Getting Ready for Democracy: The Positive Effect of a Large-Scale Teaching Program on Students’ Political Efficacy and Competences

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Abstract
Concerns about young citizens’ political engagement and competences exist in many democracies. One potential solution is to implement teaching programs in schools and thereby make the students better prepared to take part in democracy when they become adults. However, finding an effective and scalable program is difficult. This paper evaluates an innovative and engaging three-week teaching program implemented in the three oldest primary school classes across Denmark. Utilizing a two-wave panel dataset with students from a random sample of the schools participating in the program, the analysis documents positive effects on the students’ internal and external political efficacy, their motivation to participate in politics, their political knowledge, and their political compass. Actual enrollment rates in youth political parties was positively affected as well. Students with low-medium pre-level scores gained most from the program, which indicates that it decreased inequalities in competences for political engagement. While no big fix, the program is a positive nudge that can serve as an inspiration for others concerned about youth political engagement.

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Political engagement from relatively competent citizens is of benefit to both democracies and the citizens themselves. While the participation of a substantial share of the citizens is often seen as a necessary condition for a well-functioning democracy, it may not be sufficient in itself. Indeed, a vibrant democracy also depends on its citizens believing that they can have an impact in politics and that they have the capacity to contribute through deliberate judgements and actions, which informally captures the concept of political efficacy (Beaumont 2010; Miller et al. 1980). Politically efficacious citizens are likely to participate more in societal and political affairs (cf. Holbein 2017). Thus, instilling civic skills and political efficacy in citizens is an important duty in democratic societies.

Most democracies across the world have been struggling with declining voter turnout rates as well as low levels of youth turnout (International IDEA 2016; Vowles 2017 (forthcoming); Hansen 2017a). Furthermore, young citizens participate in relatively low numbers in other types of traditional political activities (Hooghe & Dassonneville 2013). This can be considered a cause for concern since the youth of today, logically, will shape democracy many years ahead. Therefore, we might wonder what can be done to prepare young citizens for taking part in democracy.

The educational system is one potential arena for developing a sense of political efficacy. Indeed, nurturing the active participation of citizens has been argued to be a key task for public schools in democratic societies for many years (Langton & Jennings 1968; Ravitch & Viteritti 2001; Campbell 2008; Holbein 2017). There are several reasons why the educational system can potentially be used to make young people more likely to become active democratic citizens when they grow up. Children and young adults are expected to have weaker attitudes towards societal and political affairs, which makes them more likely to be receptive towards inputs about these matters. This fits well with the idea that education can have a causal effect on political participation by developing skills relevant to politics (Brady et al. 1995; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008; Persson 2015). While the influence from, for example, parents to children, is potentially stronger and has received considerable attention (cf.
Langton & Jennings 1968; Jennings et al. 2009), it is more challenging to design policies and programs that affect what parents transmit to their children. Instead, from a policy-making perspective, the educational system is attractive due to both the potential to reach a large share of the young population and because of the control that policy makers have to some extent with regards to what is being taught in the classrooms. The question is how to design effective programs that make young citizens better prepared for democratic engagement.

In this paper, I present a three-week teaching program called the School Elections that was implemented in the oldest classes (14-16 years old) in most Danish primary schools in 2017 and analyze the effects of the program. The program is focused around a mock election and consists of a number of elements that mimic real-world election campaigns. A key element is that the students are highly active, set their own agenda, and work with presenting their own arguments and listening to co-students. Students from a random sample of the participating schools were drawn to take part in a survey before and after the School Elections program, thereby making panel data available which are used to investigate the effects of the program on students’ sense of political efficacy, motivation for varied types of political participation, political knowledge, and political compass.

The paper has three main contributions. First, it presents a novel teaching program that can inspire others with the aim of making programs that help prepare students to become active democratic citizens. Second, the analysis shows that the program had statistically significant positive effects on five relevant dimensions for political engagement. On a scale from 0-100, the students’ sense of internal efficacy increased by 4.7 points and external political efficacy by 2.2 points. Furthermore, the motivation to participate in various political acts increased by 2.3 points and actual enrollment rates in youth political parties is positively affected. Political knowledge increased by 2.9 points and the students’ political compass by 14 points. Third, the analysis indicates that the program helped decrease inequalities in the prerequisites for political engagement by making the largest difference
for students who had low or medium scores on the five dimensions before the program was implemented.

Taken together, the contributions have important perspectives for both scholars and practitioners concerned about the political engagement of young citizens. The paper presents a scalable and innovative teaching program that can be implemented in other contexts. Furthermore, it documents that the program works to make young citizens better prepared for political engagement. Identifying effective solutions that are scalable and inexpensive is no simple task, and the program can serve as an inspiration for future research and for policy makers struggling with similar challenges. Finally, concerns about inequalities in political participation and political competences are present across the Western world. The fact that the program helps decrease inequalities in the dimensions relevant for future political engagement suggests that it is indeed possible to make educational interventions that also work to increase equalities in democratic engagement.

**Point of departure: Getting ready for democratic engagement**

In most Western democracies, politicians, pundits and scholars regularly express concerns about low and declining voter turnout (cf. Bhatti et al. 2017c). In particular, worries have been voiced about young people’s low levels of political activity. One simple indicator for political engagement is voter turnout, which is substantively lower for young voters than their older counterparts (Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980; Leighley & Nagler 2013; Hansen 2017a; Bhatti et al. 2017b), and are thus underrepresented at the polls. Since voting is habit-forming (Coppock & Green 2016; Dinas 2012; Plutzer 2002), the large proportion of young people not voting early on in their adult lives risks spilling over to long-term declines in voter turnout (Campbell 2006; Plutzer 2002). In addition, few young people sign up for party memberships, which is another important type of political participation.
for the functioning of representative democracies (Hooghe & Dassonneville 2013). If young people do not engage in party politics, it will, for instance, become more difficult to recruit candidates for office in the years ahead. In sum, worries about low levels of political activity among the youth are present both in regards to the short term and the long term.

