** (0.000)	0.024 *** (0.000)
Political trust			0.017 *** (0.000)	0.017 *** (0.000)
<i>School-level variables</i>				
Open classroom climate				-0.004 ns (0.003)
Student influence				0.012 *** (0.004)
ICC school	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06
ICC country	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03

Data: ICCS 2009. Entries are parameter estimates and standard errors (between brackets) of a multilevel OLS regression. Significance: \*\*\*:<0.001; \*\*:<0.01; \*:<0.05; ns: not significant.

**Table 8.** Intention for Electoral Participation: Country Level Variables

		Model IV	Model V
		Without interaction	With interaction
		Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)
A	Intercept	-2.370 ** (0.715)	-1.842 * (0.826)
	Human Development Index (HDI)	-0.611 ns (0.811)	-1.229 ns (0.949)
	Expected years of education * HDI		0.096 ns (0.070)
B	Intercept	-2.973 *** (0.267)	-2.934 *** (0.282)
	Freedom House Index (FHI)	0.084 ns (0.123)	0.058 ns (0.148)
	Expected years of education * FHI		0.004 ns (0.011)
C	Intercept	-2.870 *** (0.234)	-2.870 *** (0.236)
	Years of stable democracy	-0.002 ns (0.001)	-0.002 ns (0.001)
	Expected years of education * Years of stable democracy		0.000 ** (0.000)
D	Intercept	-2.880 *** (0.234)	-2.856 *** (0.236)
	Proportionality	-0.000 ns (0.010)	-0.003 ns (0.012)
	Expected years of education * Proportionality		0.001 ns (0.001)
E	Intercept	-2.819 *** (0.246)	-2.855 *** (0.253)
	Effective number of parties (ENP)	-0.015 ns (0.021)	-0.004 ns (0.026)
	Expected years of education * ENP		-0.002 ns (0.002)
F	Intercept	-2.901 *** (0.230)	-2.883 *** (0.231)
	Compulsory voting	0.107 ns (0.081)	0.058 ns (0.100)
	Expected years of education * Compulsory voting		0.007 ns (0.007)
G	Intercept	-2.940 *** (0.235)	-2.929 *** (0.237)
	Adult party membership	0.011 ns (0.007)	0.011 ns (0.009)
	Expected years of education * Adult party membership		-0.000 ns (0.001)

Data: ICCS 2009. Entries are parameter estimates and standard errors (between brackets) of six separate multilevel OLS regressions. Party membership figures not available for Malta and Luxembourg. Country level variables included one by one in order to avoid multicollinearity. Each time all individual level and school level variables were also included (as in Table 7, but not shown in the Table). Significance: \*\*\*:<0.001; \*\*:<0.01; \*:<0.05; ns: not significant.

## Appendix 1. Variables Used

Variable	Question wording	Coding
Gender	Are you a girl or a boy?	1 = girl 0 = boy
Immigrant background	In what country were you and your parents born? (you, mother or female guardian, father or male guardian)	1 = country of test 0 = other country
Number of books at home	About how many books are there in your home?	0 = 0-10 books 1 = 11-25 books 2 = 26-100 books 3 = 101-200 books 4 = 201 -500 books 5 = More than 500 books
Expected future education	Which of the following levels of education do you expect to complete?	IRT WLE scores with mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10 for equally weighted countries
Highest parental education level	What is the highest level of education completed by your father or male guardian? What is the highest level of education completed by your mother or female guardian?	IRT WLE scores with mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10 for equally weighted countries
Interest in politics and society	How interested are you in the following issues? Political issues within your local community Political issues in your country Social issues in your country Politics in other countries International politics	IRT WLE scores with mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10 for equally weighted countries
Internal political efficacy	How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about you and politics? I know more about politics than most people my age When political issues or problems are being discussed, I usually have something to say I am able to understand most political issues easily I have political opinions worth listening to As an adult I will be able to take part in politics I have a good understanding of the political issues facing this country	IRT WLE scores with mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10 for equally weighted countries

Trust in institutions	<p>How much do you trust each of the following groups or institutions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The national government</li> <li>The local government of your town or city</li> <li>Courts of justice</li> <li>The police</li> <li>Political parties</li> <li>National parliament</li> </ul>	IRT WLE scores with mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10 for equally weighted countries
Open classroom climate	<p>When discussing political and social issues during regular lessons, how often do the following things happen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers encourage students to make up their own minds</li> <li>Teachers encourage students to express their opinions</li> <li>Students bring up current political events for discussion in class</li> <li>Students express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students</li> <li>Teachers encourage students to discuss the issues with people having different opinions</li> <li>Teachers present several sides of the issues when explaining them in class</li> </ul>	IRT WLE scores with mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10 for equally weighted countries
Influence in school decisions	<p>In this school, how much are students' opinions taken into account when decisions are made about the following issues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The way classes are taught</li> <li>What is taught in classes</li> <li>Teaching and learning materials</li> <li>The timetable</li> <li>Classroom rules</li> <li>School rules</li> </ul>	IRT WLE scores with mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10 for equally weighted countries

Source: ICCS 2009; Brese et al., 2011.

