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Education and Civic  
Engagement: Review of  
Research and a Study on  
Norwegian Youths

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**Education and Civic Engagement – Review of Research and a Study on Norwegian Youths**

**By Jon Lauglo and Tormod Óia**

**(Education Working Paper No. 12)**

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**ABSTRACT**

What difference does education make for young adults' engagement in politics and social issues? This study is part of the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) project on "Measuring the Social Outcomes of Learning" (SOL). It discusses relevant international research, with special attention to studies in the Nordic countries, and analyses survey responses by more than 11 000 Norwegian youths aged 13 to 19. "Engagement" is defined as youth's declared interest in politics and social issues and by their participation in various forms of political activity. Educational performance and especially educational aspirations matter for this type of engagement. Socialisation in family environments with regard to civic related issues, however, matters even more for taking interest in such types of civic engagement. It also seems that young people experience educational benefits from growing up in families who care about the civic domain. Separately, the findings suggest that young people who are politically active do not easily conform to the status quo. Rather, they confront the authority structures of their schools more often than other young people do. The paper concludes with suggestions for policy and research.

## RÉSUMÉ

Quel est l'impact de l'éducation sur l'engagement politique et social des jeunes adultes ? Ce rapport, publié dans le cadre du projet « Mesurer les retombées sociales de l'éducation » du Centre pour la recherche et l'innovation de l'OCDE (CERI), traite de la recherche internationale en la matière, et plus particulièrement dans les pays nordiques, et analyse les réponses à une enquête menée auprès de plus de 11 000 Norvégiens âgés de 13 à 19 ans. Par « engagement » on entend l'intérêt déclaré des jeunes pour les problèmes politiques et sociaux ainsi que leur participation à diverses formes d'action politique. Les performances éducatives, et notamment les aspirations scolaires, ont une importance dans ce type d'engagement. Mais la socialisation aux problèmes civiques au sein des familles compte pour bien plus dans l'intérêt porté à l'engagement civique. Également, les jeunes semblent retirer des bénéfices éducatifs du fait de grandir dans des familles intéressées par les questions civiques. D'un autre côté, l'étude suggère que les jeunes qui sont politiquement actifs ne s'accommodent pas du statu quo ; ils ont tendance à se confronter aux autorités de leurs établissements plus souvent que les autres. En conclusion, le rapport fait des recommandations en matière de politique et de recherche.

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## EDUCATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND A STUDY ON NORWEGIAN YOUTHS

Education's impact on civic engagement has been one of the main strands of the activity on "Measuring the Social Outcomes of Learning" (SOL), carried out by the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI). This activity aims to:

- develop a framework that can be used to analyse the links between education and social outcomes;
- foster the gathering and application of evidence on SOL;
- improve the knowledge base about the full extent of benefits that accrue to individuals and society;
- contribute to more well-integrated policies across education and other policy domains by making explicit the interactions between economic and social outcomes.

Two overall reports have been published from the first phase of SOL: *Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning* (OECD, 2007); a companion volume available free as a web publication at [www.oecd.org/edu/socialoutcomes/symposium](http://www.oecd.org/edu/socialoutcomes/symposium).

This paper, by Jon Lauglo and Tormod Øia, was one of the substantial inputs to the first phase of the SOL work. It focusses on schools and young people's civic engagement. Civic engagement covers a number of different dimensions, both behavioural (eg voting, or membership of a political party) and attitudinal (eg trust in political institutions). The issue is a topical one in most OECD countries, which show similar patterns of declining formal participation and disaffection from the traditional democratic system. The authors first contribute a substantial overview of different theoretical approaches to measuring the link between school and civic engagement. This is a significant task, as we do not have a settled framework for analysing these issues. The heart of the paper is a detailed examination of empirical evidence from a very substantial dataset of 12 000 Norwegian youths. Norway is generally regarded as very much towards the top end of democratic practices, so there should be some lessons from their experience. The report indeed points to relatively high levels of democratic participation, but against a background of declining commitment and engagement – a possible "democratic deficit".

Amongst the report's interesting and not necessarily predictable results:

- non-linear relationships exist between level of schooling and some forms of civic engagement. Although generally speaking the higher the schooling achievement the greater the engagement, this does not always hold.
- the societal and family context of the students appears very important in shaping their civic outlooks and behaviours, but this takes a variety of forms. The challenge here is to weigh up the relative effects of these compared with formal schooling



- informal as well as formal learning needs to be accounted for. An obvious example is the role school/student councils play in fostering positive attitudes and skills for future civic engagement.

The report concludes with a set of implications, both for the research agenda and for policies. A key challenge is to address the democratic deficit, especially in increasingly diverse societies.

This report will be followed by others which address the key SOL question – what are the links between education and social outcomes – from specific national angles. It is published concurrently with a similar report from Austria [EDU Working Paper No. 11].

## **1.1 Goals and scope**

The present study has two partly overlapping research goals: (a) reviewing research on effects of education on civic engagement with special attention to studies carried out in the Nordic countries, and (b) analyzing a nationwide survey of more than 12 000 youths in Norway that was carried out in 2002, in order to examine certain aspects of this relationship.

In the empirical part the main question is what role does education play in building civic engagement among youths under conditions where the great majority of them are still enrolled in school when they reach the voting age (age 18 in Norway) and when close to half continue to higher education? In assessing what seems to be “influences of education” there is also need to take account of the influence of learning in other arenas than school. We shall take account especially of the role played by socialization in the family. Other sources of influence will be voluntary organizations that adolescents and youths may join (addressed in Lauglo and Øia 2006). We shall not be able to address the role of mass media and informal peer groups.

## **1.2 Methodological limitations**

The societal context in which education is embedded and in which civic engagement develops can matter in important ways for the outcomes of education. The findings reviewed in this study may therefore not be generalizable across all societal contexts. Further, in analysis of cross-sectional data the extent to which it is reasonable to attribute causality to observed associations can only be inferred, not directly put to any test. The best one can do is to control statistically for effects of other traits than those whose effects one seeks to assess. The findings reviewed or generated in this study are therefore provisional.

## **1.3 What is civic engagement?**

In our view “civic” relates to the domain of collective action which is outside the market and beyond the private affairs of citizens and their families. The term derives from the Latin *civitas* (the city state) and thus refers originally to a political entity as a whole. This would imply that “civic” is concerned with the weal of society as a whole. Therefore, the term connotes some identification with the larger society beyond purely sectional goals; and it assumes that the political order has a basic legitimacy. In OECD countries that legitimacy must be based on political democracy.

“Civic engagement” is a wider concept than overtly “political” activity. It will certainly include collective action that aggregates and expresses interests in order to access or influence different levels of government. However, whether organized groups (e.g., voluntary organizations) perform political functions does not follow simply from their declared purpose. Groups formed mainly to provide activities of intrinsic value to their members (e.g., religious bodies, sports clubs) also equip officials and members with skills for collective action and can thus serve as a foundation for overtly political functions. The argument that voluntary associations are an important foundation for democracy is part of liberal democratic theory. Examples from the 19<sup>th</sup> century are the contributions by Alexis de Toqueville on

Democracy in America and John Stuart Mill's On Liberty. Well known 20<sup>th</sup> century contributions that stress the political functions of more broadly civic activity include Almond and Verba (1963) and Putnam (2000).

A strong definition of *engagement* would stress *action* or *readiness to act*. In this study we shall adopt a more inclusive definition that also includes *interest* in politics and social issues, on the grounds that readiness to act in the public domain requires people to take "an interest" to begin with. Not surprisingly, interest in politics and social issues is more widespread than any political and civic activity. We shall also see that political activism which is not strongly institutionalized is more widespread than membership in explicitly "political" organizations.

#### 1.4 Is there a democratic deficit problem?

Improved civic engagement will be an urgent goal for schools to address if trends show declining engagement among youths. Is that the case? We note that compared to older adults, youths vote less often and involve themselves less often in civil society. In Norway, only about half of those who in the four years since the previous election had turned 18, and thus acquired the right to vote, took part in the 2005 parliamentary election. Like preceding generations, one expects the present generation of youths to vote and join organizations in civil society in greater proportions as they achieve more fully adult status (regular work, responsibility for family) and as they grow more familiar with political parties and public issues. In Norway youths of today join voluntary organizations less frequently than their predecessors some decades ago. The proportion joining overtly political voluntary organizations is distinctly low, about 4.5%; and more worryingly, it does not rise much during the 13-19 age range, with increased age.

##### 1.4.1 Are youths becoming more self-centred?

Civic engagement implies at a minimum "concern" with issues in the public domain, beyond one's own private life. Is such concern declining among youths? A number of well known contemporary theorists (e.g., Tomas Ziehe in Germany; and Christopher Lasch, Robert Bellah and Amitai Etzioni in the United States) have argued that preoccupation with one's private domain increasingly has come to characterize Western societies. Worries about adverse social consequences of excessive individualism underlie a current interest in "social capital" (Coleman 1988, Putnam 2000). Yet, individualism is a multi-faceted concept (Oscarsson 2005) which need not mean retreat to one's private domain and lack of care of interest in the welfare of others. In a positive sense it denotes independence of thought and action and is as such a longstanding ideal for general education and for citizenship in OECD countries.

Is there any evidence in the Nordic countries which indicate that youths are growing more individualistic in a negative sense, of becoming more exclusively concerned about their private lives? Research presents a complex picture. In Denmark the IEA Civics Education Study of 18-year-olds (Bruun *et al.* 2003: 425) observes that most youths express agreement *both* with "collectivist" values and with "individualist" ones—suggesting that these types of value are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. A strong sense of personal "agency" need not imply lack of concern about others.

In Sweden, Oscarsson (2002, 2005) has analyzed annual changes during 1986 to 2000, in surveys using nationally representative samples of 15-29 year-olds. A long list of questions concerned basic values. The main finding is great stability over time with the regard to most of the 26 value dimensions examined. He noted some increased emphasis on "self realization", "a comfortable life", "a life filled with satisfaction" and an "exciting life" among youths during this period. There are also signs of decreased concern with certain collectivist values such as "clean environment", the "security of the country" and "world peace". But at the same time the value which showed the greatest gain over time among youths was the Swedish collectivist value *par excellence*: "jämlighet" (egalitarian social justice).

More striking than any shifts over time is the gap in values between the young and older adults. According to Oscarsson's (2002, 2005) findings on Sweden, those aged 30-85 profess less attachment to values of personal satisfaction, and more attachment to the collective values of national security and world peace than did the 15-29 year olds. But this gap did not change much during 1986-2000.

In Norway, Hellevik's studies (2001, 1996) used data from repeated public opinion surveys (*Norsk Monitor*) since the mid 1980s. He compared people's basic life goals and views of means appropriate for reaching these goals, among youths and older adults in different generations. His prime value dimension has at one pole openness for new trends, tolerance of diversity, and willingness to take risks. The other pole stresses security, and traditional virtues and institutions. This he dubs "modernity versus traditionalism". He finds that youths are strongly overrepresented at the "modern" end, while older adults tend to be more "traditional". There is also a tendency for youths to be slightly more materialistic than older adults.

A common element in the orientation of youths to health, environment and consumption is that they appear to have a shorter perspective on time than do older adults. What matters more for them, is to enjoy life here and now while they assign less importance to long-run problems. For example, though youths are worried more than older adults about environmental issues, they are less willing to make sacrifices and take part in activities to protect the physical environment and less likely to support organizations working for environmental protection. Compared to older adults, they are also less morally upright in the market place: more ready to cheat on insurance claims, less likely to correct mistakes in their favour at a cash register. Though Hellevik found signs of more ego-centred individualism among youths than among older people, he also found that the type of solidarity which youths express ranges further afield (e.g., development aid) and that youths are more tolerant of cultural diversity (e.g. immigrants, homosexuals, and erotic films on TV).

Hellevik tracked into more recent surveys cohorts who in his earliest national opinion data had still been youths. He found more "traditional" values as persons grow older. However, on the assumption that the rate of change with age would be similar for more recent cohorts as for those he tracked over age, he inferred that the greatest part of the contrasting values between youths and older people is due to genuine generation differences.

Fauske and Øia (2003) examined change from 1992 to 2002 in NOVA's large scale national surveys of Norwegian youths and found some signs of increased individualism in the values used to assess the attractiveness of different occupations. Solidarity among workmates was not as important in 2002 as it was in 1992. In 2002 fewer attached importance to work being "useful to society" than in 1992. In 2002 a greater proportion attached importance to the occupation's prestige. Thus, there were some signs of greater concern with individuality, and less weight on collective values. But this individualism is not connected with greater stress on creativity or expression of personal talents. In fact, a smaller proportion (55%) in 2002 emphasized the importance of work providing outlet for personal creativity than in 1992 (66%).

On the whole, we see some support in these all too limited findings for concluding that there is a trend among youths away from acting idealistically on "behalf of others". On the positive side, there are some signs of more openness to cultural diversity. The trend may be captured in "live and let live" and "I do care, but I choose not to commit much time". Thus, we may be in for a shortage of volunteers for carrying out the aspects of civic engagement which require time and sustained contributions. In our view, the analysis of values and value change among youths in these Nordic studies indicates that there may be a rising challenge for civil society and schools alike: how to stimulate participation in civic activities which require sustained commitment to act and invest time and effort.

### **1.4.2 Does low civic participation indicate democratic deficit?**

Lipset (1960:14) observed half a century ago that low participation in elections may reflect a belief that the electoral outcome makes no important difference. A low rate of participation need not express blocked channels or lack of caring, it may simply reflect high consensus. Conversely, rising levels of participation may be a sign of exacerbation of conflict—as it was in Germany in the 1930s. Issues and campaigns that sharply divide the electorate tend to drive up participation in elections. For example, in Norway, 89% of the electorate took part in the 1994 referendum on whether or not to join the European Union reached, a much higher level than what is typical for elections to parliament (76% in the 2005 election).

