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Article

# Becoming a disagreeable citizen – disagreement orientation and citizenship education: A multilevel analysis of Norwegian adolescents' disagreement orientation

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**Keywords:** political disagreement; political discussions; citizenship education; political socialization; young people

## Highlights:

- The findings support viewing disagreement orientation as multidimensional, with debate seeking and conflict aversion being two distinct dimensions of disagreement orientation
- There are different factors that impact debate seeking and conflict avoidance.
- Characteristics of citizenship education has impact on conflict avoidance, but not debate seeking.
- Debate seeking is related to individual background variables, such as political interest, political conversation, and news-consumption

**Purpose:** This study explores debate seeking and conflict avoidance as dimensions of disagreement orientation, and how factors such as citizenship education and individual background may impact how young people engage in situations with conflicting political perspectives. The aim is to study whether how we facilitate citizenship education may affect young people to be more comfortable with political disagreement.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Multilevel modelling and factor analysis is performed using a survey among a selection of Norwegian fifteen-year-olds.

**Findings:** Citizenship education characteristics impact conflict avoidance but not debate seeking. Debate seeking is rather related to individual background factors such as political interest and attention paid to the news. Finally, the dimensions form basis of a potential typology of young people's disagreement orientation

**Research limitations/implications:** Further research is needed to establish causality, however the results have implications for the role of disagreement in teacher education and classrooms.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Disagreement is something people often find difficult, particularly when it comes to political issues. For instance, people tend to avoid discussing politics if they believe disagreement is likely (Gerber et al., 2012), and people who are comfortable with conflict tend to participate in politics more often than those who are less comfortable with conflict (Testa et al., 2014; Ulbig & Funk, 1999). However, exposure to a diversity of opinions is important in forming one's own opinions and deciding whether and, if so, how to politically participate (Hong & Rojas, 2016; Mill, 1998). Against this background, how individuals orient themselves toward disagreement becomes essential to citizenship, political participation and political education.

In previous research, there has been a tendency to focus on disagreement orientation in terms of conflict avoidance. However, a few studies (Testa et al., 2014; Wolak, 2020) consider disagreement orientation to be multidimensional and highlight the fact that positive dimensions are distinct from negative dimensions. This article follows up on these studies and explores debate seeking (i.e., positive emotions and active participation in disagreements) and conflict avoidance (i.e., negative emotions consisting of discomfort and worries about social consequences) as central dimensions of disagreement orientation. More specifically, the study explores what factors may impact these dimensions of disagreement orientation and how citizenship education may impact young people's orientation toward disagreement.

A multilevel analysis is performed using data obtained from a survey among a selection of fifteen-year-olds in Norway (N=531). The model shows the impact of individual background variables such as gender, political interest, and news-consumption, together with the impact of contextual variables measuring characteristics of the discussion climate and use of current political issues in the classroom. The findings support debate seeking and conflict avoidance as distinct and central dimensions of young people's disagreement orientation by demonstrating how individual background variables tend to have an impact on levels of debate seeking. In contrast, conflict avoidance can be linked to contextual educational variables. Furthermore, this article makes an original contribution by discussing a potential typology of young people's disagreement orientation based on these dimensions. Understanding the characteristics of young people's disagreement orientation and impacting factors is important in gaining better insights into political socialization and how political education can be facilitated to promote engagement with a diversity of political perspectives.

This paper is structured by first clarifying the term "disagreement orientation". It then explains the theoretical framework used for this study by exploring why there is a need to teach young people that democracy involves learning to disagree and what previous research can tell us about young people and political disagreement. The third section presents the methodology by clarifying the operationalization of variables and constructing the multilevel model. The fourth section present the model, results, and analysis. Finally, the fifth section discusses the results, how they can form the basis for a potential typology of disagreement orientation, and the implications and limitations of the study.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Disagreement orientation

First, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by disagreement. Disagreement is understood as the “interaction among citizens who hold divergent viewpoints and perspectives regarding politics” (Huckfeldt et al., 2004, pp. 3-4). The focus is on political disagreements, that is, disagreements refer to differing views on political and social issues. Furthermore, disagreements may vary in intensity. They can range from relatively harmonious conversations about differences of opinion to harsher conflicts between opposing views. In the literature, conflict is often understood as a stronger form of disagreement. This view also applies here, meaning that disagreement and conflict are understood as terms existing on a continuum. Against this backdrop, it is possible to define another key term. Disagreement orientation is understood as individual dispositions with significance for how people engage in political disagreement. Disagreement orientation thereby include aspects such as values, attitudes, and perceptions regarding disagreement. It is further assumed that disagreement orientation has an influence on young people’s engagement with political disagreement.

