



Experiences of school democracy connected to the role of the democratic citizen in the future: A comparison of Swedish male and female upper secondary school students

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Keywords: experiences of school democracy, upper secondary education, gender differences, intention to vote, ambition

Highlights:

- Most important for student's democratic attitudes is their personal trait of ambition.
- Female students are more ambitious concerning their schoolwork than male students.
- Experiences of school democracy do not differ between male and female students.
- Experiences of school democracy do not directly foretell students' intention to vote.

Purpose: The aim of this study was to explore the link between upper secondary school students' experiences of school democracy and their future role as democratic citizens, focusing on a comparison between men and women.

Design/methodology/approach: The data derives from a questionnaire conducted to all last year upper secondary school students in Kronoberg county, Sweden. A hypothesis based on the theory of participatory democracy was tested through a four-step multilevel regression analysis.

Findings: The result show no direct effects from experiences of school democracy on the intention to vote, neither for female nor for male students. Instead, the most important factor for civic virtues and behaviour seems to be the personal trait of ambition, which is more prevalent among female students.

Research limitations/implications: More research on different ways to realize democracy in classroom connected to promotion of citizenship is needed, and so is research on how to encourage students' ambition which is shown to be beneficial both for the individual and for the common good in a democratic society.

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Suggested citation:

Jormfeldt, J. (2023). Experiences of school democracy connected to the role of the democratic citizen in the future. A comparison of Swedish male and female upper secondary school students. In: *Journal of Social Science Education* 22(3). <https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-5530>

Declaration of conflicts of interests: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors. This work did not receive funding from external sources to do research and the author has not received any financial benefit or incentive related to the writing of this article.



1 INTRODUCTION

Will women take over the world politics? There are some reasons to believe so. Females are more successful in school than males and education is a promotor for civic virtues and civic action. In this article, upper secondary school student responses on a survey conducted in a county in southern Sweden will be used for multilevel regression analyses. The students' experiences of school democracy will be measured through two dimensions, capturing the students' own perceptions of influence and discussion in everyday school environment. The aim is to explore the link between upper secondary school students' experiences of school democracy and their future role as democratic citizens, focusing on a comparison between men and women.

1.1 A link between education and political activity

Many scholars have tried to find the causal link between education and political activity (ref. e.g. Langton & Jennings, 1968:865; Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995:433; Niemi & Junn, 1998:2 f; Hillygus, 2005; Berinsky & Lenz, 2011). Since female students excel in the education system (Van Houtte, 2004; DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013) a gender comparison in the search for this link is highly motivated. There are gender differences in partisan identification (Gillion, Ladd & Meredith, 2020) in voter behaviour and in opinions on political issues (Inglehart & Norris, 2000; Howell & Day, 2000; Adman, 2009) and also in those elected in office (Dolan & Lawless, 2021). According to Howell and Day (2000) the gender gap in some political issues increases with higher levels of education. The connection between education and civic behaviour on the one hand and the gender difference in school achievement on the other, could result in a gender difference in civic behaviour.

Concerning what in education that makes people more knowledgeable, interested, and active as citizens, Condon (2015) argues that we need to focus on what is learned rather than on the numbers of years spent in school. In a study in the 1960s, Langton and Jennings established that courses in social sciences at school had no impact on the individual's political knowledge or interest in politics (Langton & Jennings, 1968:865 f). However, subsequent studies have reached different conclusions (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995:424 f; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Torney-Purta, 2002; Hillygus, 2005; Campbell, 2019). Furthermore, some researchers have tested out hypotheses involving indoctrination (Glaeser & Ponzetto, 2007:82 f), socialization (Hillygus, 2005:41; cf. Glaeser & Ponzetto, 2007:83), selection (Langton & Jennings, 1968:866; Glaeser & Ponzetto, 2007:83; Berinsky & Lenz, 2011; cf. Hillygus 2005:40) or reading and writing skills (Bennett, Rhine & Flickinger, 2000; Hillygus, 2005; Condon, 2015) as the actual core factors in the impact of education for promoting democracy. Some of these hypotheses have received a certain amount of support, but there is no single explanatory factor of decisive importance. In this article, the focus is everyday experiences of school democracy. Can civic behaviour be learned through a democratic school environment?

1.2 Political socialization and gender

Despite females' educational supremacy, males continue to dominate on higher positions in working life and politics (Blackburn et al, 2002; SOU 2004:43; Dolan & Lawless, 2021). Bos et al. (2022) state that women are still disadvantaged in politics due to less political interest and less political ambition. Political socialization is a process that takes place alongside gender socialization. Young girls change their perceptions of politics in their formative years, starting to think that politics is a male domain (Bos et al., 2022). A common explanation for women being less politically active is that women take on greater family responsibility (e.g. Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995; Conway, 2001). However, the findings by Bos et al. (2022) indicate that the gendered socialization might start long before family life. This study investigates potential gender differences among individuals who are still in school. Students at upper secondary schools have not yet been affected by differences in level of education and labour market position; even the traditional trends for family life are a subsequent and hitherto irrelevant issue. The different premises between the genders normally used to explain political differences between men and women are thus still a future factor for the respondents.

1.3 The case of Sweden

There are good reasons to choose Sweden as a case for analyses in this area. Sweden is a country where gender equality is highly valued both by public authorities and people in general. Women are part of the work force to a large extent (Eurostat, 2019). Modern-day Swedish women and men have approximately the same extent of involvement in different types of political activities (Bergqvist, Adman & Jungar, 2008:77). However, the Swedish labour market is highly gender segregated (SOU 2004:43, pp. 91 f; Jonsson 2004:361). This has consequences for the upper secondary school education, which is accordingly gender segregated, especially when it comes to vocational education programmes. Furthermore, after a school choice reform in the 1990s the Swedish school system is offering a notable freedom of choice for parents and students (Fjellman, Yang Hansen & Beach, 2019). Both municipal and independent schools are tax-financed, and all schools are subject to the same governing documents. This publicly funded student voucher system has led to a segregation where background conditions constitute restrictions for where the students perceive themselves to belong (Dovemark & Holm, 2017). School choice is a mirror of socioeconomic cleavages in Sweden. Considering this, Sweden is a case where experiences of school democracy could be expected to differ according to school, gender and type of educational programme. The Swedish school system consists of one year of compulsory pre-school, nine years of compulsory school and three years of voluntary upper secondary school. Although it is voluntary, almost everyone attends upper secondary school. Therefore, the respondents in this study cover the entire socioeconomic spectrum in the age group of 18–19 year olds in Kronoberg county.

