

TUNING IN TO FORMAL POLITICS

Mock Elections at School and the Intention of Electoral Participation among First Time Voters in Norway

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ABSTRACT

Does voting in mock elections at school have an effect on students' willingness to vote in the following Parliamentary election? Empirically tested through the case of mock elections at schools in Norway in relation to the Parliamentary election of 2013, the multivariate logistic regression analyses of the data shows that voting in mock elections proves to have an effect on the students' willingness to vote and that this effect persists after controlling for background factors. The results strengthen the case for political education in school while simultaneously acknowledging its limits.

KEYWORDS

Electoral participation -Norway-political education-mock elections-first time voters

1. INTRODUCTION

Politicians, media and researchers alike are concerned about young people's attitudes towards political participation in general and voting in particular. A declining electoral participation in advanced democracies alerts a disengagement from the community and political

life (Putnam, 2000; Wattenberg, 2012), a lack of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Galston, 2001) and a generation of apolitical youth (Øia, 1995).

This study's objective is to examine the role mock elections as political education in school play in stimulating young people to vote. The research question is: "Does voting in mock elections at school have an effect on students' willingness to vote in the following Parliamentary election?"

Much of the scholarly interest in the individuals relation to the political system grows out of the claim that voting is democracy's *sine qua non*, without which it cannot be. Thus, a decreasing voter turnout may not only challenge one of the core characteristics of a democratic regime but also question the effectiveness of the institutions in imbuing in young people the desired political behavior and support for the regime. At a macro level, this process, in which institutions legitimate support for the regime, is in political science research often referred to as *political socialization*, with the main objective of enabling system persistence (Easton, 1965; Hyman, 1959). Democratic states depend on institutions to promote democratic citizens (March and Olsen, 1995), and the school has, in many countries, been given the role of safeguarding this functional dimension of education (Rokkan, 1987).

Thus, it is of high relevance to study the field of *political education*, which, in this article, is defined as 'the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for citizens to *participate in the political process*'. This definition is distinct from "civic" or citizenship education, which in the literature, is treated in a broader manner; it is instilling in young people the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them 'to *participate in the communities* of which they are a part, locally, nationally and globally' (Arthur, Davies and Hahn 2008, p.5, own italics).

An example of institutionalized political education can be found in Norway where mock elections were introduced after the Second World War to promote democratic participation, values and attitudes for the future (Storstein, 1946). The mock elections have expanded through

the last 70 years to include all upper secondary schoolsⁱ. Norway is the sole country in the world with a long tradition for and a national frame to this activity, which is conducted every second year a week before the local or Parliamentary elections. The Norwegian mock elections involve other educational features than the act of voting. There is a school debate where youth politicians visit the school and debate current political issues, and since 2011 there has also been an election square. The election square is a market place where the students can meet and interact with party members from the political youth organizations.

This study is based on data from the 2013 School Election Surveys (SES), collected by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD)ⁱⁱ, and conducted among students in upper secondary schools in Norway in the classrooms either later the same day or a few days after the mock election has taken place. In 2013, there were 177 participating schools in the survey across the country. To avoid selection bias due to school variances, this analysis is based on a sample of students weighted on educational program and geography (N=1611).

The relation between education and political participation is perhaps the most well-established relation that exists in research on political behavior (Persson 2015, p.689). However, we do not know the mechanisms at work. Persson (2015, p.691) asks whether education is a direct cause of political participation or if it works as a proxy for other factors. 'The Absolute Education Model' suggests that it is the skills and knowledge gained through education that matters; the 'Pre- adult Socialization Model' is the extreme alternative where education is merely a proxy for factors such as family socioeconomic status, or political socialization in the home environment and personal characteristics.