This article is part of a research project addressing young people’s disagreement orientation. Whereas the first study (Dahl, 2022) looked at how education can stimulate the development of self- efficacy for political disagreement, the second study (Dahl, forthcoming) explore the dimensionality of disagreement orientation. This second study showed that two dimensions stood out as especially strong: debate seeking (i.e., active participation and positive emotions toward disagreement) and conflict avoidance (i.e., negative emotions involving discomfort and worries about social consequences). In this follow-up study, these dimensions are further explored and perceived as two central dimensions of young people’s disagreement orientation.

Theoretically, debate seeking and conflict avoidance can be connected to the distinction between approach and avoidance motivation, well-known from psychology and studies on affect, behavior, and personality. This dichotomy describes that motivations for behavior may differ as a function of valence. Approach motivation refers to the positive and desirable of a situation, which pull people toward it, whereas avoidance motivation refers to the negative and undesirable of a situation which push people away from engagement (Elliot, 1999; Elliot & Thrash, 2002). In the context of disagreement, on the one hand, negative attributes could include stress, discomfort, and worries about social consequences, which may stimulate motivation to avoid the situation. On the other hand, the more desirable aspects could include positive emotions such as joy or excitement, which individuals may find rewarding and leading to motivation to approach a disagreement situation.

Disagreement orientation can be perceived as a collection of mechanisms relevant to young people’s engagement with disagreement. Mechanisms refer to “frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal patterns that are triggered under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences” (Elster, 1999, p. 1). As causal chains, mechanisms may help explain variations in how young people engage with disagreement, but they should

not be seen as laws predicting particular behavior. Levels of debate seeking and conflict avoidance do not predict how adolescents handle disagreement. Still, they may provide a better understanding of young people's relationship with disagreement and political issues.

## 2.2 Democracy and education for disagreement

There are different theoretical perspectives on how democracy should handle pluralism and conflicting opinions. One central theoretical dividing line is evident in the current debate between deliberative and agonistic democratic theories. These theories and the debate between them provide the theoretical framework for the role of diverse perspectives and disagreement in democracy, and consequently why there is a need for more attention to educating citizens with capacity for disagreement.

Deliberative democracy places public deliberation of free and equal citizens at the core of legitimate decision-making and self-governance (Bohman, 1998, p.401). Habermas (1996) argued that for decision-making to be legitimate, there is a need for a rational deliberative process aimed at reaching consensual solutions based on the common good. To have legitimizing force, the deliberative process is related to communicative and procedural conditions that enable a fair democratic process and yield reasonable results. One condition is deliberative rationality, which necessitates that deliberation be grounded in reason, justification, and the best arguments (Eriksen and Weigård, 2003). Another condition refers to inclusive universality, meaning that deliberation must be open so that all potentially affected parties are able to participate on equal and free terms (Deitelhoff, 2018). These presuppositions collectively contribute to fostering fair deliberative processes wherein conflicting views can be rationally discussed, parties can attempt to persuade each other, and bargaining can occur with the aim of finding common solutions to collective matters.

Mouffe (1999) criticizes deliberative democracy, arguing that by emphasizing rational consensus, deliberative models do not acknowledge the fundamental conflictual dimension of politics. In many cases, achieving rational consensus between conflicting perspectives is not possible. Instead, Mouffe posits an agonistic model of democracy, which views the political as inherently marked by antagonism. Politics, according to Mouffe (1999) aims to create unity within a context of conflict and pluralism, always creating an "us" versus a "them". An important task for democracy is to make sure that this us/them-distinction does not take an antagonistic form, where the other is perceived as an enemy to be defeated. Instead, it should be transformed into an agonistic confrontation, where the other is seen as an adversary with opinions one can disagree and debate, but not question their rights to defend their perspectives. Democratic politics, therefore, is not about overcoming the us and them opposition through rational deliberation, but rather about establishing it in an agonistic and democratic manner. A well-functioning democracy necessitates confrontation between differing political positions, in this confrontation consensus and compromises are possible but are also accompanied by dissent (Mouffe, 2013).

The debate between Habermas and Mouffe centers on conflict and how differences can confront each other in a democratically way. Whereas Habermas promotes a deliberative

discussion and solving disagreement by seeking consensual solutions, Mouffe emphasizes agonistic confrontation, avoiding antagonism and promoting own views. This debate is also present in the research field on citizenship and political education. On one side, studies argue that students should learn skills and values for participation in deliberative discussions (Englund, 2006; Samuelsson, 2016). On the other side, theorists have argued that there is a tendency in education to portray democracy in terms consensus rather than conflict (Biesta, 2009), and that the focus on capacities for consensus have been at the expense of abilities for disagreement (Ruitenberg, 2010). This study does not position itself in the deliberative or agonistic model. It is based on both perspectives when making a case for more attention to preparing young citizens for participation in different forms of disagreement.

In broad terms, education for democracy and citizenship has an aim to prepare and enable young people to participate in politics and society. With this in mind, citizenship education should also focus on young people's capacity to understand and handle political disagreement. Because conflicts are an inevitable part of any political process (Klofstad et al., 2013; Ulbig & Funk, 1999), the ability to handle and withstand disagreement becomes a part of political participation. In addition, schools represent a heterogenous context, with students from different backgrounds bringing different perspectives into the classroom. To this extent, schools afford significant opportunities for young people to engage in debates with people who have multiple viewpoints and gain essential experience, confidence, and skills they can use in handling future disagreements.