With regard to findings in the most recent round of IEA studies on civics education studies (carried out on 18-year-olds in 15 countries), Amnå (2001) notes the strikingly high confidence in national public institutions in the Nordic countries (the police, the courts, the schools, institutions of government, the media) compared to other countries that took part. At the same time, youths in the Nordic countries did not have particularly high levels of expected future political participation in terms of voting, joining political parties, standing for office, demonstrating. On the other hand, youths in southern European countries had less trust in public institutions but expected more frequently to be involved in various forms of political activity between elections. Amnå suggests that trust in institutions is balanced against perceived need to get personally involved. While too low trust may make political activity seem pointless, “too high” may make it seem unnecessary. He thought that the declining trend in Sweden during the last two decades, regarding participation in elections among first-time voters and declining memberships in political parties (shown in Ungdomsstyrelsen 2003:20, 22) might reflect much consensus among the main political parties and high trust in government.

In the Nordic countries, politics has become less strongly structured by the type of socio-economic cleavages as to social class which in earlier generations fuelled high and broadly based political participation.<sup>1</sup> With high trust in public institutions and a high level of consensus, there may not be much reason for choosing one party rather than another. If this hypothesis is correct, “present” levels of actual participation do not suffice to indicate the *capacity* for civic engagement among youths, if they perceive involvement as necessary. This would be another argument for a wide definition of civic engagement that includes “interests” rather than only “participation”.

## **1.5 Hypotheses on effects of education**

### **1.5.1 The “Enlightenment hypothesis”**

That argument that education empowers and converts politically passive “subjects” into active “citizens” has a long history. Radical and liberal advocates of mass literacy and schooling in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries believed that education “enlightens” and that enlightenment liberates and empowers. By enabling people to learn and communicate, mass schooling for children and access to adult education for adults would widen people’s mental horizon beyond the confines of their everyday life and thus strengthen their capacity for independent thought and judgement—even if schools were to aim at keeping “the lower social orders” in their place.

Opponents of mass schooling often feared and opposed schooling because of its empowering consequences. In the antebellum South in the United States, it was a crime to teach slaves how to read, for

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Oscarsson (2005:65) shows a long term trend in Swedish elections from 1956 to 2002, towards looser connections with voting behaviour and social class background.

fear that slaves who could read were more likely to rebel. In England, conservative clergy in the established church the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were pessimistic about mass schooling because they feared it would undermine the social order (they blamed popular literacy historically for the Puritan Rebellion) (Lawson and Silver 1973:180). A staple demand of radical movements in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century that sought enfranchisement for the poor (e.g., the Chartists in the UK, and the Thrane movement in Norway) was primary schools for their children. Marx, too, thought that access to schools even when controlled by the bourgeoisie, would have empowering consequences for the proletariat. Thus, mass education was seen by proponents as by opponents as a generally empowering experience that helps transform passive “subjects” into politically empowered actors.

The “enlightenment” hypothesis is still with us. One example is the argument that education promotes tolerance. Lipset in *Political Man* (1960:104) argued that social isolation breeds narrow-mindedness. Seeking to explain findings on intolerant and authoritarian attitudes among the “underdog” in American society, he theorized that groups that are isolated from the activities, controversies, and organizations of democratic society are prevented from acquiring the “sophisticated and complex view of the political structure which makes understandable and necessary the norms of tolerance”. Education would promote tolerance and support for democracy because it enhances people’s capacity to understand complex abstract entities, including political issues, and to develop their own views about such abstractions.

### ***1.5.2 Contents, pedagogy and context make a difference***

A recurring question has been how far a simple “enlightenment effect” of education is valid. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rise of totalitarian rule undermined unqualified “enlightenment optimism” concerning effects of education, because education in the hands of totalitarian rulers was overtly used to instil uncritical obedience and hostility to others, rather than tolerance and active citizenship based on independent critical judgement.<sup>2</sup> Thus, “civic” outcomes of schooling will not only depend on exposure to education but also on what is taught, how teaching is conducted and on influences upon learning from the context outside school. A mainstream view among educationists has long been that democratically run classrooms prepare youths better for democratic citizenship.

### ***1.5.3 Hypotheses on “attenuation of effects” versus “increased educational meritocratization” of civic engagement, as education expands***

One could expect that greatly expanded access to education affects the connection which education has with civic engagement. On the one hand is the attenuation hypothesis: that other things being equal, civic engagement will be more easily stimulated by education when a student perceives education to be preparation for elite status than when education confers no awareness of being in a particularly select group. Completing secondary education (or teacher education) may no longer make the same *difference* for civic engagement as it did under conditions of much more constricted access. The same may apply to higher education with the advent of mass access. At present close to half the age group in Norway enter higher education.

A different hypothesis is increased educational “meritocratization” of civic engagement. When access to secondary and higher education becomes more open and selection becomes more dependent on prior performance in school, and less dependent on what families can afford, youths from popular origins and with talents for leadership will no longer be barred from access to schooling and will be more able to rise

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<sup>2</sup> However, Lipset (1960: 102-103) showed that among Germans who had been schooled largely under Nazism, more educated persons were in the early post-war period more supportive of pluralist democracy, than those with less education.

high in the education system before they involve themselves in civic activities. This points to the possibility of increased strength of the relationship between education and civic engagement, as the education system expands. Both hypotheses could simultaneously be true, the attenuation hypothesis pointing to a decreased effect of *the experience of education*, the meritocratization hypothesis to an effect of *self selection to education* of persons who have talents and interests in politics and civic issues and who under more constricted conditions of access to education would have acted out these interests and talents without being channelled through the higher reaches of the education system.

We have been unable to locate any study that empirically addresses either the hypothesis of “weakened” or of “strengthened” connection between education and civic engagement, as education systems become more inclusive and accessible to youths during the years when one can presume that such engagement is developed.

## Earlier findings

### 2.1 Trends in research

For more than half a century, positive associations between educational attainment (level of education) and indicators of civic engagement and of tolerance have been noted and much commented upon in studies of public opinion and civic participation in many countries. Important contributions to this body of research, whose main conclusions still stand, date as far back as the 1960s.

Another current of research concerning civic education in schools has been carried out under the aegis of IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement). An increasing number of countries have taken part (most of them OECD members) and there have been several rounds of research. After controlling for the influence of home background, positive associations are noted in these cross-sectional studies consistently between scores on tests of civic education knowledge and on the other hand the interests which students have in politics and their intention of active citizenship.

In both currents of research, the strength and consistency of positive associations between indicators of education and civic engagement are typically interpreted as support for the conclusion that there are clear education effects on civic engagement. In both strains of research, the assumed conceptual maps have often been wider and complex than the traits examined and than the “education effects” inferred. For example, Torney-Purta (2002:203) who has led the series of civic education studies within the IEA series, notes that assumptions of uni-directional “effects” have been replaced by assumptions that interaction is at work, and that the role of school in political socialization is “played in the context of and in concert with other social systems (families, youth organizations, informal peer groups, and the mass media)”. The framework recognizes that individuals develop and function within a set of “systems” and contexts at different levels, all of which exert influence.

### 2.2 Educational attainment predicts tolerance and active citizenship

Lipset (1960: 102-103) showed that education makes a consistent difference in the United States for how willing adults are to accord civil liberties to religious or political dissidents. These effects existed also when persons of the same occupational status but with different levels of education were compared in national survey data. He also showed that education level strongly influences support for pluralist politics in early post-war Germany - again controlling for occupational status. In keeping with the classic “enlightenment hypothesis”, he - and subsequently many others (e.g. Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980) - have interpreted such findings to mean that exposure to education increases support for tolerance and democracy because it enhances people’s capacity to understand complex abstract entities, including political issues, and to develop their own judgements about such abstractions. The idea that education

better enables a person to apply abstract principles (e.g. “rights”) to concrete cases, bears similarity to Hyman *et al.*’s (1975) conclusions from their review and re-tabulation of U.S. survey research findings: that more educated persons are better able to distinguish between principles (e.g. morality) and context specific conventions (e.g. manners).

Since Almond and Verba’s (1963) comparative analysis of surveys in five Western countries in the 1960s, the importance of “education level” for voting, taking part in politics and in interest organizations has been confirmed in a large number of studies—after controls for occupationally based social class. For example, in western Sweden Eriksson (2002:25) showed from comparison of the general population of 15-29 year-olds and university students, that university students discuss politics, take part in political demonstrations, belong to political parties, and involve themselves in humanitarian organizations and associations for human rights much more often than other youths. Wollebæk *et al.* (2000:239) found in a Norwegian national survey of the adult population carried out in 1998, strong associations of educational level with participation in most types of voluntary organizations. In another study Wollebæk *et al.* (2002:109) report that among university graduates there are three times higher proportion of “active participants” and they spend thrice the time contributed to voluntary organizations, as compared to persons with only primary school. In particular, administrative work and elective offices are dominated by persons with high education and/or income. Persons outside the labour market (and/or with low education and income) were weakly represented in voluntary organizations. Referring as a rough benchmark to Rokkan and Campbell’s (1960) comparison of Norway and the USA in the 1950s which at the time showed strikingly more broadly based participation in interest organizations in Norway, Wollebæk *et al.* (2000) suggest that civic participation may have become more tightly correlated with “high status” than it previously was in Norway—cfr the “educational meritocratization hypothesis” noted earlier.

The three rounds of the IEA Civics Education study have consistently shown across countries that those children and youths who are more knowledgeable about political institutions and processes also are more interested than others in political and social issues and express more readiness to participate actively in politics and in civil society when they become adults. For example, in the case of Norway, the most recent IEA Civics Education study (18 year olds) showed generally “high” knowledge scores and prevalent attitudes of strong support for democratic institutions and processes. It also showed consistently strong associations between knowledge on the one hand, and attitudes and readiness to participate on the other (Mikkelsen *et al.* 2002).

### **2.3 Does education predict type of political belief?**

The path-breaking 5-country comparative study by Almond and Verba (1963) concluded that while education predicts civic engagement, it does not predict well the particular political values and allegiances which citizens have. Analysis by Rose and Pettersen (2002) of data from several Norwegian national surveys from 1993 to 2001 shows that education is not a good predictor of support given by adults to any particular “ideal of the good citizen”. In their 2001 material they examined support for value dimensions concerned with: law-abiding behaviour, socio-political awareness, socio-political involvement, social empathy and tolerance. They found only two statistically significant education effects in multivariate analysis of a large sample (N of about 1300): that “high education” predicts tolerance, and that “low education” predicts expressed support for “law abiding behaviour”. These partial regression coefficients were weak (.10 or less).

Oscarsson’s (2002:83) analyzed value differences among young adults in his large sample from western Sweden. At lower levels of education he found more attachment to “wealth”, “a life full of gratification”, “power”, “comfort” “status” and “happiness”—findings which he interpreted as an emphasis on immediate gratification. Those with completed higher education were more attached to values of “self respect” and “self realization”. While these differences could be due to effects of education, they could in

our view also reflect different life styles and constraints upon life chances, of the “education groups” compared.

#### **2.4 A Nordic theme: Adult education empowers**

In the Nordic countries, a close and symbiotic relationship between adult education and the historical growth of a broadly based civil society is taken so strongly for granted by historians that it has not been subject to much statistical probing. An early Norwegian mass movement promoted a narrowly religious form of adult education. This was the folk-Pietist revival at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century led by the lay preacher Hans Nielsen Hauge. They disseminated religious tracts on a truly mass scale. Tellingly, they came to be known as “readers” (*lesere*). Similarly, in Sweden, the followers of “free churches” (outside the state church) have been known as “readers”. In both countries these religious movements are also widely recognized by historians as having had economic and political empowerment effects among common folk.

Another example is the historical role of folk high schools in all Nordic countries which taught residential courses of relatively short duration for young adults. The Danish bishop N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) played an important role as a source of inspiration for such schools which explicitly aimed at preparation for active citizenship, founded on a blend of humanist Christianity and nationalist Romantic ideas about ordinary people as carriers of valued culture. Networks based upon the alumni from these institutions played an important role in providing leadership in the mobilization of the farming class for political, cultural and economic collective action in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Manniche 1969).

A third Nordic prototype of adult education for civic engagement was study circles combined with correspondence education. This was pioneered by the Swedish temperance movement, and adopted across a wide range of voluntary associations (especially the labour movement) and helped develop leadership “from below” in these organizations and their associated political parties (Paulston 1968).

The historical importance of these models of adult education for political recruitment was an unusually strong representation of national political leaders who had “risen from below” in the Nordic countries. Erickson (1966) investigated the educational background of members of the Swedish parliament in 1961-62. He found that fully 66% of MPs had only elementary school (6-7 years) as their highest level of formal educational attainment, and that they had relied on self-study or adult education to prepare themselves for public service. He noted the contrast with United States where most national legislators had a law degree.

For illiterate and semi-literate people in developing countries, adult literacy programs can build basic civic skills. A conclusion from a review of evaluations of such programs (Lauglo 2001) is that adult literacy education builds capacity to act with confidence in larger and more “public” social arenas.

#### **2.5 Do effects depend on type of education?**

A measure of “modern attitudes” (the OM scale) was developed by Inkeles and Smith (1974) and was widely used in the 1970s and 80s in studies of populations in middle and low income countries. Drawing on sociological conceptions on modernity, as well as on Lerner’s (1964) earlier empirical work, the scale sought to capture such mindsets as: openness to new experience, readiness for social change, awareness of the diversity of surrounding attitudes and opinions, readiness to form one’s own opinions, making efforts to find information upon which to base opinions, a sense of personal efficacy, time orientation towards the present and future rather than towards the past, a basic trust in the calculability of the surrounding world, valuing technical skills, valuing formal education, respect for the dignity of others, understanding the logic of production and industry, universalism (that rules and norms should apply regardless of one’s person relations with people concerned), and optimism. Some of these elements--respect for others, awareness of



diversity, active search for information to form views about the larger world, readiness to form one's own opinions—would also seem to be indicators of tolerance and democratic citizenship.