## Appendix 2. Country level variables

**Table 1. General country level variables (measured in 2009)**

Country	Human Develop- ment Index	Freedom House Index	Years of stable democrac y	Compulsory voting
Austria	0.849	1.00	63.00	0.00
Bulgaria	0.741	2.00	19.00	0.00
Cyprus	0.809	1.00	35.00	1.00
Czech Republic	0.841	1.00	16.00	0.00
Denmark	0.864	1.00	63.00	0.00
Estonia	0.809	1.00	19.00	0.00
Finland	0.869	1.00	65.00	0.00
Greece	0.853	1.50	34.00	1.00
Ireland	0.894	1.00	88.00	0.00
Italy	0.851	1.50	61.00	0.00
Latvia	0.769	1.50	18.00	0.00
Lithuania	0.782	1.00	18.00	0.00
Luxembourg	0.850	1.00	65.00	1.00
Malta	0.813	1.00	45.00	0.00
Netherlands	0.888	1.00	63.00	0.00
Poland	0.791	1.00	18.00	0.00
Slovak Republic	0.815	1.00	16.00	0.00
Slovenia	0.826	1.00	10.00	0.00
Spain	0.861	1.00	31.00	0.00
Sweden	0.884	1.00	92.00	0.00
United Kingdom	0.847	1.00	129.00	0.00
Belgium	0.865	1.00	65.00	1.00

Sources: UNDP database ([hdrstats.undp.org](http://hdrstats.undp.org)); FHI data ([www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)); Polity IV Data Series ([www.systemicpeace.org](http://www.systemicpeace.org)).

**Table 2. Election-specific country level variables**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Election before but closest to 2009</b>	<b>Proportionality</b>	<b>Effective number of parties</b>	<b>Adult turnout</b>
Austria	2008	2.92	4.24	75.61
Bulgaria	2009	7.00	3.34	72.43
Cyprus	2006	2.42	3.90	77.83
Czech Republic	2006	5.72	3.10	65.12
Denmark	2007	0.72	5.33	83.20
Estonia	2007	3.43	4.37	53.44
Finland	2007	3.20	5.13	68.18
Greece	2009	7.29	2.59	79.24
Ireland	2007	5.85	3.03	68.89
Italy	2008	5.73	3.07	79.13
Latvia	2006	4.77	6.00	50.18
Lithuania	2008	11.14	5.78	29.44
Luxembourg	2009	4.22	3.63	53.20
Malta	2008	1.44	2.00	98.39
Netherlands	2006	1.03	5.54	77.48
Poland	2007	4.67	2.82	54.24
Slovak Republic	2006	5.53	4.81	56.40
Slovenia	2008	3.89	4.23	65.04
Spain	2008	4.49	2.36	77.92
Sweden	2006	3.02	4.15	80.60
United Kingdom	2005	16.73	2.46	58.32
Belgium	2007	3.77	8.42	86.00

Sources: Gallagher database ([www.tce.ie](http://www.tce.ie)); IDEA database ([www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int))

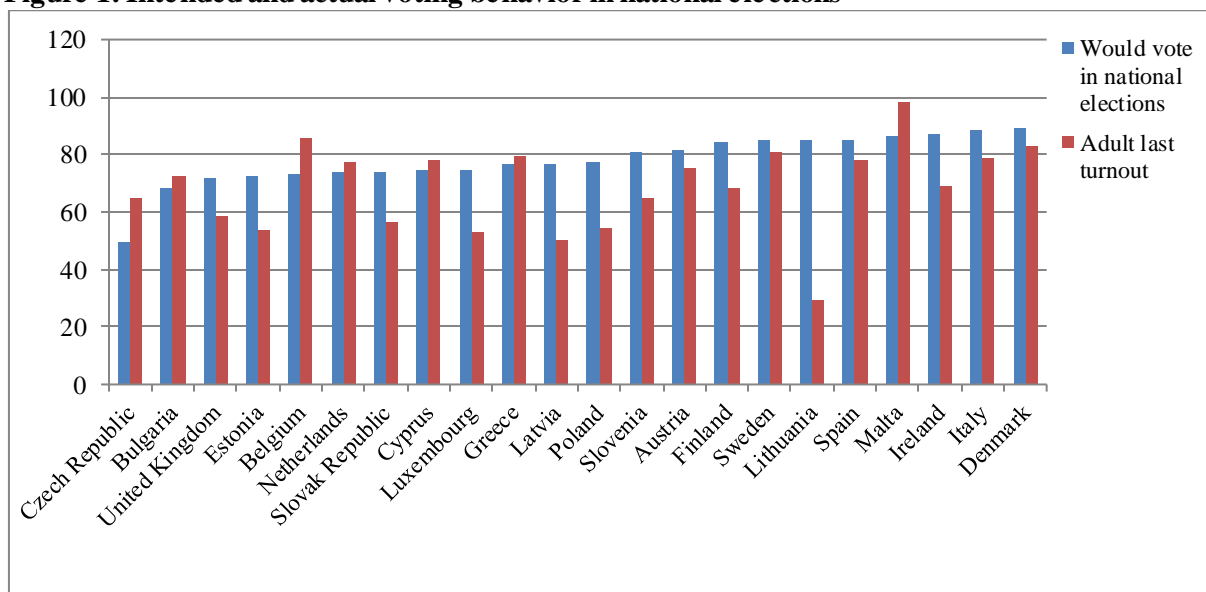
**Table 3. Country-level variable: Party membership**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Party membership (% of the electorate)</b>
Austria	2008	17.27
Bulgaria	2008	5.60
Cyprus	2009	16.25
Czech Republic	2008	1.99
Denmark	2008	4.13
Estonia	2008	4.87
Finland	2006	8.08
Greece	2008	6.59
Ireland	2008	2.03
Italy	2007	5.57
Latvia	2004	0.74
Lithuania	2008	2.71
Luxembourg	n.a.	n.a.
Malta	n.a.	n.a.
Netherlands	2009	2.48
Poland	2009	0.99
Slovak Republic	2007	2.02
Slovenia	2008	6.28
Spain	2008	4.36
Sweden	2008	3.87
United Kingdom	2008	1.21
Belgium	2008	5.52

Source: Van Biezen et al. 2011.

### Appendix 3. Comparing adolescents' intention to participate with actual figures

**Figure 1. Intended and actual voting behavior in national elections**



**Figure 2. Intended and actual party membership**

