



EDUCATION, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

# Education, Democracy and Inequality

Political Engagement and Citizenship Education in Europe

Bryony Hoskins · Jan Germen Janmaat



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# Education, Economy and Society

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Political Engagement and Citizenship  
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Education, Economy and Society

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# Preface

The thought about writing a book together synthesising and expanding our work on education and political engagement first crossed our minds four years ago. We both felt the need to write a more substantial piece enabling us to not only put all our existing research in a coherent frame but also provide it with a more solid theoretical grounding, update it on key aspects and explore new lines of inquiry suggested by our previous publications. The product lying before you represents our effort in achieving these aims.

Although writing a book requires patience as it is always interrupted by more urgent duties or activities deemed to be more important, such as writing articles for prestigious journals or bids for funded research, it is more rewarding in the end because it allows for a fuller explanation of one's line of argument, including relevant theoretical perspectives and research approaches. In contrast, the strict word limit imposed on articles by many journals feels like a straightjacket, impelling authors to cut the exposition of their ideas and lines of argument short.

Authoring a book is also more gratifying, yet more challenging as well (!), in that it forces the composers to think hard about the key message that it should convey. In our case, we had to spend several brainstorming sessions on this issue before it revealed itself to us in a single sentence: 'Education reinforces social inequalities in political engagement by not offering children of different social backgrounds equal access to valuable

learning opportunities.’ We argue, essentially, that schools do not provide working-class children with the same engagement-promoting activities as middle-class children. As the former usually have lower engagement levels to begin with, schools only exacerbate the social engagement gap. As long as this is the key point that sticks among readers, we are happy.

We contributed exactly equal halves to the book and leave it to the reader to figure out which of the chapters have a stronger imprint of the first-named author and which of the second-named author. Far more important is the fact that our joint brainstorming sessions, and the mutual learning that this entails, allowed us to develop new insights and innovative approaches, to the benefit not only of the present product but also of our future research trajectories.

London, UK  
March 2019

Bryony Hoskins  
Jan Germen Janmaat

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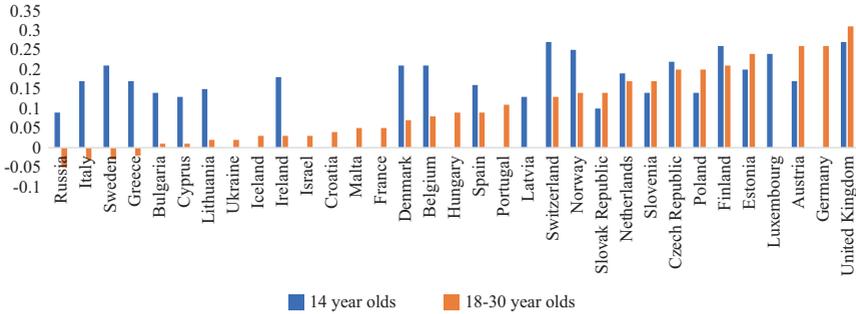


# 1

## Introduction

### Why This Book and Why Now?

The level of youth participation in the 2017 UK election is contested and widely debated (Sloam et al. 2018; Sloam and Henn 2019; Prosser et al. 2018). However, what is uncontested is the fact that by some considerable margin the social group who voted the least were disadvantaged young people (young people aged 18–34 who were either unemployed or doing unskilled and semi-skilled labour). Their level of voter turnout was about 35% (Ipsos MORI 2017). The second-lowest group in terms of turnout levels were young people (18–34) doing skilled manual labour at 49%. All other social groups according to gender, age, social class and ethnicity had a turnout rate of more than 50% and the overall turnout was about 63% (Ipsos MORI 2017). Thus, the intersection between social class and age was the crucial factor amongst the myriad of ways in which people differ that defines the likelihood that they voted in the 2017 election. Research indicates that political participation at a young age instils patterns of behaviour that individuals draw on through the rest of their lives (Flanagan and Levine 2010). Thus, from this initial evidence, social differences in political engagement are unlikely to improve

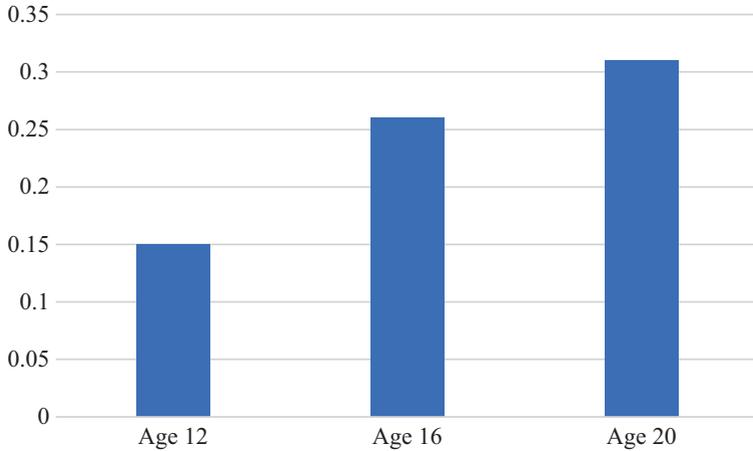


**Fig. 1.1** The relation between social background and voting among two age groups. Sources: ICCS 2009 for the 14-year-olds; European Social Survey, Rounds 4–7 (2008–2014) for the young adults

in the short term, and it is the next generation currently in education that we need to support in their learning of political engagement.