One potential source for political participation is an individual’s resources (Brady et al. 1995). As argued by Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995), individuals abstain from taking part in politics either because: (1) they lack the resources (‘they can’t’), (2) they lack the psychological engagement (‘they don’t want to’), or (3) they lack recruitment networks (‘nobody asked them to’). In this regard, the relevant resources for political participation are time, money and civic skills, whereas psychological engagement covers aspects such as political interest and a sense that political activity makes a difference (Brady et al. 1995: 271). Some of these elements (e.g., time and money) are difficult to affect with large-scale public policy programs. However, issues such as civic skills and psychological engagement – concepts later closely related to aspects such as political interest, efficacy and competences – are more realistic to affect in a positive direction through public policy programs.

*Developing democratic engagement through the educational system*

A particularly interesting arena for programs aiming at increasing citizens’ civic skills and efficacy is the educational system. Almost all citizens spend a substantial amount of time in the educational system, which makes it possible to scale programs and reach a large and diverse share of young citizens. In addition, politicians and policy makers in most Western countries have at least some leverage regarding what is being brought into the classrooms in primary and high schools. Furthermore, it has been argued that a central mission of the public school system is to promote students’ engagement in democracy (Ravitch & Viteritti 2001; Campbell 2006; Langton & Jennings
In sum, there are both practical and principal considerations which, from a policy perspective, speak in favor of going through the educational system to make citizens better prepared to take part in democracy.

From a substantive point of view, targeting children and teenagers with the aim of developing civic skills and efficacy might also be a good idea. Theories concerning political socialization and learning point to the importance of experiences early in life in explaining the behavior of adults (Holbein 2017; Jennings et al. 2009; Niemi & Hepburn 1995; Campbell 2006). While what takes place inside the family is likely to be very important (cf. Lane 1959; Jennings et al. 2009; Jennings & Niemi 1978), there is also the possibility that school can make a difference in two ways: First, by developing the cognitive skills of the students (e.g., reading, mathematics), they also give students relevant resources for their future political engagement (Denny & Doyle 2008; Holbein 2017; Langton & Jennings 1968; Brady et al. 1995). Second, they can help develop non-cognitive skills (e.g., social, cooperation and psychological skills) that can also enable greater political participation later in life (Holbein 2017; Beaumont 2010). For instance, this could be instilling the feeling that one can make a difference in politics and is able to make one’s voice heard, which is likely to be relevant for future political involvement (Campbell 2008; Hooghe & Dassonneville 2013). Consequently, if the aim is to increase future political engagement via educational programs, it seems to be a reasonable idea to consider how to design programs that strengthen both cognitive and non-cognitive skills and to gather more evidence about their effectiveness (Niemi & Hepburn 1995).

Looking inside the schools, we can imagine several elements that might contribute to making the students better prepared for taking part in democracy. These include the curriculum being taught, the teachers, the level and type of student involvement in local decisions, and the climate in the school and the classroom (Niemi & Hepburn 1995; Campbell 2008). While, in theory, we can separate each of these factors, they are, in practice, often jumbled together in complex systems. For instance,
teachers have considerable influence on the classroom climate and the priority given to different parts of the curriculum. Instead of trying to highlight the relative importance of these specific elements, the focus here will be on whether a teaching program in which all parts center around core principles of student involvement and engagement works to make students better prepared for political engagement. In this manner, the overarching principle that goes into all possible elements is to develop students’ non-cognitive skills. The focus is on students who are between 14-16 years old, which is the period where the transition from adolescence to early adulthood takes place. Arguably, these years are formative with regards to young citizens’ future political engagement and competences, and society also seems to assume that this is the period in which the youth needs to be educated about politics and political participation (Niemi & Hepburn 1995).

Learning about the effects of civic educational programs

Implementing programs in schools with the aim of educating the youth for democracy is not a new idea.¹ Both in old and new democracies, programs have been implemented and experiences have been formed. Some early studies were skeptical about the effects of civic education, but a more optimistic view is present in more recent work (cf. Galston 2004; Hooghe & Dassonneville 2013). While much has been written about civic education and the potential use of educational programs, two challenges in the existing literature call for a consideration with regard to whether programs actually make a difference.

¹ The focus here is on programs that work in addition to what is already being taught in schools. Teaching about civic and political affairs has been a part of the school systems in many developed democracies since – at least – World War II (Niemi & Hepburn 1995). In this paper, the question is whether special programs can provide a boost in addition to what students already learn.
The first challenge concerns the level of analysis, which is often above specific programs. For instance, a number of interesting analyses draw on cross-sectional data from multiple countries to investigate current and future political engagement of adolescents (e.g., Hooghe & Dassonneville 2013; Torney-Purta et al. 2004; Galston 2004). These often include some answers about school experiences among other variables that might explain adolescents’ civic attitudes and behavior. A finding from some of these analysis is that – all else being equal – an open classroom climate is positive for future political engagement (Hooghe & Dassonneville 2013). While this might be accurate, it is not a specific program being investigated, but instead a broad range of questions, of which many are distinct from what is taking place in the classrooms that are being studied. From a policy-making perspective, we lack answers to whether and how we can design specific programs that actually work. To explore this, we instead need to focus in on specific programs.