Next follows a literature review, leading to the general hypothesis of the study. The

data, variables and analysis will then be presented and thereafter the results. Finally, there will be a section with conclusion and discussion.

2 LITERATURE OVERVIEW

2.1 Participatory democracy and intentions to vote

The theoretical foundation of the assumption that good experiences of democracy in school could result in democratic behaviour in adult life is fetched from the theory of participatory democracy. Participatory democracy is thought to make individuals being more interested in and knowledgeable about politics, besides making them develop more altruistic views (Pateman, 1970). Dealing with decision making in cooperation with others is supposed to wake an interest in and understanding of how the things that are decided on work. This in turn is supposed to lead to an increased sense of responsibility, and to play down self-interest in favor of the common good. Political efficacy is a concept covering the belief that oneself has the capacity to affect politics. According to Pateman (1970) participation in workplace decision making contributes to develop political efficacy.

The theory of participatory democracy has been questioned (e.g. Teorell, 2006) and tested by many scholars (e.g. Adman, 2008; Geurkink, Akkerman & Sluiter, 2020). Adman (2008) concludes that no effects on political activity from workplace participation could be found, after having conducted rigorous panel data analyses. However, in a cross-sectional study from the Netherlands Geurkink, Akkerman and Sluiter (2020) find complex results from supporting and suppressing voice at the workplace. Besides the common studies on positive effects of workplace experiences on political participation they also investigate the effects of negative experiences. For example, they state that workers that have been silenced by their supervisor tend to be more active in political parties (Geurkink, Akkerman & Sluiter, 2020:14). From that conclusion, we can assume that both good and bad experiences can prompt action.

There are several theoretical suggestions on the nature of political participation, but not everyone is adaptive to a school context. When Teorell (2006) elaborates three models of democracy – the responsive, the participatory and the deliberative – the two latter are applicable to a school setting, giving their nature and the conditions for democracy in school. The participative model concerns participation as direct decision making while the deliberative model describes participation as political discussion (Teorell, 2006). These models have proven to be important in previous research investigating connections between “political participation intentions and a participatory climate at school” (Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013). Quintelier and Hooghe (2013:576) find that an open climate for classroom discussions is associated with students’ intention to vote (among other kinds of political participation). In contrast, students’ experiences of a direct influence in decisions about school are negatively related to intentions to vote. Besand (2020) is

warning that school activities presented as democratic but perceived by students as nothing but simulated participation could harm instead of develop their democratic learning (cf. Bruch & Soss, 2018). One of Teorell's (2006) main points is that each model of democracy should be evaluated in relation to the normative argument of its consequences. The normative thought behind local setting participation in decision making is self-development, not election turnout. The normative thought behind the deliberative discussion is to promote the legitimacy of the democratic system. Thus, according to Teorell (2006), a fair empirical study testing the theory of participatory democracy should focus on effects in self-development. Still, both self-development in terms of political efficacy and the perception of a legitimate democratic system could be promoters for electoral participation. Electoral participation is generally valued as a democratic virtue, encouraged in liberal democracies, and encouraged in school. It may be difficult to predict one's own interest in voting during an election that is around two years ahead in the future, when you are young and have never voted before. Even so, researchers find it worthwhile to ask (e.g. Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013; Holbein et al., 2020). Furthermore, the students' estimates of their own future participation in elections are reasonably comparable with each other. They are, after all, in the same position as prospective first-time voters.

2.2 School democracy

Pateman's theory concerns primarily workplace participation but she states that the argument is also relevant for students. A participatory system in educational institutions is justified, since students are "mature citizens of the future" (Pateman, 1970:109). Moreover, a school study is justified because of the explicit democratic mission of school, which is not apparent in workplaces. Also, the important element of learning – participation is anticipated to educate participants with democratic skills (Elstub, 2018:190) – motivates a test of the theory in school settings. One of the expressed purposes underlying the democratic mission in schools is to encourage the students to become democratic citizens and to promote involvement in societal life (Hahn, 2001; Amadeo et al, 2002; Besand, 2020). School democracy is expected to promote political involvement. It is reasonable to believe that the students who have a positive attitude towards voting in future elections have more favourable experiences of school democracy than others, quite simply because they are more interested in democratic participation (Campbell, 2019). Therefore, a word of caution is needed concerning the direction of causality (cf. Berinsky & Lenz, 2011). Moreover, in a rigorous study Holbein et al. (2020) have shown that grit is an important trait to explain intentions to vote among not yet eligible students. Grit is a concept that captures the determination to achieve one's goals, the readiness to exert oneself, the personal ambition. Since the aim here is to demonstrate how the students' experiences of the democratic mission in upper secondary school are linked to their attitudes towards voting, the personal ambition needs to be considered.