A standard international observation is that high scores on this scale are strongly associated with “level of schooling”. This was also the conclusion by Fägerlind and Saha (1989) when they reviewed the international research on this scale up to the late 1980s, but they pointed out that there are other forms of education in the world than Western type schooling. They also reviewed research on correlates of the OM scale with exposure to traditional Koranic schooling in two Muslim countries and found that lower rather than higher “modernity scores” were associated with greater exposure to such schools (Wagner and Lofti (1980) on Morocco, and Armer and Youtz (1971) on “an African country”—both summarized by Fägerlind and Saha (1989). We infer from this that if democratic civic engagement appears to be a robust outcome of (Western) type of schools, it may be because of the widely internationally shared institutional and curricular features of such “modern” schools. It does not mean that *any* form of organized instruction would yield such outcomes.

## 2.6 Are there effects of classroom climate?

The IEA Civics Education studies have sought to trace effects of teaching styles and learning climates. However, a positive association between an “open classroom climate” and learning outcomes in social studies has not been an internationally consistent finding throughout the three rounds IEA studies, nor have the associations—when noted, been strong. The first round of IEA Civics education research in 1971 included 9 countries (Torney *et al.* 1975). A general conclusion was that civics education test scores and support for democratic values were higher when students reported that they were encouraged to state their views freely in their civics education classes. This finding was replicated in most of the 28 countries which participated in the second round that was carried out in the 1990s on 14-year olds (Torney *et al.* 1999)—but some countries were exceptions.

The most recent IEA study of civic education was carried out on upper secondary school students in 16 countries (Amadeo *et al.* 2002). A scale of “Open Classroom Climate for Discussion” was used, with these components: (1) students feel free to disagree openly with teachers about political/social issues; (2) students are encouraged to make up their own minds about issues; (3) teachers respect our opinions and encourage us to express them in class; (4) students feel free to express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from those of most students; (5) teachers encourage us to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions; and (6) teachers present several sides of an issue when explaining it in class. Findings were divided. In multivariate regression, the scale was a significant predictor of Civic Knowledge scores in seven countries: Estonia, Israel, Latvia, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia and Sweden. However, it was not a significant predictor in six countries: Chile, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Norway, and Poland (Amadeo *et al.*, 2002:153). When intention to vote was taken as the dependent variable, the same predictor was significant in Norway and in Israel, Latvia, Russia and Poland (but not in Sweden and Denmark). Thus, the results are mixed. The magnitude of coefficients which reached significance was in nearly all cases distinctly modest. With “Civic Knowledge” as dependent variable, the very strongest standardized regression coefficient of Classroom Climate that was noted, was 0.17 (in Sweden). When “intention to vote” was the dependent variable, the “significant” effect of “Open Climate” was only 0.09 for Norway.

Thus, the findings from the IEA studies do not conclusively show that students who perceive the classroom climate for discussion to be more “open” are better informed about politics or more engaged in politics and social issues. But nor do weak or lacking associations show the opposite—that there is no effect. One would expect effects as measured in the IEA studies on 18-year olds to be “low”. School interventions are a cumulative process over many years, and what a student experiences at age 18 may be quite different from earlier classroom climates. Further, by age 18, other sources of influence on civic

engagement may have “kicked in” to have more impact than they did at age 14 in the second round of IEA Civics studies.

## 2.7 Do effects of education last, and are they “education effects” or effects of social status?

How far does schooling have life-long consequences on people’s attitudes and values? Will effects of schooling wear off as the experience of adult statuses overlays these early effects? If so the effect of schooling will largely be to give access to various types of statuses later in life. The most comprehensive set of reviews to date are two studies by Hyman and associates from the United States (Hyman & Wright 1979, Hyman *et al.* 1975). They re-reviewed and in many cases retabulated data from 38 national public opinion surveys in the period 1949 to 1975. They found that a person’s original education level was consistently and strongly associated with “positive” civic values throughout their life, also when occupational career could be statistically controlled. They concluded (1979:60):

A value on civil liberties not just for the orthodox but also for nonconformists, of due process of law, of freedom from the constraints of arbitrary laws in personal and social relations, of freedom for the flow of not only innocuous but also controversial information, of equality in the social, economic, and political spheres, and of humanitarianism or measures to reduce pain, injury, suffering, or deprivation, and also placing a higher valuation on morals or good conduct towards others than on manners, are more prevalent among adults who have gone to high school than among those who have not gone beyond elementary school. This profile is most prevalent among those who have gone to college. Despite aging, contrasts persist. No matter which birth cohort or generation was examined, we found that the more educated preserved almost all their distinctive and attractive values up to age 60. Beyond that stage of life, the differences on some values dwindle and occasionally disappear between ages sixty-one and seventy-two, but on many aspects the differences continue to be large.

Hyman *et al.*’s analysis strongly supports the argument that educational institutions are important arenas within which political socialization occurs, that there are long lasting education effects on a wide range of “civic attitudes” and activities,<sup>3</sup> and that these effects are not reducible to effects of the status to which education gives competitive access--since education effects persisted also in those cases where statistical controls were possible for other aspects of people’s status as they move through life (income, occupation).

Hyman also tracked long lasting effects on “knowledge” from much the same material of opinion surveys (Hyman *et al.* 1979). Across 54 opinion surveys during 1950 to 1960, they noted findings in support of the conclusion that education deepens receptivity to further knowledge, and stimulates active seeking for new information in adults long after they finish their formal schooling. They also found that education produces enduring, large and pervasive effects on what adults of all ages *know*—not only survey items that might reflect academic knowledge close to what they may have learned in school (e.g., civics education, maths), but also practical knowledge. As far as we know, similar use of data from a whole series of from public opinion surveys to assess education effects on civic engagement has not been attempted in other countries.

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<sup>3</sup> There can of course be dramatic experiences events (e.g., wars, mass economic hardships) which alter political attitudes for entire generations well into their adult life, as illustrated in Elder’s (1998) research in the United States on *Children of the Great Depression*.

## 2.8 Why no increase in civic engagement with rising level of education?

Over the last half century, the level of schooling in the adult population has risen sharply in OECD countries. For example, in Norway, the percentage of youths completing upper secondary education and entering higher education has been rising for many decades. At present close to half of the relevant age group enter some form of higher education. And yet, level of education has not been matched with a corresponding rise in participation rates in politics and voluntary associations for the population as a whole. In some countries, these rates have been declining. In Norway, according to NOVA's data from large scale nationally representative surveys of youths, 76% of youths reported in a 1992 survey that they belonged to at least one voluntary association. In 2002 the proportion had declined to 65%.

In any one election, since the beginning of surveys of voting and voters, the level of education has been a consistently "strong" predictor of participation (Berglund 2003). In Norway there has been no secular trend for election turnouts to rise, and the percent of newly eligible voters (age 18) who actually vote is distinctly low. It was about 50% in the 2005 parliamentary election compared to an overall voting rate of 76%. Clearly, political activity is not so strongly determined by education that education could be a driving force explaining long term trends in electoral turnout.

It was noted earlier that political participation, including voting, could be reduced by a high degree of consensus in politics. Lower electoral participation could also be due to increased "individuation" in political behaviour. More voters are "floating" from election to election as to party preferences, and their preferences are less influenced than in earlier times by social class. This has been documented for Sweden by Holmberg and Oscarsson (2004) with regard to trends over half a century.

In seeking to explain the apparent paradox of expanding education and yet no rise in political engagement, Nie *et al.* (1996) theorize with respect to the United States that political engagement is driven by social status not by education as such, and that the role of education in shaping such engagement is to give competitive access to positions of high status in the social hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> However, as previously noted there is considerable research showing strong education "effects" both on political participation and on measures of tolerance, also when adult social status is held constant. Early contributions were: Lipset 1960, Hyman & Wright 1979, Hyman *et al.* 1975. Further, as will be shown below in the study of Norwegian youths, there are effects of successful performance in school as well as of having plans of continuing to higher education, while youths are still in school and prior to any attainment of position in the adult status hierarchy—and independent of their parents' social status. We are left with the conclusion, that education has direct effects on civic engagement, but that other influences obviously also are at work.

### Present findings on Norwegian youths

#### 3.1 Scope of the study

The present study on Norway will examine civic engagement in an age group (13-19 year olds) when nearly all youths are in school, except at the top of the age span concerned.<sup>5</sup> Under the term Civic Engagement we subsume:

- a. Interest in social issues and politics,

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<sup>4</sup> We are grateful to David Campbell of Notre Dame University for drawing our attention to this study. In his own contribution to the present OECD activity on Social Outcomes of Education, Campbell puts implications of Nie *et al.*'s theory to an empirical test (See Campbell's contribution to the present volume).

<sup>5</sup> About 15% are estimated not to complete the upper secondary course.

b. Participation in political activity:

- Representational participation (membership in voluntary organisations concerned with politics or advocacy e.g, youth wings of political parties, environmental advocacy groups);
- Activism (participation in demonstrations and other political events etc. which do not necessarily any “membership”), and
- Unlawful protest (forms of political protest by means which skirt the law or are clear unlawful—e.g., causing damage to property as a form of protest).

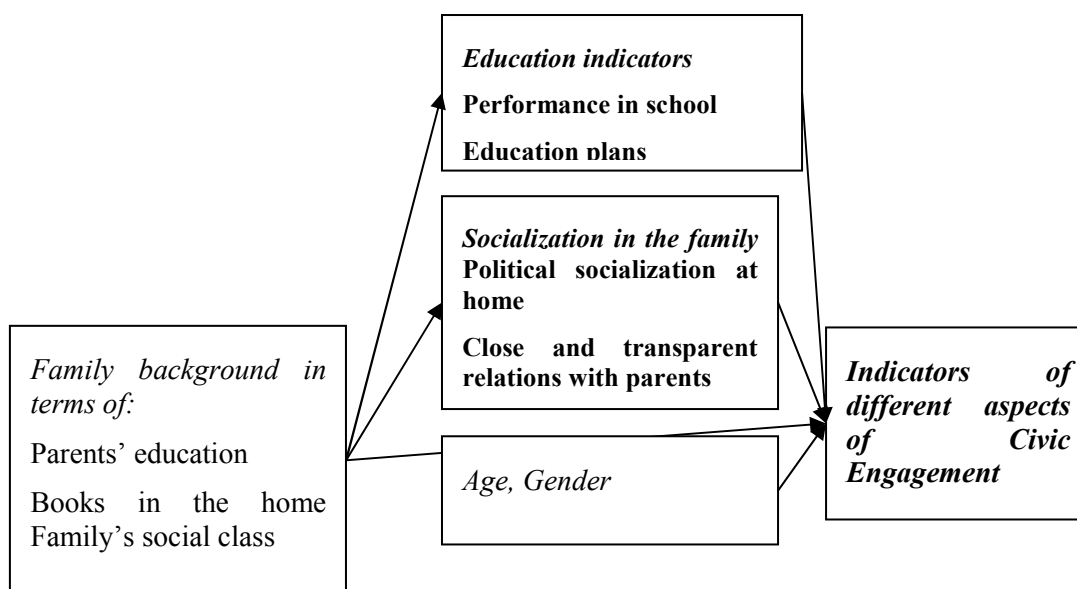
Regrettably, we lack an indicator of tolerance. However, other recent work on Norwegian youths (Mikkelsen *et al.* 2002) has shown that readiness to concede freedom of speech to anti-democratic groups, is associated with high test scores on civic education knowledge.

We shall examine a large data set which will give opportunity to trace the evolution of interests and participation from younger to older age groups (13- to 19-year-olds). We shall also be able to analyse the relationship between the various aspects of civic engagement and a range of “education” variables: (a) adjustment to school—valuing school, extent of discipline problems, “school fatigue”; (b) performance (self reported grade on the last report card received by the respondent), and (c) plans/aspirations for higher education. We also have information on age and gender. Indicators of the home as a socialization arena will contain (a) a scale measuring the extent of close and transparent relations to parents, and (b) a scale of “political socialization at home”. This latter scale is based on answers to questions about how often students talk with their parents about politics and social issues, and a question which asks the youths to assess how far they are encouraged by the parents to develop independence (“make your own decisions”). In the multivariate analysis we shall control for the influence of social class and the family’s cultural capital (father’s occupation, parental level of education, and the student’s estimate of the stock of “books at home”).

### 3.2 Model of assumed relationships

Figure 1 shows the assumed *main direction* of influences among the variables on which we have data. Effects of the highlighted (*bold face*) variables in this model on civic engagement, are our main concern. Other variables serve as controls in the sense that account need to be taken of their effects.

**Figure 1. Model of factors shaping civic engagement among youths**



Beyond this initial model, our analysis also indicates that there is an “arrow” from political socialization in the home to young people’s performance in school and in particular to their education plans—after taking account of effects of the conventional “family background” variables. We shall also find that “close and transparent relations with parents” has no consistent effect across different types of civic engagement indicators.

### 3.3 The data

Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) has carried out a series of youth studies since the early 1990s. We shall make use of the most recent country-wide survey which was carried out in 2002. The sample has more than 12 000 observations and was designed to be nationally representative of youths in six grades of school: the three lower secondary grades (ages 13-16) which are part of compulsory education; and the three post-compulsory grades (ages 17-19) which offer general and vocational specializations. Practically *all* youths (96%) commence a course in the post-compulsory “further education school”. A school-based target sample will in this case be a good approximation of a general sample of youths in the age range 13 to 17. However, the upper age range of the sample (18-19 year olds) will not include the approximately 15% who by that age are not enrolled in school. More than 12 000 youths took part. The response rate was very high: 90% or higher in each of the six grades.