The second challenge is related to the applied research designs in the few analyses of specific civic teaching programs. If evaluated at all, it is common to see analysis based on either cross-sectional survey data from participating students or qualitative interviews with students and teachers (e.g., Borge 2017). While such data can deliver useful descriptive knowledge and also teach us valuable information about what students and teachers think about the programs, it is hard to use it for causal inference. Even if we are able to control for some background factors, the list of potential confounders at both the student and school level is lengthy, and it is impossible to take them all into account. Thus, to learn about the effects of specific programs, we need research designs and data that are better suited for drawing causal inferences.

This paper aims at addressing both challenges by studying a specific civic teaching program and analyzing the effects of it with a panel dataset. Specifically, the focus of this paper is whether one can implement a program that has an explicit political focus and thereby influence students’ political attitudes and potentially their future behavior in a positive direction. As such, it speaks to one of the
suggested mechanisms regarding how education might increase political participation, i.e., by increasing political efficacy (Sondheimer & Green 2010; Abramson & Aldrich 1982). The ideal evaluation of such programs should consist of rigorously implemented randomized experiments, but such are rarely possible to conduct. As a second-best option, panel studies enable us to obtain a more credible estimate of the effectiveness of programs than we can obtain from cross-sectional studies or qualitative interviews. With a panel data setup, it is possible to hold time-invariant factors constant and thereby eradicate most of the concerns regarding confounders when conducting cross-sectional studies. Consequently, while not ideal, panel data designs can, under the right circumstances, give us somewhat credible estimates regarding a democracy-teaching program’s effects. Furthermore, a panel data approach is a substantial step forward compared to cross-sectional survey studies.

The School Elections teaching program

The School Elections teaching program was introduced in Denmark in 2015 and repeated in 2017. The program is a national event organized by the Danish Parliament and the Ministry of Children, Education and Gender Equality. Primary schools are invited to sign up their eighth, ninth, and tenth

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2 Sondheimer and Green (2010) suggest assigning civic coursework that increases civic knowledge and political interest and see whether it increases political participation. While the program presented in this paper attempts to do this, the research design does not allow us to test the mechanism. If the program works as hypothesized, it does contribute to the direction suggested by Sondheimer and Green by providing an intervention that will work for the first purpose. In future research, one could therefore take an intervention such as the one studied in this paper, randomly assign it and track political participation downstream.

3 In recent years, randomized experiments and quasi-experiments aimed at programs with non-political targets have been used to investigate whether it has downstream effects on political behavior such as voter participation. One example is Sondheimer and Green (2010) who examined 1,200 articles in the American Educational Research Journal and identified 35 randomized designs, of which it was possible to locate information on voter turnout for three of these studies. They found that the three experiments that exogenously increased the high school graduation rates had a positive effect on voter participation. Another example is Holbein (2017) who matched subjects from a randomized experiment on developing kindergarten children’s non-cognitive skills with voter files and document a positive effect on voter participation 20 years after the intervention. These are both examples of strong causal identification strategies to investigate the effect of educational interventions on political behavior. However, they are also examples of exploiting nonpolitical interventions, which is a somewhat different focus than that raised in this manuscript.
graders. Sign-up was performed at the class level at each school, but most schools either sign up all their classes or do not participate.

The organizers describe that the purpose of the program is to increase the students’ feelings of competence and political efficacy, which they hope will result in increased voter participation in the longer term (Skolevalg 2017a). While the organizers did not provide a precise definition, their understanding of the concept was close to what political scientists understand as internal and external political efficacy (Balch 1974: 24; Hansen & Pedersen 2014). For clarity, we define internal political efficacy as “individuals’ self-perceptions that they are capable of understanding politics and competent enough to participate in political acts such as voting” and external political efficacy as “the feeling that an individual and the public can have an impact on the political process because government institutions will respond to their needs” (Miller et al. 1980).

The focus on efficacy was chosen from a belief by policy makers that it would work to increase future participation. Furthermore, international comparisons have positioned Danish youth at the top in terms of general political interest and civic knowledge (Kerr et al. 2010; OECD 2016; Schulz et al. 2017). However, Danish students rank substantially lower when it comes to political efficacy (Kerr et al. 2010; Schulz et al. 2017), and youth voter turnout is considerably below average in all types of Danish elections (Bhatti et al. 2017a; Bhatti et al. 2017b; Bhatti et al. 2016; Bhatti et al. 2014b; Bhatti et al. 2014a). Therefore, even though many young citizens are relatively knowledgeable, the perception from policy makers, politicians and the public has been that many of the young citizens feel that they do not have the competencies to make their voice heard or they do not believe that the political system will be responsive to their inputs, which results in lower rates of participation when reaching adulthood.
When designing the teaching program, the organizers drew on experiences from Norway as well as inputs from teachers, researchers and youth organizations. In Norway, a School Elections program has been in place in high schools since 1989 (NSD 2017). Here, the target group is older – many are indeed eligible to vote – and the program takes place shortly before an actual election, which makes it quite different from the Danish program. A recent cross-sectional survey study found that voting in the Norwegian mock elections is correlated with an intention to vote in parliamentary elections (Borge 2017).

The program is described by the organizers as an authentically conducted election (Skolevalg 2017b). The School Elections commenced with the Prime Minister announcing the Elections in a televised speech on January 16, 2017. From here, a three-week teaching program centered on a mock election campaign began. A core pedagogical element throughout the program was a focus on developing the students’ non-cognitive skills, which would hopefully lead to an increase in their political efficacy. Instead of teaching the students facts about the political system, process and so forth, the program focused on tasks where the students needed to cooperate, develop arguments for their viewpoints, and debate with classmates and youth politicians.