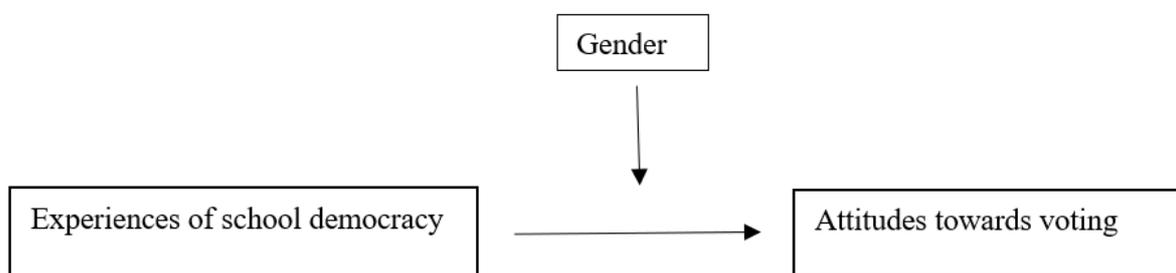
Bos et al. (2022) describes the importance of acknowledging political socialization as gendered. Young girls tend to over the school years develop a notion of politics as a male area. Something happens between childhood and adolescence that reinforces the gender stereotypes of what is male and what is female (Bos et al., 2022). The democratic climate in school might affect this gendered political socialization process. Lay (2017) has found that girls learn more about politics and gain more political efficacy in environments with less conflict. A democratic dimension of discussion could be seen as more peaceful than a dimension of influence, and perhaps therefore be more beneficial for female students. Quintelier and Hooghe (2013) state that students who perceive an open participatory democratic climate in school more often express intentions to future political participation. However, they recommend further research on different aspects of this climate, for example interactions with gender (Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013:580).

The definition of school democracy is in no way a foregone conclusion, and neither is measurement of how it is experienced by students. For this context, school democracy is operationalized into the two specific components *influence* and *discussion*, both adapted to realistically measurable aspects of day to day life at school for the students. While influence is a form of direct impact that can be designated as some type of participatory democracy, discussion is a measure of the schools' deliberative qualities. Thus, the influence component relates to Teorell's (2006) model of participatory democracy, and the discussion component relates to his model of deliberative democracy. Although influence and discussion do not necessarily have to conflict (see e.g. Elstub, 2018), there are interesting studies showing their widely different impacts in school. Almgren has demonstrated that influence has a negative effect on political knowledge among students, while an "open climate for discussion" has a positive impact (Almgren, 2006:151 f). Several scholars confirm that an open climate for discussion in schools promotes democracy (Ekman, 2007:132 f; ref. also Torney-Purta, 2002:210; Campbell, 2008; Lenzi et al., 2014; Reichert, Chen & Torney-Purta, 2018). In the analyses to follow school democracy will be measured in the two dimensions influence and discussion.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 The general hypothesis

The general hypothesis here, shown in figure 1, is that upper secondary school students' everyday experiences of school democracy influence their interest in taking part in future general elections. The hypothesis is derived from the theory of participative democracy and the thought that participating in a democratic school environment should promote political efficacy and political interest. This should, in turn, enhance intentions to vote. Also, this influence from experiences of school democracy is expected to be affected by gender.

Figure 1. The general hypothesis

The analyses to come will show if and in what way experiences of school democracy differ between men and women and if gender affects the way experiences of school democracy prognosticate voting.

3.2 Data

The empirical basis for this study is a survey conducted among students in their last (third) year, in *all upper secondary schools* in the Swedish county of Kronoberg in the school year 2008/2009. The survey covered a wide range of questions concerning different aspects of democracy. The data were used to explore how experiences of democracy are affected by gender composition in the classroom (Jormfeldt, 2011; Jormfeldt, 2023). However, in this study items that have not been used before are analyzed. The data is believed to have kept its value over the years mainly for two reasons. First, gender differences in school achievements persist according to current statistics (Skolverket, 2022) and this dataset gives an opportunity to future studies using the same instrument, allowing a longitudinal perspective. Second, although there have been recent changes in school regulations in Sweden, the democratic mission has not been revised (SKOLFS 2022:13). Comparisons of male and female students' experiences of school democracy are thus relevant, and this study aims to give a model to how such a comparison can be constructed. The dataset is unique, since the questionnaire was distributed on paper by the researcher, who visited each classroom. In total, 1,524 students aged 18–19 years responded to the questionnaire, corresponding to 61 percent of the total population.¹ The survey comprises 18 schools, all differing significantly in character. Some of the schools are large with a wide range of study programmes. Others are small and specialise in one or a few programmes. Academic tracks as well as vocational tracks are covered. Both municipal schools and independent schools are included in the data.

As it is probable that the characteristics of the students to be analysed differ between schools – partly due to the differences between the schools and partly because different types of students apply to different types of schools (Dovemark & Holm, 2017) – multi-level regression analyses will be used. This encompasses the fact that those students who attend

the same school may have shared characteristics, which may differ from the characteristics of students attending a different school.

3.3 The variables

The dependent variable, intentions to vote, was measured with the question: “I will vote during the next general election” with the following five response alternatives: “Definitely not” (1), “Probably not” (2), “Possibly” (3), “Very probably” (4) and “Definitely” (5).

To control for a general positive attitude to democracy there is a variable measuring views on democracy in society. The question used reads: “How important do you think democracy is in society?” with the following response alternatives: “Not important” (1), “Slightly important” (2), “Moderately important” (3) and “Very important” (4).

There are, as mentioned, two dimensions of experiences of school democracy. The variables are constructed as indices, built by groups of questions trying to catch similar aspects in each dimension. If the respondent has misunderstood the question, or been careless in his or her reading, or if the researcher has been careless in the coding process, then the result will not be reliable. But, by adding several questions to one variable, the risk of error is reduced (Barmark 2009). The correlations between the variables included in an index must be strong. Cronbach's Alpha, which varies between 0 and 1, is a summary measure of how well the constituent variables are connected. This measure should ideally be at least 0.7 so that we can be sure that the index is well designed (Barmark, 2009). The indices in this study come close to that criterion.