I conduct a multivariate logistic regression analysis to test if voting in mock elections proves to have an effect on the students' willingness to vote in the Parliamentary election and whether this effect persists after controlling for background factors. It is important to keep in mind that the study does not have an experimental design. The mock election takes place earlier

in the day or a few days before the students answer the survey, and the causal effect might be understood as if participating in mock elections is responsible for students' positive attitudes towards voting. However, in general, a process has many causes. Statistical studies, which omit all contextual factors except those codified in the variables selected for measurement or used for constituting a population of cases, necessarily leave out many contextual and intervening variables (George and Bennett 2005, p.21). Therefore, it might be that the students who participated in the mock elections already were favorable towards attending elections and that other underlying factors can explain the relation between voting in mock elections and willingness to vote in the Parliamentary election. Comparisons made under "other things equal" have a causal interpretation, but real "other things equal" comparisons are hard to engineer (Angrist and Pischke, 2015). All schools conduct mock elections and almost all students participate, thus it is difficult to provide comparable individuals that did not have the opportunity to vote in mock elections.

However, one of the current debates in civic and political education research regards the role the school plays in comparison to background factors (such as parental socialization see for example Neundorf et al., 2015). In this case, the mock elections make an interesting test. If voting in mock elections prove to have an effect on the students' willingness to vote in the Parliamentary election and this effect persists after controlling for background factors such as pre- adult socialization factors, it strengthens the case for political education in school.

Section 2 provides a brief overview of the literature on political education in school with regard to political participation before moving on to the presentation of the case of Norwegian mock elections in section 3. Section 4 presents the data and method applied in the empirical analysis. The results are presented in section 5. Finally, a discussion and conclusion follow.

2. POLITICAL EDUCATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In regard to research on *political education* in school, many scholars, based on the writings of John Dewey, argue in favor of active learning through participation such as live simulations in class, hands-on experiences with political campaigns and voting (Coffey, Miller and Feurestein, 2011), mock trials (Bengston and Sifferd, 2010), mock congress and other forms of project-based learning (Parker et al., 2013). Others focus on the general democratic atmosphere of the school, such as having an open classroom climate (Sherrod, Torney-Purta and Flanagan 2010; Hooghe and Stolle, 2004). For instance, Hooghe and Dassonneville (2013) show how an open classroom climate promotes the willingness to vote in future elections among adolescents by presenting several sides of the issues, encouraging students to express their own opinions, and encouraging them to make up their own minds and discuss issues with people having different opinions.

The whole idea about active learning and schools as democratic institutions is to enable students to participate and, thus, learn from their democratic experiences (Solhaug 2003). The underlying theoretical assumption is that participatory experiences in school are transferred to the “real world”. Through engagement in an activity, individuals change and handle a later situation in ways prepared by their own participation in the previous situation (Rogoff 1995, p.153). However, there is minimal knowledge regarding mock elections. The mock elections in Norway provide an excellent case study of active learning because it offers a meeting place between youth politicians and students in a school debate, an election square and the opportunity to vote in all upper secondary schools. Thus, the mock elections as political education also taps into the debate of what active learning is. This study tests the effects of three political education “efforts” as active learning: attending a school debate, an election square and voting in mock elections, on the students` willingness to vote in the Parliamentary election.

By now, it has become generally accepted that there is a wide array of factors that may be of importance when explaining the intentions of political participation. On the one hand, scholars stress contextual factors (Campbell, 2006), institutional frameworks (Lijphart, 1999), individual level predictors of socio-demographics such as gender, age and socioeconomic status (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980) or resources such as time, money and civic skills (Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995). On the other hand, Almond and Verba's (1963) cross cultural study was a main breakthrough in the 1960s highlighting the role of individual level cognitive, evaluative and affective explanations. Researchers agree the following individual level background variables are of basic relevance, and they are expected to be so in the Norwegian case: gender, place of residence, educational program, socio-economics and previous political action experiences.

First, there has been persistence in the gender gap (Inglehart and Norris, 2003) where men traditionally have been found to participate to a higher extent than women in all forms of political participation. However, studies on adolescents have shown that girls and boys tend to prefer different forms of participation and that girls are in fact more likely to state that they will vote than boys (Hooghe and Dassonneville, 2013; Hooghe and Stolle, 2004). In Norway, previous research has found no gender gap effect (Strømsnes, 2003).

Second, more political activity is predicted in urban rather than in rural settings according to the center-periphery paradigm (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). The levels of political participation vary, particularly with regards to voter turnout in the Northern part of Norway (lower voter turnout) and the Southern part. Additionally, immigrants from outside Western Europe typically have a lower rate of political participation in Norway than other groups. At the Parliamentary election of 2013, the immigrant turnout rate was approximately 50 percent compared to 78.2 percent (SSB 2014) for the general population.