Figure 1: Timeline of the teaching program and data collection

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4 The Danish School Elections teaching program ran for the first time in 2015. Based on an evaluation of the 2015 program in Denmark (Hansen et al. 2015), and inputs from teachers and youth organizations, some minor adjustments have been made to the 2017 program. It is the 2017 School Elections program that is analyzed in this paper.
Specifically, the program consisted of three consecutive blocks (Figure 1). Block 1 was labelled ‘the informal democracy’, in which the students, in groups, informed each other about 20 policy issue statements and choose three that their group would explore in depth. The students had to research the issues themselves, either by using the teaching program’s website, browsing other websites, or by contacting relevant sources.

Block 2 focused on campaigns and rhetoric. Here, the groups created a political campaign for one of their chosen issues and presented it for their classmates and on an online platform. In this block, the students also interacted with other campaigns and were asked to evaluate the other campaigns based on parameters such as ‘did I learn something from the campaign?’ ‘was it well-communicated?’ and ‘did I agree with the campaign?’. Until this point, the students had focused on developing their own attitudes and testing their arguments against one another.

This changed in Block 3, which focused on the election. Here, the students were presented with the political youth organizations’ positions on the policy issues that the students had worked with since Block 1. The students met the political youth organizations online and many schools also had a town hall-like meeting with youth politicians debating and answering questions from the students. The program finished on February 2, 2017, once the students had cast their vote in a mock election. A polling location was set up in the school and the students marked their favored party on a ballot paper

5 The three most frequent issues to work with were ‘tougher punishment for violence and assault’, ‘shorter school days in primary schools’, ‘make euthanasia legal’ (Hansen 2017b: 16).
reminiscent of those from the real-world Parliamentary election. The results were presented on national TV and online during the evening.

All aspects of the program were conducted with the aim of reflecting the real-world elections and election campaigns in which students will be eligible to vote when they reach 18. In Denmark, the Prime Minister calls the election and the campaign is usually approximately three weeks’ long. The students, just like the voters, were confronted with a number of opposing viewpoints and a variety of policy issues. They had to cope with these conflicting perspectives and a large amount of information and summarize it for their own decision as to which party that was most in harmony with their preferences.

*Expectations*

Based on the content and pedagogical approach described above, the program is expected to have a positive effect on five dimensions. First, with the program’s emphasis on student engagement, discussion and cooperation, it is hypothesized that the students’ internal political efficacy will increase. Second, since the students interact with politicians in real life or online, their external political efficacy is also expected to increase. Third, by learning about elections, meeting politicians and getting a chance to vote in a setting similar to a real election, the students’ likelihood of participating in politics is expected to increase. Fourth, although not an explicit aim of the program, it is hypothesized that the students’ factual political knowledge will increase as a side effect of learning about politics. Fifth, by being part of a mock election campaign, it is expected that the students’ political compass, i.e. their ability to place the parties in their respective political blocks (red or blue), will be positively affected.
In addition to the five expected main results, we will investigate the degree to which the program helps to level out inequalities in the prerequisites for political engagement. To test this, we will analyze whether the effects are larger for students with lower pre-level scores on all five dimensions.

**Research Design**

The study is conducted using a standard pre-post survey design, with students answering a survey before and after the teaching program. Sampling took place at the school level. All schools – private and public – were invited to participate in the School Elections. Invitations were sent out by the organizers in May 2016. The official sign-up deadline was on November 1, 2016, and multiple reminders were sent to the schools ahead of this date. On November 8, the organizers delivered a list of the 563 schools that had signed up to the research team. A total of 151 schools with less than 50 students in grades 8-10 (the participating classes) was removed from the list before sampling. The argument for this is partly due to resources, as the marginal cost per response is too high for small schools, and partly since the small schools are likely to be special schools (e.g., for children with physical or psychical disabilities). Of these, 80 out of the remaining 410 schools were then randomly sampled to take part in the study, and six schools were added later to increase statistical power. Two of the schools informed us that they had withdrawn from participating in the teaching program and one school experienced technical problems that made it impossible to answer the survey. This left us with 83 schools from which the students could potentially participate in the study.

The surveys were distributed to the schools and directed to those responsible for the School Elections at each school. In practice, these are the individuals who enrolled their schools for the program, who thereby also served as the gatekeepers to the study. Each school received a link to the survey. They were asked to distribute the link to the students and they were strongly encouraged to let the students
answer the survey in class. In Denmark, almost all schools either have computers or tablets available for all students that they can use for answering the survey, so the technical aspects were not a problem.

The pre-survey was answered between November 9 and December 23, 2016 and the post-survey between February 3 and March 17, 2017 (cf. Figure 1). In both waves, reminders were distributed twice to schools with less than five responses. Since there was a gatekeeper at each school, it is questionable whether students at all schools actually received the chance to answer the survey. Looking at the data, we can see that there were no answers from students at 18 of the schools in either of the rounds, which indicates that their students never received the opportunity to participate. In addition, there are 13 schools with less than five respondents, and most of these responses are either not completed or used the “don’t know” answer for most questions. This indicates that one or more teachers or school leaders at the 13 schools had worked through the survey to see what it was about and decided that it should not be passed on to the students. The responses from these schools have been excluded from the analysis. Nine of the remaining schools only answered the post-survey. In total, this leaves us with data from students at 33 schools corresponding to 39% of the schools that could potentially have participated in the study.

In each wave, the students have entered a personal ID that makes it possible to merge the surveys and compare the answers from before to after the School Elections at the individual level. Students who have not completed the survey or have answered ‘don’t know’ on a majority of the questions have been removed from all analysis. This ensures that students who merely want to finish the survey are promptly omitted. In total, the dataset ends up with 754 students.