The influence measurement is an additive index based on five questions in the questionnaire involving experiences of a direct influence regarding regulations, furnishings/decor, school food, methods of education and content of education. The influence index has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.68 and comprises the following questions: “We have an influence over the regulations that apply at school”, “We have an influence over the furnishings at school”, “I am able to influence the courses I take based on my own interests” and “We have an influence over the school menu” with the following response alternatives: “Strongly disagree” (1), “Disagree” (2), “Neither agree nor disagree” (3), “Agree” (4) and “Strongly agree” (5) and the following question: “The teachers allow the students to have an influence over working methods for schoolwork” with the response alternatives “Never” (1), “Rarely” (2), “Occasionally” (3), “Frequently” (4) and “Always” (5).

The discussion measurement deals with issues relating to the students' experiences of deliberation and communication, with each other and with their teachers. The discussion index has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.695. It comprises the questionnaire question: “When we are not happy with something, we suggest improvements” with the following response alternatives: “Strongly disagree” (1), “Disagree” (2), “Neither agree nor disagree” (3), “Agree” (4) and “Strongly agree” (5) and the following questions: “When our views are not taken into consideration, the teachers provide reasonable grounds for why we have not been granted our wishes”, “We are consulted prior to making changes at the school”,

“When we are not happy about something, we protest against what we feel is wrong”, and “We discuss the consequences of various alternatives before we reach a joint decision” with the following response alternatives: “Never” (1), “Rarely” (2), “Occasionally” (3), “Frequently” (4) and “Always” (5).

It is naturally conceivable that experiences of school democracy are significantly affected by the level to which the students have any claims relating to school democracy (ref. e.g. Skolverket, 2003:135 f; Almgren, 2006:119). Two control variables are included due to this aspect. Firstly, there is an “incentive measurement” based on whether the students will take action to achieve change in the school. In the questionnaire, the students are encouraged to respond whether there is any aspect of school over which they have no influence but would like to have influence (and if so, what). All responses that indicate a desire for influence the student does not have are coded as 1, and all responses not expressing such as desire are coded as 0. Secondly, the students have responded to a question regarding how important they think it is to have democracy at school. The response alternatives are on a scale of 1 to 4, from “Not important” to “Very important”.

As mentioned, the personal ambition is expected to affect the students’ attitudes towards voting. The level of ambition is here measured by means of an additive index made up of three questions in the questionnaire on the extent to which the students have their own goals, organize their own schoolwork, and take initiatives independently for schoolwork. The ambition index has a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.659. This index was measured using the questionnaire question “I have my own goals for school results” with the following response alternatives: “Strongly disagree” (1), “Disagree” (2), “Neither agree nor disagree” (3), “Agree” (4) and “Strongly agree” (5) and the following questions: “I plan my schoolwork according to the goals I want to achieve” and “I take the initiative for planning how to carry out my schoolwork” with the following response alternatives: “Never” (1), “Rarely” (2), “Occasionally” (3), “Frequently” (4) and “Always” (5).

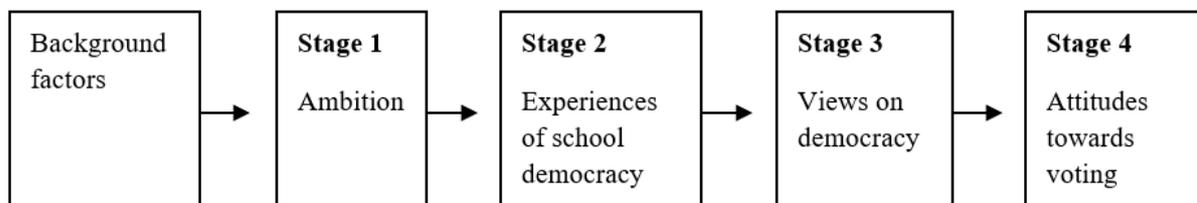
A group of independent variables is made up of certain underlying properties that may impact all the subsequent variables in a causal chain: gender, native language, the school’s principal, and study programme. When it comes to gender, which is of particular interest in this study, several of the tables to come refer to separate analyses for males and females. This procedure has been applied to allow detection of heterogeneity between the groups and to exploit the potential to identify each of the specific prerequisites for each gender (ref. Burns, Schlozman & Verba, 2001:40). The second background factor studied is native language, not least of interest as it is probable that linguistic skills affect involvement in democracy (Bennett, Rhine & Flickinger, 2000; Hillygus, 2005). A third background factor is the importance of the school’s principals, as there is reason to assume a selection of more “favoured” students in the independent schools. Finally, the category of study programmes attended by the students is studied. The students in the study were attending 23 different study programmes at upper secondary school. To simplify presentation, the study programmes are categorised into two different groups; preparation for further studies and vocational (Sveriges kommuner och landsting, 2009:34). This is of significance

given that the choice of study programme at upper secondary school encompasses a significant level of unequal recruitment both socially and in terms of gender (Dovemark & Holm, 2017). When measuring all background factors, the following dummy variables have been formulated; “Gender”: male = 1, female = 0, “Is your native language Swedish?”: yes = 1, no = 0, “Type of principal”: independent school = 1, municipal school = 0. The upper secondary school study programme has been categorised as follows: preparations for further studies (social sciences, natural sciences, technology, aesthetics and International Baccalaureate) and vocational (all other programmes). Students attending the programme category to prepare for further studies are coded as 1, and the vocational programme category as 0.

3.4 A four-stage analysis

The link between education and democracy is complex. Various factors influence each other in different ways. The hypothesis that experiences of school democracy impact the students’ attitudes towards voting will be tested through several different stages. Inspired by Verba, Schlozman & Brady’s (1995 chap 15) detailed study of the roots of participatory factors, the analysis will take part over four stages. The figure below provides a summarised sketch of the possible chain of links.

Figure 2. Analysis in a four-stage process



To test the hypothesis that experiences of school democracy affect attitudes towards voting, a series of analyses have been conducted in which the dependent variable in stage 1 is included among the independent variables in stage 2, and where subsequently the set of independent variables is added on in the same way up to the fourth and final stage.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Differences in ambitions among the students

In stage 1, the students’ ambitions regarding their own schoolwork represent the dependent variable. If the above-mentioned background factors impact ambition, this may be an indication that the students have different prerequisites for succeeding at

school. In terms of the importance of education for future political involvement, the ambition index serves as a measurement of the resource assumed to be represented by personal drive.

