Youths’ Political Efficacy: 
Sources, Effects and Potentials for Political Equality

av

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Abstract


The aim of this dissertation is to increase knowledge of political efficacy, both theoretically and empirically. A thorough theoretical discussion is combined with empirical studies of the development of political efficacy and of its effects on political participation. The results are also discussed in the light of political equality.

In three papers, quantitative data on Swedish adolescents are analyzed. The first paper discusses what political efficacy actually entails. Based on an overview of previous research, a merged multidisciplinary perspective with a focus on people’s beliefs in their capacities to perform political actions is presented. Four main pathways concerning how youths gain political efficacy are tested. The second paper’s main question is whether, and in which ways, schools can help students gain political efficacy. In the light of political equality, it reflects upon the individual and societal effects of potential gains in youths’ political efficacy. The third paper scrutinizes the effects of political efficacy on political participation. In addition, the combinations of having political efficacy beliefs, and political knowledge or interest, are tested in order to explore potential interaction (leverage) effects. Altogether, this dissertation presents a more refined and stringent view on political efficacy. It further clarifies the concept itself, which may aid clearer, more coherent, and less ambiguous research. It also provides an input into an existing framework for understanding the development of youths’ political efficacy. Finally, it finds that political efficacy seems to work as a lever for participation. Combined with political interest, it facilitates the transformation of psychological engagement into political action.

The findings will inform discussion on the implications of stimulating youths’ political efficacy to promote political participation and political equality. By boosting political efficacy along various pathways – in part independently of socioeconomic status – political equality may be promoted by benefiting the least advantaged.

Keywords: Political Efficacy, Political Socialization, Youth, Political Equality, Political Participation, School.

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