Survey measures

Most of the measures take their point of departure in the questionnaires used in the Danish National Election Studies (DNES) that have been conducted in 17 consecutive elections since 1971 (for the
most recent study, see Hansen & Stubager 2016). The questions in DNES are well-tested and capture concepts such as political efficacy, knowledge, party placement, and so forth. While these questions are highly useful, some of the words or formulations used are difficult to understand for young people. They were developed long time ago, meaning that some words are seldom used today, and the students do not necessarily have as extensive vocabularies as adults. Ahead of the 2015 study, we ran a pilot test of the questionnaire. Based on the pilot test, we reformulated some of the questions to better suit the language used by Danish students aged 14-16 (Hansen et al. 2015). We strived to maintain essentially the same meaning, but the words deviated from the usual DNES studies in some instances.

Analysis

We begin with a brief descriptive overview of the sample. Table 1 presents some key facts about the study population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voted in the School Election</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender: Girl</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending eighth grade</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attending ninth grade 42.8 323
Attending tenth grade 0.4 3

Parents’ country of origin
Both parents born in Denmark 76.3 571
One parent born in Denmark 9.8 73
Both parents born abroad 13.9 104

Note: Students were asked separately about the country of origin for their father and mother (6 students answered “don’t know / refuse to answer” to this question).

With regards to gender and ethnic background, Table 1 shows that the students are relatively similar to the average of that age group in the Danish population. There is a larger share of eighth graders than ninth graders in the sample.

For the analysis of the main effects of the program, we first compare the difference in means from before to after for the five dimensions previously described. Thereafter, the results are summarized in Figure 2, where we take the clustering of students at schools into account. For the analysis, an index for each of the five dimensions under investigation is constructed. The order of the questions was randomized for all of the questions and half of the questions concerning political efficacy were negations, but have been redirected in this analysis. In Table 2, we calculate the difference in means for the five dimensions.

Table 2: Comparison of means for five dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before the program</th>
<th>After the program</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

17
The immediate takeaway point from the table is a statistically significant positive effect of the School Elections teaching program on all five dimensions. We see an increase in internal political efficacy of 4.7 points, which shows that the students feel more capable of understanding politics and also perceive themselves as being more competent to participate in political acts after the program. The increase in external political efficacy is smaller, but still statistically significant in a positive direction. The likelihood of participating in politics within the next 12 months increases by 2.3 points. Finally, there is a positive effect on the two dimensions related to the students’ political competences. Their factual knowledge increases by 2.9 points and their political compass, which covers their ability to place the parties in the correct political block, increases by 14 points. Taken together, the first impression of the program’s effectiveness is positive.

Before discussing the results in more depth, we will conduct an analysis that takes the clustering of students at schools into account. To do this, we run a regression analysis with a first-difference variable as the dependent variable and pre-level score as the independent variable with clustered standard errors at the school level. From this, we take the average marginal effect with pre-level set
at its mean, resulting in an effect estimate similar to the mean differences presented in Table 2 but with a wider confidence interval due to the clustered standard errors. The results with and without clustered standard errors are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Average effects with and without clustered standard errors**

[Graph showing the difference in means from before to after the program for various dimensions: Internal political efficacy, External political efficacy, Political participation, Factual political knowledge, Political compass. The graph includes markers for mean difference, 95% CI, and 95% CI with cluster robust standard errors.]

Note: Standard errors are clustered at the school level.

As Figure 2 shows, the difference in means from before to after the teaching program is robust to clustering the standard errors at the school level for all five dimensions. The next step is to go into more detailed discussions about the results.
Starting with political efficacy, we can obtain a more substantial impression of the effect sizes by comparing them with a panel study of Danish voters in relation to the 2011 National Elections (Hansen & Pedersen 2014). On the same scale as that used in this paper, Hansen and Pedersen find that Danish voters increase their internal political efficacy by 3.2 points and their external political efficacy by 2.2 points during the course of a Danish election campaign of 23 days. The results presented in this paper are remarkably close to this finding and thereby show that the teaching program positively affects the students approximately as much as a national election campaign affects the voters’ political efficacy.

The students were asked whether they could imagine conducting eight different political and civic participatory acts within the next 12 months and, on average, the students’ likelihood of doing so increased by 2.3 points. In the Appendix, looking at the individual activities, there is a statistically significant and positive development for six out of the eight types of participation (cf. table A.2). The largest increase is for liking a politician’s profile or update on Facebook. While the intensity of this type of activity is somewhat low–it is quick, easy and arguably somewhat superficial–it could be seen as a stepping stone for further political engagement. Everybody has to start somewhere, and raising the political awareness of young people and making them consider engaging with politics on social media could be a good start.

The second largest increase regards imagining becoming a member of a political party or a political youth party. Unlike the Facebook activism above, this act can be viewed as high intensity, due to the level of commitment one expresses by signing up and also the energy it takes if one becomes an active member. It is remarkable that the teaching program increases the likelihood that the students join a political party organization by five points on a 0-100 scale. In Denmark, as many other Western democracies, parties have considerable difficulties in recruiting young members, which threatens the descriptive representation of the parties as well as the quality of candidates running for office. The
fact that the youth politicians played a large role and visited more than half of the participating schools could potentially help explain the notable increase. In this light, the teaching program showed the students that there are young people like themselves who are active in the parties, which can be a motivation to join.

However, it is also important to remember that we are studying intentions, not actual behavior. To overcome this problem, we contacted the youth branches of the political parties to get actual enrollment in the organizations. We got response from six organizations of which three had shareable data which included an exact date of enrollment for each member. Figure 3 shows a substantially bump in new members in the weeks just after the teaching program ended. The parties got 183 new members in week 0 and 1 in 2017 compared to 44 new members in the corresponding weeks in 2016 where no teaching program took place. This indicates that the teaching program has an effect on actual behavior.