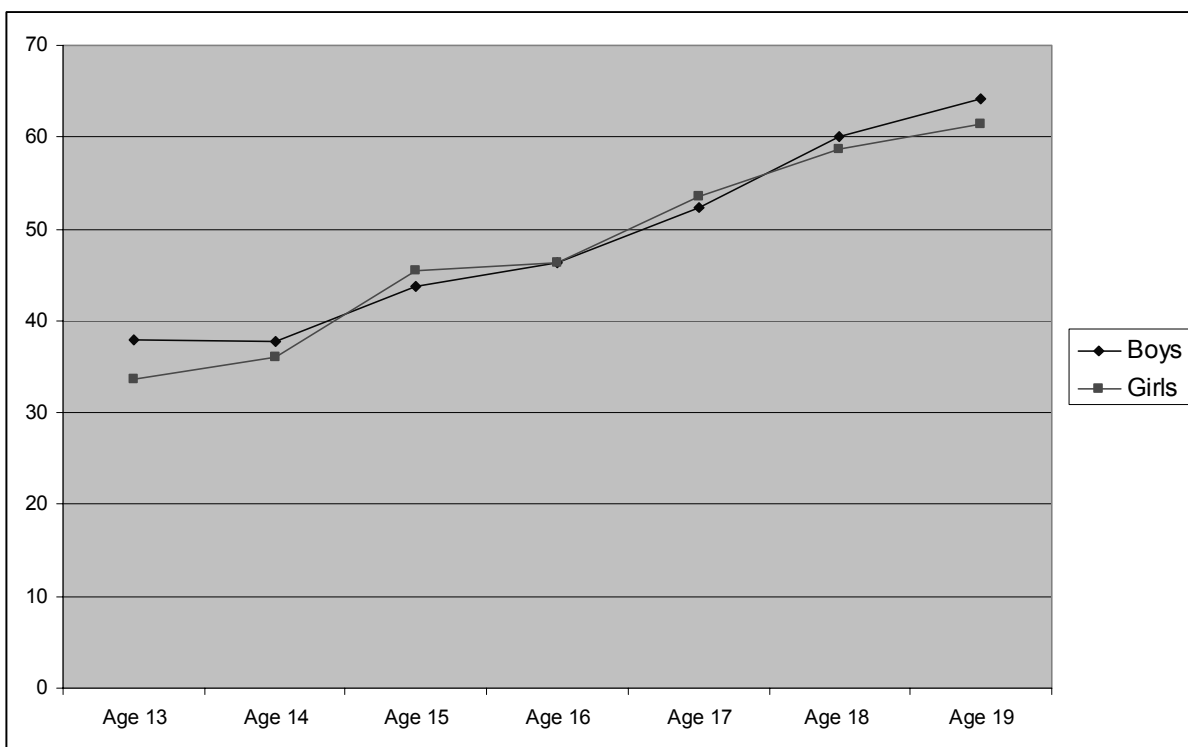
### 3.4 Interest in politics and social issues

#### 3.4.1 Measuring interest

The Survey asked: “How interested are you in social issues?” and “How interested are you in politics?”<sup>6</sup> About half the youths said they are “quite interested” or “very interested” in “social issues”. Only one quarter expressed a similar extent of interest in politics. Gender differences were small. There was a tendency for boys to take a stronger interest in “politics” than did girls. Interests in “social issues” and in “politics” were strongly correlated ( $r = 0.61$ ). We combined the two items into a summary scale of “Interest in Politics and Social Issues”. On each item, a score of 0 refers to “not at all interested”, a score of 6 to “very interested” in both politics and “social issues”, other answers were given intermediate values. The scale’s distribution is uni-modal and sufficiently symmetric for regression analysis. Figure 2 shows steady rise in such “interest” with age. At no age was effect of gender statistically significant.

This scale will turn out to be strongly correlated with “planning higher education”, with performance in school, and with “political socialization at home”. Social class and “cultural capital” will be shown to have little effect on these relationships.

**Figure 2. Percent “Interested in Politics and Social Issues” by age and gender**



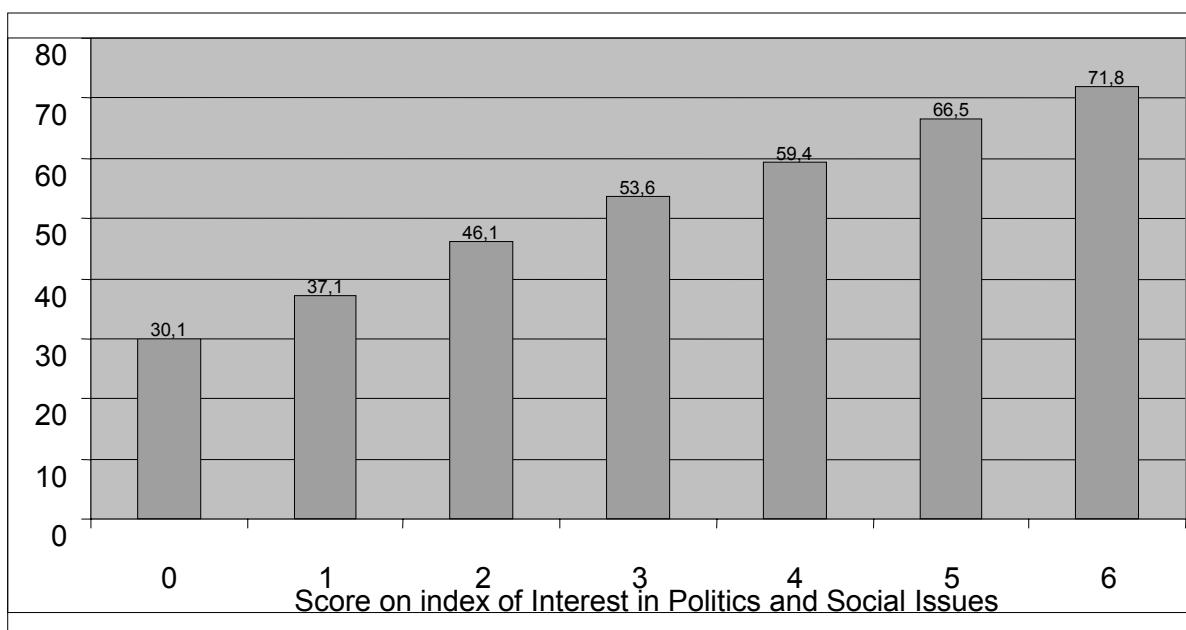
N > 1500 for each age category.

<sup>6</sup> The questions and response options referred to are of course translations from the Norwegian text used in the questionnaires.

### 3.5 Academic performance

The youths reported the marks (on a 0 to 6 scale) which they received in Norwegian, English, and Mathematics “on the last occasion you received a report card”. Girls have a lead in English and Norwegian. There was no gender difference in Mathematics. The marks for Norwegian, English and Mathematics are combined in a summary measure of “educational performance” which also was set to range from 0 to 6. On this scale girls have an average of 3.85 while boys achieve 3.62. Across the three subjects 54% of girls and 42% of boys have a grade point average of 4 or better. Figure 3 shows a positive and quite linear relationship between getting good marks and having an interest in politics and social issues.

**Figure 3. Percent with average grade at least 4, by score on index of Interest in Politics and Social Issues**



N > 10300

The stronger the interest youths have in politics and social issues, the more often they get good grades (and vice versa)—in keeping with the “Enlightenment hypothesis”, that civic engagement increases with cognitive knowledge as produced by schools. A positive relationship with grades also fits the widely noted finding that civic engagement rises with *level* of education, for performance at lower stages of schooling will affect the chance of ascending to the higher ones. We shall later show that the positive association with grades is robust, in the sense that it persists after controls for “family background”.

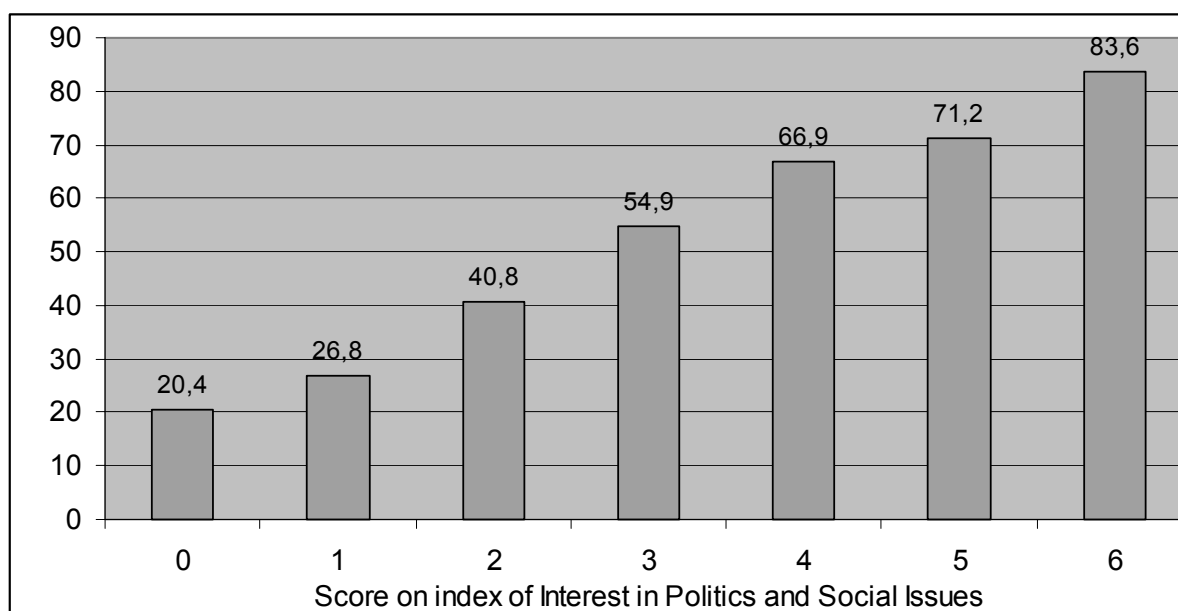
We would expect an even stronger association with performance in social studies, not only because social studies may itself lead to civic engagement but also because an interest in politics and social issues to begin with can be assumed to motivate students for social studies as a subject. In the Civic Education IEA studies, a positive correlation has been consistently found between scores on Civic Education knowledge tests and various measures of civic engagement. (Mikkelsen *et al.* 2002: Ch. 6, on Norwegian 18 year-olds; Ungdomsstyrelsen 2003:30 on Sweden, Torney-Purta *et al.* (2001) and Torney-Purta (2002) on IEA findings across countries). We lack a measure of performance in social studies in the 2002 national survey of youths in Norway. But such information was included in a large scale survey of youths in Oslo in 1996 which showed grade in social studies was a much better predictor of participation in political youth organizations, than were grades in other school subjects (Lauglo and Øia).

### 3.6 Ambition for higher education

Hirschi (1969) notes that a person's perceptions and actions will be shaped by goals and expectations about the future. Do plans and expectations for one's education in the longer run, predict the interest which youths take in politics and social issues? Education ambition is in our survey material gauged by: "How long education do you think you will get?" The response options were "university or other higher education", "the general education program in upper secondary school", "vocational programmes in upper secondary school", "other" and "don't know". As might be expected in a sample of 13-19 year olds, many were too young to have a clear expectation; and 24% checked "don't know". More girls than boys expect to go on to higher education (51% as compared to 42%). As one would expect, high performers aim more often for higher education. But 24% aspired to higher education also among the distinctly "low performers" (a grade point average of 2 or less).

There is a strong association between "planning higher education" and young people's interest in politics and social affairs (Figure 4).<sup>7</sup> The relationship with ambition is stronger than the relationship with actual performance in school. This will be confirmed later in multivariate analysis.

**Figure 4. Percent planning higher education, by score on index of "Interest in Politics and Social Issues"**



N > 11200

### 3.7 Adjustment to school

Does civic engagement go with smooth adjustment to life at school and to the authority regime of schooling? Or are politically interested youths impatient with school and have conflict with school authority more often than others do? A view of politically interested youths as educationally well adjusted "status seekers" points to the former expectation. On the other hand, a view of them as rebels--or simply as

<sup>7</sup> American analysis of the "National Assessment of Education Progress" data has also shown educational ambition to be a strong correlate of "civic knowledge" (Niemi and Junn 1998). The same applies to the 2000 IEA civics study (Torney-Purta and Stapleton 2002).



assertively confident persons who are impatient to be treated as adults--would point to friction with school and mental disengagement from teaching and learning processes that constrain their autonomy.

### 3.7.1 *Valuing school*

The survey included a series of statements with which the youths were asked to state agreement or disagreement. Response options ranged from “fully agree” through “agree a bit” and “disagree a bit” to “entirely disagree”. A common theme is the extent to which the students value their school experience. The profile of answers shows some ambivalence. Nearly all (about 9/10) see their education as important for their future. Nearly as many (84%) say they “like school”, but at the same time a very substantial majority (69%) say “school is boring”. Clearly, it is possible *both* to enjoy school and to value its importance, and yet to experience much boredom there. Norwegian secondary schools are not perceived as an adequately orderly environment for learning, either. Close to 50% of the students agree that there is too much noise and disruption during classes. A still higher proportion says teachers should deal more strictly with disruptive students. (For details, see Lauglo and Øia 2006).

Factor analysis is a statistical technique that identifies traits that tend to “go together” in a population, as if these traits express some common underlying dimension. In such factor analysis, 8 items are part of a one-factorial solution which explains 24 percent of item variance and with high internal reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.75).

Items loading positively on the factor are:

- I enjoy school
- We learn many exciting things at school
- Our teachers teach well
- My schooling will be useful regardless of what I do later

Items loading negatively are:

- I think I learn more during breaks than in classes
- School is boring
- I dread going to school
- Meeting friends means more to me than learning everything and doing well in school.