Third, previous research has shown that students in general educational programs (academics) are more likely to participate and to intend to participate politically than students from vocational programs (Ekman, 2007). In Norway, school education is compulsory to the 10th grade, and nearly all students attend upper secondary school as well. However, upper secondary school offers both general educational programs, which approximately six of ten students attend; and vocational programs (SSB 2016).

Fourth, with regards to “the socioeconomic status model” of education, income and occupation, which has traditionally been a strong predictor of participation (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), the students are naturally not asked about their income and occupation since they are students. However, the survey includes a question regarding the parents’ education level. Parents’ education level can be an indicator of family background (Lauglo and Øia 2006), and political socialization in the home environment.

The previous political action experiences the students have may be an indicator of a personal characteristic: whether “I am someone who participates” (Beaumont et al., 2006). Being a member of an organization can have a positive impact on participation and attitudes towards participation. Those who are already active in youth associations and volunteering are more likely to participate later on (Hooghe, 2003). A consistent finding in research thus far is that young people distance themselves from “formal” politics, for example, voting and becoming a member of a political party, whereas direct forms of participation such as boycotts, demonstrations and short-term engagements increase in scope (White, Bruce and Ritchie, 2000; Taft, 2006; Dalton, 2008; Ødegård, 2010). In accordance with this finding, Quintelier (2015) argues that organizations are the political socialization agents with the strongest effect on political behavior among adolescents. In Norway, the youth organizations of the political parties are essential parts of the mock election.

3. THE NORWEGIAN CASE OF MOCK ELECTIONS AT SCHOOL

At a macro level, political education is introduced in schools to imbue in young people the appropriate behavior to uphold the political system (Easton, 1965). According to March and Olsen (1995), democratic states depend on institutions to create democratic citizens. In Norway, the mock elections have become an institution of political education; however, there are mock elections conducted by organizations and school in countries around the world (McDevitt and Spiro 2006; Linimon and Joslyn, 2002; Undervisningsministeriet 2015, MUCF 2015). These mock elections differ with regards to educational policies such as school support and cooperation with organizations, age (who participates and when), curriculum, whether the mock elections are an integrated part and the teaching practices are related to them, the actors (roles of teachers and youth parties) and the publication of the results.

In Norway, the mock elections are nationally coordinated, administered by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) and financed by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. The NSD analyzes and reports the results. The mock elections have received increased attention from the media, politicians and society in general, and all schools arrange them prior to parliamentary and local elections in Norway. Thus, all students have had the possibility to vote at least once in school before actually receiving the right to voteⁱⁱⁱ. The activities proceed as follows: The school debate assembles one representative from each of the seven major political parties, and they present several political issues chosen by either the teachers or a few of the students. The duration of the debate varies from school to school, from one hour to two and a half hours; students gather in a gymnasium or assembly hall. During the debate, the politicians discuss current political events and issues. Thereafter, there is an election square where the students have the opportunity to participate in discussions with the party representatives and ask them about specific political issues they are interested in. Either the same day or a few days after the party politicians have visited the school; the school conducts

the mock election in a classroom, a gym or a common area. There was a turnout in the mock election in 2013 of 81.1 percent (NSD 2013).

4. DATA AND METHOD

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of voting in mock elections on the students' willingness to vote in the following Parliamentary election. As was noted in the introduction in section 1, the idea is to test if voting in mock elections proves to have an effect on the students' willingness to vote in the Parliamentary election, and whether this effect persists after controlling for background factors such as pre- adult socialization factors (Person 2015, p. 691).