Previous research indicates that certain characteristics of democracy and citizenship education may be particularly relevant concerning political disagreement in general and, especially, disagreement orientation. First, exposing students to disagreement and multiple opinions by using current political and social issues in learning activities may be valuable. A group of studies shows that exposure to disagreement and divergent views may be related to higher levels of political interest, efficacy, knowledge, and understanding of political issues (Kim et al., 1999; Schmitt-Beck & Lup, 2013), as well as the complexity of political thinking (Eveland Jr & Hively, 2009). It has also been argued that exposure to a diversity of political perspectives is essential to the development of own opinions (Mill, 1998). Furthermore, engaging with current political and social issues is expected to have an impact because it may lead to understanding of political issues and political perspectives, which might contribute to the forming of opinions and lower the threshold for participation in debates.

Second, classrooms in which students feel safe to express opinions, with an emphasis on a discussion climate that values disagreement, may impact students' disagreement orientation. Open classroom climate have been linked to several skills and competencies relevant to how young people encounter disagreement, such as perspective-taking (Hahn, 1998), critical thinking and consciousness (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Newmann, 1990), and an appreciation of conflict as an essential part of politics (Campbell, 2008) in addition to political engagement (Torney-Purta et al, 2001), political self-efficacy (Campbell, 2008), and political learning (Persson, 2015a). Individuals are often reluctant to express their own political opinions (Hayes, 2007; Hayes et al., 2001; Peacock, 2019). It may therefore be essential that students experience their classrooms as safe arenas in which to reveal their own opinions, as well as

that both students and teachers value a diversity of opinions.

### 2.3 Previous research

Studies from various research fields indicate that certain factors are relevant to young people's disagreement orientation. To begin, Peacock (2019) pointed to four common groups of motivations for avoiding conflict: to save face or avoid being negatively judged; to avoid a verbal or physical altercation; to avoid negative personal repercussions by upsetting or alienating friends; and because conflict requires effort and can have long-term effects in which disagreement is associated with stress, emotional strain, or ongoing unresolved debate. In addition, people are often hesitant to participate in contested talk because they are worried that such a situation can generate strong emotions and negative social consequences (Conover et al., 2002). This social aspect and worries about others' judgments are also supported by "the spiral of silence", which refers to that, if individuals believe their opinions lack support, they tend to withhold expressing them (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

Situational factors affecting people's engagement with disagreement have also received attention in previous studies. In expressing an opinion, both evaluations of opponents, such as their levels of political knowledge and competence, and the consideration of whether the time and place are appropriate are relevant (Peacock, 2019). Also, level of interpersonal disagreement affects how people handle conflict. That is, people are more willing to seek compromise when the level of disagreement is considered to be low or moderate. However, levels of disagreement do not seem to have a significant impact on conflict avoidance (Hopmann et al., 2020).

Finally, studies point to variations in how individuals handle disagreement based on demographic and individual background variables. To begin, gender is likely relevant to disagreement orientation because women tend to be less comfortable with disagreement and more conflict avoidant compared with men (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2017; Ulbig & Funk, 1999). Coffé and Bolzendahl (2017) argued that girls are socialized to avoid discussions with the potential for disagreement, and Wolak (2020) showed that gender gaps in political participation are related to men having comparatively higher levels of enjoyment when it comes to argumentation and disagreement. In addition, women's lower levels of self-efficacy may also lead to more insecurity and a higher threshold to express an opinion in a political debate (Wolak & McDevitt, 2011). Also, men are more likely to talk about politics in their everyday lives compared with women (Bennett et al., 2000; Schmitt-Beck & Lup, 2013). There is also reason to believe that disagreement orientation can be related to socioeconomic background. Higher levels of education and income have been associated with lower conflict avoidance scores (Ulbig & Funk, 1999). Socio-economic background is also known to strongly correlate with political participation, engagement, and interest (Martinussen, 2003) and have been connected to resources and skills facilitating disagreement participation, such as argumentation, writing, and social networks (Verba et al., 1995).

Furthermore, some personal traits could be relevant factors regarding young people's disagreement orientation. For instance, political interest is related to political knowledge,

political participation (Neundorf et al., 2012), and opinion expression (Baldassare & Katz, 1996; Lasorsa, 1991). It is therefore assumed that interest in politics could make young people more positive towards disagreement. The frequency with which political issues are discussed is also expected to be relevant since experiences with political discussion can make adolescents more familiar and comfortable with disagreement and conflict. Because a lack of knowledge seems to be an obstacle to expressing an opinion (Salmon & Neuwirth, 1990), it is expected that levels of news reading may impact disagreement orientation. In addition, attitude strength (Baldassare & Katz, 1996) and certitude in one's own opinion (Lasorsa, 1991) are positive for opinion expressing and can affect disagreement orientation. Finally, judgments of one's ability to succeed in a situation such as a disagreement affect how one participates in such situations. People tend to engage in tasks in which they feel confident and competent and avoid those in which they do not (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996). Therefore, it is possible that self-efficacy for disagreement can be a significant factor in young people's disagreement orientation.