Figure 3: New Members in Youth Political Parties Before and After The School Elections
Note: 0 indicates February 2nd, the day the mock election in the teaching program took place in 2017. Numbers from three youth parties are included. 95 pct. confidence intervals shown.

Still, we need to keep in mind that most of the political participatory actions – e.g. voting, donating money or becoming member of a party – lie many years ahead in time or are probably unrealistic for a 14-16 year old to actually fulfill. While the findings indicate that the students’ motivation to participate has increased and that the youth political parties actually got more new members than usual, there is a need for stronger evidence to firmly conclude that the teaching program has succeeded in increasing actual political participation.

For the analysis of political knowledge, we utilize the answers to four factual questions concerning the political system and rules for participation in Denmark (Table 4). Although political knowledge was not a central focus of the teaching program, the analysis shows a significant and positive effect on average of three points on a 0-100 scale. The answers to the four questions included in the index show that the increase comes from two of the four items (Table A.3). The proportion of students who correctly answer that no age limit exists for joining a political party doubles from before to after the teaching program and is at 21.6% following the program. There is also an increase in the proportion
of correct answers about the number of Members of Parliament. There is no significant change in knowledge about the age for participating in a demonstration or about the voting age, the latter likely explained by the fact that 95% know the answer before the program (ceiling effect).

The final dimension concerns the students’ so-called political compass, which focuses on the students’ basic skills in navigating the multi-party landscape of Danish politics and election campaigns. Denmark uses a proportional representational electoral system with multiple parties running for elections, with a threshold of 2%. As a voter, the fact that approximately ten parties are serious contenders for gaining representation at each election can potentially make it more challenging to decide who to vote for due to the complexity compared to a two-party system. In practice, the parties align into two political blocks that generally cooperate. An essential element is that, in practice, the parties in the two blocks for several election campaigns have said in advance who their preferred Prime Minister would be. Consequently, the voters have the chance to know ahead of the election which Prime Minister candidate their vote will support no matter which party they vote for. Therefore, it is highly relevant for the voters to actually know which parties that typically go together in the blocks.

To test whether the teaching program improved the students’ political compass – a ‘what goes with what’ test, they were asked to place all of the ten parties that are currently running for the next election in the block in which they generally belong. The students’ political compass increased from 54.7 to 68.7 points, a statistically significant increase of 14 percentage points (cf. Figure 2). Breaking it down on the individual parties, the increase in correct placements is above ten points for all parties (cf. Table A.4). The results on this dimension show that the students became substantially better at navigating the political party landscape of Danish politics due to the teaching program. This might be explained by the large role of the youth politicians or the program’s concept, whereby the students had to research the policy issues themselves and ask questions about it to relevant sources, including
politicians, which might have helped them position the parties in relation to each other on relevant dimensions.

Are the effects larger for students with lower pre-level?

In this section, we investigate how the effects vary conditional on the students’ prior levels on the various dimensions. This is an exploratory analysis, which we did not specify in our pre-analysis plan. In many Western democracies, politicians and policy makers worry about inequalities in political participation. One way of changing this is to strengthen the prerequisites for participation for students with a low starting point. The program’s focus on student-driven learning and the fact that there is greater room for improvement could be an argument for why the program should do this. However, there is no guarantee that the program works better, or even as well, for students with fewer prerequisites. It could be that the program works best for students who are already relatively well-equipped from the outset, as they have a starting point that makes the content of the program more recognizable and thus enables them to learn more from the program.

To investigate how the effects vary conditional on the students’ pre-level scores on the five dimensions, we run regression models with the same first difference variable, as used in Figure 2 as the dependent variable. To take various starting points into account, we include school fixed effects, and we then estimate the first differences over the pre-level scores. Figure 4 shows the results for each of the five dimensions.
Figure 4: Effects conditional on pre-level scores

Note: The plots show the effect estimates for various levels of pre-scores. They stem from an OLS-regression with post-level as the dependent variable, pre-level and a school-dummy variable as explanatory variables with robust standard errors at the school level and then calculating the marginal effects over the pre-level scores.
Figure 3 shows that the effects of the program are greater for students with lower starting points. For both internal and external efficacy, we see that the effects are slightly larger for those with low pre-level scores, but the wide confidence intervals in this part of the scale also remind us that there are not many students here. The marginal effect for students with low-middle pre-level scores is noticeably larger than those with middle-high pre-level scores, but the differences are not substantial. For political participation, the substantial differences in effect over pre-level scores are not markedly interesting to interpret.

The largest substantial variations in effects are found for the dimensions capturing the students’ competences for political engagement. The effects are substantially larger for students with low and medium pre-levels for both political knowledge and political compass. Overall, the analysis shows that the program made the most significant difference for students with low-medium prerequisites for political engagement, thereby potentially creating more equal opportunities for future political engagement. In Figure A.1, we take potential floor and ceiling effects into account by constraining the sample to those with pre-level scores between 20 and 80, which does not change the substantial conclusion drawn from Figure 3.