To build a summary measure of the common dimension across these indicators, we used a scaling procedure that sets the scale to have a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 5. A value of 5 means “agreement” with all items having a positive loading and “disagreement” with all items having a negative loading. We shall call the scale “Valuing school”. Girls scored slightly higher (2.01) than boys (1.95). There were only minor differences by age. How does this scale relate to interest in politics and social issues? We found that the clearly “uninterested” had a distinctly low appreciation of school. But the opposite does not hold. Youths taking a definite interest in politics and social issues (scoring at least 3 on the scale) did not distinguish themselves from the “less interested” mainstream. In multivariate analysis we shall find that “a positive effect” depends on the particular aspect of civic engagement that is examined.

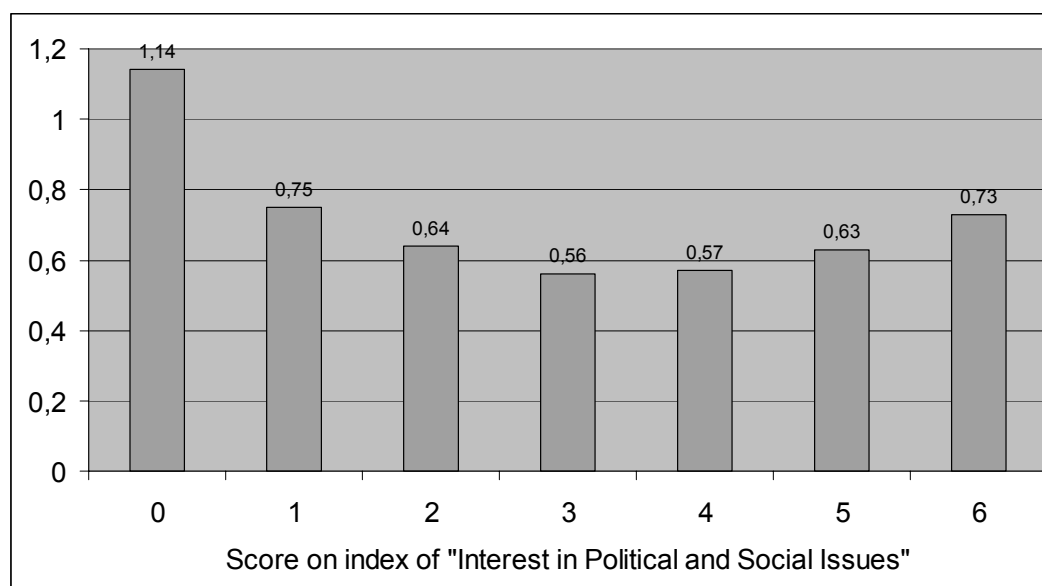
### 3.7.2 *Discipline problems*

A series of questions concerned infractions of school rules and conflicts with school authority. The format was: “Have you participated in, or done any of the following, during the last twelve months?” The type of infractions/conflicts listed in the questionnaire were: “swearing at a teacher”, “quarrelling furiously with a teacher”, “having been sent to the principal’s office” [for an offence], “being told to leave the classroom” [for misbehaviour], and “being absent without legitimate reason”. The response options were:

“never”, “once”, “2-5 times”, “6-10 times”, “10-50 times” and “more than 50 times”. The frequency of self-reported misconduct is high: 46% said they had “sworn at a teacher” at least once during the last 12 months. A quarter said they have had a furious quarrel with a teacher. In factor analysis the five items load strongly on a single underlying dimension which explains 54% of item variance ( $\alpha = .74$ ). We constructed a simple additive scale of “Discipline problems” on which scores can range from 0 to 5. Boys score decidedly higher (0.80) than girls (0.54) on this index.

A hint of curvilinearity was found when the relationship with “interest in politics and social issues” was examined. Those who are uninterested in politics and social issues (scores 0 or 1) are clearly the ones most likely to have discipline problems. However, next in line are those with uncommonly strong interest (scores 5 and 6). This minority (which constitutes about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the sample) have “discipline problems” more often than those scoring 3 and 4 on the scale. Multivariate analysis will show that signs of “discipline problems” among those who are the most politically and socially “engaged”, are more clearcut with regard to *participation* in different forms of political activity, than they are with merely taking a strong interest in such matters.

**Figure 5. Mean score on index of Discipline Problems by score on index of Interest in Politics and Social Issues**



$N > 10500$   $\eta = .16$   $\eta^2 = .025$

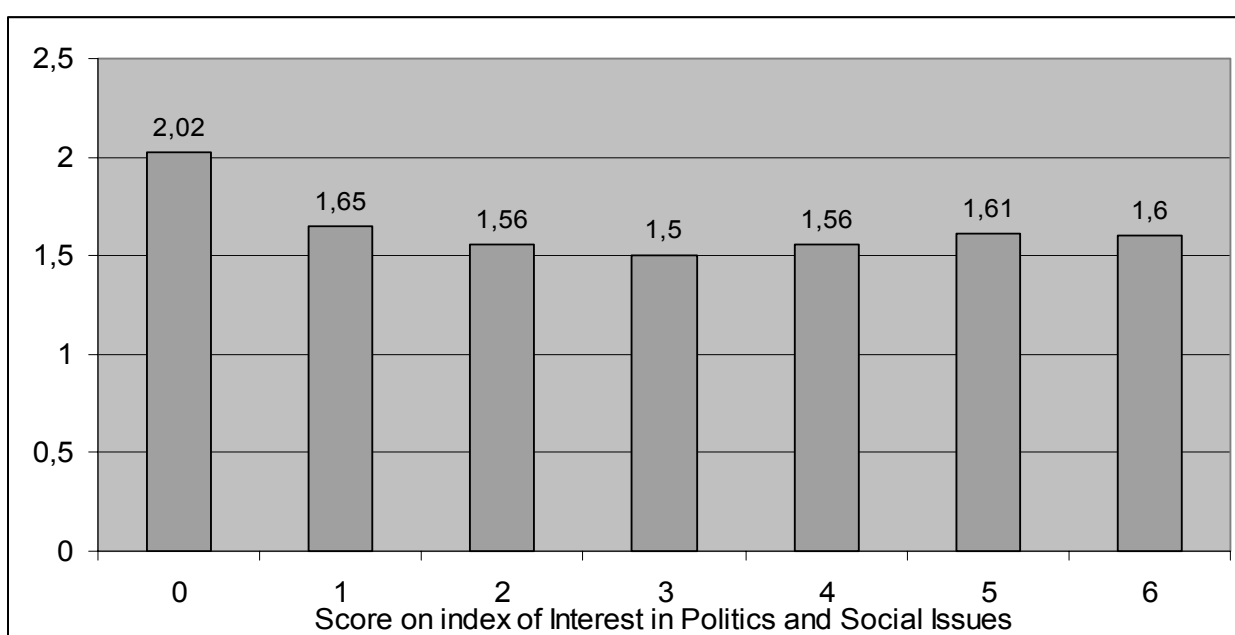
### 3.7.3 School fatigue

The 2002 youth survey contained 5 questions seeking to capture mental or behavioural disengagement from the teaching and learning processes in classrooms “during this last school year”: “daydreaming during class”, “not doing assigned homework”, “being unable to concentrate on what is being taught”, “falling asleep during class”, and “being tardy for classes”. The response options were: “every day or nearly every day”, “some times each week”, “once a week”, “rarely”, and “never”. In factor analysis, all items load on a “first factor” that accounts for 49% of total item variance ( $\alpha = .74$ ). We label this dimension “School Fatigue”. The scores were added to a scale set to range from 0 to 4. On each item a score of 1 means that the person answered “every day”, or “nearly every day”. A score of 0 on the scale means the student has checked “never” on all counts. Boys have a slightly higher score on the average (1.62) than girls (1.57). In contrast to the “Valuing school” scale, it refers to experience and behaviour rather than perceptions or attitudes.

School fatigue rises systematically with age, from a mean index score of 1.13 for 13-year olds to 1.96 for 19-year-olds. Such a relationship may be unavoidable under conditions of mass enrolments in secondary education. As youths mature, they acquire new needs and wants which can make everyday life at almost any school seem increasingly narrow.

When this School Fatigue is examined in relation to Interest in politics and social issues, we find a non-linear relationship (Figure 6). The 4% of students in our sample who are totally uninterested in social and political issues (a score of 0) have a markedly higher School Fatigue than others. Thus, again we see that an effect occurs at the extreme low end of the “Interest” scale. However, for the other 96% of the sample there is no clear pattern. However, we shall find a more pronounced pattern when School Fatigue is examined in relation to the various forms of political activity in multivariate analysis.

**Figure 6. Score on “School Fatigue” by scores on index of “Interest in Politics and Social Issues”**



$N > 10600$   $\text{Eta} = .13$   $\text{Eta squared} = .017$

We conclude from these bivariate analyses that youths with unusually strong interests in politics and social issues are not docile eager beavers at school. As a group, they have their sights set on higher education and master the tasks set by schools quite well. They also appreciate the value of schooling a bit more than what their peers. But they suffer “school fatigue” as much as the mainstream, and they have run-ins with school authority more often than youths of “middling” interests in politics and social issues. Multivariate analysis will show that youths who actually engage in political activity have more conflicts than others with school.

### ***3.7.4 The importance of the home for socialization to civic engagement***

Even if schooling and orientation to the education system have effects, there are obviously also other sources of influence. Networks and institutions outside will matter—as will mass media, and there is the question of home influence. Has the home’s importance receded so much that it no longer is a dominant arena for shaping young people’s identity and outlooks with regard to the “public domain”?

Some social theory has stressed the importance of youths as a collectivity unto themselves, with much readiness to ignore or depart from the views of the older generation. Karl Mannheim (1947:35) wrote: “Youth is neither progressive nor conservative by nature, but is a potentiality which is ready for any new start”. Currently influential theories of individuation in present day modern society (Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Thomas Ziehe) assert that the youths are becoming detached from the social categories which have strongly shaped identities in the past: gender, ethnicity, social class and nation state. However, even if previously strong “larger social categories” turn out to have declining importance, this need not mean that youths are cut adrift from the influence of their homes.

Research that probes into the role of families in the formation of civic and political engagement among youths is surprisingly sparse. The IEA-civics education study on Swedish 18-year-olds showed a strong association between “discussing with parents” and the extent to which youths expect to take part in various forms of political participation in the future (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2003:32). A Norwegian study by Sivesind and Ødegård (2003:136-137) analyzed data from a 2001 citizenship survey, and focused on the 14–23 age group. The survey asked: “How often were there political discussions in your home when you were growing up?” They found in multivariate analysis that answers consistently and strongly predict: faith in the value of politics and in the importance of voting, taking part in political discussions, and civic volunteering. Clearly, “politicking families” matter for political socialization in Norway.

Our present survey asked: “How often do you talk about social issues and politics when you are together with...”. Then followed a list: “your friends”, “your mother”, “your father” and “teachers, students in your classes”. Response options were “often”, “sometimes”, “seldom” and “never” for each type of interlocutor. About 4/10 said they “often” or “sometimes” talk about such issues with parents. “Friends” were mentioned slightly less often. Thus, parents have a continued importance as interlocutors for youths with regard to issues in the public domain. “Teachers, students in your classes” were mentioned less often (about 1/3) by the respondents, though Norwegian social studies curricula strongly recommend that students be encouraged to state views and engage in discussion with others.

We also found that youths talk *more* with their parents about social and political issues, as they get older. The same was true for talking “with friends” and “with teachers and with other students in your class”. We also found that parents and friends are not polarized alternative interlocutors for talking about politics. Those talking with their friends are also more likely to do so with their parents (and with others). In short, civic engagement is manifested in diverse and social relations that typically complement each other. We conclude that the home remains a main arena for discussion and that it gains (rather than recedes) in importance as youths mature.

### ***3.7.5 Measuring socialisation at home***

Not surprisingly, “talking politics” with parents is very strongly related to the students’ own interest in politics and social issues (Eta square = .30). Could it be that talking with parents about such matters is simply another indicator of the student’s own interest rather than a source of such interest? It is reasonable to assume that parents typically will have developed views about political issues long before their children start taking any interest. Therefore, over the long haul of time we think the relationship will mainly be that the “old” influence “the young”. Parental modelling is also likely to matter for political socialization of youths: that parents show concern beyond the “private domain” in various ways, e.g., making a point of voting, going to meetings and events, belonging to advocacy groups and other organizations, being activists, discussing with their own friends, staying informed and talking about current events among themselves.

We think that discussions with parents are most likely to make a positive difference for young people’s own civic engagement when the parents encourage their children to develop their own views and

make their own decisions. In our survey, the youths were asked to reflect on their relations with parents and to indicate on a 4-point scale the extent of agreement or disagreement with the statement [My parents] “have encouraged me to make my own decisions”. To devise a measure of political socialization in the home we therefore combined indicators of “talking with parents” with affirmative answers to the question of whether parents encouraged such independence. The resulting scale is a 0-6 index which sums up scores 0-3 on the items of “talking with father” and “talking with mother” with the proviso that the scale takes the value of 0 if parents disapprove of “my taking decisions on my own”. Thus the scale measures family-based socialization to young people’s *independent* engagement with politics and social issues.

### ***3.7.6 Family-based socialization to civic engagement boosts educational performance and ambition***

Analysis of the Norwegian youth survey data showed that political socialization at home boosts their performance at school. The effect is significant after adjusting for age, gender, parental levels of education, books in the home, and the family’s occupational social class. Adding indicators of “talking about politics with parents” to this set of predictors, raises R square from .133 to .151 in ordinary least squares multiple regression analysis of grade point average in school (Lauglo and Øia 2006). Preliminary analysis indicates that such socialization makes a greater difference for “planning higher education” than it does for performance in school. Thus, a refined version of Figure 1 would need to take account of an arrow from “political socialization at home” to the education indicators.