### **3 DATA AND METHODS**

#### **3.1 Sample and survey**

As mentioned above, this study is part of a research project addressing how young people orient themselves toward political disagreement. The first part of the project (Dahl, forthcoming) used data from the International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS) to explore how the discussion climate in classrooms may have an impact on young people's self-efficacy for political disagreement (conflictual self-efficacy). The second part, which this study is a part of, is based on a survey among a selection of Norwegian fifteen-year-olds, which includes more specific measurements of disagreement orientation and assumed relevant impacting variables.

The survey was conducted in the fall of 2020 with twenty-one strategically selected tenth-grade classrooms from one county in middle Norway. Five hundred and thirty-one youths approximately 15 years old responded to a digital questionnaire about 1) their background, 2) their relationship with political disagreement, and 3) characteristics of their citizenship education in school. 54,3 percentages of the respondents were girls. While this was not a random sample in Norway, steps were taken to ensure maximum variation along three dimensions: rurality/centrality, size, and north/south location within the county.

In developing the survey, previous measures related to conflict avoidance and strategies for handling disagreement were important sources of inspiration. Strategies such as compromise-seeking, avoidance, forcing and yielding have been highlighted (Bresnahan et al., 2009; Goldstein, 1999; Rahim, 1983; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978) and were therefore represented. Also, framing questions such that respondents either recalled a disagreement situation they had been in or visualized an imaginary disagreement situation has been promoted (Hayes, 2007; Hopmann et al., 2020; Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Peacock, 2019), and this was considered in the question framing. Finally, a pilot study provided central feedback to improve the

clarity of the concepts and formulations in the final questionnaire. In a workshop, one classroom of twenty 18-year-olds discussed the survey in groups and helped ensure that the questionnaire items were clear and appropriate for the main respondent group. The pilot also made an important contribution regarding items related to political and social issues young people forms opinions about.

In the survey I opted for the term disagreement rather than conflict. People tend to associate conflict with more negative connotations such as hostility, competition, and distrust compared to the term disagreement (Teven et al., 1998). This view was supported in the pilot study, where participants noted that the term “conflict” tends to be associated with harsher situations. At the same time, disagreement can relate to less intense differences of opinion. The pilot group also indicated that this distinction might be more polarized in younger age groups.

### **3.2 Dependent variables: debate seeking and conflict avoidance**

Debate seeking is a constructed index based on five items collected from two batteries. Respondents were asked on a five-point-scale, “In discussions about politics and society, how well do these characteristics describe you?”. The items were 1) I try to argue for my opinion, even though I find it demanding; 2) I try to find solutions and compromise we all can agree with; 3) I like to challenge others’ opinions, and 4) I think political discussions are exciting. In the fifth and final item, the respondents were asked, on a five-point-scale, “If you find yourself in a situation where someone disagrees with you about political and social issues, to what extent?” 5) do you find joy in discussing issues with someone whose opinions differ from your own?”. These five items are related to active participation in disagreement and/or positive emotions associated with disagreement. Whereas items three, four, and five are connected to positive emotions regarding disagreement, items one and two are related to forms of participation, specifically argumentation and solution seeking. A principal component analysis of these items, which is displayed in Table 1, shows that they load on the same latent factor, debate seeking.

Conflict avoidance is constructed as an index based on three items. Respondents were asked to imagine a situation in which someone disagreed with them on a political or social issue and evaluate the degree to which the following statements applied to them: 1) do you feel uncomfortable, 2) are you afraid that someone will not like you, and 3) are you afraid to lose friends or become enemies? This scale involves negative emotions and worries about social consequences related to disagreement. The principal component analysis for these items is presented in Table 1. Three variables are often perceived to be the minimum and including a few more items would have been beneficial for the validity of the scale and the analysis. However, no other items showed acceptable levels of factor loading to be included.

For a more detailed discussion of the two indexes see Dahl (forthcoming) “Disagreement orientation and young people – characteristics of Norwegian adolescents’ engagement with political disagreement.”