Stage 1 in the chain of analyses thus comprises studying the background factors' effect on the students' personal ambition in relation to own schoolwork. The result is presented in table 1. To determine whether the schools represent any substantial differences in relation to the students' ambitions, an "empty" model is presented first – a regression without independent variables, often referred to as a "zero model" – in which we can read on the one hand the variation between the schools and on the other hand the variation between the students in the schools.

Table 1. School variation in ambition and background factors' effect on students' ambition

	Empty model	Model 1
Fixed effects		
Constant	3.93***	4.09***
Gender (male)		-0.14***
Native language (Swedish)		-0.13***
Principal (independent school)		-0.02
Study programme (preparation for further studies)		0.09***
Stochastic effects		
School level	0.011 (0.007)	0.009 (0.006)
Individual level	0.441 (0.017)	0.435 (0.017)

Fixed effects: * statistically significant at 95% confidence level, ** statistically significant at 99% confidence level, and *** statistically significant at 99.9% confidence level. Significant stochastic effects are written in bold.

Comments: Mixed effects REML regression. The ambition index in the dependent variable is measured on a scale from 1 to 5. The independent variables are dummy variables, coded 0 or 1. The number of observations is 1,345.

There is no variation between the schools in the data material regarding students' ambition levels. It is only possible to claim a variation when the figure is at least double its standard error (shown in brackets), and this clearly does not apply at school level. The intra class correlation-coefficient (ICC coefficient), showing the ratio of the variation that can be designated to school level, is stated as 2.4 percent, which must be said to be fairly low. The ICC coefficient is calculated by dividing school variance by the total of school variance and individual variance, which for this study is $0.011/0.452 = 0.024$. Of equal importance when studying how the background factors affect the students' ambition is the consideration that the students attend different types of schools – which can be read from model 1. For male students, lower ambition than female co-students are established

at the highest level of statistical significance. This applies even with control of native language, school principal and study programme. Students with Swedish as the native language had a lower level of ambition. It thus appears that students with a Swedish background take schoolwork less seriously than those students with different ethnic origins. It is also demonstrable that students attending study programmes preparing for further studies have a slightly higher level of ambition concerning their schoolwork than those students who are not aiming for further studies after upper secondary school. The analysis does not support the idea that the most ambitious students apply to attend independent schools.

4.2 Differences in students' experiences of school democracy

Now when the students' ambitions for schoolwork are established, we can move on to studying the two dimensions relating to experiences of school democracy. These experiences are thus the dependent variables in stage 2. How do the background factors and ambition affect the students' experiences of influence and discussion?

Table 2. School variation and difference between male and female students' experiences of influence

	MALE		FEMALE	
	Empty model	Model 1	Empty model	Model 1
Fixed effects				
Constant	2.67***	1.6***	2.75***	1.92***
Native language (Swedish)		-0.15		0.09
Principal (independent school)		0.19***		0.2
Study programme (pre- paration for further studies)		-0.8		0.04
Ambition		0.35***		0.2***
Incentive		-0.32***		-0.29***
School democracy important		-0.01		0.01
Stochastic effects				
School level	0.021 (0.013)	0.01 (0.009)	0.071 (0.028)	0.047 (0.021)
Individual level	0.479 (0.028)	0.389 (0.023)	0.323 (0.017)	0.289 (0.015)

Fixed effects: * statistically significant at 95% confidence level, ** statistically significant at 99% confidence level, and *** statistically significant at 99.9% confidence level. Significant stochastic effects are written in bold.

Comments: Mixed effects REML regression. The influence index in the dependent variable is measured on a scale from 1 to 5. The independent variables – native language, principal, study programme and incentive – are dummy variables, coded 0 or 1. Ambition is measured on a scale

from 1 to 5. Views on democracy in school are measured on a scale from 1 to 4. The number of observations is 609 for male students and 736 for female students.

Table 2 shows the analysis concerning experiences of influence. To allow a comparison between the genders, separate analyses for male and female students are presented.

We can derive from table 2 that there is a difference between genders regarding school variation for the experiences of influence. For male students, there is no identifiable variation between the schools, but there is for female students who have an ICC coefficient of 18 percent. In other words, we can establish that the female students' average value for influence differs systematically between different schools. Based on the result in model 1, we can confirm that it is the most ambitious students – both male and female – who experience most influence, and that the students who have incentive to make changes experience lower potential for influence than others. The belief that democracy in schools is important, however, does not have an impact on experiences of influence. On the part of the male students, we can establish a positive effect of attending independent schools. It is not, however, possible to ascertain any difference between genders in this context.² The control for the independent variables for the female students implies that the variation between schools falls from 0.071 to 0.047 (from 18 to 14 percent), but remains significant.

The next factor to discuss is the students' experiences of discussion. This analysis has been conducted in the same way as for the former, and the result is provided in table 3.

Corresponding precisely with the experiences of influence, it is only the female students who demonstrate an ascertainable variation between the schools on the issue of experiences of discussion. It is also only among the female students that we find a notable reduction in school variation after considering the independent variables in model 1. Thus, we can conclude that female students who are similar in terms of those characteristics controlled, to a certain extent apply to the same schools. Otherwise, the experiences of discussion among male and female students appear to be similarly affected. The potential for discussion is perceived as higher in independent schools and by ambitious students who believe that school democracy is important. Those students who have the incentive to change claim to have worse experiences of discussion than others. The only real difference between genders is thus that there is a systematic variation from the outset between the different schools in the female students' average values relating to experiences of discussion. However, this difference is diminished when we consider the students' ambition, incentive and view on school democracy, and the schools' principals.