The phenomenon of socioeconomic inequalities in political engagement unfortunately is not new, not confined just to voting and applies to most of the democratic western world (Dalton 2017). Nevertheless, these inequalities are significantly worse in the UK compared to other countries in Europe. To see this visually, the graph in Fig. 1.1 shows the strength of the association between socioeconomic background, as measured with parental education and occupation, and electoral participation for 14-year-olds and young adults across Europe. The UK stands out as the country in Europe with the largest effect of social background on voting for both age groups (voting intentions for the 14-year-olds). This effect is positive, which means that turnout among young people of disadvantaged backgrounds is much lower than among their more socially privileged peers.

Adding to the importance and urgency of examining how social disparities in political participation come about, particularly in the UK, is the fact that these disparities appear to become more salient during adolescence. This is demonstrated by Fig. 1.2, which shows that the association between socioeconomic status (SES) and intention to vote among young people in England is becoming stronger between the ages of 12 and 20, moving from an insignificant positive correlation of 0.15 to a significant one of 0.31.



**Fig. 1.2** The relation between social background and intention to vote among English teenagers. Source: The Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS)

The democratic ideal is social equality in political voice. The justification for this is that everybody's views and needs should be taken into account in political decisions and policy development for a democracy to be truly representative and responsive to its electorate. Nevertheless, social inequalities in political engagement have been rife within western democracies for a considerable amount of time, and the evidence suggests that this gap is increasing in the ever more unequal and globalised world in which we live (Dalton 2017). This phenomenon has been connected to 'Diploma democracy' (Bovens and Wille 2017, p. 140), which refers to a situation where the university educated dominate the parliaments, the political parties, NGOs and even protest marches whilst the less educated are participating less in all these political arenas and have great difficulty in having their voices heard. The long-term effect of this has been that the educated and wealthy have acquired a greater influence on public policy (Verba et al. 1995), leaving the poor and least educated feeling alienated, powerless and distrustful of mainstream politics (Bovens and Wille 2017). The feeling of political alienation not only excludes certain voices from the decision-making process but also leaves untapped frustration, which has been exploited in referendums and elections by populist and extremist parties (Huber and Ruth 2017; Kriesi 2014; Mair 2009;

Katz and Peter 2009). These parties and political agendas have quite successfully positioned themselves as outsiders agitating against the political elite and have had some success in politically mobilising the disaffected and lower socioeconomic groups, as exemplified by the UK EU referendum in 2016, Trump's election in the US in 2016 and the victories of populist anti-immigrant parties in the 2018 Hungarian and Italian parliamentary elections.

Instead of tackling the issue of political alienation head-on with a strong citizenship education (CE) programme, gradually more and more schools in England have been able to opt out of citizenship education as they have taken on the status of academies or free schools and are only required to teach Math, Science, English and Religious Education. In England in 2018, just under three quarters of state-funded secondary schools had this status and their number is growing rapidly (UK Government 2018). Thus, this recent trend in England may well undo the progress made with the introduction of compulsory citizenship education in the national curriculum in 2001. In the US, a country which the UK often follows, inequalities in the provision of citizenship education have become so extreme that in New York, students are suing the Rhode Island Department of Education for not providing the education that they need to vote or have their voices heard (New York Times 2018).

Nevertheless, citizenship education may not always be the most effective way to learn political engagement. How young people learn to politically engage is complex and the influence of social class and family background on this process is even more difficult to tease out. Recent political socialisation research indicates that the political alienation and disengagement of the disadvantaged are passed down from one generation to the next (Brady et al. 2015; Hoskins et al. 2017), thus maintaining the status quo and preventing social mobility in political engagement. Nevertheless, until now, there are few in-depth theories that explain the reproduction of social inequalities in political engagement and little in the way of systematic analysis of empirical data on the role of the school in this process. In this regard, Brady et al. (2015) berates the lack of political socialisation theory and empirical research that identifies the transmission process between generations of economic, human and social capital, and how this perpetuates unequal patterns of political engagement.