**Table 1. Factor scores debate seeking and conflict avoidance**

Item	Debate seeking	Conflict avoidance
Finds joy in discussing with someone who has a different opinion than you	.70	.05
I try to argue for my opinion, even though I find it demanding	.72	-.06
I try to find solutions and compromise we can all agree on	.56	-.12
I like to challenge others' opinions	.78	.12
I think political discussions are exciting	.72	-.05
On what level do you feel uncomfortable	.01	.81
On what level are you afraid that someone will not like you	-.01	.89
On what level are you afraid to lose friends or become enemies	.01	.87
Eigenvalue	2.46	2.23
Explained variance	30.70 %	27.90 %
Chronbacks alpha	.66	.82

N=531, Principal component factor with varimax rotation

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics**

Item	Obs	Mean	Std.dev.	Min	Max
Debate seeking	531	3.44	0.89	1	5
Conflict avoidance	531	2.51	1.03	1	5

### 3.3 Independent variables

The independent variables used in this study falls into two categories. First, there are independent variables at the individual level, such as gender and political interest. Second, there are variables on a contextual level, namely variables measuring how students encounter political and social issues in their classrooms, together with characteristics of the discussion climate.

The model includes six variables at level one. Respondents' self-definition measures gender as a girl, boy, or another gender identification. Socio-economic background is measured using students' reports of dads' highest education levels. However, many respondents had difficulties reporting their parents' education levels. Teachers and the researcher proved support in this regard, but this was a challenge regarding this measure. Third, political interest is measured in one variable by asking adolescents, on a five-point scale, how interested they are in politics. During the introduction to the survey, they were asked to think about politics in a broad sense. The frequency of political conversations is represented by an item in which the respondents were asked, on a five-point scale, how often they talk to friends or family about politics.

Furthermore, self-efficacy for political disagreement is measured with an index based on four items. First, the students were asked to evaluate how well they would master the following activities: argue their own point of view in a disagreement over a political or social issue; withstand their own opinion even when others say against on a political or social issue;

follow a media debate on a conflictual issue; and make a post on social media or a newspaper where you argue your point of view on a current issue. News-consumption was measured using an index of how often the respondents reported paying attention to the following news categories: foreign, domestic, local, sports, and entertainment. Finally, the last individual variable is the degree to which the students reported having formed political opinions, which is an index based on students' reports of having formed opinions about classical and current themes in the Norwegian context: immigration and integration; environment and climate; food production and animal welfare; social inequality; corona management; and the Black Lives Matter movement.

Two contextual variables were included to explore the potential impact of characteristics of citizenship education in school. Here, the focus is on school context, focusing on two traits of citizenship education, namely whether political and social issues are something the students meet in school and what characterizes the political discussions students may have with their peers. First, the degree to which political and social issues are included in teaching situations at school is measured with students being asked, on a five-point scale, how often the following things occur in teaching situations: the class talks about political and social issues; we talk about political and social issues in smaller groups; we watch a documentary or news about a current political or social issue; and we work with political and social issues in other ways. These items were calculated into an index. The discussion climate is measured with an index consisting of four items. The students were asked, on a five-point scale, how well the following statements could describe political discussion in their classroom: does it feel safe to speak my own opinion; the teachers encourage us to speak our opinions; it is okay to disagree with the teacher; and most student respect that peers have other opinions.

### **3.4 Analytical approach**

The analysis was performed using Stata MP17. To begin, the factor analysis and construction of debate seeking and conflict analysis were performed, together with calculating the scale for the above described independent variables. The central part of the analysis was exploring the two dimensions using multilevel modelling. Multilevel analysis can handle hierarchically structured data and consider both characteristics of the individual on level one as well as the characteristics of the classroom on level two (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen 2017; Robson & Pevalin, 2015). By using multilevel modelling, it is possible to generate variables measuring the classroom average of discussion climate and use of political issues. This explores whether variations in disagreement orientation are related to classrooms with higher or lower average scores on discussion climate and/or political issues. The multilevel analysis does additionally account for potential cluster structure in the dataset. However, the variance at the class and school levels was relatively small.

## **4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The analysis included two multilevel models, one in which debate seeking is the dependent variable, and one where conflict avoidance is the dependent variable. There are two levels

included in the models: individual (N = 531) and class (N = 21). Random intercepts were used to allow for clustering. The first model consists of debate seeking as the dependent variable. Included are the base model and the full model. The same goes for the second model, in which conflict avoidance is the dependent variable.

Table 3 shows the results of the two models. The results of the first model, in which debate seeking is the dependent variable, show significant coefficients for four items. First, the model shows that young people who more often talk to friends and family about political and social issues tend to have higher scores on debate seeking than those who less frequently participate in such conversations. This indicates that the experiences young people gain from political conversations can positively impact their participation and their positive emotions toward political disagreement. Second, adolescents with higher levels of political interest also tend to score higher on debate seeking. This is in line with the expectations. Having an interest in political topics seems to relate to more positive emotions toward disagreement. Third, the results show that, the more adolescents pay attention to the news, the higher they tend to score on debate seeking. This indicates that young people's levels of news reading and, consequently, their orientation toward and knowledge about current issues can motivate them to find disagreement situations rewarding. Fourth, self-efficacy for disagreement shows a positive coefficient for debate seeking. The more strongly young people believe in their ability to master disagreement, the more positive the perspectives they have on situations with conflicting political perspectives tend to be. This relationship also has the highest beta coefficient, indicating that adolescents' judgments of their potential to succeed in political disagreement are particularly important as compared to the other variables in the model. Gender and socio-economic background do not show any significant results. The same applies to the level two variables. Based on this analysis, it is not found that neither the discussion climate or the use of political and social issues in teaching activities has an impact on adolescents' scores on debate seeking.