### ***3.7.7 Close and transparent relations with parents***

In Coleman’s (1988) theorizing about social capital for education, there is emphasis on the importance of close social relationships between children and their parents. How do close relations with parents affect the extent to which youths develop civic engagement?

The survey contained a battery of statements regarding relations between youths and their parents. The response options were: “completely correct”, “quite correct”, “roughly correct”, “quite incorrect” and “completely incorrect”. Some items are based on Alsaker, Olweus and Dundas (1991). Factor analysis of this battery gave a strongly dominant first factor that accounts for 34% of item variance and has an alpha coefficient of 0.82. The factor indicates transparent relations, monitoring by parents, trust, positive communication, interest, and support. The components are:

- My parents often ask how I am getting along at school.
- My parents often ask who I am with and what I am doing during my spare time.
- When I have received grades on tests and assignments, I inform my parents.
- My parents often praise me when I do well.
- My parents usually know where I am and what I am doing during my spare time.
- My parents know quite well who I am with, during my spare time.
- My parents usually know when my assignments are due.
- When I have been out in the evening, I tell my parents what I have been doing, even if they don’t ask.
- My parents always ask “how tests have gone”.

The five response options of each item were scored 0 to 4. Items were summed to a score which then was divided by the number of items, so that scale values also range from 0 to 4. We label the resulting index: *Close and transparent relations with parents*.

The relationship between this scale and the scale of “Interest in politics and social issues” was found to be curvilinear in the sense that it is those with middle-high interest in politics and social issues who display the “closest” relations to parents. Because freeing oneself from “too dependent” relations with parents is part of maturation, there is no reason to expect any straightforward linear bivariate relationship with civic engagement, even if close relations with parents do facilitate the integration of youths into the wider world of “adult” concerns. There is in fact a negative correlation of (-.29) between the “close and transparent relations with parents” and the age of youths.

The question is whether civic engagement is associated with a closer relation to parents *than that which is normal for a given age*, or is such engagement part of young people’s independence project which could involve less transparent relations with parents than what is “age typical”? We shall pursue this question in multivariate analyses.

### **3.8 Family background as social class and cultural capital**

Educational performance and ambitions are well known to correlate with their family of origin’s social position in the occupational hierarchy. Terms such as “class”, “strata” and “status groups” are variously used to denote relative advantages and identities which individuals derive from their family’s connection with the economy. Even more important for children’s and youths’ navigation of the education system is their family’s closeness to socially valued high culture—typically indicated by parental level of education and by other signs of high status cultural resources in the home.

In our sample, bivariate analyses showed that interest in politics and social issues is more strongly related to indicators of “cultural capital” (parents having higher education, “books in the home”) than to indicators of the family’s connection with the occupational hierarchy of socio-economic status (Lauglo and Øia 2006). The strongest association was with “books in the home” (Eta square of .051). The association with the family’s occupational social class (father’s occupation classified according to ISCO88) was weaker (Eta square = .037).

In the model for our multivariate analysis (cfr Figure 1), we expect these traditional measures of “family background” to influence young people’s education plans, performance at school and adjustment to school. We also expect they will exert some influence on political socialization in the family, and that they may also directly affect civic engagement. In our analysis the “conventional” family background variables are treated as control variables. Thus we expect a combination of “indirect” and “direct” influences on civic engagement.

### **3.9 Multivariate analysis of interest in politics and social issues**

How are the noted bivariate relations affected by other effects? We shall perform OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) linear multiple regression to assess this issue. Such analysis is a means of adjusting statistically for the effects which “other” traits have on a particular outcome, when the effect of a given trait is assessed. In keeping with the model in Figure 1 we assume that the civic engagement is directly affected by the “education indicators” of performance, ambition for higher education, indicators of adjustment to school. We also assume that it is also affected by socialization in the home. In assessing the net effect of these variables we shall control for age and gender. We shall further include as control variables the parents’ level of education, “books in the home”, and the family’s occupational social class. Table 1 summarizes results of stepwise regressions.

The dependent variable is the full 0-6 range of scores on Interest in politics and social issues. The predictors are a mix of so-called “dummy variables” (presence or absence of a trait, taking on 1 or 0) and continuous scales. For comparison across this mix of predictors, one needs to look at the standardized

regression coefficients--the so-called *beta weights*. For comparisons *among those variables which are in dummy variable form* it is also appropriate to look at the unstandardized regression coefficients (*the Bs*) since these will be less affected than the beta weights by differences among the predictors in the proportion of cases being assigned the value "1".<sup>8</sup>

Model 1 in the table includes only age, gender, and those other predictors which have to do with the respondent's own education—performance, plans, and adjustment to school. Age is measured as a continuous variable from age 13 to 19. Gender is a dummy variable where 1 is assigned to "girl" and 0 to "boy". Performance in school is the grade point average (0 to 6 scale) across the subjects Mathematics, Norwegian and English on the "last report card received". Planning higher education is a dummy variable (values 0 and 1).

Model 1 confirms findings from bivariate analyses. Planning Higher Education is the strongest predictor. Next in order of importance, going by the beta weights is Educational Performance. Age matters: interest in politics and social issues increases with age. "Valuing school" matters but less strongly so than educational ambition and actual performance. Other predictors in Model 1 show little or no effect. There is a slight effect of gender: boys score higher than girls. With roughly half the sample in each gender category, even a slight gender difference will easily attain statistical significance with such a large number of cases (that is the probability the observed difference would be due to random sampling fluctuations is less than 5%).

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<sup>8</sup> A general constraint in regression analysis is that a trait possessed by only a very small proportion of the population analyzed, will show up as having a low effect even if the effect is strong for those cases which exhibit the trait. The reason is of course that the model is concerned with accounting for the variation which occurs in the dependent variable in the total set of cases analyzed. Traits which are present in a minute proportion of cases cannot have much impact on that variance.

Table 1. Regression analysis of index of interest in politics and social issues

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3 (with controls for cultural capital and social class)	
	B	Beta weight	B	Beta weight	B	Beta weight
<b>Age</b>	<b>.113</b>	<b>.145</b>	<b>.073</b>	<b>.094</b>	<b>.077</b>	<b>.099</b>
<b>Gender (girl)</b>	<b>-.175</b>	<b>-.063</b>	<b>-.118</b>	<b>-.043</b>	<b>-.111</b>	<b>-.040</b>
<b>Educ. performance and expectations</b>						
Average grade	<b>.253</b>	<b>.158</b>	<b>.145</b>	<b>.091</b>	<b>.106</b>	<b>.066</b>
Planning higher education (dummy variable)	<b>.596</b>	<b>.216</b>	<b>.403</b>	<b>.146</b>	<b>.342</b>	<b>.124</b>
<b>Adjustment to school</b>						
Valuing school (scale)	<b>.317</b>	<b>.117</b>	<b>.173</b>	<b>.064</b>	<b>.183</b>	<b>.068</b>
Disciplinary problems (scale)	-0.008	-0.004	-0.008	-0.004	-0.001	-0.001
School fatigue (scale)	-0.012	-0.007	-0.018	-0.010	-0.037	-0.021
<b>Socialisation at home</b>						
Political socialisation (scale)			<b>.311</b>	<b>.424</b>	<b>.299</b>	<b>.407</b>
Close and transparent relations to parents (scale)			-0.022	-0.011	-0.030	-0.015
<b>Constant</b>	<b>-.968</b>		<b>-.204</b>		<b>-.397</b>	
R square	<b>.158</b>		<b>.314</b>		<b>.323</b>	
R square change			<b>.156</b>		<b>.009</b>	

Coefficients in **bold face** print:  $p < .05$ .  $N > 10\,000$  for all pair-wise estimates of covariance.

*The findings show that adolescents mature as they grow more interested in politics and social issues. The aspects of their education which most affect the development of these interests are: how far they expect to “rise” in the education system, how well they are performing at school, and to a much lesser extent—that they generally appreciate the value of school. Extent of conflict with school authority (discipline problems), or their extent of personal disengagement from the process of education (school*



*fatigue*) have no significant effect. All together, Model 1 explains about 16% of the variance in the “interest index” (cfr. the R square). This is in our view a moderately strong effect.

Model 2 adds as predictors indicators of socialization in the family (discussing politics and social issues with parents given that parents encourage independence) and the scale of close and transparent relations with parents. We see a dramatic rise in predictive power. The *increase* in explanatory power (.156) in Model 2 is in fact as strong as the total R square (.158) was in Model 1. We also see considerable reduction in the regression coefficients of those “education indicators” which in Model 1 made a clear difference: “average grade”, “planning higher education” and “valuing school”. This simply means that these traits covary considerably with political socialization at home. We have deliberately followed a conservative procedure for assessing effects of socialization at home—giving statistical full play to “education indicators” in Model 1. But one could argue that home influences are “prior” to school influences and should therefore be entered first in the regression, something which would have further served to show their importance. We take the increase in predictive power which nonetheless occurs from Model 1 to Model 2 to mean that the home matters at least as much as the school does, as an arena for political socialization.

If civic engagement very much were to be the prerogative of economic and cultural elites and their offspring, effects of “education indicators” and “family socialization” in Model 2 would largely be reducible to the social status of the family to which youths belong. Conversely, in a distinctly egalitarian social context with broadly based civic engagement, conventional measures of “family background” would add little predictive power.

Model 3 adds as control variables the family’s position in cultural and socio-economic hierarchies. The control variables include more precisely: mothers’ education, father’s education, a 7-point scale of “books in the home”, and a string of dummy variables measuring social class according to father’s occupation classified in 6 groupings: workers, lower functionaries, primary industries, techno-economic middle class occupations, socio-cultural middle class occupations, and higher administrative positions (For details see Lauglo and Øia 2006).

The findings in Model 3 fit an egalitarian model since adding these conventional “family background variables” makes little difference. The predictive power of the model (R square) increases by only .009, indicating miniscule “direct effects” of social class and cultural capital. The beta weights of the predictors in Model 2 are not much affected, suggesting that “indirect effects” of social class and cultural capital also are distinctly weak.

*We conclude that the pattern of effects which were shown in Models 1 and 2 are not reducible to the “prior” influence of social class and cultural capital. The education system is in its own right an important arena for socialization to taking an interest in politics and social issues. The “education effect” which matters most is level of ambition: planning higher education, rather than academic performance as such. Home influences that are not reducible to social class and cultural capital, matter even more for developing interests in politics and social issues.*

### **3.10 Political participation**

Giddens (1998) maintains that traditional representative democracy with its parties and institutions is perceived as remote from everyday life by many politically engaged people, and that citizens (including youths) increasingly are attracted to new forms of political expression which are closer to their life. Beck (1999, 2002) argues that new forms of “sub-politics” have emerged with a theatre of action removed from parliament and local government. Examples are loosely constituted advocacy groups and networks concerned with e.g., ecology, animal rights, and consumer rights. Thörn (2002:176) refers to such phenomena as the “politics of life”. The findings below will give some support to such theories *as far as*

*youths are concerned*, for they will show that involvement in stably constituted political groups (“organizations”) is a marginal phenomenon among 13-19 year olds in Norway, but that participation in more loosely constituted “Activism” is quite common and rises with age.

### ***3.10.1 Scales for measuring different types of political activity and their relationship with age***

Answers to questions about participation in various forms of political activity were factor analyzed in order to identify underlying dimensions common to different questions. This yielded a three-factor structure. Each factor had three items with markedly higher loadings than others. Simple additive scales, each based on three items, were then created for each of these three dimensions of political activity.<sup>9</sup>

The first factor, **Representational Participation**, refers to participation in formal organizations which traditionally have been seen as recruitment channels for becoming involved in politics. These organizations are typically hierarchically organized, with local boards elected by members, and representatives from local units serving as delegates at higher levels. The components are “been active in a youth branch of a political party”, “been active in another political organization”, “participated in youth council, municipal council of youth, etc”.

The second factor, **Political Activism** refers to advocacy that is directly expressed in the public domain and where participation need not imply any sustained involvement in any formally constituted group (though conventionally organized groups will usually be involved in organizing and publicizing the “open” events or activities). Its components are participation in “a campaign to collect signatures”, “a political rally or demonstration”, and “boycott of certain products or firms”.

The third factor, **Unlawful Protest**, refers to activity by methods which skirt the border of legality or are clearly beyond that border. The items are: “written political statements or slogans on walls etc”, “taken part in unlawful actions”, “damaged public or private property as a form of protest”.

Each of these three scales can take on values from 0 to 3, where 0 means no involvement in any of the component activities, and 3 would mean experience from involvement in all three. Girls scored higher on Representational participation and especially on Political Activism, while boys scored higher on Unlawful Protest.