In Figure 3, we take differential starting points into account by including school fixed effects, but one might imagine that the effects differ conditional on factors at the school level. For instance, we can imagine that some teachers are better at implementing the program in a way that ensures students with low pre-scores learn more than others. While the focus of this analysis has been on whether the program across schools on average decreases inequalities in prerequisites for political engagement, Figure A.2 presents an analysis with an interaction between schools and pre-level scores. This
analysis allows for various treatment effects. The overall picture is the same as in Figure 3, but the confidence intervals become wider and the estimates fluctuate slightly more.\footnote{In the pre-registration, we also planned to analyze the effect conditional on whether the students had experienced a visit by one or more politicians. As our sample size ended up being smaller than expected, we do not have sufficient power for this analysis to be presented in the main paper. We still present the analysis in the supporting information.}

**Discussion**

The youth of today will become the future carriers of our democracies. Accordingly, preparing them for being active democratic citizens is an important task in all democracies. While there are no exact definitions of when one is ready to participate in democracy, we have an idea about some of the important elements that go into being ready for active democratic citizenship. For instance, most people agree that it helps to feel able to understand politics and believing that one is able to make a difference, i.e., having a sense of political efficacy. Feeling motivated to participate in politics and having some basic knowledge about the political institutions, process and parties are other aspects that are likely to be of importance. With declining voter turnout, large inequalities in turnout and low levels of youth political participation in most Western democracies, the question of how to make young people of today more ready to become active citizens when they become adults necessitates an answer.

One potential solution is to implement programs in the educational system and thereby give the students better prerequisites to take part in democracy. This paper has presented one such program, the School Elections teaching program taking place over three weeks in January, 2017 at the eighth-tenth grade in Danish primary schools (14-16 years old). The program had a particular aim of increasing the students’ political efficacy and competences, which the organizers hope will lead to increased political participation in the years ahead. To reach this goal, the program was designed to
be highly engaging by, for example, making the students work with self-chosen political issues, researching the issues and making campaigns for their preferred solutions themselves, having them deliberate pros and cons of various solutions, questioning politicians about their attitudes, and, finally, voting in a mock election. Thereby, the program designers deliberately downplayed the focus on cognitive skills (learning about facts, rules, etc.) and instead tried to develop the students’ non-cognitive skills by focusing on social, cooperative and psychological skills relevant for political engagement.

Utilizing a two-wave panel study with 754 students at 33 participating schools answering a survey before and after the teaching program, this study shows that the program had a positive and significant effect on five dimensions relevant to the students future political engagement. The analysis showed an increase of 4.7 points in internal political efficacy and on 2 points in external political efficacy, both measured on a scale from 0-100. The effect estimates are relatively close to those found by a panel study conducted in relation to the Danish National Elections Campaign for the average voter (Hansen & Pedersen 2014). Furthermore, the study found an increased motivation to participate in various political acts with 2.3 points on average and we found a substantial increase in actual enrollment rates in three youth political parties just after the teaching program.

A skeptic might worry that the results are partly driven by a demand effect in survey answers (Orne 1962; Iyengar 2011), as the students might try to ‘guess’ what the researcher expects from the answers and respond in accordance to this immediately after the teaching program. However, it is important to note that the effects are not only present for attitudinal measures, but also for factual questions which cannot be driven by such demand effects. In particular, the analysis also showed an increase in political knowledge of 2.9 points and in the students’ political compass, i.e. their ability to place the different parties in the political block which they usually support, of 14 points. The fact that the
program also has a positive effect on the students’ factual knowledge and political compass is reassuring, since such types of measure simply cannot be driven by demand effects.

Finally, the analysis found that the program had larger effects for students with low or medium baseline scores on four out of five dimensions, indicating that the program was successful in decreasing inequalities in prerequisites for political engagement. Researchers have expressed concerns about a tendency for some young citizens to be passive and permanently disengaged from participating in democracy (Amnå & Ekman 2013). The results from this paper might point toward a solution for this, by lifting both the efficacy and competences of young citizens with bad prerequisites for political engagement.

While the study shows promising results, it also has limitations. First, it is not possible to analyze with this design whether the effects are sticky. The data in the post-wave were collected between one and 45 days after the program ended. Ultimately, policy makers and political scientists alike are probably most interested in what works in the longer term and thereby increase the efficacy and political participation for young voters. This study cannot definitively say whether the program helps doing this. However, it does appear to be a nudge in the right direction.

Second, while the panel helps ameliorate many of the problems present in cross-sectional studies, a randomized controlled trial (RCT) would have been an even stronger design in order to uncover the causal effects of the program. Unfortunately, it was not possible to conduct an RCT in relation to the program. However, we did actually try to conduct an RCT when the program was first implemented in 2015. While the policy makers became convinced about the perils, we did not have sufficient resources available for the study. Moreover, unfortunately, the teachers who were to implement the program were not as excited about the RCT element as we were, which meant that the implementation
of the study failed in most aspects. The lesson was clearly that it takes a great deal of effort and resources to implement RCTs at the school level, to which we have not yet had access.

Third, and relatedly, a threat to the conclusions could be that something other than the program takes place in the period which drives the results. While this could be the case, there are different reasons for why this is not so likely. First, Danish students at this level have midterm tests during December. The pre-wave was conducted immediately before this. During midterms, many of the normal classes are cancelled and there is a focus on the tests in the schools and at home. Importantly for this study, there is no midterm test on subjects related to the teaching program. Furthermore, the Christmas holiday is located between the waves. Therefore, there are no significant risks of something else taking place in the classes that drives the results.

To summarize, the program analyzed in this paper shows positive signs in terms of preparing youth citizens to take part in democracy. While it clearly does not solve all problems, it does move the students in a positive direction. It is worth keeping in mind that most students do not spend more than ten hours apiece on the program. Furthermore, the program is implemented in Denmark, which is arguably a challenging case for finding effects of such a program, since societal issues and democracy training already have a substantial role in Danish schools. That the program is able to make a positive difference in this context is promising in terms of the expected effects in contexts where introductions of societal and political affairs for children and adolescents take up less focus. The fact that the program is easily scalable to many schools without being expensive also makes it compelling to policy makers. If implemented in different contexts, rigid evaluations of the effects are encouraged.

References


Appendix

The results for the individual items along the five dimensions analyzed in the paper can be found below. For the question wordings in Danish, see Hansen (2017b).