The questionnaire used in the survey consists of 58 items on students' political attitudes and behavior in addition to background information. The dependent variable is *willingness to vote in the Parliamentary election*; this was phrased as follows in the questionnaire: "Do you have the right to vote in the forthcoming election, and do you intend to vote?" The problem with the twofold question is avoided by solely examining those who have the right to vote. When excluding everyone who did not have the right to vote, the sample consists of 1611 students. Of those, 9.4 percent responded that they have the right to vote, but do not intend to vote, and the significant majority of 90.6 percent said they have the right to vote and do intend to vote. This is a high number, particularly because first time voters at the age of 18-21 generally have a lower turnout than the remainder of the population. In the Parliamentary election in 2013, the turnout rate among first time voters was 66.5 percent, an increase from 56.2 percent in 2009. In the local election in Norway of 2011, 46 percent of first time voters decided to cast a ballot on Election Day compared with 33 percent four years earlier (Bergh 2013).^{iv} In this context, I want to emphasize two aspects.

First, this study addresses students' *willingness* to vote. The survey is conducted after the mock election, approximately one week before the Parliamentary election. Therefore, whether the students actually have voted is not the focus of the analysis. Nevertheless, asking about the likelihood of future political participation is, in most youth research, the sole means of grasping electoral behavior among a group that does not have the right to vote (Hooghe and Dassonville, 2013; Torney-Purta, et al., 2001). There is a large discrepancy between intentions to vote and actual turnout rates for first time voters. Two reasons may explain this. One regards how survey data may overstate turnout because respondents misreport their own participation (Denny and Doyle, 2008)^v. The other reason may be that abstainers are typically less likely than voters to participate in surveys overall. However, in this case, the students are encouraged to answer and complete the survey during class, which ensures a non-biased and high response rate.^{vi}

Second, there are methodological considerations to consider when working with a highly skewed sample. Of the 1611 students who had the right to vote, 1459 reported intentions of voting, whereas 152 stated that they had the right to vote but did not want to use it. One challenge is that the study may suffer from a small-sample bias (King and Zeng, 2001). What is important with regards to sufficient variation on the dependent variable in a logistic regression is that the total sample is sufficiently high to include a high number of cases on each value (1) or (0). The number of students who said that they did not intend to vote was three digits, and this is not an excessively small number. Because the research question has a dependent variable, which is a dummy, logistic regression was applied.

Two additional comments must be made before the presentation of the results. First, the sample in this study consists of a particular group of respondents, and the results may not be generalizable to groups other than students. Second, 2013 was chosen as an empirical snapshot of the mock election because this is the first time the survey included questions about election

squares. The election squares were introduced as an alternative to school debates in 2011^{vii}. I therefore have the unique opportunity to examine the effects of participating in the three elements of the mock elections on the students' willingness to vote in the Parliamentary election.

The strategy of the analysis presented in the next section is to start out with a binary analysis of the impact of voting in the mock election, followed by the activities of the mock election in detail: the effects of participating in the school debate and the election square on students' willingness to vote in the Parliamentary election (Model I). The final model (Model II) examines the effect of participating in the political education of mock elections at school controlling for the background factors expected to have an impact on intentions of political participation.

5. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Does voting in mock elections at school have an effect on the students' willingness to vote in the following Parliamentary election? A high majority of the students in the sample voted in the mock elections at school. There were 1359 students who participated, and 221 who did not (N=1580, 31 respondents N.A). A correlation analysis was computed to examine the relation between voting in the mock election and the intentions of voting in the Parliamentary election. Overall, there is a weak and positive correlation ($r = 0.212, N = 1580, p = .000$) between voting in the mock election and the students' willingness to vote in the Parliamentary election of 2013.

Exploring the relations more thoroughly in a cross tabulation in Table 1 reveals that 88.4 percent of the students who voted in the mock election intended to vote in the Parliamentary election.

Table 1: The relationship between voting in the mock election and intentions to vote in the Parliamentary election of 2013

		Intention to vote in Parliamentary election	
		YES	NO
Did you vote in the mock election?	NO	11,6 % (166)	36,7 % (55)
	YES	88,4 % (1264)	63,3 % (95)
Total		100,0 % (1430)	100,0% (150)

Moving to a binary analysis of the impact of voting in the mock election, the results presented in Table 2 below show that there is a positive and significant effect of voting in the mock election. Voting in the mock election increases the likelihood that students intend to vote in the following Parliamentary election. The Exp(B) column, the Odds Ratio, tells us that the students who have voted in the mock election at school are about 4 and a half times (or 340 percent) more likely to be willing to vote in the Parliamentary election than those who have not participated in the mock election. The explained variance of voting in the mock election on the willingness to vote is 7.3 percent.