Figure 7 shows mean score by age on each scale. Activism is the only type that shows a clear rise with age. It is also at a distinctly higher “level” at all ages than the two other forms. “Representational Participation” shows a slight increase up to age 16 but not subsequently. Given that youth wings of political parties and associated interest organizations have been designed as gateways to “adult” politics, the extent of involvement in them is remarkably low. One would have expected some rise with age simply because the phrasing of the questions did not refer to any particular time period. But the curve is remarkably flat. Unlawful Protest is at a distinctly low level and shows no rise with age. These findings suggest that Activism (within the law) is in fact the mainstream form of political participation among Norwegian youths, and that both conventional “membership based” participation and Protest by unlawful means statistically are marginal phenomena. *Though the findings are confined to youth, they give some*

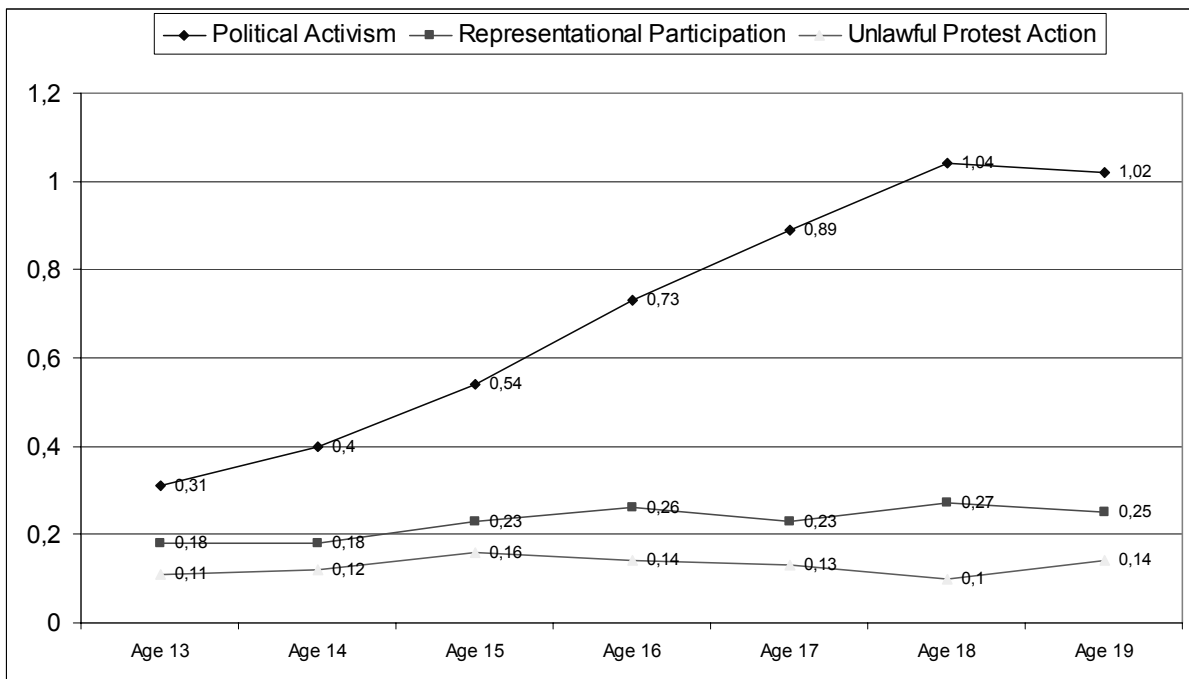
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<sup>9</sup> Guro Ødegård, a colleague at NOVA, took the initiative to include the items which we have used for these scales in the Youth in Norway 2002 survey. She has earlier pointed to the same types of different political activity as is confirmed in our factor analysis, but using slightly different labels for them—in translation: using “conventional activities”, “action oriented activities” and “unlawful expressions” (Ødegård 2003). We are very grateful for her contribution. Her current research plans include in-depth analysis of political engagement in relation to social inequality.

support to theories which point to the current importance of loosely institutionalised political activism, and the failure of “traditional politics” to attract the young.

The scales differed in their relationship to “Interest in Politics and Social Issues”. With increased “interest”, there was also increase both in Representational Participation and in Activism. Unlawful Protest, however, had a curvilinear relationship to the “Interest” scale in that it is those with distinctly “high” and distinctly “low” interest in politics and social issues who are most likely to have taken part in “Unlawful Protest”. Presumably, among the politically and socially “uninterested”, such actions have an affinity to vandalism.

**Figure 7. Mean score on 0-3 scales of Representational Participation, Political Activity, and Unlawful Protest, by age**



The distribution of all three participation scales was sharply skewed (with a mode of 0). Linear regression is therefore inappropriate for these scales. We shall use Logistic Regression instead which like linear regression is a technique for estimating the effects that a particular trait has on a given outcome, after taking account of the effect that other traits also have on the same outcome—except that in this technique the outcome is not measured as a continuous scale of some sort, but as a categoric variable. For each participation scale, the dependent variable will be set to 1 if the respondent has a score of 1 or higher, otherwise it will be zero. **Thus in the analysis below, it is experience of any kind of involvement at all, that will be examined for each type of political participation.**

### 3.10.2 Representational Participation

Table 2 shows the results of logistic regression of “Representational Participation” when such participation is measured as the presence of any activity that counts as such participation. Thus, the measure here is the *presence or absence* of that particular participatory trait (any kind of indication of such participation). 23% of the sample has been excluded because of “missing information” on any of the three indicators of Representational Participation. Of the remaining cases, 16% had been involved in at least one

type of such activity--thus scoring "1" on the dependent variable in the table. We shall concern ourselves with the overall explanatory power of the three models in Table 2, and with significance and magnitude of the estimated B coefficients which may be taken as a measure of relative strength of predictive impact of each predictor. The Table also includes "Expected B" (also known as the "odds-ratio").<sup>10</sup> Even when using the "Nagelkerke procedure" which yields the highest estimates of total explanatory power ("quasi R square"), the explanatory power of all three models (R squared) is distinctly low. It is only 6 percent in Model 3.

Direct comparison is not appropriate with Table 1 because of the difference in method. However, adding as control variables the family's occupational social status, parental education and "books in the home" (in Model 3) hardly affects the structure and magnitude of the coefficients and makes no appreciable difference, neither for predictive power, nor for the magnitude of the regression coefficients (the Bs).<sup>11</sup> As in the linear regression of the Interest scale (Table 1), the multivariate logistic analysis shows no significant effect for age. A weak positive effect of being a girl is significant only in Model 2.

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<sup>10</sup> The odds ratio expresses the probability of going one step up (or down) on the scale according to which the dependent variable is measured.

<sup>11</sup> A logistic regression with only these "home background" predictors gave extremely low R square: .010 (Nagelkerke procedure), further confirming the relative unimportance of the conventional "family background variables" as predictors of young people's participation in representative bodies.

Table 2. Logistic regression of "Representational Participation"

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3 (with controls for occupational social class and cultural capital)	
	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)
<b>Age</b>	.009	1.009	- .007	.993	-.006	.994
<b>Gender (girl)</b>	.102	1.108	<b>.121</b>	<b>1.129</b>	.113	1.119
<b>Education performance and expectations</b>						
Average grade (scale)	<b>.131</b>	<b>1.140</b>	.069	1.072	.049	1.050
Plans higher education (dummy)	<b>.310</b>	<b>1.364</b>	<b>.204</b>	<b>1.226</b>	<b>.205</b>	<b>1.228</b>
<b>Adjustment to school</b>						
Valuing school (scale)	<b>.396</b>	<b>1.486</b>	<b>.297</b>	<b>1.346</b>	<b>.306</b>	<b>1.358</b>
Disciplinary problems (scale)	<b>.288</b>	<b>1.333</b>	<b>.303</b>	<b>1.353</b>	<b>.301</b>	<b>1.351</b>
School Fatigue (scale)	<b>.141</b>	<b>1.151</b>	<b>.149</b>	<b>1.161</b>	<b>.146</b>	<b>1.158</b>
<b>Socialization in the home</b>						
Political socialization (scale)			<b>.162</b>	<b>1.176</b>	<b>.155</b>	<b>1.168</b>
Close and transparent relations with parents (scale)			.072	1.075	.071	1.073
<b>Constant</b>	<b>-3.70</b>	<b>.025</b>	<b>-3.58</b>	<b>.028</b>	<b>-3.83</b>	<b>.022</b>
R square (Nagelkerke procedure)	<b>.025</b>		<b>.045</b>		<b>.049</b>	
R square increase compared to model 1			<b>.020</b>		<b>.024</b>	
R square incr. compared to model 2					<b>.004</b>	

**Bold face:**  $p < .05$  For all models :  $N > 8600$

Education-related predictors make a difference. "Planning higher education" and "valuing school" have consistently positive coefficients. Performance has a weak positive effect that is not consistently significant statistically across the three Models. It is interesting that "the participants" show *more* School

Fatigue and have *more often* had Disciplinary Problems, than those with no record of such Participation. There is a positive effect of “Political socialization in the home” (Models 2 and 3) but it is not a dominant predictor. There is no significant association with the scale of “Close and transparent relations to parents.” The strongest predictors are Valuing School and paradoxically also having Disciplinary Problems. Though school is “valued”, the findings show signs of impatience with school and friction with school authority among these early recruits to conventional “politics”, rather than their being pliant conformists with their school’s regime.

### ***3.10.3 Political Activism***

Activism is the most commonly occurring form of political participation: 44% report experience of some such involvement. It is “mainstream” also by being the one type which “rises with age” as youths mature. Table 3 shows that the predictive power of all three models is much higher with regard to such Activism than it was for the Representational Participation measure. Again we see that adding controls for “home background” (Model 3) makes little difference for predictive power as compared to Model 2, adding only about 1% to the estimated R square. Activism rises strongly with age and is an activity in which women are strongly present. The pattern of other regression coefficients and their direction are similar to what we found for Representational Participation in Table 2, but their magnitude is greater. As was the case for the “Interest scale” in Table 1, there is a strong and positive effect of “plans to enter higher education”, and also a clear and positive effect of doing well in school.

“Close and transparent relations with parents” has a negative effect: activists show independence from parents. This need not be a sign of conflict with them since we also see that “political socialization in the home” makes a quite a strong difference. In general, it is “education indicators”—not family indicators”, which dominate as important predictors for this “mainstream” type of civic engagement among youths.

Table 3. Logistic regression of Political Activism

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3 (Controlling for cultural capital and occupational social class)	
	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)
<b>Age (in years)</b>	<b>.266</b>	<b>1.304</b>	<b>.234</b>	<b>1.263</b>	<b>.241</b>	<b>1.273</b>
<b>Gender (girl) (dummy var.)</b>	<b>.326</b>	<b>1.386</b>	<b>.389</b>	<b>1.475</b>	<b>.393</b>	<b>1.482</b>
<b>Education performance and expectations</b>						
Average grade (scale)	<b>.455</b>	<b>1.576</b>	<b>.395</b>	<b>1.484</b>	<b>.333</b>	<b>1.395</b>
Plans higher education (dummy)	<b>.648</b>	<b>1.912</b>	<b>.547</b>	<b>1.729</b>	<b>.485</b>	<b>1.624</b>
<b>Adjustment to school</b>						
Valuing school (scale)	<b>.149</b>	<b>1.160</b>	<b>.088</b>	<b>1.092</b>	<b>.107</b>	<b>1.113</b>
Disciplinary problems (scale)	<b>.149</b>	<b>1.161</b>	<b>.146</b>	<b>1.157</b>	<b>.158</b>	<b>1.171</b>
School Fatigue (scale)	<b>.253</b>	<b>1.288</b>	<b>.242</b>	<b>1.274</b>	<b>.219</b>	<b>1.245</b>
<b>Socialization in the home</b>						
Political socialization at home (scale)			<b>.207</b>	<b>1.230</b>	<b>.188</b>	<b>1.206</b>
Close and transparent relations with parents (scale)			<b>-.128</b>	<b>.880</b>	<b>-.139</b>	<b>.870</b>
<b>Constant</b>	<b>-7.400</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>-6.646</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>-7.197</b>	<b>.001</b>
R square (Nagelkerke procedure)	<b>.178</b>		<b>.210</b>		<b>.222</b>	
R sq. increase compared to model 1			<b>.032</b>		<b>.044</b>	
R sq. increase compared to model 2					<b>.012</b>	

**bold face** coefficients:  $p < .05$   $N > 8600$

“Valuing school” ceases to have a significant effect in models 2 and 3; but there are clear *positive* effects of School Fatigue and of having Disciplinary Problems. *Thus, again there is some tension between political activity, and on the other hand, submission to school authority and “staying tuned” to the instructional process of the classroom.*

#### **3.10.4 Unlawful Protest**

The IEA 2000 Civics Education studies of 18 year olds asked youths how likely it is that they in the future would become involved in certain unlawful forms of political activity. Surprisingly, it appears that such activity has not been much examined in publications from this international study. However, the Swedish report analyzed the proportion expecting to be involved in activism which would block traffic (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2003). The proportion “certain to get involved” was much higher among boys than among girls. The report also found that youths expecting to be involved in such activity discussed politics with their parents more often than others. Such militant activists were also overrepresented among those who would join political groups (p 38), but they remained a small minority among all “joiners” of such groups.

In our Norwegian sample 9% say they have been involved in protest activism by unlawful means. The logistic regression in Table 4 shows a slightly negative effect of age (younger ones being most likely to report such activity). In Norway too Unlawful Protest is very distinctively “male”.



**Table 4. Logistic regression of Unlawful Protest**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3 (With controls for cultural capital and occupational social class)	
	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)	B	Exp (B)
<b>Age</b>	<b>-.072</b>	<b>.930</b>	<b>-.116</b>	<b>.890</b>	<b>-.113</b>	<b>.893</b>
<b>Gender (girl)</b>	<b>-.714</b>	<b>.490</b>	<b>-.663</b>	<b>.515</b>	<b>-.652</b>	<b>.521</b>
<b>Education performance and expectations</b>						
Performance at school. Average grade	.049	1.050	.023	1.023	-.016	.984
Planning higher education	.067	1.069	.023	1.024	-.069	.933
Low confidence in finding work after completing education	<b>.154</b>	<b>1.166</b>	<b>.159</b>	<b>1.172</b>	<b>.166</b>	<b>1.180</b>
<b>Adjustments to school</b>						
Valuing school	<b>-.086</b>	<b>9.17</b>	-.060	.941	-.053	.948
Disciplinary problems	<b>.717</b>	<b>2.048</b>	<b>.700</b>	<b>2.014</b>	<b>.717</b>	<b>2.048</b>
School Fatigue	<b>.329</b>	<b>1.390</b>	<b>.302</b>	<b>1.353</b>	<b>.278</b>	<b>1.321</b>
<b>Socialisation in the home</b>						
Political socialisation (scale)			<b>.118</b>	<b>1.125</b>	<b>.105</b>	<b>1.111</b>
Close and transparent relations with parents			<b>-.279</b>	<b>.756</b>	<b>-.289</b>	<b>.749</b>
<b>Constant</b>	<b>-2.214</b>	<b>.109</b>	<b>-1.002</b>	<b>.367</b>	<b>-1.171</b>	<b>.310</b>
R square (Nagelkerke)	<b>.156</b>		<b>.166</b>		<b>.171</b>	
R sq. increase comp. to model 1			<b>.010</b>		<b>.015</b>	
R sq. increase comp. to model 2					<b>.005</b>	

**bold face** print:  $p < .05$   $N > 8600$  in all three models.

As in the earlier analyses, adding controls for the conventional “home background variables” adds extremely little to explained variance and does not appreciably alter the magnitude of effects or the pattern of coefficients.<sup>12</sup>

The table shows strong effects of several predictors that indicate marginalization from school. Performance and “planning higher education” are not statistically significant predictors. Rebellion against rules within school and rebellion outside are strongly connected. Across all three models in Table 4 there is a strong association with “Disciplinary Problems”—much stronger than those noted for the other forms of political activity. There is also a strong positive association with School Fatigue. Model 1 shows a weak but significantly negative association with “valuing school”. The table includes a new predictor: whether the respondents will face problems finding work when “you finish your education”. Such expected marginalisation from the labour market had no significant association with the scales examined previously. But for “Unlawful Protest” there is an effect: those involved in such militancy are more likely than others to expect problems finding work.