Table A.1: Political efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Before the program</th>
<th>After the program</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) You can trust that politicians make the right decisions for Denmark</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
<td>730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) I find it easy to decide on political questions</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) I have a say on the decisions taken by the Parliament and the Government</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) I am ready to take part in political discussions with friends and family</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) I have political attitudes that are worth listening to</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6, R) I think that politicians do not care enough about what people like me say</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
<td>716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7, R) I find politics so complicated that I cannot understand what is going on</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>-5.7</td>
<td>736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8, R) I think that politicians perform many unimportant tasks</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9, R) I find it hard to understand politicians when they discuss economic policy</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
<td>719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10, R) Politicians deliberately promise more than they can hold</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td>703</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Scale is from 0-100. Internal political efficacy is an index constructed from questions 2, 4, 5, 7 and 9 (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.76-0.81) and external political efficacy is constructed from questions 1, 3, 6, 8 and 10 (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.5-0.55). R = question is reversed before constructing the indexes. P-values in parenthesis stems from a two-sided paired sample t-test.
### Table A.2: Political participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Before the program</th>
<th>After the program</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participate in a political debate meeting</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post a political status update or comment on Facebook</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in work for the school Council</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect donations for an organization</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
<td>729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in a demonstration</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a member of a political party or a political youth party</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Like” a politician’s profile or update on Facebook</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a member of an organization that works with political subjects</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation index</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>663</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Question: “To what degree could you imagine doing the following within the next year?”
'Don’t know’ answers not shown (8-40 students in each question). Response categories have been “Not at all”, “To a limited degree”, “to some degree”, “to a high degree”, “to a very high degree”.
The scale has been recoded to go from 0-100. Question order was randomized in the survey.
Significance test from a two-sided paired sample t-test. P-values in parenthesis.

### Table A.3: Factual Political Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Before the program</th>
<th>After the program</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of members of Parliament (179 members)</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age for gaining the right to vote (18 years old)</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age for participating in a demonstration (no limit)</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age for joining a political party (no limit)</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Multiple choice questions with four response options. Correct answer in parenthesis. ‘Don’t know’ answers included. Significance test from a two-sided paired sample t-test. P-values in parenthesis. Question order has been randomized in the survey.
**Table A.4: Political compass**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Before the program</th>
<th>After the program</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Democrats (red)</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Liberal Party (red)</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative People’s Party (blue)</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Right (blue)</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist People’s Party (red)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Alliance (blue)</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish People’s Party (blue)</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venstre (blue)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red-Green Alliance (red)</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Alternative (red)</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Index</strong></td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: “In politics, we often speak about red block and blue block. Where would you place the individual parties?” Share of correct placements reported in the Table.
Figure A.1: First difference model when constraining the sample to 20-80 pre-level scores
Figure A.2: First difference model with interaction between schools and pre-level scores
Appendix B: The effects conditional on experiencing a visit by politicians

In the pre-analysis plan, it was specified that we would explore the effect of the teaching program conditional on whether the students had experienced a visit by one or more politicians or youth politicians. Unfortunately, the sample size ended up being too small to conduct a proper analysis of this question. For reasons of transparency, and to provide a hint as to whether such analysis would be interesting to follow with more data in another study, we present the analysis in this Appendix. As described in the paper, the organizers and the youth political organizations devoted considerable energy to having, in particular, youth politicians, out to visit the schools during the teaching program. A total of 67% of the sample of 754 respondents remembered having had a visit by one or more politicians. Table B.1 presents the main analysis from Table 2 in the paper conditional on their answer to this question.

Table B.1: Difference in effect of the teaching program conditional on visit by politicians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Change in X for students who had a visit by politicians</th>
<th>Change in X for students who did not have a visit by politicians</th>
<th>Difference in effect (had visit – no visit)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal political efficacy</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.0 (0.47)</td>
<td>731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External political efficacy</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5 (0.28)</td>
<td>703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of political</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.3 (0.82)</td>
<td>663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factual political knowledge</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.2 (0.23)</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political compass</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.4 (0.08)</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Column two presents the difference in means from before to after the program for students who had a visit by one or more politicians and column three presents the similar figure for students who did not have such a visit. Column four shows the difference in effect. P-values in parenthesis stem from a two-sided paired sample t-test allowing for unequal variance.
While the direction of the difference in effects is in the hypothesized direction on all aspects, only the matter of the political compass reaches statistical significance. The effect on the students’ political compass was remarkably large overall, and Table B.1 shows that the effect is particularly significant for the students who experienced a visit by one or more politicians. In one respect, we can easily imagine a causal process where being exposed to politicians boosts the effect on the students’ ability to place the parties into blocks with which they usually cooperate. For instance, many schools had gathered the students in a hall where the politicians were lined up along the political spectrum, thereby presenting themselves to the students in their respective blocks. However, the difference in effect could also be due to selection. It is not hard to imagine that the schools that have visits by politicians differ on relevant parameters (e.g., teacher engagement or students’ socio-economic background) from the schools that do not have visits. With the data and research design at hand, it is not possible to determine whether the difference is causal, pure selection or a combination.

Table B.1 also shows that there are no significant differences for the four other aspects. One potential explanation for this is that the study is underpowered in terms of detecting the potential differences in effects when splitting the sample into groups with, at largest, 505 and 249 students respectively. With sample sizes such as this, it takes a difference above four points to detect statistically significant differences at the pre-declared .10 level of significance, which is a relatively large difference from this type of intervention. Overall, the analysis does not support the idea that having a visit by one or more politicians boosts the effect, but the data are also not well-suited to investigate it due to the relatively small group sizes when splitting up the sample. Thus, there is a need for more data in order to properly analyze this question.