Table 2: The impact of voting in the mock election at school on whether the students intend to vote

Voting in the mock election	4.408 (.188)***
Nagelkerke	.073
N	1580

*Note: The table shows the Odds Ratio (Exp (B) and (S.E)). *** p < .001*

Table 3 below explores the impact of attending the school debate and the election square on the intention to vote in the following Parliamentary election. In regard to the activities of mock elections, it is necessary to emphasize that all students do not engage in all activities. It

may very well be that a student participates in the debate but does not attend the mock election or vice versa. In addition, the election square has a different, less mandatory feel to it. In the sample (N=1611), 64.4 percent of the students attended the debate, whereas 40.5 percent attended the election square. There is a weak and positive correlation ($r = 0.137$, $N = 1611$, $p = .000$) between attending the school debate and the students willingness to vote in the Parliamentary election of 2013. This finding is also the case with attending the election square ($r = 0.115$, $N=1611$, $p=.000$).

The results in Table 3 show that students who were present at the school debate are 2.2 times (or 122 percent) more likely to be willing to vote in the Parliamentary election than the students who were absent from the school debate. Also, the students who attended the election square were about 2.3 times (or 129 per cent) more likely to intend to vote in the Parliamentary election than their schoolmates who did not visit the party representatives at the election square. In addition, voting in the mock election continues to have a strong and positive effect on the willingness to vote in the Parliamentary election. The overall goodness of fit experiences an increase to 12.4 percent.

Table 3: The impact of attending the school debate and election square on the intention to vote

	Model I
Voting in the mock election	3.778 (.194)***
Attending the school debate	2.218 (.179)***
Attending the election square	2.289 (.209)***
Nagelkerke	.124
Hosmer & Lemeshow test	.997
N	1580

Note: The table shows the Odds Ratio (Exp (B)) and (S.E.). *** $p < .001$

From the results in Model I, the conclusion may be derived that the mock elections have a very important impact on the students' willingness to vote in the Parliamentary election. What

is the effect of participating in the mock election activities when controlling for the background factors?

Table 4 summarizes the results when conducting a multiple logistic regression controlling for the following background characteristics; gender, geography, immigrant background, current educational track, and parental level of education and political action experiences^{viii}.

Table 4: Final model explaining the intention to vote

	Model II
Voting in the mock election	3.874(.300)***
Attending the school debate	1.337 (.268)
Attending the election square	1.661 (.291)
Gender (0=male, 1= female)	1.432 (.271)
Geography (0 = center, 1= periphery)	.562 (.319)
Immigrant (1= immigrant from outside West-Europe/N. America)	.599 (.396)
Attending general studies (1= yes)	2.498 (.276)***
Parental level of education (1= parent went to college)	1.779 (.277)**
Sign petitions (1=yes)	1.676 (.350)
Demonstrate	1.567 (.430)
Member of political party	1.772 (.559)
Member of political organization	1.080 (.593)
Member of sports/music organization	1.607 (.322)
Member of religious organization	.411 (.469)
Nagelkerke	.196
Hosmer & Lemeshow test	.923
N	1062

Note: The table shows the Odds Ratio (Exp (B)) and (S.E). * p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

First, there is no gender effect. This supports research on political participation in Norway. This finding contradicts the youth-specific hypotheses suggesting that there is a gender gap among young people (Hooghe and Stolle 2004). However, the young people in this study are of sufficient age to have the right to vote; therefore, it is not possible to say whether there, up this point, has been an effect. Additionally, the results solely indicate that there is no effect of gender on the willingness to vote; however, a gender gap in regard to other forms of political participation may remain.

Second, there is also no effect of whether the students live in urban or rural areas nor the immigrant variable on their willingness to vote, contradicting the expectation that there is lower political participation among people in the Northern part of Norway and immigrants.

Third, membership in various organizations does not have an impact on the students' willingness to vote as opposed to Quintelier's findings (2015) that organizations have the strongest effect on political behavior among adolescents. In addition, partaking in demonstrations does not have a significant effect. This result supports the persistent finding in research on political participation among youth that there exists a distinction between informal and formal forms of political participation.