Rather than researching the education system to explore how social inequalities in political engagement are reproduced, much of the focus of recent political science research has been on the social status afforded by education (Nie et al. 1996; Campbell 2006; Dalton 2017) and contextual factors such as the changing nature of political participation in western democracies, which demands higher levels of knowledge and skills to participate (Dalton 2017). We might have thought that the question of social reproduction in political engagement demands attention from the education field, but few educational studies appear to have focused on it. This book addresses this gap by discussing theories and evidence of the socialisation process from the sociology of education literature and draws on a range of learning theories, including participatory/constructionist, critical pedagogy and cognitive theories, to develop and test theories about the learning of political engagement in the school environment.

## What's New in This Book?

The world of education has focused heavily in recent years on social mobility in employment, careers and economic returns (Blanden et al. 2007; Macmillan 2009; Crawford et al. 2011). Education for Employability is the dominant discourse within the political neoliberal agenda of the western world. In contrast, learning political engagement, particularly since the 2008 economic crisis, has been a low priority (Hoskins et al. 2016). Policy and practice on facilitating social equality in political engagement are hardly mentioned at all. Schooling has been developed, even with the best of intentions, to help get disadvantaged kids to succeed on basic skills tests. Yet such practices represent more restrictive environments for the learning of political engagement (Ben-Porath 2013 and see Chap. 2). Thus, qualifications for employability have become the dominant school mantra above educational aims towards supporting democracy, social justice and social inclusion, and these aims have equally dominated the education research field.

The lack of empirical research focusing on the reproduction of social inequalities in political engagement has meant that we have had to turn in this book to the sociology of education literature and theories on social

mobility more generally to develop our own theory. In this book we draw on the social theories of class and social reproduction of Bourdieu and Bernstein and theories of social class and access to learning from the seminal work of Bowles and Gintis (1976, 2011). Back in the 1970s, the latter explained how the US education system socialised students into the appropriate attitudes, values and behaviour for particular positions in the labour market. They thus saw the education system as exclusively serving the needs of the market economy. We draw on these sociological theories and the criticisms of these theories to build a new theory of the reproduction of social inequalities in political engagement. *In brief, this theory states that young people learn to become engaged through a combination of participatory activities and knowledge transmission processes and that education can contribute to social reproduction (1) by not providing the same access to these learning opportunities and (2) by providing learning opportunities from which middle-class children benefit more than working-class ones.* In this regard we build on a small but increasing body of knowledge that has begun to show that the separation of students within the education system, technically referred to as tracking, has an additional and independent effect on levels of political engagement (Janmaat et al. 2014; Hoskins and Janmaat 2016; Hoskins et al. 2017). In this book we look at access to specific political learning approaches from the age of 11–12 to 23. This is particularly interesting as at this earlier age the separation and differentiation of learning opportunities are much less explicit in the UK education system. We also explore young people's access to voluntary political learning opportunities both within and between schools with different social intakes.

This book provides not only the theory but also the evidence that explains the reproduction of social inequalities in political engagement and in particular the role of the school in this process. It examines in depth the process of this reproduction within the education system in the UK and across Europe. It analyses the extent to which experiences of schooling have an influence, both positively and negatively, on social inequalities in political engagement. Education has been considered the main policy tool for increasing levels of political engagement. Scholars have consistently shown that education always has a strong association with levels of political engagement (Verba et al. 1995; Nie et al. 1996),

and knowledge and skills have been considered crucial resources enabling political engagement (Verba et al. 1995). Nevertheless, increasing levels of participation in higher education have not led to the same growth in political engagement. As a result, scholars have started to argue that measures of education are simply another metric of socioeconomic status and reflect the social class differences in family socialisation for academic success and political engagement before school entry (Persson 2012, 2014; Kam and Palmer 2008; Burden 2009). Another argument made is that political engagement is not a reflection of the learning process but rather a consequence of the social status afforded by the qualifications gained (Nie et al. 1996; see also Campbell 2006). All these scholars argue that the school system and learning within the school make little difference to social inequalities in political engagement.

In contrast, the argument and evidence presented within this book are that the school system has an additional effect beyond the learning in the home in which one grows up and the social status of the qualifications that learners gain. We argue that the effect of the education system and schooling on political engagement is complex and certainly not all bad news. We will provide evidence showing that specific types of education such as participatory activities in school, a safe and open environment for discussion and citizenship education can provide all social groups with similar learning opportunities for political engagement. Thus, given the opportunity, all young people can and do benefit from these learning opportunities (see Chaps. 4 and 5).

However, the analyses presented in this book suggest that not all social groups within the schooling system have equal access to these learning opportunities. We find that students from lower social backgrounds gain less political learning experiences than their peers within the same school and in schools with a more socially privileged intake. The differences are in the opportunities to learn through participation. It is this lack of access that provides the basis for the reproduction of social inequalities in political engagement (Chaps. 4 and 5). Tackling these differences in access to opportunities to learn is the basis for creating higher levels of equality in political engagement. We will return to this point in our concluding chapter (Chap. 8).