Table 3. School variation and difference between male and female students' experiences of discussion

	MALE		FEMALE	
	Empty model	Model 1	Empty model	Model 1
Fixed effects				
Constant	3.06***	1.43***	3.21***	1.53**
Native language (Swedish)		-0.07		0.06
Principal (independent school)		0.23***		0.22**
Study programme (preparation for further studies)		0.02		-0.01
Ambition		0.35***		0.3***
Incentive		-0.18***		-0.23***
School democracy important		0.09***		0.12**
Stochastic effects				
School level	0.028 (0.016)	0.024 (0.014)	0.035 (0.017)	0.017 (0.01)
Individual level	0.443 (0.026)	0.367 (0.021)	0.375 (0.02)	0.324 (0.017)

Fixed effects: * statistically significant at 95% confidence level, ** statistically significant at 99% confidence level, and *** statistically significant at 99.9% confidence level. Significant stochastic effects are written in bold.

Comments: Mixed effects REML regression. The discussion index in the dependent variable is measured on a scale from 1 to 5. The independent variables – native language, principal, study programme and incentive – are dummy variables, coded 0 or 1. Ambition is measured on a scale from 1 to 5. Views on democracy are measured on a scale from 1 to 4. The number of observations is 609 for male students and 736 for female students.

One general conclusion to be drawn so far is that the experiences of school democracy among both male and female students are basically similar. Only a few differences between the genders have emerged from the analyses, and it has not been possible to statistically ascertain any of these. The only factor of significance for positive experiences of school democracy, for both dimensions and for both genders, is the students' level of ambition. The more ambitious the student, the more positive experiences of school democracy. This is true irrespective of the individual school's specific prerequisites, and irrespective of study programme category. The incentive to change is also important for both male and female students.

4.3 Views on democracy

We will now be studying how the students evaluate societal democracy and whether their experiences of school democracy have any importance in this context. During stage 3, analyses are performed to test whether views on democracy in society are affected by the

independent variables applied during the former stages. This will allow us to discover whether experiences of school democracy have any impact beyond the closed world of the school.

To minimize the amount of information in the presentation of the result, the stochastic effects are not shown in table 4. There is no school variation to present, either for female or male students. Model 1 shows the background variables' effect for male and female students jointly. Subsequently, the genders are separated, and the ambition variable is added in model 2. Finally, in model 3, the effects of the two dimensions of experiences of school democracy on views of democracy in society are shown.

Table 4. Difference between male and female students in their views on democracy

	Model 1	Model 2		Model 3	
Fixed effects	ALL	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
Constant	3.55***	2.73***	3.3***	2.59***	3.26**
Gender (male)	-0.12***				
Native language (Swedish)	0.08	0.18***	0.02	0.15	0.01
Principal (independent school)	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.04
Study programme (preparation for further studies)	0.21***	0.2***	0.2***	0.19***	0.21***
Ambition		<i>0.16***</i>	<i>0.08**</i>	<i>0.13**</i>	<i>0.06</i>
Influence				-0.12**	-0.11**
Discussion				0.13**	0.08***

Fixed effects: * statistically significant at 95% confidence level, ** statistically significant at 99% confidence level, and *** statistically significant at 99.9% confidence level. Gender differences that are significant at minimum 90 percent confidence level are marked in italics.

Comments: Mixed effects REML regression. The views on democracy in the dependent variable are measured on a scale from 1 to 4. The analyses also include a control variable for the student's experience of legal certainty, not shown in the table. The number of observations is 1,345, of which 609 male students and 736 female students.

From model 1, we can see that the male students have ascertainably lower views of democracy than the female students. Another obvious effect is that students taking study programmes to prepare for further studies report that democracy is more important than students attending vocational programmes. This result is expected and in line with the results of previous studies of students' attitudes towards democracy (Skolverket, 2003). This can most probably be explained by the socioeconomic dimensions underlying the

choice of study programme. Students preparing for further studies have in general more favourable conditions at home and better educated parents than those taking vocational programmes. In model 2 we can see that the level of ambition among the students in terms of their own schoolwork, just as in previous analyses, appears significant also for the issue of views on democracy. This effect seems to be particularly dominant among the male students. A control of the interaction effect shows that the difference between the genders is very close to the limit for establishment at 95 percent confidence level. In model 3, where a control for experiences of school democracy is included, the ambition variable has both lower strength and significance for both genders. This implies that ambition co-varies positively with both dimensions of experience of democracy, which also positively correlate. Pearsons R for ambition and influence is 0.29, and for ambition and discussion 0.35. The experiences of influence appear to have a clear and negative link with the views on democracy, for both male and female students. Note that this effect only emerges when controlling for the other dimension of democracy. Given that those students who have positive experiences of influence also to a large extent have positive experiences of discussion, and both these dimensions of experiencing democracy pull in different directions on the views of societal democracy, they must be controlled independently in order to avoid neutralisation of the effects. However, this result can be related to Almgren's established negative effect of student influence on political knowledge (Almgren, 2006; cf Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013). If it is true that persons with political knowledge have higher views of democracy, which there is reason to suppose (Galstone, 2001; Skolverket, 2003), it is reasonable to assume that the negative impact of student influence will also be reflected in their views on democracy. On the other hand, the experiences of discussion in schools have a positive link with views on democracy. This result is also in line with former research (Skolverket, 2003; Amadeo et al., 2002; Almgren, 2006; Ekman, 2007). Thus, discussion seems to be an important promotor of democratic views.

In summary, the students' views on democracy are more favourable primarily among those preparing for further studies, who have personal ambition and who have positive experiences of discussion, while the views are less favourable among students who have positive experiences of influence. There are no clear, ascertainable differences between the genders in the importance of these impact factors.

4.4 Attitudes towards voting

We have now arrived at the fourth and final stage of the analysis. How do the variables previously considered, affect the students' attitudes towards voting in future general elections?