It is interesting that the home still matters as an arena for political socialization. There is a significantly positive association (Models 2 and 3) with discussing politics and social issues with parents. This fits observations in research on student radicalism in the United States from the 1960s: that militancy more often was an extension of parental values rather than rejection of them (Flacks 1976). We also note in Table 4 clearly negative effects of “close and transparent relations with parents”. This indicates much autonomy from parents. In this case such “independence” cannot be assumed to occur under conditions of harmony, because family relations tend to be more turbulent for this group of militant protestors than they are for others. We found that those who reported “frequent quarrels with parents” more often than others also had taken part in Unlawful Protest. The same applies to those who reported higher frequency of quarrels between “adults in our family”. Similar associations were not found with the scales of Political Activism or Representation Participation.

### ***3.10.5 Is civic engagement stronger among those who take part in student councils?***

The youths were asked if they had experience as representatives in any participative councils at school. Such councils exist in all Norwegian secondary schools, both for the school as a whole and at the class level. In multivariate analyses we found very strong effects on all measures of civic engagement (See Lauglo and Øia 2006). The logistic regression coefficient of “student council experience” was especially strongly positive for “Representational participation”. In our view these associations are so strong that they probably reflect a genuine positive effect on civic engagement. But since self-selection obviously is at work in getting “student council experience”, the associations will be inflated measures of such effects.

It is interesting to note that in having student council experience was positively associated also with “Unlawful Protest”. Thus, working “within the system” at school is in Norway positively, rather than negatively, associated with the chance of being in that small minority of militants who have not shied away from Protest by unlawful means.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> These control variables hardly have any predictive power of their own: R square was .003 (Nagelkerke procedure).

<sup>13</sup> In the Swedish IEA Civics Education study of 18 year olds, by way of contrast, a negative association was found between interest in student council activity and expecting to participate in protest action which would involve unlawful blocking of traffic (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2003). The apparent difference from Norwegian findings could be a result of the different measures used. Existing comparable data on Norway in the IEA data files, could presumably be used to see if there is a genuine difference between the two countries.

### 3.10.6 Membership in voluntary organizations

Is membership in voluntary organizations generally a sign of “civic engagement” or is it more a cause of the development of such engagement? Much of the literature on civil society (e.g., Putnam 2000) assumes that such participation builds a wider social commitment to the public domain. In our sample the percent of youths who involve themselves in any one type of organization, is quite small (a dramatic exception is sports clubs—about 40%). At the time of the 2002 survey, only 4.5% belonged to an organization with a political purpose. We examined the relationship between membership and the interest that youths take in politics and social issues, and found in most cases a positive association. It is especially strong for those organizations which have a purpose related to politics or public benefit. But a positive association was also noted for a range of other types: religious organizations, supporter clubs for sports teams, rural youth league, sports clubs, even hobby clubs (Lauglo and Øia, forthcoming). We lack data for assessing how far these associations are due to self selection as compared to genuine effects of “belonging”. However, recent reviews of research on “trust in others” point to the importance of self-selection: that higher “trust in others” characterizes those who join, rather than being a result of the experience of participation (Stolle & Hooghe 2003).

For 8 out of 16 types of voluntary associations in our data file there is also a statistically positive association between being a member and performance at school, and with “plans in higher education”. On the whole these are the same organizations for which we found membership to be strongly correlated with having an interest in politics and social issues.

## Conclusions

Civic engagement is engagement with political and social issues that are objects of collective action, beyond one’s private domain and outside the market. The term “civic” implies acceptance of the legitimacy of the political order and working within its basic rules, rather than seeking to overthrow it. In OECD countries that legitimacy must be based on political democracy. A narrow definition of engagement will focus on readiness to initiate or participate in *action*. Our wider definition includes also an active *interest* in such issues.

### 4.1 Is there a democratic deficit that schools need to address?

A need to use schools more actively in order to build civic engagement would be especially important if youths are becoming more exclusively concerned about their private lives. Research on trends over time on such matters is internationally sparse. In some countries there is evidence of declining membership rates among young people in voluntary organizations. In Norway the membership of youths in political organizations, though low, appears to have remained constant since the early 1990s. However, there is some support for the view that youths have laxer honesty than older adults in dealings with firms and other impersonal institutions and that they are less willing to make personal sacrifices for the public good. The gap between young and old is so great that it probably cannot be explained by correlates of aging. Swedish research points to great stability over recent decades in the value profile of youths. It shows increase in certain aspects of individualism but continued and possibly increasing support for egalitarian values. There is also evidence of youths being more tolerant of cultural diversity than older generations. Possibly, there is a trend towards a mindset of “live and let live” which would favour the tolerance aspect of civic engagement. At the same time it may point to reduced supply of people willing to devote time and effort in a sustained way, to organizations concerned with interest advocacy and the common weal.

IEA studies of Civic Education have also shown that in a number of countries there is a tendency for youths to be sceptical of politics as an institutionalized activity, even when the level of trust in public institutions and agencies in fact is high—as they are in the Nordic countries. It is still not clear whether

scepticism of “politics” and reluctance to get involved in stably organized civic activity is a sign of a “not caring” since low involvement can also indicate wide consensus and youths taking political institutions and processes for granted.

However, a healthy democracy benefits not only from citizens being “informed” and “concerned”. Without a participative form of civic engagement there is no stable and broadly based aggregation and expression of political interest. It is an important task for schools in OECD countries to promote such participation, especially since schools (and increasingly higher education) are the dominant institutional arena outside the family, for youths during their politically formative years.

#### **4.2 Does education boost civic engagement?**

International research literature shows a strong and systematic association among adults between “level of education” and indicators of civic engagement—including tolerance. Education matters also when occupational social status is statistically held constant. These effects are so consistent and strong that it is reasonable to assume considerable causal influence from “education” to “civic engagement”.

We find in our Norwegian data on secondary school students that doing well in school and, especially, expecting to continue to higher education, are positively associated with civic engagement—both “interest” and participation. The one exception is participation in protest action by unlawful means. This may indicate that educational “success” promotes an engagement in politics that stays within “the rules of the game”—at least in the context Norwegian society.

Higher education in particular has in a number of studies and countries been shown to make a statistical difference for civic engagement. Some of this effect is probably due to a foundation laid while youths are on their way to higher education. The secondary school age (in Norway 13 to 19) is a politically formative period during which interests in political and social issues rise. The single most important “education predictor” of civic engagement of Norwegian secondary school students is not performance in school, but whether they hope and plan to progress to higher education. This remains a valid observation also after controls for their family’s cultural capital and social class.

#### **4.3 The importance of student council experience**

We find in our Norwegian research material strong support for the conclusion that experience of student council participation predisposes youths to become engaged in political activity. This is inferred from statistical associations which we judge to be so strong that they probably indicate a causal influence even if some portion of the association will be due to self-selection.

#### **4.4 Civic engagement and adjustment to life at school**

Civic engagement is not part of some pliant and conformist adjustment to life at school. Valuing school—recognizing the importance of education and expressing on the whole appreciation of life at school, is positively associated with taking an “interest” and with participation in the traditional form of “youth politics” and civic involvement. The latter would be youth wings of political parties, and voluntary organizations concerned with advocacy. However “valuing school” is not associated with the kind of “Activism” that requires no sustained organizational involvement by participants. In the case of Protest action that resorts to unlawful means, those who “value school” more are slightly less likely to be involved.

School Fatigue, which mainly measures mental disengagement from the classroom process of learning and instruction, has no significant association with interest in politics and social issues. However, it has a positive effect on all three types of political activity examined on the Norwegian data on youths: *Those who are more active politically report more frequently than others such disengagement.* This is most

strongly so for Protest resorting to unlawful means. But it also applies to political Activism of the “lawful” and mainstream kind, and (less strongly) to Representational Participation of the traditional and formally organized kind.

The clearest sign that political activity goes with a degree of friction with schools as institutions is the pattern of relations with Discipline Problems. Those who more frequently have had run-ins with school authorities are also more likely than others to have taken part in Unlawful Protest. It is interesting to note that a similar but weaker pattern applies to the “lawful” types of political participation: Activism as well as membership in political youth organizations. Discipline problems are more frequent even among those who have experience of participation in student councils within the school (See Lauglo and Øia 2006). However, there is no association between Discipline Problems and merely taking an interest in politics and social issues. Thus it is those who convert their interest in actual political participation, who more often than others have had conflictual relations with school authority. We see these findings as signs of assertive independence among politically active youths.

#### **4.5 Socialisation at home**

Being “interested” in politics and social issues or belonging to that small minority of youths who take part in traditional form of politics (Representational Participation) shows no association with having “Close and transparent relations with Parents.” However, there is a weak *negative* effect on Activism of the mainstream variety, and a stronger negative effect on being involved in Unlawful Protest. These forms of political activity appear to be especially associated with assertive independence. Relations with parents can of course still be “close” but not of the kind which means that parents stay closely informed about the daily activity of their children.

The positive associations between civic engagement and “Political Socialization in the Home” are strikingly consistent and usually quite strong, across all indicators of civic engagement, and all statistical models. This measure of home influence reflects both how frequently the student talks with parents about politics and social issues, *and* such communication occurs in a family context where the student is encouraged to make his/her own decisions. The effect is especially strong with regard to Interest in politics and social issues and for “lawful” forms of political activity. But it is interesting to note that the coefficient is also significantly positive for “Unlawful Protest” giving some support to the hypothesis that also militant protest tends to have a positive base in socialization in the family --rather than being rebellion against parents. The Norwegian findings show that young people’s active interest and involvement in politics continue to be strongly rooted in the family contrary to much current theorizing about the declining influence of the family as a source of young people’s identities in contemporary modern societies.

#### **4.6 Gender and civic engagement**

Girls participate more than boys in the mainstream form of political activism. On the other hand, boys are much more likely to take part in Protest action by unlawful means—which involves only a distinctly small minority of youths. We read the findings to indicate that the already strong involvement of females in Norwegian politics will be further strengthened in future years as these young people reach their participatory prime in politics and civil society.

#### **4.7 Suggestions for research**

- We found that youths who are actively involved in politics show impatience with school and more often than others have run-ins with school authority, though they also value the importance of school and have their eyes set on higher education. Apart from studies on student radicalism of the 1960s and early 70s, research has neglected the relationship between “friction with school” and

socially committed youth. Does such friction apply to youths across the political spectrum, including those who identify with mainstream political parties? What measures can reduce such “friction”?

- If civic engagement were mainly a function of social status, one would expect attenuation of the relationship between education and such engagement, as the higher reaches of education become less exclusive. On the other hand, one can expect increased educational meritocratization of recruitment to politics as talented and socially skilled youths from ordinary homes acquire opportunities to rise within the education system—while previously they might have risen to civic and political leadership within their social class of origin, outside of any select educational institutions. Research on such issues is wanting.
- The importance of the family for socialization to politics and civic participation is poorly researched. Too often it has been assumed that the only “family background” traits which matter are social class and cultural capital. Regrettably, current fashions in social theory that focus on increased individualism steer attention away from probing more deeply into those aspects of “family background” which matter for civic engagement. Our findings show that family influences on young people’s civic engagement are strong. What matters is growing up in a family that cares about the public domain. Young people who have such a family background are not only more likely to get involved with the public domain themselves, they also benefit educationally from this background. Such influences are in our data not reducible to social class or cultural capital. Attention is needed to this neglected theme of research.

#### 4.8 Suggestions for policy

- Regardless of whether countries face a growing “democratic deficit”: civic engagement is good for democracy and good in the long run for social cohesion. Secondary education is now nearly universal in many countries and comprises formative years for civic engagement. Policy makers should recognize that the building of civic engagement is an important task for secondary schools.
- Student-councils are an early grooming ground for active citizenship. Countries should introduce civic engagement as theme in their annual educational indicators. One set of indicators could be rates of student participation in participatory councils.
- Countries can usefully review the arrangements for participatory councils in schools with a view to broadening their base and widening their function.
- Indicators of civic engagement should be included in national surveys which are combined with achievement testing. These indicators should not be confined to membership in organisations, they should also include volunteering and activism.
- Families in which parents and their children talk about politics and social issues matter for civic engagement (and for educational performance and ambition) among secondary school students. Indicators of “home background” in national surveys (in PISA combined with testing of students) should be widened to include measures of such family influences.
- As secondary schools now are the main institutional arena outside the family, during young people’s formative years for civic engagement, there is a case for organizing education in such a way that it provides common social space for youths from diverse cultural and social origins.

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