**Table 3. Multilevel regression models of debate seeking and conflict avoidance**

		Debate seeking		Conflict avoidance	
		Base model	Full model	Base model	Full model
Level 1	Intercept	3.42***	.93***	2.52***	2.25***
	Girl		-.02		.41***
	Socioec.		.03		.05
	Political conversations		.09***		.01
	Political interest		.14***		.07
	News-consumption		.11**		.06
	Self-efficacy		.43***		-.16*
Level 2	Politics in the classroom		-.01		-.18**
	Discussion climate		.59		-.15**
N		523	503	523	503
R <sup>2</sup> -level 1			52.20 %		9.80 %

\*\*\*p < 0.001, \*\*p < 0.01, \*p < 0.05

Conflict avoidance is the dependent variable in the second model. The results for the independent variables are very different compared to the first model. First, gender has a significant impact on conflict avoidance. Girls tend to score higher on conflict avoidance compared to boys. This is consistent with previous research and the expectations before the study. It is noteworthy that girls, on the one hand, tend to score higher on discomfort regarding disagreement situations. On the other hand, no significant results indicate that girls show lower levels of positive emotions toward disagreement compared to boys. Second, there are no significant findings between conflict seeking and socio-economic background, frequency of political conversations, political interest, or level of news reading, which were variables found to impact debate seeking. Third, self-efficacy for disagreement is the only variable with significant effect on debate seeking and conflict avoidance. As expected, whether adolescents think they can succeed in disagreements impacts the level of discomfort they feel when encountering political disagreements. Young people with a higher belief in their ability to succeed in a disagreement tend to score lower on conflict avoidance. Fourth, both contextual variables have significant coefficients. The use of current political and social issues shows a significant negative coefficient. Students in classes where they experience regular use of political issues in their education tend to have lower levels of conflict avoidance. This indicates that a political education that allows students to work with current political and social issues regularly may be beneficial in terms of students' discomfort and worries about the social consequences regarding disagreement. Discussion climate also has a significant coefficient. Showing that when students belong to classrooms where they experience discussions and disagreement as valued, they tend to score lower on conflict avoidance than in classrooms with lower scores on discussion climate. Thus, the results indicate that education has the potential to influence adolescents' orientation toward disagreement through their levels of debate seeking and conflict avoidance.

## 5 DISCUSSION

The results show that debate seeking and conflict avoidance is affected by different factors. This supports viewing disagreement orientation as multidimensional, with debate seeking and conflict avoidance being two distinct dimensions of disagreement orientation. Accordingly, it seems as if most young people experience a combination of different levels of debate seeking and conflict avoidance. That is to say, they simultaneously can experience both excitement and discomfort levels.

Debate seeking and conflict avoidance as two separate dimensions of disagreement orientation is in accordance with the theoretical framework of avoidance and approach motivation. Behavior in disagreement can be motivated by both the attractiveness (approach motivation) and the averseness (avoidance motivation) of the situation. In this case, debate seeking reflects the "attractive" aspect of disagreement situations through positive emotions and active participation. These are rewarding elements that, most likely, pull young people toward engagement in disagreement. In contrast, conflict avoidance reflects the aversive traits of disagreement situations in form of discomfort and worries about social consequences.

Consequently, conflict avoidance likely create motivation to avoid a situation rather than engagement. The results suggest that most young people experience combinations of these motivations or dimensions and that disagreement orientation can include elements of a weighing process between them.

In some situations, it is likely that debate seeking and conflict avoidance can be in harmony and stimulate similar behavior. For instance, high levels of discomfort and low levels of joy will motivate avoidance rather than engagement. In contrast, these dimensions can also lead to ambivalence when they contradict one another. For example, high scores on debate seeking and conflict avoidance can mean experiencing both motivation to participate in a situation and motivation to avoid it. In such cases, young people may weigh these motivations against one another and evaluate whether the positive aspects are worth the negative ones before choosing how to handle a disagreement.

The results indicate that debate seeking can be closer connected to a general political engagement compared to conflict avoidance. The items showing a significant, positive impact on debate seeking were political conversations, political interest, attention toward the news, and self-efficacy, which are all variables known to affect political participation and engagement (Persson, 2015b; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). In addition, the model explains 52% of the variation in debate seeking on level 1. This indicates that the connection between debate seeking and the items linked to political engagement is strong. Therefore, adolescents oriented towards politics may tend to be more interested in debates with multiple perspectives.