Table 5 presents the analyses in four models; model 1 for both genders and models 2, 3 and 4 for separate genders with respective sets of independent variables from the former stages of the analysis. As there is no variation between the schools in the students'

attitudes towards voting, the stochastic effects are not shown in table 5. The variation between individuals within the schools is, however, more notable when it comes to the intention to vote than the dependent variables studied before.

Table 5. Difference between male and female students in their attitudes towards voting

	Model 1	Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
Fixed effects	ALL	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
Constant	3.31***	2.64***	2.46***	2.63***	2.27***	1,82***	3.26***
Gender (male)	0.27***						
Native language (Swedish)	0.34**	0.59***	0.15	0.59***	0.14	0.54**	0.13
Principal (independent)	0.06	0.14	-0.02	0.14	-0.03	0.14	-0.06
Programme (preparing for further studies)	0.22**	0.05	0.34***	0.05	0.34***	-0.02	0.24**
Ambition		0.2**	0.25**	0.2**	0.21**	0.15***	0.18**
Influence				-0.01	0.02	0.02	0.07
Discussion				0.04	-0.0	0.0	-0.04
Democracy important						0.32***	0.48***

Fixed effects: * statistically significant at 95% confidence level, ** statistically significant at 99% confidence level, and *** statistically significant at 99.9% confidence level. Gender differences that are significant at minimum 95 percent confidence level have been marked in bold, and those at minimum 90 percent confidence level in italics.

Comments: Mixed effects REML regression. The attitudes towards voting in the dependent variable are measured on a scale from 1 to 5. The analyses also include a control variable for the student's experience of legal certainty, not shown in the table. The number of observations is 1,345, of which 609 male students and 736 female students.

As seen in model 1 being male³, having Swedish as native language and attending a programme to prepare for further studies are all factors that imply a higher probability to claim the intent to vote in the next general election. In model 2, separate analyses for male and female students are presented to demonstrate the differences between the genders. Also, the effect of ambition on the attitude towards voting is tested. The ambitious students, both genders, have much stronger plans to vote than other students. This result

confirms the research establishing grit as an important asset for intended voting (Holbein et al, 2020). A few interesting differences between male and female students emerge in model 2. Native language is a characteristic with a notable effect on male students, but this is not the case for female students. Male students who have Swedish as their native language are more interested in taking part in future elections than both male students with a different native language and female students in general. There might be individuals among those without Swedish as their native language who do not have Swedish citizenship, making it impossible for them to vote in a general election even if they otherwise would want to do so. This obstacle to voting should, however, be as significant for females as for males. The choice of study programme is of significance for female students but not for male students. Female students preparing for further studies claim to intend to vote to a much higher degree than female students on vocational programmes – and than male students in general. Male students with Swedish as their native language and high study ambitions have the most positive attitudes towards voting, while female students on vocational programmes with low study ambitions are least interested in taking part in future elections.

Experiences of school democracy appear, in model 3, to lack any significance for the attitude towards voting. Nor in bivariate analyses for each of the dimensions of school democracy experiences any effect is seen on the attitude towards voting. The effects from the other independent variables remain in principle unchanged under control for experiences of school democracy.

In model 4 the views on democracy have guaranteed importance for the attitude towards voting, for both male and female students. Ambition in schoolwork still has a demonstrable effect, but this is weaker. This relates to the fact that ambitious students rate democracy higher than others. The positive effect for male students of having Swedish as their native language and the positive effect for female students of attending a programme to prepare for further studies are both less secure.

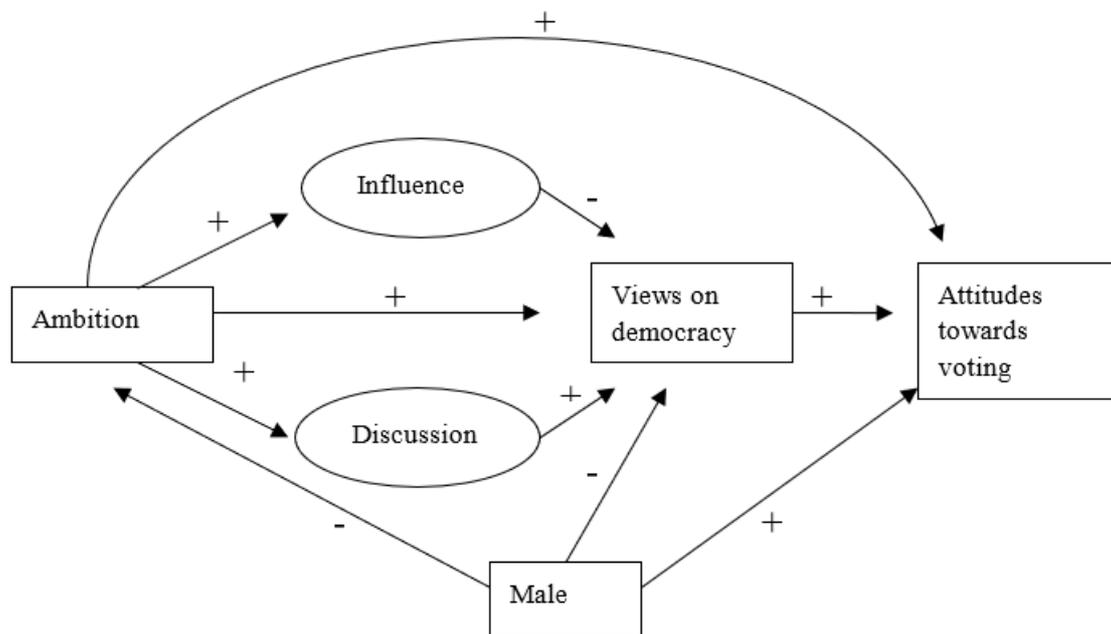
This shows that ambition is the only factor with a direct significance for all the dependent variables studied in the different stages of the analysis (cf. Holbein et al, 2020). Being ambitious is thus an important personal driving force in relation to both experiences of school democracy and views on democracy, in addition to attitudes towards political involvement.