We also explore in the book whether there are methods used at school that can mitigate socioeconomic differences in political engagement (Chaps. 4 and 5). The good news for the education system is that we find citizenship education, as one of the learning opportunities, to have some mitigating effects on inequalities in political engagement. Another uplifting result is that there are no accelerating effects. In other words, participation in the learning opportunities does not widen the social gaps in engagement (see Chaps. 4 and 5).

Another of the added values of this book is the empirical evidence that we have drawn together to develop the findings on the reproduction of social inequalities in political engagement. This book focuses on analysing the education experience from the age of 11 to 23, including lower secondary, upper secondary and higher education. We follow the same young people in the UK using longitudinal data through their experiences of school to the age when they can legally vote and have a chance to participate in a national election. A major focus of this book is on lower secondary education (Chaps. 4 and 5) as this is the phase of education when children experience compulsory citizenship education and when choices in education and training start to take place. We continue this analysis into post-16 education and higher education to explore how different educational trajectories and tracks vary in the opportunities they offer for learning political engagement (Chaps. 6 and 7).

We compare both lower and upper secondary school experiences in England with other European countries. The benefit of providing this comparative analysis is to understand if education systems in other countries are better able to provide inclusive access to effective political learning opportunities. If some countries can achieve a greater level playing field for learning opportunities in political engagement, social gaps in these opportunities are not inevitable and schools can be organised differently to create greater levels of equality in political engagement. Factors that we examine include the age of first selection, the status difference between academic and vocational tracks and participation in higher education. What we typically find (in Chap. 7) is that the English education system is providing the most unequal access to learning political engagement across Europe.

The first data source that we draw on is the English Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS). The CELS data is unique in that it combines a panel study of adolescents with a questionnaire tapping a wide range of both forms of learning citizenship, actual and intended form of political engagement. The study includes a nationally representative cohort of young people aged 11–12 in 2003. This cohort was then surveyed about every two years until 2014 (Round 6) when the students were 22–23. For comparisons with other countries for lower secondary students we have used the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). ICCS includes nationally representative samples collected among Grade 8 students (13–14 years old) in 25 European countries. We use the 2009 data as this was the last study that England participated in. The final data set that we use for comparisons is the European Social Survey. This survey, which occurs every two years, uses nationally representative samples of the adult population in 30 countries in Europe. It allows for comparison of social and political attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. We use the age group of 18–30-year olds.

When we explore the learning of political engagement, we explore a wide range of forms of political engagement, from the more conventional such as voting and party membership to the less conventional such as different forms of peaceful protest (demonstrations, signing petitions, boycotting products) and illegal forms of protest. When the young people we follow are aged 18 and older we more often than not examine actual forms of political engagement focusing on recent national and European elections and their actual participation in protest activities. When they are younger we focus more on their intentions to politically engage so that we can track these same forms of political engagement into adulthood.

## **Who Will Be Interested in Reading This Book?**

This is an interdisciplinary book written for multiple audiences. The first of these are academics and students who have an interest in political engagement from the field of education, political science, sociology and the social sciences more broadly. It is also equally written for policy

makers, educators and those working in civil society organisations who are interested in understanding the topic of social inequalities in political engagement and who are keen to facilitate equality in political voice. The book is also written for members of the public who are concerned about the state of democracy in western democracies and would like to consider some possible remedies using the education system.

## Structure of the Book

The book begins with two chapters that provide the basis for a theory on the reproduction of social inequalities in political engagement. They start by discussing theories on how young people learn to become engaged and then move on to identify theories that set out the barriers to these learning opportunities particularly in schools. The first of these chapters explains the theory of how political engagement is learnt using two different conceptual models of learning: one a cognitive model based on the acquisition of knowledge and the other a constructivist model based on active participation and co-construction of meaning. The chapter identifies how both theories can be useful in understanding the learning of political engagement and the extent to which these learning opportunities may exist within the school environment. The second of the theoretical chapters detects the potential barriers within the school system to learning political engagement. Drawing on Bourdieu and Bernstein, this chapter will explain the relationship between socioeconomic background and the learning of political engagement in the home and how this then influences the access to learning political engagement in the school environment. In addition, we draw on the social theory of Bowles and Gintis to explain the issue of access to political learning in school. The chapter will also discuss theories regarding the potential inequality-enhancing or inequality-mitigating effects of different forms of political learning.

Having set out the framework of a theory of the social reproduction of inequalities in political engagement, Chaps. 4, 5, 6 and 7 will then test these theories for different age groups and different education systems across Europe. Chapter 4 focuses on testing the theories in lower school using longitudinal studies in England whilst Chap. 5 focuses on analysing