The results in Table 4 further show that two background factors, attending general studies and parent's educational program, have a positive and significant impact on the students willingness to vote. The students who attend general educational programs are about 2.5 times (or 149 percent) more likely of being willing to vote than the students who attend vocational education programs. Additionally, the students who have a parent who has attended college are about 1.7 times (or 77.9 percent) more likely to be willing to vote in the Parliamentary election than the students who do not have college educated parents.

A main finding in Table 4 is that participating in the mock election continues to have a strong and significant effect. The students who have voted in the mock election at school are about 3.8 times (or 287 percent) more likely to be willing to vote in the Parliamentary election than those who have not participated in the mock election. All the other variables lose significance with the exception of educational program and parental level of education. Although participating in the school debate and election square had significant effects on students intentions of voting in Model I, the significance of the effects were lost in the final model. Neither participation at the debate nor the election square have an effect on the students'

willingness to vote in the following Parliamentary election when controlling for the background factors.

A brief summary of the models' explanatory power shows that the binary analysis had an explanatory power of approximately seven percent. The first model analyzed the effects of the activities of the mock election, explaining as much as twelve percent of the variance. However, the final model appears to fit better than the previous, explaining nearly 20 percent of the students willingness to cast a ballot on Election Day.

6. DISCUSSION

Examining the effect of mock elections is interesting in itself because it contributes to our prior understanding of what influences political participation. The persistence of the effect of voting in mock elections on students' willingness to vote after controlling for background factors strengthens the case for political education in school.

Political education can be defined as the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for citizens to participate in the political process. There is no doubt that voting in the mock election has an influence on students *attitudes* because the findings in this study show that voting in mock elections increases the willingness to vote. What may explain this?

When mock elections are conducted at school, it simulates a Parliamentary election because the votes cast do not actually elect anyone. As a simulation, mock elections become a part of the "curriculum", a school assignment for the students but also for the teachers who interrupt the classroom routine to make time for voting. Then, when the students partake in the election, they observe other students casting ballots and the teachers encouraging them to do so. Thus, voting at school becomes a means of promoting voting as the norm. It is an activity that interrupts the daily routine and that "everyone" participates in. However, the mock

elections are also a means for students to express their political identities: am I someone who votes? The results of the mock elections paint a picture of the political voice of youth today. Further studies are needed to explore these relations. First and foremost, what are the students' perspectives on mock elections as political education? Additionally, qualitative differences in how the schools conduct the mock elections can lay the framework for a comparative analysis of schools. For instance, are the students encouraged to participate by their teachers? Is the mock elections organized freely, or are the student followed to the voting booths? How do these school-level factors impact students' willingness to vote?

This study shows that practice and participation in activities in school is a means of enabling youth to participate in the political process. However, the effect is limited to voting in the mock election, and not partaking in the activities of the mock election: the school debate and the election square. This is interesting particularly because the school debate is the main event the schools organize, to the extent that it has become an institution of political education in itself. During this debate, young party politicians present their view on various political issues. According to the literature, a willingness to vote can be promoted by presenting several sides of the issues, encouraging students to express their own opinions and decide for themselves and to discuss issues with people having different opinions (Hooghe and Dassonneville 2013). Initially, the debate would fulfill the two criteria of bringing current political events and debates into school and presenting several sides of the political issues, therein promoting the students' willingness to vote. However, the debate has no effect on the students' intentions of voting. The election square in which the students can discuss the issues with people having different opinions also has no effect. This article tests the effect of participating in the mock elections as active learning. The findings show that the active learning experience of casting a ballot "matters more" than attending a debate or an election square. Without in-depth studies of the activities occurring in relation to the mock election, it is difficult

to explain their lack of effect. Thus, further studies need to explore what occurs when the political youth parties and the students meet and interact.