4.5 Negative effects of influence and positive effects of discussion

The two dimensions of school democracy – and their impact on the attitudes towards voting, which has been the main purpose of this study – appear to be relatively insignificant in this context. However, as the experiences of discussion appeared to have a positive effect on views on democracy, and experiences of influence to have a negative effect on these views, and given that the views on democracy have an obvious significance for the attitude towards voting, we can then claim that there are reasonably *indirect* effects

of these experiences of school democracy. The fact that experiences of influence and discussion pull in different directions yet at the same time are positively interrelated (Pearsons R for influence and discussion is 0.56) implies that the pattern of links is difficult to illustrate in a table format. A general illustration of the routes taken by the analysed variables is shown in figure 3. The arrows indicating plus and minus effects are based on the significant results in table 5.

Figure 3. A summary of the significant effects of the various variables



There are differences between the genders when it comes to ambition and views on democracy, where the male students “come off worse”, and in the attitudes towards voting, where the male students claim to be more positive than the female students. Ambition has positive effects for both genders in all aspects. Experiences of influence are negative for views on democracy while experiences of discussion are positive. Views on democracy have in turn a clearly positive effect on the attitudes towards voting. If the male students were as ambitious as the female students, and if they valued democracy equally highly, we would be able to observe an even greater difference between the genders in terms of their attitude towards voting.

5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In relation to the general hypothesis – that upper secondary school students’ experiences of school democracy affect their attitudes towards voting in future general elections – we have been able to ascertain that there is no such effect. Hence, the hypothesis is concluded

to be false. Another conclusion is that no support can be given to the theory of participatory democracy. Taking part in decision making, in this study indicated by experiences of influence, affect student's views on democracy negatively (cf. Pateman 1970; Geurkink, Akkerman & Sluiter, 2020; Besand, 2020). Negative effects from influence in school on different aspects of democratic virtues have been seen before (Almgren, 2006; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013). That these negative effects are now confirmed is bad news for proponents of the theory of participatory democracy. However, positive effects of discussion, or an open classroom climate, as is seen in previous research (Torney-Purta, 2002; Campbell, 2008; Almgren, 2006; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013; Lenzi et al., 2014) are confirmed by the analyses. This highlights the need to separate the two democracy models, here inspired by Teorell (2006), and more research on different outcomes from different ways to realize democracy in classroom could deepen our understanding of how to promote citizenship. This study was conducted on a single occasion in a limited location. A reimplementation of the survey in a wider population would give a valuable contribution to school democracy research. When gender gaps in school achievement are to be investigated in other countries, this survey and its data collection might could serve as inspiration.

The implication of the result does not have to be that school democracy is without meaning. Firstly, participation in general elections is just one aspect among several regarding how individuals actively exercise their citizenship (Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013). The fact that experiences of school democracy do not influence plans to vote does not necessarily mean that there are no other "political virtues" that may be affected positively (or negatively). We have, for example, seen that the views on democracy are related to experiences of school democracy. Discussion is obviously a good experience albeit influence is not. It is nonetheless not certain that influence in schools must therefore be seen as something that is always negative. Influence can manifest in different ways. In this study, it has not been possible to differ between various qualitative aspects of how influence emerges. It is an important task to further explore how students can exercise influence in schools without risking their democratic virtues. It is doubtful that democracy would emerge automatically in a classroom without being exercised under expert guidance from teachers so that it can be favourably developed and function satisfactorily. Democracy needs to be practiced in school to be properly learned.

Although changes have recently been made in the Swedish school's governing documents, the democratic mission remains in roughly the same way as in the 1990s. Based on the results of this study it would be justified to clarify the democratic mission. The deliberative democratic dimension needs to be protected. An open deliberative classroom climate should not be mixed up with student influence as a common description of school democracy.

When it comes to gender differences in school achievements there is nothing in the results presented here indicating that experiences of school democracy could explain the female supremacy (cf Lenzi et al., 2014). The most striking result is the importance of

ambition. Being ambitious concerning one's own schoolwork is a significant resource that has repercussions for the attitude towards voting via several elements. The clearly negative effect of being male within the ambition index implies that female students have a more favourable starting point even before considering the other factors. It does seem, quite simply, that female students make more of an effort than male students (cf van Houtte, 2004). As ambition probably is a measure of something quite like grit, explored by Holbein et al. (2020) further work on how to promote this trait among adolescents should be valuable. Ambition is the one variable that – clearly significantly although with a varying degree of statistical confidence – generates positive direct effects in the chain of analysis throughout all four stages. However, the most evident effect of ambition is on the experiences of school democracy. Due to the persuasive meaning of ambition, more knowledge about how to promote this trait among adolescents should be beneficial for both individuals and the common good in a democratic society.

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ENDNOTES

¹ The survey covered all 2,483 students in the third and last year of upper secondary school in the county of Kronoberg in school year 2008/2009. The lapse is due to organisational shortcomings when collecting the questionnaires in certain schools, student absence due to illness, leave or truancy, and (only) three cases of refusal to participate. However, the number of observations has been kept at a constant so that only those students who responded to all the questions in the current analysis have been included. As such, the risk that demonstrable effects are due to a variation in the set of observations is eliminated.

² In an analysis covering both male and female students, a dummy variable for gender is included and a variable where “male” is multiplied by “independent school”. The coefficient from the product variable shows the effect for the male group in comparison with the female group. In this case, however, the effect was not significant.

³ The established gender difference in the attitude towards voting, *to the benefit of the male students* is unexpected. Both former studies of upper secondary school students and public election statistics from Statistics Sweden (SCB) show that females currently both claim to intend to vote and actually do vote to a larger extent than men. However, closer inspection of the election statistics for adolescents in Kronoberg in Sweden confirm the result of this study. The county of Kronoberg differs from the national average. Adolescent males in the county had a higher rate of participation in the election than adolescent males nationwide in the general election in 2006. The data should therefore be seen as reliable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and feedback on this paper.

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