In comparison, the variables related to political engagement do not significantly impact conflict avoidance. The only individual background variables that significantly impact conflict avoidance are self-efficacy for disagreement and the fact that girls tend to be more conflict avoidant than boys. In this case, the model can only account for 9% of young peoples' conflict avoidance variation. Therefore, the results suggests that conflict avoidance variation is related to factors not included in this study. Still, previous research points to some possibilities that could be relevant for future studies. For instance, conflict avoidance and discussing politics has been linked to specific personality traits (Gerber et al., 2012; Hibbing et al., 2011). Notably, these studies tend to focus on disagreement in a general sense rather than a political one. However, it is plausible that the correlation could also apply to political disagreement. Additionally, studies indicate the importance of contextual factors such as the relationship one has with other participants. For instance, individuals often find it easier to disagree with people they have closer ties with (Morey et al., 2012).

## 5.1 Towards a typology of disagreement orientation

The results suggest that most young people experience a combination of different levels of debate seeking and conflict avoidance in their orientation toward disagreement. A two-way cross table has been constructed to concretize and discuss how these combinations can express themselves, which shows the relative frequencies between debate seeking and conflict avoidance. To begin, the scales for debate seeking and conflict avoidance were divided and dummy coded into high and low scores. Because the scales are based on five-point variables,

no middle value creating equal item scores exists. Therefore, the dividing point was the value closest to 3 based on skewness and mean. Debate seeking has a mean of 3.44, with respondents scoring high. The scale was therefore divided so that respondents with scores of 1 - 3 were grouped as non-debate seeking, while those with scores of 3.2 - 5 was grouped as debate seeking. Conflict avoidance has a mean of 2.51 with the respondents scoring low. This scale was divided so that values of 1 – 2.6 represented non-conflict avoidance, while values 3 - 5 represented conflict avoidance. The results of a cross table between these two variables are displayed in Table 4.

**Table 4. Two-way cross table between dummy coded versions of debate seeking and conflict avoidance showing relative frequencies.**

	non-debate seeking	debate seeking
non-conflict avoidance	19.60 %	39.90 %
conflict avoidance	13.60 %	26.90 %

This cross table has been further developed toward a potential typology of disagreement orientation. Using the dummy coded versions of debate seeking and conflict avoidance as parameters, the typology is displayed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. A typology of disagreement orientation with debate seeking and conflict avoidance as dimensions.**

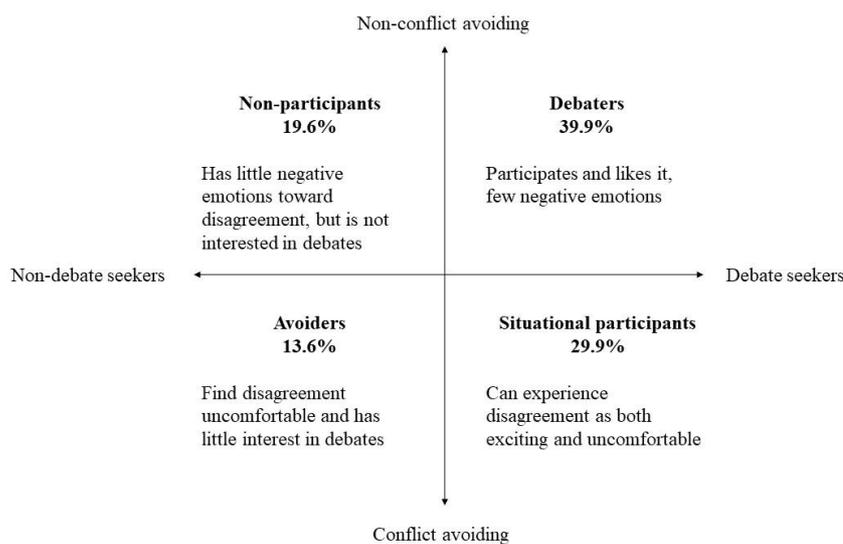


Table 4 and Figure 1 show that a relatively large group of respondents, 39.9%, seems to be characterized by a combination of high scores on debate seeking and low scores on conflict avoidance. Meaning that they associated disagreement with positive emotions, were inclined to active participation, and their relationship with disagreement was not marked by negative emotions. Based on these characteristics, this group has been labeled “debaters”. It is very interesting and unexpected to see that such a large percentage of adolescents in this study indicate that political disagreement is something they like, participate in, and are comfortable with. Because debaters connect disagreements to positive emotions, it is likely that they

find participation rewarding and that positive emotions, such as enjoyment, can function as motivation to participate and a factor that draws them towards debates.

Of the sample, 19.6% can be grouped as a combination of non-debate seeking and non-conflict avoiding. Therefore, they tend not to relate disagreement with positive emotions or active participation and are labeled “non-participants”. However, even if non-participants seem uninterested in debates, they do not relate disagreement to neither feelings of discomfort nor worries about losing friends. It can therefore be assumed that it is not conflict avoidance that pushes them away from engaging in a disagreement. Most likely, other factors motivate this group to avoid disagreement.