Additionally, the findings in this study emphasize the continued relevance of two background factors. First is the parents' education level. This factor suggests that the school is but one arena for political education, in which youth make up their minds regarding electoral participation. The influence of parents cannot be underestimated. The pre- adult socialization factor of what occurs at home has a significant impact. These findings have implications for political education because it emphasizes the limits of educational efforts. Political education can only extend so far because the students' background characteristics establish the guidelines. Second is the students' educational track. Although the latter may be a proxy for other underlying factors (Persson, 2012), which navigate certain students into vocational education and others into general education, there are also differences in the political education curriculum in the two tracks that can offer possible explanations. In the Norwegian upper secondary school (grade 11-13), social studies is a two-hour course per week the first or second year for all students. However, the students in general education can also choose to specialize in social studies. The different curricula give more time for political education in general than in vocational educational programs. There is no potential in the data to explore the possible effects of the students' specializations *in* the general program on the willingness to vote, which would provide more information about the effects of political education with regards to form and scope.

The findings in this study reveal certain factors that influence students' willingness to vote; however, most of the variance remains unexplained. In sum, the model explains 20 percent of the factors that impact students' willingness to vote. The question is what can explain the remainder? When surveyed, the students report an intention to vote; however, on Election Day, many young people who obtain the right to vote for the first time choose not to participate.

Thus, what actually makes first time voters decide to vote is yet another part of the story. Therefore, further studies should examine subjective factors and, particularly, the individual motivations to understand what makes young people tune in to formal politics.

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study has been to examine the role mock elections as political education in school play in stimulating young people to vote. While voting in the mock elections has an effect on students' willingness to vote in the following Parliamentary election, partaking in the mock election activities of the school debate and the election square does not. This underlines the importance of research on teaching and learning on the topics of politics and democracy with regards to present and future political participation among youth.

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ⁱ The Norwegian school system can be divided into three parts: elementary school (Barneskole, age 6-13), lower secondary school (Ungdomsskole, age 13-16), and upper secondary school (Videregående skole, age 16-19). Although there is a dropout rate of approximately 30 percent (Markussen 2009), many return; in addition, 81 percent of the students have completed the course of five years (Falch and Nyhus, 2009).

ⁱⁱ NSD is not responsible for the analysis of the data presented here.

ⁱⁱⁱ There are 420 upper secondary schools in Norway: 341 county, 77 private and 2 at the state level (<http://www.udir.no/Tilstand/Utdanningsspeilet/Utdanningsspeilet/Utdanningsspeilet-2013/1-Fakta-om-grunnskole-og-videregaende-opplaring/110-Fortsatt-nedgang-i-antall-videregaende-skoler-i-Norge/>) In 2013, 419 of them arranged elections. One of the schools has students who are adults, and the school did not conduct a mock election.

^{iv} Whether this is a burst or a part of trend is a matter to follow with close scrutiny.

^v For instance, the questionnaire is distributed (immediately) after the mock elections, a week before Election Day. Thus, voting is all over the media, the school and (for some) at home. This may facilitate over-reporting.

^{vi} However, this may vary. It is an electronic survey, and there is of course a chance that the students do not actually spend the time provided to complete the forms but prefer other kinds of internet activities despite the teachers' recommendations.

^{vii} After the 2011 Norway terror attacks in Oslo and at Utøya, where the Labor Party's youth organization, AUF, was having a summer camp, the electoral campaign for the local elections were postponed. As a direct consequence of the attacks, the debates were canceled out of respect for the loss of many lives of young politicians. Instead, the politicians agreed to replace the school debate with an election square where the politicians would be available for questions. Although the debates were canceled in 2011, they returned in 2013 in addition to election squares. Therefore, 2013 is the second year with election squares in most schools.

^{viii} Controlling for gender (1= female; 51,6 percent), geography (1= Troms, Finnmark, Nordland 13,1 percent), immigrant background (1= outside West- Europe/N. America; 10 percent), current educational track (1=general studies; 61, 5 percent), and parental level of education (1= at least one parent has attended college; 47,1 percent). Political action experiences: (N= (+/-) 1500); here referring to whether the students have signed petitions (1= 28.1 percent), participated in demonstrations (1=17,2 percent), are members of political parties (12,2 percent), other political organizations (8,5 percent), sports or music organizations (34,1 percent) and religious organizations (8,6 percent).