The smallest group, 13.6%, is characterized by low scores on debate seeking and high scores on conflict avoidance. This group tends to relate disagreement with discomfort and worries about social consequences, as well as scoring low on positive emotions toward disagreement. Therefore, it is possible that such negative emotions can be an important motivation for these adolescents to avoid situations that may involve political disagreement, especially as compared to the group of non-participants. This interpretation is in line with studies such as Ulbig and Funk (1999) and Gerber et al. (2012), which show that conflict avoidance can be an important factor in why some people avoid situations with the potential for conflict. On this basis, this group has been labeled “avoiders”.

Finally, there is a group with a combination of debate seeking and conflict avoidance, consisting of 29.6% of the sample. This group seems to have a disagreement orientation that includes both positive emotions, such as joy and excitement, and, simultaneously, negative emotions, such as discomfort and worry. This is an interesting group because they seem to have a combination of conflicting motivations, including emotions that previous research has tended to view as occupying opposite ends of a continuum. One potential interpretation of these oppositional motivations is that disagreement orientation can be a question of balancing between rewarding emotions pulling one toward debates and uncomfortable feelings pushing one away. Some factors could be influential in this regard, particularly situational factors, such as other participants, time, and place (Peacock, 2019), which can be important for how people deal with political debates and disagreements. Situational factors such as these may have the power to tip the scale toward or away from disagreement. This group has therefore been labeled “situational participants”.

Based on the multilevel model, these groups may have certain tendencies. For example, the two groups with high scores on debate seeking, namely debaters and situational participants, may tend to be young people who are oriented toward and interested in political and social issues and have a relatively firm belief in their ability to handle political disagreement. In the case of avoiders and situational participants, it can be assumed that young people in these groups can have an overrepresentation of girls, tend to have lower belief in their ability to handle disagreement, and belong to classrooms with less use of political issues and lower scores on discussion climate.

## 5.2 Implications and limitations

Whereas previous research has tended to focus on conflict avoidance, this study implies a need for a broader perspective on disagreement orientation, including a multidimensional understanding. Future research should include, theoretically and methodologically, the notion that there are other significant dimensions with relevance for how young people handle debates and situations with a diversity of political perspectives. This suggests the need for the further development of measures that can capture this complexity. Furthermore, the study is relevant to how teachers include disagreement in citizenship education by facilitating discussions that allow for disagreement, as well as how they involve current issues that demonstrate alternative political perspectives. Thus, disagreement's role in citizenship education should receive attention in teacher education. If teachers are uncomfortable and avoid disagreement, it is unlikely that their students will be motivated and gain positive experiences in disagreement situations. Additionally, conflict avoiding teachers signal that conflict is for a variety of reasons unwanted and students should avoid engaging in it.

This study has certain limitations. The intra-cluster correlation is low for both models, with values below 3%. Usually, in cases in which less than 5% of the total variance in the dependent variable can be attributable to the second level, it is not necessary to run a multi-level analysis to account for level two variance (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017). However, there was a theoretical reason to use multilevel modelling to explore the effects of characteristics on adolescents' citizenship education. The low variance in disagreement orientation between classrooms entails that, even when the models find significant results for contextual variables, they are related to a minimal variance.

Furthermore, the models are based on 21 units. A rule of thumb is that there should be ten units per level two variable to avoid untrustworthy confidence intervals (Robson & Pevalin, 2015). Consequently, when including two variables at level two, the model is within acceptable levels, but still at a minimum. It is also important to highlight the fact that the models cannot establish causality. They are based on cross-sectional data rather than time series, which would have been better for exploring causality between the independent variables and disagreement orientation. It is also likely that it is not only the independent variables that impact debate seeking and conflict avoidance; rather, the dimension also may influence variables such as self-efficacy for disagreement and how they perceive their classroom discussion climate. Finally, socio-economic background turned out to be difficult to measure. It did not show any significant results in this study, despite being known from previous research to be important for several factors that influence for participation in discussions and politics. Many students had a hard time answering questions about parents' educational level, affecting the variable's reliability.

## 5.2 Conclusion

Notwithstanding these limitations, the study supports the role of several dimensions in disagreement orientation, including debate seeking and conflict avoidance. Debate seeking refers to positive emotions (such as feelings of joy) that drive active participation in debate. In

contrast, conflict avoidance refers to negative emotions (such as discomfort and concerns about social consequences) that may inhibit participation. The findings show that different factors impact debate seeking and conflict avoidance. First, debate seeking is related to individual background variables, such as political interest, political conversation, and attention paid to the news. It is a dimension that seems connected to political engagement and participation. This does not apply to conflict avoidance. On the other hand, citizenship education characteristics seem to impact conflict avoidance but not debate seeking. Consequently, we argue that there is a need for more attention to the notion that young people's disagreement orientation is multidimensional and has an influence on citizenship and political socialization, especially citizenship education.

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